

ARTICULATION OF KURDISH IDENTITY THROUGH  
POLITICIZED MUSIC OF *KOMS*

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## ABSTRACT

### ARTICULATION OF KURDISH IDENTITY THROUGH POLITICIZED MUSIC OF *KOMS*

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The thesis analyzes the role of politicized music of Kurdish music groups (*koms*) that emerged in the 1990s in the construction of Kurdish identity. The relation between politics and music is analyzed in the framework of the relation between nationalism and music and political movements' relation to music. Through *koms*' politicized music, the movement communicated its cause, told the struggle of the movement and aimed to mobilize the masses. In addition to this, music has functioned as a field where the collective identity of the movement as well as the Kurdish identity is constructed. As the Kurdish movement did not possess the institutional and ideological apparatuses of the national state in its national identity construction process, music started to play an important role. Through modernization of Kurdish folk music, the identity is constructed as a modern and authentic one. In addition, with the political lyrics of the songs, the national elements such as common language, common history and the imagined territory are constructed, popularized, and canonized. Despite their counter-hegemonic position, *koms* have articulated elements of the hegemonic discourses as well.

Keywords: Politicized music, identity construction, Kurdish movement

## ÖZ

### KOMLARIN SİYASAL MÜZİĞİ DOLAYIMIYLA KÜRT KİMLİĞİNİN EKLEMLENMESİ

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Bu tez, 1990'larda kurulan Kürt müzik gruplarının (*komların*) yaptığı siyasal müziğin Kürt kimliğinin kurulumundaki rolünü inceliyor. Siyaset ve müzik arasındaki ilişki, milliyetçilik ile müzik arasındaki ilişki ve siyasal hareketlerin müzik ile ilişkileneceği çerçevesinde incelenmektedir. *Komların* siyasal müziği yoluyla hareket, amaçlarını ve mücadelesini anlatmış, kitleleri mobilize etmeyi hedeflemiştir. Buna ek olarak müzik, hareketin kolektif kimliğinin ve Kürt kimliğinin kurulması için bir alan haline gelmiştir. Kürt hareketi, ulusal kimliğin kurulumunda ulus devletinin sahip olduğu kurumsal ve ideolojik araçlara sahip olmadığı için, müzik önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Kürt halk müziğinin modernleşmesiyle, otantik ve modern bir kimlik kurulmuştur. Ayrıca, şarkılardaki siyasal şarkı sözleri yoluyla ortak dil, ortak tarih ve hayali vatan kurulmuş, popülerleştirilmiş ve kutsanmıştır. Karşı hegemonik duruşlarına rağmen, *komlar* hegemonik söylemlerin öğelerini eklemişlerdir de.

Anahtar kelimeler: Siyasal müzik, kimlik kurulumu, Kürt hareketi

*to my grandparents and the ones uprooted from where they wish to live and die*

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## INTRODUCTION

The significance of music in political life is a well-known phenomenon that has been recorded by many, over the centuries from the time of Plato. In *Republic*, Plato echoes Socrates' saying: "The introduction of novel fashions in music is a thing to beware of as endangering the whole fabric of society, whose most important conventions are unsettled by any revolution in that quarter." (Plato, 1945: 115 cited in Pratt, 1990: 2-3) While Plato is talking about the effects of changes in the musical field on the political realm, this thesis will concentrate more on the effects of political realm on music. However, as it will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, the relationship between the two is not unidirectional and simplistic, rather there is a complex set of interrelations. There are numerous ways music and politics are intertwined from rap and rock to folk music. While some of these ways are much more implicit and complex to analyze, in other cases, music is used as a political tool in an overt way. It has been used to articulate the hegemonic discourses of the state as well as by oppositional movements. In both cases, it functions to mobilize people, popularize different discourses and has been a part of the identity construction processes.

Music is both a sign and a way of creating a community. It is representative and constructive. In this study, I will analyze the role of politicized music in the construction of Kurdish identity. While the focus will be on the 1990s, when a number of politicized Kurdish music groups - as they will be referred in this thesis; *koms*<sup>1</sup> – emerged, the changes that took place during 2000s are also be scrutinized.

Political music in the context of Kurdish nationalist movement should be discussed within the framework of construction of national identity through music and nationalization of music and as an oppositional music, with its function of

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<sup>1</sup> *Kom* means group in Kurdish. With the suffix -a it is used in front of the names of most music groups. While the music groups that are established in 2000s also use *Koma* before their names, what I refer as *koms* during the thesis will be the groups that are formed in the first half of the 1990s. Please see Appendix C for a detailed list of the *koms* included in the sample.

communicating the cause of the movement, mobilization and construction of the collective identity of the movement. The separation between the two is only an analytical one as these processes are not independent from each other. The Kurdish movement has approached music with a nationalist agenda, but as it has not established itself into a state, its tools are not as comprehensive and domineering as that of a state's. Moreover, as the apparatuses of a nation state such as schools, national history and language institutions, official maps have not been available to the Kurdish movement, music has adopted some of the functions of these institutions.

Turkish music reform and the oppositional music tradition in Turkey will be examined because of their role in the emergence of *koms*. Before doing this, I will have a brief look at theories of nationalism; how the nations as well as national music are invented. "Music has been a tool intensively used by the new states or by the classes that have the highest stake in the new social formations of dominant classifications through the control of archives, educational institutions including the conservators and media systems." (Stokes, 1994: 10) The process of defining the "national styles" has never been unproblematic: Who makes the definition, what kinds of instruments are involved in this process and how the existing music world is affected by these processes are important questions to ask.

As politicized Kurdish music has emerged as a reaction against the Turkish assimilationist policies, how Turkish nationalism tried to invent a 'national music' is examined. The analysis of Turkish Music Reform is important in two respects: First is that the nationalist policies in the cultural realm have damaged the Kurdish folk culture as a result of nationalization and homogenization efforts of the Republican cadres. These have been challenged by the Kurdish movement through collecting Kurdish folk songs and singing them in Kurdish. The second reason is that, although the modernization and Westernization attempts at music have not reached the goals desired by the Republican cadres, the discourse of modernization has become hegemonic. In the Turkish nationalist discourse, West is to be negated at the same time to be resembled to. Despite their counter-hegemonic position, the modernist and progressionist discourse was adopted by the Turkish singing oppositional bands and Kurdish *koms* too. Yet, it is important to underline the fact that the discourse of

modernization is not only hegemonic in the context of Turkey and *koms*' articulation of it should be examined as an articulation of the discourse of modernization in general. The novel Kurdish identity was to be modern against being despised as vulgar, and underdeveloped by the Turkish nationalist discourse.<sup>2</sup> Both the Turkish and Kurdish identities aim to construct themselves as *modern* and *civilized identities* against the primordial characteristics of pre-modernity that are attributed to them. Such an emphasis on modernity finds its reflection in the musical field as polyphonization and harmonization of music, and Western harmony and polyphonic music are embraced by the *koms*.

Music of political movements might be a 'prefiguration' of a wider social transformation, a utopia or a more elaborated conception of social revolution. (Pratt, 1990: 36) "...popular music can be the social glue for creating and maintaining diverse communities; that these communities support several distinct forms of collective political action including intra-communal disagreement and debate as well as assertion in external public arenas; and that music can increase the capacity, or power, of relatively marginalized people to choose and determine their own fate." (Mattern, 1998: 6) Oppositional music making gains significant functions both on the individual and collective levels. Also, different movements' musical traditions influence and inspire each other. The *koms* that have emerged during the 1990s have adopted the heritage of oppositional music tradition in Turkey. Musically as well as lyrically there are continuities between *koms* and the political musicians in Turkey between 1960s – 1980s. The polyphonization and harmonization of folk music in the realm of popular music, using popular Western music instruments such as guitar, bass, drum set alongside with folk instruments, use of Western march rhythms are some of the musical common characteristics. In terms of content, past struggles are told, people are called for mobilization, the jargon of the movement is popularized by both. Some groups such as Grup Yorum has had an important influence on *koms* not only with their musical understanding and lyrics, but also with their stance as organized (*örgütlü*) musicians who have an organizational relation with a certain

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the Turkish state abstained from defining the "backward" population as the *Kurds*. Rather it formulated the problem around the concepts of *aghas*, *sheiks* and bandits. (Yeğen, 2006)

political group.

The politicized Kurdish music emerged by the end of 1960s. This was a time during when the Kurdish movement started to get organized separately from the Turkish left. The first Kurdish signing political musician in Turkey, Şivan Perwer, has gained a significant amount of popularity. Like his successors, for Perwer music was an important tool in telling the oppressed position of the Kurds as well as the past struggles. His songs were both an expression of an identity that is aimed to be eliminated as well as its construction. The relative affinity of Kurdish nationalism with the left in Turkey had an impact on the musical realm, and socialist themes were more frequently used by musicians.

The evolution of Kurdish music can not be analyzed separately from the evolution of Kurdish nationalism and the state's denial and assimilation of the Kurdish identity. Thus, before an analysis of the politicized music of *koms* in 1990s, I provided a brief analysis of Kurdish issue and Kurdish nationalism in Turkey with a focus on 1990s. While the previous Kurdish movements were able to mobilize the national sentiments of the ethnic Kurds, no movement before the PKK (*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan - Kurdistan Workers Party*) had been as widely supported as it did. The PKK emphasized not only the Kurdish national independence, but also creation of a new Kurdish identity. This new identity, which has been embodied in the leadership and the martyrs, was defined through ambiguous characteristics and it was not clear how to reach it.

The artists and musicians had important responsibilities in terms of national liberation and the construction of this identity. They had to battle just like other militants of the movement. They should tell the Kurdish people about the struggle, mobilize them with their music, set an example to them and refine the vulgar Kurdish people with arts and music. The self-positioning of the artists was not very different from the role that is ascribed to them by the movement. They saw their engagement with arts and music as a responsibility they had for the movement. This is also due to the fact that most of the musicians started dealing with music in cultural centers which can be defined, in a simplistic way, as the cultural extensions of political

movements. The MKM<sup>3</sup> (Mesopotamia Culture Center) has been especially important for the *koms* as a majority of the *koms* that I have analyzed have emerged within MKM which is close to the PKK line; yet it has never been a party organization or had organic links with the party.

The politicization of Kurdish music in Turkey is inevitable as only singing in Kurdish was seen as a political statement by the state for a long time and musicians had to pay the price of singing in their mother tongue. In 1990s, the Kurdish nationalism and the struggle given by the Kurdish movement had infiltrated to all levels of life including the music. Moreover the PKK has declared itself as the only actor in the artistic realm. The founder and leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan says, without the PKK there would be no Kurdish art or music. Within such a context, arts and politics are entangled; and the political engagement of the musicians is the very act of making music. Such an understanding is reflected to the songs of *koms* during 1990s.

The *kom* albums are mainly composed of two types of songs; folk songs and songs with direct political lyrics.<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the latter makes it possible to have a grasp of the discourse of the movement. These songs were telling the state oppression and the struggle given against that while inviting the people to join. The symbolic repertoire of the movement has been popularized through the songs. By the 2000s, there had been significant changes in the lyrics of politicized songs with the changes in the movement. More than the changes in the lyrics, the decrease in the number of songs with political lyrics in *kom* albums is a notable development. This does not mean depoliticization of music of *koms* as singing folk songs in Kurdish is itself a political statement.

Folk music and culture have been used by nationalist movements around the world. The culture of the people is presented as a place where the pure and unspoilt characteristics of the nation can be found. The Kurdish folk music has been faced with the 'threat of assimilation' and Kurdish movement saw it a responsibility to

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<sup>3</sup> Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya

<sup>4</sup> In the albums produced after 2000s, this division gets blurred as there are some recently composed songs with lyrics irrelevant to the struggle as well as songs of other musicians which can not be classified under either of the categories.

rescue it. The degenerated and spoilt Kurdish identity was to be negated only by reaching the essence of Kurdishness that is not touched by the colonialists and the degenerate tribal relations. For the musicians folk music represents the authentic Kurdishness and the traditions. However, the 'tradition' itself is being constructed; the cultural practices are selected and transformed according to the discourse of the movement and the existing cultural values. Although not as systematic as the Turkish state's, Kurdish musicians were involved in the effort of collecting folk songs. However, as there had been no music reform which was designed and implemented in a systematic way, their collections was more as a result of individual efforts. The individual's unsystematic practices brought about a process of standardization in a way not desired by the *kom* musicians.

The Kurdish identity constructed by the movement were to be founded on the essential characteristics which are not spoilt; but it should not remain on that level and be developed too. The repercussion of this in the musical realm has been the importance given to harmonization and polyphonization of folk music. As mentioned above, this approach has been articulated from the hegemonic discourse of modernization and Westernization. Polyphonization was done in the realm of popular music and the musicians' responsibility was to 'teach' the people the Western music.

*Kom* musicians not only had the responsibility to present people the modern and authentic music, but also stop them from diverting to the degenerate kind of music which is arabesk. In the construction of Kurdish identity through music, arabesk has been defined as the "other". The attitude of musicians towards arabesk resonate the dominant view about the music which despises it as the music of dissidence, alienation and passivity. The *kom* musicians are critical about arabesk in Kurdish with political lyrics too.

In the process of national identity construction, common history, common territory and common language are invented. This invention process found clear implications in music. These elements are also used to create a feeling of 'national pride'. The despised and ignored elements of Kurdish ethnies were reclaimed as things that are essential in Kurdish identity. Music had been an important means of popularizing the language. Through the political lyrics, the standard Kurdish, as

called by 'Academic Kurdish' by some actors including the musicians, has been popularized. In the folk songs, the local accents were kept to a certain extent. The collective memory of the movement and the nation are intermingled with the PKK declaring itself as the sole representative of the Kurdish struggle. Through the *koms* songs, this history has been constructed and popularized. The events in Kurdish history, which are independent from the movement's struggle, find a place in song of *koms* from MKM alongside with the events of the movement's history. The continuity established between past struggles, myths and collective memory of the Kurdish ethnics, and the movement provides a justification of the current struggle. The history of the nation, and the movement, has been territorialized too. The imagined borders of the nation are constructed by the political lyrics of the songs. With the 2000s, the number of songs with politicized lyrics has decreased. As the Kurdish movement's discourse started to emphasize linguistic and cultural rights more, the importance of singing in Kurdish remained. Yet, the function of politicized music by *koms* in the construction of collective history underwent a significant change.

Nationalization is a process of homogenization. Yet, all nationalist movements adopt a different attitude towards the internal differences of the community which is to be constructed as the nation. While the Kurdish nationalist movement did not pay much attention to these differences in its early years, with the mid-1990s, the linguistic, religious and cultural differences have been started to be acknowledged. In line with this, *koms* included some songs in Zazakî and Soranî in their albums. Unlike the Turkish nationalists who aimed to ignore and assimilate the cultural differences within the imagined community of the nation, Kurdish nationalism acknowledged and contained them. Such an approach resembles to the discourse of multiculturalism which celebrates and aims to domesticate the cultural differences. Yet, it should be noted that there exists no Kurdish state through which the approach to cultural differences can be manifested. The nationalist movements' and nation states' attitude towards the ethnic, linguistic, religious differences might be dissimilar because of their differing agendas.

The Kurdish movement's approach to women's identity and gender differences is worth analyzing. This is crucial not only because national identity

construction processes are gendered, but also because of the active role played by the women in the guerilla movement and the political struggle. As in all spheres of life, women were invited by the movement to be a part of the musical struggle too. Yet their position was still shaped by patriarchal gender relations. While their appearance on the stage was presented as a sign of modernity and women's active participation, their equal participation was hindered in tacit ways. Another aspect of the reflection of gender hierarchy in music was the representation of women in songs. They were either represented as genderless heroes of the nation in *elegy* songs after dead activists and guerrillas, or as suffering mothers and brides. Both reproduce the patriarchal gender structure in different ways.

The thesis is based on the in-depth interviews I conducted. Fifteen interviews had been conducted with musicians who have been a part of *koms* during 1990s. Some of the musicians continue to make music in *koms* while the others are solo musicians. I also interviewed with three actors who are involved in the music industry, three critics and one theater director who was a part of MKM when it was established. The real names of the interviewees are not used, rather pseudonyms are given. Keeping them anonymous was seen as necessary to respect the wishes of some of the interviewees' and to protect their privacy. In order not to disrupt the coherence of the text I pseudonyms rather than codes. A brief explanation of each pseudonym used is provided in Appendix A. When specific characteristics of the interviewees are mentioned in the main body of the text, I did not use pseudonyms and rather called them as “a musician, a producer” etc.

In addition to the interviews, I analyzed the songs in *kom* albums. It should be noted that there are more music groups now – and they are also named as *Koma* – yet my sample included the music groups which were established during the first half of 1990s. I could not access all albums of the *koms* included in the sample.<sup>5</sup> The biggest difficulty I faced in the analysis of *kom* albums was the fact that I do not speak or understand any dialect of Kurdish. I analyzed the lyrics of Kurmanjî songs through their Turkish translation. I singled out some Kurdish words which are frequently used and counted them. I believe this was important to understand the

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<sup>5</sup> A list of the albums that I have analyzed are provided in Appendix C.

discursive repertoire of the Kurdish nationalist movement. A list of the interviewees, the songs analyzed and their Turkish translations are provided in the appendices. I tried to make a musical analysis through looking at the instruments used, how much the march rhythms are used. However, as I am not a musician or a musicologist, a detailed musical analysis should not be expected from this study. Lastly I participated a number of concerts of *koms* and *ex-kom* members in Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır. I also used my field observations in these concerts in the thesis.

## CHAPTER 1

### MUSIC AND POLITICS: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND OPPOSITION

From the "Marseillaise" and the "Internationale revolutionary Soviet songs and "Nueva Canción" in Latin America, and from national anthems to nationalist songs in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe to songs of the anticolonial struggles for national liberation in Asia and Africa, songs have played an important role in mobilizing the masses.” (Massad, 2003: 21) The relation between music and politics of national independence movements should be analyzed both within the framework of nationalism and music, as well as music and oppositional movements. These two are not independent from each other. Through music, the Kurdish nationalist movement has aimed to construct a national identity, which is authentic and modern at the same time, and a movement identity and it aspired to mobilize the Kurds in Turkey to join the movement. In order to understand these better, in this chapter I will try to explore certain issues such as nationalism and national identity construction, the relation between nationalism and music in the context of Turkey, politicized music in Turkey and the relation of these to the *koms'* music.

I believe that the rise of Kurdish politicized music in Turkey is very much related to the “Turkish Music Reform” of the early Republic and the following cultural policies related to music. The Turkish nationalists aimed to eliminate the Turkish classical music and approached the existing folk cultures of Anatolia with a nationalist agenda. They ignored and assimilated the folk music of other cultures including the Kurds. The new music of the Republic was defined to be a “national” one; which meant that there was no space for other cultures and languages in this music other than that of the invented Turkish national identity. With the re-emergence of Kurdish resistance in 1960s, Kurdish nationalists rejected the

assimilationist policies of the Republic and emphasized the unique character of Kurdish folk culture and music which was suppressed by the Turkish nationalism. While doing this, they reclaimed their language and music, emphasized their authenticity and invented a novel Kurdish identity.

In addition to nationalization, modernization has been the aim of Turkish Music Reform. Being modern meant having polyphonic and harmonic music of the European civilization for the Republican cadres of the early Republican period. In this framework, I will analyze the Republican musical reform and the underlying logic of modernization which was articulated by *kom* musicians of 1990s. This articulation did not take place as a direct inheritance of the discourse of modernization of Republican cadres by the Kurdish musicians. Modernization of folk music has become hegemonic for a majority of nationalist movements in the non-Western world. This discourse was embraced by the Turkish singing oppositional and political musicians in Turkey too and its musical repercussions had implications on *koms'* music.

As mentioned above, Kurdish politicized music should also be analyzed as the music of a political movement. According to Denisoff , political songs not only mobilize people and provide them a viewpoint of the world; but they are also important in terms of processes of identification. Kurdish politicized music has been important in both mobilization and identification processes. Different cultural articulations of different social movements have been an important linkage between past and present social movements as well as in linking generations. (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 28) Just like the Kurdish movement itself, the cultural forms associated with it were influenced by the leftist movements in Turkey. A “tradition” of political music has been established from 1960s onwards, which influenced the Kurdish musicians not only in their music making style but also in the way they position themselves with regards to the movement. The marches and songs produced and adopted by the leftist movements of 1960s and 70s were embraced by the *koms*. There are links between the two in terms of their approaches to folk music, use of political lyrics, forms of producing music and articulation with the music market. This is why I will explore the political music in Turkey. While doing this, I will try to analyze how the Turkish singing political musicians articulated the elements of music

reform, which was also reflected on Kurdish movement's articulation of such elements. Lastly, I will analyze the politicization of Kurdish music by the end of 1960s which is a process that led into the emergence of *koms*.

### **1.1. Invention of the Nation and “National Music”**

Music is extensively used by the nationalist movements in articulating the national identity. Before looking at the relation between music and nationalism, I will have a brief look at the theories of nationalism and national identity construction. Such an analysis is important for understanding the Turkish music reform as well as *koms*' articulation of the Kurdish identity. The debate on nationalism is divided mainly between three camps. The first camp is the primordialists who believe that nations have always existed and nationalism is perceived as natural. The second camp is the modernists who believe that nationalism and nation-state are recent historical innovations (Hobsbawm, 1990) and cultural artifacts of a particular kind (Anderson, 1991). Third camp is the ethno-symbolists who draw attention to the continuities between pre-modern ethnic communities and modern nations. While the first camp is usually composed of nationalists themselves, I believe both the second and third camps have valid points about nationalism.

Eric Hobsbawm, who is a modernist, has brought an important dimension to the nationalism debate with the concept of invented tradition. Although Hobsbawm is talking about the modern nations, the invented nature of the nation as well as the national identity apply to newly emerging nations and nation aspiring movements too.

We should not be misled by a curious, but understandable paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion. ... And just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern 'nation' consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as 'national history'), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition'. (Hobsbawm, 1983: 14)

Invented tradition is a set of practices that is governed by some symbolic rules and aim to inculcate certain values, create social cohesion amongst members of a group

or legitimize an authority through its implication of continuity with a suitable past. A variety of ideologies, political groups and movements established links between themselves and the past through invented traditions amongst which nationalism has been the strongest. (ibid, p. 2, 9)

Anthony D. Smith, who is an ethno-symbolist, says; "Clearly, there is more to the formations of nations than nationalist fabrication, and 'invention' must be understood in its other sense of a novel recombination of existing elements." (Smith, 1999: 46) In order to understand the appeal of nationalism, the way these existing elements are utilized should be analyzed with scrutiny. The ethnic bond, which is one of the strongest bonds through which nations are established and collective cultural identities are shaped, selects some memories, symbols and myths, and uses them to assert cultural difference. (ibid, p. 127) While modernists' claims about the novel character of nationalism are true, these continuities are also significant in terms of understanding how nationalism can legitimize itself. The way it combines the existing elements is novel and it tailors them according to the needs of the nation or ethnic movement. "The images and traditions that go into the making of nations are not the artificial creations of intelligentsias, cultural chefs or engineers but the product of a complex interplay between these creators, their social conditions and the ethnic heritages of their chosen populations." (ibid, p. 171)

In all collective identity construction processes, including the national one, resources of history, language and culture are used in the becoming process, rather than in what they are. (Hall, 1996a: 4) So they are in relation with the invention of tradition as much as the tradition itself. In the case of construction of national identity, the narrative of the nation assumes a timeless national identity which has existed since the emergence of humanity, and through using the elements of history, language and territory, this timeless existence is aimed to be proved.

The strength of modern nationalisms can be explained through their ability to sustain from the existing memories, symbols, traditions and myths of ethnic communities. (Smith, 1999: 19) While doing that it does not only adopt the existing elements, but also transform them in order to create a common language, history and geography that unite the imagined members of the nation. For the Kurdish movement, in the lack of state education system, national history and language institutions; popular culture, newspaper and television played a significant role in this process. Music has

been one of the earliest means to be used in constructing the national Kurdish identity because of its relative easiness in terms of production and dissemination.

In my analysis, I will look at the invented nature of the national identity and seek its relation with the existing cultural elements and values of the communities. Invention of national music is a good example of this. Just like most elements of national identity, national music is an invented phenomenon too. In this invention, the existing elements of folk culture and music are tailored by the nationalists according to the needs of their political agenda.

Folk music has an ongoing role in nationalist politics and sensibilities in the contemporary world. (Ramnarine, 2003: 6) Folk culture and folk music are terms that need to be dealt with. Folk culture denotes a broad range of cultures and practices which show great diversity; however, the term is usually used to refer to a monolithic entity. The interest in the folk cultures that emerged in Europe during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries should be analyzed as a part of a broader movement which can be called as the discovery of the people. (Burke, 1995: 21) During 19<sup>th</sup> century, nationalism started to become an important motivation in dealing with folk culture. Interestingly, the idea of the nation, which is created by the intellectuals is imposed on the people that they try to define. (ibid, p. 27) “Indeed, this close interest in the folk refers to a search for origin. The notion of origin revealing genuineness and authenticity gives the nationalist political discourse legitimacy as well as meaning in its pursuit of constructing a nation having the same cultural roots in origin.” (Değirmenci, 2006: 49) While the nation is an invented phenomenon, through establishing links with the existing cultural elements, it presents itself as something that has always existed and that will always exist. Folk music is constructed as carrying intrinsic and essential elements of this eternal national identity. The *authenticity* of the folk music of the nation is constructed on a discursive level by the cultural authorities, folk researchers, musicians and other practitioners.

Folk culture has been especially significant for the nationalist movements that try to maintain their traditional cultures under foreign dominance. (Burke, 1995: 27) Here, the culture of the people is conceptualized as eroding as a result of foreign influence and rapid changes brought with modernization. The nationalists aim to make a contribution to the history of the motherland which is faced with the threat of

disappearing. (ibid, p.30) The members of *kom* musicians formulated their 'mission' regarding the Kurdish folk music in similar terms. However, while being 'rescued' the folk culture is also restored. As Burke says, the European folklorists changed the folk songs as they were recorded through transcriptions which is a system that is not compatible with folk music. Moreover the vulgar and disorderly elements in music were refined by the musicians who collected the songs. (ibid, p. 33) As it will be demonstrated later, Turkish nationalists were involved in a similar process regarding the folk music traditions in Anatolia.

Although folklore has been used by various nationalist movements and theoreticians, in each different case it shows unique characteristics. (Balkılıç, 2009: 14) Nationalistic discourses and folk music's use accordingly is shifting in relation to the social, economic and political conditions. (Stokes, 1998: 44) Also, within one nationalist discourse, folklore's role might change over the time with the evolution of that discourse. I will try to analyze the peculiar role folklore gained in Turkish nationalism, within the framework of the music reform (*musiki inkılabı*) - as defined by the Republican cadres - that took place during the Early Republican Period and the preceding developments during the Late Ottoman Era. The music reform (*musiki inkılabı*) is shaped by the three main tenants of the Kemalist reforms; modernization (perceived as Westernization), nationalization and secularization. I will mainly focus on the two aspects of the Turkish music reform which played a crucial role in the evolution of Kurdish political music; modernization and nationalization. I will not focus on the secularization aspect because the effects of the other two on the emergence and evolution of Kurdish music in 1990s can be observed more clearly. While secularism affected the Kurdish music in Anatolia just like any other musical tradition, I have not designated a clear reflection of this process on *koms'* music.

## **1.2. Music Reform and the Invention of Modern Turkish Music**

As mentioned above, modernization and nationalization were the two defining elements of Turkish music reform. As modernization is usually used synonymous with Westernization in the context of Ottoman and Turkish modernization, "modernization" attempts at music aimed to westernize the Ottoman music. This created a dualism of Eastern music vs. Western music. (Aksoy, 1985)

The Westernization attempts of Ottoman music started even before Tanzimat, with the reforms of Mahmud II. Starting with 1850s, Western notation system was started to be used for transcription of Ottoman music. Quarter notes<sup>6</sup> that do not exist in Western music were lost in this notation system. During the Second Constitutional Regime, Dâr-ül-elhân (House of Chants) -the first official music school - was established as a result of institutionalization efforts. (Paçacı, 1994a: 48)

The polarization East vs. West was accompanied with a discourse of "synthesis" of the two. The "East" that should be used in the synthesis was the Anatolian folk music, while the East to be avoided was the Ottoman classical music which has been influenced by the Arabic and Persian musics and the Byzantium heritage. This idea is most clearly articulated by Ziya Gökalp who believed that the Anatolian music carries the true essence of the Turkish nation.

"Now we are faced with three kinds of music: Eastern music, Western music and folk music. Which one is the national music for us? We have seen that Eastern music is not national and is morbid. Folk music belongs to our national culture and Western music to our new civilization; thus neither of them is foreign to us. Therefore our national music will be born out of the cohesion of our folk music and Western music. Our folk music provides us with a number of melodies. If we gather and harmonize them in the Western style, we will have a music that is both national and European." (Gökalp, 1990: 139-140)<sup>7</sup>

While Ziya Gökalp defines the Eastern music as "morbid", he adopts the language of Western Orientalism.<sup>8</sup> (Stokes, 1998: 62) The emphasis on naturalness

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<sup>6</sup> What I mean by quarter notes are *koma* sounds. Although musically quarter notes and *koma* sounds are not the same thing, I refer the *koma* sounds as quarter notes instead of keeping the former in its original language. I saw this necessary as *kom* (Kurdish music groups) and *koma* could easily be confused with each other.

<sup>7</sup> Gökalp's ideas on music is a reflection of nationalistic ideas in *Türkçülüğün Esasları*; Ottoman civilisation took over the Eastern civilisation from the Byzantium, which they should get rid of. (Gökalp, 1990: 39) The true *türkçü* wants to be a part of the Western civilisation by remaining a Turk and a Muslim. (Gökalp, 1990: 40-41) The true culture is found only in the people, and this is why the intellectuals should go to the people. "The people are the living museum of national culture." (Gökalp, 1990: 42, translation belongs to me.) "Halk, milli harsın canlı bir müzesidir."

<sup>8</sup> It can also be analyzed as Occidentalism, as in Occidentalism, the Orient is defined from the imagined point of view of the Occidental subject. Here, the East (which is already the other for Gökalp) is defined with its deficiencies. As Ahıska says; "The backbone of Occidental fantasy in Turkey is detecting the essential "deficiency" of the "people" that is defined within the framework of nationalist and modern discourse and the "desire" to fix this." (Ahıska, 2005: 87, translation belongs to me.) "Türkiye'deki Garbiyatçı fantazinin belkemiğini, milliyetçi ve modern söylem

versus the unnaturalness points to an important element of nationalism. Folk is presented as the pure, untouched essence of people's culture upon which the national culture can be built. Ziya Gökalp's ideas on the "national" music was largely adopted by the Republican cadres.<sup>9</sup> The national music would be born out of the synthesis that was defined around three concepts; West - Origin- East and the latter was one the taboo for the Republican elite in creating its cultural policies. (Tekelioğlu, 1996: 194) This music should be polyphonic, as opposed to the monophonic Ottoman music, like the civilized European music.

Music was defined as a policy area six months after the foundation of the Republic and in 1934 it was delineated as one of the *inkılab*s (reform/revolution). (Oransay, 1983: 1520) The cultural policies were intensified in the field of music more than others as music was seen to be most appropriate field because of its collective character and its ability to arouse emotions. (Üstel, 1994: 41) The music reform aimed to create a polyphonic national music. Inline with Gökalp's arguments, while the Ottoman music was to be excluded, Anatolian folk music was to be harmonized. The only way of having a civilized music was seen as Westernization. The Eastern music was presented as passive, pessimistic and not suiting the active and cheerful nature of the Turkish nation. However, how the music reform should be implemented was not very clear and the process was full of contradictions. (Balkılıç, 2009: 78) One example is the banning of Ottoman classical music broadcast from the radios in 1934 which aroused a great deal of reaction. After 20 months, the ban was annulled.

The tensions and conflicts that emerge during the music reform can be related to the inherent contradictions of nationalism and modernization. While nationalist discourse calls for the local, it aspires the universal which embodied in the West. As Chatterjee says, the rationalization and reformation of the local cultures within the nationalist project could not be merely imitating the West as this would

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çerçevesinde tanımlanan “halk”taki temel “eksikliği” tespit etmek ve bunu doldurmak “arzusu” oluşturur.”

<sup>9</sup> There are opposing views too. According to Budak, Gökalp's vision of Turkish music is different from Atatürk's. While Gökalp aimed to Westernise Turkish music and harmonise it with Western musical methods, Atatürk aimed at "modernising" Turkish music in a much wider sense. (Budak, 2006: 95)

threaten the essential existence of the nation. (Chatterjee, 2002: 201) The dubious character of the “West” in the Turkish nationalist discourse caused the inconsistent nature of the modernization project. “The border which is tried to be drawn continuously between us and them in defining the national in Turkey after the Republic, contains a series of ambiguous and divergent attitudes towards the West. On the one hand, the 'West' is the power which 'denies our history and has driven it to disaster'; on the other hand, it is the pioneer and example of the ideal of 'civilization'.”<sup>10</sup> (Ahıska, 2005:80) The dilemma of being national and modern (which meant Western) was tried to be solved by saying that the Turks are essentially a civilized nation but were corrupted under the influence of “foreign” cultures; the Arab, the Byzantine, the Islamic etc. The reflection of this idea was the search for pentatonism<sup>11</sup> in folk songs by the Republican cadres. They identified pentatonism as the most important element in the birth of polyphonic music. The Turkish music in Middle Asia was claimed to be pentatonic, and it was the national duty of the musicians to search for the persisting pentatonic characteristics of the folk songs. (Balkılıç, 2009: 138) The nationalist discourse tried to resolve the inferiority complex against the West by saying that the Turks are the origins of the civilization and Turkish folk music is originally 'modern'. Yet it had to be transformed; nationalized and standardized.

### **1.2.1. Standardization of Folk Music and Nationalization**

Folk Music, which was denoted as the source of desired East-West synthesis, had to be collected, categorized and written down.<sup>12</sup> Through the years, the

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<sup>10</sup> “Türkiye’de Cumhuriyet sonrası milliliğin tariflenmesinde biz ve onlar arasında sürekli çizilmeye çalışılan sınır, “Batı”ya karşı bir dizi muğlak ve bölünmüş tavrı barındırmaktadır. Batı bir yandan “tarihimizi yadsıyan ve felakete sürükleyen” güçtür, bir yandan “medeniyet” idealinin öncüsü ve örneğidir.” (Translation belongs to me.)

<sup>11</sup> Pentatonic scale is a musical scale where there are five pitches in one octave. The scale is frequently found around the world in various regions.

<sup>12</sup> In 1922, approximately 2000 questionnaires were prepared by Dâr-ül-elhân with the aim of collecting folk songs and were sent around Anatolia. 85 of these songs were published in 2 notebooks, but as the results were not satisfactory the idea of organizing collection trips and identification of the songs through phonograph has come to the fore. (Paçacı, 1994b: 21) In 1925, first folk music collection trip was organized. This was followed by the trips in 1927, 1928, and 1929. Between 1937 and 1957, Ankara State Conservatory organized a trip every year. 10.000

methods of collection, categorization and the way the folk songs were processed changed. But the general logic of treating them remained the same. Starting with the foundation of the Republic, standardization and homogenization was the main aim. (Paçacı, 1999a: 20) “Therefore, this immense activity of collecting folklore forms was the major part of the project of constructing the imagined concept of nation, which was supposed to overarch all the distinct cultural traditions.” (Değirmenci, 2006: 55) The local cultures in Anatolia were not only repressed, their existence was denied. (Öztürk, 1998: 53) While earlier, folk songs were seen as the "origin" in creating the national music, this understanding was later abandoned and folk music was started to be seen in a more populist way. However it was continued to be seen as a part of the national music repertoire.

Culture and cultural activities were seen in a pedagogical manner by the Republican elite and the nation as pupils was aimed to be mobilized through education.<sup>13</sup> People's Houses, which were established in 1932 within such a framework, played an important role in the evolution of folk music. "Specifically, the Houses were charged with the duty to establish a national culture based on Turkish folklore, teach the masses the Republican principles, eradicate illiteracy, and devise the means to raise the people's living standards." (Karpas, 1974: 69,) People's Houses were engaged in the collection of folk music, yet, most of the collections made by them had deficiencies as the collectors were amateurs and did not include significant information such as the name of the collector, the way of performance, time or location. (Öztürkmen, 1998: 131)

State radio was another institution that played a significant role in the collection, nationalization and dissemination of folk music.<sup>14</sup> People in Anatolia showed little interest in the radio broadcasts of Western classical music or the new

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songs were collected. TRT organized a trip in 1961 to Erzurum, Kars, Van, Hakkari, Erzincan, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Urfa, Adana, Bitlis, Muş, Bingöl and Siirt. The songs were recorded on tapes. (Tüfekçi, 1983: 1488)

<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that the Kurdish movement shared with the Republic the pedagogical approach which will be analyzed later.

<sup>14</sup> However, during 1927-1934, there was little folk music broadcast on the radio and despite the collection attempts, folk music was still locally bounded. In this period, the radio was privately owned by Telsiz Telefon Türk Anonim Şirketi (Wireless Telephone Joint Stock Company). In 1936, the radio was nationalised. (Kocabaşoğlu, 1980: 89)

synthesis that is promoted. This caused an attraction to other countries' radio stations which aired music that was more familiar to people.<sup>15</sup> As a number of scholars claim, radio stations from across the borders (Egyptian, Syrian, Iranian, Armenian etc.) were more popular than Turkish radio broadcast. (Stokes, 1998: 72-73, Kocabaşoğlu, 1980: 94, Güngör: 1990:55 cited in Tekelioğlu, 1996: 206) Although in the above mentioned sources it is indicated that people were listening to Arab music, also Kurdish broadcast of Erivan, Baghdad and Kirmanshah radios were quite popular among the Kurds living in Turkey. These broadcasts were important in the revival of Kurdish identity during 1950s. (McDowall, 1996: 403)

In 1948, Muzaffer Sarısözen<sup>16</sup> established "Yurttan Sesler" (Sounds from the Homeland) group with 6 vocals and 4 instruments with the aim of making different "regions" hear each other's music. (Paçacı, 1999b: 125) Sarısözen has been an important name in the state policies of nationalization and standardization of folk music. His own words summarize the approach of the Turkish state to folk music and culture: "The most important aim of folk music programs on the radio is 'maintaining the national unity amongst the Turkish people'."<sup>17</sup> (Sarısözen, 1944a cited in Balkılıç, 2009:168) The folk music performances of TRT damaged the local and anonymous characters of the songs. (Paçacı, 1999b: 126) The songs collected were selected according to certain criteria and they were modified. In the first step of collection - because of the Western notation system that is not suitable for folk songs - important local characteristics of the songs were lost. (Hasgül, 1996a: 35) As a result of the notation, improvisation - which is one of the most important characteristics of some folk music traditions - was lost. (Stokes, 1998; Belge, 1980) TRT archives excluded songs from a large part of Eastern Black Sea, Greek and Kurdish music, while some songs' lyrics were Turkified. (Stokes, 1998: 104) In the first collections, the ethnic identities of the songs were denoted, but these have never been declared. (Hasgül,

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<sup>15</sup> Authors such as Özbek (1991) claim that the ban on Ottoman Classical Music on radio played a crucial role in this interest.

<sup>16</sup> In 1938, Muzaffer Sarısözen has become the chief of folklore archive of Ankara conservatory. In 1940, he is attended as the chief director of folk music programmes on the radio.

<sup>17</sup> "Radyoda halk müziği programlarının en önemli amacı ise 'Türk halkı arasında ulusal birliği sağlamak'tır." (Translation belongs to me.)

1996a: 35) However, regional characteristics were not completely ignored; they were fixed to certain standards. For instance, various accents and dialects in Black Sea Region are fixed to one -supposedly - *Laz* accent in singing styles. (Stokes, 1998: 104) The songs were classified according to the seven geographical regions, the individual styles of the minstrels (*aşık*) were ignored and the "samples" that do not fit either of the seven regions were excluded. (Tekelioğlu, 1999: 149) Regional differences were not seen as something against the national unity, but rather were promoted as an integral part of it. (Öztürkmen, 1998: 119) The diversities within the single national identity were first eliminated then re-invented according to certain criteria defined by the nationalist elites. "The process of constructing a cultural origin or heritage generally involves two elements. One is eliminating the differences and the other is reprocessing the 'differences' in folk forms in order to define them as a part of an imagined entity." (Değirmenci, 2006: 60)

The *arrangement* of the folk songs usually meant distortion as Muzaffer Sarısözen was "correcting" the way they were played by the local minstrels. The songs were arranged in way that can be sing by a chorus which is, generally, not a characteristic of folk music. The versions played on *Yurttan Sesler* were even more distorted as they were sung by a choir with a number of *sazs* all playing the same tune accompanying them. (Tekelioğlu, 1996: 200) The folk song - as demanded by TRT - has a closed form, is repetitive and in verse-chorus-verse structure in a monologic manner. (Stokes, 1998: 108)

The exclusion, and modification processes were part of the process of creating a national identity. The attitudes of ignoring, exclusion and modification were adopted towards Ottoman Classical music, ritual music of the *tekkes*, diverse cultures in Anatolia other than "Turkish". What is "Turkish" was also invented in this process. For instance songs with erotic lyrics were found improper and corrected or excluded from the repertoire as they did not represent the idealized Turkish identity. (Balkılıç, 2009: 130) Local minstrels' songs with critical lyrics were kept out of the repertoire. The folk music that was incredibly rich and multi-cultural in multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire was redefined and renamed under the title of "Turkish Folk Music" with nationalistic motivations. (Tekelioğlu, 1996: 196) In the writings of the Republican cadres about folk songs, (such as Gökalp, Saygun, Gazimihal) Anatolia

was defined as "Turkish" with almost no reference to other peoples living in it. It was not only defined as predominantly Turkish, but also as the site where pure Turkishness could be found. "Music policies of the Republican Era was adopted inline with the culture policy that was founded on the strategy of reaching its "modernization" target through 'Westernization', project of becoming a nation through Turkification, assimilation and ignoring of the Ottoman culture and ethnic cultures, and replacing these with Western cultures and an invented 'Turkish national culture'." (Hasgöl, 1996a: 41)

The formative activity of the state, which is not limited to the education it offers but includes all of its activities, do not work on a blank slate; on the contrary it competes and contradicts with other conceptions of the world and folklore is a significant one amongst these, which "needs" to be uprooted and replaced by the "superior" conceptions of the world as defined by the state. (Gramsci, 1985: 191) Turkish Republic has approached folklore in a similar manner. According to authors who do not approach folklore with a nationalist agenda (amongst whom Boratav is an example in Turkey), folklore can be understood only when it is regarded as a reflection of the everyday conditions of the people's lives. While trying to strengthen its own conception of world through folk music, the Republic has 'domesticated' folklore, and aimed to replace the way folk music is lived by people with its homogenized and standardized form.

Nationalization of folk music should be analyzed within the framework of assimilation policy of Republic of Turkey towards its Muslim minorities. Culture has played an important role in the invention of Turkish identity at the sake of other ethnic identities and cultures living in the defined national territories.<sup>18</sup> The music reform was also inline with these cultural policies. Kurdish folk songs in particular

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<sup>18</sup> How culture is used in the state's policy about the Kurds can be observed in the document "Nazımiye Tetkik Seyahati Notları" which are notes taken by teachers who made an investigation visit to the villages within the borders of Tunceli province in 1937, during Dersim Revolt. The notes included information on the population of villages, their customs and traditions, education level, languages spoken, economic situation, historical sites around and so on. These notes were re-published by *Foklora Doğru* magazine in 1998 with the article "Dersim ve Kolonizatör-Foklorcular" (Dersim and Colonist Folklorists) Öztürk says that they adopted the term colonist folklorist from Sadhana Naithani which defines the relation between the will and ambitions of the colonist and the folklorist in strengthening the power and control over the indigenous people and found enough resemblances with the attitude of Turkish folklorists. (Öztürk, 1998: 52)

and Kurdish culture in general were excluded/ eliminated or *Turkified*. Like all other folk songs, Kurdish folk songs which were included in the state repertoires were modified as a result of notation because the *makam*<sup>19</sup> structure can not be translated into Western notation system. Moreover the musical fabric was distorted because of standardization and elimination of improvisation. (Mutlu, 1996: 60)

One of the most detrimental effects was the denial of Kurdish language in folk songs. Music reform was fundamentally related to other reforms especially the language reform. Because of the connection between language and music, changes in one inevitably meant changes in the other.<sup>20</sup> Ignoring other languages than Turkish resulted in ignoring or transforming of folk songs in these languages. Kurdish songs were "Turkified" usually with lyrics irrelevant to the original. This process has started with the early republican era. For instance the content of the three songs of Alişer - one of the ideologues of Koçgiri and Dersim rebellions - that are in the collections made by Istanbul Municipal Conservatoire were changed. (Bayrak, 2002: 24) Kurdish singers such as Celal Güzelses, Mukim Tahir and folklorists such as Muzaffer Sarısözen and Nida Tüfekçi Turkified some of the Kurdish folk songs. (Mutlu, 1996: 60) Musicians with Kurdish origin, such as İzzet Altınmeşe, İbrahim Tatlıses and Burhan Çaçan, continued to contribute to the process of Turkification in 1980s and 1990s.<sup>21</sup> (Bayrak, 2002: 21)

Some Kurdish singers and *dengbêjs* rejected singing in Turkish and their efforts had helped Kurdish music to resist the assimilationist policies. (Mutlu, 1996: 61) Mihemed Arif Cizrevî, Hesên Cizrevî, Şakiro, Kawis Axa, Mele Ehmedê Batê, Silemanê Hinarê, Mihemed Şêxo, Îsa Berwarî, Mêryem Xan, Gerabetê Xaço, Aramê Tîgran, Şeroyê Biro, Ayşe Xan are some of the names who are regarded as the classics of Kurdish music by contemporary Kurdish musicians in Turkey. These musicians fled Turkey and carried the music of their region with them. Through singing these songs on Erivan and Baghdad radios, they caused the emergence of a

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<sup>19</sup> The melodic system that is based on a complex set of rules for composing.

<sup>20</sup> For instance classical Ottoman music's rhythm was compatible with the intonations in Ottoman language. With the language reform this rhythmic structure has become redundant. (Paçacı, 1999a: 22)

<sup>21</sup> See Korkmaz (2002) for an extended list of songs that are Turkified.

music that could transcend its local boundaries.

In addition to nationalization and modernization aspects of the Turkish music reform, secularization affected the Kurdish folk music as well as other musical traditions in Anatolia. With the abandonment of *tekkes* in 1925, the musical tradition in Mevlevi, Bektaşî and Kadiri *tekkes* were interrupted. These institutions had significance in the musical life both in terms of transmission and music education during Ottoman time. (Paçacı, 1999a: 16) These places have been important for Kurdish music and literature and their closure meant a rupture in transmission of Kurdish culture.

The nationalization of music was a part of the national identity construction process in Turkey. The invention process of the Turkish nation, and national music, has not been without conflicts and resistances. As demonstrated above, some Kurdish musicians resisted this process from its beginning. Of course Kurdish resistance was not limited to the field of music. Kurdish rebellions and their suppression during the early Republican period have been amongst the most bloody aspects of the national identity construction and homogenization processes. It is not a coincidence that these revolts and the Turkish music reform were taking place during the same period. While the Kurdish culture was denied through cultural policies, physical existence of Kurds was aimed to be eliminated in the case that they do not accept to be assimilated.

While the music reform aimed to create a homogenous national music, the Kurdish musicians challenged it through asserting the Kurdish identity. In doing this, reinvention of Kurdish culture, language and music, which were tried to be assimilated, have been very important.<sup>22</sup> Kurdish music groups in 1990s dedicated a large part of their repertoire to Kurdish folk songs, especially during 2000s. The folk songs which were excluded or modified according to the Turkish nationalist policies were rediscovered, and this time were sung in Kurdish. This was both a reaction against assimilation as well an assertion of the Kurdish identity. Although *koms'* assertion of cultural difference can be seen as an attempt to counter the Republican

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<sup>22</sup> Other musical initiatives that assert the local and regional characteristics of folk music has increased in the second half of 1980s, and continued in 1990s. While bands such as *Kardeş Türküler* did it with a "multi-culturalist" agenda, others such as *koms* had their own nationalist agendas.

cultural policy, both of them approach the folk culture with a nationalist agenda. While Republican policies ignored cultural difference, *koms* emphasized it. However, belonging to a nationalist movement, they became actors of another process of cultural homogenization and standardization.<sup>23</sup>

As no hegemonic process is ever complete or total, the possibility of oppositional or alternative projects is always inherent to it. (Williams, 1977: 113) However, the counter-hegemonic projects are not a complete negation of the hegemonic project either. They articulate some elements of it, while negating some others completely. This can be said about the Kurdish music groups of 1990s as well. While they negated the Turkification and homogenization of culture, they articulated some elements of the dominant discourse such as the emphasis on modernization of folk music. Ahıska draws attention to the imperialist practices of the West in this process. However, the position of the Turkish Republic should not be seen as that of a victims' against the West. The *us* who is positioned against the West, becomes the subject of other practices of domination in its own terrain. (Ahıska, 2005: 88) It defines itself as the pioneer and example of civilization against the “other” peoples; for instance the Kurds. Articulation of the hegemonic discourse of “modernization of music” by the *kom* musicians can be understood within this framework.

