

# OZAN<sup>1</sup> AND DENGBEJ:<sup>2</sup> THE LOST VOICES OF ORAL TRADITION IN TURKEY

Ozan ve Dengbêj: Türkiye'de Sözlü Geleneğin Kaybedilen Sesleri

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## ABSTRACT

Since the Grimm Brothers, folklore studies returned to respectability through the second half of nineteenth and twentieth century to uncover, decipher and save the folkloric remains including the oral traditions. But, as the first decades of the new millennium are being scribbled, the 'modern new' versus the 'needless old' is still burning in the back burner, and is, unfortunately, eroding the original, authentic and traditional 'lore'. The creators of insatiable modern culture are also the directors of the ambiguous route of consumerist culture that encourage societies to condone the residue of authentic traditional tissues that have vital social and psychological communicational functions on folk groups and individuals. The "Ozans" and "Dengbêjes" have been the performers of Turkish and Kurdish oral literatures in Turkey until the last decades of the twentieth century, but, are face to face with the danger of being extinct, because of the new technological innovations that let the audience have the advantage of being able to access the recorded replicas. Besides, the consumerist life style has made the individuals so busy that they would not attempt to attend any traditional oral performance as it was 'once upon a time', because they have the alternative of watching them at any time, any place they like. For hundreds of years, the "Oral Tradition" of Anatolia has been represented and performed by Ozan-s and Dengbêj-es who are live archives and performer artists of oral culture; the last representatives of Anatolian oral folklore.

In this paper, it is aimed to bring forth and discuss the social role of Ozan-s and dengbêj-es, and illustrate the possible reasons of their loss of value and audience.

**Key Words:** Ozan, Aşık, Dengbêj, Turkish Oral Tradition, Kurdish Oral Tradition

## ÖZET

Grimm Kardeşler'den bu yana, folklor çalışmaları, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısı ve yirminci yüzyıl boyunca, sözlü gelenekler de dahil olmak üzere, folklorik kalıntıları ortaya çıkarmak, deşifre etmek ve korumak adına önem kazandı. Ancak, yeni binyılın ilk yirmi yılı karanlıkken, 'modern yeni, gereksiz eskiye karşı' anlayışı arka planda işlevini sürdürmeye devam ediyor ve maalesef orijinal, özgün ve geleneksel olan "loru" erozyona uğrıyor. Modern kültürün doyumsuz yaratıcıları ve tüketim kültürünün belirsiz rotasının yöneticileri, toplum, halk grupları ve bireyler üzerinde hayati sosyal ve psikolojik iletişim işlevlerine sahip olan otantik ve geleneksel doku kalıntılarının kayboluşuna göz yummaya teşvik ediyor. "Ozanlar" ve "Dengbêjler", yirminci yüzyılın son yıllarına kadar Türkiye'deki Türk ve Kürt sözlü geleneğinin icracılarıydı, ancak, izleyicinin kaydedilen kopyalara erişebilme avantajına sahip olmasını sağlayan teknolojik yenilikler nedeniyle, varlıkları tükenme tehlikesiyle karşı karşıyadır. Ayrıca, tüketici yaşam tarzı bireyleri o denli meşgul etti ki, herhangi bir geleneksel sözlü performans, bir zamanlar olduğu gibi, katılmaya gayret etmemektedirler, çünkü istedikleri zaman ve istedikleri yerde izleme alternatifine sahiptirler. Yüzlerce yıldır Anadolu'daki "Sözlü Gelenek", sözlü kültürün icracı sanatçıları ve canlı arşivleri olan Ozanlar ve Dengbêjler tarafından temsil edilmiş ve icra edilmiştir; bu sanatçılar, Anadolu sözlü folklorunun son temsilcileridir.

Bu çalışmada amaç, Ozanlar ve Dengbêjlerin sosyal rolünü inceleyerek, tartışmak ve değer ve izleyici kaybının olası nedenlerini göstermektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ozan, Aşık, Dengbêj, Türk Sözlü Geleneği, Kürt Sözlü Geleneği

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relation of the 'word' with the beginning of creation is underlined in the *Bible* as; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (King James, Chp. I.; 1. 1262). Here, the definition "in the beginning" seems to imply a dimension beyond the humane notion of time and space; but it does contain the message that *utterance* is fundamental within the curriculum of creation. Albert B. Lord proposes that "in the history of mankind words were heard before they were seen" and argues that "even those who have learned to visualize words as containing particular letters in a particular sequence,

<sup>1</sup> "Ozan" corresponds to "bard", "troubadour", "minstrel" in Western culture. "Ozan" or "Aşık" can be defined as Turkish coffee-house bards, village bards or traveler minstrels.