The modernization emphasis in music was not inherited directly from the Republican discourse. As it is hegemonic all around the world, the modernization of folk music been articulated by a number of nationalist movements. The monophonic musical traditions of the non-Western world were affected by the Westernization and modernization efforts. This approach was adopted not only by the states, but also by social and political movements.

As I have mentioned above, music becomes a political tool not only with respect to the state policies but also to the oppositional movements. The politicization of Kurdish music should be analyzed within the framework of the relation between music and oppositional movements. In the next part I will try to

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the cultural homogenization in the context of Kurdish culture in 1990s was not as organized and planned as the Turkish cultural reforms. Kurds did not possess the means to have such a project as they did not have a state and related state institutions. Moreover, such a deliberate aim of homogenization and standardization were not defined by the Kurdish movement, unlike the Turkish music reform. How standardization and homogenization of Kurdish folk music took place will be analyzed in more detail later.

examine this relationship and analyze the evolution of political music tradition in Turkey after 1960s.

### **1.3. Music and Political Movements**

As it has been mentioned above, there are various ways in which music and politics are interrelated. As music is not created and listened to in a vacuum, one might claim that any musical expression is actually political, no matter whether it is identified as such or not. As Pratt puts it, music might influence political behavior with or without intention. (Pratt, 1990: 5) Songs that do not have an explicit political content or intention might have a significant effect on people through the role they play in constructing and presenting people's identities. However, what I will analyze here is musical expressions that are explicitly identified as political by musicians as well as the listeners. Such identification is made usually when music belongs to a political movement. This might be as a result of musicians' participation in a movement, or through the adoption of a genre of music, or certain songs by the movement without the musicians' active involvement. The political aspect of music might emerge as a result of using music to mark the identity of certain groups or using a song for political mobilization or both. The *koms'* music's political character emerges from both. The bands have performed Kurdish folk songs which marked the Kurdish identity as well as songs with political lyrics which narrate the struggle and invite people to join.

When the relation between political movements and music is analyzed in an instrumental way, what is to be explored is the function the music plays for the movement. Although such a view is simplistic and does not take into account complex relations between the movement, musicians and the audience; it might still provide some useful insights. According to Pratt, political meaning and function of any music depend on its use. (ibid, p.1) When music is analyzed with respect to its political "function", the content of the music becomes very important. Through the lyrics of songs, different political effects can be created on the members of a group. Denisoff classifies the affects of popular music on political action as the following: soliciting support for a movement, reinforcing values of individuals, creating cohesion and solidarity, recruiting individuals to the movement, evoking solutions to

a social problem via action, describing a social problem in emotional terms, dividing supporters from the world around them, counteracting despair in social reformers when the change that has been waited for is not getting realized. (Denisoff, 1983 cited in Pratt, 1990: 200)

Within such a perspective Denisoff defines propaganda songs, magnet songs and rhetorical songs as types of political songs. Propaganda song communicates an idea, a concept or an ideology employing the structure of a folk song. It aims at reinforcing the value systems of individuals who are already members of a social movement, recruiting new people, creating cohesion among the members of a social movement, invoking solutions to reach the desired goal, directing attention to some problems. (Denisoff, 1968: 229) The "magnet" songs aim to persuade the listener emotionally or intellectually to join the movement and to create a feeling of solidarity among the members of the movement. A rhetorical song is written to point or describe a social situation, or an event that has a place in the collective memory of the members of the social movement. These songs do not usually offer a solution. Denisoff claims that rhetorical propaganda songs should be defined as "outbursts of desperation" rather than a call for mobilization. (ibid, p.231) While he takes magnet songs as an indicator of class conscious social movements and rhetorical songs with an absence of change oriented perspective, I think this is an idealized categorization for evaluating class consciousness of social movements.<sup>24</sup>

These definitions correspond to many songs that have become popular for Turkish left, as well as songs of *koms*. Both the Turkish left and the *koms* employed folk songs to communicate their ideas and aimed at recruiting new people to the movement, or creating cohesion amongst the group members. Within the framework of Denisoff's definition, most songs they made can be called as propaganda songs. The demarcation line between magnet songs and rhetorical songs is not very clear; and most of the songs that are analyzed within the scope of this thesis fall into both categories.

Another classification of political songs is made by Mattern. He identifies three main forms of 'community based political action with regards to music'. The

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<sup>24</sup> The underlying assumption that class consciousness is *the* criteria upon which a movement can be evaluated is also open to criticism.

first one is *confrontational* form. In this form, a community uses musical practice to resist and confront other communities whose interests appear to be in contradiction with their own interests. (Mattern, 1998: 25) Here the two communities can be formulated as dominant and subordinate groups where music becomes an arena of opposition. In *deliberative* form, through music, the identity is debated and multiple identities are negotiated, sometimes common interests of a community are shared and identity of the community is discovered, shaped and re-shaped. (ibid, p.28) The last form is identified as *pragmatic* form which emerges when music is used to raise awareness and mobilize people for certain issues. (ibid, p.30) Mattern says that these three categories he introduces should not be seen as mutually exclusive. The songs I have analyzed can be put in all three categories. While I have not encountered any songs that position Kurdish community against the Turkish community; existence of an “enemy” (which is the state) is clearly articulated. The Kurdish identity is asserted in all songs and they aim to mobilize the Kurds for action.

There are important weaknesses to functional analysis of political music which I tried to outline above. Even in the case when music is used as a deliberate strategy by the political or social movements; there needs to be a further evaluation of music which is not limited to its aims and effects. In order to understand the relation between the social movements and culture, one should not be seen as an instrument of the other but rather the relation between them and how they transform each other should be investigated. Although music might serve efficiently to enable political action, the outcomes are dependent on the larger political and social context. In analyzing the relation between identity, politics and culture, it becomes important to ask the question whether it is useful to look for concrete outcomes of using music in political context. "Music is a communicative arena in which various political actors can pursue multiple, often contradictory, agendas in which there are no guarantees of a positive democratic outcome. It is one political terrain, among many." (ibid, p.146)

Furthermore, music's political function can not be limited to its effects on public life. The changes it causes in the private realm, in the desires and behaviors of persons are also critical. (Pratt, 1990: 4) Political music has implications in terms of the articulation of identity and personal motivation for mobilization as the personal

realm and the public realm are quite intertwined in the emotional world of the listeners. "The imagery in music ... helps people to define themselves, to establish an identity. ... Personal political implications are evident as well in the ability of music to provide the public with "a way of managing" the intersecting dimensions of their "public and private emotional lives"." (ibid, p.5) The glorification of certain heroes/heroines by the musicians might have helped the identification of the listeners more with the political struggle and helped them to define themselves with the substitute imagery of the heroes/heroines in the songs. Frequent examples of such usage of public figures in Kurdish movement – killed guerillas, suicide activists - are an example to that. Popular music as such has a wider significance in terms of the interrelation between personal and public realms, thus any popular song might serve transformative functions unexpectedly. (ibid)

In almost all social or political movements, cultural resources are reworked both as a resource for inventive and creative artistic activities as well as a reflection of the social movement. (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 10) These movements also contribute to the cultural milieu they are in and the cultural effects of a movement that remains in the collective memories. Social or political movements provide a space for a particular movement culture to emerge. These cultures are dependent on the context within which they emerge, yet they can produce innovative forms and understandings which in turn might transform that cultural context. (ibid, p.160) This holds true for the political musicians and culture of 1960s and 1970s as well as the Kurdish music groups. While the former had a larger effect over the cultural milieu in Turkey, politicized Kurdish musicians have contributed to the Kurdish cultural formations in Turkey as well as the Turkish speaking leftist movements' cultures.

"... [S]ocial movements can help to reinvent and reproduce traditions of protest and rebellion, "alternative" cultures, which live on in the collective memory and which may influence and affect the emergence of future social movements." (ibid) More than the songs that are produced by the musicians of a certain era, the cultural effect they produce is influential on the next generations. It makes up a tradition of *resistance* and *opposition* which shapes the heritage adopted by other social movements. Different movements, and the cultural spheres they create, influence and inspire each other. This is across borders as well as generations; and

even though the discourse of movements or groups which a music group is attached to are not embraced by all groups, their music making style, approach to music production, forms of their songs or even songs themselves might be adopted by other movements. More importantly the heritage of some kind of oppositional music making inspires musicians and movements of next generations. This has been the case for the Kurdish music groups in 1990s. They have been inspired and influenced by the political music tradition in Turkey as well as in other countries. While the previous Kurdish musicians such as Cizrevî brothers, Şakiro, Kawis Axa, Ayşe Xan as well as politicized Kurdish musicians such as Şivan Perwer have been influential on them, the tradition of having music groups that belong to a movement is largely adopted from the political music tradition in Turkey<sup>25</sup> This is why I believe an analysis of political music making tradition in Turkey is necessary.

### **1.3.1. Political Music Tradition in Turkey Before 1980**

There had been a tradition of critical/ oppositional music making in folk music of Anatolia. These included folk songs critical against the administration, military mobilization, taxes, songs that praise bandits and elegies after the dead rebels who revolted against the local and central administrations. (Gündoğar, 2005a) The local poets and minstrels (*aşiks*) were important actors in the tradition of oppositional music. Although the Republic included some of the minstrels in its cultural reforms – such as *Aşık Veysel*-, some others who were more critical remained marginal. It can also be assumed that some minstrels were hopeful about the new Republic and its policies and were not too much critical about the administration. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 76) There were songs composed after the Kurdish rebellions after the foundation of the Republic such as *Şerê Eliyê Unis*, *Bişarê Çeto*, *Alikê Batê*, *Havae Cûxure*. (ibid, p.82-4) These songs are also important in terms of the transmission of collective memory of the Kurdish rebellions to next generation against the official history's narrative of these revolts.

Political music in Turkey started gaining significant popularity with 1960s. The musicians who came to the fore with a revolutionary identity in 1960s were the

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that international examples such as the *nueva canción* tradition in Latin America have also been inspirational on the *kom* musicians.

minstrels.<sup>26</sup> In 1940s and 50s, minstrels and folk poets (*ozans*) were already politicized, however with TİP (Turkish Workers Party) these musicians gained a new perspective. (ibid, p.89) Most of them joined the TİP, which was a magnet for different segments of the society who are discontent with the politics. Their songs can be classified both as magnet and rhetorical in Denisoff's terminology as they described the situation and invited people to join the struggle with their songs. While calling people for mobilization, minstrels assumed the role of raising people's consciousness. Such a pedagogical approach to people is the reflection of an idea of revolution with intellectual vanguards and is seen in a majority of musicians who can be classified under political musicians. During 1960s, socialism as the word itself as well as other concepts such as bourgeoisie, proletariat, imperialism, exploitation appeared in songs of folk poets. (ibid, p.96, 100) *Aşık* tradition got weaker after 12 September, as the apprenticeship system it relied on was weakened and as a result of rural migration the musical preferences of the people started to shift. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 53)

Ruhi Su has been an important name in political music tradition in Turkey. Su joined TİP in 1960s and became a prominent name in the music tradition that was shaped around the party. (ibid, p.58) He summarized his musical understanding as "Reaching the universal within one's own identity and nation by being free of preciousness."<sup>27</sup> (ibid, p.55) In this phrase, traits of Republic's discourse on folk music can be found. Although Su's position can be regarded as alternative to the hegemonic order, as he was usually singing Alevi *deyiş*<sup>28</sup> with an oppositional content, his stance towards national identity, modernization and Westernization was articulated from Republic's discourse. According to Kahyaoğlu, for Su, polyphonization was *naturally* a target, but he rejected topdown policies and defended that polyphonization can develop only when people *embrace* it. (ibid, p.56) This is a clear

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<sup>26</sup> It worths mentioning the names of some minstrels names who were prominent during 1960s: Âşık Ali İzzet, Âşık İhsani, Mahzuni Şerif, Âşık Nesimi are some prominent names. Especially Âşık İhsani has been a popular name amongst workers and students.

<sup>27</sup> "Özenmelerden ve özentilerden sıyrılmak, kendi benliği, ulusallığı içinde evrenselliğe açılmak, ulaşmak." (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 55)

<sup>28</sup> Alevi songs of mystical love.

example of how the modernization discourse has become hegemonic. To resonate Gramsci, hegemony is not constructed by force and coercion but by the consent of people. While the top-down policies of banning and forcing people to listen to Western classical music are criticized, the belief that polyphonic music is the *natural* way to catch up with the contemporary world is reproduced. It has been mentioned above that a similar approach to polyphonization and harmonization can be observed in *koms* too.

The evolution of the political music in Turkey, largely reflected the evolution of political movements throughout 1960s, 70s and 1980s. (ibid, p.67) Towards the end of 1960s and during 70s, the lyrics became more direct and political, and the number of minstrels and political musicians increased. With the fragmentation within left, different movements and organizations started to have their own affiliated minstrels. (ibid, p.69) With the discussions in the leftist movement about the armed struggle, political songs were increasingly militarized. Names of guns, terms such as *mavzer*, *namlu*, *tüfek* were increasingly used. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 100) As the left started putting a clearer distance between itself and Kemalism, musicians' anti-imperialist, left and socialist perspectives shifted as well. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 69) Yet not all musicians adopted similar discourses. The anti-imperialist discourse had a more nationalist character in some musicians such as Mahzuni Şerif.

Folk music had been an important source and inspiration for most political musicians of 1960s and 1970s. The rediscovery of folk music in an urban context was very much related to the urban migration of the rural population in 1960s. (Coşkun, 1999: 143) The *aşık* tradition was monophonic and rural while, there were musicians who made music in Western popular forms and combined them with folk tunes and political lyrics. These musicians signaled a different musical understanding that would attract the urban population to it. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 64) *Anadolu Pop* was a genre that emerged towards the end of 1960s and Moğollar was the first to use the name. Musicians of the genre come from a background of singing popular Western songs. With the influence of anti-imperialist discourses and politically motivated minstrels such as İhsani, they were inclined towards folk music. Hasgül says that during the 1960s and 70s, the distinction between urban and rural lifestyles was not

as clear as it is today - or there has not emerged a clear-cut hierarchy - and it is not surprising that an interaction between the two took place. Initially, folk songs were arranged for guitar, later on orchestration and harmonization gained importance. Instruments like bass, guitar and drum machines were used alongside folk instruments such as *cura*, *kaval*, *mey* and *zurna*. (Hasgül, 1996b: 59)

An important characteristic of the *Anadolu Pop* movement was that for the first time group music and group phenomena emerged in Turkey. With the influence of these groups, group music has become very popular and amateur music groups started to emerge in various cities and towns. A group understanding in which the musician has to obey the strict group rules was seeded during 1970s. Such an understanding prevented a collective consciousness and intra-group criticism mechanisms to emerge. (ibid, p.63) This group understanding gained dominance in the music groups of 1980s and was inherited by *koms*.

The folk songs were interpreted in a unique way different from that of TRT's and the minstrels' by *Anadolu Pop* musicians. The songs belonging to the genre were not broadcasted on TRT and TRT wanted to keep its monopoly over the folk songs by claiming that *Anadolu Pop* degenerates folk songs, ruins their 'authenticity' and uses discordant instruments together. (ibid, p. 67) TRT's efforts against *Anadolu Pop* is interesting as Westernization of folk music was adopted as an official state policy in 1930s. Here, the reaction is not against Westernization per se, but rather its development through popular culture outside the realm of state control. TRT was aiming to justify its reaction by claiming that folk songs are performed in their 'authenticity' by the TRT. Leaving aside the accuracy of the debate on authenticity, as demonstrated above, most folk songs were included in TRT archives in a modified way according to the ideological needs of the Republic.

Despite this clash between TRT and musicians of *Anadolu Pop*, Tekelioğlu claims that the genre is akin to the official state project of polyphonization of folk music with Western instruments; with the difference that, this time, it was taking place in the realm of popular music. (Tekelioğlu, 1999: 151) "Anatolian pop can be called a late East-West synthesis attempt at the realm of popular music. Maybe if they have included this popular music version, the early officials of the Republic could have succeeded in the music revolution." (ibid, p.151) On the other hand,

Kahyaoğlu claims that popularization of polyphonic and harmonic folk music which took place in 1960s is a *different kind* of East-West synthesis against the top-down synthesis project of the Republic. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 64)

The relation between state's policy of Westernization of folk music and the musical practices that take place in the realm of popular culture, which started with Anadolu Pop and continued until today, is more complex than a relation of resemblance or difference. This is a relation of opposition, articulation and incorporation which has been taken over by the successive musical movements such as *koms'*. Like the Republican cadres, for a majority of the political musicians of 1960s and 70s, polyphonic music meant innovation. They modernized the folk songs in a way that local styles were lost. Neither have they performed folk songs in languages other than Turkish. (Hasgöl, 1996b: 72) However, while the Republican cadres aimed to bring “modern” music through Western classical music, the political musicians used Western popular forms. Popularization of Western harmony and polyphony is significant as popular music is a terrain where there is more space for negotiation of dominant forms and identification. As demonstrated above, opposition does not always mean complete rejection, but rather articulation.

Marches and elegies (*ağts*) accompanied the politicized folk songs in the repertoires of political musicians of 1960s and 70s. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 63) The elegies such as "Ulaş'a Ağıt", "Şarkışla", "Kızıldere" were composed after the death of important revolutionary figures after 12 March. (ibid, p.71) Composing elegy songs for “martyred comrades” is frequently seen in *koms'* albums as well. The heroes/ heroines in songs provide examples to the members of the movement and make personal association possible. "In eras of great change and or movements for change, music functions to catalyze personal perspectives while "managing" and providing substitute imagery for people seeking to express their dreams and fantasies." (Pratt, 1990: 200) These figures also provided concrete examples with their stories rather than the abstract concepts such as freedom, struggle, and resistance. In addition to these, elegies on massacres such as Kahramanmaraş events<sup>29</sup> were composed. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 103) Such songs contributed to the

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<sup>29</sup> Şahturna's *Şanlı Maraş* is an example.

collective memory about the events that have a symbolic importance for the leftist movements. Construction of a collective history is crucial in collective identification processes; and such songs were composed by *kom* musicians very frequently too.

During 1960s and 70s, songs in march format were very popular. These included international marches as well as recently composed ones. International marches established links between international movements. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 94) Newly composed marches carried both folk music elements as well as Western musical forms. (ibid, p.85) The march as a musical form is related to mobilization of the masses which is a reflection of the movements' approach to revolution. In most marches the lyrics are more direct, yet some poems have been composed in march form too. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 164) Folk songs were polyphonized through marches too.

### **1.3.2. Political Music Tradition in Turkey After 1980**

If the revolutionary groups of 1970s are perceived to be counter-hegemonic, their incorporation started after the coup. Musicians such as Livaneli, or Yeni Türkü abandoned their radical discourses. The sign of being incorporated is denoted as appearing on TRT by Kahyaoğlu.<sup>30</sup> (2003) In the second half of 1980s, *özgün müzik* started to emerge. This music was polyphonic, and the vocal style of arabesk was used extensively by the musicians of the genre. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 116) The left intelligentsia was critical of this music style because of its similarities with arabesk.<sup>31</sup> Ahmet Kaya, the prominent name of the genre, has become very significant for the Kurdish movement.

During 1980s, several groups emerged, some around cultural centers<sup>31</sup>, some independently. Ezginin Günlüğü which was established around İşçi Kültür Derneği, Çağdaş Türkü, Yeni Türkü, Mozaik are the groups which gave more weight

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<sup>30</sup> It is not a coincidence that today such an incorporation for Kurdish musicians would be singing on TRT Şeş.

<sup>31</sup> Ortaköy (later İdil) Kültür Merkezi, Arya Kültür Merkezi, Evrensel Kültür Merkezi, Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi, Tohum Kültür Merkezi, Yüz Çiçek Açsın Kültür Merkezi were some of the cultural centres.

to musical expression and used less direct lyrics. While some polyphoned folk music, some were closer to Western popular music forms. They used folk music instruments, in addition to Western instruments and arrangements. These groups are defined as “urban”<sup>32</sup> by Gündoğar which indicates their relative affinity to individual expression. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 223-8) Grup Yorum, Grup Ekin, Kızılırmak and Grup Baran were other groups that had more explicit political lyrics and devoted less space to individual feelings and expressions. These groups were subject to severer political oppression, their members were frequently arrested and albums were confiscated. Some of these groups were directly attached to a political group while some others were independent. The former ones usually saw music in a more instrumental way and considered music as a way of building moral for their political struggle. (Kahyaoğlu, 2003: 122) The *koms* were especially influenced by the latter group of music groups.

Grup Yorum was one of the most popular amongst these groups. Their first album *Sıyrılıp Gelen* was released in 1987. Yorum was initially shaped around TFK (Turkish Folklore Organization) and Ortaköy Cultural Centre which was later called İdil Kültür Merkezi<sup>33</sup>. The group was an example of organized musician; which means a musician that belongs to a political organization and makes music in a way that is directly linked to that organization. (ibid, p.138) The culture centre has acted as an education institution for group members, and as the band lost members; there have always been potential members in the cultural centre to fill their place. (ibid, p.6) The band members were frequently arrested, imprisoned, tortured; their albums were confiscated, concerts were raided. Yet the band continued to exist until today and became very popular during 1990s.

Although musically they rest on folk music tradition, Yorum had explicit connections with the world revolutionary music. (ibid, p.123) Both Latin American *nueva canción*<sup>34</sup> and Anatolian folk music have been influential in Grup Yorum's

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<sup>32</sup> Being *urban* as an identity is a theme that recurred in my interviews. Yet what is meant by *urban* as an identity remains ambiguous for me.

<sup>33</sup> The name was changed to İdil Kültür Merkezi after Ayçe İdil Erkmen died in hunger-strike. She was the first woman militan to die on hunger strike.

<sup>34</sup> “New song” in Spanish. It emerged as a musical movement in late 1950s in a number of Latin

music. In addition to that, marches that have been influential in the Soviets as well as the ones that belong to international socialist movements had been part of the repertoire. Even though Grup Yorum belongs to a political group, their listeners were much wider than the members of that specific group. As the members of the band were frequently imprisoned, prison culture has played an important role in their music. Even when the band members were not, the activists they sang about were, so prison has always been an important theme in Grup Yorum's songs.

Grup Yorum was also closely related to *koms* as they were singing Kurdish songs in their concerts as well as composing in Kurdish. The band and the *koms* took stage in several common events. Grup Yorum is mentioned by some of the *kom* members I interviewed among the musicians and groups they have been influenced.

Music meant something like that for us. Şivan Perwer, Haco, bands like Grup Yorum, Ezginin Günlüğü, a phenomenon like Ahmet Kaya. Music was perceived as such in that atmosphere. It was an important component of the struggle. The figure of an artist corresponded to a political icon. Before coming to Kurdish music, it is necessary to draw attention to Grup Yorum. Because Grup Yorum had been influential on Kurdish music groups as it has been influential on many student groups and music groups. It was the image they have represented.<sup>35</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008)

For instance Grup Yorum made an imprint on the left in Turkey. They have a style. There isn't anyone who is not influenced by Yorum. When I listen to their songs, I get carried away.<sup>36</sup> (Interview with Munzûr, 27.09.2008)

Some *kom* musicians were critical of Grup Yorum. Ciwan criticized the *gırtlak*<sup>37</sup> Yorum and Kızılırmak used in Kurdish songs of not being *Kurdish* and added that neither groups aimed to make music in Kurdish, they just included some

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American countries. It searched for the roots to recover, recreate the indigenous cultures and make social criticism. (Mattern, 1998: 39) While looking for the indigenous musical forms, the musicians of *nuevo canción* were also looking for the "new" as the name indicates.

<sup>35</sup> “Zaten müzik denilince aklımıza aşağı yukarı öyle şeyler geliyordu. Şivan Perwerler, Hacılar, Grup Yorum, Ezginin Günlüğü gibi gruplar, Ahmet Kaya gibi bir fenomen. Zaten müziğin böyle algılandığı bir atmosferdi. Müzik mücadelenin önemli bir bileşeniydi. Sanatçı figürünün politik bir ikona denk geldiği bir atmosfer söz konusuydu. Kürt müziklerine gelmeden önce Grup Yorum'a dikkat çekmek gerek. Çünkü Grup Yorum, pek çok öğrenci grubunu, müzik grubunu etkilediği gibi Kürt müzik gruplarında da belirleyici olmuştur.. Grup Yorum'un verdiği görüntü...”

<sup>36</sup> “Mesela Grup Yorum Türkiye'deki sola damgasını vurmuştur. Onların bir yorumu vardır zaten. Yorum'dan etkilenmeyen yoktur. Ben onların parçalarını dinleyince coşuyorum.”

<sup>37</sup> *Gırtlak* is used to denote the special vocal styles in Kurdish folk music.

songs to their repertoires. Yet, I believe there are important common characteristics between the two: In terms of content, both make magnet as well as rhetorical songs. They use confrontational lyrics in calling the people for mobilization. Some themes such as prison, armed struggle, mountains are common in songs of both. Yorum has been important in setting an example to making “collective”, political and *örgütlü* (organized) music. Especially the musician as a political figure who has certain responsibilities for the movement s/he belongs to has been very influential on *kom* musicians. The musician is committed to the movement not only as a result of individual responsibility feelings. The movement *charges* the musician with certain responsibilities. As the intellectual pioneers, they are to give the messages of the movement to the audiences and mobilize them for action. They are to behave in a way appropriate to a 'revolutionary'. The notion of musician's responsibility in the framework of *koms'* music will be explored in more detail later.

It has been mentioned above that political musicians shape the culture of the era they belong to. Moreover, they inspire and influence the next generations of political musicians. I tried to demonstrate the direct and indirect ways the political musicians and music groups in Turkey influenced *koms*. The modernization of folk music, harmonization and polyphonization has been articulated by the oppositional music tradition, which was also embraced by the *koms*. As it has been mentioned above, the dominant discourse of modernization of music was negotiated and appropriated in the field of popular music. In addition to this, making music in a group, affiliating with a specific political movement was also influential over *koms*. Like most the preceding political groups, *koms* have composed and sang songs in march form. Most of the musicians I interviewed mentioned Kurdish musicians, especially Şivan Perwer, as a source of inspiration. Now I will have a brief look at the politicization of Kurdish music which has started by late 1960s and its evolution until the emergence of *koms* in 1990s.

### **1.3.3. Politicization of Kurdish Music**

As Kurdish has been denied by the Turkish state for decades, only singing in Kurdish is a political statement. “Those who tell that their language does not exist create conditions in which singing or listening to a popular song is a sign of life. In

such conditions, every performance of a Kurdish song conveys the same message as the refrain of the nationalist song 'Ey, Reqîb' (O, Enemy!): 'Let no one say that the Kurdish will die; Kurds will live on'." (Blum and Hassanpour, 1996: 325) It has been analyzed how folk songs in Kurdish (and other languages in Anatolia) have been Turkified by the Republican cadres and later by popular singers. In such an environment, singing a folk song in Kurdish, regardless of its content, is a statement about the existence of a cultural identity that is being denied.

Because of this denial, singing in Kurdish has not been independent from the Kurdish political demands. What is meant by Kurdish *political* music - which is dealt with in this thesis - is the music that is not only in Kurdish but which is also involved in the Kurdish movement in different ways. While some musicians – such as the *koms'* members – were directly attached to a political group, some musicians such as Şivan Perwer and Nizamettin Arîç have never been affiliated to any group.

Before 1960s, there were names who were singing in Kurdish before that such as Ayşe Xan<sup>38</sup> however, their repertoire was composed mostly of Kurdish folk. Yet, as mentioned earlier, there are folk songs composed about the Kurdish revolts and their suppression by the state. Kurdish singing *dengbêjs* such as M. Arifê Cizrawî and Karapetê Xaco had to flee Turkey after Kurdish rebellions were crushed violently. Although Kurdish was not circulated through mainstream media, these *dengbêjs* could be listened from Erivan, Tahran and Baghdad radios by the Kurdish speaking audience in Turkey. According to some authors, this contributed to the emergence of a Kurdish music that is perceived to be national as it could transcend its local boundaries across the state's borders. (Yıldırım, 2007)

During 1960s and 1970s Kurdish records were started to be released. Political Kurdish musicians emerged towards the end of 1960s when Kurdish youth started to get mobilized independently from the Turkish left and demands about Kurds' rights were started to be voiced. Towards the end of 1960s, Kurdish student organizations started organizing some “nights” which were social, political and cultural gatherings for the members of the movement. In addition to individual

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<sup>38</sup> Some of the records are cited by Gündoğar as Kadir Gedikanlioğlu – Bedir Cani/ Kareli Derviş, Ayşe Xan – Kaderey Yar/ Vallah Te Nestinim, Aşık Ali Cizreli – Bişarê Çeto/ Le le Xifşê. (Gündoğar, 2005a: 34)

musicians who took stage in these nights, there were also some groups. Although I could not get any detailed information about these groups, some were Koma Azadî, Koma Brusik and Koma Peşeng (Gündoğar, 2005b: 36) and Koma Dengê Kawa, Koma Berxwedan (as a continuation of Koma Niştiman) (Yıldırım, 2007) which were attached to Kurdish parties and organizations. Kurdish left was as fragmented as the Turkish left during 1970s; and these groups were attached to different factions. As Yıldırım says, these are the early examples of *group music* understanding in Kurdish political music. After the 1980 coup, Kurdish political music underwent a change too. Even before the coup a significant number of musicians have fled to Europe, with the coup this number increased further. Secondly, the socialist discourse in their songs started to be given less weight, and a discourse that concentrates on the struggle of the Kurds became more dominant. (Gündoğar, 2005b: 188)

Şivan Perwer has become a well known name during the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> His songs are performed by other musicians, including the *koms* - even by Turkish singing musicians by writing Turkish lyrics on.<sup>40</sup> He has never been affiliated with a movement, and has become a name who is respected by all parties and fractions. Different from folk musicians who sing in Kurmanjî dialect, Perwer made songs about the struggle on national identity and language which made him popular. His lyrics in his first album demonstrate how the following Kurdish musicians were influenced from his music.

I am a flamboyant Kurdish youngster  
I am loaded with guns and bombs  
I am going to combat, to fight  
If I do not come back mother, please do not cry.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Some other individual musicians who emerged during 1970s are Şiyar Farqînî and Ali Baran.

<sup>40</sup> Perwer's songs were Turkified just like Kurdish folk songs without indicating the name or the source of the original.

<sup>41</sup> “Ben anlı şanlı bir Kürt genciyim  
Bomba ve tüfeği yükledim  
Savaşmaya, vuruşmaya gidiyorum  
Eğer dönmezsem, anne sen ağlama.”

The poem belongs to Mehmet Emin Bozarslan. The Turkish translation was taken from Gündoğar, 2005b: 44. English translation belongs to me.

The lyrics resonate the lyrics of Turkish political musicians' lyrics and reflect the discourse of Kurdish nationalists during the time. Most of Perwer's lyrics belong to well known Kurdish poets, especially to Kurdish nationalist poet Cigerxwin whose poems have been composed by *koms* too. Frequently used themes in Cigerxwin's poems are the struggle of the Kurds, a call for the Kurds to resist their national subordination and sometimes the social situation of the Kurds. Şivan Perwer's songs covered similar topics too. His lyrics described the situation of Kurdish people, presented Kurdishness as an identity, aimed to raise awareness amongst the Kurds about their oppressed position and called people for mobilization. Different from other leftist musicians of the time, Perwer's songs negotiated the Kurdish identity. Singing in Kurdish is an important way of presenting the Kurdish identity. Perwer was also using nationalist lyrics as quoted above. A thorough analysis of Kurdish identity in Perwer's songs will not be presented here. However, it can be said that the oppression and resistance and struggle against the oppression are the main elements of the identity that is negotiated.

They are workmen of the enemy, we are their workmen  
Workers and farmers, it's enough, the time has come, rise  
Until when are we going to be workers of *aghas* and lords  
Until when are we going to be the bone under the feet of a dog  
Until when are we going to be slaves and lose face?<sup>42</sup>

Workers and farmers are not frequent themes in Kurdish songs with a political motivation. Yet, it can be claimed that class struggle and socialism were themes that Şivan Perwer used more frequently than *koms*. There are songs that he made about Marxism as a science, for Lenin<sup>43</sup> or Ho Chi Minh especially in his early albums. A part of the explanation for using such themes is their popularity among the political musicians of the time. Names of socialist, communist leaders and

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<sup>42</sup> Onlar düşmanın ırgatı ve biz onların ırgatıyız  
Ey işçiler ve çiftçiler, yeter, zaman geldi, kalkın  
Ne zamana kadar ağa ve beylerin işçileri olacağız  
Ne zaman kadar köpeğin ayakları altındaki kemik olacağız  
Ne zaman kadar biz, köle ve rezil rüsva olacağız”  
The poem belongs to Cigerxwin. Turkish translation is taken from Gündoğar, 2005b: 46. English translation belongs to me.

<sup>43</sup> Within the sample of the songs I analyzed, there is one song about Lenin.

theoreticians were pronounced quite frequently in music during 1970s. It was due to Kurdish movement's affinity with socialism too. The weakening of the emphasis on socialist themes in Kurdish music is related to the evolution of the Kurdish struggle. Especially after the movement declared that it abandoned socialist discourses in 1995, the emphasis on class struggle – which has never been very central - has almost disappeared. Recently, like almost all Kurdish musicians, Perwer's albums are composed entirely of folk songs. Earlier, his songs sounded more like marches, and political lyrics were most common. Today, the songs are performed more with folk instruments even when they are not folk tunes. A similar trend can be observed in *koms*' too. This has a lot to do with the evolution of Kurdish movement which will be explored later.

An important group of songs – which can be classified as *rhetorical* – are the ones that tell a story which has a significant place in the collective memories of the Kurds. It has been mentioned before that music plays a significant role in the oral history of the Kurds. As the Kurdish population is largely illiterate, traditionally music has played an important role in the formation of collective memory. Political musicians' songs have also contributed to the collective memory formation of the politically mobilized Kurdish population. Perwer, and other musicians such as Ciwan Haco, Nizamettin Arıç as well as *koms*, made songs about important events related to the Kurds. These can also be evaluated as efforts at creating a national history; which will be explored more in detail later. Some examples of such songs that are made by Şivan Perwer are; Agirî about Ağrı Revolt, Dilo Yeman about Dersim Revolt and Helebçe about the Halepçe massacre.

Other musicians who worth being mentioned are Ciwan Haco and Nizamettin Arıç. Both names have been important sources of inspiration for the Kurdish music groups with their political songs and musical approaches. Arıç approaches the folk music in his own way and asserts that he aims to polyphonize and modernize Kurdish folk music (Gündoğar, 2005b: 160); Ciwan Haco made music in Kurdish in different genres. Haco is regarded as an “urban” musician by some critics and some of the musicians I talked to. The “urban” identity corresponds to making music with unconventional instruments in more Western forms and writing more individualistic lyrics. The *urbanness* - which is an ambiguous term as

indicated earlier - as a component of Kurdish identity articulated through music will be explored in detail later.

Some Kurdish musicians who fled to Europe established Koma Berxwedan (Group Resistance). The band was established out of the "Kurdistan Artists' Association" in Europe Hünerkom, which was founded by politically mobilized diaspora Kurds in Europe in 1983. Berxwedan has been very influential on *koms* of 1990s in Turkey too. It was an important example with its political stance that was clearly reflected to its lyrics. Berxwedan had political lyrics that narrated the struggle and called people to join. The band set an example to the Kurdish youth not only with their music and political stance, but also with the fact that they were a Kurdish singing *music group* which represented a collective identity on the stage. But most importantly, it was directly engaged in the movement to propagate its messages. Below is a quote from an interview made with Xemgîn Bîrhat, one of the founding members of Koma Berxwedan. The quote makes the position of the musician in the movement very clear.

When the Liberation Movement started to develop in 1980s, mass communication media was not very advanced and the publications released by the liberation movement did not reach the people in a fast way. If the literacy problem of our people is considered, I believe the role Koma Berxwedan played for the liberation movement will be understood better. In this sense, the most effective way of carrying the newly developing ideology of liberation movement to people has been Koma Berxwedan's music. For instance, the working style of that time, propaganda and agitation, were brought to life almost with Koma Berxwedan. This situation brought the development of people's sentiments on language, culture and identity. Shortly, Koma Berxwedan has played an important role in transmitting the politics of liberation movement as well as the values created by this movement in an artistic way of expression. In this sense, it has been an important moral booster for the struggle and the Kurdish people.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Özgürlük Mücadelesi 1980’li yıllarda gelişmeye başladığında kitle iletişim araçları henüz o kadar gelişkin değildi ve özgürlük hareketinin çıkardığı yayın organları da hızlı bir şekilde halka ulaştırılamıyordu. Halkımızın okuma yazma sorunu da gözönünde bulundurulursa Koma Berxwedan grubunun özgürlük mücadelesinde nasıl bir rol oynadığı daha iyi anlaşılacaktır kanımca. Bu anlamda yeni gelişmekte olan özgürlük ideolojisini halka taşımanın en etkin aracı Koma Berxwedan müziği olmuştur. Örneğin o dönemin çalışma tarzı olan ajitasyon ve propaganda neredeyse Koma Berxwedan’la hayat bulmuştur. Bu durum aynı zamanda halkın kendi dil, kültür ve kimliğini sahiplenme duygularının gelişmesini de beraberinde getirmiştir. Kısacası Koma Berxwedan’ın gerek özgürlük mücadelesinin siyasetini halka taşımakta gerekse de bu mücadelenin yarattığı değerleri sanatsal bir dille tekrar halka ulaştırılmasında önemli rolü olmuştur. Bu anlamıyla hem mücadele için hem de Kürt halkı için önemli bir moral kaynağı olmuştur.” (<http://www.yeniozgurpolitika.org/yazdir.php?hid=40513>, retrieved on 23.06.2009;

While the musicians I interviewed have emphasized the influence of Koma Berxwedan's over their music and political engagement, some were also critical of Berxwedan's music's quality which was given less importance than the politically agitative content.

There was a limited number of music groups back then. We took Koma Berxwedan as an example because they were a group. Şivan, Ayşe Xan or Cizrawî were all solo singers; we were nourished by them but Berxwedan was the only example for us. But we could not see the life style of Koma Berxwedan. We could follow them only from the cassettes imported.<sup>45</sup> (Interview with Osman, 02.10.2008)

Koma Berxwedan did it professionally; it is the music group of a party, makes music and delivers a message parallel to the ideology of the party. [We said] we are university students within the society, we got their message and we will start something new. We wanted to make music that would represent the Kurdish culture, which would have quality and carry Kurdish music to the world from local to national and from national to universal.... Koma Berxwedan does it but quality is very low there. The message is more important. The instruments used and the melodies were Kurdish. They would write political lyrics over folk songs. That was something we did not approve.<sup>46</sup> (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009)

It is important to note that, the names that are mentioned above were popular among the Kurmanjî speaking Kurdish population in Turkey. The Zazakî (Dımilî, Kırmanckî) speaking Alevi population in Dersim were more interested in the minstrels who would sing *deyişs* with a political content during 1970s. Yet, there were some local musicians such as Emekçi and Zilfî who include Zazakî songs in their repertoires. (Yıldırım, 2007) Inclusion of other Kurdish dialects in the repertoire

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translation belongs to me.)

<sup>45</sup> “O dönemde çok kısıtlı düzeyde müzik grupları vardı. Biz Koma Berxwedan'ı örnek aldık çünkü gruptu. Şivan, Ayşe Xan, Cizrawî hep solistti, onlardan da beslendik ama Berxwedan bizim için tek örnekti. Ama Koma Berxwedan'ın yaşam tarzını görmüyorduk. Yalnızca gelen kasetlerden takip ediyorduk.”

<sup>46</sup> “Koma Berxwedan profesyonel olarak o işi yapar, bir partinin müzik grubudur ve partinin ideolojisi paralelinde müzik yapar ve mesaj iletir. Biz toplum içerisinde üniversite öğrencileriyiz, biz bu mesajı aldık ve yeni bir şey başlatıyoruz. Biz öyle bir şey yapmalıyız ki, Kürt kültürünü temsil etsin, nitelik kaygısı olsun, yerelden ulusala, ulusaldan evrensele; Kürt müziğini dünyaya dinletecek nitelik kazandıralım. ... Koma Berxwedan yapıyor ama nitelik orda çok düşük. Daha çok mesaj kaygısı var. Kullanılan enstrümanlar Kürt enstrümanlarıdır ve melodiler de öyle. Onlar halk şarkılarının üzerine değiştirerek siyasal sözler yazarlardı. Bu çok onayladığımız bir şey değildi bizim.”

of political musicians is connected with the increasing mobilization of these groups in the struggle.

Until late 1980s, Kurdish music production was mainly located outside of Turkey. In 1988, Beşir Kaya released an album in Turkey which was entirely composed of Kurdish songs and met with fierce state reaction. The album was confiscated; the musician and the record label were sued. (Kahyaoglu, 2003: 121, Gündoğar, 2005b: 190) Rahmi Saltuk released an album called *Hoynaro* in 1989 and a lawsuit was filed against him; yet he won the case. In 1986, Ses Plak was established by which would release albums of musicians such as Grup Kızılırmak, Şivan Perwer, Hasret Gültekin and the first albums of *koms*. The law numbered 2932 which prohibited the use of Kurdish in published material was lifted in 1991 which opened the way in front of releasing albums in Kurdish. According to Gündoğar around 200 albums were released during the time and firms were very enthusiastic about releasing albums in Kurdish. Most of these albums belonged to local musicians. (Gündoğar, 2005b: 191) A majority of the interviewees regarded the albums released during this period as commercially driven and of low quality.

I tried to analyze the relation between politics and music in this chapter with a focus on state-led music policies in Turkey and the oppositional music tradition after 1960s. This framework is necessary not only to understand the cultural context that the Kurdish music groups in 1990s emerged, but also the complex relations between dominant and alternative practices of music. The relation between nationalism and music is also significant as the Kurdish nationalist movement approached music with a nationalist agenda while challenging the Turkish nationalism. They did this by using folk music as a marker of an identity that is denied by the Turkish nationalism as well as propagating the Kurdish identity and struggle through the political lyrics of the songs they created. In doing this, they appropriated certain discourses and practices of the oppositional music tradition in Turkey. In addition to nationalism, modernization has been an important part of the Turkish music reform. Westernization as modernization has reflected to the music reform as celebration of polyphonic and harmonic music. Such an idea was appropriated also by the oppositional music tradition in Turkey in the realm of popular music. As it will be demonstrated later, the Westernization of folk music and

the idea that polyphonization is a sign of civilization has been embraced by *kom* musicians too.

Music's counter or alternative hegemonic functions are not without contradictions and the process of incorporation takes place on different levels. This is the very nature of how hegemony works and counter-hegemonic cultural forms emerge. As Williams (1977) notes, hegemony is not static or frozen; neither are counter-hegemonic projects. While the counter-hegemonic elements are incorporated in the hegemonic project, counter or alternative hegemonic projects build themselves within the hegemonic system. For instance while the Turkish and Kurdish singing political musicians in Turkey challenged the existing hegemonic order through the contents of their songs – and in the case of Kurdish singing musicians by using a forbidden language- and creating alternative cultural spaces and practices, some of these have been incorporated into the dominant musical production and consumption mechanisms. It might be claimed that they reproduced the existing market mechanisms of music production and consumption by releasing their albums through labels located in Unkapanı, using studios and arrangers of the market, establishing their own record labels and selling their products in the same music market. However, such an analysis would be simplistic as the relations between the movement, the musicians, the audiences and the market is more complex. In the next chapter I will talk about the emergence of Kurdish music groups in 1990s as a part of the Kurdish movement, their evolution and the above mentioned relations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **POLITICIZED KURDISH MUSIC AS A PART OF KURDISH MOVEMENT**

In Turkey, politicization of Kurdish music has been almost inevitable. This is both due to the denial of Kurdish culture and language and the Kurdish resistance against it. Because of the bans over Kurdish as a language, music's transmission had always been problematic, and Kurdish folk music remained on a local level for a long time. The realm denied to music by the Republic was first offered by other states to a limited extent with Kurdish radio broadcasts. Later, Kurdish music and culture were offered space by the Kurdish movements. Kurdish nationalism not only offered a space to music, but gave it prominence in the invention of the national culture. This affected the evolution of music fundamentally and music had organic links with the Kurdish nationalist movements. The Kurdish artists and musicians were given the responsibility of stopping the cultural assimilation and calling people to join the struggle. They had to be militants of the movement. While there emerged musicians and music groups who are politically engaged yet not directly affiliated with a specific group, as the movement got more institutionalized and gained a mass character, most of these musicians also became a part of the affiliated institutions.

I have discussed in the previous chapter that music is an effective tool in making propaganda, mobilizing the masses, constructing and negotiating an identity. For the Kurdish population in Turkey, music fulfilled all of these functions. It played an important role as most of the other means of communication were either denied by the state or economically not viable. The high illiteracy rate among the Kurdish population and the fact that music tapes could be easily reproduced and disseminated caused them to be used extensively by the movement.

The relation between politics and music is manifold. In order to understand

the politicized music of *koms* and articulation of Kurdish national identity through their music, state's policies regarding the Kurds, Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, the role ascribed to culture and arts by the movement and emergence of Kurdish cultural institutions within this framework, the relation between the musicians and the movement as well as the listeners, the market mechanisms should be analyzed. In this chapter, I will try to examine these. The emergence and rise of Kurdish nationalism will be analyzed as the *koms* emerged as musicians of this nationalist movement. The symbolic resources, historical narrative as well as the struggles of Kurdish nationalism have been used by the political musicians and have played a significant role in the construction of the Kurdish identity. The Kurdish movement in 1990s is worth analyzing separately as the *koms* have emerged during this period and most of the “musician militants” have been recruited as a result of the mass mobilization process.

During 1990s, the Kurdish identity is invented as a new personality by the movement. As the articulation of the national identity through music is not independent from this identity, I will examine how this process has taken place and what is presented and aimed to be constructed as the “new identity” by the movement. The artists and musicians were to transmit the people the new identity through their music and their lifestyle. According to Öcalan (2008), the artists who were ‘created’ by the movement, have a responsibility for the movement. As it will be demonstrated, musicians themselves shared the idea that they were the ‘products’ of the movement, and it was their responsibility to make music as a militant of the movement under the tense war conditions.

1990s was a period during which Kurdish cultural centers were emerged. Cultural centers have been places of political groups where several Turkish singing political music groups have emerged. Kurdish political groups followed a similar path of establishing cultural centers where a variety of cultural activities take place and music groups are established. Different from earlier cultural centers, the cultural centers established by the Kurdish political groups functioned as places where national identity is constructed through the cultural and linguistic activities. Some interviewees denoted the aim of these centers as stopping assimilation in the Western cities of Turkey. Several musicians I interviewed indicated that they learnt or

improved their Kurdish language skills in the cultural centers. Even this is an indicator of the function cultural centers had in the construction of Kurdish identity. However, they have also been places that belong to a specific political group which meant that the collective identity of this group is constructed in the cultural centers.

Music has been the most important field of activity of the cultural centers and several music groups (*koms*) were established in MKM. The idea of making music as a group is important as it symbolizes the collectivity which is promulgated by the movement. Such a collectivity was shaped by a hierarchical structure and the individuality of the artist was to be curbed within this structure. The musicians had the mission of representing the people the collectiveness of the movement.

The *kom* musicians say that in 1990s, politicization of music was *natural, inevitable* as all spheres of life were politicized and the war was carried to an everyday level both with its real connotations and the symbolic world it constructed. The music they made and lyrics of their songs were shaped around this understanding. In the lyrics, not only the symbolic references to Kurdish identity were used. These were intermingled with the indications of the identity of the movement. As the songs were composed during a period when a national independence war was fought, they included expressions of the country as well as the symbols of war.

With the 2000s, a ceasefire that lasted for four years was declared and the demands for an independent Kurdish state receded from the discourse of the movement. The direct political lyrics and confrontational music are denoted as a need of the tense military conflict of 1990s by the musicians. With the demise of this need, *koms'* albums started to be composed mostly of folk songs in 2000s. While the movement's demands were focused more on recognition of cultural and linguistic rights, the musicians started putting more emphasis on the existing cultural resources. It should be mentioned that such a shift of focus does not mean that *koms'* music is not politicized any more. The relation between folk music and nationalism has been explored in the previous chapter. Yet, songs with a direct political content that called people to struggle gradually disappeared from *koms'* repertoires.

*Koms'* relation with the music market has not been independent from the Kurdish question. Because of their radical lyrics, *koms'* albums were frequently

confiscated. As a result of the state pressure, very few companies were willing to release the albums of these groups. This resulted in creating a record label of MKM. Although Kurdish cultural actors created a sphere for production and release of albums, in this 'alternative' space, the capitalist logic of music production and consumption was not challenged.

While analyzing the politicized Kurdish music, it is necessary to examine how it is perceived by the listeners. Within the context of politicized Kurdish music, this relation is a peculiar one. The musicians and the listeners both belong to the same movement. The musicians are designated as the educators of the people, at the same time, they have responsibilities for them. However as the musicians became more popular, they also started to become popular music stars in the eyes of the listeners. Although I have not conducted a research on listeners, I will try to analyze this peculiar relationship through the interviews I made with the musicians and my observations at the concerts I attended. Before this analysis, Kurdish issue and rise of Kurdish movement will be examined.

## **2.1. Kurdish Question and the Rise of Kurdish Nationalism**

In the context of Turkey, it is almost impossible to talk about anything related to Kurdishness without any reference to the Kurdish question. This is not only because the subject is a taboo, but also because anything related to Kurdishness is actually connected with the Kurdish question and the Kurdish nationalist movements. The same holds true for music. Because of the inseparable integrity of Kurdish music and Kurdish nationalist movements, it is necessary to analyze the evolution of Kurdish question in Turkey and rise of Kurdish nationalism.

Kurds have never constituted a homogenous society and when objective criteria are used, they can be regarded as a multiplicity of ethnic groups rather than being one ethnic group. (Bruinessen, 1995: 863) Kurdish nationalism emerged more or less at the same time Turks and Arabs began to recognize and embrace their ethnic identities. The intellectual Kurdish nationalists of 20th century can be defined as a classical national-Westernist (baticı) movement. (Bozarslan, 2002: 846-847) The

national references they employed continued to be used by the following Kurdish movements such as the origins of the Kurds that is taken back to the Medians of 17th century B.C. (Oran, 2002: 875) Most significant of all these references is the Kawa myth – the myth of ethnic descent of the Kurds - which invited the Kurds to connect their futures with their pre-historical periods and celebrate their national festivals. (Bozarslan, 2002: 847) Ehmedê Xani's *Mem û Zin* was also used as a national reference by the early Kurdish nationalists, which was inherited by the following Kurdish movements. Kurdish nationalists looked at the past and used existing cultural resources to prove that their community has always existed as a 'nation'.

Radicalization of Kurdish nationalism happened only after the declaration of the Republic with the abandonment of the promises on equality of Kurds and Turks and the abolishment of the Caliphate. (ibid, pp.847-848) The Sheikh Sait revolt of 1925 was suppressed brutally. “Shaykh Said's revolt marked the beginning of 'implacable Kemalism'. Systematic deportation and razing of villages, brutality and killing of innocents, martial law and or special regimes in Kurdistan now became the commonplace experience of Kurds whenever they defied the state." (McDowall, 1996: 198) The Ağrı and Dersim revolts were suppressed fiercely too. State's reaction in Dersim is defined as 'genocide' by authors such as Beşikçi (1990).

The three revolts played an important role in the development of the Kemalist discourse on the Kurdish question. It was shaped around the modern-traditional conflict where it was not the Kurds, but the anachronistic sheikhs, *aghas*, tribes, bandits and other reactionary forces which the Republic was determined to crash. (Yeğen, 2006: 54) During the first twenty years of the Republic, Kurdish existence was denied on an official level and Kurdishness was defined as an atavistic, reactionary and savage *ethnos* against the civilized, honest and revolutionary Turkish *ethnos*. (Bozarslan, 2002: 848) As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Kurdish movement challenged this image through inventing a modern and civilized Kurdish identity which found its reflections in the realm of music too.

Before the foundation of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal stressed the unity of the Kurds and Turks although he was aware of the separatist tendencies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> However, as McDowall mentions he was vague about the future relationship between the two

(McDowall, 1996: 187-8) After the foundation of the Republic, Kurdish was banned in courts, schools and other official uses and the language was pushed to the periphery while Kurdish speaking population was excluded from education.<sup>48</sup> (ibid, p.192) While in 1924 Kurds' legal existence was denied, with 1930s their physical existence started to be denied.<sup>49</sup> Kurds were not discriminated – at least not on a systematic basis – but were invited to be assimilated to Turkishness. In addition to the rigid reaction of the state to the rebels, a variety of socio-cultural and political tools were employed to eliminate anything that might suggest a separate Kurdish nation. (Gunter, 2008: 5)

Kemalist government was able to marginalize the Kurdish movement and succeeded in creating a gap between the active generations of 1920s and 1930s and the new generations. Although there have not been any significant claim or movement of the Kurds from 1938 to 1960s, the physical and symbolic violence exerted did not eliminate the ground fertile for nationalism; on the contrary strengthened it. (Bozarslan, 2002: 852) The new nationalist tendencies gained a more political and an organized character towards the end of 1950s. (ibid) In 1959, 49 leading Kurdish intellectuals were arrested as a result of a protest and the case which is to be known as 49s<sup>50</sup> raised awareness among literate Kurds.

The military - which seized the power in 1960 - perceived Kurdishness as a serious threat. National Unity Committee<sup>51</sup> aimed to consolidate assimilationist policies and forced resettlement against the Kurds. (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 107) The popular reaction of the Kurdish youth was suppressed brutally. The fierce

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groups. (1996: 188)

<sup>48</sup> Closing of *medreses* and *kuttabs* removed the last place for education for most Kurds. (McDowall, 1996: 192)

<sup>49</sup> In 1925, İsmet İnönü summarised the official position with regards to muslim minorities: “We are frankly [n]ationalist[s]...and [n]ationalism is our only factor of cohesion. In the face of a Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. We must Turkify the inhabitants of our land at any price, and we will annihilate those who oppose the Turks or 'le turquisme'.” (Şimşir, 1991:58 quoted in Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 10)

<sup>50</sup> 49s included names that would play a prominent role in Kurdish movement - or Turkish politics - in the following years; Said Elçi, Şerafettin Elçi, Nurettin Yılmaz, Medet Serhat, Sait Kırmızıtoprak, Canip Yıldırım, Musa Anter, Yaşar Kaya, Naci Kutlay

<sup>51</sup> The junta that took over the government on 27 May 1960.

reaction of the state was coupled with an unexpectedly liberal constitution. According to some scholars such as Baskın Oran, 1960 coup created two contradictory processes; while the military targeted the Kurds and Kurdish movement directly, there emerged a liberal environment for Kurds to express themselves (Oran, 2002: 876) and become aware of their ethnicity. (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 107)

During 1960s, Kurdish intellectuals expressed their concern about the Kurdish question and their grievances within the general socialist discourse. As a result, Kurdish identity was secularized within the broader leftist movements of the time. Translation of Lenin's and Stalin's writings on "national matter" provided an important point of departure for Kurdish problem to be articulated as a national matter. (Bozarslan, 2002: 853) The Kurds in socialist parties and unions organized Eastern Meetings (*Doğu Mitingleri*) in different cities which marked the first urban mass challenge against the Republic and signaled the shift of social mobilization away from aghas and semi-tribal peasantry towards urban-based students and young professionals. (McDowall, 1996: 408) In 1969, DDKOs (Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East – *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*) were established in Ankara, Istanbul and Kurdish populated cities. Their purpose was defending political, civil and economic rights and persuading the government to recognize Kurds' cultural rights. In October 1970, DDKO leaders were arrested and were brought in front of the court in Istanbul and in Diyarbakır. Against the public prosecutor who claimed that a language called Kurdish did not exist, the DDKO members said that the official discourse which denied the existence of Kurdish was a lie. The defendants said that "1. Under the light of objective truths and scientific data, Kurdish people with a distinct cultural character exist in Turkey. ... 2. As the existence of Kurdish people is a scientific and objective truth, it is also a truth that they are denied of the right to speak and write in their mother tongue."<sup>52</sup> (Bozarslan, 2007: 1179)

During the 12 March period, the Kurdish movement was increasingly

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<sup>52</sup> "1. Objektif gerçeklerin ve bilimsel verilerin ışığı altında Türkiye'de farklı bir kültür yapısına sahip KÜRT HALKI vardır. (...) 2. Kürt halkının varlığı ne kadar objektif ve bilimsel bir gerçekse, kendi ana dilini konuşma, yazma vs. haklarından mahrum edildiği de o kadar büyük bir gerçektir."

fragmented.<sup>53</sup> During late 1970s, Kurdish movement(s) started to gain a more popular character and tried to develop themselves theoretically. All Kurdish groups 1974-80 accepted Kurdistan as a country independent from Turkey and a colony shared amongst four countries. Official Kemalist history was questioned and opportunities for a new history writing were sought. This rupture also meant that- initially on a theoretical level - armed struggle was the way out from colonialist oppression. (ibid, p. 1181)

There are both continuities and ruptures between the Kurdish movement before and after its encounter with the "left". One of the continuities is expressing Kurdish people are oppressed. The second one is the Westernization, modernization and development themes that are frequently used. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1170) The early Kurdish nationalists in the Republican era responded to Kemalism by its own tools. With this heritage adopted, the Kurdish movement during 1960s has embraced developmentalism and progression - which was taken as the synonym of civilization - and feudalism as tribalism, *şeyhs* and aghas was severely criticized. (ibid) Although ideologically the Kurdish left was not very much different from the Turkish left, it was able to develop concepts such as "anti-colonialism" which differentiated it from the Turkish left. (ibid, p.1171)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the political musicians of 1960s and 1970s shared with the leftist movements the same emphasis on Westernization and progression. This was reflected to their music as the value given to harmonization and polyphonization of music. The *ulusalçı* and anti-imperialist tendencies found their

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<sup>53</sup> Some intellectuals gathered around Mümtaz Kotan and formed a group that would be known as *Rızgari* later on. This group was predominantly making publications. While supporters of Said Elçi continued the KDP tradition, supporters of Dr. Şivan started a new group called DDKD (Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Associations). (Bozarslan, 2002: 857) Supporters of Kemal Burkay who has left TİP were about to initiate TKSP (Turkey Kurdistan Socialist Party) or *Özgürlük Yolu*. TKSP had a legal representation through Devrimci Halk Kültür Dernekleri (Revolutionary People's Culture Associations) in Diyarbakır, Ağrı, Bitlis and Van. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1190) All four of the groups were looking for a solution to Kurdish problem in a democratic way and did not support armed struggle. (Bozarslan, 2002: 857) While DDKD and *Özgürlük Yolu* were closer to Soviet line, KDP and *Rızgari* did not take sides in Soviet-China conflict. (ibid) After 1977, new movements in Kurdish movement have emerged such as *Beş Parçacılar*, *Peşenge Karkaren Kurdistanê*, *Kawa - Yekitiya Proleteriyaya Kurdistan* which had limited effects and were short-lived. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1190) Among the groups that emerged during that period, it is necessary to mention TKSP and *Özgürlük Yolu* more in detail as one of the *koms* that will be analyzed was initially linked to the Halk Kültür Derneği that was attached to this party. The *Özgürlük Yolu* magazine defended a radical but non-violent struggle that would depend on people. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1190) By defending non-violent means the party positioned itself as the anti-thesis of PKK.

expression as an interest in folk music. The Kurdish political musicians articulated the leftist discourses in their own way; they used socialist themes in their songs like the Turkish singing musicians while their emphasis on Kurdishness was manifested through singing in Kurdish. Both shared an anti-imperialist discourse, the Turkish left against Western imperialism, Kurdish left against Turkish 'colonialism'.

### **2.1.1. Kurdish Movement After 1980s and the Emergence of PKK**

1980 coup has identified Kurdish nationalism as one of the divisive forces against the Republic and any symbolic or cultural reference to Kurdishness was forbidden. (Yavuz, 2007: 64) With the coup, most of the activists were jailed, the ones who could escape became refugees in Europe, and Kurdish organizations were dismantled. "(T)he oppression of the 1980 coup had the opposite impact of by further politicizing and strengthening the Kurdish sense of identity, and this, in turn, was used by the PKK." (ibid) After the 12 September 1980, the prison conditions that Kurds were faced with contributed to the rise of Kurdish nationalism.

The 1982 Constitution curtailed all democratic rights in Turkey including any expression of Kurdishness. The law 2932, which was introduced in 1983, prohibited the use of Kurdish in published materials and tapes. This had a significant effect on literate and activist classes. The measures were extended to cover the illiterates too. "In December 1982 the minister for education reminded all provincial governors that folk songs in east and south-east Anatolia might be used for ethnic or separatist purposes and must only be sung in Turkish." (McDowall, 1996: 424) The children could not be given Kurdish names (under the law 1587); the names which "contradict the national culture, morality and traditions and insult the public" were changed as well as the names of villages in order to erase any indication of the Kurdish identity. (ibid, p. 425) The PKK grew in such an environment that was created by the coup and the undemocratic 1982 Constitution.

PKK was formed by Abdullah Öcalan in 1974 and was named in 1978. PKK decided to start an armed struggle right after its foundation, defined Kurdistan as a colony and the main aim of Kurdish people as national independence. Armed struggle's

target was Turkish colonization, imperialist powers behind it, and local collaborators in Kurdistan. The Kurdistan revolution would be *national* and *democratic*: national against the Turkish state and democratic against the feudal powers. (Bozarslan, 2002: 859) The imprisoned PKK members in Diyarbakır Prison were involved in the resistance against the brutal doings of the military regime which involved all kinds of physical and psychological torture against the inmates.<sup>54</sup> The inhumane conditions contributed to the rise of Kurdish nationalism as well as the symbolic repertory of the party. On 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1982 Mazlum Doğan hung himself to protest the prison conditions. The *Fours* (Ferhat Kutay, Eşref Anyık, Mahmut Zengin, Necmi Öner) set themselves on fire on May of 1982. On 14 July, four other members (Kemal Pir, M. Hayri Durmuş, Akif Yılmaz, Ali Çiçek) went on a hunger strike and died. Especially Mazlum Doğan has been celebrated as the new Kawa figure by PKK. As it will be demonstrated later, these events have become frequently used themes in the songs of *koms* from Mesopotamian Culture Center.

The guerilla offensive was launched against Turkey on 15 August 1984 in Eruh and Şemdinli. The armed forces of the party - HRK (Hêzên Rizgarîya Kürdistan - Kurdistan Salvation Forces) declared the war with the following lines:

Patriotic People of Kurdistan! It is time to raise the struggle against the colonialism which aimed to destroy our nation for hundreds of years, it is time to ask for the oppression, torture and cruelty, and the blood we have shed for hundreds of years and have become barbaric more than ever in the last four years. This is the duty of all members of Kurdistan who wants an honorable life."<sup>55</sup> (Quoted from Bozarslan, 2002: 861)

State's increasing pressure on Kurds and Kurdish identity helped PKK in gaining mass support. In addition to assimilationist policies targeting the Kurdish culture and identity, state's use of violence was pervasive; arbitrary arrests, assaults on villages, torture, sexual abuse have become commonplace in the Kurdish regions. The OHAL (Regional State of Emergency Governorship) governance was a peculiar legal and

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed information about the systematic torture in Diyarbakır Prison and the resistance see [www.diyarbakirzindani.com](http://www.diyarbakirzindani.com).

<sup>55</sup> "Yurtsever Kürdistan halkı! Yüzyıllardır ulus olarak bizi yoketmek isteyen sömürgeciliğe karşı mücadeleyi yükseltme, yüzyıllardır süren, özellikle son dört yılda en barbar biçimleriyle uygulanan baskı, işkence ve zorbalığın, akıttığımız kanın hesabını sorma zamanı gelmiştir. Bu, onurlu yaşamak isteyen her Kürdistan'lınin yurtseverlik görevidir."

administrative structure which had extraordinary powers without being legally accountable. More than 2300 villages were burned, cleared, destroyed or bombarded; crops, trees and meadows and 10 million hectares of forest was burned; more than 2 million Kurds were forced out of their villages. (Gürbey, 1996: 18)

In March 1990, a series of *serhildans* (uprisings) started in villages and Kurdish cities which withered away in 1993. The Kurdish youth participated in these uprisings largely. Through these uprisings thousands were recruited to the party. The *serhildans* spread to Western cities of Turkey and they were all met with severe reaction from the Turkish security forces. The *serhildans* have become an important symbolic reference in the mobilization process and historical narrative of the movement. Towards the mid-1990s Kurdish question was started to be debated openly by Turkish politicians while draconian measures were taken at the same time. In 1991, law 2932 was repealed and Kurdish became legal unless it was used in education and broadcast. With this law music cassettes in Kurdish have become legal, although they have already being sold illegally on the street.<sup>56</sup>

All the other platforms and parties established in the 1990s remained marginal when compared to the ones that followed PKK's line. The Kurdish movement lost its significance as a leftist movement and Kurdish organizations concentrated more on democracy and the "national question". (Bozarşlan, 2007: 1196) From the parties that were effective in 1970s and 80s only TSKP - acting under the name PSK (Partiya Sosyalista Kurdistan) - was active in the 1990s. The party abolished its pro-Soviet stance in 1990s and underwent a social democratization process.

During the course of 1990s, emptying and razing of villages was accelerated, torture and killing of ordinary villagers have become widespread. By the end of 1994 an estimated one million sought refuge in Diyarbakır in addition to 20,000 others who fled to Iraq. With the policy of deportation, Kurdish nationalism was spread to the Western cities of Turkey. (Oran, 2002: 878) Thousands of Kurds have already migrated from rural areas to urban centers with the mechanization of agriculture in 1950s. Migration has become an important dimension of the construction process of Kurdish identity.

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<sup>56</sup> On the same day the Anti-terror Law was introduced which defined any activity - including democratic attempts such as demonstrations or publications - that has the aim of changing the characteristics of the Republic as terrorism. (McDowall, 1996: 429)

"Over the years, the number of migrants greatly increased, and the fact that they tended to live in close proximity with each other established permanent strongholds of Kurdish identity across the republic. In due course the existence of these communities was to make the Kurdish question a visible reality even for the citizens of Istanbul, 800 miles away from Kurdistan." (McDowall, 1996: 402) The Kurdish population that was concentrated in the urban centers was mostly composed of youngsters. "The PKK targeted these "displaced" and "semi-intellectual university students" in terms of offering identity (Kurdish nationalism) and commitment to justice (socialist economic order)." (Yavuz, 2007: 66) The members of *koms*, Kurdish music groups of 1990s, were among these youngsters most of whom got organized in cultural centers.

The support given to the PKK was not only as a result of the suffering and despair Kurds had to go through in their everyday lives but also a growing national consciousness. As the PKK played an important role in the development of this consciousness, the emerging national identity and the identity of the movement was very much intermingled. I will try to explore the relationship between these two while analyzing the articulation of Kurdish identity through *koms*' music.

Towards the end of 1990s, some administrative cadres within PKK demanded more weight to be given to political struggle. 1999 was a threshold for the PKK as Öcalan was captured by the Turkish state and unilateral ceasefire was declared. After being captured, Öcalan repeated his statements in 1993 when the initial unilateral ceasefire was declared, and said that their objective was not separation and they know it is not realistic. He stated that for solving the Kurdish problem, obstacles in front of Kurdish culture and language should be removed. (Öcalan, 1999: 97 cited in Gunter, 2008: 71) The *Program* of PKK by 2000 declared that Kurdish struggle has stopped the former colonialist policies to a certain extent and it was time for a more democratic struggle: "They have come to believe that ... even if the assimilation has not been completely stopped in the sense of language, it is considerably driven back ... that Kurdishness converted from an entity from which everyone ran away, to an identity which everyone is proud because of its contribution to freedom, democracy and humanity; and that, while the first condition of being involved in politics used to be the *denial* of Kurds, now there are many people active in the politics on behalf of the Kurds." (Özcan, 2000: 128)

Yet the new line adopted by PKK did not bring a solution to the Kurdish problem. The dialogue demands were not realized and it remained as a monologue of the PKK. Some HADEP<sup>57</sup> figures were arrested, press control over the Kurdish question continued. In June 2004, KONGRA-GEL declared the end of unilateral ceasefire of five years that has been declared in 1999. Since then the military conflict between the army and the PKK continues with changing intensity. In 2009, DTP – which was in the parliament - was closed by the Constitutional Court despite the Kurdish opening discourse of the governing AKP. While ornamental liberal reforms are made, party closures, imprisonment and arrest of Kurdish politicians, bans over pro-Kurdish publications continue. If the day to day developments are left aside, it is now clear that the solution of Kurdish problem has become a hegemonic struggle itself. Now that the Kurdish existence and the problem are acknowledged, the struggle is to decide who will be the main actors in the solution. The AKP government is eager to take steps that would put PKK and BDP out of action which have been almost the sole representative of Kurdish movement in the last 25 years. This hegemonic struggle becomes visible in the discussions on cultural and linguistic rights. While the Prime Minister Erdoğan could use Kurdish in his banners, the DTP municipalities have been sued against. TRT Şeş, Kurdish medium state television channel which started its broadcast in January 2009, is another controversial issue with regards to cultural rights. For the musicians I interviewed, being a part of TRT Şeş symbolizes integration into the state's policy on Kurds. This policy aims to 'domesticate' the Kurdish identity as opposed to the former policy of denial and assimilation. Now I will analyze how the Kurdish identity was constructed through the nationalist discourse of the PKK.

### **2.1.2. PKK's Discourse and Articulation of Kurdish Identity**

As mentioned by Bozarslan (2002; 2007) Kurdish politics could not develop a

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<sup>57</sup> In 1989 HEP was founded by the 7 expelled deputies of SHP. The party announced that a political solution to Kurdish problem should be sought, that it could be a mediator between the PKK and the Turkish state, and declared that PKK is not a "terrorist movement". (Gürbey, 1996: 26) The party prepared a list of conditions which included ending the state of emergency, granting of cultural and educational rights and an end to the military operations. In 1992 HEP was banned by the Constitutional Court. The following parties; DEP, HADEP, DEHAP, DTP exerted similar demands and all were closed or dismantled themselves. As seen as an "arm of PKK", these parties had been subject to violence and harassment both by political parties and leaders, police, state authorities, "deep state" groups and civilians. Currently BDP is in the parliament which is the continuation of the above mentioned parties.

space independent from the PKK. This holds true for Kurdish culture as well and music was not immune to this. Especially during the early 1990s, culture in general and music in particular was largely shaped by the organizational culture and structure of PKK and its discourse. Thus, I believe it is necessary to examine the discourse of the party and the new identity it aims to construct in order to understand how Kurdish identity is articulated through music.

PKK identified Marxism-Leninism as its ideological reference from its outset. Öcalan defined PKK's role as not only founding independent Kurdistan but also as initiating the socialist revolution in the Middle East. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1194) Before the armed struggle started, the word socialism and revolution were under the heavy influence of cold-war socialism. In early 1990s the line adopted towards Soviet socialism became more critical and in 1992 and Öcalan asserted that Russia constructed its own form of capitalism through using socialism. (Öcalan, 1992 quoted in Özcan, 2006: 109) In 1995 Congress, the hammer and the sickle were removed from the party's flag and party emblem was changed.<sup>58</sup> Socialism continued to exist in the second manifesto<sup>59</sup> and the PKK emphasized socialism as the ultimate goal to be reached through establishing the 'Democratic Republic'. However, the emphasis shifted to democratization, cultural and human rights from socialism within the party's discourse.

As demands of a separate state withered, it can speculatively be claimed that there was no longer a need for its justification with socialism. "In fact, behind the left-wing rhetoric, the PKK had always been a nationalist movement. ... [I]ts assumption of a nationalistic image is in fact not just keeping with the times but also a return to its real self." (Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 24) Although PKK was against "vulgar nationalism" on a discursive level, actually it developed a nationalist discourse that was based on sacrifice and violence. (Bozarslan, 2002: 862) As the Kurdish nationalist struggle in Turkey did not establish a nation-state, its ethnic and primordial references are stronger than nationalism based on the idea of citizenship. "The nature of the struggle conducted

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<sup>58</sup> In an interview in 1995, Öcalan said that this decision does not represent distancing of PKK from socialism. (Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 24)

<sup>59</sup> Barkey and Fuller state that not abandoning its left wing roots had strategic and tactical reasons as PKK had to present itself as a somehow consistent movement and still needed the support of the left against the Turkish state. (Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 25)

by the PKK embodies all the 'raw material' of nationalism but not nationalism itself. That is, the movement's spirit relates very much to the innate sentiments of ethnic-cultural, primordial and patriotic sorts. This 'raw material', however, has never been 'refined' to become a real nationalism of a nation state with a national market. In other words, the PKK's 'nationalism' has remained a 'mass nationalism' which is not *yet* nationalism." (Özcan, 2006: 229) However, although PKK has never possessed the means of a nation state, it went beyond mobilizing the innate sentiments of the ethnic Kurds. It aimed to construct a national identity through the means it possess such as the popular music, the newspaper, the satellite television channel.

In Bozarslan's view, Kurdish nationalism took the nationalism of Kemalism as a model for itself. Although on discursive level Kurdish left was critical of Kemalism, it Kurdified a similar pattern by adopting single party, single ideology and single man (Bozarslan, 2007: 1200), and its success should be sought in its ability to Kurdify the Kemalist symbols. (Bozarslan, 2002: 862) Such an analysis resembles to that of the colonialist discourse on anti-colonial nationalism. As Chatterjee (2002) says, the colonialists represent the anti-colonialist nationalist movements as being modeled on the European nationalism. He claims that anti-colonial nationalism was not simply derived from European nationalism; rather there was an intricate relationship of borrowing and difference between the two. "History, it would seem, has decreed we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the America, the only true subjects of the history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized." (Chatterjee, 1993: 5 cited in Loomba, 1998: 190) Against the analysis of "derivative" nationalism of the colonized nations, Chatterjee says, while challenging the colonial domination in the material world, the anti-colonial nationalism creates an inner domain of culture where the spiritual world is claimed to be the essence of culture. Such a complex relationship can be observed between Turkish nationalism and the Kurdish nationalism as articulated by the PKK. The spiritual inner sphere where the Kurdish identity is constructed finds its reflections in the political music of *koms* where ethnic and symbolic references of the nation and the movement are frequently used.

PKK's narrative was shaped around the good vs. the bad, the leader (*önder*)

and the martyrs. While Atatürk has become a god-like figure, the Kurds have created the sun-like figure of Öcalan. Öcalan's *Çözümler* was the counter-part of Atatürk's *Nutuk* and responded Atatürk's charisma with the charismatic figure of Öcalan. (Bozarslan, 2002: 863-4) In both cases, the superiority of the nation and its mission have become concrete only around a leader that is above any politics and above the society. Just like Atatürk, Öcalan was the only reference point for the good, the right, universalism and development. (ibid, p.864) In both Kemalist discourse and the discourse of the PKK, the land could become homeland only if lives are sacrificed for it, people could become a nation only if they were militarized, the past before the struggle was defined as a degenerated period of disintegration to be denied and a new history started with the resistance. (ibid, p.863)

Yet, the nationalism of PKK has peculiar characteristics and it is not simply derived from Turkish nationalism. In this peculiar nationalism, while there are some elements borrowed from Turkish nationalism, there are also unique elements that belong to the 'inner sphere' of the movement. For instance a myth of eternal resistance against the oppressors of Kurdish nation has been significant both in constructing the Kurdish identity and providing a symbolic resource for the justification of movement's struggle. The traits of this myth can be found in *koms'* music as it will be demonstrated later. Violence, sacrifice and war occupy a significant place in PKK's discourse. According to Marvin and Ingle, blood and sacrifice are two crucial things that hold a nation together. Whether or not it is *the* tie that bonds the people, violence has a significant role in mobilizing the feelings of attachment. "The creation of sentiments strong enough to hold the group together periodically requires the willing deaths of a significant portion of its members. The lifeblood of these members is shed by means of a ritual in which designated victims become outsiders and cross the boundary of the living group into death. The most powerful enactment of this ritual is war." (Marvin and Ingle, 1999: 5 quoted in Özkırımlı, 2005: 51) While war and sacrifice for the nation is glorified in most nationalist discourses, violence gains unique characteristics in PKK's discourse. It is seen necessary to 'save' the Kurdish nation from its slavishness. In order to reach the ideal Kurdish identity, to reach the transcendental level of the leader and the martyrs, one should be ready to sacrifice herself/himself.

Different from the former Kurdish movements, PKK connected the national

independence to the formation of a new Kurdish identity. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1192) The colonial revolution could be successful only if it was able to establish a new Kurdish identity. The new individual - the *new Kurdish identity* – did not define itself as an anti-thesis of the Turkish identity. Rather, it defined itself as the anti-thesis of its own past. The old identity was delineated by Öcalan as a debased (*düşürülmüş*) identity. Treason and tribal attachment<sup>60</sup> (Özcan, 2006) in addition to the Turkification efforts of the state and the chauvinistic education system which have alienated the Kurds from their culture (Bozarslan, 2007) caused the emergence of degenerated people. The idea of degenerateness and the creation of a new identity seem to be conflicting elements as the former implies going back to an essence which has degenerated while the latter aims to negate the past and bring something new. This conflict was solved by Öcalan with the phrase "resurrection is completed; now it is the turn for liberation"<sup>61</sup>. The concept of resurrection corresponds to an ancient Kurdishness, an essential identity that is carried from ancient times to today which has been oppressed by external forces. (Çağlayan, 2007: 102) This essential identity was to be reconstructed through modern institutions and ideas. (Öcalan and Belli, 1999: 10-12 cited in Çağlayan, 2007: 102) I have mentioned in the previous chapter how the dilemma of novelty and ancientness was tried to be resolved in Turkish nationalism. Actually such a dilemma exists in all nationalist discourses. This dilemma manifests itself in the realm of *koms'* music through the emphasis put on modernity and authenticity at the same time in modernization of folk songs.

PKK presented itself as the sole representative of the Kurdish movement - and speculatively the Kurdish people - and the architect of a project that included a Kurdistan in its temporal and territorial continuity. (Bozarslan, 2007: 1194). In doing this, it established a connection with certain traditions and heritage of the Kurdish struggle that led into its emergence in the first place. Amongst these were the invented Kurdish history, the armed struggle which has an important place in the collective memory, culture, language and the imagined national territory. The selective use of past and

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<sup>60</sup> Tribalism is an important characteristic of the Kurdish society. From its outset, PKK has targeted this tribal structure. According to the party's discourse, the new individual was supposed to get rid of the remnants of the tribal societal structure through the struggle.

<sup>61</sup> "Diriliş tamamlandı, sıra kurtuluşa".

traditions play an important role in the construction of identity as well as mobilization. "(T)he values and institutions of a persisting cultural group will suggest what appeals and symbols will be effective and what will not be and may also provide traditional avenues for the mobilization and organization of the group in new dimensions." (Brass, 1994: 87) The leaders of the ethnic movement select the elements of culture that would be more effective in uniting and mobilizing the group. These symbols are not selected randomly; they are the ones that have significance in the culture and tradition of the society. A good example to such mobilization is the legend of Kawa which is the founding myth of the Kurds. By associating Kawa with Mazlum Doğan, the PKK established links with the existing culture and myths of the Kurds and the new individual that is presented. With the evolution of the movement and the set of values of the group, such symbolic associations shifted as well. As Çağlayan demonstrated, with the increasing recruitment of women guerillas and the significant role they played in the struggle, Kawa myth was started to be replaced by the myth of goddess İştâr that appeared as Zilan; the first woman suicide bomber who died in 1995. (Çağlayan, 2007) Popular music has been an effective tool in presenting and popularizing such elements.

Through politicization of arts and culture in 1990s, Kurdish movement's discourse was embodied and translated into cultural production. This had been a process where the musicians and artists in other fields articulated the discourse of the movement in cultural products. Yet this process was not shaped by the artists and musicians themselves, but rather it was as a result of the direction of the leadership. In order to understand the politicization of Kurdish music in 1990s by the *koms*, the role ascribed to music and musicians by the movement should be scrutinized.

## **2.2. Politicization of Kurdish Arts and Culture in 1990s**

### **2.2.1. The Role Ascribed to Music and Arts by the Kurdish Movement**

Although not all *koms* that emerged during 1990s were affiliated with the same political movement, most of them were. Also, there is not much discrepancy between the Kurdish identity reflected to the albums of *koms* that are related to

different Kurdish movements.<sup>62</sup> Thus it is necessary to analyze the discourse of the movement related to culture and arts. The discourse of the party, and especially of Öcalan, related to the Kurdish identity did not find a direct expression in music. The direct influence of the ideological texts of the party and the inculcation talks of Öcalan was the responsibility given to the artist and music's perceived role for the Kurdish movement.

This section will be largely based on Öcalan's inculcation talks about Kurdish culture and arts. Although these can be perceived as Öcalan's personal views that are expressed through some disorderly lectures and writings which are not always consistent, they demonstrate the way culture and music was seen by the Kurdish movement. It is also important to note that the writings are all before 1999 and more than half are from 1990 to 1995. Kurdish music and culture started to gain a more independent space in the second half of 1990s and by 2000s the relation between politics and culture underwent some significant transformations which will be discussed later. These changes were also related to the transformation of the movement during 2000s, both in terms of its strategies and its discourse.

During the 1990s, PKK presented itself not only as the only bearer of Kurdish struggle and identity, but also as the main actor who would define the artistic realm. According to Öcalan, without the PKK there would be no arts as the Turkish state has colonized the art and culture of the Kurds, and PKK was the only power to resist the colonization.

PKK action as a whole is an artistic action. PKK action is the focus of the new art for Kurdistan, its source and includes almost all properties of arts in its body. In a Kurdistan without the PKK art is dead, and the remaining can not be called art. The art of the Turkish Republic is an act of invasion. The art of Turkish Republic is an act of suffocation, assimilation and clearance of the existing traditions and activities of people in Kurdistan by the bourgeois. So, art is dead. Therefore emergence of the PKK is the resurrection of the art. It is the source of art, it is the foundation laid down.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The most significant difference between these groups' albums are the songs that are composed after the *martyrs* of the movement. This also demonstrates how the national memory constructed intersect the collective memory with regards to the movement. The dead guerillas are represented as the *martyrs* of the nation in songs as well as texts of the movement.

<sup>63</sup> “PKK eylemi, bir bütün olarak sanat eylemidir. PKK eylemi, Kürdistan için sanatın odağıdır, kaynağıdır ve hemen hemen bütün sanat özelliklerini kendisi içinde barındırır. PKK'sız bir Kürdistan'da sanat ölmüştür, var olana da sanat denilemez. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin sanatı,

(Öcalan, 2008: 11)

It is important to note that the talk is from early 1990s when the socialist themes have not withered away from Öcalan's talks completely yet. The *bourgeois* character of the Turkish Republic's culture does not have a continuation in Öcalan's writings and talks about culture. Moreover, the way the Turkish cultural assimilation is challenged is not through socialist themes, but rather through the articulation of a national culture. The general self-boosting tone of Öcalan might look as an over-exaggeration of the role casted for the PKK. Yet, the quote makes the pioneering role of the PKK, which can not be challenged by any other effort, clear. This is indicated by Öcalan clearly several times. He answers a question about artists who are not related to the PKK yet involved in Kurdish struggle, by saying that they are created by the movement, but now they demand individuality. Art is not possible without the collectivity of the party.<sup>64</sup> (ibid, p.239) In the same talk, he says that without the party there would be no Kurdish folk songs, no academy, nor any enthusiasm for making art.

The Kurdish identity to be negated is defined by movement through the ugliness and degenerateness of the Kurds. On the contrary, the Kurdish identity to be *reached* is beautifulness. Art is denoted as a way of reaching the beauty, but only when it is a part of the revolution. The colonists have devastated the Kurdish identity by claiming that Kurds are one of “them”. The struggle against colonialism in the field of arts should not be underestimated. In this struggle, the limited elements of the 'national identity' that survived can be a good starting point and a solid foundation. Öcalan gives Ahmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zin* and the legend of Kawa as examples to these elements. Yet they are to be advanced as the potential they created in terms of the Kurdish national identity is incomplete and needs to be completed by the revolution. Without the war, political and militaristic activities; arts and cultural activities would mean nothing. The national identity had its gigantic take-off only with the political and militaristic struggle. With this, the significance of arts has not

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burjuvanın, Kürdistan'da varolan gelenekleri, halk etkinliklerini boğması, asimile etmesi, tasfiye etmesinin hareketidir. Yani sanat ölmüştür. O halde PKK'nin ortaya çıkışı, sanatın dirilişidir. Sanatın kaynağıdır, temelini atılmasıdır.”

<sup>64</sup> The idea of collectivity was embodied in the field of music through making music as a group.

decreased; on the contrary it increased and it has become a concrete need for the enhancement of the war.

Öcalan acknowledges the relative importance of music in this process, yet he adds that other fields of arts -especially literature – should be developed too. Music is denoted to be significant as it is the only field that is relatively preserved and as it is an essential characteristic of the Kurdish identity. (ibid, p.87) However music is also tried to be used to degenerate the Kurdish people through arabesk, and Öcalan even claims that arabesk singers such as Emrah are promoted by the Turkish intelligence. In order to prevent the emergence and expansion of arts that is not nourished by revolutionary forces, Öcalan says that *they* got their hands on revolutionary art practices which would be in the service of the war and the organization.

According to Öcalan, Kurdish people are folkloric. With the advancement of the war, people's interest in patriotism increased, as their interest in patriotism increased their interest in folklore increased. With the war the value of folklore proliferated. With nationalistic aims, folklore and existing traditions of people, myths and popular stories are denoted to be the foundation which is liberated by the war. Yet arts should not be limited to the folklore and the essence should be the National Liberation Struggle (*Ulusal Kurtuluş Mücadelesi*). The artists and musicians were expected to be warriors, militants themselves and be as courageous as the militants who set themselves on fire. Öcalan says that if they are true nationalists (*ulusalci*) they should tell the stories of these militants and they should be the voice of the guerillas. Moreover as they are able to make music only as a result of the political military struggle; they were expected to show fidelity to the movement. In line with Öcalan's directives, *kom* musicians have realized all these objectives. They researched and modernized the Kurdish folk music within the framework of National Liberation Struggle. They behaved as militants of the movement and told the stories of militants, the martyrs in their songs.

During the 1990s the position of the *kom* musicians has been a peculiar one within the Kurdish movement. They were assigned to be intellectual pioneers who would lead the way for the *beautiful* to be reached. They should tell the people about the struggle, motivate them to join it, nourish the war, and *teach* the vulgar (*kaba*

*saba*) Kurdish people how to live, refine their identity. Yet, while doing these they were to follow the discourse of the party. “In the final analysis, the political leadership is the fundamental institution, the source of authority which embraces economic, artistic and military leadership, and originates them.”<sup>65</sup> (ibid., p.53) While the musicians adopt a leadership role in stopping the assimilation, developing the musical taste of people and creating the new Kurdish identity, they were not the avant-garde of the revolution. They had to accept the authority of the leadership and in order to 'reach' the new Kurdish identity, had to live a militant life as desired by this authority. Especially in the early 1990s, this meant a total abandonment of individual wills and desires, acting with the collectivity and full commitment to MKM. The collective living, is presented as the only way to reach the 'beautiful'. As a reflection of this attitude, in the early albums of *koms* from MKM, there are no names indicated. The interviewees seemed to have accepted their role willingly; while only a few (who do not belong to MKM) were critical of it.

The role ascribed to art and culture; stopping assimilation, finding the elements of Kurdish culture which survived the Turkish colonialism and advancing them led to the emergence of cultural institutions. Although the first Kurdish cultural center did not follow the line of the PKK, with the emergence and development of Mesopotamian Culture Center, the ideas of Öcalan were embodied in its full sense. Both the artists and musicians defined their mission related to culture within the framework of the discourse of the movement which was a nationalist one. The cultural centre was to create and advance the Kurdish national culture following the ideas of the leadership.

### **2.2.2. Cultural Institutionalization and MKM**

With the 1990s, the Kurdish movement became a mass movement. With the increasing support given to the PKK, it started to get organized under different institutions and organizations. In addition to these directly attached organization and groups, there also emerged others which were influenced by the movement, yet not a

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<sup>65</sup> “[S]iyasi önderlik, son tahlilde ekonomik, sanatsal önderliği de, askeri önderliği de bağlayan, esasta onlara çıkış sağlayan en temel kurumdur, otorite kaynağıdır.”

direct part of it. Mesopotamian Culture Center in Istanbul and its branches in other cities were amongst the latter.

As the Kurdish movement has been a nationalist one, cultural resources of the Kurdish ethnicity had to be reworked with a nationalist agenda. The cultural centers are places where the elements of the Kurdish culture are selected, tailored and invented according to the nationalist discourse. “Cultural institutionalization” of the movement – as it is called by the interviewees - was necessary because the Kurdish culture, which was denied by the state, was an important element in mobilizing the ethnic Kurds. Kurdish nationalism never possessed the means of a nation-state which promulgate an official national culture. As mentioned above, it remained on the level of 'raw nationalism' where the existing elements of the Kurdish ethnicity and culture were not researched, selected, transformed and homogenized in a *systematic way* in the construction of a 'national' culture. However, they were used and articulated according to the discourse of Kurdish movement in an eclectic way.<sup>66</sup> For instance a homogenization and standardization of culture happened; yet the way it happened was not planned by the cultural actors of the movement.

The cultural centers were cultural organizations of the political groups; thus through them, the collective identity of the movement was constructed too. The artists as well as the audiences who attend the cultural centers were expected to behave in the manner desired by the movement. As the PKK has become all pervasive in Kurdish movement, the movement's identity and national identity which were constructed and presented by the MKM started to get intermingled as they have been in the discourse of the movement.

The Kurds have started migrating to Western cities already in 1960s, with the internally displaced population of 1990s, the number of youngsters who grew up in Turkish speaking cities increased. The mobilized population of the Kurdish movement during these years was largely composed of these students, young workers and the unemployed. The Kurdish movement tried to attract these masses to itself through a nationalist discourse. According to Mizgîn, one of the reasons for cultural centers to

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<sup>66</sup> I have discussed in the previous chapter that Turkish nationalist policies towards culture had not been consistent and coherent, although a state policy was formulated and practiced. The rising conflicts in the process of constructing the national culture are related to the internal conflicts of the nationalist discourse too.

emerge first in Istanbul was the urgent need to prevent the assimilation that these youngsters were faced with. The Kurds living in Kurdish regions could live in their culture by using their language, thus the threat of assimilation was not too big there. But the Kurds who have migrated were to be brought together with their culture. (Interview with Mizgîn, 05.07.2008) The cultural centers were places where the Kurdish youngsters who identify themselves with their ethnicity, but who were 'alienated from their national culture' could 'meet with their culture'. It is important to note that, such a notion of assimilation assumes a fixed Kurdish identity that is eroded by the state's policies, tribalism as well as migration. This was demonstrated in Öcalan's ideas which have been presented earlier. The musician was to rescue this essential identity through finding and transmitting the folkloric elements. Yet the Kurdish culture that was constructed and 'taught' to the new recruits was not the folk culture as it is experienced in everyday life, but a culture that was invented according to the Kurdish nationalist discourse. In addition, the culture of the movement, with its hierarchical nature and symbolic references, was very much intermingled with the "Kurdish" culture that was being presented.

The organizations and institutions that emerged in Istanbul attracted the young urban population who were mobilized under different Kurdish groups. HKD (*Halk Kültür Derneği* - People's Culture Association), which was affiliated with the PSK, was established by some youngsters in 1989. Ciwan was one of the founding members of the association. He said that before them there was no institution that concentrated on Kurdish culture. Musicians such as Şivan Perwer, Nizamettin Arıç were living abroad, and the oral culture transmitted by the *dengbêjs* was not recorded and collected. According to Ciwan, as they were the first to establish such an institution, HKD met great enthusiasm.

1988 was a period when the Kurdish youngsters came together. Maybe the Kurds have started the armed struggle in 1984, but we were the first Kurdish students to deal with culture. There were many Kurdish students and they wanted to do something about Kurdishness. It was not only the people who dealt with music and arts who attended our association. The parties did not exist by then. There was no HEP. There were the ones who fought, and the ones in Istanbul who wanted to do something about Kurdishness. There was an intellectual accumulation in these institutions. People, who dealt with politics, people who were going to the Human Rights Association... This is why our institution was very crowded in the beginning, maybe MKM was too. Later on

HEP was founded and politicians parted. The ones dealing with literature went to the Kurdish Institute.<sup>67</sup> (Interview with Ciwan, 03.12.2008)

Ciwan's quote demonstrates the importance given to culture was not only because of the nationalist tendencies, but also because of the lack of other means of political mobilization on a legal level. Although HKD was affiliated with a certain political circle, as there was no other alternative, people who were not close to that political group attended the association too. Towards the end of 1980s, Kurdish trips to the surroundings of Istanbul were organized. During these visits, different Kurdish political groups could come together and Kurds who did not meet in Istanbul could meet. According to Ciwan, the first steps of the institutions to be established later on were taken during these visits. Although HKD attracted many people, with the emergence of Mesopotamian Culture Center, a great deal of the people shifted there. As a result, HKD had to change its structure and Stran Music Company was established.

MKM was founded in 1991 in Tarlabaşı. It became a place for the Kurdish youngsters in Istanbul who wanted to be involved in the movement. Although MKM had limited capacities and a very small space, it caused a great deal of excitement. During the early years, MKM was really amateur and a diverse range of people joined it. Özgür has been involved in MKM during its emergence. He claims, some people had intentions of being involved in the cultural realm, while others saw it just as a place to become a part of the struggle.

The people who were involved during that process were not artists or people who did art with that language. The cultural center was founded as if a party or a foundation was founded. Of course there were people who were interested in arts and culture in it, but there were other people too. Therefore there was a very fast flow of people. The real aim was not making art in the professional sense. The common goal for people to get together was doing something about the cause, being a part of the process. Therefore it did not matter; you could be a painter, a business man, a grocer, a worker or a student. There was high participation in the practices but people would leave afterwards. Of course

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<sup>67</sup> “O dönem -1988'ler- ilk defa Kürt öğrencilerin bir araya gelme dönemleriydi. Kürtler belki 1984'de silahlı bir savaş başlatmıştı ama bizim yaptığımız şeyler Kürt öğrencilerinin ilk defa kültür ile ilgili yaptığı şeylerdi. Bir sürü Kürt öğrenci vardı ve Kürtlükle ilgili birşeyler yapmak istiyorlardı. Kurduğumuz dernek de sadece müzikle sanatla uğraşanların geldikleri bir yer değildi. O zaman partiler de kurulmamıştı. HEP falan da yoktu. Bir savaşanlar vardı ve İstanbul'da Kürtlükle ilgili birşeyler yapmak isteyenler vardı. Entellektüel bir birikim vardı bu kurumlarda. Politikayla uğraşan insanlar, İnsan Hakları Derneği'ne gidip gelen insanlar... O yüzden ilk başlarda da çok kalabalıktı bizim kurumlarımız, belki MKM de öyleydi. Daha sonra HEP açıldıktan sonra siyasetçiler ayrıldılar. Edebiyatçılar, Kürt Enstitüsü kuruldu, oraya geçtiler.”

we did not know where they went; everybody joined the freedom movement from different places. The early years were like this; very intense.<sup>68</sup> (Interview with Özgür, 28. 01.2009)

According to Özgür, MKM emerged as a result of a need. As they were giving the struggle related to cultural rights and language, cultural institutionalization was *necessary*. The Kurdish cultural resources had to be 'rescued' from colonial pillage and they had to be presented to people to mobilize them against the assimilation. Yet in the early years of the Mesopotamia Culture Centre, Kurdish culture was not a priority for all. Yasemin said that in the beginning she saw MKM as a temporary place and aimed to join the struggle from a more radical place. As a result of the fast circulation of people, in the early years of MKM, cultural practices were not sustainable and remained on a more amateur level.