<sup>2</sup> In Kurdish Oral Literature "Dengbêj" stands for "bard", "troubadour" or "minstrel"; like "Ozan" or "Aşık"; they are coffee-house bards, village bards or traveler minstrels.

continue to operate much of the time with the heard, and hence the spoken, word” (Lord, 1991: 15). The essence of ‘orality’ can be considered as untouched, for the ‘written words’ distance the speaker and the listener and eliminate the live interaction of face-to-face communication. Walter J. Ong assesses that “human society first formed itself with the aid of oral speech,” and identifies “the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print” as ‘primary orality’, (Ong, 2002: 29) and the one that “has been affected by high-technology culture as ‘secondary orality’” (Foley, 1986: 1, Ong, 2002: 29). It seems that human ‘word’ has been interrupted by “secondary” means of communication, and that documentation has gained more importance than the speakers’ firsthand interaction. Havelock outlines that “documentation” is the means of “literate societies” while “pre-literate ones achieve the same result by the composition of poetic narratives which serve also as encyclopedias of conduct” (Havelock, 1978: 3-29). The authenticity of these “encyclopedias” triggered “the Brothers Grimm” who “were anxious that ‘the buried gold’ of oral tradition should be brought to light and preserved” (Ruth, 1971: 266). The researchers of the historical map of world literature, Hector and Nora Chadwick, go one step further, in their comprehensive work *The Growth of Literature* (1932) and argue that “oral literature is universal, and possesses great vitality” (Chadwick, 2010: 14). Today, the cultural curriculum of Modern life is anesthetizing the individuals, preventing them to live and feel the authentic taste of the ancient folkloric archive.

The term ‘Modern’ was expected to be a positive and exciting definition of civilized world until the Two World Wars, which ended with tremendous human loss and dire economic and sociocultural consequences. “Europe had not seen mass death on such a scale since the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century. Millions of people perished, not to mention the destruction of material assets in a wave of violence that finally came to a cataclysmic end in 1945” (Berghahn, 2005: 7). The lesson was that neither religious teachings nor philosophical principles and promised norms of civilization could secure the world from the egoist greed of the human in power. The human history of materialistic enlightenment has proved that whenever there has been a new phase of economical innovation, the human himself has been the victim. The “historical fact that the consumer society was born of the Industrial Age” that “indebted to war, dispossession, and exploitation” is a striking example. (Selimovic, 2017: 12) The reasoning of Selimovic’s claim is quite explicit; industrial products need a society that demands, buys, consumes and wants more; and to guarantee the continuity of this economical wheel, “war, dispossession and exploitation” seem to be the best mechanism of creating the so called demand. Besides “these seemingly capricious and changing consumer wants, desires or needs, the structure of consumer society drives production, generates employment and wealth, and brings about **cultural changes**”<sup>3</sup> (Martinez, 2015: xv). In other words, the “consumer” label of Industrial Age, - creating ‘adhesive materialistic lethargy’ - is not only consuming the presently created transient values, but also consuming or neglecting the authentic archive culture(s) and traditions that for hundreds of years have been live inter-communication tissues of society.

The cultural change created by ‘adhesive materialistic lethargy’ also causes the obsolescence of authentic culture and negligence of ancient social traditions which bring about the question “whether it is possible for people to express their species being,” because “no one is totally in control or totally controlled; totally humanized or become more fully human” (Martinez, 2015: 25). The literature of the period reflects the reality of social, psychological and cultural erosion, which proves to be the opposite of what had been expected from the so called civilization of Modern era. James Farr summarizes the general content and mood of Modernist literature as follows:

Modernist literature came to maturity in the 1920s, but its dominant themes and concerns were already becoming evident in novels, poems, and plays of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Growing social unrest, which was signaled by unprecedented strikes among industrial workers and the spread of political anarchism, evoked moods of decadence, pessimism, and nostalgia for a more unified and meaningful past. Moreover, in the literature of the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, one can sense an apocalyptic tone and a foreboding that civilization is coming to an end. (Farr, 2002: 76)

Farr’s focus on the expectations of civilization – “coming to an end” – and “nostalgia for a more unified and meaningful past” sheds light on the core of the acquisitions and losses of the period. The music of the time was also a mirror to show the increasing angle between the patron-producers and the consumers:

<sup>3</sup> My emphasis.

The dissonance, discord, and atonality that marked much of the emergent Modernist music did not appeal to mass audiences... Late in the nineteenth century many great, elaborate concert halls were constructed for performances of “serious” music by the increasingly professional and prestigious orchestras. At the same time, many working-class neighborhoods had music halls for the performance of “popular” music. This growing separation correlated to the class divisions that had taken hold in nineteenth-century industrial society. (Farr, 2002: 79)

Farr’s explorations on the literature and music of Modernist era take us to the deduction that the victims of both materialist and cultural domain of consumerist conspiracy are the middle and lower class members. On the one hand, even though they play their roles, as members of consumerist society, it is not possible to keep pace with the speed of “the new”; on the other, they are the ones who have lost the values of a “more unified and meaningful past,” because the cultural norms and traditions that were “meaningful” and “unifying” are changing hand with the newly created ambiguous ones.