Although cultural centers were places where the activities were concentrated around music, theater, folk dances etc., and their essential objective was not producing cultural products. According to Sinan, cultural centers were 'civilian' extensions of the movements and the propaganda of these movements was reflected to them. He added that they were places where the youngsters could come together and gain an identity. The social environment that was offered by the cultural centers was significant in the shaping of a collective identity. This identity was shaped by the nationalist discourse as well as the organizational culture of the movement.

The cultural centers did not work through professional relations where the musician/artist would stay for some hours and then leave. The activist/ artists within MKM were expected to be committed fully and abandoned their personal ties. An organizational culture that dominated the party as well as other groups affiliated with it was reflected to MKM too. MKM musicians indicated that in the early years, they had no social or private life outside of MKM. Yasemin said that they were living and making

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<sup>68</sup> “Çok sanatçı olan, o dille sanat çalışmaları yapmış insanlar değildi o süreci oluşturanlar. Bir parti ve dernek kurulur gibi, kültür merkezi de öyle kuruldu. İçinde tabi ki kültür sanatla ilgili insanlar vardı ama onun dışında da birçok insan vardı. Dolayısıyla insanların dönüşümü çok hızlı yaşanıyordu; asıl amaç orada profesyonel anlamda sanat çalışması yapmak değildi. Herkesin ortak buluşma nedeni o dava ile ilgili birşey yapmak, o sürece dahil olmaktı. Dolayısıyla fark etmiyordu; siz ressam da olabilirsiniz, iş adamı da, manav da, işçi de, öğrenci de. Dolayısıyla çok yoğun insanlar gelip çalışmalara katılıyorlardı, sonra da bir yerlere gidiyordu. Tabi ki bu yerleri bilmiyorduk; herkes özgürlük alanlarına farklı noktalarda gidiyordu dahil oluyordu. İlk yıllar öyle yoğun bir süreçti.”

music as a militant of the movement. Just like described by Öcalan, the musicians were as dedicated and committed as the militants and warriors of the movement. Such a closed social environment was effective in the construction of a collective identity without much negotiation.

MKM was composed of people from a variety of backgrounds. This was also a reflection of the movement. As a nationalist movement, Kurdish movement aimed to embrace all classes within itself; and its nationalist discourse could mobilize Kurds with different backgrounds. I have interviewed musicians from a middle class background with university grade who was born and raised in Turkish speaking cities as well musicians who are from a rural background and have not received primary education. Some had to learn Kurdish in cultural centers, while others learnt Turkish at school and grew up with two languages. It is worth noting that four interviewees who indicated the mixed character of MKM in terms of class, education level and profession are all with a middle class background. Halit is from a middle class background, he holds a university degree and he has grown up in one of the big cities of Turkey.

The profile of the musicians and artists in MKM was so different. There were primary school graduate musicians who have just left his/her village, as well as conservatoire graduates. There were the ones like me who has not received any musical education, but who is a doctor or a pharmacist. There were sociologists as well as pharmacists. It was a very wide range and the reflections of this atmosphere were different for everyone. Its reflections are different for someone who has just left his/her village and can not express herself/himself neither textually nor musically. For the latter, it is more didactic, more formal, more inline with the official ideology in quotation marks; while its reflections on us were different.<sup>69</sup> (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008)

By the mid 1990s, the ones who wanted to stay in MKM decided to stay, and a degree of sustainability, specialization and professionalization took place. Education was given importance in all branches. Musicians started to attend the music courses such as Pera and Evrensel Müzik Merkezi; learnt how to play Western instruments such as guitar, piano etc. This was seen as a step towards development of a more 'scientific'

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<sup>69</sup> “MKM'deki müzisyen ya da sanatçıların profili çok farklı. Daha köyünden yeni çıkmış ilkokul mezunu kişi de vardı müzisyen olarak, konservatuar mezunu da vardı. Ya da benim gibi müzik eğitimi almamış, ama doktorlukla ya da eczacılıkla uğraşanı da vardı. Sosyoloğu da vardı, eczacısı da vardı. Çok geniş bir yelpazedeydi ve bu ortamın yansımaları herkeste farklı oluyor. Ya da köyünden yeni çıkmış kendisini ne müzikal olarak ne de tekst olarak ifade edemeyen insanlardaki yansımaları farklı oluyor. İkinci söylediğim insanlarda daha didaktik, daha formel, tırnak içinde resmi ideolojiye daha uygun oluyor ama bizdeki uygulamaları farklı oluyordu.”

approach towards music. Êvdal told that although they had some experience when they first got together, they realized that these would not carry them too far and decided to develop their basis. While some of the group members attended courses, some concentrated on how to compose or write lyrics. The private music courses in Istanbul which the *kom* musicians attended not only taught the musicians how to play the instruments; they also shaped their musical understanding. These courses are run by TRT musicians or graduates of conservatories and they teach music in the way they learnt it in these institutions. (Stokes, 1998: 74) The terminology and the themes embraced by the TRT and State Conservatories have been adopted by the course owners. These were preservation of cultural heritage, Arabesk threat, developing a systematic and scientific approach to music and educating musicians who should lead the music reform. (Stokes, 1998: 75) As it will be demonstrated in the next chapter, these discursive elements were articulated by the *kom* musicians as well. They defined their music as Western and polyphonic taking the superiority of polyphonic and harmonic music as granted and defined Arabesk as the 'degenerated' other of the music they make. Education and the importance of scientific research are emphasized by the *kom* musicians resonating the musical understanding in the courses. The 'deficiencies' of MKM in terms of providing adequate education as well as conducting research is acknowledged by the musicians and these are explained with the absence of a state, and its institutions. The *kom* musicians do not question state's involvement in the cultural sphere per se, but object Turkish state's Turkification of culture. The underlying thrust in science, education as well as Western music has been adopted by the *kom* musicians in addition to the role they ascribe to the state. However, some musicians such as Yasemin are critical about the education system in MKM. She said that the Western music thought in the courses was deficient, moreover it was tried to be taught by the attendees of the courses to other MKM members which led to the emergence of a distorted education system.

The insufficiencies of MKM in terms of education and research have not always been on the agenda of MKM musicians. According to Dilan, the absence of 'research and education' started to be felt only after the political agenda lost its importance.

When there is no state or structure, the research and systematization were not sufficiently done. Maybe we did not feel this in 1980s or 1990s, because

by then the efforts were paid for the acknowledgement of the language. The political discourse of the content was felt more. But after some things have changed, the question of how to systematize this music became important so that the next generations will perceive it more correctly and will have something to say about Kurdish music.<sup>70</sup> (Interview with Dilan, 30.01.2009)

In Dilan's quote one can see how the function of the cultural centers has shifted over the time according to the needs of the movement. Initially MKM was located in Tarlabaşı. A group of artists and musicians insisted to move it to İstiklal Street. According to Özgür this change of location meant a lot for MKM in order to become a significant cultural institution. Yet, their demand was met with some resistance from artists who were more conservative about moving MKM.

We thought that Beyoğlu was the center of arts and culture. We said that we did not make this thing only for the people who live in Istanbul; it should gain new dimensions. It should become a place that *represents* the Kurds. Something like a consulate, *a window of the Kurds*. ... After that, the work done changed a lot. Some really good things were created. Some professional musicians that you can name today gave their first concerts there. Theatre has become more professional, the hall was more professional. ... MKM has become an institution that is taken seriously not only in Turkey but also internationally.<sup>71</sup> (Interview with Özgür, 28. 01.2009)

The idea that MKM should 'represent' the Kurdish culture means a level of cultural homogenization is desired by the cultural actors of the movement. No ethnic group has a culture which is homogenous and standard. The cultures of people are various and evolve over the time. The culture to be represented and shared with 'others' by the MKM is a fixed and homogenous culture of the Kurds which is constructed by the nationalist movement.

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<sup>70</sup> “Bir devlet ya da yapı olmayınca, bunu araştırma yönü, sistematize edilme yönü doğal olarak eksik kalmış. Belki 1990'larda ya da 1980'lerde bunu çok hissetmiyorduk çünkü o zaman ağırlıkta dilin kabulüne yönelik bir çalışma söz konusuydu. Politik söylemli içerikler, çok daha fazla hissediliyordu. Ama bir dönemden sonra bazı şeyler kırılınca bu müziğin nasıl sistematize edileceği sorusu da söz konusu oluyor; ki gelecek kuşaklar da bunu daha doğru algılayıp, en azından Kürt müziğine dair söylenebilecek şeyleri olsun diye.”

<sup>71</sup> “Beyoğlu kültür sanatın merkezi diye düşünüyorduk. Biz sadece İstanbul'da yaşayan insanlara yönelik yapmıyoruz bunu, bu işin daha fazla boyut kazanması gerekir diyorduk. Hatta Kürtler'i temsil eden bir yer olması gerekiyor. Konsolosluk gibi birşey olarak görmesi gerekir orayı, Kürtler'in penceresi olarak. ... Ondan sonra çalışmalar çok farklı oldu. Çok iyi çalışmalar yapıldı. Türkiye'de aklına gelecek, profesyonel müzisyenler ilk konserlerini orda verdi. Tiyatro çalışmaları daha profesyonel oldu, salon daha bir profesyonel oldu. ... MKM oradan bir şekilde sadece Türkiye'de değil, dünyada çok önemsenen bir kurum oldu.”

MKM has a hierarchical structure where there is a central administration. The administration used to have the authority to give punishments to artists. According to Yasemin this authority was sometimes misused. Artists were punished because of having love affairs. This was also a reflection of the culture of the movement where love was defined as something to be felt for the country, and sexual love was presented as a sign of being debased and degenerate. As mentioned above, MKM has been a place where the collective identity of the movement as well as the national identity was constructed. Despising sexual love and replacing it with the love of the country and the leader is one of the characteristics of the new Kurdish personality as defined by the 'leadership'. This had to be embodied through the behaviors of the musicians as the intellectual vanguards of the movement.

When I asked what they think about the hierarchical structure of MKM, musicians usually approved it. For Osman, hierarchy means collectivity. The unquestioned hierarchical structure is also related to the structure of the movement, where a leader with an unquestionable authority is central. The 'collectivity', which also plays a significant role in the discourse of the movement, is to be 'ensured' by the hierarchical structure. The opposite of this kind of collectivity is formulated by the musicians as individualism which should be curbed with the hierarchical structure. This understanding was reflected to characterization of group music as a sign of collectivity.

### **2.3. The Politicized Kurdish Music Groups in 1990s; *Koms***

The emergence of group music as a part of political music tradition in Turkey has been explored in the previous chapter. The Kurdish political groups had been influenced by the leftist music groups in Turkey. The *koms* that emerged in late 1980s and early 1990s created the tradition of group music making that did not exist in Kurdish music previously. While there had been some Kurdish music groups in 1970s, they have not gained much popularity and reputation. Koma Berxwedan in Europe was an important example in front of the *koms* not only because they were a group, but also they were directly related to the Kurdish movement and were making music of the movement.

The earliest music groups that are in the scope of this study are Koma Amed

and Koma Dengê Azadî which were not established within MKM. Although they did not have a name by then, Koma Amed was founded by a group of medical students in 1987 in Ankara. The members of the group, none of whom had musical experience, met each other in a Diyarbakır night organized in Ankara. They released their first album in 1990 with the name *Kulîlka Azadî* (Flower of Freedom). They recorded the album with their own financial resources, rented a studio by lying to the owner. The album was circulated from hand to hand. Koma Dengê Azadî was established within HKD; which turned into Stran Müzik afterwards. Later on the some of its members left the group, but with the new members Dengê Azadî released four albums under HKD/Stran Müzik. Today both groups do not exist, while some members of Koma Amed continue making music under the name Çar Newa.

As a reflection of the all-inclusiveness of the Kurdish movement by mid-1990s, most musicians singing in Kurdish were musicians of the movement. While the political musicians of 1970s could make music without becoming a part of any Kurdish political group, by 1990s most musicians preferred to become a part of a political group if they have not started making music within the cultural centers. As the political groups were fragmented during 1970s, the music groups that were affiliated with them were also multiple. By mid-1990s, MKM have almost become the only place where political Kurdish musicians - especially groups – were concentrated. Both Koma Amed and some members of Dengê Azadî joined MKM. Civan left HKD and joined MKM. He said that in the last Kurdish trip organized, two thirds of the people who have participated in the trip went to listen to music groups from MKM. By then he realized that a majority of the people shared the political perspective of MKM.

Several music groups have existed within MKM. Koma Mezrabotan, Koma Çiya, Koma Azad, Koma Rojhilat, Koma Gulên Xerzan, Koma Rewşen, Agirê Jîyan, Koma Vengê Sodîrî, Koma Asmîn are some of these groups. While some were established within MKM, some were established outside of it and joined later. Some members of Koma Amed continued to make music under the name Çar Newa. The members of the groups changed over the time, while all groups had one or two stable musicians. Today Koma Çiya, Koma Gulên Xerzan, Agîre Jîyan, Çar Newa, Koma Rewşen continue to exist. While some musicians from *koms* left MKM, some others continue to make music individually.

Making music as a group has been significant for the *kom* members because of the previous mentioned conception of collectivity. As mentioned above, the idea of collectivity was positioned against individualism and selfishness. Collectivity is not a concept that is limited to organizational structure, it represents a 'lifestyle'. According to Öcalan (2008) the Kurdish artists, who demand individuality rather than collectivity are selfish and ungrateful to the movement that created them. Mizgîn from Kom Müzik said that he used to take the *koms* as an example to himself as a youngster and the collectivity represented by the music groups influenced the Kurdish population. As indicated above, hierarchical structure is seen as necessary for collectivity. This understanding of collectivity that can be achieved through the existence of a strong leadership is expressed by Hüseyin. However, he thinks that such a leadership is 'lacked' in music.

Being a music group is like bringing a lot of ideas together. You create something out of many ideas, it is not something that everyone can do. Sometimes we say there needs to be a leadership in order to bring so many people together. We could not have a good leadership in music; thus everyone becomes individual, selfish. It is not because of interests or likes; it is about the lack of leadership spirit. When we have two three voices, one wants to sing a song, the other wants to sing another... The idea of creating a piece together is not very strong. Thus, in a group everyone tries to sing individually, and the groups break up.<sup>72</sup> (Interview with Dilan, 30.01.2009)

Some musicians said that the group music was necessary because of the collectivist discourse of the movement and the struggle they had been giving. According to Halit the reason for the emergence of so many groups was directly related to the movement. “You are a part of a mass movement and the need for doing something collective was felt. It is about the perception about the world and the political stance”<sup>73</sup> (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2009) According to Zozan, they were giving a struggle to exist, for their languages to be recognized and this struggle could

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<sup>72</sup> “Müzik grubu olmak birçok fikri biraraya getirmek gibi birşey. Birçok fikirden birşey ortaya çıkarıyorsun, bu herkesin yapabileceği birşey değil. Bazen deriz bu kadar halkı bir araya getirme önderlik sıfatı isteyen bir şey. Çok iyi müzik önderliği yapamıyoruz, o yüzden herkes çok fazla bireyleşiyor, bencilleşiyor. Yani bu ilgiden ve sevgiden kaynaklı birşey değil; önderlik ruhunun olmamasından kaynaklı. Bizde iki üç solist oldu mu bu parçayı ben söyleyeyim, şunu ben... Onlardan bir bütün halinde eser çıkarma fikri çok fazla yok. O yüzden herkes bireysel söylemeye çalışır gruplar içinde, o yüzden de gruplar dağılır.”

<sup>73</sup> “Bir biçimde kitle hareketinin bir parçasısınız ve kollektif birşeyler yapma ihtiyacı hissediliyordu. Bu hem dünyayı algılayışla ve politik duruşla ilgili.”

only be given through collectivism. (Interview with Zozan, 26.01.2009) Nationalism presents the national community as an organic entity where the members of the nation are not presented as their individual identities, but rather with their 'national' identity. The *kom* musicians, as the intellectuals of the movement, were to set an example to the rest of the nation. They were to represent the collective identity of the nation where the individual is embraced by and dissolved in the hierarchically structured national community. Such an identity was especially necessary during 1990s as the struggle was recruiting more and more people to the struggle who needed to be bounded to each other.

Of course this idea of collectivity can not be explained only by the nationalist discourse. The hierarchical way of organization embraced by leftist political groups were reflected to music groups such as Grup Yorum. As the Kurdish music groups (as well as the political movement) were very much influenced from these groups, the traits of the idea of a kind of 'collectivity' which swallows the individual in a hierarchical structure can be followed back to Turkish left as well.

Another reason for making group music indicated by the *kom* musicians was the 'conditions'. A majority of *kom* musicians were amateurs who did not know how to play instruments, compose songs, use the recording studios etc. A majority of the musicians indicated that chances of making a mistake decrease as a group as the members can make up for each others' lack of knowledge and expertise. According to Mesut, making music as a group was a necessity because of their insufficiencies. As there were not many groups or musicians singing in Kurdish, they did not have the 'luxury' of leaving a group even though they wanted to. (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008) Playing in a group was also more practical for the culture center. As the group members were arrested, escaped or died and it was always possible to find another musician to fill her/his space from MKM as very rarely musicians were irreplaceable for the movement's cultural activities.

Being a *kom* from MKM meant that the musicians were affiliated with the Kurdish movement by the listeners as well as the state. The former meant popularity without paying too much effort, while the latter meant pressure by the state and the police. Hasan said they could not give concerts before they joined MKM; and it was much easier for them to reach an audience after they joined it. Hüseyin said that

being a part of MKM implied a stance towards music and politics. This identification was implied by the listeners' reactions as well. Yasemin said that musicians from MKM were perceived as 'ours' by the listeners and the quality of the music they make was not questioned too much. Such a perception was also inhibiting the creativity of the musicians as the listeners did not tolerate 'their' musicians to do something they do not like. In the eyes of the authorities, the MKM and musicians from MKM meant an attack on the 'indivisible integrity of the state'. The groups' concerts were raided, musicians were arrested and imprisoned, and albums were confiscated. I could not get a hold of the first albums of most groups and a majority of the musicians said that even they do not have a copy of the confiscated albums. Many musicians had to flee Turkey. MKM and its branches in other cities were subject to frequent raids by the police and closures. As a result of the raids, a significant part of the archive of MKM was lost.

With the 2000s, groups started to break up or musicians split from the groups to make music individually. While the musicians who remained in the groups see this as a sign of 'individualism' (in a negative way), the others said that making music as a group was meaningful in the context of 1990s. A variety of factors led into the break-up of *koms*. If the lack of expertise and musical knowledge brings the 'need' of making music as a group, the development of musical expertise and knowledge means that such a need does not exist any more. Musicians who gained more experience in music making, wanted to express their individual musical understanding after a while. Zozan indicated that, she could not improve herself musically within a group. She said that one person had all the say in the group which prevented the collectivism to rise. In a similar fashion Yasemin said that it was difficult for her to develop individual tendencies within a group.<sup>74</sup> The dissolution of groups was associated with the political changes that took place by the end of 1990s. According to arranger Ercan, the idea of making music as a political activity lost its significance and commercial interests gained more weight which stimulated the musicians to make music individually. The inclination towards making music

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<sup>74</sup> Female musicians' limited space to express themselves in music groups is connected to the patriarchal gender relations within MKM and the *koms* which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

individually can be explained with the relative independence of culture and music with regards to the political movement too. Music and musicians did not have to 'represent' the collective identity constructed by the movement any more. Also personal relations that could not be sustained over a long period have led to the dissolution of groups.

### **2.3.1. Politicized Music's Function and Role of Musicians for the *Kom* Musicians**

The cultural centers were close to certain movements although not directly attached. The musicians who were member of the cultural centers can be perceived as musicians of the movement and the sense of “responsibility” they felt was more than an individual feeling: It stemmed from their participation in the cultural centers. This organic relation implied that their vision of music and culture was not very different from that of the Kurdish movement. As most of them started making music within cultural centers, both their understanding of culture and music as well as their political views were shaped in these centers. There was not much opportunity to create something in Kurdish outside of the cultural centers, especially for the youth who was grown up in big cities like Ankara, Istanbul and İzmir and who were not familiar with language as well as folk culture. As the political struggle both helped the emergence of music groups as well as shaped their evolution, musicians have a feeling of being an *outcome* of the movement.

We are the outcome of a political environment. The Kurds, Kurdish struggle created a political environment. We developed with the things that are an outcome of our social life alongside that language, these songs. Naturally a feeling of belongingness grew inside us. But our spiritual world was not very political. But with time, with the changes that Kurds experienced which are also the outcomes of the struggle; I started looking at the world politically. In the end, these did not happen by themselves; they happened with the changes created by the politics. This is why I say that music is the outcome of political development.<sup>75</sup> (Interview with Êvdal, 29.09.2008)

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<sup>75</sup> “Biz siyasal bir ortamın sonucuyuz. Kürtler, Kürt mücadelesi siyasal bir ortam yarattı. Biz, sosyal hayatımızın getirdikleri ile beraber o dille, o türkülerle büyüdük. Doğal olarak içimizde bir aidiyet duygusu oluştu. Fakat düşünsel dünyamız çok siyasal değildi. Ama zamanla Kürtler'in yaşadıkları değişikliklerle beraber - mücadelenin de yaşattığı olduğu değişikliklerle – ben de hayata siyasal olarak bakmaya başladım. Sonuçta bunlar kendi kendine olmadı; siyasetin yaşattığı değişimlerle beraber oldu. Bunların topluma olduğu kadar, bize de bir yansıması oldu. O yüzden müzik, doğal olarak siyasal bir gelişimin sonucudur diyorum.”

Within such an understanding of music and politics, separation of arts from politics becomes an irrelevant question. Music and arts, when it is in Kurdish, is perceived by the musicians as well as the movement as an extension of political struggle. Most interviewees indicated that with regards to Kurdish culture, cultural and political actors are not separated from each other. Some claimed that art and politics can never be independent from each other and claiming the opposite is deceptive. The interviewees who expressed this opinion are still a part of the Mesopotamian Culture Centre. Sinan, who is now making music independently and who has never become a part of MKM, said that this indivisibility is a result of the position of Kurdish identity and language in Turkey. Because of state's attitude towards the Kurds, music did not remain to be only music and had to undertake a big mission. As long as Kurdishness and Kurdish language do not become normal categories, arts and politics will remain inseparable. (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008)

Accordingly, music has become the way the musicians joined the struggle and a very effective instrument for the Kurdish movement. As indicated above, music can be a very strong medium in identification processes as well as mobilizing people. In the beginning of 1990s, Kurdish music had to take on multiple functions as the other means of expression and communication were limited. When the early *koms* emerged, there was no television or radio broadcast and written media was not accessible by the illiterate population. The music tapes could be easily copied and transmitted to large segments of the Kurdish population. Even when television broadcast became wide spread through satellite, music continued to maintain its crucial role and television broadcast devoted a significant place to music. Most musicians indicated that music made a noteworthy contribution to the Kurdish movement in gaining a mass character. Although it is difficult to denote whether music has made new recruits to the movement, as Mesut says, it has been an important factor in creating enthusiasm and motivation.

[Music] has provided strength and moral support; the individuals involved in the political struggle built good morale through our songs; they are nourished with their culture and language. As a human can you feed only on bread? Music and arts is like this; it is a combination of vitamins. A poem in the song is vitamin C, *kaval* is vitamin E...They all nourished people.

Motivated the people, as well as the ones in political struggle.<sup>76</sup> (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008)

Politicization of music during 1990s is indicated as something inevitable as the whole atmosphere was politicized. Öcalan has asked for the enhancement of war to arts and culture in his talks and during 1990s this was succeeded. Social, economic and cultural spheres of the life were influenced by the war between the PKK and the Turkish army if not directly militarized. The albums which are produced during the 1990s include more songs with direct political lyrics which called people to struggle. This trend changed by 2000s, folk songs are used more while lyrics are less direct. Musicians also emphasized that the war atmosphere influenced their music during 1990s. They indicated that it was so tense that using radical lyrics in their songs was natural. Yasemin said that music and arts was not perceived as something fun, musicians were expected to be militants. (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008) One reflection of the tense political environment and mobilization of large segments of society was the gatherings where the groups would take stage. As several interviewees indicated, any social gathering would be an occasion for political expression including the weddings. “Weddings were not ceremonies any more, they turned into propaganda. These were environments where Kurds were, and political messages were given through them.”<sup>77</sup> (Sinan, 28.09.2008)

The political mission of the musician is not defined only as making songs with direct confrontational lyrics. Singing Kurdish folks songs in Kurdish and using the existing cultural repertoire of the Kurds in order to stop the assimilation was another important responsibility. The relation between folk culture and nationalism has been examined. The Kurdish nationalist discourse also indicated the folk culture as the source where the *unspoilt* Kurdish culture can be found. The cultural actors in the movement had the responsibility of advancing these cultural elements according

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<sup>76</sup> “[Müzik] güç vermiştir, moral vermiştir; şarkılarımızla siyasal mücadele içindeki bireyler moral bulmuşlardır, kendi kültürleri ve dilleriyle beslenmişlerdir. Bir insan olarak sadece ekmekle beslenebilir misiniz? Müzik ve sanat da biraz böyledir; biraz vitaminler bütünüdür. Şarkının içinde okuduğun şiir C vitamindir, kaval E vitaminidir... Hepsi ayrı ayrı insanları beslemiştir. Hem siyasal mücadele verenleri hem de halkı motive etmiştir.”

<sup>77</sup> “Düğünler dahi mitingler şeklinde geçiyordu. Düğün dediğimiz şey evlenme töreni olmaktan çıkıp, propagandaya dönüşmüştü. Kürtlerin içinde buldukları ortamlardı bunlar ve bu ortamlarda da politik mesajlar veriliyordu.”

to the needs of the movement and the nationalist discourse. Moreover, the folkloric elements had a stronger effect in arousing the emotions of the masses and calling them to struggle. The musicians reinvented the folk music with a nationalist agenda. How a link between the legend of Kawa and the current struggle was established was told. The association of Kawa with Mazlum Doğan has been encountered in a number of songs.

The musician militants were under the pressure of the state as much as other militants of the movement. Not only the Kurdish movement, but also the Turkish state was aware of the significant impact of the politicized Kurdish music. Raids over concerts, arrests, lawsuits against the musicians and confiscation of albums were frequent events. A significant number of *kom* musicians still live in Europe. According to Osman, when they went to an event to perform, it did not matter whether they played political songs on the stage or not. Their existence there was perceived as a threat by the police. For the audiences, only their existence meant a political expression, and this caused a great enthusiasm. In police raids on concerts, the listeners would protect the musicians from being arrested. Sometimes concerts would turn into a dispute between the listeners and the police.

### **2.3.2. Political Lyrics in the Songs of Koms**

What is meant by the militant music can be better understood through an analysis of the political songs during that period.<sup>78</sup> Neither the lyrics nor the melodies of political songs of *koms* are radically different from that of the Turkish singing political music groups of 1990s. The lyrics also show great similarity with the lyrics of the songs in Şivan Perwer's early albums. However, some lyrics are unique to the collective identity of the Kurdish movement. "The construction of meaning through music and song is...a central aspect of collective identity formation and... collective *structures of feeling* are actually made and reorganized, in part, through song." (Eyerman and Jamison, 161) Words that have a symbolic place in PKK's discourse as well as Kurdish movement in general such as *serhildan*

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<sup>78</sup> In *koms'* albums there were folk songs alongside with songs with a direct political content. What I refer to as 'political songs' are the latter.

(upheaval) *berxwedan* (resistance) and *serxwebûn* (independence) are frequently used.<sup>79</sup> While these are important key words in any kind of struggle, PKK's discourse was successful in including them into its repertoire and giving them a meaning that is related to the collective identity of the movement. In addition, already existing symbols that have a place in Kurdish traditions were adopted by the movement. Popular music had been an important medium in the popularization of such symbols and including them into the symbolic repertoire of the movement. Folk culture terms such as *govend* (line dance) or *berîvan* (the woman who milks the cattle) are used not only in folk songs but also in political lyrics, and in this way they gain a new political significance.

In the lyrics of *koms'*, blood is one of the most frequently used words, while war, enemy, gun, guerrilla, Kalashnikov are also very common. The usage of these words is both related to the nationalist discourse and the militarization of the movement. An example song might be useful to demonstrate the content of the songs more clearly.

The revenge of Kurdistan  
 They laid their head under the knife  
 So that neighborhoods, villages and cities  
 Will not turn into graves

Brave guerillas went down to the field  
 They are like tigers and lions who are born for revenge

...  
 In Serhat and Botan  
 They are fighting severely  
 They will rescue our golden and silver land  
 From invasion.<sup>80</sup>

The political songs fulfilled several functions. In the previous chapter, functional definitions of political music by Denisoff and Mattern were analyzed. While most political songs in *koms'* albums can be regarded as propaganda songs; there is not much distinction between rhetorical songs that define the situation and

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<sup>79</sup> *Serhildan* refers to the uprisings in Kurdish populated cities starting with early 1990s, while the latter two are also names of the magazines of PKK.

<sup>80</sup> Koma Çiya, "Tolhildan" in *Dilana Bêsînor* (1995).

magnet songs that call for struggle. Mattern's classification is more appropriate as it is more detailed and less rigid when compared to Denisoff's. While confrontational, deliberative and pragmatic songs can be found in *koms'* music (or intersections of two or all in one song); confrontational elements can be found in almost all songs. In confrontational songs, the enemy to be fought against is delineated. The enemy is the Turkish state which is sometimes symbolized with snake or defined as blood sucker that occupies the land. The enemy is usually referred to when it is beaten by the brave Kurdish warriors. The Kurdish identity as courageous and fearless is presented as positioned against the enemy. Such a portrayal of Kurdish identity is also to motivate the people to resist and fight.

Finally the movement used music in a pragmatic way. The Kurds are called to the struggle in various songs. They are asked to rise (*rabûn*), to walk, take up arms, go to the mountains or just to resist. Comrades, my people, boys and girls, youngsters, brothers, friends, mothers, Kurds and sometimes peasants and workers are the words that are used to designate the subject that is called to join the struggle. The wideness of the scope of this subject can be explained with the all-inclusiveness of the nationalist discourse. In this way, the *imagined community* of the nation, to use Benedict Anderson's terminology (1991), is presented. The members of this imagined community are called to join the national liberation struggle no matter who they are, and know that other fellow members are being called as well even if they do not know them. Joining the line dance (*rabûn govende*) is a symbolic term to call the Kurds to become a part of the fight. It has been mentioned above how existing cultural elements are re-appropriated by the movement. The collective structure of *govend* as well as its significance in Kurdish folklore makes it a term that is effective in denoting the struggle that should be fought collectively just like the line dance. Use of folkloric elements point to the populist character of *koms'* music, as well as to the identity construction processes as exemplified in the following lyrics.

The fire of freedom is flared up  
Men, women, girls, boys rise up!  
We will walk on the way of freedom

Good days are waiting for us, rise up!<sup>81</sup>

Peasants come join the line dance  
To the line dance and rising  
Sun rose in Kurdistan  
It lits up the whole world.<sup>82</sup>

It has been mentioned that different political views of the movements to which different *koms* were attached did not reflect to the lyrics at first glance. All groups used the similar symbolic references in Kurdish culture (such as colors green, red and yellow) and poems of nationalist poets such as Cigerxwin. However, it is possible to denote some significant differences. The *koms* from MKM made songs about the 'martyrs' of the movement which have a symbolic importance for the collective history of the movement.<sup>83</sup> I have not encountered such a song in Koma Dengê Azadî albums I have analyzed, or in the first Koma Amed album.<sup>84</sup> Other symbolic references to the movement can be found in the albums of *koms* from MKM such as the *Rehber* or sun to refer symbolically to the leader. Diyarbakır Prison resistance, which has a significant place in the collective history of the movement, has been a theme that can be found in *koms* from MKM too. Yet, prison is a common theme in almost all *kom* albums as well as groups such as Yorum as mentioned before.

Marches are common in political music both in Turkey as well as internationally. Kurdish music groups used march rhythms extensively too. There are songs with distinctive march melodies, while some others combined folk tunes with march rhythms. International marches with Kurdish lyrics have been included in some albums too. Singing marches was denoted to be a necessary component of political music by some of the musicians interviewed. *Ciao Bella* was translated into Kurdish and sang by Koma Amed and Koma Dengê Azadî in their first albums.

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<sup>81</sup> Koma Dengê Azadî, "Agirê Azadî" in *Welatê Min* (1995)

<sup>82</sup> Koma Çiya, "Gula Min" in *Dilana Bêsînor* (1995)

<sup>83</sup> It is important to note that the dead guerillas were presented as martyrs of the nation, not only of one movement.

<sup>84</sup> As I have explained in the previous chapter, Koma Amed did not belong to a cultural centre in its first album and Dengê Azadî was a part of the HKD which was affiliated with PSK.

Dengê Azadî also included *El pueblo Unido, Jamás Será Vencido* and *Die Arbeiter von Wien* in their album *Hêvî*. This might indicate that both groups sought references in international movements in addition to Kurdish movement, which do not exist the albums of groups that emerged within MKM. This is both due to the decrease of socialist themes as well as accentuating the nationalist struggle more in the latter albums of *koms*.

The socialist themes in *koms*' music have never been very strong. However, as the movement abandoned this discourse, the socialist themes in *koms*' songs receded. The gradual disappearance of socialist themes can be observed through the evolution of Kurdish music from 1970s to 2000s.<sup>85</sup> It has been mentioned in the previous chapter that Şivan Perwer was one of the most prominent names of political Kurdish music in 1970s. His earlier songs included words such workers and peasants, as well as names of socialist leaders such as Lenin and Ho Chi Minh. Although Şivan Perwer has never been attached to any specific Kurdish political group, his music was influenced from the evolution of the movement and left and socialist themes did not exist in his later albums. A similar evolution can be observed in *koms*' albums. Amongst the songs I have analyzed, there is one song that includes the word Lenin, and few songs that address the Kurdish workers and peasants. I could not access the first albums of *koms* from MKM, yet Yasemin said that in *koms*' early albums socialism was a relatively strong theme.

Class politics was taken up more during the early years. For instance the name of a Koma Mezrobotan album was *Kedkar*, meaning labor. Worker, labor, socialism was frequent in Rotinda's lyrics. Afterwards, as a result of political and ideological things... When you are in a war, going into the working class was inappropriate, almost a luxury. You are just learning your identity.<sup>86</sup> (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008)

In a similar fashion, Hasan said that although they have been close to the Marxist Leninist groups and included some socialist themes in their songs, their

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<sup>85</sup> These songs have not diminished completely from *koms*' repertoire. The song Hewrêyan from *Xeli* (2004) is a song with socialist themes.

<sup>86</sup> “Sınıf politikası daha çok ilk yıllarda işleniyordu. Mesela Koma Mezrobotan'ın bir albümünün ismi *Kedkar* yani emekçi. Rotinda'nın sözlerinin içinde çok fazla işçisi, emekçisi, sosyalizmi, şuyu buyu geçirdi. Daha sonra ideolojik, politik şeyler sonucunda... Bir savaş yaşarken, işçi sınıfına eğilme durumu çok da olamayacak, neredeyse lüks kalacak birşeydi. Zaten kimliğini yeni öğreniyorsun.”

primary aim was not this. They were part of a national struggle and gave priority to national independence. The Kurdish people were invited in *koms*' songs to give a national fight as the Kurdish nation. The only change in the music of *koms* as a result of the changes in the movement has not been the gradual disappearance of socialist discourse from the lyrics. As the direct confrontational lyrics were explained as a need and a natural result of the war during 1990s, with the ceasefire of 2000, the number of these songs decreased as well. With the 2000s, *koms*' role in the national struggle was focused more on *reinventing* the Kurdish folk music.

### 2.3.3. Shift in the politicized music by 2000s

With 2000s the political lyrics have become less confrontational and there has been a decrease in the number of political songs in the albums while the number of folk songs increased. Most musicians interviewed said it was relevant to use more confrontational lyrics and march rhythms during 1990s because of the tense military conflict. There is a distinction between the *kom* musicians who believe in the value of making politically motivated songs that have sloganic lyrics and the ones who are critical of it. During the interviews, this division was reflected to their preference of the words that define the music they do. While some used the words provocative or agitative regarding their music; others like Osman preferred to describe their music as having more direct lyrics and said that saying agitative is not the right word. Êvdal said that agitation can be art too, while Nevin said that it is not true to say that there should never be agitation in music. According to Osman, as it was *needed* in 1990s, *koms*' music was more *radical*.

People had some demands from the music groups that are from institutions. Musician and artist is an agent of that. She/he is the means to express the demands and aims. Naturally she/he has to have a direct way of expression therefore takes direct risk. It might seem vulgar but it results from a need.<sup>87</sup> (Interview with Osman, 02.10.2008)

With the 2000s, there had been a shift in the lyrics of *koms* and albums

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<sup>87</sup> “Kurumsal yapılar içindeki müzik gruplarından toplumun bazı talepleri var. Müzisyen, sanatçı bunun aracıdır. İstekleri ve amaçları anlatma aracıdır. Doğal olarak bu direk anlatımı yapmak zorundadır, dolayısıyla direk risk alır. Bu kaba görünebilir ama bu da ihtiyaçtan kaynaklı bir şeydir.”

started to be composed of folk songs predominantly. As the political songs are explained with the *needs* of 1990s, the change during the 2000s is also explained with the changing political agenda of the movement. Demands for a separate Kurdistan have been abandoned and with the ceasefire the militarization of the society was not necessary any more. In the few political songs that remained, lyrics have become less confrontational and peace started to be used as a theme. When I asked to a musician from Koma Gulen Xerzan why they made the song *Aşîî* (Peace) in their album dated 2005; he answered as below:

In the last chorus part of the song Sonda Me [a song from 1998 album] it said 'aşîî de were' [come peace], but we turned it into 'sonda me' [our oath]. We have actually started by then. But it was a very tense period and denial was bigger so we took that word out. ... This century will be the century of liberation. ... Cultural differences will result in peace. In the same period Kurds said that they abandoned the guns. And we wanted to give utterance to peace with our voice, with our album.<sup>88</sup> (Interview conducted on 27.09.2008)

Hüseyin said that with the development of Kurdish independence struggle, their music developed too. The influence of the struggle is reflected *naturally* to their music. When the war ascends, they make songs about war; when the peace ascends, they make songs about peace. (Interview with Hüseyin, 02.10.2008)

More than the change of content, with 2000s the apparent change was the shift in the composition of the albums towards a more folk repertoire. Musicians and other actors involved in music scene provide different explanations for this shift. Mizgîn from Kom Müzik Company said that the struggle for cultural recognition and stopping assimilation which was given during 1990s has succeeded to a certain extent and by 2000s Kurdish cultural institutions have redefined their objectives towards giving more weight to existing cultural resources. As they have proved the Kurdish cultural and linguistic existence, they could now give more weight to more 'academic' studies about that culture. (Interview with Mizgîn, 05.07.2008) According to Êvdal, with 2000s there had been a political turmoil which was reflected to them

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<sup>88</sup> “Aslında Sonda Me'nin [1998 tarihli albumden] son paragrafında 'aşîî de were' [barış, artık gel] diyordu ama biz onu 'sonda me, sonda me' [yeminimiz] yaptık. Aslında o zamandan başlamıştır. Ama o dönem daha sıcak bir dönemdi ve inkar daha fazla olduğu için o kelimeyi oradan çıkardık. ... Bu yüzyıl, bundan sonra özgürleşme olacaktır. Kültürel farklılıklar barışla sonuçlanacaktır. Aynı dönemde Kürt hareketi dedi ki silahı bırakıyorum. Biz de barışı kendi sesimizle, kasetimizle dile getirmek istedik.”

as well. During that period, instead of 'faltering', they chose to concentrate on the 'authentic' Kurdish melodies and produced an album solely composed of folk songs. (Interview with Êvdal, 29.09.2008) Some musicians said that political songs have reached a saturation point, and people started demanding better quality music. Underlying this claim is an assumption that political music has low quality.

A combination of all these factors played a role in this shift. As mentioned above, musicians have had certain responsibilities in the National Liberation Struggle. This was to assert the Kurdish identity while being engaged in arts as a militant. The war needed to be told to the people through music. By the end of 1990s, artists and musicians who defined themselves as a part of the national struggle had to find a different trajectory when the nationalist discourse was replaced by a more identity based discourse. While in the field of politics cultural rights and democratic coexistence of peoples under the Republic became the dominant concepts, the field of culture redefined itself accordingly. In addition to that, musicians have gained a degree of expertise and professionalization during the ten years they made music. Folk music has always been a part of their repertoire, and after abandoning the political songs, it was the remaining field that they continued to focus on. While by the early 1990s Kurdish music had to take over the roles of other propaganda mediums, in 2000s music was not the only means that the movement could propagate its discourse. There emerged newspaper and other publications, satellite TV channels and political parties. In addition to these, *koms* started to disappear from the music scene by 2000s. They were not as popular as they used to be, and started splitting up. Even though there are remaining *koms* right now, they are usually one/ two men groups that still continue making music under the name of their previous groups.

With the end of ceasefire, the Turkish military's operations started to be responded with guerilla activities again. However the existing *koms* did not go back to making propaganda songs. The musicians from *koms* have been concentrating on Kurdish folk music for a while and said that it would not be meaningful to make such songs again. When I asked Hüseyin why they do not make songs about war as the military conflict has started again, he said that now there is no demand for a separate state and even though there is an armed conflict going on, they still want peace. He added that no peace can be achieved without fighting for it. (Interview with Hüseyin,

02.10.2008) Not making political songs might also be explained with the relatively independent space achieved by arts and culture during 2000s. The musicians could decide their own agendas as the Kurdish musical scene flourished. Yet, this does not mean that they have abandoned their political engagement completely. It has been already mentioned that singing Kurdish folk song is already a politicized act. Moreover as Kurdish musicians who have an organizational belonging, they continue to consider themselves as a part of Kurdish struggle. They continue to take stage in political gatherings and their songs motivate people in political environments.

As a result of intensification of the armed struggle, propaganda songs became popular again. This time it is not the militant musicians who make this music, but the musician militants. The song *Orêmar* by the guerilla band Awazê Çiya gained great popularity in 2007 and 2008 and became the song that was aired most frequently on Kurdish music television channel MMC. The song is about the Dağlica (Orêmar) clash between the Turkish military and HPG (Hêzên Parastina Gel). The song has similar lyrics to the lyrics of *koms* during 1990s, talking about the revenge taken from the enemy and bravery of the guerillas. The song has become so popular that its melody was used by DTP in an election song. According to Halit, there emerges need for agitative music according to the perspective adopted by the main body that directs the struggle. As the musicians in legal platform could not satisfy these needs, guerillas had to do it. (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008)

While the direct relation between politics and culture have not been criticized by most musicians, some were more critical about it. According to Sinan, the cultural domain should be able to create its own dynamics and professional concerns should have more weight than the political concerns. He drew attention to the fact that Kurds are usually hesitant to attend a concert just for the sake of listening to music and still think of music as an integral part of the political events such demonstrations or Newroz celebrations. (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008) Ciwan protests the lack of concerts too; yet he contends that political and professional concerns should play an equal role in Kurdish music's evolution. The production of politicized Kurdish music in the music market and its consumption by the listeners has been shaped by the agenda of the movement as well as the state's denial of Kurdish language and identity. In the preceding part, I will try to have a

closer look at these relations.

## 2.4. Kurdish Music Market and *Koms'* Listeners

### 2.4.1. *Koms'* Relations with the Music Market

The emergence and development of a Kurdish music market<sup>89</sup> is produced by the status of Kurdish language and culture in Turkey. While there had been some record companies that released Kurdish albums in 1960s in Unkapanı, with the law numbered 2932 that banned the use of languages other than Turkish in published material, Kurdish records and tapes started to be recorded and distributed through informal ways. Yet, there had been some companies that resisted the ban and faced penal sanctions. In 1988, Beşir Kaya released an album with some Kurdish songs. Rahmi Saltuk's album *Hoynaro* was confiscated and sued in 1989. After the ban was annulled in 1991, a number of companies released Kurdish albums realizing that there exists a big market. Most of these were albums of local musicians without a political content. However, according to producer Ferzan, the change in the law did not mean a drastic change for political Kurdish music.

I do not think that it was free after 1991. It was only on paper. Before that Kurdish language, even the word Kurdish meant dealing with the prosecutors, judges and State Security Courts. After 1991, it was annulled on paper, but the same thing continued by saying that the content is divisive. Grup Kızılırmak has an album called *Pir Sultan'dan Nesimi'ye*. On the cover of the album there is the picture of an old woman from Anatolia who looks like a granny that anyone can have. I exported 4000 tapes and an amount of CDs. They were apprehended in Kapıkule. A meddler over there says that she looks like Apo's mother. They apprehended the truck for 21 days, loaded down the albums, kept the foreign driver under custody for three days... The dismissal took three- four years. I mean the mentality was the same; the change was only on the paper.<sup>90</sup> (Interview with Ferzan, 23.01.2009)

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<sup>89</sup> What is meant by Kurdish music market is the music firms, studios, and distributors that are involved in the production of albums in Kurdish.

<sup>90</sup> “Bence 1991'den sonra serbest olduğu yok, sadece kağıt üzerinde. Daha önce Kürtçe, Kürt kelimesi dahi hakimler, savcılar, DGM'lerle bir sürü dalaşmak demektir. 1991'den sonra onu kağıt üzerinde kaldırdı, bu sefer içeriğinde bölücülük var diye aynı şey devam etti. Grup Kızılırmak'ın Pir Sultan'dan Nesimi'ye diye bir albümleri var ve kapağında bir Anadolu kadınının, hepimizin nenesine benzeyen yaşlı annenin resmi vardır. Yurt dışına 4000 kaset, bilmem kaç tane CD ihraç ettim, Kapıkule'de yakalandı. Oradaki bir işgüzar diyor ki bu Apo'nun annesine benziyor. Orda 21 gün tırı bağladılar, malları indirdiler, üç gün yabancı tır şoförünü göz altında tuttular... Beraati 3-4 yıl sürdü. Yani zihniyet aynıydı, sadece kağıt üzerinde bir değişiklik oldu.”

The firms that started to release Kurdish albums did not continue for a long time because it was not very profitable. Ferzan identified several reasons for this. The pressure by the state, which is exemplified above, is one reason. The other reasons are related to it. As Kurdish albums were always under the threat of being confiscated; other actors in the music market such as publishers of the covers and the distribution warehouses would ask for cash while they accept payments by installment from other producers. The Kurdish albums were not sold in chain stores or big markets. In addition to these is the pirate music consumption of Kurdish music. Some of the interviewees indicated that pirate consumption is much higher in Kurdish music because of the economic conditions of the Kurdish speaking population in Turkey.

Ses Müzik has released some of the early albums of *koms*. Yet, as it is a 'private' company, it became more and more difficult for it to release the *kom* albums because of the lawsuits and confiscations. The idea of having a music company of MKM emerged. According to Ferzan<sup>91</sup>, this company was supposed to be the Universal of the Kurds where all albums could be released. Kom Müzik was established in 1997 in Unkapanı. Êvdal said that through establishing their own production and distribution structure, they thought they could make better music. Osman said that the firms in Unkapanı would ask them to change their lyrics. With the establishment of Kom Müzik, *koms* were able to make music in a more independent way. Kom has released the albums of *koms* as well as some archive albums, albums of individual Kurdish musicians in Turkey and diaspora.

MKM also established its own studio. According to Osman establishing a production company and a studio was necessary as they could not use the private ones in the way they wanted. He added that today MKM has the basic infrastructure to produce an album. Yet, there is no distribution network established and Kurdish musicians use the same warehouses as other musicians in Turkey. According to Yasemin, Kurds had to create everything themselves as they had no other chance. Acknowledging this, Yasemin is critical because MKM and Kom Müzik were gradually integrated into the market mechanism.

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<sup>91</sup> Ferzan sold his shares in Kom Müzik later on.

Albums were released from other firms, but they were banned, nobody wants to release them. So you need to establish an institution that can overtake these. Music sustains this institution [MKM] and keeps people's tension high, so you need to have the financial organization of music. After establishing the production company and the studio, it could produce any album it wanted. But this time album discussions started; whose album to be released and so on. A market started to emerge. By 2000s musicians started to get percentages. As managerialism and entrepreneurialism developed, Kom Müzik has become a separate institution. It started to include musicians from outside and studio was used by outside musicians. The arguments did not stop after the albums are released. This time they started to complain that the albums are not distributed, not advertised and gradually it became a part of the market. Music videos, MMC period... Today people can be famous with their music videos.<sup>92</sup> (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008)

Although an infrastructure that enables the production of albums have been established by MKM; most *kom* musicians complain that the system is not professional enough, it is not regulated and they do not possess the means that musicians in Turkey have. Lack of a distribution system, a managerial system, a sponsorship system, organization firms, independent concerts are among the 'insufficiencies' that are denoted by the musicians. These comments by the musicians confirm Yasemin's criticisms about the nature of the Kurdish music market. The *oppositional* music making by the *koms* have been incorporated into the music market. Although the cultural institutions have created a Kurdish speaking market, it has not challenged the commercialization of music. Although the movement tried to create alternatives to capitalist relations after the 2000s, this did not find its reflections in the music production.

The video clips and the Kurdish music television MMC are criticized by *kom* musicians saying that the quality of music as well as the videos had been very low. Some musicians said that because of the popularity gained through videos, there

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<sup>92</sup> “Albümler başka firmalardan çıkıyor ama yasaklanıyorlar, kimse çıkarmak istemiyor. Öyle ki bunları üstlenecek bir kurum da ortaya çıkartman gerekiyor. Zaten bu kurum müzikle ayakta kalıyor, halkın da biraz müzikle tanışmasını yukarıda tutuyorsun. Demek ki müzikal örgütlenmeyi finansal olarak da kuralım. Yapım şirketini kurmuşsun, stüdyoyu açmışsın artık her albümü yapabilirsin. Bu sefer albümler tartışmaları başladı. Şunun albümü çıktı bilmem ne. Bir piyasa da oluşmaya başladı. 2000'lerde müzisyenler yüzdeler almaya başladı. İşletmecilik, özel girişimcilik geliştikçe Kom da kendi başına bir kurum oldu. Dışardaki çalışmalara da yer veren, stüdyoyu da dışarıya açan bir kurum oldu. Albümler çıktıktan sonra da tartışmalar bitmedi; dağıtım yapılmıyor, tanıtım yapılmıyor derken yavaş yavaş piyasanın içine tamamen giriliyor. Video klipler, MMC dönemi... İnsanlar artık klipleriyle ünlü olabiliyorlar.”

emerged musicians who do not make an album, release one song to become famous. However, they added that as a result of the criticisms towards MMC, there has been an improvement in the videos that are broadcasted. However, they are not critical of music videos per se, and indicated that they need music videos in order to have popularity and to 'sell'. Mesut thinks that today the biggest means of promotion is music videos and he wants to have 'professional' videos with good quality, but because of economic insufficiencies he can not. Most of the videos aired on MMC or Roj TV are produced by the channels or the musicians themselves. Ferzan said that all around the world the videos are produced by the production companies, but it is not possible for the Kurdish music companies. As the Kurdish television channels do not pay copyright for the videos they air, the companies can not find the financial resources to produce music videos.

The biggest problem denoted by the *kom* musicians about music market is the pirate consumption. The internet downloading and circulation of pirate CDs have reduced the revenues of the musicians drastically. According to Ferzan, the music sector is undergoing a crisis in general and the Kurdish music sector is damaged the most. Mesut said that because of the low income levels of the region, pirate is more common amongst the Kurdish speaking population. A simple internet search demonstrates that almost all albums of *koms* and individual musicians who were in *koms* can be found online. As a result, the firms are not willing to produce albums. The musicians demand a system that would generate income through downloading to be established. Musicians' criticisms towards pirate also demonstrate that they adopt the capitalist arguments on intellectual property rights. While a great deal of oppositional movements around the world embraces pirate consumption and challenge intellectual property rights, I have not encountered such an attitude in my interviews.

Although the Kurdish music market developed its financial institutions, they are not independent from the political realm. As mentioned above, Kom Müzik is related to MKM which is a cultural organization of a political group. According to Sinan as there is no private sector that wants to invest in Kurdish culture and music as it is very risky. As a result, the decisions given by the political realm becomes decisive. Sinan thinks that it would be better if the private sector had the say rather

than the politics.

A production style that is integrated to Unkapanı but determined by the political actors is decisive. This realm is not civilized. I can not say that actors willing to invest in music, painting, and cinema have emerged because this realm is occupied by the political actors. ... It has been seen as a part of the political struggle for forty years and if music is to be produced; it should be produced by the political actors. A market that works through supply and demand can not develop as no one would compete with a political movement. Political actors have taken over the musical production. It is because dealing with Kurdish was risky, it was not something people would do with commercial drives. It necessitated a political mission; it was something that can be conducted by the cadres that have taken over this mission; it involved risks and penalties. These are still valid today. If you ask whether the political actors would like to continue their dominance in an environment where all the pressure over Kurdish is released; I think they would. Because it is also about controlling the art and the artists. We can not regard it naively as a mission, as voluntarism or political struggle. It is the control mechanism of the political authority over the artist.<sup>93</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008)

Ciwan also thinks that political decisions are decisive and the private sector should get involved in the music sector. The dominance of the political decision making in the musical realm results in the production of low quality music. However, he also added that, politics and private interest should both play a role. According to him, private actors who think idealistically about Kurdish music should invest.

These critics about the current situation of the Kurdish music sector seem to think within a dichotomy of private actors and political actors. The finance of the music, which is seen as necessary, seems to play the decisive role in this thinking. As mentioned above, Yasemin is critical about adopting the market structure and

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<sup>93</sup> “Daha çok Unkapanı'na eklenmiş, ama politik aktörlerin belirleyici olduğu bir prodüksiyon yapma biçimi belirleyici burada. Bu alan sivilleşmiştir diyemem. Müziğe, resme, sinemaya yatırım yapmaya hevesli aktörler ortaya çıkmıştır diyemem çünkü bu alan politik aktörler tarafından doldurulmuştur. ... Zaten bu politik mücadelenin bir parçası olarak düşünülmektedir kırk yıldır ve müzik üretimi yapılacaksa bunu da politik aktörler yapacaktır. Arz talep üzerinden yürüyen bir piyasa gelişemez, çünkü kimse çıkıp da bir siyasal hareketle rekabet etmez. Müzik üretim işini politik aktörler üstlenmiş durumda. Bunun nedeni de şu: Kürtçeyle uğraşmak riskli bir iş, bir insanın ticari olarak yönelebileceği bir iş değildi. Bu bir politik bir misyonu gerektirirdi, bu misyonu üstlenecek kadroların yürütebileceği bir şeydi, bunun bir riski ve cezası vardı. Bu söylediğim şeyler bugün hala geçerliliklerini sürdürüyor. Kürtçe'nin üzerindeki baskıların büsbütün kalktığı bir ortamda politik aktörler bugünkü üstünlüklerini sürdürmek isteyecekler mi diye sorarsanız, bence isterler. Çünkü sanatı, sanatçıyı aynı zamanda denetim altına almak şeklinde de çalışmakta. Bir misyon, bir gönüllülük, bir politik mücadele naifliğinde göremeyiz. Siyasal otoritenin sanatçıyı denetleme mekanizmasıdır bu.”

commercial thinking by the MKM and Kurdish musicians. Yet, she asserted that adopting these structures were out of necessity. It has been indicated earlier that the counter hegemonic projects which build themselves within the hegemonic order, adopt some of its elements. The musicians involved in the *koms* and MKM have not envisaged different ways of creating and perceiving music other than the existing relations of production and consumption. Alternative ways of organizing the relationship between the listeners were not imagined. The existing mechanism was adopted according to the capacities and demands of the movement. However, the relation between the 'producers' and the 'consumers' is not shaped only by the market mechanism. Rather it is a unique one as both sides belong to a political movement which shapes the musical experience in its all aspects.

#### **2.4.2. *Koms* and the Listeners**

Musical events construct a relatively free space for its attendees and such a space might be empowering for the people. Music as a part of a political protest, might have a direct empowering effect as it mobilizes political attachments as well as emotions. In such an environment, music not only gives a 'feeling' of achievement, it also creates a sensorial atmosphere where the utopian vision of the movement is enacted.

Music that empowers releases human energies as well as invites investment of affective powers. It is not an illusion, nor is it a quantifiable something imposed from without; it is, rather, something *generated from within*, something akin to "the glow" that one could see generated at certain historical moments among those who had returned from revolutionary situations. (Pratt, 1990: 38)

The direct experience of the music helps us to place ourselves in the narrative established by the movement. (Frith, 1996: 124) Musical experience is decisive not only in individual identification processes but also collective ones. Through the collective experience of music, a sense of 'us' is constructed.

In the early years of MKM, the cultural activities were not perceived as performances that the audiences attended and the separation between the artist and the audience was not very strict. The people who attended a cultural event would not position themselves as the audience; but rather as a participant of a political event.

The collective identification process was felt intensely as the arts and music was not perceived as a 'representation', but rather as a part of the 'real life'. The space constructed by the performance was not a representational space, but rather a space of embodiment of the vision of the movement. Özgür, who was in the theatre branch since the opening of MKM, told the atmosphere during these early years. Although he is talking about theatre, a similar atmosphere can be presumed for the musical experience.

There was no separation between the artist and the audience. There was a mass. It would be wrong to call that an audience. The artists were also a part of that mass. They were a part of the political action. You could switch roles sometimes. If you attend a meeting, a hunger strike or a party work, you would be the guest and they would be the more active ones. The mobilization was very pervasive. It started from the families. ... In the early plays we performed, the atmosphere and the feelings were very different. ... We would usually perform in the basement in Tarlabası. After we started acting, we would hear people crying. Sometimes players would cry on the stage, at the backstage everyone would cry. Actually it was not a sentimental atmosphere, it was tough. ... The audience or the mass would sometimes forget that you are an actor. They would attack us when we acted the special forces; and we could not explain them. ... Politically it was very different; it was not like today. The way you attended the nights, the halls, the activities were different. You would go there as if you go to another world.<sup>94</sup> (Interview with Özgür, 28.01. 2009)

As the cultural activities got more established, there emerged a separation between the audiences and the artists. Yet, during the 1990s the occasions they got together continued to be shaped by the movement. Musicians would take stage in political nights, protests, meetings, hunger strikes, Newroz and weddings. The weddings were also political events as the movement has infiltrated into all levels of life. Because of the denial of Kurdish language and culture, the cultural events were

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<sup>94</sup> “Arada sanatçı izleyici durumu yoktu. Bir kitle var. Çok seyirci demek bile doğru değil. Sanatçılar da o kitlenin bir parçası. O eylemin bir parçası. Bu yer değiştirebiliyor bazen. Siz bir mitinge, bir açlık grevine, bir parti çalışmasına gittiğinizde, orda misafir oluyorsunuz, asıl etkin olan onlar oluyor. Çok yaygınlaşmış bir örgütlenme var. Ailelerden başlıyor. ... İlk oyunlar da değişik duygularla yapılıyordu, atmosfer çok farklıydı. ... Genellikle biz Tarlabası'nda bodrumda oynuyorduk; ve sahneye çıktıktan bir süre sonra bütün seyircilerin ağlama sesleri size geliyordu. Sahnede oyuncular da ağlıyordu bazen, kulise girdiğinizde, kuliste herkes ağlıyordu. Halbuki duygusal değil sert bir ortamdı. ... Seyirci ya da kitle oyuncu olduğunuzu bazen unutuyordu. Özel Tim'ler falan oynadığı zaman saldırıyorlardı; ve bunu anlatamıyorduk. . ... Siyaseten de atmosfer çok farklıydı; bugün olduğu gibi değildi. Gecelere, salonlara, etkinliklere gidişiniz farklıydı. Başka bir dünyaya gider gibi gidiyordunuz.”

seen by the people as an act of asserting their existence. The music performed was loaded with the discourse of the movement which turned any musical event into an atmosphere of political mobilization. These events were not only constructing the collective identity of the movement, but also the Kurdish national identity as the identity which has been denied by the state could be expressed.

A majority of interviewees indicated that the audiences used to give over-enthusiastic reactions to their music as it was in Kurdish and it did not matter too much which song they played. Hüseyin said that in concerts they would see people making victory signs or crying during folk songs with an irrelevant content. He thinks it is both due to the enthusiasm felt by the audience as well as their enthusiasm reflected to the audience. Sinan said that the listeners would be fervent to see them on stage; but it was not only because of the music they made. They symbolized something different in the eye of the listeners and he thinks that as a group they received more appreciation than they deserved.

Musicians indicated that during the 1990s, people demanded more sloganistic lyrics and songs that would give messages. As Kurdish was banned, they did not question the quality of the music as long as it was in Kurdish. However, over the time the listeners 'developed musical appreciation' and neither singing in Kurdish nor the political content of the songs were enough any more. Osman said that *koms'* music *developed* the musical taste of the listeners and the listeners started to criticize their music. Osman's quote about the transformation of listeners' music taste exemplifies the pedagogical tone of MKM musicians towards the listeners.

We have transmitted what we have to the people and this *cultivated* a level of appreciation and consciousness. When we start repeating ourselves people started to criticize us. They say that we were not sufficient. Our first productions reached its target and helped a consciousness to emerge through negative and positive criticisms.<sup>95</sup> (Interview with Osman, 02.10.2008)

As I have explained before, Kurdish musicians and artists had some responsibilities towards 'their' people. They had to be pioneers of the movement,

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<sup>95</sup> "Biz bizde olanı halka ulaştırdığımızı inanıyoruz ama bu halkta belli bir beğeni düzeyini geliştirdi, bilinç geliştirdi. Halk artık bizde bir kısır döngüsü olursa ve gelişme olmazsa eleştiriye döndü. Halk diyor ki siz yetersiz kalıyorsunuz. Bizim ilk üretimlerimiz yerini buldu ve artık halktan bize olumlu olumsuz eleştiriler gelerek müzikal bir bilincin oluşmasına yardımcı oldu."

demonstrate the people the new life style which is designed by the leadership, and *teach* them how to refine their identity through arts and music. While the leader of the movement is the ultimate teacher of the whole population, the intellectuals and musicians are to transmit this knowledge to the 'ordinary' people. Both in my interviews and the concerts I attended, I encountered the reflections of the position of musicians as the teachers of the people. Some *kom* members said that with the collectivity they symbolized and with their attitude, they gave the people important messages. Zozan said that they were treated and respected as if they were the cultural ministry by the people. Because of the hierarchical relation established between the musicians and the listeners, the former is to be imitated by the latter as long as they fit into the image of 'musician' or 'artist' drawn by the movement. The musicians are to teach the people the modern music, how to appreciate it, how to behave in concerts etc. Boran from Agirê Jîyan said that they do not want people to dance *govend* in all of their songs. As Kurdish people have listened to music in protests, meetings and Newroz until now, they do not know how to listen to music in a concert and as musicians they have to teach them. (Interview with Boran, 02.10.2008) Ciwan also complained that the Kurdish listeners attend a music event to line dance and do not know how to appreciate different genres. I participated a concert given by Agirê Jîyan without a political occasion. When the youngsters started dancing *govend* in a song, the singer stopped singing and warned the listeners to sit down. He waited until they were seated back and then continued singing. I found the attitude of the singer quite offending; yet the same group of youngsters rose up to dance in a song that is 'proper' for *govend*.

The change in people's demands was also reflected to the musical events. Music was started to be performed outside of the political protests. The festivals organized in different Kurdish cities during 2000s have become important occasions for the musicians. As a lot of DTP municipalities organized festivals, it was not difficult for the musicians to meet with the listeners any more. According to Osman, when musicians started to perform in more professional settings rather than the weddings, they had to pay more attention to the quality of music. As the audiences had the chance to participate in more musical events, they have become more selective. The participation in these festivals by the people were really high. Halit

said that reaching so many people was unimaginable for the Kurdish musicians in 1990s. He also added that these changes resulted in the emergence of Kurdish musicians who are treated as 'stars' by the listeners<sup>96</sup> and musicians such as Kawa or Diyar were treated by the audiences just like İbrahim Tatlıses or Özcan Deniz. The degrading tone used against these artists is not only because they make arabesk, but also because they present the image of a 'pop musician' which the *kom* musicians tend to avoid. The musicians' desire to become popular is mentioned in a despising way by a majority of the *kom* musicians I interviewed. However, musician as a popular figure is not only valid for musicians such as Diyar or Kawa. *Kom* musicians started to become popular figures for the audiences as they started to get integrated into the music market. Moreover, by being a part of the music market that produces popular figures, by making videos, giving interviews etc., they reinforce their 'stardom' which they seem to object on a discursive level. This not true for all musicians. Sinan acknowledges the position they acquired as popular figures amongst the Kurdish youth.

We have to establish its relation with the popular culture well. In the end, we are in the realm of popular culture. Music is not only a tool for the political struggle. A popularization that includes the political struggle is at issue. It has been experienced in the same way it did around the world. Kurdish youngsters demand life. They want to like their musician as an American or English does, they want to tear their shirts for them just like they do. This is an imitated style of liking. Kurdish youngsters want to be like their peers but also want to be different from them with their culture and language. We have turned into popular figures in a way; when the listeners came to the culture centers, they came to see us; it was important for them to see us.<sup>97</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008)

Lack of concerts which fall outside of political occasions is something that

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<sup>96</sup> Yıldırım also mentions that by 2000s, a 'star musicians' period has started in Kurdish music. (Yıldırım, 2007)

<sup>97</sup> “ Öncelikle bu işin popüler kültürle ilişkisini çok iyi kurmak gerek. Sonuçta popüler kültürün alanındayız. Müzik sadece politik mücadelenin araçlarından biri değil. Bunu da içinde barındıran bir başka popülerleşme giriyor işin içine. Dünyanın her yerinde nasıl yaşıyorsa burada da öyle yaşandı. Kürt gençleri aslında hayatı talep ediyor. Bir Amerikalı, bir İngiliz müzisyenini nasıl seviyorsa ben de öyle seveyim, o t-shirtünü yırtıyorsa onun için, ben de yırtayım. Bir kere burada taklit edilen bir sevme biçiminden söz etmek gerek. Kürt gençleri dünyadaki yaşlılarına benzemek isterken bir yandan da kendi dili ve kültürüyle farklı olmak istiyor. Bu yanıyla biz de popüler figürlere donüştük, kültür merkezlerine gelen dinleyiciler biraz da bizi görmeye gelirlerdi, gördükleri zaman önemserlerdi.”

is frequently criticized by musicians as well as the producers. Even the festivals of different municipalities have been shaped a lot by politics as DTP used to organize them. Ferzan said that he tried to create an entirely private concert sector in Kurdish music; but he could not succeed. According to Halit, the reason lying behind the lack of non-political concerts is the 'non-urbanized' character of the Kurdish society.

Kurds have not been urbanized yet and they can not fulfill the requirements of urbanization. There is a huge difference between attending an organization or concert that is not political and a political one. An Agirê Jîyan concert by itself is different from an Agirê Jîyan concert organized by DTP. There are partial implications of it, but not to the general. The main body is still composed of political cultural activities.<sup>98</sup> (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008)

Urbanity of Kurdish identity and its implications will be explored in the next chapter. For the time being it would suffice to say that the interaction between the listeners and the *kom* musicians take place in a political context. However, this does not prevent them to achieve some kind of a 'star' status. In the concerts I have participated, I observed that the young audience takes pictures of the musicians with their cell phones, make their friends listen to the concert on the phone and have their pictures taken with the musicians after the concert. I participated a concert in Diyarbakır in the context of a political gathering. The audience was slightly older and their use of technology was limited. Still I could observe the musicians had a significant popularity and it created an excitement for the people living in Diyarbakır to listen to the musicians they see on television live. As mentioned above, coupled with the fame of the musicians is the pedagogical 'mission' they adopt before the people. The peculiar position and role of the political musicians is shaped by several mechanisms; their participation in the same movement with the audiences which make the latter to have a claim over the former, being the intellectual pioneers of the movement which puts them into the position of “examples” for the people and their position of popular music stars who try to produce and sell albums in the music market.

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<sup>98</sup> “Kürtler hala kentlileşemedi ve kentlileşmenin gereklerini de ister istemez yerine getirmiyor. Politik olmayan bir organizasyon ya da konsere katılımla, politik olan konserlere katılım arasında dağlar kadar fark var. Tek başına Agirê Jîyan konseri başka birşey, DTP'nin düzenlediği Agirê Jîyan konseri başka birşey. Bunun kısmen yansımaları oldu ama bu genele yansımıyor. Şu an halen ana gövdeyi politik kültürel etkinlikler oluşturuyor.”

Although I could not conduct a detailed research about the relations between the listeners and the *koms*, the analysis above will make it possible to understand better the context of identity construction through political Kurdish music.

In this chapter I tried to examine the politicization of Kurdish music in 1990s as a part of the Kurdish nationalist movement. The rising Kurdish nationalist movement started establishing its cultural institutions in 1990s. The *koms* have emerged within the cultural centers which are the cultural institutions of these movements. Music was seen as a tool for the movement in these institutions as well as by the musicians. The market mechanism and the relation of *koms'* with their listeners were also shaped by the political struggle. In the next chapter I will analyze how the politicized music of *koms* articulated the Kurdish national identity.

## CHAPTER 3

### ARTICULATION OF KURDISH IDENTITY BY *KOMS*

"When we are looking at the way in which ethnicities and identities are put into play in musical performance, we should not forget that music is one of the less innocent ways in which dominant categories are enforced and resisted." (Stokes, 1994: 8) Not only dominant categories are resisted, but also new ones are constructed through music. Popular culture and music are fields where identity formation processes take place. Through music, we construct our sense of identities with the direct experiences it offers of body, time and space (Frith, 1996: 124) as well as the discursive practices which enable us to associate ourselves with certain cultural narratives such as the nationalist one. "...music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them." (Stokes, 1994: 5) The relation between music and ethnic identities is not an essential one as assumed by some nationalist folklorists. Through music identities are negotiated, boundaries that separate "us" from "them" are erected and maintained. These boundaries are justified with terms such as authenticity. (ibid, p.6)

"Nationalisms are made from innate sentiments of the most available sorts as 'raw material', such as ethnic, primordial and patriotic and - eventually - laborious (contributed by 'communist nationalism') ones. While the basic 'raw material' for nations is ethnic identities, they provide their *innate sentiments* to nationalism. But just as nations are not ethnicities any more, nationalisms are not individuals' innate sentiments in their full-scale operation for the *realpolitik* of rising industrial capitalism." (Özcan, 2006: 41) The Kurdish movement was successful in mobilizing the innate sentiments; yet it did not remain of this level. Although it did not reach its 'full-scale operation', it aimed to create a national language, national culture and some national institutions. The resources of history, language, culture and geography are used in the becoming process

of the identity. (Hall, 1996a: 4) By using these elements, a sense of national pride was created. However, the tools of the Kurdish movement have not been as comprehensive and obliging as the institutions of a nation state. This is why popular culture and music have gained a significant role in the mobilization of innate sentiments and carrying them into the political realm.

The PKK aimed to construct a collective identity for the Kurds which mobilized the primordial elements but was to be anew against the old *debased* Kurdish identity. The new identity, which found its clearest expression in Öcalan's writings, is reflected to all spheres of the movement's activity. Öcalan defined this identity with ambiguous characteristics. It is to negate the ugly, debased and degenerated Kurdish identity and to re-emerge as a beautiful one. The discourse of the movement denotes fighting and being in war as the ways to reach this identity. It is important to note that what I refer as the “Kurdish identity” does not correspond only to an essential Kurdishness, but rather denotes the identity that is aimed to be constructed by the PKK.

Before analyzing the construction of Kurdish identity through *koms'* music, what Kurdishness and national Kurdish music mean for the *kom* musicians should be analyzed. The individual identification processes of the musicians had been various, yet all of them denoted Kurdishness as something latent in them which is revealed through certain experiences. The 'Kurdishness' of music is explained by the interviewed *kom* musicians through some essential and ambiguous characteristics. However, what 'national' music means for them is more than these essential characteristics and usually imply making music that transcends the locality. Whether *koms* have accomplished creating a national music is answered differently by musicians. As there had been no 'Kurdish music reform'<sup>99</sup> that was planned and implemented by national institutions, such a difference of opinion among the musicians is natural.

In the discourse of the Kurdish movement, the essential Kurdishness, which had been spoilt and degenerated under the colonization of Turkish state and tribal family relations, was to be rescued by the intellectual pioneers. The movement took upon itself this mission of rescuing the presumed essential identity. Like many other nationalist movements, Kurdish nationalism has denoted the folk culture as the place where the

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<sup>99</sup> Öcalan is talking about “Culture and Arts Revolution” (2008). However, it was neither planned nor implemented in an institutional and systematic way and remained on a discursive level.

unspoilt Kurdishness can be found. In order to rescue it, the folk songs were collected, selected and utilized. This process has been influenced by the ideological discourse of the movement as well as the existing values and attachments of the society. Yet the essential, *authentic* identity is not “complete” – to resonate Öcalan (2008) – and had to be completed by the movement. Within such a framework, the Kurdish identity has been fixed on two levels; first is the unspoilt essence to be revealed and the second one is the new one to be created. Through this fixation, the ever evolving and multiplicity of the identity has been aimed to be brought under control.

The dilemma between authenticity and modernity is reflected to the politicized music of *koms* in the modernization of folk songs. Like a number of nationalist movements, Kurdish movement denoted the folk music as the source of unspoilt national identity. The Kurdish folk music had been ignored or Turkified as a result of the nationalization of folk music in Turkey. The *kom* musicians identified their mission as stopping the assimilation of Kurdish folk music by the 'colonists'. However, with the aim of carrying the Kurdish music to a more universal level, folk music had to be modernized as well. Against the Turkish nationalist discourse which portrays the “Eastern” identity as backward, ignorant and reactionary, Kurdish nationalist discourse constructs the new Kurdish identity as modern and progressive. Within this framework, polyphonization and harmonization of music have been accepted as positive contributions to folk music by Kurdish musicians. By doing this, the dominant modernist discourse, which envisages a single path of progression for all societies, is reproduced.

In the previous chapter, the reflection of the changes in the political realm in music has been explored. In 2000s songs with direct political lyrics were not composed as much as during the early 1990s, and Kurdish folk music started to be given more weight by the *kom* musicians. In the early 1990s, singing Kurdish folk songs was to assert the existence of the Kurdish identity that has been denied by the state and to have a 'foundation' for the creation of a national culture. By 2000s, the Kurdish identity had been acknowledged on social and political levels. The demands for cultural and linguistic rights were emphasized while a separate Kurdish state diminished from the movement's discourse. This time folk music was used by the *koms* to emphasize the cultural difference of the Kurds. While emphasis on land, struggle and war diminished with the demise of political lyrics, the cultural elements of

the Kurdish ethnicity came to the fore through the folk songs.

For the *kom* musicians, the “other” of the modern and authentic Kurdish identity, is the arabesk music. The dominant discourse that negates arabesk music as a degenerate, shallow, alienated and pacifying “lifestyle” is adopted by *kom* musicians too. Because of the popularity of arabesk among the Kurdish population, such a negation is also significant for the musicians in positioning themselves as the intellectuals of the movement who can rescue the Kurdish population from degeneration by arabesk.

As the Kurdish national movement does not possess the means such as a national education curricula, museums or official maps to 'institutionalize, popularize and canonize' the standardized language, the national history and territory, popular music adopted unusual functions. *Koms'* music played a significant function in the popularization of the standard Kurdish developed by the Kurdish movement. National associations of common history and land were made frequently in the songs. The musicians as the *teachers* of the nation taught the people not only the refined and beautiful way of living, but also the 'correct' language, the national history as well as the boundaries of the homeland.

The historical and territorial references in *koms* music are made through the politicized songs. As the number of politicized lyrics decreased with 2000s, such references -especially that of history - also diminished and *koms'* function as popularizing the national history and territory of the desired state in the construction of Kurdish identity faded. Geographical references are continued to be made through folk songs but their number was less and the meaning of referring to certain locations was different. However, correct use of language is still on the agenda. As the number of musicians making music in Kurdish increased, the *kom* musicians who 'belong to a cultural institution' formulate their responsibility as 'giving people the correct use of Kurdish'.

In the early years of the movement, the cultural differences within the imagined Kurdish nation were not paid much attention. However, the linguistic and religious differences were started to be recognized by the movement by mid-1990s. This recognition found its reflection in the Kurdish cultural organizations. While the religious differences were not manifested too much (as the *koms* music is largely a secularized music), linguistic differences were acknowledged by including one or

two songs in dialects other than Kurmanjî in *koms*' albums. Later, a Zazakî singing band was established within MKM. Unlike the Turkish nationalists, the Kurdish nationalist movement did not ignore or try to assimilate the cultural differences within the imagined community. Rather, these were acknowledged and tried to be contained within the nationalist discourse.

Because of its all-inclusiveness, nationalism embraces women as well as men. The nationalist projects include women in the national community through the reproduction roles, as the transmitters of the culture of the nation and the symbols of modernization of the nation. As a result of the active role women played in armed struggle, demonstrations as well as representational politics, women's 'identity' started to gain another aspect in the Kurdish movement's discourse in addition to the above mentioned gender roles. The women have been represented in the Kurdish nationalist discourse as the actual participants of the nationalist struggle as well as through patriarchal family structure. In the politicized Kurdish music, references to both can be found. The women musicians' role in *koms* has been peculiar. While on a discursive level, they had been seen as an integral part of the musical 'struggle', they have been seen in an instrumental way and pushed to the background in tacit ways.

The identity construction process is never complete and adjusts according to the changing conditions and the discursive shifts. The analysis below will concentrate more on the 1990s as it was the period when the new Kurdish identity was being defined. The changes in 2000s will also be analyzed within the framework of the changing discourse of the movement. As music has been one of the fields where the identity construction process has taken place, its interaction with other fields was tried to be kept in mind. However, a complete picture of the Kurdish identity construction by the Kurdish nationalist movement should not be expected from this study. This is impossible both due to the limits of the study as well as the dynamic nature of identity.

### **3.1. Kurdishness and 'Kurdish' Music for *Kom* Musicians.**

Before analyzing how the Kurdish identity has been articulated by the *kom* musicians, I believe what Kurdishness mean to them should be examined. I will try to

examine this through the individual identification processes of musicians and what they think about the Kurdishness of music and 'national' Kurdish music. While the individual identification processes and what they describe as Kurdish music is different for all musicians, almost all of them assume a latent and essential Kurdishness.

For some musicians Kurdishness is something that they adopted as a result of encountering the other, for others it was perceived after they have become aware of their own 'otherness'. As a number of scholars have denoted, only in relation to the "other" the identity is constructed. (Hall, 1996a: 4-5) Nevin said that until she started the primary school, she was speaking Kurdish at home. At school, her teacher would punish them if she heard them speaking Kurdish. These events led her to asking questions about her identity. Kurdishness as an identity is perceived by some musicians as an existing and static entity that can be recognized, found out. In the recognition or revealing of *the* identity – that is hidden, or suppressed – Kurdish struggle has played a significant role. Mesut said that he used to be ashamed of being a Kurd and make his mother walk behind him on the street as she was wearing traditional Kurdish clothes. He 'turned to himself' as a result of the national struggle, and without the struggle he could have been still living 'far from his identity'. (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008) For some musicians Kurdishness was something to be *learnt*. Yasemin said that her family did not speak Kurdish. When she was sixteen, she started visiting her uncle's son in prison and asked questions about Kurdishness to the inmates. Later on she joined the MKM and learnt everything about Kurdishness there. This static and monolithic identity that can be revealed, or learnt, could be faced with being *lost* as a result of migration.

Such a perspective is reflected to their conception of 'Kurdish music'. What is regarded as *essentially* Kurdish varies in different contexts according to living conditions, and in response to ideological constraints. While for some it denotes the antiquity of the culture, for others it might denote its independence from Turkish, Arabic, Persian or Western culture. (Blum and Hassanpour, 1996: 337) "It is not so much language as the ways it is treated that makes songs recognizably Kurdish. Arguments about what songs and ways of singing can be accepted as 'Kurdish' is an inevitable consequence of the different situations in which Kurds must recognize themselves." (ibid, p. 339) Although not all musicians believe in the value of defining what is *Kurdish*

music, some said that lyrics, *makams*<sup>100</sup>, musical base, *gırtlak*, musical color and the instruments used are decisive. For a significant number of musicians, Kurdish music is the folk music. Such a definition of Kurdishness is related to innate sentiments that nationalism aims to construct an identity upon. According to Mesut, Kurdishness of a tune or instrument arouses emotions in any Kurd, no matter where she/he is grown up.

Wherever you go around the world, when someone who has a little bit of Kurdishness inside hears the sound of a *kaval*, she/he is touched by it. For me the feeling of *kaval* is very important, feeling of a *bağlama*, *kemençe*, *tulum* would make someone stop for a moment and think. Just try to create that emotion with guitar or bass guitar.. One might find it pleasant because of having grown up in a city, but if she/he has a little bit of feeling inside, *kaval* asks her/ him something to make her/him look at her/himself. I believe, even though she/ he moved away from her/ his village when she/ he was one year old, the feeling of that *kaval* is still *hidden* in her/himself.<sup>101</sup> (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008)

When it comes to 'national' Kurdish music, the musicians' definitions go beyond associations of innate sentiments and are more about surpassing the local differences. As there has been no explicit project formulated by the movement in creating a national culture and music, the musicians do not adopt a uniform discourse in terms of creating national music. According to Êvdal, the music they have made went beyond the regional and linguistic particularities without ignoring them. In this way, they have signaled national Kurdish music and created its foundations. Hasan and Halit said

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<sup>100</sup> As a musical tradition of the Middle East, Kurdish music is a *makam* (modal) music; which works on a complex system of melodic modes. There is not common opinion about the *makam* structure of Kurdish music. Poche claims that there is single *makam* in Kurdish music which is called as *Kurdi* or *Kordi* by the neighbor cultures. (Poche, 1996: 67) He claims that what is called as other *makams* by other authors is only the variations made within this single *makam* (Poche, 2002: 126) Izady rejects the claim of single *makam* and adds that almost all lullabies in Kurdish are in *Humayûn makam*. (Izady, 1996: 26) According to Izady, the most frequent *makam* in Kurdish music is *bayat-i kurdî* which is the Kurdish *makam* used by neighbouring cultures as well. (ibid) Zozan claims Kurds use the *makam* which the Persian calls *Shûr*, Arabs call *Bayati* and Turks call *Uşak*. (Zozan, 2002: 131) Tatsumara says that *güşeh* called as *Bayati-Kurd* is a Kurdish *makam* and mentions similar *makams* with Kurdish origin in Iraq and Syria. Mutlu says that *makams* that are frequent in Middle East such as *rast*, *uşak (newruzî)*, *kürdî*, *çargâh* and *hicaz* are also used as basic *makams* in Kurdish music. (Mutlu, 1996: 58)

<sup>101</sup> “Dünyanın neresine giderseniz gidin, içinde Kürtlük barındıran bir kişi bir kaval sesi duyduğu zaman çok etkileniyor. Bir kaval duygusu benim için çok önemlidir; bir bağlama duygusu, bir kemençe duygusu, tulum duygusu bir durduruyor insanı, düşündürüyor. Ama sen gitarla, bas gitarla yarat bakalım o duyuguyu... Kentte büyüdüğü için belki ona hoş gelir, ama bir parçacık duygusu varsa, kaval ona kendisine dönmesi için bir şeyler sorar. Bir yaşında köyünden uzaklaşmışsa dahi, o bir yaşına kadar yaşadığı duygu, o kavalın hissi içerisinde saklıdır diye düşünüyorum.”

that their musical approach was shaped with an understanding that would carry the local to national, national to universal. Hasan also acknowledges that creating a national Kurdish music would go beyond the capacities of MKM and *kom* musicians; and the resulting ‘homogenization’ was unhealthy and detrimental to local particularities.

The Kurds did not have such a chance: TRT goes and make collections; it brings everything that exists, classifies and uses them. But Kurds did not have such a chance. It happened in an uncoordinated way. People started to sing popular songs. Even though MKM musicians do not take stage, others sang their songs. In one aspect, this is nationalization and universalization; but as we have not accomplished a cultural headway on grassroots level it turned into a disadvantage. People do not sing the songs of their villages but sing MKM songs. Because youngsters learn them more easily.<sup>102</sup> (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009)

As the quote above makes it clear, Hasan is not critical of state's interference in the folk culture in a systematic way and acknowledges its necessity in creating national music. Today there are more musicians and groups that make local music and are popular among the Kurdish population. Musicians also try to include more variety of regions in their albums. Ciwan is critical of this change as he believes it hinders the national music that started to emerge after years of struggle.

We also collected a Malatya song, but we performed it in a way that everyone can enjoy by transcending the local style. After a while, especially after 2000s when Kurds experienced a political turmoil, everyone started going back to their sub-identity. I think this is politically wrong for the Kurds' future. Some say, only Zazas may listen to me. ... National things are left aside. Kurds' future, common life, all the things that are done to bring Kurds together over some years. ... Maybe in the beginning we did not know much about other Kurdish people. But after a certain time, Kurds were able to find a common denominator. In this common denominator everyone started to do what they can do for the future of the Kurds. Musicians, politicians... [Localization] is taking this struggle twenty years back.<sup>103</sup> (Interview with Ciwan, 14.12.2008)

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<sup>102</sup> “Kürtler'in şöyle bir şansı yoktu: TRT gider derleme yapar, bütün herşeyi süpürür getirir, tasnif eder, yararlanır ama Kürtler'in böyle bir şansı yoktu. Bu biraz sakar işledi. Popüler şarkılar söylemeye başladı insanlar. MKM sanatçıları çıkmasa da başkaları onların şarkılarını söylemeye başlıyorlar. Bu uluslaşma, ortaklaşma bir yandan ama bir kültür atılımını tabanda gerçekleştiremediğimiz için ciddi anlamda dezavantaja dönüşüyor. İnsanlar Malatya'da kendi köyünün şarkılarını söylemiyor da artık MKM gruplarının şarkılarını söylemeye başlıyorlar. Çünkü gençler bunu daha kolay öğreniyorlar.”

<sup>103</sup> “Biz de mesela Malatya şarkısı derledik ama o yöresel şeyin dışına taşıp herkesin dinleyebileceği bir şekilde yorumladık şarkıyı. Bir dönem sonra, özellikle Kürtler'in politik olarak da karmaşıklığı yaşadığı 2000'ler sonrası, artık herkes alt kimliğine dönmeye başladı. Ben bunu politik olarak, Kürtler'in geleceği açısından yanlış görüyorum. Kimi var, diyor ki beni sadece Zazalar dinlesin. ... Ulusal şeyler bir yana bırakılıyor. Kürtler'in geleceği, ortak yaşamı, Kürtler'in belli şeylerde

Emergence of a common culture was not as a result of central planning and grassroots implementation, but rather through the popular culture as the Kurdish movement does not possess the former means. The Turkish state had the means and state instruments to formulate and implement cultural policies. Although these policies did not result in total homogenization and nationalization of all cultures, it was successful to a certain extent. However, the outcomes of this process had been unpredictable and contradictory. Although Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms had very different aspirations and capacities, the Kurdish movement's instrumentalization of music has resulted in the erosion of local styles and emergence of a degree of homogenization. Kurdish nationalist movement effects on music had been beyond the control of the cadres of the movement and resulted in unexpected ways. In order to have better comprehension of these processes I will try to analyze the role folk music played in the construction of Kurdish identity and its modernization by the *kom* musicians.

### **3.2.'Authenticity' / 'Modernity' in Articulation of Kurdish Identity**

#### **3.2.1. Kurdish Folk Music in the Construction of Identity**

The albums of *koms* include two types of songs; Kurdish folk songs and songs with political lyrics. Amongst the one hundred eighty two<sup>104</sup> songs I analyzed, eighty five folk songs. I have already noted that there are less folk songs in the early albums compared to the latter ones. This is due to the changes in the Kurdish movement as well as dynamics of the musical field. This shift has effected the articulation of the Kurdish identity throughout the 1990s and 2000s. While during 1990s the collective identity of the movement as well as the Kurdish national identity were constructed through political lyrics, in 2000s language and culture were more emphasized as a result of the increase in folk songs in *kom* repertoires. This is also due to the changing discourse of the Kurdish

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birleşebilmesi için bu kadar yıldır yapılan şeyler... Belki biz ilk başta diğer Kürt insanlarını tanımayı çok fazla yapamadık. Ama belli bir dönem geldi ki, Kürtler uzun bir zaman sonra ortak bir paydada birleşmeyi başardılar. Bu ortak paydada herkes yapabileceğini Kürtler'in geleceği için yapmaya başladı. Müzisyenler, politikacılar... [Yerleşme] bence bu mücadeleyi yirmi yıl geriye götürmektir.”

<sup>104</sup> The number is not definite as in some albums whether the song is anonymous or not is not indicated.

movement. While the demands for a separate state were abandoned, the emphasis on cultural and linguistic rights has gained more weight. The emphasis on folk music in 2000s denotes to a Kurdish identity that is constructed around concepts of cultural identity and ethnicity, rather than a national identity defined around territorial and common historical references.

*Koms* have devoted a significant amount of place to folk songs in their repertoire. In addition to the folk songs which are identified as anonymous (*gelêrî*), some recent songs have been composed with folk tunes. The following analysis is based on the folk music in *koms* repertoire both during the 1990s and 2000s. Yet as the interviews are conducted in the late 2000s, the analysis might correspond more to the discussions on Kurdish folk music in the 2000s.

Kurdish folk music has been tried to be Turkified by the Republic as a part of the reforms in music. Coupled with Turkification were the bans over Kurdish music. Overall, Kurdish language and culture were prohibited either through formal or informal measures. Cultural assimilation was coupled with the political denial of the Kurds. As Öcalan desired, existing elements of national identity were used to create a new Kurdish identity. In such a context, focusing on Kurdish folk music is a statement against the assimilation. Through folk music the *cultural difference* of the Kurdish ethnic, that is aimed to be obliterated, was asserted. While doing that, cultural difference is fixed under a monolithic Kurdish ethnic identity. However, such a fixation is never possible as the construction of cultural difference goes in over time and is never finished. (Hall, 1996b: 345)

The terminology used when referring to Kurdish folk music is indicative of how it is perceived as a fixed essence of the Kurdish identity. Musicians frequently refer it as *authentic* Kurdish music or *traditional* Kurdish music. It is ambivalent what authenticity signifies and term is used in a self-justificatory manner. In the *Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno claims that the jargon is a product of the disintegration of the aura, and its sacred words have no sacred content; they are only frozen emotions. The jargon provides appearances of what has been driven out of people by the mass communication, culture industry and unfree labour.

The jargon, a waste product of the modern that it attacks, seeks to protect itself - along with literally destructive institutions - against the suspicion of being

destructive: by simultaneously accusing other, mostly anti-conservative, groups of sinful intellectuality, of that sin which lies deep in the jargon's own un-naive, reflective principle of existence. (Adorno, 1973: 45)

The nationalist discourse uses *authenticity* to justify itself. The nationalist is to recover the authentic past of the nation, which has been ruined by the foreign influences. Not only are its past, but also its customs and traditions, its values validated by their authenticity. Today Kurdish music is not performed in its original setting; *dengbêjs*<sup>105</sup> do not perform the *kilams*<sup>106</sup> for days and nights in the villages they stop by. In short, the modernity and urban lifestyle has disintegrated the aura; yet by using the term *authentic*, the musicians try to bring in this value to the music they make. The notion of authenticity is significant in the context of cultural production as well. "Good music is the authentic expression of something - a person, an idea, a feeling, a shared experience, a *Zeitgeist*. Bad music is inauthentic - it expresses nothing." (Frith, 1987: 136) In that sense, the *authentic* Kurdish music is used to express the difference between degenerated forms of *bad* music in Kurdish -such as arabesk- and folk music. It is also to denote music that is truly Kurdish and which expresses the essential, unspoilt Kurdishness accurately. Such a discourse could be read from musicians' attitude towards the folk music. Mesut claims that the newness that the *kom* musicians have brought to folk music is nourished by this authenticity.

Maybe there is a set of values that have been created since 1984 with the

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<sup>105</sup> *Dengbêjs* are story tellers who perform their talents in front of an audience by telling Kurdish stories in a melodic way, sometimes alongside an instrument. (Parilti, 2006: 65) Kurdish author Mehmed Uzun defines *dengbêj* as following: "*Deng* is sound in my mother tongue Kurdish. *Bêj* is the one who shapes the sound, who tells it. He is the one who gives the sound its soul, who makes the sound alive. He is the master whose profession is sound, the person whose space is sound. *Dengbêj* is the one who gives life to sound." (Uzun, 2006: 11, translation belongs to me.) They not only know the traditions, conditions and contradictions of their society but they also they have a very strong memory and musical talents. Important events in the Kurdish history, conflicts between different tribes, uprisings against *aghas* and the state are frequent themes of their stories. *Dengbêjs*, are either protected by a specific tribal leader or they travel independently. Yet they have a respectable position and are always welcomed in the villages that they stop by. Because they travel through villages and regions that are isolated, they transmit the collective memory spatially as well as temporally. Evdalê Zeynikê, Karapetê Xaco, M. Arifê Cızrawi are amongst the most well known *dengbêjs* of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *dengbêjs* such as Karapetê Xaco joined the Sheikh Said rebellion. (Parilti, 2006: 130, 132) As a result of Dersim and Sheikh Said rebellions and the forced displacements that followed them; many *dengbêjs* fled to other countries where there was a more liberal environment for Kurdish music.

<sup>106</sup> *Kelam* (the word of God) and *kilam* (harmony and rhythm) are the three concepts that make up the essence of *dengbêj* culture. (Parilti, 2006: 79-80)

National Liberation Struggle. A new culture has been built on the old culture. But our essential values, such as the *dengbêj culture*, which has brought us to today, in a way which sustains the struggle, which gets it together with that kind of thinking is the oral tradition. The current cultural heritage of the Kurds, their art, literature, stories and everything that has been lived is carried to today with the words of *dengbêjs*.<sup>107</sup> (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008)

According to Êvdal, whoever wants to learn about Kurdish music should first listen to the *dengbêj* music. Hüseyin said that he got closer to Kurdish culture by listening to *dengbêj* music. The Kurdish movement has been a means for musicians to discover this true Kurdishness which is expressed in *dengbêj* music. Dilan said that, although her father would listen to *dengbêj* music, when she was younger she did not enjoy it. After she joined MKM her 'Kurdish consciousness developed' and she started listening to *dengbêj* music and learnt how to appreciate it. (Interview with Dilan, 30.01.2009) The *dengbêj* music has been praised by the musicians as something through which true Kurdishness could be approached, as the most *authentic* expression of Kurdish culture.

In addition to authenticity, 'traditional' is frequently used by the musicians to indicate Kurdish folk music. Just like authenticity, traditional is a problematic term to deal with. As mentioned earlier, the identity construction process calls upon resources of history, reassembles and in a way constructs them. As Giddens says "tradition was called upon particularly in respect of the generation, or regeneration, of personal and collective identity". (Giddens, 1994: 5 cited in Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 32) What is peculiar about tradition is the fixation of the past; while, for instance custom, is not invariant just like the life itself. (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2) The 'traditional' contains a paradox at its core as it is looking back at a long past, while at the same time by realizing it, it transforms, reconstructs this past in the way it is imagined or remembered. (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 33-34) The Kurdish culture is presented by a majority of musicians with a very rich tradition and long history.

Kurdish music is a very old music; it has started around the years 207. I have

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<sup>107</sup> "Evet belki 1984'ten bu yana, ulusal kurtuluş mücadelesinin başlamasıyla birlikte, yeniden yaratılan bir değerler bütünü de var. O eski kültürün üzerine yeni bir kültür de inşa edildi. Ama bizim öz değerlerimiz olan, mesela *dengbêjlik* kültürü, aslında bizi belki bugünlere getiren, belki bu mücadeleyi bir boyutuyla ayakta tutan, o mantıkla buluşturan, ayakta tutan, belki o sözlü gelenektir. Kürtler'in bugünkü kültürel mirasını, sanatını, edebiyatını, hikayelerini, ne bileyim bir sürü yaşanmış olan olayını biz aslında *dengbêjlik* geleneği ile, *dengbêj*lerin o söylediği sözlerle bugüne taşıdık."

made a research but I can not recall the name, a Kurdish musician notates it for the first time then. We are talking about the cradle of Kurdish art in Mesopotamia. Kurds were in that region and if the arts and music emerged with the emergence of first human, Kurds have started their art and music in Mesopotamia.<sup>108</sup> (Interview with Hüseyin, 02.10. 2008)

*Kurdish music* is given a validity through constructing a long past of it. Not only Kurdish music and but also Kurds themselves are presented as categories that have existed over thousands of year without changing. Not only the 'long history' but also the geography of the tradition, as Mesopotamia, is invented through the nationalist discourse.

In making the tradition, first the terrain should be explored and *selection* is done depending on a number of factors such as individual preference or political choice. “What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a *selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification.” (Williams, 1977: 115) The folk songs are collected, selected and categorized. *Kom* musicians collected, selected and transformed folk songs as well. The methods of collection vary. While some included the songs they remember from their childhood to the repertoire, some went on collection visits and some asked the elderly in their villages to sing folk songs. In the albums where it is denoted that the songs are folk songs (*gelêrî*; anonymous), usually their sources are indicated. MKM has an archive of folk songs; yet no systematic archiving system has been established. Furthermore, a part of the archive was lost as a result of police raids.

One of the things that a majority of musicians aspire to is having a systematized way of collecting and archiving the folk songs. The desire for a systematic way of collecting songs is about preserving a 'national treasure' which would get lost unless it is not collected 'scientifically'. As mentioned previously, the nationalist movements under a foreign rule see the discovery of the folk culture as necessary for the survival of their traditional cultures. (Burke, 1995: 27) “Collection is something that

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<sup>108</sup> “Kürt müziği çok eski bir müzik. 207 yıllarında başlamış. Araştırdım ama ismi aklıma gelmiyor, Kürt müzisyen tarafından ilk defa o zaman notaya dökülüyor. Kürt sanatının beşiğinden bahsediyoruz Mezopotamya'da. Kürtler de o bölgedeydiler ve eğer sanatın, müziğin, ilk insan oluşumunda başlamışsa, Mezopotamya'da Kürtler de kendi sanat ve müziğine başlamışlardı.”

Kurdish musicians should focus on. There is a big *treasure* lying there and big part of it has not been *discovered* yet. I believe we have thousands of tunes that can be carried to a universal level; this is why we have given a lot of importance to collecting.”<sup>109</sup> (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008) In this quote, it is also significant that the validity of the quality of Kurdish folk songs is sought on an international level.

None of the musicians have denoted a stable set of criteria they use in making a selection out of the songs collected. Usually subjective criteria are adopted and if all members like a song, it is included in an album. Some musicians said that they were looking for interesting and catching melodies. There had been no political criteria mentioned about the selection of the folk songs. It has been indicated in the second chapter that the folk songs collected by Turkish institutions were selected to some criteria regarding language, or appropriateness of the content. For instance, songs with an erotic content were excluded or lyrics were changed. Although sexuality has been something to be avoided in the discourse of Kurdish movement, erotic content of some songs were not changed. Breasts are a frequent theme in Kurdish folklore, and I have encountered songs in *koms'* repertoire that mention breasts.

After collection and selection, the folk songs are *rearranged*. As Eyerman and Jamison say, in construction and reconstruction of traditions, there are both preservationists who discover sources for new traditions as well as innovators who experiment new forms and styles on the traditional ones. (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 40) Preservation and innovation do not exclude each other; and musicians might claim to do both while giving more emphasis on one than the other. Although not very drastic, such a demarcation exists in *kom* musicians too. According to Mesut, *koms* have rediscovered the richness of Kurdish culture and brought it to today. He said that his *kom* aimed to reflect the authenticity of Kurdish music and what differentiated them from other *koms* is that they focused more on traditional aspect of Kurdish music. Hasan and Dilan said that despite of the richness of Kurdish folk music, it can not be left as it is and should be developed. According to Hasan a new dimension should be brought to the traditional music so that it can be listened and appreciated by people with a more

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<sup>109</sup> “Derleme halen Kürt müzisyenlerinin en çok önemsemişi gereken noktalardan biri. Çok ciddi bir cevher var ve o cevherin sadece bir kısmı çıkarılabildi. Evrensel taşınabilecek binlerce ezgimiz olduğunu düşünüyorum, o yüzden derlemeye biz her zaman önem verdik.”

'developed' musical taste. A *dengbêj* would sing a *kilam* better than him, but what the *kom* musicians were supposed to do was bringing in a different value to this music. (Interview with Hasan, 24. 01. 2009) On musical level, I have not denoted a significant difference between the arrangements of musicians who differ from each other on a discursive level.

The concerns of the musicians, while rearranging the folk songs, are significant in terms of reflecting their approach to folk culture. A majority of the musicians said that while folk songs are sung by *koms*, their 'essence' was respected.<sup>110</sup> What this essence is defined sometimes with ambiguous terms, sometimes with some attributes of singing and instruments. According to Zozan, the right *girtlak* should be used and the songs should not be emptied out.<sup>111</sup> (Interview with Zozan, 26.01.2009) Not spoiling the *makams* or changing the lyrics was also counted among the qualities that should be maintained. Hasan was critical of Koma Berxwedan as they wrote political lyrics on folk melodies. The essence to be respected also corresponds to the 'Kurdishness' of the music as it implies the core of the Kurdish identity which has an assumed continuity over the time. What Kurdishness means for the musicians has been examined above. No matter that it can not be clearly defined, for the authenticity to be kept intact, it is to be rescued.

The definition of traditional and authentic implies not only a historical antiquity and continuity of the Kurdish culture over time, but also the rural lifestyle of the Kurds. Nationalist discourse usually assumes that the essence of the nation could be found in the rural culture and peasant life. Because of their memories that carry many customs, ballads, dances and tales, peasants become "quasi-sacred" objects of nationalist concern. (Smith, 1999: 85) Kurdish musicians with whom I interviewed with had a similar attitude towards Kurdishness' essence. The rural life is implied to be where the uncontaminated Kurdishness can be found. It also implies nostalgia against the urban conditions of living. "It is also an alleviating response to civilization, taken in the

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<sup>110</sup> Ciwan, as an opposite example, said that in today's world there is no pure music and it would be pointless to look for such a pureness. Yet, he was critical of Grup Yorum because they changed the *makam* of folk songs and did not respect the peculiar Kurdish *girtlak* used when singing.

<sup>111</sup> Zozan also added that in the beginning they did not know much about the characteristics of Kurdish music, its *makams*, which instruments should be used and they just wanted to be heard through music. As they gained more experience and received education, their approach to folk music changed as well.

etymological sense to be the social context produced by urbanism.” (Armstrong, 1982: 16) Yet such an attitude is not very explicit. Only Mesut explicitly said that the rural identity of Kurdishness should be preserved by the musicians against urbanization. The relation between Kurdishness and rural life is a complicated one for the musicians.<sup>112</sup> While they seek references for the 'authentic' Kurdish identity in this life, it also contains 'backward' elements such as tribalism which is shown as one of the reasons of debased Kurdish identity by the movement. This conflict lies at the heart of nationalism. As a modernist movement, while seeking references in the traditional, the rural, the archaic, it is trying to advance and overcome them.

As mentioned above, with time the repertoire of *koms* started to include more and more folk songs. In addition to the reasons that are analyzed in the previous section, *Dergûş* album of Koma Amed which was released in 1995 was significant in this shift. The album was solely composed of folk songs and gained a significant popularity. The arrangement of the songs, richness of the instruments used and the use of vocal styles make the album different from other *kom* albums. According to Yıldırım, the album has transcended some formulaic arrangements of *koms*. (Yıldırım, 2007) According to two Koma Amed members who have been interviewed, the success of the album is due to the good selection of folk songs all of which had a peculiar tone or different usage of *makam*. After the album, the *koms* came to realize that folk music is appreciated by the listeners and a shift towards a folk repertoire started.

As making Kurdish folk music was perceived as a statement against cultural assimilation, the musicians in MKM made a project about the Kurdish folk songs which are Turkified. Two albums were released from Kom Müzik, *Şahiya Stranan 1-2*. In these two albums, folk songs that were collected by Muzaffer Sarısözen's team and Turkified were sung in Kurdish by MKM musicians.<sup>113</sup> These albums aimed to document the cultural seizure and criticize TRT's assimilation. Zozan said that it aroused different emotions of the listeners as they heard the songs in Kurdish which they have been listening in Turkish for years. Nevin said that they tried to reach the originals of the folk

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<sup>112</sup> This complicated relation is observed in the 'urban' identity for Kurdish musicians which will be discussed within the framework of the debate on modernization of Kurdish music.

<sup>113</sup> Among the songs included in the album, there are famous tunes such as *Edlê* which is Turkified as *Yaylalar*; *Lo Berde* which is Turkified as *Makaram Sarı Bağlar*, *Lorkê Lorkê*, *Canê Canê*

songs in the way they are sung by *dengbêjs*. It is significant that the first *Şahiya Stranan* album was released in 2000. This corresponds to the period when folk music was started to be given more weight by the *kom* musicians. The emphasis made by the albums on the existence of all cultures without assimilating or dominating each other is inline with the political demands of the Kurdish movement in 2000s.

There had been criticisms after the first album was released, claiming that some songs are not in Kurdish originally, but rather in Armenian or other languages. After the criticisms, in the cover of the second album it has been indicated that there have been many exchanges between cultures of the region, and the aim is not to denote a language for folk songs. The albums were criticized not only in terms of language and lyrics of the songs, but also in terms of the musical quality. Yasemin is critical about the musical arrangements of the songs.

*Şahiya Stranan* albums include songs that are converted, rendered from Kurdish to Turkish. But look at the arrangements; they are the same as TRT choruses' singing style. They have been even distorted further by including artistic guitar and piano parts. They insisted that I should become a part of *Şahiya Stranan* albums, but I declined. You do this, and you talk about it ambitiously but you are not in a position to defend it. You do the same assimilation that you criticize which is the reason for you to make this album.<sup>114</sup> (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008)

What is referred by Yasemin here is the musical *assimilation* which curtails the local musical characteristics of songs. While the linguistic assimilation of the Republic is criticized through these albums, the musical 'assimilation', as defined by Yasemin, has not been challenged. This is due to the adoption of Western modal system and polyphony in folk songs which will be explored next.

Traditional Kurdish culture was articulated through visual means as well. Sometimes *koms* would take stage in 'traditional' Kurdish clothes. In the videos of music groups, it is frequent that musicians are dressed in traditional outfits within a rural atmosphere. The all women group Koma Asmîn would always take stage in traditional clothes. It is significant that women's visual association with traditional culture is much

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<sup>114</sup> “*Şahiya Stranan* albümleri, devşirilmiş, Kürtçe'den Türkçe'ye çevrilmiş şarkıları içerir. Ama düzenlemelere bak: TRT korolarının o şarkıları söyleyişi ile aynıdır. Hatta, artistik gitarlar piyanolar katılıp daha da çarpık hale getirilmiştir. Mesela *Şahiya Stranan* albümlerinde bana baskı kurdular sen de olmalısın içinde diye. Ben olmak istemiyorum dedim. Bu işi yapıyorsunuz, büyük sözler ediyorsunuz, ama savunmasını yapacak durumda değilsiniz. Çünkü eleştirdiğiniz, bu albümü yapmanıza neden olan asimilasyonu siz kendi elinizle yapıyorsunuz.”

stronger. Kurdish women's appearance with traditional clothes in demonstrations is a recurrent picture. The clothing of Kurdish women, as well as Kurdish men through *puşi*, is fixed to certain elements as representations of Kurdishness and used by the movement effectively. Music has contributed to this with video clips as well as stage performances.

Majority of musicians and other actors involved in the musical production of *kom* albums appraised Kurdish folk music and were not critical of *koms*' approach to it. Only two musicians were critical neither of whom are currently part of MKM. Sinan has never been a part of MKM and currently he makes music individually. He says that folk music and culture have not been studied seriously by the *kom* musicians and were taken up because it is seen as an integral part of the struggle. According to Sinan, by getting involved in the field of folk culture, *koms* have undertaken a mission that was bigger than their capacity.

What past or tradition are is such a big question... We have entered the sphere of history and musicologists and it was something we could not carry out successfully. Do I care about what is existing? To speak for myself, I do not. I acknowledge its importance but it is not me. I am not working in the fields; I am not the songs of shepherds. I questioned this. The relation I have with the tradition have become more important with time and I realized that I establish a relation through my individuality.<sup>115</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.09.2008)

Yasemin used to be a part of MKM for years and took part in three different *koms*. She is critical of praising of folk music and *dengbêj* music too much.

I can say that in general in the development of Kurdish music, tradition is sanctified too much. And without making any differentiation. For instance there is something called *dengbêj* [tradition] but it does not exist in Dersim. It is also the land of Kurds, but there is a whole different culture there. There is a structure where anything anonymous is considered true, sacred and beautiful.<sup>116</sup> (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008)

Despite their criticisms, both musicians also accept that *koms* played a

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<sup>115</sup> “Geçmişin ne olduğu, geleneğin nelerden oluştuğu o kadar büyük bir soru ki... Tarihin alanı, müzikologların alanına girmiş oluyorduk, bu bizim altından kalkamayacağımız bir şeydi. Olanın ne olduğunu önemsiyor muydum? Kendi adıma hayır. Önemli olduğunu kabul ediyordum, ama ben o değilim. Tarlada çalışmıyorum, çoban şarkıları değilim. Bunu sorguladım. Bu gelenekle kurduğum ilişkinin ne olduğu zamanla daha önemli hale geldi ve gördüm ki daha çok kendi kişiselliğim üzerinden bir ilişki kuruyorum.”

<sup>116</sup> “Genel anlamda Kürt müziğinin gelişiminde geleneğin çok kutsandığını söyleyebilirim. Öyle ki hiç ayrıştırılmadan. Örneğin *dengbêjlik* denilen birşey var; ama Dersim'de yok. Orası da Kürtler'in memleketi ama orda başka bir kültür var. Anonim, geleneksel herşeyin doğru, kutsal ve güzel olduğu düşünülen bir yapı var.”

significant role in the development of Kurdish culture and music. As there were not other institutions or actors which had more potential and resources, *koms* had to conduct research on folk music and sing folk songs in Kurdish. The political motivations of the Kurdish movement played a significant role in the emphasis given to Kurdish folk culture. Folk music was used to assert the 'authentic' Kurdish identity. However, Kurdish identity was not simply represented; it was reconstructed as a culture that has existed for a long period of time. Some elements such as the *dengbêj* culture were selected as the true representative of the Kurdishness and most 'authentic' elements of the Kurdish culture, while some others such as *mitribs*<sup>117</sup> are given relatively less importance. This selection process is influenced by the existing values of the society as *dengbêjs* are more respected and protected, while being a *mitrib* is usually looked down in traditional Kurdish society. It is also significant that *dengbêj* culture does not exist in Alevi Kurds' culture which I will talk about more in detail later.

The multiple and ever changing nature of folk culture is tried to be freezed and unified by the nationalist discourses. The same holds true for Kurdish nationalist movement too. Folk culture has been ascribed some essential values in a self-validating manner; whatever folk entails an essential value of Kurdishness and Kurdishness is something hidden in the essential value of folk culture. One of the outcomes of the *koms*' approach to Kurdish folk was the standardization of folk songs. It is significant to note that unlike the Turkish Republic's music policy; there has been no such aim of the Kurdish movement. Lacking a state system and centrally organized institutions, Kurdish movement's interference into the cultural sphere was less ambitious and organized. It did not possess means such as state radio, people's houses or central conservatoires. While the folk songs were collected according to the capacities and interests of the musicians, the way they were archived and rearranged was not systematic and the local musical styles were not directly interfered. This relatively lower interference is not only due to the lack of capacities but also it was because neither the movement nor the musicians had ambitious intentions. Musicians indicated that they respected the musical style of certain regions, and they chose which instruments to use according to the musical

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<sup>117</sup> The *mitribs* (*mitirb/mirtib*) - are semi-professional musicians and Kurdish speaking gypsies - play entertainment music and stand out of the tribal social stratification. *Mitribs* (who call themselves *beyzade*) live nomadically, play in weddings in villages. They usually play *davul* and *zurna*; yet they can play *duzele*, *kemane*, *kaval* and various other instruments. (Özkahraman, 2008: 27)

characteristics of certain regions.<sup>118</sup> They acknowledge the social, cultural and ecological factors that vary and shape the different folk cultures in different regions.

Despite all these, standardization occurred. As a result of using the same base structure of bass-guitar-drumset combination in all folk songs, local characteristics of the songs were overshadowed. Not only instrumentally, but also in terms of the language, a more uniform style started to be used. Musicians are not very pleased with the popularity of the music they make and erosion of the local folk music. Some musicians expressed their disappointment when they hear their songs instead of local songs of the region when they attend a village wedding. Although the musicians have desires for creating a national music, there is also awareness about its dangers as well as the difficulty of realizing this.

Folk music's function in the construction of Kurdish identity has evolved over the time. In 1990s, Kurdish folk songs were sung by the groups to assert that a Kurdish identity and culture exists in spite of assimilation and denial. Moreover, they were devoted less space when compared with the songs with political content. With the 2000s, folk music has become much more popular. As mentioned above a part of the explanation is the interest shown for the Koma Amed album *Dergûş*. As Halit says, more important than that were the changes in the political realm.

Previously while it was the principles brought with that structure – independent and united what ever – later it turned into Democratic Republic, Autonomous Democratic Republic. Of course there had been its reflections. While previously agitative music that called people to struggle was being made, later on music evolved to incline more towards the everyday life and traditional music.<sup>119</sup> (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008)

The discourse of co-existence of people under the Democratic Republic meant a recognition of cultural and linguistic differences of the Kurds. Through singing folk songs in Kurdish, the *koms* have articulated this discourse in the field of music.

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<sup>118</sup> As most musicians interviewed are singers, rather than instrumentalists, they put more emphasis on the singing style, the *gırtlak*, in reflecting the regional differences. Zozan says that she prefers to sing the songs from Xerzan region, where she is from, as she can use her 'authentic' *gırtlak* better in these songs.

<sup>119</sup> “Daha önce o yapının getirdiği prensipler - bağımsız birleşik bilmem ne derken- bu daha sonra Demokratik Cumhuriyet, Özerk Demokratik Cumhuriyet'e dönüştü. Bunun yansımaları tabii ki oldu. Daha önce ajitatif, insanı mücadeleye çağıran müzik yapılıırken, daha sonra gündelik yaşama ve geleneksel müziğe evrilen bir değişim yaşandı yavaş yavaş.”

As mentioned earlier, Kurdish movement is a modernist movement which aimed to create a 'new' modern Kurdish identity. While the 'traditional' elements were used to provide a foundation to this new identity, they should be innovated. Its reflection to *koms'* music was adopting Western musical elements. Articulation of the modernist approach to folk music can be observed here. Next, the modernization and Westernization of Kurdish folk music will be analyzed.

### **3.2.2. 'Modern' Kurdish Music by *Koms***

The Turkish national identity has presented itself as a progressive, secular and modern identity against its reactionary, backward and *Eastern* past. Construction of Kurdish identity as the 'other' of the process of modernization – without mentioning the name Kurdish – was a long and tacit process which should be analyzed separately. It has been mentioned earlier that the early Kurdish revolts are represented by the official history as reactionary religious movements regardless of their nationalistic character. On the level of popular culture, the *East* has been represented as the “backward, uncivilized” regions. With migration movements of 1960s, the 'backwardness' was carried to the urban centers. Sometimes ridiculed, sometimes pitied, Kurdish figures started to appear on Turkish cinema by indicating where they come from without saying the word Kurdish. (Yücel, 2008)

Just like the Turkish nationalism, Kurdish nationalism emerged as a movement influenced by the Western nationalisms. Civilization and modernization were important themes in the discourse of early Kurdish nationalism and they were seen as a guarantee of being a nation. (Çağlayan, 2007: 70) Kurdish nationalism aimed to construct the Kurdish identity by negating its past. The Kurdish movement which gained a mass character in 1990s under the PKK did not object to the existing backward image of the Kurds. On the contrary, in Öcalan's inculcation talks sometimes Kurds are referred as the *ugliest* people of the whole world. The Kurdish movement was to create a new identity that would counter the degenerated identity of the Kurds. This new identity was to be a modern and civilized one. In music, the attitude had its reflections too.

There the emphasis is on being modern. “We are actually civilized people”. As it is always represented as backward mountain people. They are trying to emphasize that we can be modern people too. The Western experiments made

in music was also related to universalism, internationalism. When you look at the *koms*, there are the ones who are on stage with traditional clothes as well as the ones who are on stage with modern clothes and a secular identity and attitude.<sup>120</sup> (Interview with Faik, 05.10.2008)

In the first chapter, the continuity between Turkish singing leftist groups and *koms* has been mentioned. *Koms* have adopted the heritage of these musicians and groups in various senses. In addition to the similarities in lyrics or using marches, both have popularized folk songs through harmonization and polyphonization. The relation between this musical attitude and articulation of Kurdish identity as a modern, civilized identity might seem as a strained interpretation as in 1990s of Turkey almost all popular music forms were polyphonic and adopted Western harmonical structure. Yet, I believe it is significant to look at the role of modernization of music in the articulation of Kurdish identity as the musicians I have interviewed have accentuated the 'modern' and 'Western' aspect of the music they make.

It should be noted that such an understanding is not peculiar to Kurdish movement, or any other nationalist movement that aim to 'modernize' its music. In a number of countries, even when the colonialist and imperialist policies of the West are criticized, Westernization of music is embraced. This is a repercussion of the ideology of modernization that envisages a single path of evolution for all societies. To put briefly, modernization claims that Western societies have followed a path of evolution from pre-modern to modern and the rest of the world can follow the same trajectory and become modern. Although it is not explicitly manifested in the field of culture, the value ascribed to polyphonic and harmonic music in different countries – and movements - is a repercussion of this ideology. Massad is talking about the role of songs in mobilizing the Palestinians' struggle. I believe the quote below is significant not only because both people are struggling for their independence, but also because Palestinian music and Kurdish music belong to the same Middle Eastern musical tradition.

The lyrics of "Watani Habibi" address the Arab homeland with the words "The voice is your voice, Arab and free, and not an echo of West or East,"

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<sup>120</sup> "Burda modern olma vurgusu var. Biz de aslında medeni bir halkız. Hep dađlı, ilkel bir toplum vurgusu vardır ya. Biz de modern, çağdaş bir halk olabirizi vurgulamaya çalışıyorlar. Müzikteki Batılı arayışlar evrensellekle, enternasyonalizmle de ilgili. *Kom*'lara baktığımızda geleneksel kıyafetlerle sahneye çıkanlar da var, ama daha modern kıyafetlerle, seküler bir kimlikle ve duruşla sahneye çıkanlar da var."

but the orchestra lacked a single Arab or Eastern instrument. This is an important aspect of the persistence of the colonial legacy in postrevolutionary times. Although Arab music in Egypt was Westernized during the years of British colonialism..., which coupled its anticolonialism with a commitment to a Western modernization project, did not object to the colonial pedigree of this music. ... While "Watani Habibi" asserts pride in a pure Arab identity uncontaminated by East or West, it does so unhampered by essentialist arguments of what constitutes nationalist music. Nationalist music, then, is seen more through lyrics that express the sentiments of the nation, while the musical genre is appropriated as global culture that has been Arabized. (Massad, 2003: 23)

Just like the Palestinians musicians, the Kurdish *kom* songs articulate the national aspect of the music through lyrics and use Western musical elements in accentuating modernization. This should not simply be seen as a repercussion of "cultural imperialism"; but rather as a result of the hegemony of ideology of modernization and progressionism. The *kom* musicians have indicated that the *koms* were to first ones to make polyphonic Kurdish music popular. For them this meant development, progression, and reaching a universal level in music.

The relation of this understanding with the oppositional musicians in Turkey had been mentioned above. Yıldırım calls the musical tradition that has started with Ruhi Su as the "universal-nationalist" traditional music model which is reflected to the use of vocal in the classical voice technique (*şan*) and 'primitive back vocal use' based on with-thirds, with-fifths sound relations which was used in Kurdish music too. Yet, the *kom* style showed more of a hybrid character in which this style and local styles of the Kurdish folk songs are used together. (Yıldırım, 2007) Some singers used the classical voice technique while singing, some others use local singing styles. Halit mentioned the influence of groups such as Yeni Türkü and musicians like Zülfü Livaneli on their attempts at reaching a 'synthesis'. *Koms*' 'hybrid' use of musical structure and elements is presented as a richening of the Kurdish music by the musicians.

Polyphonization is perceived as a target to be reached and as inherently positive against the monophonic Kurdish music by *kom* musicians. Reflection of a such a perception was exemplified in my interview with Nevin. When I asked her about the monophonic structure of Kurdish music, she said she rejects this idea and asserted that Kurdish music is actually polyphonic. She mentioned some records from Dersim dating

back to 1930s in which *bağlama* is played in a polyphonic way.<sup>121</sup> (Interview with Nevin, 26.01.2009)

Modernization through harmonization and polyphonization is considered to be necessary in the field of music according to the 'new worldview' that is provided by the Kurdish movement. As mentioned above, it was seen as an essential outcome of the modernization process that the Kurds experience. In addition to this, some musicians like Hasan, put an emphasis on carrying Kurdish music to a universal level by integrating Western elements.

We were trying polyphony: with-thirds and with-fifths... When you make a chord it sounds pleasant. And you *have to* make people get used to this sound. Because the music in the *world* is like this. Traditional music is ours, but you have to add something to it, you have to *develop* it.<sup>122</sup> (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009)

In order to 'elevate' the Kurdish music as well as the musical taste of the Kurds to an international level, Kurdish musicians from *koms* saw bring in these elements as a responsibility. As the intellectuals who should transmit the modern way of living to Kurdish people, they were to 'teach' them and make them get used to the Western harmony and polyphony. Here the pedagogical attitude of the musicians is coupled with a progressionist tone.

Polyphonization and harmonization of folk songs are done through the use of B flat and using chords that would not hinder the quarter notes too much. Êvdal said that Koma Çiya was the first group to use with-thirds, with-fifths to polyphonize Kurdish music and while doing that they were careful not to damage the Kurdish *gırtlak*.

We tried to do something for the first time in Kurdish music by harmonizing the with-thirds, with-fifths sounds. This change we brought to *authentic* music was something new for Kurdish music both musically and *socially*. ... Usually when you listen to Kurdish music, you hear single tonal sounds; you can come across with-thirds and with-fifths only in choral pieces and symphonies. Use of Western instruments should be regarded as an innovation too. In 1990s,

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<sup>121</sup> It is also significant that in 1930s, Kemalist musicologists and intellectuals such as Adana Saygun and Mahmut Ragıp Gazimihal claimed that Turkish folk music carries elements of the pentatonic scale, which is denoted as the most important scale in the birth of polyphonic music. This claim was in compliance with the Turkish History Thesis which claim that the Turkish nation has been the source of civilization. (Balkılıç, 2009)

<sup>122</sup> “Çok sesliliği deniyorduk. Üçlü beşli sesler. Bir akor oluşturunca kulağa hoş geliyor. Bir de insanların kulağını alıştırmak lazım. Çünkü dünya müziği böyle. Geleneksel müzik her zaman bizim müziğimizdir ama birşey katmanız, geliştirmeniz lazım.”

Western instruments such as guitar, trombone, snare drum, bass, drum set, violin were started to be used more often and more by harmonizing. The situation of Kurdish music in Turkey metropolis in 1990s was like this: Kurdish music was not monophonic anymore, and was *richened* in terms of the use of instruments. Kurds have developed different intellectual and revolutionary world views and developed different approaches in social and artistic life. These were *naturally* related to reflections of Kurdish liberation movement.<sup>123</sup> (Interview with Êvdal, 29.09.2008)

The modernization of Kurdish music was 'accomplished' through the changes the Kurdish liberation movement created. Thus, the musicians' adoption of polyphony and use of Western instruments has been a deliberate choice in the construction of 'new' Kurdish identity as a modern identity. Significance of using Western instruments is something mentioned by a majority of *kom* musicians. It is sometimes indicates as a 'need' as the musicians are living in today. Nevin said that even if she is singing a *dengbêj* song from 50 years ago, she would not be able to sing it in its original way, and if she is living today, she chooses to include guitars and other Western instruments in her music. (Interview with Nevin, 26.01.2009) According to Zozan, before the *koms* there were only *makams* in Kurdish music; with the introduction of bass, guitar, *bağlama* the Kurdish music was 'innovated'. (Interview with Zozan, 26.01.2009) As the Western instruments were started to be seen as an integral part of the *kom* music, musicians attended music courses to learn how to play the guitar, the piano or the violin. Today a guitar, bass and drum set; usually a keyboard seems to be necessary for a group. They are used to have the infrastructure of a song. *Bağlama*, which is not considered to be a Kurdish instrument originally, usually accompanies these instruments. Such a composition of instruments is frequent in political music groups as well as *özgün* music performances.

While using the Western elements, musicians from *koms* claim that they have

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<sup>123</sup> “Üçlü beşli sesleri armonize ederek, Kürt müziğinde bir ilki yapmaya çalıştık. Otantik müzikte yaptığımız bu değişim, hem toplumsal, hem müzikal olarak Kürt müziği açısından bir yenilik yarattı. ... Genelde Kürt müziğini dinlediğinizde tek tonal ses var; ancak koral durumlarda ya da senfonilerde görebilirsiniz üçlü beşlileri. Batı enstrümanlarının kullanılması da bir yenilik olarak ele alınmalı. 1990'lı yıllarda gitar, trombon, trampet, bas, davul, keman gibi Batı enstrümanları daha fazla kullanılmaya başlandı; daha çok armonize edilerek kullanmaya başlandı. 1990'lı yıllarda Kürt müziğinin Türkiye metropollerindeki esas durumu bu: Kürt müziği tek sesli halinden çıktı, enstrüman kullanımı konusunda zenginleşti. Kürtler daha farklı düşünsel, devrimci bir dünya görüşüyle hem sosyal hayatta hem de sanat hayatında farklı yaklaşımlar geliştirdi. Bunlar doğal olarak Kürt özgürlük hareketinin yansımaları ile ilgili birşeydi.”

not spoil the *makam* structure or the 'authentic' singing style of Kurdish music; yet they are usually critical of other music groups' use of Western harmony and instruments. Halit said that they avoided changing *makams* – from *Nihavend* to *Uşşak* – in order to fit the chords but other groups have done it. According to Ciwan what they aimed in Koma Amed, as well as in Çar Newa, is to bring the Western harmony without spoiling the *makams*. He is critical of the usage of Western classical singing in folk songs which most of the dominantly Turkish singing political music groups have done and said that the *gırtlak* should be kept intact in Kurdish songs.

In addition to polyphonization and harmonization, secularization of music has been important. Although PKK had been originally anti-religious, by 1980s it adopted a more conciliatory attitude towards Sunni Islam in order to gain more grass roots support from Sunni regions. (Bruinessen, 2006: 39) However this attitude was not reflected to the music and *koms*. It has been indicated in the first chapter that *medreses* have played a significant role in Kurdish culture and music. With their closure, the Sunni religious songs withered from the repertoire. However, there are various religious songs of Alevi Kurds which have been included in *koms* albums as well. Inclusion of Alevi *deyişs* is also related to *koms*' affinity with the political music in Turkish which has used Alevi *deyişs* extensively. Secularization brought by the movement was reflected to the participation of women in musical production. Zozan is from a religious family and she received religious education. As it is considered to be a sin for women to sing, she said that she could not go to her village after she started singing. She used to wear a headscarf, but after joining the MKM she gradually changed and took her headscarf off. The gender aspect of the Kurdish music will be analyzed later in more detail.

There are musicians who are critical of the 'modernization' process of Kurdish music which was initiated by the *koms*. From a conservative standpoint, Mesut claimed that using Western instruments degenerated the Kurdish music. Although he is not critical of modernization itself, Sinan is critical of Kurdish modernization – and its reflections in music – because it has copied the Turkish modernization process. Yasemin said that development was perceived as resembling to Western popular music or Turkish music groups, which she would never call as development.

Development was always seen as Westernization. Just like the Middle East analysis made on an ideological level, on cultural level education and research

could have been geared towards the Middle East. But unfortunately the tendency has always been towards the West. It is because the society that you are in, the Turkish society, has a Western sickness. Some people from MKM joined the courses in Pera or Evrensel Müzik. What kind of places are they? They are unctuous to the West. Just look at the conservatoires in Turkey. Even in the institutions that study folk music there are songs converted from Kurdish music which are trimmed. Their quarter notes are eliminated. They are included in the Turkish archive in a Westernized way. ... Where does the Kurdish musician get education from? From the Turkish education system with Western complex. She/he includes piano and guitar harmonies without first learning about the fine points of her/his own music. Agirê Jîyan, Koma Amed... They all popularized Kurdish music by Westernization<sup>124</sup> (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2009)

As Ahıska says, the diagnosis made by the intellectual about the 'inferiority' complex of her/his society is actually indicative of the fact that the intellectual is not immune to this complex. The elite puts her/himself into the position of Western and modern subject and 'detects a social reality'. (Ahıska, 2005: 82) Although Yasemin does not make the same criticism about Kurdish society or movement in general, her criticism of Kurdish musicians resonates Bozarslan's analysis of Kurdish movement. Bozarslan says that minority nationalisms adopt values and symbols of the country they emerge in. Accordingly, he claims that PKK has Kurdified Kemalist values and symbols. As indicated in the previous section, Turkish singing political music have articulated elements of Turkish modernization's musical understanding. It would be a vulgar analysis to say that these elements are copied by the Kurdish movement or the musicians of *koms*. Rather, they have been articulated according to the discourse of the movement. Westernization and modernization of music, without questioning their real value, has been accepted as the objective to be reached. Even when Westernization and following the same rout of modernization that Kemalism did is criticized by some musicians, the inherent value given to progress and development is not questioned. The modernist conceptualization of the world, in which all societies are to progress, is reproduced.

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<sup>124</sup> “Gelişmek hep Batılılaşmak olarak görüldü. Nasıl ideolojik olarak Ortadoğu çözümlemesi yapılıyorsa, kültürel olarak da Ortadoğu yönelimli bir eğitim, bir araştırma olabilirdi. Ama maalesef direk Batı'ya yönelindi. Çünkü senin içinde olduğun toplum, Türk toplumu, Batı hastalıklı bir toplum. Mesela MKM içindeki birkaç kişi Evrensel müzik merkezi ya da Pera'daki kurslara katılıyor. Oralar ne? Batı yalakası. Türkiye'deki konservatuarlara bak. Halk müziğini inceleyen kurumlarda bile Kürt müziğinden devşirilmiş bir sürü parçaların yontulmuş halleri var. Koma sesler dedigimiz sesler ortadan kaldırılmış. Türklerin arşivine Batılılaştırarak konulmuş. ... Kürt müzisyeni nereden eğitim alıyor? Bu Batılı kompleksiyle yaşayan Türk eğitim sisteminden. Hiç bir zaman kendi müziğinin inceliklerine, zenginliğine girmeyerek piyano ve gitar armonileri koyuyor. ... Agirê Jîyan, Koma Amed, bunların hepsi müziğini Batılılaştırarak popülerleştirmiş müzik grupları.”

Urbanization is an aspect that comes to the fore in the modernization debate of Kurdish identity. Yet it is a contested issue which found its reflections in *koms* music as well. While some claim that *koms* have urbanized the Kurdish music, others disagree with that. The 'urban identity', as uttered by the interviewees, remains as a vague concept for me.<sup>125</sup> Unlike the other elements of Kurdish identity, that have been defined and shaped by the discourse of Kurdish movement, urbanity corresponds to the everyday experience and socio-economic life of the Kurds. As a result there is no uniform idea about whether Kurds or *koms* are urban or not. Some musicians used the concept with regards to the musical 'needs' of urbanized Kurdish population living in big cities, while some referred to including Western elements. For others it delineated a more individual way of expression through the lyrics. In line with this, Mehmet Atlı, who writes more individualistic lyrics and use a poetic language alongside with poems, is designated as an *urban* musician by a majority of the interviewees. Urbanity of the music also corresponds to lyrics that reflect the everyday experiences of the Kurds who are living in the city. One of the criticisms against the *koms* is that they do not make songs that correspond to the lives of millions of Kurds living in the big cities. (Interview with Ferhat, 02.07.2008) Vedat Yıldırım's album *Bajar* is shown as an example to 'urban' music making as the songs tell the stories of *işportacı*s (street vendors) who moved from Mardin, or construction workers' lives.

According to Halit, Kurds have not been urbanized and have not adopted *the* urban lifestyle. He added that *koms*' music is similar to the position of the Kurds; stuck in between rural and urban lifestyle. The Kurds have lagged behind so much and while dealing with all other issues, they could not develop very fast. (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008) Here the 'urban' is constructed as uniform way of living with some vague attributes, while actually there are countless experiences and ways of existence in the city. The uniform urban lifestyle is positioned against its binary opposite rural lifestyle which is also fixed to a single experience. These experiences are formulated in such a way that, either one or the other is determining the inner word of the individual; or the subject is stuck between two coherent entities. Zozan thinks that *koms* have not created an urban music as their sentiments are not urbanized.

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<sup>125</sup> The concept is used to define some political musicians by critics such as Gündoğar and Kahyaoğlu who share similar terminology and political perspectives with these musicians.

I think they have not created urban expression, urban literature. When I am creating a love song, I do not say I took the metro and I thought of you. I am still looking for my love in my village. Even at this age I do not dream of myself here. They say [Kurds] have not been urbanized. It is true, they have not been urbanized. Because you are trying to create a culture. You tell the beauty of the mountains in a composition. You try to make your heart beautiful with those mountains. The mountains have created such a big love in your heart, your become one with it. It is something about what you live.<sup>126</sup> (Interview with Zozan, 26. 01. 2009)

The element of nostalgia about the rural associations is obvious here. Kurdishness remains to be an identity that finds its expression in the rural atmosphere. Accordingly, the symbolic universe of the Kurdish music – and literature – is shaped by rural and natural associations, more than urban ones. However there are millions of Kurds living in the city center. Although Zozan says that the Kurdish population is not yet urbanized, actually it is urbanized. However their urbanization does not fit into the single definition of the 'urban' (which is associated with the 'modern'), yet to a more deviated definition which is shaped around migration and marginalization. This population's musical preference is mainly arabesk which is presented by the intelligentsia in Turkey as the music of the not-yet-urbanized populations that are stuck between two cultures. As will be demonstrated in the following section, such a definition is adopted by the Kurdish musicians too.

### **3.2.3. Degenerated Music as the Other of Modern and Authentic**

As mentioned earlier, the identity construction process is a process of articulation, and a totality can never be reached. It operates across differences by marking the frontiers in which what is left outside constitutes what is inside. (Hall, 1996a: 2) Through this process, what is left inside and outside are constantly shifting too. Within the realm of music, the 'other' that has been identified by the *kom* musicians is the 'degenerated' (*voz*) music that is usually identified as arabesk or 'shallow market music'. The definition of arabesk by the *kom* musicians interviewed corresponds to the dominant

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<sup>126</sup> “Ben bir aşk türküsü yaratırken metroya bindim de seni düşündüm demiyorum yani. Ben hala aşkı köyümde arıyorum. Bu yaşa geldim rüyalarımda kendimi burda görmüyorum. Kentleşmedi diyorlar ya. Evet kentleşmedi. Çünkü zaten bir kültürü yaratmaya çalışıyorsun. Bir bestende *çiyanın* güzelliğini anlatıyorsun. Yüreğini o *çiyalarla*, o dağlarla güzelleştirmeye çalışıyorsun. Çünkü o dağlar senin yüreğinde o kadar güzel aşklar yaratmış ki, onunla bütünleştiriyorum. Bu biraz yaşadıklarımızla ilgili birşey.”

discourse that despises arabesk. As stated by Stokes, condemnation of arabesk that criticize it from a variety of perspectives has become the dominant view about this music. (Stokes, 1992: 91) In Music Encyclopedia, arabesk is identified as the music of alienation and dissidence with the environment. (Özbek, 1991: 15) The dominant view about arabesk judges it outside of the music realm which it originated and reaches sociological conclusions only by looking at its lyrics in a selective manner. Such an analysis is reductionist and makes a one to one correspondence between social phenomena and cultural products. (ibid, pp.16-7) This elitist analysis of arabesk follows a classical modernization thought where it is assumed that all societies will/should follow the same trajectory of evolution. Within this discourse, arabesk is the product of the transition society as it reflects a distorted form of tradition and a marginality that is not yet modern. (ibid, p.17) For the critiques of arabesk, it represents the 'Eastern' aspect of the psyche of the Turks which is something to get rid of. (Stokes, 1992: 98) The critiques also claim that arabesk is not only a music genre; it is a life style that is shaped by pessimism and fatalism. Against the definition of arabesk as a *yoz* (degenerated) music, Özbek asks the question how a music genre can be 'alienated' or 'degenerated' in itself. Referring to Cem Behar, she says that no music can be defined a priori as degenerated. (Özbek, 1991: 18)

The identification of arabesk by the *kom* musicians as the 'other' of the Kurdish identity that is aimed to be constructed is a manifestation of the above mentioned dominant analysis of arabesk. Against the 'modern' Kurdish identity that is tried to be constructed, arabesk symbolizes the not yet modern and the degenerateness that should be left behind. The Kurdish movement's discourse viewed Arabesk as an *opium* to pacify the masses through its 'fatalist and pessimistic' lyrics. As Kurdish musicians aimed to make a music that would mobilize people, the assumed passivity inherent in arabesk is singled out as something to be fought against. According to Ciwan, arabesk music's perspective is the opposite of leftist approach to world.

The relation between Kurdish music and the arabesk is another factor that leads the Kurdish musicians to construct arabesk as the 'other' of the music they make. A significant proportion of the arabesk singers are ethnic Kurds who sing in Turkish. Some of them have even Turkified the Kurdish songs and sang them in arabesk forms which is called as *Kürdübesk* by Mehmet Korkmaz (2002). Thus, arabesk does not only signify

the degenerated music taste of the not yet modern masses, it also signifies assimilation. It is the music made and liked by the debased Kurdish identity that is negated by the Kurdish movement. The high popularity of the arabesk musicians amongst the Kurdish population is diagnosed as a sign of this degenerateness. According to Öcalan arabesk is promoted by the state to empty out the social opposition of the Kurds.

When PKK was first promulgated I was in Diyarbakır. Someone called İbrahim Tatlıses was advertised as the king of *türkü*. Thus, a new ethics, culture and *türkü* developed in Kürdistan. ... (H)e was imposed on the poor. They trained him well. ... In general in Turkey, in particular in Kurdistan, the revolutionary type is humiliated through them.<sup>127</sup> (Öcalan, 2008: 19)

Arabesk is presented as an obstacle to the movement as well as creating the Kurdish identity. Within this formulation, the movement averts the degenerateness. Mesut said that he used to listen to arabesk in 1980s. If the movement did not exist, maybe he would have become a musician of the system, or he would be making arabesk music. (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008)

The arabesk that is condemned by the *kom* musicians is not only the arabesk in Turkish. They expressed their disappointment about the Kurdish arabesk which is very popular and promoted by cultural actors within the Kurdish cultural production and even the movement itself. The arabesk criticized by *kom* musicians has political lyrics. According to Yıldırım this indicates the incorporation of political music into the dominant cultural forms.

In a lot of arrangements where folk music and phantasy-arabesk aesthetics are brought together, themes in lyrics might show a variety. Both anonymous folk songs and political compositions might exist in the same *sound*. The political Kurdish music which had a 'left' character is included in the mainstream musical aesthetics; there emerges a gap between the image reflected by the melody and the musical representation.<sup>128</sup> (Yıldırım, 2007)

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<sup>127</sup> “PKK yeni ilan edildiğinde Diyarbakır'daydım. İbrahim Tatlıses birden bire “türkü kralı” ilan edildi. Yani Kürdistan'da aşağı yukarı yeni bir ahlak, yeni bir kültür, yeni bir türkü geliyordu. ... [Y]oksul kesime dayatıldı. Bunu iyi eğitmişler. ... Aslında Kürdistan'da, genelde de Türkiye'de devrimci tip bunların eliyle aşağılanıyor.”

<sup>128</sup> “Fantezi-arabesk estetik ile halk müziğinin bir araya getirildiği çoğu düzenlemede, sözel tema farklılıklar gösterebilir. Aynı *soundun* içinde hem anonim halk şarkıları hem de politik içerikli besteler yer alabilmektedir. Önceleri "sol" karakter taşıyan politik Kürt müziği de ana akım müzik estetiğinin etkisine bu şekilde girer; güftenin yansıttığı imge ile müzikal sunum arasında boşluklar oluşmaya başlar.”

The arabesk videos that were frequently aired on MMC few years ago is criticized by a majority of the musicians. According to Sinan this music was favored by the political movement.

Arabesk is still determining. What should be discussed here is the musical perception of the political decision makers and the ones who own the resources related to music. It is important what they like and what they present to people. I was really pessimistic for a while about what television promoted for people's musical taste. An arabesk culture was put into circulation. Kurdish arabesk developed and it was presented to people. Moreover, this arabesk had political lyrics. It was really open to debate. We have seen that this music was protected. I think it met a strong resistance, and it is still a contemporary debate. But I feel that we can be more optimistic about the current trajectory.<sup>129</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.08.2008)

Hüseyin and Boran also said that musicians that make low quality music are aired on Kurdish television through personal relationships and other mechanisms. According to Ciwan, arabesk is not only a musical genre, but a *lifestyle*. He claims, a pessimistic lifestyle has become dominant amongst the Kurdish population as a result of the political confusion that emerged by 2000s. He identifies arabesk with indeterminacy in life, against the political music that expresses political vision and a 'clear, progressing path to the revolution'.

Arabesk is not a musical term or something that can explained with musical terms. It is a viewpoint about life, the way it analyzes the world is significantly different from the left perspective that I was talking about. I think making arts through such a perspective is not good for the Kurds; this is why I am really against arabesk. I am not against their use of *gırtlak*, instruments or arrangements. ... The arabesk that we are against is not a musical term... After Abdullah Öcalan's capture, the Kurds have become pessimistic. The emergence of arabesk is related to that. An enormous pessimism, thinking that everything is over... Kurds have experienced a period of pessimism and hopelessness. Then arabesk found a fertile ground.<sup>130</sup> (Interview with

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<sup>129</sup> “Arabesk hala belirleyici. Burada tartışılması gereken siyasal karar alıcıların, müzikle ilgili kaynakları ellerinde bulunduranların müzikle ilgili algılarıdır. Onların beğenileri ve toplumun beğenisine ne sundukları önemlidir. Televizyonların falan halkın beğenisine ne sunduklarına baktığım vakit, bir dönem epey bir karamsarlığa kapıldım. Arabesk bir kültür dolaşıma sokuldu, Kürtçe arabesk gelişti ve toplumun beğenisine sunuldu. Üstelik bu arabesk, sözleri politik olan bir arabeskti. Gayet tartışmaya açık bir alandı. Bu müziklerin kayırıldığına tanık olduk. Güçlü bir direnişle de karşılaştı bence; bu tartışma hala daha güncel. Ve biraz daha iyimser bir yolda olduğumuzu seziyorum.”

<sup>130</sup> “Arabesk müzikal bir terim değil ya da sadece müzik terimleriyle açıklanabilecek bir şey değil. Hayata bakış açısı, dünyayı yorumlayış şekli, benim o ilk başta söylediğim sol cepheden bakarken yorumlayış şeklimizden çok bambaşka. Bence bu açıdan bakarak sanat yapmak Kürtler için hiç de olumlu değil, ben bu yüzden çok karşıyım arabeske. Yoksa onların gırtlaklarını kullanımlarına, arenjelerine,

Ciwan, 14.12.2008)

The actors involved in the music industry believe that the most popular music amongst the Kurds is arabesk. Arranger Ercan said that Kurds listen to their music in Turkish by listening to arabesk; and if Kurds are going to make arabesk they should make it in İbrahim Tatlıses standards. Producer Ferzan also thinks that arabesk is very popular, but added that he would never release an arabesk album as it would degenerate Kurdish music. He thinks that the monotonous music of *koms* have pushed the Kurdish population towards arabesk; which is a dangerous 'diversion'.

The damage in music caused by the groups is this: If you do the same thing all the time and can not voice the feelings of the society, the people will start looking for other things. And the people's search for new things reached such a level – I was observing from the sellers in the region – if Şivan or Koma Amed or Çar Newa or Agirê Jîyan sold 10.000, Gürses sold 30.000, Kırmızıgül sold 50.000 and İbrahim Tatlıses sold 100.000. Their demand is arabesk and fatalism; and these musicians have stronger musical base, groups' march mentality pushed our audience towards arabesk.<sup>131</sup> (Interview with Ferzan, 23.01.2009)

While both folk music as well as 'modern' music are valued by the Kurdish movement, arabesk is defined as a diversion, an in between form that would degenerate the Kurdish identity. In 1990s, arabesk as the music of assimilation and degeneration was negated by the movement completely however, around 2000s arabesk in Kurdish with political lyrics was promoted by some actors in the movement. The videos of musicians such as Kawa and Diyar were aired on Kurdish televisions frequently. However, all *kom* musicians are critical of the culture they represented no matter how political or radical the lyrics are. According to them, it is a culture that is shaped with market demands rather than 'idealism'. It symbolizes pessimism, fatalism and shallowness. The condemnation of arabesk is influenced by the dominant position taken

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enstrümanlarına karşı bir sorunum yok. ... Bizim karşı olduğumuz arabesk müzikal bir terim değil. ... Abdullah Öcalan'ın yakalanmasından sonra Kürtler bir umutsuzluğa kapıldılar.. Zaten arabeskin doğuşu da bununla ilintili. Acayip bir umutsuzluk, artık bu iş bitti. Kürtler umutsuzluğun, karamsarlığın olduğu bir dönem yaşadılar. Arabesk ondan sonra zeminini buldu.”

<sup>131</sup> “Bu grupların müzik açısından zarar verdikleri şey şudur: Sürekli aynı şeyleri yaparsanız ve toplumun duygularının sözcüsü olmazsanız, o kitle başka bir arayış içine girer. Ve o kitle öyle bir arayış içine girdi ki - ben izliyordum, bölgede satıcılar var - Şivan veya Koma Amed veya Çar Newa veya Agirê Jîyan bölgede 10.000 satıyorsa, Gürses 30.000, Kırmızıgül 50.000 satıyor, İbrahim Tatlıses 100.000 satıyordu. Talepleri arabesk ve kadercilik şeyi, bir de onlarda daha güçlü altyapılar olduğu için, grupların marş mantığı kitlemizi arabeske yöneltti.”

against this music. As mentioned above, all counter hegemonic projects articulate elements of the hegemonic discourse. In constructing the Kurdish identity as both 'authentic' and 'modern', arabesk as the 'inauthentic' and 'not yet modern' form of music is kept outside of the frontiers of identity. The main pillars of the national Kurdish identity will be analyzed in the following part.

### **3.3. Articulation of National Identity: Common Language, History and Homeland**

In my analysis, I identified three main elements through which the Kurdish national identity is constructed through music which are common language, history and homeland. As mentioned earlier, the two of these elements, common history and territory, are used by the Kurdish music during the 1990s more intensely. These elements are appropriated in music usually through political lyrics. As the number of political lyrics decreased by 2000s, references to common history and territory in lyrics decreased. This is also due to the above mentioned shift in the discourse of the movement. As a Kurdish nation state was not emphasized any more, establishing the history and territory of the nation is not a priority for the *kom* musicians. Moreover by 2000s, a set of references to history and territory had already been established and there emerged other means of researching and transmitting the knowledge. Yet it is also important to note that history and common territory are not handled by the musicians in the same manner. Geographical references are continued to be cited in music through different means during 2000s but with different intentions. While in 1990s, the *territory* is denoted as the land of future nation state, in 2000s it has become the *geography* of where a separate culture exists and its cultural and natural elements to be preserved. The third element, language, has always had an importance for the Kurdish movement. While in early 1990s, music has been a crucial mean of popularizing the standardized Kurdish, by 2000s there had emerged other and more effective means, such as television, that promoted the standard Kurdish. But this time, the cultural institutions had the responsibility of protecting the language. Emergence of many musicians who sing in Kurdish resulted in different and 'incorrect' uses of language. The *kom* musicians positioned themselves against these musicians as the conscious intellectuals who have the responsibility of giving the people the correct Kurdish.

Through these three elements, a feeling of national pride is inseminated. Using the Kurdish language, history and geography not only assert the existence of the elements of the denied Kurdish ethnics, but also bring in a dignity. These elements are sanctified and elevated to a level that warrants fighting for them, and self-sacrifice of the militants is justified.

### **3.3.1. Common Language**

The political and cultural significance of singing in Kurdish have been referred to earlier. The question of language is an important part of the musical experience. Use of certain languages or dialects may be iconic for marginalized or colonized groups and a tool for affirmation of identity. Language choice might be reproducing the existing language ideologies or resist them. (Berger, 2003: xv) The unique status of language in the society plays an important role in the choice of language in popular music. "Much of our identity in everyday life is achieved through linguistic behavior, and, capitalizing on this fact, singers and songwriters use forms of talk from the social world around them to publicly think about, enact, or perform their identities." (ibid) Not all musicians interviewed use Kurdish in their everyday lives. Some had to learn Kurdish in cultural centers. However, as their 'mother tongue', using Kurdish had a crucial importance for the *kom* musicians.

Most musicians asserted that only singing in Kurdish is a political message, and signifies an alternative position. Kurdish is important not only to make a statement against the assimilation policies and censorship, but also to make Kurdish a living language. As Sinan said, music is one of the most vivid ways Kurdish youngsters establish a relation with their languages. For the audience, hearing music in Kurdish was very significant too. According to Munzûr when a Kurdish song was heard in 1980s, people would be packed in venues. (Interview with Munzûr, 27.09.2008)

When Koma Amed released its first album *Kulîlka Azadî*, there were no other groups in Turkey singing in Kurdish. When I asked one of the founders of Koma Amed why they decided to make an album entirely in Kurdish, he said that it was a matter of honor for them, and it still is. Even though he learnt Kurdish later, for

him singing in Kurdish is related to *national pride*. (Interview conducted on 14.12.2008) Just like folk culture, language is taken as bearing an essential value of Kurdishness and unique emotions. “Every emotion is beautiful only when it is expressed in its own language. Only then it finds its meaning and expression. Thus you can not really express a Kurdish feeling in another language. This was the case for a majority of songs that were translated from Kurdish to Turkish.”<sup>132</sup> (Interview with Hüseyn, 02.10. 2008) For both of the musicians, the link established with the language is on the level of emotions. Language relates to the innate sentiments that are evoked by the processes of national identity construction. Through these sentiments, Kurdish language is given the dignity it has been denied by the policies of denial and assimilation.

Although nationalism works on innate sentiments, it does not remain on that level. It involves processes of creation and invention built on the existing structures, values and sentiments. Standardized language is one of the most important steps in the nation building process. As Hobsbawm (1990) says, just like the nation, the national language is invented too. Standardization of Kurdish was not a state-led process, unlike many other examples, as there exists no Kurdish state. Therefore, the Kurdish movement has taken on the role of creating a standardized Kurdish. However it has been a difficult process due to both lack of the resources and a national education system. Moreover, there is a great variety of languages spoken by the population that identify themselves as Kurds such as Kurmanjî, Soranî and Zazakî (Dimilî, Kırmanckî) which are impossible to bring under one dialect. In Turkey, Kurmanjî is the dominant language spoken by the Kurds and has undergone a process of standardization. Different cultural and political institutions and groups have taken the role in the efforts of creating and disseminating the standardized Kurmanjî. Although there had been some efforts about Zazakî, they were not as much as the efforts at Kurmanjî. According to Barkey and Fuller, Kurds in Turkey have created a common language because of practical concerns; in order to compete with Turkish to become the primary language of the Kurds. (Barkey and Fuller,

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<sup>132</sup> “Her duygu kendi dilinde ifade edildiğinde güzeldir ve anlamını, ifadesini bulur. O yüzden Kürtçe duyguyu başka dilde çok ifade edemeyebilirsin. Mesela Kürtçe'den, Türkçe'ye çevirilen birçok parçada durum böyleydi.”

1998: 64) However, I believe that the reason is not only practical concerns and importance of a standardized language in building the Kurdish identity is very significant too.

The common written Kurmanjî is called 'Academic Kurdish' in everyday language. While the spelling rules have been established to a large extent, the spoken language of the Kurds continues to show great diversity. According to Tan, the 'academic' denotes that the common Kurmanjî is used in written language, and does not reflect the spoken language of any region. (Tan, 2009) This is why many people feel alienated from this language and call it 'academic'. Tan also adds that many Kurdish intellectuals object to the term Academic Kurdish. Özgür who was a part of MKM from the very beginning, also thinks that Academic Kurdish is not a right concept, and prefers to call it a common written language that is based on grammar. The language studies aimed at creating a standardized language are based on a grammar book written by Celadet Ali Bedirxan and continued by institutions such as the Kurdish institute. (Interview with Özgür, 28.01.2009) The newspaper and satellite television broadcast have played a significant role in the diffusion of this language. Television broadcast in Kurdish is crucial as it can reach the illiterate population and influence the pronunciation. In addition to these, music is an important means. Moreover as it existed before the television, during early 1990s its role was even more crucial.

There exists a literature and language branch in MKM. The language studies within MKM effected the musicians as well. All members of MKM had the chance to join the language courses and their albums' language was controlled by the Rewşen literature magazine group. One of the members of Koma Çiya, Zana Farqhini, wrote Kurdish to Turkish, Turkish to Kurdish dictionary. Hüseyin said that his 'Kurdish' (meaning Kurmanjî) was much assimilated; it included many Zazakî and Turkish words and he improved his Kurdish in MKM. The musicians from MKM have accentuated the importance of using 'correct' Kurdish – meaning the standardized Kurdish- in their songs and disclosed that it is their 'responsibility'.

One needs to be very careful about [the language] as music reaches hundreds of thousands of people. We are transmitting it to people and we have to do it in the most correct way. We have some methods to ensure that. When we make an album, we show the lyrics to the specialists. After it is

approved by them, we correct the mistakes and align their spelling and pronunciation with the correct way and then release. It is important; hundreds of thousands of people listen and and place it in their memory in the way they hear it from you.<sup>133</sup> (Interview with Boran, 02.10.2008)

Mesut also said that it is the mission of the Kurdish musicians to use the language correctly. While musicians outside of MKM use language in the wrong way, they do not have such an option. As pioneers of the movement in the artistic realm, MKM musicians also adopt the role of teaching the right language to the people. The pedagogical attitude of the musicians towards the Kurdish people is demonstrated in the quote below.

This is what differentiates the artists in MKM from others. This is a mission. We do not have the luxury to make mistakes, we should not. Some others might make, and we can criticize them. As Mesut, I am a Kurdish musician and I am the representative of Kurdish music and art. I can not give the people wrong things. I have to give the correct language. Music gives the emotion at the same time it teaches the language. For instance when we use unknown words in our songs, people ask what they are. We urge them to make research. A lot of people did not know that *bengî* means love. *Ez bengî bûne* means I am in love. My first album was called *Bengî*. It is a small contribution I make to Kurdish if I could teach thousands that *bengî* is love.<sup>134</sup> (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008)

To what extent music had been effective in shaping the language is a question that I can not answer in this thesis. Some musicians have indicated that they have learnt Kurdish mainly through music and have heard some words for the first time in songs. The effect of music on them might be due to the fact that they have been inclined towards music. For the scope of this thesis, it is sufficient to note that

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<sup>133</sup> “[Dile] çok dikkat etmek gerekiyor çünkü yüzbinlere ulaşan bir şey müzik. Sonuçta biz onu insanlara aktarıyoruz ve en doğru biçimde aktarmak gerekiyor. Bizim de böyle olması için çeşitli yöntemlerimiz var. Albüm hazırlanırken sözleri bu işin uzmanlarına gösteriyoruz; onlardan onay aldıktan sonra, hatalar varsa düzeltiliyor ve bunları yazısal ve okurken uygun hale getirip öyle yayınlıyoruz. Önemli bir durum, yüz binler senden o şekilde duyup, hafızasına o şekilde aktarabiliyor.”

<sup>134</sup> “MKM'deki sanatçıları diğerlerinden ayıran da bu. Bu bir misyon. Bizim yanlış yapma lüksümüz yok, olmamalı. Birileri yapabilir, biz onu eleştirebiliriz. Ben Mesut olarak Kürt müzisyeniyim ve Kürt müziğinin, sanatının temsilcisiyim. Bu halka ben yalan yanlış şeyler veremem. Doğru olan dili vermek zorundayım. Müzik hem duyguyu veriyor, hem de dil eğitmenlik görevi görüyor. Mesela biz hiç bilinmeyen kelimeleri şarkılarımızda kullandığımızda insanlar soruyorlar; acaba bu nedir? Biz onları araştırmaya da itiyoruz. *Bengî* kelimesinin şu ana kadar aşk anlamına geldiğini birçok kişi bilmiyordu. *Ez bengî bûne* dediğinde ben aşık oldum. Benim ilk albümümün ismi *Bengî*ydi. Onlarca, yüzlerce kişiye *bengî*'nin aşk demek olduğunu söylemem Kürtçe'ye bir nebze de olsa katkıdır.”

musicians in *koms* have given importance to using the language 'correctly' as they are addressing the Kurdish people. The 'correct' language was the common Kurmanjî that was standardized and fixed according to some grammar rules. Therefore, music has contributed to the dissemination of standardized Kurmanjî, sometimes at the expense of local dialects. While the compositions were sung in 'academic Kurdish', the folk songs' local accents were kept. Hasan said that they were trying to find a balance between keeping the local while creating the 'national'. When they collected a song from Hakkari, they tried to sing it close to the local accent, but at the same time tried to bring that accent closer to the 'general Kurmanjî', to the 'West' so that others can understand it too. (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009)

When the musicians interviewed said Kurdish, they generally meant Kurmanjî, while Zazakî was referred to only when I asked a question about it. However some musicians have also mentioned that through their music, Kurmanjs could hear music in Zazakî and Soranî. I will analyze the use of Zazakî and Soranî dialects in terms of cultural difference within the Kurdish identity. Linguistic differences, among others such as religious and regional differences, have been articulated as 'diverse' and 'richening' elements that constitute the national identity, yet their position remain marginal to the Kurdish identity that is aimed to be constructed. Next, I will analyze construction of common history which is crucial in the construction of national identity.

### **3.3.2. Common History**

Construction of common history is important not only for nationalist movements, but any movement that aims to construct an identity. When the nation is perceived as an invented or imagined entity, the historicization of the community becomes important in the construction of the national identity. Different memories about the evolution of the group, or tales that are passed from generation to generation show great variety amongst the individuals, and the nationalist discourse aims to create a single and static history out of these fragmented, unpredictable elements that exist in different collective memories. The continuity of symbols, languages, customs and traditions that exist over different communities and the past that is re-invented by the

political archeologists are brought together under the 'history of the nation'. (Smith, 1999: 12) The nationalists aim to create a common history not only to homogenize the memories of the individuals of the nation, but also to present the 'nation' as something with a historical continuity. The continuities between past of certain ethnies are selected and refurbished according to the needs and interests of the nation.

Hirschler says that although there had been a great number of studies about the role of history in the construction of identity in the existence of a state, there had not been much about the construction of Kurdish historiography. (Hirschler, 2001: 145) As there is no Kurdish state, in the field of history, just like in language, attempts at creating a common history had to be done by the Kurdish movement, different institutions and sometimes academicians. Izady mentions the difficulty of 'reconstruction' of Kurdish history. "Middle Eastern history has all too often (although not always) been written by its hegemony, and most recently the nation-state. The Kurds have not been hegemony for over 800 years. The result is that Kurdish contributions to history have been ignored, or worse, appropriated by other peoples." (Izady, 1992: 23) According to Izady, importance of the construction of the Kurdish history is not only constructing the past of the Kurds to imply continuity with the present, but also challenging the hegemonic narrative of the nation states that the Kurds live in.

Izady adds that any 'pioneering' effort of uncovering this long buried history would create controversy as it will challenge the status quo. Here the assumption is that the Kurds have a history as a nation that waits to be uncovered. This assumption exists in the claims of most nationalists. Although there are common elements in different accounts of the Kurdish history, it would be erroneous to claim that there is a single narrative over the history of the Kurds.

It has been mentioned above that the Kurdish nationalist movements sought references in the past since its emergence. Ehmedê Xani's *Mem û Zin* has been a frequently used reference. The tale of Mem and Zin is frequently referred to in songs. Their love is associated with the love of the country; and the love of country – and the existence of the country - is attributed a timeless history.

The dreams you have given me  
My smiling one  
Are like a thousand years old song  
Are like the love of Mem and Zin

You are the love of the country  
You are the one felt my mothers  
My smiling one<sup>135</sup>

As the PKK gained popular support, infiltrated to more spheres of life, and presented itself as the sole representative of the Kurds (at least in Turkey), the movement's historical narrative has become the dominant one. However, even within the movement, there is no agreed Kurdish historical narrative. Hirschler divides the Kurdish historiographers into two; monopolists who monopolize the history of the region on Kurdish history and 'Inter-Activists' who include the history of other peoples into their history.<sup>136</sup> While a group of monopolist historians seek the ancestors of the Kurds in the Aryan, there is a popular tendency of expanding the possible ancestral links of the Kurds to the Medes. (Hirschler, 2001: 152) As Smith has noted, myths of ethnic descent have been vital both for territorial claims and national solidarity. (Smith, 1999: 58) The myth of an ethno-genesis has been important for the Kurds whose existence has been denied by the Turkish state for decades. The Median legacy played a crucial role in the construction and representation of the Kurdish identity. The Medes provide a point of reference for the existence of Kurdish language and culture for a long time, against the denial of Kurdish identity.<sup>137</sup> Amongst the songs that I have analyzed I have encountered eight songs with a reference to the Medes. It is noteworthy that all songs that give a reference to the Medes are by *koms* from MKM and they all use the Med reference in relation to the current struggle of the Kurds.

By placing the present in the context of the past and of the community, the myth of descent interprets present social changes and collective endeavors in a manner that satisfies the drive for meaning by providing new identities that seem to be also very old, and restoring locations, social and territorial, that allegedly were crucibles of those identities. (ibid, p.62)

Through establishing links between the heroes/heroines of the movement and ethnic ancestors, the past resistances are connected with the current struggle of the

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<sup>135</sup> Koma Gulên Xerzan, "Rûkenî Min" in *Rûkenî Min* (2005)

<sup>136</sup> Hirschler's study on Kurdish historiography is based on daily paper *Özgür Gündem* and its successors as there is no 'official' Kurdish historiography institution. The paper is close to PKK although it is not a party publication.

<sup>137</sup> The name Med is frequently used by the party to popularise the historical narrative. Med TV, that was established in 1995 is an example to this.

Kurds. As demonstrated in the lyrics below, the current struggle is validated through the myths and history, while myths and history are constructed through these associations.

Zilan is the thunder during summer  
Zilan is the voice of angry hearts  
Zilan is a Med daughter  
Zilan Zilan Zilan Zilan<sup>138</sup>

The first women guerilla to set herself on fire, Zilan, is presented as the descent of the Medes. By doing this, the current struggle is justified through historical references to Medes, and the PKK militant Zilan is represented as the martyr of the nation (that is descending from the Medes). Through such a link, the 'myth of an eternal resistance' against the invaders is constructed too. The Kurdish narrative about the imagined national territory is that it is originally Kurdish against the Turkish narrative that defines Anatolia as the second homeland of the Turks. (Hirschler, 2001: 153) According to this narrative, the Kurdish homeland has been under constant invasion. Kurds, as a nation, have been oppressed by other 'nations' and states for thousands of years. The discourse that describes the Turkish state as a colonial state and Kurdish struggle as an anti-colonial one is presented in the following lyrics.

Kurdistan is under invasion for thousands of years  
Kurdish youngster rebelled  
Broke the chain of colonialists<sup>139</sup>

The Kurdish historical narrative claims that despite the coercion, assimilation and annihilation policies of the barbaric invaders, the Kurds were able to maintain their national characteristics and traditions. Such an ability is linked to a myth of eternal resistance. The representation of teleological resistance establishes link with the present struggle and the past ones which would eventually lead into the establishment of a Kurdish state. (ibid, p.154) The invaders as well as the resistance find itself a place in the songs.

I am from Arbil, the city from which Hūlagūn<sup>140</sup> escaped  
I am from Suleymaniye, the city of the revolt

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<sup>138</sup> Koma Rojhilat, "Keçe Delal" in *Mezrabanım Ez* (1997)

<sup>139</sup> Koma Gulên Xerzan, "Sonda Me" in *Sonda Me* (1994)

<sup>140</sup> The İlhanlı empereror who overthrew the Alamut State in 1256. According to the Kurdish historical narrative, Alamut is one of the Kurdish states in the history.

I am from Haneke, the city of Kurdish people  
I am always your son.<sup>141</sup>

The myth of Newroz has been important in the Kurdish movement in several aspects. According to the myth, the ironsmith Kawa liberated the Kurds from a tyrant eating the brains of two youngsters everyday.<sup>142</sup> In historical narration it corresponds to the day of the victory of Medes against the Assyrians in 612 BC. Newroz has a strong symbolic meaning with regards to the collective memory of the movement because of Mazlum Doğan's suicide on that day in Diyarbakır prison in 1982 as well as the massive celebrations of Newroz in early 1990s that was met with severe police violence. Because of the symbolic significance of Newroz for the Kurds in Turkey, it has also become a discursive battlefield between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement. (Aydın, 2005) Against the Kurdish movement, the state tried to promote its own *Nevruz* by saying that it is originally a Turkish festival which celebrated the day that Turks left Ergenekon. (ibid, p.90)

Newroz is celebrated by the Kurdish movement as the day of resistance and victory. Through the linking of present day's resistance with the Newroz myth, not only origins are implied but also continuity is constructed. (Hirschler, 2001: 155) In *koms'* songs, Newroz is extensively referred both as a myth and in relation to the current struggle. The historical and mythical meaning of Newroz is reflected to the future; it is projected as the day of the victory of the Kurds.

Newroz of the Medes is the feast of the peoples  
Irises and daisies have bloomed  
They have lit the sacred fire today

They are walking in a conscious way  
Lions and tigers with Kalashnikov  
All of you have a happy Newroz!  
They are lions, tigers, falcons in the sky.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Koma Çiya, “Kurd Nişîn” in *Venamire* (1999).

<sup>142</sup> There are opposing accounts of the myth. Varol claims that Kawa and Newroz myth are recently linked and in some historical accounts, Kawa is not even mentioned. (Varol, 1994 quoted in Hirschler, 2001: 154)

<sup>143</sup> Koma Gulên Xerzan, “Şêrê Girêdayî” in *Sonda Me* (1994).

The linking of the movement's history with the existing myths of the Kurds is done through the figure of Kawa as well. Mazlum Doğan, was started to be celebrated by the modern Kawa by the movement.

On March 21st in Diyarbakır Prison, Mazlum Doğan became a milestone in the history of UKM [Ulusal Kurtuluş Mücadelesi - Struggle for National Liberation]. From then on, he was to be commemorated as the contemporary Kawa. ... In such a critical period, on the day the day turned towards spring, on the Kurd's festival day 21 March, Newroz, Mazlum Doğan put an end to the search and discussions: He transformed the *historical NEWROZ* into a new day for progress in UKM. The sparkle was lit; the pitch-black darkness was brightened up.<sup>144</sup>

Mazlum Doğan as modern Kawa is referred in a number of songs either by his name or only as the 'modern ironsmith'.

You saw Newrozs in prisons  
With the love of modern ironsmith  
With the fire lit by the fours<sup>145</sup>  
You adorned them with the poem of Amed.<sup>146</sup>

The Diyarbakır resistance against the brutal tortures of the military regime after the 1980 coup occupies a significant place in the narrative of the movement and the songs of *koms* from MKM. The March month – and spring - is celebrated as the time of freedom because of Newroz and its association with the current struggle.

How many martyrs have devoted their lives  
By resisting in prisons  
They took the revenge of the history  
They lit the mountains  
The month March, flower of spring.<sup>147</sup>

Songs about killed Kurdish guerillas and militants as well as suicide militants

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<sup>144</sup> *Özgür Halk*, March 1997. Quoted from Aydın, 2005.

<sup>145</sup> The *fours* are the four PKK militants who set themselves on fire in Diyarbakır prison the same year Mazlum Doğan died.

<sup>146</sup> Koma Çiya, “Hanê” in *Dilana Bêsînor* (1995)

<sup>147</sup> Agirê Jiyan, “ Adarê” in *Adarê* (1996)

are very frequent. Zilan, Agit, Ferhat, Sarya are just few of the dead militants referred to in the songs. It has been mentioned in second chapter that the martyr songs were very frequent in Turkish singing political musicians. In the context of Kurdish music, the martyrdom gains another meaning as the dead ones have lost their lives 'for the liberation of their people and their land'. The martyr figure has been important in most nations where the young was to be educated to become a "martyr" in the service of the nation. Through these songs, not only the youngsters, but all Kurdish people were invited to become martyrs for their nation. The glorification was so strong that, becoming a martyr was almost presented as the only way of reaching the 'beautiful' Kurdish identity. "For the true nationalist hero was a martyr, sacrificing his or her life for nation and ancestral homeland and in death hallowing both. Love of the sacred homeland inspired the martyr's death, a love and devotion that fed on tales of analogous exploits long ago." (Smith, 1999: 154) The martyr figure attains its sacredness from the sacred homeland.

As mentioned above, the construction of national history through music is usually done during the 1990s. By 2000s, the movement already had a historical narrative which was popularized. Historical references were usually used in calling people to struggle and continue the 'eternal resistance' of the Kurds. With the ceasefire of 2000s, such a need was not necessary any more and political songs gradually disappeared from *kom* albums. Coupled with the national history was the construction of the national territory through the political lyrics of *koms* during the 1990s. While Kurdistan as the land of the nation is emphasized more during the 1990s, geographical references continue to be made in songs during 2000s with more emphasis put on culture. Next, I will analyze the construction of "Kurdistan" as the homeland of Kurds through the music of *koms* and its transformation.

### **3.3.3. Homeland**

In the construction of the historical narrative, territorialization of the memory is very significant. The narrative of the nation, the wars, conflicts, resistance, takes place within a specific territory which is unique and indispensable for the community. Kurdistan, although defined with flexible borders, is defined as the ancestral land of the Kurds. Within the nationalist discourse, territory is much more than a land with some defined borders; it is invested with emotional connotations and cultural meanings which

creates the attachment felt by the national community. "What is at stake is the idea of an historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group, and vice versa, a group part of whose character is felt by themselves and outsiders to derive from the particular landscape they inhabit, and commemorated as such in verse and song." (Smith, 1999: 150)

The construction of a territory as the ancestral homeland of a particular *ethnie* is crucial in inspiring the masses for devotion and sacrifice. These are necessary elements for moulding a heterogenous population into a nation. (ibid, p.157) In this construction process, the intelligentsia, educators and leaders of the community locate certain historical events and figures in a particular geography, the locations are recited over generations in ballads, stories and visual arts. (ibid, p.151) These events and figures sanctify the homeland; the ancestors who have lived over it, the blood shed on it, the civilization that was built on it. When the land is sanctified, greater attachment to it is attained and larger numbers of people can be mobilized to 'fight for it'. (ibid, p.156)

The intellectuals of the movement have played a crucial role in the construction of 'Kurdistan' as the homeland of the Kurds. Kurdistan has gained a symbolic importance for the Kurdish movement and started to represent the things taken away from and denied to Kurds. According to Halit, in 1990s, for someone who wanted to deal with Kurdishness, Kurdishness and Kurdistan were the same thing. (Interview with Halit, 14.12.2008) In Kurdish political music, the symbolic significance of Kurdistan and the homeland is constructed and reproduced. While musicians before them have used Kurdistan as a symbol for national independence, *koms* have intensified these efforts. Amongst the songs I have analyzed, I have come across twenty songs with political lyrics that include the word Kurdistan, forty songs with the words country, land, homeland, and fatherland. *Gülistan* (rose garden) was also used to refer to Kurdistan in a more symbolic and hidden way to avoid law suits being filed against the songs.

According to the Kurdish narrative of the homeland, the region is the fatherland of the Aryans who are Kurds' ancestors and Kurds are the oldest people in the region as opposed to the Turks or Romans who have invaded the Kurdish territory. (Hirschler, 2001: 153) The homeland, which is constructed as inherently integral within the defined borders, has been divided into four pieces by the invaders. Just like the Kurds, Kurdistan has suffered the break off and the barbaric, inhumane treatments of the invaders over the

course of history.

They tore Botan, Behdinan and Şikak from each other  
They divided Kurdistan to four,  
They killed out fathers and mothers, drowned them in red blood.<sup>148</sup>

As mentioned above, according to the historical narrative of the Kurds, they have always resisted against the invaders. Kurdistan not only symbolizes the pain and the injustice Kurds had to go through, but also the resistance. The part of the sacredness of the territory of 'Kurdistan' emanates from the resistance, and the independent Kurdish state that would be established as a result of the continuous resistance of the Kurds; the utopia of having an independent state over the geography.

That day, Newroz day will come  
It is a beautiful fest, sacred for the Kurds  
The day of Kurdistan's independence  
That day is Kurdistan's Newroz, the day of feast  
...  
Kurds rise up  
Struggle for the country  
Rescue it from captivity  
Fight for the country...<sup>149</sup>

Their foreheads are high just like the sun  
They are going to Kurdistan for victory  
Running in Serhat and Botan  
And the enemies are running away like snakes.<sup>150</sup>

Not only Kurdistan as the territorially bounded homeland, but its mountains, lakes, cities, valleys are attributed emotional meanings. I have encountered ninety-three references to a specific geographical location in the songs with political lyrics. The geographical locations were referred to not only within songs, but also in the name of the groups. *Koma Amed*, *Koma Gulen Xerzan*, *Koma Mezrobotan* are some examples. These sites are given reference with regards to their natural beauty, historical events that

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<sup>148</sup> Koma Gulên Xerzan, "Sonda Me" in *Sonda Me* (1994)

<sup>149</sup> Koma Dengê Azadî, "Roj Wê Bê" in *Welatê Min* (1995)

<sup>150</sup> Koma Rewşen, "Sorgul În" in *Çiyayê Bêzar* (1998)

took place in them, or simply to indicate the names of locations within the imagined borders of Kurdistan. Especially events that have an importance in terms of Kurdish struggle such as the massacre in Halepçe, Dersim Revolt or the Mahabad Republic are territorialized and through the songs' narratives, both the history as well as the territory of the Kurds are constructed.

Everywhere is in the color of blood  
My country is wounded  
Where is my pen?  
In Ağrı, in Dersim  
In Kirmanşah, in Mahabad  
In Zilan, in Helebçe  
It's enough!<sup>151</sup>

The territory that is sanctified as *homeland* is also personified; sometimes it is wounded as a result of the invasion, sometimes it is a brave and proud fighter, sometimes it is a bride to be protected<sup>152</sup>. The locations are not simply places where the resistance and war is taking place; they are presented as integral parts of the struggle. Especially the mountains have a special importance with regards to the links between the territory and the struggle. Mountains have significance in the life of the Kurds outside of the struggle as well. According to Izady, it is one of the national characteristics of the Kurds.

To a Kurd the mountain is no less than the embodiment of the deity: mountain is his mother, his refuge, his protector, his home, his farm, his market, his mate, and his only friend. This intimate mountain-man relationship shapes the physical, cultural and psychological landscape of Kurdistan more than any other factor. (Izady, 1992: 118)

Mountain (*çiya*) has a significant place in Kurdish folklore as well. Like many other elements that exist in Kurdish folklore and traditions, the mountain and the symbolic meaning attached to it is effectively mobilized by the Kurdish movement. The mountain started so symbolize the war, especially the armed struggle against the Turkish army. The names of the mountains are used to refer to specific conflicts which territorialized the history of the movement. Music groups are named after mountain – Koma Çiya – or musicians have used it as a stage name. The mountain usually symbolized the pride, strength and struggle. A musician from Koma Çiya explained why

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<sup>151</sup> Koma Çiya, “Bes E!” in *Dilana Bêsînor* (2000)

<sup>152</sup> Koma Rojhilat, “Ew Gol” in *Mezrabotanim Ez* (1997)

they chose the name 'mountain' through a combination of the meanings attached to mountain. According to him, the name symbolized the mountain as an essential component of the Kurdish identity as well as its 'modernization'.

In the end we are mountain people. Mountain is one of the places where the Kurds seek refuge when expressing themselves. Thus the richness of the *türkiis* I sing is as a result of our natural conditions. Therefore, the longing felt for the mountain, perpetuating the mountain culture and establishing our relation with the mountain... We blended the mountain culture with a more modernized thought and named our group as Koma Çiya. Our aim was presenting the culture of today's society, the social structure and industrialization to the people.<sup>153</sup> (Interview conducted on 29.09.2008)

In Turkey, the geographical location's name has been a discursive battle field. As a part of its Turkification efforts, the Republic has changed the Kurdish names of cities and towns. The name of Dersim may be the most violent example to that. While *Dersim* symbolized the culture and tradition of the region aimed to be erased, the 1938 revolt and state's fierce reaction, the name *Tunceli* aimed to erase the history and the non-Turkish identity there.<sup>154</sup> In all *kom* songs the places are indicated with their Kurdish names such as Amed and Dersim. Also regions such as Botan, Xerzan or Serhat are used to indicate the regions where the folk songs are coming from as well as within songs. Against the denial of the geography where the Kurds live, the Kurdish movement asserts it through using the locations names and establishing links with history and the current struggle.

It has been mentioned before that the Kurdish movements' efforts of constructing the national identity have not been through state policies and its instruments. A common instrument used by the states to draw the borders of the nation is the maps. The modern maps have played a significant role in shaping the everyday consciousness about one's own country as well as its place in the system of nation states. (Calhoun, 2007: 22) When compared to the Turkish state which promotes its

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<sup>153</sup> “Sonuçta biz bir dağ halkıyız. Kürtlerin kendilerini ifade ederken sığındıkları yerlerden bir tanesi dağ. Dolayısıyla söylediğim türkülerdeki zenginlikler de doğa koşullarımızın sonucu. Bundan dolayı hem dağa olan özlem, hem dağın kültürünü yaşatmak, dağla olan ilişkimizin örgüsünü kurmak... Dağ kültürünü daha modernize bir düşünceyle harmanlaştırıp, birleştirip grubumuzun adını Koma Çiya koyduk. Bugünün toplumunun kültürünün, sosyal yapının, sanayileşmenin halka sunulmasıydı amacımız.”

<sup>154</sup> With the Kurdish Opening that is currently debated, Turkification of Kurmanjî and Zazakî names of places is also discussed on public and political levels.

internationally recognized border through maps, the Kurdish movement uses unconventional means such as music to challenge the territorial imagination of the Turkish state and to construct its own homeland. The territorial references in the songs attribute a sanctified meaning to the 'Kurdish homeland' through the history of domination and resistance.

While the territorial references made during 1990s were framed through the discourse of a separate Kurdistan, during the 2000s it was more against the denial of Kurdish existence in the region. Names of the places are continued to be asserted to emphasize the existence of Kurdish culture and language in that geography. References to specific geographical locations were usually made through folk song as songs with political lyrics decreased. Although the emphasis on a Kurdish state that is composed of all four parts is much weaker today, musicians indicate that they want to be listened in all four parts of Kurdistan. Mesut says that their aim is different than the local musicians who are known only in their region. “We want to address all Kurds in all parts. As a Kurdish musician, Kurdish artist, we should not, do not and will not see it as Eastern Kurds, Western Kurds, diaspora Kurds. I have to address the Kurds in Afrika too. I have to address the Kurds in South, in Syria, in Australia too.”<sup>155</sup> (Interview with Mesut, 30.09.2008) Although, Kurdistan as a nation state which would include all Kurds in different 'parts' is not emphasized, Kurds as a nation is given utterance by the musicians.

### **3.4. Articulation of Cultural Difference or Diversity?**

The Kurdish population is divided along many linguistic and religious lines. The linguistic differences between Gorani, Zazakî and the dialects of Kurmanjî and Soranî, religious differences between Sunni, Shi'i, Alevi, Ahl-i Haqq (Kaka'i), Yezidi, Christian and Jewish Kurds are coupled with differences of material culture, tribe and rural-urban division. (Bruinessen, 2006: 38) With regards to the Kurds in Turkey the divisions between Alevi and Sunni Kurds, and Kurmanjî and Zazakî have been the most significant divisions. As a nationalist movement, the Kurdish movement aimed to

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<sup>155</sup> “Biz istiyoruz ki bütün parçalardaki Kürtlere hitap edebilelim. Kürt müzisyeni, Kürt sanatçısı olarak, biz Doğu Kürtleri, Batı Kürtleri, diaspora Kürtleri gibi göremeyiz, görmüyoruz da, görmeyeceğiz de. Ben Afrika'daki Kürt'e de hitap etmek zorundayım. Orda yaşayan Kürtlere de hitap etmek zorundayım; Güney'deki, Suriye'deki parçaya, Avustralya'daki Kürt'e de hitap etmek zorundayım.”

embrace all peoples that is defined as Kurdish regardless of the differences mentioned above. Development of Zazakî and Alevi nationalism had a dialectical relation with the development of Kurdish nationalism. (ibid) PKK had difficulties in establishing itself in Dersim where the large part of the population is Alevi and Zazakî speaking and since 1960s the region has been more inclined towards radical left rather than Kurdish nationalism. (ibid, p.39) By mid 1980s, PKK adopted a more moderate attitude towards Sunni Islam which alienated the Alevi Kurds more. (ibid) Yet the PKK emphasized the difference between Turkish and Kurdish Alevism and by mid-1990s and established its own Alevi association. (ibid, pp.39-40) While some Zazakî speaking people claimed that they were Kurdish but demanded the recognition of their identity, some distanced themselves totally from Kurdish nationalism and claimed that Zazakî are different people whose identity has been denied both by Turkish state and the Kurds. (ibid, p. 41) While it is generally accepted that Zazakî is a dialect of Kurdish, authors such as Cengiz (1995) claim that it is a separate language. The interviewees regard Zazakî as another dialect and did not refer to it as an indicator of a different cultural identity.

The reflections of the all embracing nationalist discourse of the Kurdish movement found its reflections in *koms'* music too. Some Alevi songs have been included in the *kom* repertoires, both due to the inclusive approach of the movement as well as the importance of *deyişs* in political music in Turkey. Awareness about linguistic differences seem to emerge by mid-1990s, and groups started to include one or two Zazakî songs in their albums. *Koms* included Soranî songs as well. However *koms'* music remained predominantly Kurmanjî. From the one hundred eighty six songs that I have analyzed, eleven songs were in Zazakî and eight were in Soranî. Koma Gulen Xerzan included an Armenian and a Chaldean song in their album *Rûkena Min*.

A majority of *kom* musicians said that Kurdish music should include other *dialects* as they are also Kurdish.

These are languages that exist and are used in Kurdish. It is almost obligatory to sing in them for musicians who make Kurdish music, who claim to be Kurdish groups. If you say that you are a Kurdish artist, you have to sing in them because they are also dialects related to Kurdish.”<sup>156</sup> (Interview with Hüseyin, 02.10.2008)

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<sup>156</sup> “Kürtçe'de varolan, kullanılan diller bunlar. Onların da seslendirilmesi, Kürt müziği yapan, Kürt grubu olduğunu iddia eden sanatçılar için mecburiyet gibi birşey. Sen Kürt sanatçısı olduğunu söylüyorsan o lehçelerde de söylemen gerekir çünkü onlar da Kürtçeye bağlı lehçeler.”

Hüseyin added that he sings in Zazakî because a part of his family is Zaza but he does not prefer to sing in Soranî as he does not want to do something if he would not do it in the right way. Munzûr also thinks that Kurdish musicians should sing in other dialects as well, but they have not included any Zazakî songs as they can not sing well in it. (Interview with Munzûr, 27.09.2008) Both musicians said that they are Kurmanjî groups and they usually sing in Kurmanjî. Osman expressed the need to sing in other *dialects* within the framework of the National Liberation Struggle.

I do not speak Soran, but we have some kind of a dialogue with them as Sorans are also in the revolutionary struggle. Of course it does not mean that I do not understand any Soran. But it is very difficult for someone who has never gone out of his village to understand Soran. Or for a Kurmanj who never left his village to understand Soran. You should address them too. With the development of national consciousness, the idea of penetrating to all levels of your own society, addressing them has developed. All musicians in MKM sing in Soran, Zaza; such a thing emerged to address them too. This is richness.<sup>157</sup> (Interview with Osman, 02.10.2008)

As a result of this 'increasing consciousness' about addressing different dialects by the musicians of the movement, a Zazakî singing group- Vengê Sodirî - was established within MKM in 1997. The group was founded with a decision given by the administration of MKM and some musicians were selected to become a part of the group. It is noteworthy that the group was not founded with some musicians coming together within MKM; bur rather as a result of an administrative decision. With a separate *kom*, the Zazakî identity was addressed even more directly by the movement. The group included songs from different regions where Zazakî is spoken. A musician from Vengê Sodirî said that this made them different from Metin-Kemal Kahraman who only sing songs from Dersim. According to her a group that is singing in Zazakî was a need, and it is important that the group was founded under the umbrella of an 'institution'.

Until 1997, MKM has been the voice of all peoples in the Mesopotamian

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<sup>157</sup> “Ben Soranice bilmem ama devrimci mücadele içerisinde Soranlar da olduğundan dolayı onlarla da az çok bir diyalogumuz oluyor. Ama onları hiç anlamıyorum anlamına gelmiyor bu tabii. Ama kendi köyünden hiç çıkmamış birinin Soranca anlaması çok zordur. Ya da kendi köyünden çıkmamış bir Soran'ın Kurmancî anlaması çok zordur. Oraya da hitap etmek lazım. Hele de ulusal bir bilincin gelişmesi ile beraber kendi toplumsal yapının her katmanına inme, onlara da hitap edebilme düşüncesi gelişti. MKM'nin bütün müzisyenleri Soran da okuyor, Zazaca da okuyor. Onlara hitap etmek için öyle birşey çıkmış ortaya. Bu bir zenginliktir.”

geography. But when you look at the number of people singing in Soranî it is a lot, the same is true for Kurmanjî. But we saw that Zazakî dialect was not taken up too much. There was only Metin-Kemal Kahraman brothers, and they were not singing only in Zazakî. It was both in Turkish and Zazakî. In this way, it was a deficiency. Also such a practice should be started by an organized structure. You can do it outside too, but you have to do it in an organized way. You know being organized requires discipline and plan. I think a group that makes music in Zazakî should be working within this framework. Making music as a group has many difficulties. You have to be more organized.<sup>158</sup> (Interview conducted on 26.01.2009)

She indicates that Vengê Sodrî aimed to include all Zazakî dialects in their album. By this way, the cultural differences of the Zazakî speaking population are aimed to be embraced by one Zazakî identity. The inclusive nationalist discourse not only aims to address 'different dialects of Kurdish', but also recognizes and brings together the differences within them. Against the homogenizing and assimilating policies of Turkish Republic, the Kurdish movement has adopted a cultural diversity approach towards its 'internal' differences. "The awareness has grown that Kurdish society represents a mosaic, of which not all components identify equally strong with the whole, and of which the outer boundaries may occasionally shift - but which will always remain a mosaic." (Bruinessen, 2006: 43) Such an approach resembles to the multi-culturalist discourse that Homi Bhabha is critical of. While the 'cultural diversity' is celebrated, the 'cultural difference' is aimed to be contained.

[A]lthough there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid.' (Bhabha, 1990: 208)

The 'responsibility' of singing in the dialects of all elements in the National Liberation Struggle is not only a populist attitude geared towards gaining the support and contribution of these elements to the struggle; it is as a result of adopting such a

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<sup>158</sup> "1997'ye kadar Mezopotamya Coğrafyası üzerindeki halkların sesi aslında MKM. Ama Soranî lehçesinde müzik yapan insanlara baktığımız zaman sayısı çok fazla, Kurmancî lehçesinde yine öyle. Ama Zazakî lehçesinin hiç işlenmediğini gördük. Bunun çalışmasını yapan bir tek Metin-Kemal Kahraman kardeşler vardı ki onlar da sadece Zazakî yapmıyorlardı. Hem Türkçe yapıyorlardı hem de Zazakî söylüyorlardı. Bu anlamda bir eksiklikti. Hem de böyle bir çalışmanın örgütlü bir kurum tarafından başlatılması gerekiyordu. Dışarıda da yapabilirsin ama bunu örgütlü bir şekilde yapman gerekiyor. Örgütlülük biliyorsunuz disiplin gerektiriyor, plan gerektiriyor. Zazakî müzik yapan bir grup, bu esaslar çerçevesinde çalışmalarını yürütmeli diye düşünüyorum. Grup olarak müzik yapmanın çok fazla zorlukları vardır. Çok daha fazla örgütlü olmak zorundasın."

multiculturalist discourse that aims to domesticate the differences rather than ignoring and suppressing them.<sup>159</sup> I believe it is worthwhile comparing the perspective of MKM musicians with that of Metin and Kemal Kahraman brothers<sup>160</sup> whose music reflects the fragmented multiple identities of our times rather than a singular counter identity. (Neyzi, 2002) The brothers sing songs from Dersim. The Dersim identity is mainly shaped around Alevism but the high concentration of Zazakî speaking population in Dersim is also important in the shaping of its identity. Unlike the MKM musicians who formulated their identity formation processes as revealing or learning of a coherent singular identity, for Kemal Kahraman it is a more complicated process of performance and negotiation of multiple identities.

There was the Turkishness roof, we tore it down and approached Kurdishness. We tore it, we will approach Zazaness as we are thinking in Turkish. *Dersimli* is called Zaza in Turkish. When we think in Turkish we approach Zazaness, if we think in Zaza, we see the Kurd in Dersim; but its name is *Kırdaş*. Because my name is not Zaza over there, it is Kırmanç. Other than that we hear the name of Armenians. We are *Dersimli*. There are sub identities under this Dersim identity. They do not have any problems with each other.<sup>161</sup> (Kemal Kahraman quoted in Neyzi, 2002; translation belongs to me.)

While for Vengê Sodirî musician Zazakî songs from all regions *should* be included in the album of a Zazakî music group, expressing the multiplicity of *one* local identity (which is not defined according to ethnicity or religion) is not problematic for Metin and Kemal Kahraman brothers. Metin Kahraman used to be a member of Grup Yorum where music is seen as an instrument and a responsibility; however their current understanding of music is not shaped around these concepts.

No one puts themselves into the music they make as an organic personality. When you make music in the names of others, the number of unique sentences that you can come up with is no more than five. Then you start

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<sup>159</sup> While making a comparison between Kurdish movement's attitude towards the cultural differences and that of a nation state's; it should be noted that the Kurdish nationalism is a movement that has not become a state.

<sup>160</sup> It is important to note that Metin-Kemal Kahraman brothers contributed to the Vengê Sodirî album, *Wayîr*.

<sup>161</sup> “Bir Türklük çatımız vardı yıktık, Kürtlüğe doğru geldik. Onu yırttık, Zazalığa geleceğiz, Türkçe düşünüyoruz çünkü. Dersimlinin Türkçedeki adı Zazadır. Türkçe düşündüğümüzde Zazalığa geliyoruz, Zazaca düşünürsek Dersimdeki Kürdü görüyoruz, Kırdaştır ama adı. Çünkü benim oradaki adım da Zaza değildir, Kırmançtır. Onun dışında Ermenilerin adını duyuyoruz. Biz Dersimliyiz. Bu Dersim kimliğinin altında onun alt kimlikleri var. Bunların birbiriyle bir derdi yok.”

repeating the same thing. We do not give a name to our music. Everyone uncovering their difference by listening to their heart is the basic thing.<sup>162</sup> (Kemal Kahraman, quoted in Neyzi, 2002)

Rather than domesticating and containing the ambivalent and disruptive character of cultural difference, Metin and Kemal Kahraman use it as a space for creative production. The *koms'* position with regards to cultural differences - which represent the movement's attitude-, is significantly different from that of Kahraman brothers. The quote above from Ciwan's interview about the localization of music and its threat against the building of a national culture demonstrates the difference clearly.

*Koms'* musicians position with regards to the 'internal' differences of the Kurdish identity, resonates in their attitude towards other culture and languages within the imagined borders of Kurdistan. The Mesopotamian Culture Center name is usually referred by the interviewees to demonstrate their acknowledgement of and respect to other people living in Mesopotamia. Zozan and Munzûr made an album with Armenian and Chaldean songs. Both expressed their attitude towards other cultures through a multiculturalist discourse.

The system is afraid of this *color*. And we will be stubborn to make these *colors* live. Chaldeans lived in Mesopotamia. Chaldeans, Assyrians... You can see them in our cassettes. This is telling the world the peace, *multicoloredness* and *cultural richness* in the Middle East. It is revealing how peaceful the Kurds are, the rich culture they have and how much they *embrace* other cultures.<sup>163</sup> (Interview with Munzûr, 27.09.2008)

As Hirschler says, on an abstract level other peoples' existence has always been acknowledged by the Kurdish movement and the revolution was defined as their revolution as well. Yet, their actual existence in the historical narrative is not frequent. (Hirschler, 2001: 153) The same can be said for the culture as well. While some songs in other languages are included in *kom* albums, the differences between cultures were fixed

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<sup>162</sup> “Aslında kimse yaptığı işe organik bir kişilik olarak kendini katmıyor. Oysa başkaları adına müzik yaparken söyleyebileceğiniz özgün cümle sayısı beşi geçmez. Ondan sonra hep aynı şeyi tekrar edersiniz. Bizim kendi müziğimize verdiğimiz bir ad yok. Herkesin kendi yüreğinin sesine kulak vererek, kendi farklılığını açığa çıkarmasıdır temel.”

<sup>163</sup> “Bu renkten sistem korkmaktadır. Biz de inat edip bu renkleri yaşatırız. Mezopotamya topraklarında mesela Keldaniler yaşamış. Keldanilerdir, Asurilerdir, Süryanilerdir.. Bunların bir çoğu bizim kasetlerimizde görülebilir. Bu, Ortadoğu'daki barışı, çok sesliliği, kültürel zenginliği dünyaya anlatmaktır aslında. Kürtler'in ne kadar barışçı, ne kadar zengin bir kültüre sahip olduklarının ve diğer kültürleri ne kadar benimsediklerinin ortaya çıkartılmasıdır.”

through a multiculturalist approach.

Some previous *kom* musicians are critical about the stance towards cultural differences. Sinan thinks that *koms* have approached the cultural differences with a nationalist agenda.

I do not think that the groups discussed the question through the formulation of Kurdish cultural identities' differences. They behaved in a pre-defined way. All peoples who aim to construct a nation will get involved in some homogenizing practices. ... I think the model in a majority of Kurds' minds is the way the state of Turkish Republic has conducted its modernization project. If there are dialect differences, you should ignore, do not emphasize them too much, do not miss the main target. You should accentuate the commonalities, not the differences.<sup>164</sup> (Interview with Sinan, 28.08.2008)

While Sinan says that a homogenizing discourse resembling to that of the Turkish Republic was adopted by the Kurdish movement, I believe this is not an accurate comment. Different from the Turkish Republic, the differences were not aimed to be eliminated or assimilated completely. However, they have been aimed to be brought under the umbrella of the nation. They are acknowledged, but were contained and domesticated. Such an approach might be adopted by the Turkish Republic in its changing policy towards the Kurds. Through steps such as opening a Kurdish medium TV channel, Kurdish culture is aimed to be contained by the state to eliminate its controversial character. Just like the linguistic and cultural differences, the gender differences are contained within the Kurdish nationalist discourse. Next, I will analyze how the gender differences were reflected to the musical realm and how women's identity was constructed by *koms*' music.

### **3.5. Women in *Koms* and Articulation of Gender Identity Through Kurdish Music**

National identity construction processes are gendered processes. The new Kurdish identity to be constructed by the movement defines a new woman, a new man and a new family. Thus, it is necessary to analyze women's roles in the analysis of

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<sup>164</sup> “Grupların soruyu Kürt kültürel kimliğinin farklılıkları formülasyonu üzerinden tartıştıklarını düşünmüyorum. Yine verili davranış biçimlerinden birini yürütmüşlerdir. Ulus inşa etmek gibi bir problemi olan her halk, tek tipleştirici bazı pratiklere girecektir. ... Bana öyle geliyor ki Türkiye Cumhuriyeti devleti modernleşme projesini nasıl yürüttüyse, çoğu Kürt'ün zihnindeki model de budur. Lehçe farkı varsa görmezden gelmelisin, çok üzerinde durmamalısın, asıl büyük hedefi gözden kaçırmamalısın. Bu farklılıklara vurgu yapmamalısın, ortaklıklara vurgu yapmalısın”

construction of Kurdish identity. It is important not only to make them visible, but also because gender relations are constructing elements in this process. Within the construction of national/ ethnic identities men have the roles of speaking and representing the movement; while women are attributed symbolic roles. They are the mothers to reproduce the nation, transmit the culture and symbols that denote the cultural difference of ethnic identity and actual participants of the national, economic and military struggles. (Van Gelder, 2003: 326 cited in Çağlayan, 2007: 23) According to Çağlayan, women's role in Kurdish movement was mainly shaped around two images of women; women as active participants (politicians/guerillas) and women as mothers. Both the fiction of "Kurdish women" as well as "Kurdish mothers" was constructed by the movement through the use of symbolic and discursive means.

The mass mobilization of the Kurds that reached its peak during the 1990s changed the image of women too. Previously men were the active participants of the movement and women were portrayed more inline with traditional gender roles. According to some Kurdish intellectuals, women were representatives, bearers and transmitters of authentic culture to the next generations. Kurdish women living in the villages were shown as symbols of "pure Kurdishness". (Klein, 2001: 34 cited in Çağlayan, 2007: 75) In nationalist discourses, women are expected to become the symbols of modernity in addition to their authentic image. Kurdish women's identity as a symbol of modernity and authenticity was adopted by Kurdish intellectuals until early 1980s too. (Çağlayan, 2007: 77)

Women's increased participation in the movement in 1990s marked an important shift. A significant portion of guerillas were women and women were very active in the *serhildans*. While women were defined throughout 1980s as "slaves to be liberated", by 1990s the image of "liberating woman" came to the fore. (ibid, p.101) The new Kurdish identity to be defined was shaped increasingly around this new image of woman. The old tribal family relations were identified as one of the most important factors that resulted in the debased Kurdish personality. The 'ugly' sexual love and the family founded on such primitive sexual feelings were to be replaced by the new family of the nation and the transcendent love of the country. The new Kurdish identity - the new woman, new man and new family that were defined accordingly- were not terms

that could be achieved through everyday practices; they were abstract categories that could only be reached through participating in the struggle. (ibid, p.112)

During 1990s, not only the public image of women has changed, a new discursive field about women was created too. (ibid, p.108) The change in the discourse was not by accident; rather it was as a result of women's participation in the movement at the risk of their lives. (ibid, p.109) Women started to get organized separately in all fields of life. (ibid, p.117) The reason of women's separate organizations was identified as the difficulty for women to find their own willpower and think independently in mixed environments. (ibid, p. 119)

Although the changing discourse of the movement about women can be seen as questioning the patriarchy, it was actually strengthening the gender hierarchies in other ways. Women's sexuality is defined as something negative. Asexualization was shown as the only way through which women can go beyond the narrow patriarchal structure of the family and home, and join other social circles. Guerilla women were portrayed as asexual and honored (*namuslu*) women. (ibid, p.199) During these years, 'killing the man' (*erkeği öldürmek*) has become a popular discourse within the movement. Although the statement seems to be a bold one against the patriarchal structure, it actually meant killing the "false" manhood that is symbolized in the degenerated man who collaborates with the dominant classes. When men fight and triumph they will become *real* men. The "false" manhood and "false" power over women discourse calls men back to where they belong; the real power. (ibid, p.121)

Yet, the image of the woman guerilla was empowering for women as they were freed from the oppressive family ties and did something for what they believed in. (ibid, p.207) Not only guerillas, women's participation in other fields of struggle had an empowering effect over other women. Moreover, while initially women who participated in armed struggle had to be masculinized in order to be accepted; later they started transforming the masculine character of the domain they were acting in. (ibid, p.219) This is true for other fields of the struggle too.

In the construction of new gender identities, popular culture has played a significant role too. The conflicting discourse of the Kurdish movement about women was more apparent in Kurdish music. Women in *kom* songs are guerillas, mothers and

sometimes brides. Images of women were usually ripped off from their sexuality, yet some traditional gender role associations continued to exist. While sexuality in folk songs was not eliminated, the recent songs were not about sexual love. The love of the country has replaced the 'degenerated' sexual love. As the women in songs with political lyrics represent the image of the 'liberating' woman, such associations decreased with the 2000s.

Traditionally, in Kurdish society women tend not to sing in public. Women *dengbêj* such as Mêryem Xan and Ayşe Xan faced exclusion and discrimination as it is regarded as a sin for women to sing. Folk songs that are composed by women were sung by male *dengbêjs*. (Akbal, 2007) With the Kurdish movement, women started to appear on different fields of the struggle and music was one of them. As mentioned above, the image drawn by women as guerillas, political activists was empowering for other Kurdish women.

We heard about something called Kurdish music in 1990s with the buzz created by the Kurdish struggle. Kurds can also play *saz*, guitar and sing. In addition, for me it was quite different that the women were singing too. Because where we were grown up, it was very religious, it was under the impact of the *şeyhs*. ... Of course it is related to the movement. You see it; there is a freedom struggle, woman's search of being an individual. Yes, women can sing too, they can become doctors, can do many things. If they can be teachers, revolutionaries, guerillas, if they can carry a gun and sacrifice themselves for their people; why would they not be able to sing?<sup>165</sup> (Interview with Zozan, 26.01.2009)

Although the Kurdish movement encouraged women to participate in cultural activities, the number and the position of female musicians within *koms* were shaped by patriarchal gender relations. A majority of *koms* included female musicians, but it was usually one or two. More important than the number of female musicians is the way male musicians regarded them. For Hasan, having a female musician in the group was an 'advantage' for the groups.

Women should participate too, it is a choice. Besides you *can not* make such

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<sup>165</sup> “1990'larda, Kürt mücadelesiyle başlayan bir hareketlilikle Kürt müziği diye birşey duyduk. Kürtler de saz çalıyor, Kürtler de gitar çalıyor, şarkı söylüyor. Bunun yanında kadınların da bunu yapıyor olması benim açımdan bambaşka bir şeydi. Çünkü bizim yetiştiğimiz bölge tamamen dinci, tamamen şeyh etkisinde. ... Tabi bu hareketle bağlantılı. Onu görüyorsun, bir özgürlük yürüyüşü var, kadınların özgürlük arayışı var, kadının birey olma arayışı var. Evet kadınlar da şarkı söyleyebilir, doktor olabilir, birçok şey yapabilir. Neden şarkıcı olmasın, öğretmen olabiliyorsa, devrimci olabiliyorsa, gerilla olabiliyorsa, silah taşıyabiliyorsa, kendini halkına feda edebiliyorsa diğeri neden olmasın?”

discrimination, if they are within that crowd; they join in. Also it is a *need*. It is difficult to transmit some of the things with male voice. If you have a female voice, it is an advantage. Furthermore, they reflect their personal *naïveté*, *sensitivity* into music. Both during production and performance. ... There are songs that men can not sing. Some songs should not be sung by men as they are women songs. You become more convincing when a woman sings them; you transmit it more easily to the listeners.<sup>166</sup> (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009)

Women musicians are seen in a very instrumental way by Hasan. In addition, women are attributed some essential characteristics of sensitivity and naïveté which are predominant associations within patriarchal gender roles. Reflections of the idea that women are the transmitters of the culture and represent authentic Kurdishness are existent among some Kurdish musicians. Hasan also said that he prefers to collect songs from women as their songs are more naïve and pure. While men's songs represent the dominant culture, women express more individual feelings. He explained his preference of women also by saying that women are the actual transmitters of culture through their one to one relation with the children. (Interview with Hasan, 24.01.2009) Nilüfer Akbal – who is not a *kom* musician - defines Kurdish woman through her motherhood, naïveté, unique sensitivity and assigns her the position of the origin of traditions. “The woman is the main origin of culture and social history. Oral culture starts with woman”<sup>167</sup> (Akbal, 2007)

Yet, this stance can not be generalized to *kom* musicians. Ciwan admits that they have regarded women musicians in an instrumental way and he is critical about that. “We literally considered female voice as an instrument, as a flavor. Still they tell us that we lack a female voice. They see it as a musical color. Groups still regard female voice in that manner.”<sup>168</sup> (Interview with Ciwan, 14.12.2008) Yasemin thinks that women's position in *koms* was very symbolic, almost ornamental. I have interviewed

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<sup>166</sup> “Kadınların da yer alması lazım, bu bir tercih. Zaten böyle bir ayırım koyamıyorsunuz, o kalabalıkta yer alıyorsa, yer alıyor. Bir de tabii ihtiyaç. Sadece erkek sesiyle birşeyleri iletmek zor. Kadın vokal olduğunda avantajınız var. Bir de onlar müziğe kendi kişisel naifliklerini, duyarlılıklarını da yansıtıyorlar. Üretim aşamasında olsun, seslendirme aşamasında olsun. ... Erkeklerin seslendiremeyeceği şeyler var, ya da bazı şarkılar vardır ki erkekler seslendirmemelidirler çünkü kadın ağzıyla söylenmiştir. Kadın ağzıyla söylediği zaman daha inandırıcı olursunuz, daha rahat iletirsiniz, geçirirsiniz dinleyiciye.”

<sup>167</sup> “Kadın hem kültürün hem de toplumsal tarihin ana kaynağıdır. Sözlü kültür kadınla başlar”

<sup>168</sup> “Biz resmen kadın sesini bir enstrüman, bir tat gibi düşünmüşüz. Hala bize diyorlar sizde bir kadın sesi eksik diye. Ama müzikal bir renk olarak görüyorlar. Gruplar hala öyle bakıyor kadın sesine.”

four female musicians who are or used to be a part of MKM. All four of them continue their musical careers out of the groups. Zozan said that for a woman it is difficult making music in a group and she could feel the patriarchal structure despite the environment of the liberation struggle. Dilan agreed that women were kept in the background in the groups.

Imagine that there are six-seven men in the group and you are the only *lady*. The situation was like this: Women were used as vocal but the male dominance, even within that structure, was not broken. Inevitably you remain in the background. No matter how much you resist, you think you should leave and then leave.” (Interview with Dilan, 30.01.2009)<sup>169</sup>

It has been mentioned above that in all spheres of Kurdish movement, women started to get organized separately. An all-female *kom* was established within MKM too. The name of the group was Koma Asmîn. Nevin thinks that having an all female group gave important messages to Kurdish people.

I think the group *inseminated* the idea that the woman who is locked inside, imprisoned in the house should find her identity and be where she should be by her independent will. It should not be perceived as “Oh, how nice eleven women are singing together”. It should not be perceived in such a simple way. I think the message it gives to the society is much deeper. Also the Kurdish society is very feudal. The patriarchal thinking that denies the woman's identity, that imprisons her at home is felt very intense. Therefore, Koma Asmîn has a very important place socially, politically and artistically.<sup>170</sup> (Interview with Nevin, 26.01.2009)

With the usual pedagogical tone of MKM musicians, Nevin accentuates the importance of public figures such as musicians in questioning and shifting the gender relations within the Kurdish society. In her quote, the role of representing the modernity of the Kurdish identity given to women is manifested. Although it was a self-organized group of women, Koma Asmîn has not challenged the traditional gender roles in a

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<sup>169</sup> “Düşünün gruplarda altı-yedi tane erkek var ve siz tek bayansınız. Yaşanan şöyle bir durum oluyordu: Kadın vokal olarak kullanılabilir ve erkeğin o hakimiyeti, yapı içerisinde de olsa kırılmıyor. İster istemez sen çok arka planda kalabiliyorsun. Ne kadar da karşı çıkışların olsa ayrılman gerektiğini düşünüyorsun ve ayrılıyorsun.”

<sup>170</sup> “Aslında eve kapanan, eve hapsedilen kadının bir şekilde kendi kimliğini bulması, bu anlamda mücadele etmesi, kendi hür iradesiyle olması gereken yerde olmalı düşüncesini bir şekilde aşıl原因 bir grup olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bence on bir kadın biraraya gelmiş müzik yapıyor, şarkılar söylüyor, ah ne güzel olmamalı. Bu şekilde basit bir düşünce olmamalı. Topluma verdiği mesajların daha derin olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bir de Kürt toplumu çok daha fazla feodal. Kadın kimliğini reddeden, kadını eve hapseden erkek egemen düşüncenin kadın üzerinde çok daha fazla hissedildiği bir toplum. Bu yüzden Koma Asmîn'in sosyal ve siyasal, sanatsal anlamda da çok önemli bir yeri olduğunu düşünüyorum.”

dramatic way. The choice of the name is significant as all other group names are either derived from symbolic language of the movement – mountain, east, light – or territorial references, Asmîn is the name of a flower. Nevin said it is a flower in the mountains that does not live below a certain altitude. The symbol of struggle, mountain, alongside with the traditional female associations, flower, are reproduced through the choice of the name of the group. Members of Koma Asmîn would usually be on the stage with 'traditional' Kurdish clothes, resonating the association of women with the 'authentic', the 'traditional' while their very existence on the stage was promoted to be a sign of modernity.

Koma Asmîn was composed of female musicians who continued to be members of other groups. Three of the female interviewees indicated that while Koma Asmîn was encouraged on the surface, male musicians hampered the group by saying that their groups' performances were badly influenced.<sup>171</sup> Yasemin thinks that the symbolic position of women was not challenged with Koma Asmîn. She said some women paid more attention to how they look rather than the music they make. The musical quality of Koma Asmîn is also criticized by some musicians. Yasemin and Ciwan indicated that the vocals were good but nobody could play the instruments properly. According to Yasemin all these were repercussions of a feudal patriarchal society. (Interview with Yasemin, 03.10.2008)

As mentioned above, construction of gender identities is an integral part of construction of the national identity. While the discourse of the movement about the 'new' woman and the 'new' man did not find a direct expression in the songs, its implications can be read through an analysis of the female personalities in *koms'* albums. It has been indicated earlier that elegy songs (*ağuts*) were composed frequently after the dead guerillas. With the increasing number of women recruits in the armed struggle, women started to become *martyrs* as well. Not only women guerillas, but also figures such as Zilan – Zeynep Kınacı who set herself on fire in 1995 in Tunceli – have become symbols. *Koms* have made elegy songs after these female *martyrs*.

Sarya, Sarya, Sarya, Sarya

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<sup>171</sup> The other female musician interviewed said that her group was female dominated, thus she did not meet such a reaction.

Sarya is far away like a sea  
No land/ fire<sup>172</sup> without you  
Our *govend* Sarya

Look, Sarya is walking  
Look, Sarya's heart is violent  
Look, Sarya is smiling  
Guerilla is walking<sup>173</sup>

While in some songs there is no reference to the gender of the guerillas, in others, traditional gender symbols are transformed according to the discourse of the party. It has been mentioned how the movement suggested the sexual love to be replaced by the love of country and the old family to be replaced by the nation as a family. Yet the concept of family and kinship are not abandoned by the movement. The nationalist discourse is built on the language of kinship. (Calhoun, 2007: 53) The brothers, sisters, mothers, sons and daughters of the nation are addressed as a part of the big family of nation. In the song *Keçika Dersîmî*, how the movement's discourse and the military struggle re-contextualized the traditional gendered symbols of family is exemplified clearly. Girl (*keçika*) denotes the gender of the guerrilla, while it is ripped off from sexuality by using the word *girl* instead of *woman*.<sup>174</sup>

It/he made me the bride of Medya  
For the sake of him  
Come join my line dance  
Cheer up my Dersim

I put henna on my hair  
With the blood of my heart  
I put the cartridge pouch of the partisans  
As a belt around my waist

My bridal veil is not white  
It is the red flag  
I am not asking for a *sürme*

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<sup>172</sup> Changes in different verses. While land refers to the national identity, fire refers to the collective identity of the movement.

<sup>173</sup> Agirê Jiyan, "Sarya" in *Helîn* (1999).

<sup>174</sup> Çağlayan (2007) talks about the importance of the virginity of woman guerillas in the popular discourse of the movement.

My eye lashes are gunpowder<sup>175</sup>

While the gender associations are not challenged fundamentally, they are adapted to the war. The bride is still a bride, but not the bride of a groom; the bride of the struggle. She still puts a veil in her wedding, but instead of white, it is red. However most of the songs after the female martyrs, such as Zilan, Berivan or Sarya, approach them as genderless heroes of the nation.

Handan Çağlayan notes that in mobilization processes around ethnic and national identity, use of symbols of mourning mothers or the beloved one captured by the enemy are frequently used in popular culture products. (Çağlayan, 2007:109) While the songs about female martyrs represent the women who are active participants of the movement, the songs about the mothers and brides portray woman's identity in a more passive way through pain and sufferings. With the mobilization of women whose relatives are arrested, killed, joined the guerilla or lost under custody; motherhood was politicized as an identity. (ibid, p.169) The image of the mourning Kurdish mother who suffers the war, which has been popularized by the movement, was used by *kom* musicians as well.

Enemies' hands  
Corpses dragged behind the panzers  
The screams of Lice, of mothers and brides  
Causes great suffering<sup>176</sup>

In some songs, mothers are addressed by the warriors in explaining their cause; or to call them to join the struggle too.

It is enough mother, look I am going to the revolution  
All of my friends have gone, I am the only one left; shamefaced  
I do not have any more patience, my heart belongs to the mountains  
Do not cry mother, their arms are wide open for me.<sup>177</sup>

The identity construction processes are always contradictory and includes

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<sup>175</sup> Koma Çiya, “Keçîka Dersîmî” in *Dilana Bêsînor* (2000)

<sup>176</sup> Koma Rewşen, “Marên Kor” in *Çiyaye Bêzar* (1998)

<sup>177</sup> Koma Azad, “Êdî Bese” in *Bihuştî Min* (2001)

tensions within them. Neither the discourse of the movement regarding women, nor its reflections over the popular culture are coherent and consistent. The position of female musicians within *koms*' also shows such a contradictory character. While their participation in music groups is naturalized as they are integral parts of the national liberation struggle, their position remained secondary within the groups and their existence was seen in an instrumental way by some male musicians. While songs about female martyrs and suffering female relatives were more common during the 1990s, in 2000s such songs were much less. In 2000s, the link established between women and folklore has been emphasized more as folk songs were given more weight.

## CONCLUSION

While dealing with a specific cultural form, the relations between different meanings, messages, traditions and discourses should be taken into account. While some of these relations are contingent, most are shaped by relations of power and domination. Moreover, neither the hegemonic processes, nor the identity construction as a part of them are static or complete. What makes cultural analysis difficult and challenging is the attempt of grasping the active and transformational processes of hegemony and counter and alternative forms that are tied to it. (Williams, 1977: 113-4) It should also be taken into account that any analysis of cultural forms are deemed to exclude some of these relations and the transformations as it is an act of simplification made at a specific point of time.

In this study, I tried to analyze the articulation of Kurdish identity through music by the Kurdish political music groups that emerged in 1990s. The Kurdish nationalist movement used politicized music in mobilizing the people, sustaining the struggle and constructing an identity. While doing this, it has adopted a counter-hegemonic position. Yet it did not negate the hegemonic order and discourses completely; rather articulated them. This has been a complex process of negation, adoption, incorporation and negotiation. In order to understand the complex nature of this process, I tried to evaluate different dimensions of it such as the relation between politics and music, nationalism and folk music, Westernization and modernization, politicization of music by oppositional movements, processes of identity construction and popular music as a part of it. Neither of these topics are independent from each other, but for the sake of analytical clarity, they are examined under different titles. The dynamic nature of these processes have been tried to be analyzed too. While the focus of the study is 1990s, the changes in 2000s are taken into account as a part of these processes.

Music has played a significant role in popularization of nationalist ideology as well as construction of the national identity. Utilization of music with such

intentions can be found in nationalist movements all around the world. The folk music and culture have become a focus of interest for the nationalists in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. They believed that folk culture represented the purest form of nation's values, beliefs and practices. However, it was to be *restored* in order to be adequate for the middle classes' taste. The invention of the national culture through folk culture is not limited to Europe and similar processes of discovery, restoration and invention can be observed elsewhere.

In Turkey, the nationalist cadres aimed to create a national music out of the synthesis of folk and Western music. The results of the processes of homogenization, standardization and modernization had been detrimental for the different cultures and traditions of music making in Anatolia. Moreover, the aims of the music reform as planned by the Republican cadres were not fulfilled. Yet, despite its failures and internal contradictions, the Kemalist discourse on music had become hegemonic. The oppositional movements utilize music too. Like it does for the nation states, music creates and represents the culture and values of these movements. While these culture and values aim to create an alternative to the hegemonic ones, they are not independent from them. "It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its forms of counter-culture." (Williams, 1977: 114) Westernization and modernization as well as approaching the folk culture with nationalist sentiments (this time with an anti-imperialist emphasis) were articulated by the political musicians in Turkey starting with 1960s. Polyphonization and harmonization of music were seen as necessary to elevate the monophonic music that is based on *makam* structure. Later, the Kurdish political music has refurbished these elements according to the discourse of the movement. It should be noted that not only in Turkey, but also in other countries, modernization and Westernization of local music traditions by state actors and popular musicians has been a common practice.

The *koms* are a part of the Kurdish movement and have been effective in the popularization of the nationalist discourse of the movement. Thus, the Kurdish movement has been examined too. Kurdish nationalism has emerged as a Westernist movement. Its evolution in Turkey was largely shaped by the Turkish Republic's

policies of oppression, assimilation and denial. After being suppressed brutally during 1920s and 1930s, the Kurdish movement has re-emerged in 1960s, and gained a more autonomous character with 1970s. During that period, it has combined socialist elements with the discourse of national independence. The repercussion of these can be seen in Kurdish political music during that period; especially in Şivan Perwer's songs. Although the PKK had a socialism emphasis, during the 1990s, this has diminished from its discourse. The *koms* were affected by the change, and gradually socialism and class struggle were devoted less space in songs.

Creation of a new Kurdish identity has been aimed through PKK's nationalist discourse. During the 1990s, the way to reach this identity was self-sacrifice for the leadership, the party and the nation – which are not clearly separated. The new identity was positioned against the Kurdish identity which has been *debased* and spoilt by Turkish colonialism and feudal social structure. It addressed not only the militants of the movement, but the whole 'Kurdish society'. The artists and musicians were given a special role in the construction of the new Kurdish identity. They were to motivate the militants with their songs, tell the people about the struggle and refine the vulgar characteristics of Kurdish people. Their pedagogical approach to the people demonstrates how the teaching and leading roles that are ascribed to them have been accepted by the musicians in MKM.

Turkish state's policies were defined as colonialist and assimilating the Kurdish culture. The Kurdish movement saw its responsibility to rescue the existing Kurdish culture and music and elevate it. As a result of this, cultural institutionalization was realized. While the first culture center was HKD, which was affiliated with PSK, the MKM has caused greater enthusiasm and attraction. Not only through the cultural products, but also with the full commitment of artists and musicians to the institution and the lifestyle they created there, the discourse of the movement was embodied in MKM.

Within the tense political environment of 1990s, the MKM has become a place where a number of politically motivated music groups emerged. One of the elements of the new identity that was defined by the movement was collectivity. The group music has been presented as an embodiment of this idea. Yet, the collectivity was to be assured by a strict hierarchy which suppresses the individuality. The result

was a structure where individual creativity was dominated by the 'collectivity'. The hierarchical relations reproduced the existing power relations such as the gender relations as it has been expressed by the female *kom* musicians.

The musicians from *koms'* saw their engagement with politics as natural because they were making music in a language denied by the state and because of the political character of the institution they belonged to. Their songs were explicitly connected to the struggle. While telling the state's oppressive and brutal politics and the resistance against it, their songs also aimed to mobilize people. If Mattern's classification is employed; *kom* songs were confrontational as they delineated the state as the enemy, pragmatic as they aimed mobilization, deliberative as they negotiated the collective identity of the movement as well as the Kurdish identity. A majority of the musicians think that politics' involvement in the musical field is natural and necessary. However some musicians indicated that this involvement prevents professionalization in the field of music and lowers the quality of music.

In addition to songs with political lyrics, folk songs were included in *kom* albums. Yet, this does not mean that the folk songs were not political. The motivation of singing these songs was asserting the existence of a separate Kurdish ethnies and its culture, discovering - and rescuing - the folk songs which would be the basis of the new Kurdish identity. With the cease-fire declared in 2000s, the number of songs with political lyrics decreased and folk songs started to occupy more place in *koms'* repertoires. This can be explained with a number of factors. According to *kom* musicians, making political songs in 1990s was a need. With the demise of this need, folk songs were given more weight. In addition, both the listeners and the musicians have reached a saturation point of agitative lyrics and march rhythms and started looking for new ways of musical expression; while some *koms* started making rock music, a majority focused on Kurdish folk music.

With the increasing number of musicians and groups, market concerns – which have not been independent from the realm of politics - started to play an important role for *koms'* music. These concerns led into the emergence of a separate corner of the market for politicized Kurdish music. While this market maintained its specialization, it was incorporated into the existing capitalist logic of the music market. Although the musicians are generally not critical about such incorporation,

some expressed their discontent with the commercialization of music. Some others such as Sinan complained that the political realm plays a decisive role on the market and the market dynamics are hindered by political concerns.

The relation between *kom* musicians and the listeners is a peculiar one. It should be noted that I have not conducted a research on the listeners and my findings are based on my interviews with the musicians and my field observations. From the limited empirical data I gathered I observed three intermingled ways the listeners and the musicians interact. First is that most listeners and musicians belong to the same movement and they are 'comrades'. This factor was more determining during the early years of 1990s; yet it continues to be effective and listeners see musicians as 'theirs'. However in a hierarchically structured movement, musicians and listeners are not positioned as equals. As their teachers, the musicians approach the listeners in a pedagogical manner. Yet, they are not the leaders of the movement, and can be rebuked by the leadership as well as the people. As they are acting in the field of popular music, *kom* musicians have also become stars in the eyes of the listeners. This latter factor has become more effective with the 2000s as there emerged more musicians, the gigs have become more frequent and bigger and the market grew. Although on a discursive level the musicians despise the popularity of some musicians, through getting incorporated into the market mechanisms, they reproduce the mechanism of popular music stardom. Yet, critical musicians such as Sinan, acknowledge that they have become popular figures and indicated that they should establish the relation of the music they make with the popular realm well.

Popular music must be understood not as representing the values but rather embodying them. (Frith, 1996: 117) It can be the determining factor in individual identification processes or be a part of the larger collective identity construction processes. The *koms'* music has played a role in the identity construction processes of the Kurdish movement. I delineated some topics that come to the fore in this process. Modernity and authenticity are two contradicting but necessary elements of the national identity. Folk music represents the authentic Kurdish identity, and it is praised by the musicians with its richness, pureness, and oldness. However they also added that despite these positive characteristics, it can not be maintained as it and should be refurbished according to the needs of the time. In doing this, they collected

folk songs, polyphoned and performed them with Western instruments. A majority of the musicians regard this process as development and progress of the Kurdish folk music. However, they also indicated that the means they possess have been limited. They said that a more systematized way of collection is necessary in order to *discover* the Kurdish folklore. As the folk songs are arranged in similar ways with similar instruments, folk songs started to get standardized and their local characteristics are overshadowed. This standardization process has not been desired by the musicians, and they complain about this process which occurred out of the control of cultural institutions.

While a majority of musicians saw modernization as necessary, there are some musicians who are critical of the modernization process. For musicians such as Mesut it means alienation from the *authentic* Kurdish identity, while for others it means being a replica of the Turkish modernization discourse. For instance Yasemin said that the cultural assimilation of Turkish Republic is reproduced by *koms* by performing the songs in the way they are modified by TRT. Yet, harmonization and polyphonization of Kurdish music should not be analyzed only in the framework of Turkish modernization. Musicians such as Halit said that in order to be able to carry the Kurdish music to a *universal* level, they had to polyphonize Kurdish music.

Identity construction includes boundary erection and maintenance processes. The “other” should be kept out of the boundaries of the identity. The way of doing this is positioning the 'other' as the negative of the characteristics attributed to the constructed identity. Thus, if the music of modern and authentic Kurdish identity is that of *koms*', the negative of this is the backward and degenerate embodied in arabesk. By despising the music, the dominant discourse about arabesk is appropriated. This is not independent from the discourse of modernization and progression in Turkey which denotes arabesk as a sign of dissidence from the desired path of modernization. All musicians interviewed are critical of arabesk, and they see it not only as a musical genre, but rather as a 'perspective', 'lifestyle'. They are critical not only about arabesk in Turkish but also about arabesk in Kurdish with political lyrics.

The identity constructed by the Kurdish movement is a national one. I designated three elements in the construction of Kurdish national identity; common

language, common history and a homeland. These elements are 'taught' to the imagined members of the nation, popularized and canonized through *koms'* music. While doing this, certain elements of the history of the Kurdish ethnies, its myths are selected. The history and homeland are not presented as frozen entities, rather their continuity with the present struggle is established. Through the links between the past events and the present ones which belong to the movement, the history of the movement is presented as the history of the nation. These elements not only construct an identity, but are also used to create a 'national pride' of the Kurds. The Kurdish identity - its language, its history, its land - which are denied or ignored by the state, are constructed as things to be proud of. During our interview, Halit said that singing in Kurdish is a matter of honor for them, and no matter what happens they would continue singing in Kurdish. As a result of the dynamic nature of identity, the role of these elements in the construction of identity has shifted with the 2000s. While language continued to be emphasized as a part of the Kurdish cultural identity, the historical and geographical references were not to indicate the history and the homeland of the desired state any more. With the demise of political lyrics from *koms'* repertoires, these references – especially the historical ones - diminished.

Not all national identity construction processes approach the cultural differences within the imagined community in the same way. Moreover, the dominant approach towards these differences is not the same today as it was during 1920s and 1930s. The multiculturalist discourse that has become hegemonic in Western liberal democratic discourse has been appropriated by the Kurdish movement towards its 'internal differences' since the mid-1990s. Yet, the multiculturalist approach aims to contain and domesticate the cultural differences while it seems to celebrate them on the surface. The MKM musicians attitude towards Zaza and Soran identities has been that of containment. By doing this, the different identities that are shifting, ambiguous and performative are fixed to a recognized and defined difference. Freezing the cultural differences in a separate and static identity makes their incorporation into the invented national identity easier. However, there were musicians who were critical about *koms'* approach to cultural differences within the constructed Kurdish identity.

The incorporation process is also valid for the gender differences. The

women's identity within the Kurdish movement is an important issue, especially because of the active involvement of women in all spheres of the struggle. On the level of popular music, the discourse of women's liberation has been contained both through the practices within MKM as well as through the lyrics of the songs. The female musicians interviewed said that within MKM they could feel the patriarchal gender relations. Although their participation in the cultural field was encouraged, their roles in the music groups have been secondary. Women are attributed an inherent authenticity and naiveté as the bearers of the authentic Kurdish culture by some musicians. The tension between modernity and authenticity manifests itself over women too. The bearers of authentic culture are also to symbolize the modernity of the nation. The women in the struggle are portrayed through two main images; the active participants of the movement and the mothers who suffer from the brutality of the war and the state. Implications of these two images on the kom's music are the lyrics about the women 'martyrs' and the mothers whose sufferings are narrated. In the former, the 'active' women are rendered genderless while in the latter traditional gender roles are reproduced.

In this study, I focused on a specific period and the evolution of a phenomenon – the *koms* - that emerged during that period. It is needless to say that the Kurdish music in Turkey is a much broader issue which involves different actors, genres, musicians. *Koms'* music is not independent from these either. The Kurdish musicians singing in Turkish, Kurdish hip hop, rock, jazz, Kurdish music from other countries which are popular internationally as 'world music' have an influence on *koms'* music as well as the different processes of articulation of Kurdish identity. In addition to these are the political developments and the changes in the Kurdish movement.

Turkish state's approach towards the different ethnicities and cultures within Turkey is shifting towards the multiculturalist attitude of the Western liberal democracies. However, multiculturalism, as it is adopted in the liberal democracies of the Western countries, does not aim at the co-existence of different cultures and identities without a relation of domination. “[M]ulticulturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’—it ‘respects’ the Other’s identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed ‘authentic’ community

towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position.” (Žižek, 1997) An example of such an attitude is the opening of TRT Şeş by the AKP government. While it was celebrated by the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan as a step that will strengthen the democracy, the Kurdish musicians I interviewed said that it was an insincere decision which aimed to increase the votes of AKP in municipal elections. It is said to be insincere as the channel was opened without the state pressure over Kurdish language and culture being released.

TRT Şeş is seen as a cultural version of the village guard system by the MKM musicians. The Kurdish musicians who become a part of the channel are criticized of getting incorporated and betraying the people who have created them, while rejecting the offers of TRT is presented as a decision of honor. The Kurdish issue has turned into a hegemonic struggle under the name 'Kurdish opening'. As the discourse of ignoring and assimilation is changing, it aims to incorporate the elements of counter hegemonic struggle too. The songs of MKM musicians are played on TRT Şeş which results in lawsuits by the musicians.<sup>178</sup>

The question to ask at this stage is in which way the seemingly liberal environment will affect the evolution of Kurdish music and culture. While the Kurdish movement used to be the only actor in this field, other actors are increasingly getting involved. These include state actors such as TRT Şeş, civil society initiatives as well as musicians and artists who are neither part of the Kurdish movement nor these other actors. Introduction of new ways of production and dissemination of culture, of which internet is the most widely used one, affects these processes fundamentally. Musicians singing in Kurdish can reach audiences despite the state pressure and without making much capital investment. The *kom* musicians are not happy with these developments and say that the quality is lowered by the newly emerging musicians. As the cultural actors of the movement, they set the standards of the good quality music which should be given to people. These concerns demonstrate that Kurdish culture and music will continue to be a field of hegemonic struggle between the different actors. It is not clear how this struggle will

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<sup>178</sup> See the newsstory at: <http://www.mkmbakur.com/2009/01/16/rojdadan-trt-6ya-dava>. (Retrieved on 28.12.2008)

result, yet, it is clear the identity construction and maintenance processes are shaped by it.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A:

#### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES<sup>179</sup>

**Boran:** Musician and arranger. He started making music in a Kurdish music group (*kom*) and continues making music in the same *kom*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Ciwan:** Musician. He is one of the founders of HKD. Later he joined a *kom* in MKM. He is still making music in a *kom*. He lives in Germany.

**Çetin:** Musician. He started making music in a *kom* in MKM. He lives in Diyarbakır.

**Dilan:** Musician. She started making music in a *kom* in MKM. She has taken part in two different *koms*. Currently she is a solo musician. She lives in İstanbul.

**Halit:** Musician. He has another profession too. He started making music in a *kom* outside a cultural center. Later on he joined MKM. Currently, he is making music in another *kom*. He lives in Diyarbakır.

**Hasan:** Musician. He has another profession too. He started making music in a *kom* outside a cultural center. Later on he joined MKM. Currently, he is making music in another *kom*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Hüseyin:** Musician. He started making music in a *kom* and continues making music in the same *kom*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Êvdal:** Musician. Started making music in a *kom* in MKM. He is still in the same *kom*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Faik:** Musician and critique. He is making music in a music group singing folk songs of Anatolia in their original languages. He lives in İstanbul.

**Ferhat:** Critique. He has written books on Kurdish music and oppositional music in Turkey. He lives in İstanbul.

**Ferzan:** Producer. He is the owner and founder of a private company located in Unkapanı. Most of the early *kom* albums were released by this company. He lives in

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<sup>179</sup> The names of the interviewees are not their real names and are given by me. The names of the groups they belong to are not given either.

Istanbul.

**Hezan:** Critique. He is making research about *koms*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Ercan:** Arranger. He is the arranger of a majority of the early albums of *koms*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Mesut:** Musician. He started making music in a *kom* in MKM. Currently he is a solo musician. He lives in İstanbul.

**Mizgîn:** Producer. He is working with Kom Müzik Company. He lives in İstanbul.

**Munzûr:** Musician. Started making music in a *kom* in MKM. He is still in the same group. He lives in İstanbul.

**Nevin:** Musician. She started making music in MKM. She has taken part in two different *koms*. Currently she is making solo music. She lives in İstanbul.

**Osman:** Musician. He started making music in a *kom* in MKM. He has taken part in two different *koms*. He lives in İstanbul.

**Özgür:** Theater director. He used to be a part of MKM when it was founded. He has written most of the lyrics of Zazakî songs in early *kom* albums. He lives in İstanbul.

**Sinan:** Musician. He has another profession too. He started making music in a *kom* in HKD. Currently he is a solo musician. He lives in İstanbul.

**Yasemin:** Musician. She started making music in a *kom* in MKM. She has taken part in several different *koms*. Currently she is a solo musician. She is no longer a part of MKM. She lives in İstanbul.

**Zozan:** Musician. She started making music in a *kom* in MKM. She has taken part in two different *koms*. Currently she is a solo musician. She lives in İstanbul.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **A) PERSONAL INFORMATION**

- 1) Where were you born?
- 2) When/ how did you come to Istanbul?
- 3) Where/ When did you learn Kurdish?
- 4) When did you start identifying yourself as Kurdish? How did your ideas about the Kurdish identity shaped?
- 5) How did you start making music?
- 6) Did you receive musical education? Do you play an instrument?
- 7) What did you used to listen before making music?
- 8) Did you know about the previous Kurdish musicians before making music?

#### **B) CULTURE CENTERS**

- 9) Can you tell what kind of a period the 1990s were? Can you talk about the atmosphere in Istanbul?
- 10) What was the importance of culture for the Kurds during that period?
- 11) What did music mean to you during that period?
- 12) Why the need for culture centers was felt?
- 13) What has been the significance of culture centers?
- 14) How did you join the culture center? What was your motivation?
- 15) What kind of a structure was there in the culture centers? (hierarchical/ collective)

16) How was the learning process in the culture center?

17) How did the music branch work?

18) How was the relation of music branch with other branches?

### **C) GROUP MUSIC**

19) How was your group established? How and when did you join it?

20) Why did musicians prefer to make group music in 1990s? Why did you prefer?

21) Why do musicians prefer to make solo albums today? (If the musician is making music individually.) Why do you prefer to make music individually?

22) How was the structure in your group? (hierarchical/ collective)

23) How did you decide on the name of the group?

24) How do/ did you make the division of labour in your group?

25) How was the relation between different *koms* within MKM?

26) What made your music group different from other *koms*?

### **D) MUSIC AND POLITICS**

27) What was your motivation when you started making music?

28) Did you intend to give a message through music? If yes, what kind of a message was it?

29) Did you have a 'political mission'? How would you define your mission?

30) Were you inspired by political music in Turkey? (in Turkish and Kurdish)

31) How did your political stance change over the time? What was the affect of being a part of culture center/ *kom*?

32) How were the developments in the political realm reflected on music?

33) Did the music groups have an effect over the political realm?

34) How did you write the lyrics of songs with a political content? What were your sources of inspiration?

35) Why do you think direct political lyrics decreased in the *kom* albums after 2000s?

36) How was *koms'* attitude towards class politics?

37) Did the cultural realm become relatively independent from the political realm over the time?

38) Today the military conflict continues. Why the *koms* and MKM musicians do not make songs with direct political lyrics?

#### **E) 'KURDISH'NESS/ NATIONAL MUSIC**

39) What is 'Kurdish' music for you? Is there a difference between music in Kurdish and Kurdish music?

40) Did the music groups create a common language (musical/ in lyrics)?

41) Do you think *koms'* music was 'Kurdish music'?

42) Can we talk about a 'national' Kurdish music?

43) How did the *koms* affect the Kurdish music?

44) Did homogenization and standardization of Kurdish music occur?

45) What was the 'Kurdish' identity in your mind when you started making music? How did it change over the time?

46) How was *kom's* relation with the Kurdish identity in the beginning? Did this relation change over the time?

47) Do you have relations with Kurdish singing musicians in other places? (Iraq, Syria, Iran, Europe)

48) Is your music listened by other Kurdish speaking populations? Do you have such a desire?

#### **F) KURDISH FOLK MUSIC AND MODERNIZATION**

49) How did you research the Kurdish folk music?

50) How did you select among the folk songs collected?

51) Did you try to reach the 'original' versions of the folk songs?

52) What did you pay attention to when singing/ playing folk songs?

53) Did you pay attention to regional differences of the folk songs? (in terms of language/ different instruments that are used/ different voice techniques)

54) What kind of changes did you make in the musical structure?

55) How did you integrate Western harmony and instruments into the folk songs?

56) How did you approach the *makam* structure and monophony in Kurdish folk songs?

57) The music groups claim to modernize the Kurdish music? What do you think about this?

58) Some claim that the *koms* made 'urban' music. What do you think 'urban' music means? Would you agree with that statement?

59) How did your approach to folk music change with time?

60) Why do you think more weight is given to folk songs in albums after 2000s?

61) There are criticisms that the music groups saw the folk songs only as a source to be consumed. What do you think about these criticisms?

#### **E) LANGUAGE**

62) How would you evaluate the relation between music and language?

63) Why singing in Kurdish has been important for you?

64) How was *koms*' approach to Kurdish?

65) Did you make any changes in the lyrics of folk songs?

66) Did you keep the local dialects of the folk songs you collected?

67) Which dialect did/ do you use in your compositions?

68) Have you composed poems? How do you choose the poems?

69) How do you ensure that you use 'correct' Kurdish in your songs?

70) What do you think about the Şahiya Stranan project?

#### **F) CULTURAL AND GENDER DIFFERENCES**

71) How did the music groups approach the linguistic/ cultural/ religious differences

amongst the Kurdish population?

72) Why do you think it is important to sing in Zazakî/ Soranî?

73) How did the *koms* approach the gender differences?

74) How did women's existence in music groups affected *koms*' music?

75) Did being a woman in the culture centers and music groups meant a difference?  
(To female musicians)

76) What do you think about Koma Asmîn?

### **G) PRODUCTION OF ALBUMS/ MUSIC MARKET**

77) How was your relation with the music market in 1990s?

78) With the annulment of the ban over Kurdish, a Kurdish sector emerged in the music market. What do you think about this sector?

79) What do you think about the establishment of Kom Müzik?

80) In which direction do you think the Kurdish music market is evolving?

81) How did you finance your albums? How do you finance them now?

82) How do you contact the arrangers/ producers?

83) The arrangements in early *kom* albums are very similar to each other. How would you explain that?

84) How did the arrangements change over the time?

85) The variety of musical instruments increased over the time. Do you think this brought a change to the arrangements?

86) Do you have music videos? What do you think about the Kurdish music videos?

### **H) CONCERTS AND LISTENERS**

87) Did you have a target audience in your mind when making your albums?

88) How often do you have gigs? Where do you have them frequently? How are they arranged?

89) How were the concerts during the 1990s? How did they change with time?

90) How was the relation between the audiences? What did they expect from you?

91) What was the meaning of *koms'* music for the listeners in 1990s?

92) What did the listeners expect from the musicians in 1990s?

93) Did the audiences start to have different demands with the changes in 2000s?

94) Is the atmosphere of your current gigs different from that of 1990's?

#### **I) STATE'S REACTION**

95) What kind of legal repercussions of singing in Kurdish were you faced with?

96) Which strategies did you develop to deal with these?

97) What is the difference between 1990s and today in terms of state's reaction to your music?

98) What do you think about TRT Şeş?

#### **I) LAST WORDS:**

99) What do you think about the current situation of Kurdish music? What do you think about the newly emerging musicians?

100) How do you position yourself and your music regarding the changes in Kurdish music as well as Kurdish question?

## APPENDIX C:

### LIST OF *KOMS* AND ALBUMS<sup>180</sup>

- Agire Jiyan, *Adarê*, 1996  
Agirê Jiyan, *Hêlîn*, 1999  
Çar Newa, *Zîz*, 2007  
Koma Amed, *Kulîlka Azadî*, 1990  
Koma Amed, *Dergûş*, 1997  
Koma Azad, *Bihuştî Min*, 2001  
Koma Çiya, *Dilana Bêsînor*, 1995  
Koma Çiya, *Venamire*, 1999  
Koma Çiya, *Xêlî*, 2004  
Koma Dengê Azadî, *Hêvî*, 1991  
Koma Dengê Azadî, *Welatê Min*, 1995  
Koma Gulên Xerzan, *Sonda Me*, 1994  
Koma Gulên Xerzan, *Rûkena Min*, 2005  
Koma Mezrabotan, no album could be accessed  
Koma Rewşen, *Çiyayê Bêzar*, 1998  
Koma Rojhilat, *Mezrabotan'ım Ez*, 1997  
Vengê Sodrî, *Wayîr*<sup>181</sup>, 2001

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<sup>180</sup> Not all albums of the *koms* included in the sample could be accessed. The list consists of the albums whose lyrics were analyzed with the exception of Koma Mezrabotan and Vengê Sodrî. These groups are listed here to indicate that they are included in the sample and their members are interviewed.

<sup>181</sup> Lyrics were not analyzed.