Modern Turkey is one of the practitioner countries that follows European understanding of consumerist society where the same cultural erosion is observable in traditions that are the reflections of authentic folklore. “*Folklore*” is a definition that emphasizes two important aspects of a society. “*Folk*” is the creator and owner of an authentic “*lore*”; and “*lore*” is not something produced to be consumed, it is the whole archive living-culture created by the “*folk*”; it is comprised of the cultural values that help a society exist. It is alive, has historical roots and belongs to every individual member of a folk, not a certain class. Dundes defines “folk” as “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one linking factor,” and indicates that “we all are folk” — whether urban or rural, young or old, religious or secular” (Bronner, 2007: 54). This definition amplifies Farr’s emphasis on what the Modern society longed for. Folkloric values such as ‘Oral Traditions’ embrace and “unify” the whole society, rather than dividing the “folk” into classes as the ‘consumerist society’ has adopted.

In Modern Turkey, the “Ozan and Dengbêj” culture is now mentioned with the nostalgic introductory expression “Once Upon a Time”. The tradition is losing its social function of bringing the ‘folk’ together and letting them share the values that make them feel belong to. And, the performers of the “Oral Tradition” - “Ozan-s and Dengbêj-es” – do not have the hope of earning their life by fulfilling their profession. Their voices are fading day by day, because as members of consumerist society, the individuals are trying to keep up with the programmed-life of earning and consuming, and changing whenever the program enforces them to. The focus in this research is upon the aspects inherent in ‘oral performances’ common to society whether with absent ‘literacy’ or literate background, and the social conditions that cause the fading voices of ‘oral tradition’ performers; Ozan-s and Dengbêj-es. The initial examination is about the historical context of Turkish and Kurdish oral tradition. The aşık and dengbêj cultures as oral tradition are analyzed and illustrated under a subtitle. Thirdly, the social functions of the performers, Ozan-s and Dengbêj-es, are discussed. And finally, the article is concluded with discussing social and cultural consequences.

## 2. THE TURKISH ORAL TRADITION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The traces of oral traditions of Turks, today studied as the oral tradition of Bards (Aşık, Ozan, Halk Şairi), goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Chadwick<sup>4</sup> quotes “the historian Priscus’ visit to Attila, king of the Huns, in the year 448. “This report,” is asserted to be “the first historical document of the oral tradition in Turkish culture”. Priscus’ description of the oral presentation is as follows:

When evening came on torches were lighted and two barbarians stepped forth in front of Attila and recited poems which they had composed, recounting his victories and his valiant deeds in war. The banqueters fixed their eyes upon them, some being charmed with the poems, while others were roused in spirit, as the recollection of their wars came back to them. Others again burst into tears, because their bodies were enfeebled by age and their martial ardour had perforce to remain unsatisfied. (Chadwick, 1932- 40: Vol. I, 575-576)

Priscus had reported a touching social aura of oral tradition that has representatives even in the 21st century. Parker E. Harper, in *The Origin of the Turks* (1896) certifies that “... the Turks, when they first took the national name Türk, were of Hiung-nu [or Hun] origin, a name they took from the mountains known as ‘Golden Mountains’ of which they lived along the slopes” (Harper, 1896; 436). The Turkish

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Chadwick from K. Miiller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, iv. 92.

Oghuz [Oğuz] tribes were ruling in the area of the lower Jaxartes (Syr Darya), in the vicinity of the Aral Sea by the tenth century, and the Seljuks [Selçuklu] dynasties were the heirs of the Oghuz and belonged to the large family of Turkic-speaking peoples, which today stretches from the Yakuts of north-eastern Siberia to the Turks of Turkey. Turkish Seljuks made their first inroads into Asia Minor; under their sultan Alp Arslan they took Caesarea (modern Kayseri in central Anatolia) in 1067. In 1071 they defeated a Byzantine army in Manzikert (Manâzgird) north of Lake Van, a victory that marked the beginning of the Turkish conquest of Anatolia. In 1299, Osman I, leader of a Turkish warrior group in the service of the Rum Seljuks, declared himself sultan and founded the Ottoman dynasty. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Ottomans had become the dominant Turkish power in Anatolia and had established an empire which would rule over a large part of the Middle East and southeastern Europe until its final collapse after the end of World War I. (Reichl, 2012: 681)

From Central Asia the Turks brought their language, their way of life and their culture, and also their poetry and music. At its roots their culture was that of a nomadic tribal society, and their poetry **of an oral society**<sup>5</sup>. This nomadic culture continued in some areas of Central Asia into the present age, and oral poetry has played an important role in Turkey too. (Reichl, 2012; 682) The *Book of Dede Korkut* (15<sup>th</sup> Century) is considered to be a central text not only for the Turks of Turkey and Azerbaijan, but also of Central Asia. It included the narratives of the deeds of the Turkish Oghuz tribes, and institutionalized “the oral tradition” in written literature” (Başgöz, 2001; 230). Ozan “had an important role in organizing and presenting the heroic stories and king praises of the warriors accompanied by music during the celebration ceremonies of the Oghuz Turks” (Köprülü, 1934: 273-292) The “war-like deeds, legendary stories that at least in part had some basis in history were in all twelve narratives of *Dede Korkut*” (Reichl, 2012: 690).

*Dede* and *ata* are terms of respect, used when referring to saintly persons; he is a scholar character outside the plot of the epic-tales; a chronicler, an authority who confirms and compliments on the good deeds of the heroes fighting with evil. He narrates and composes poetry; he also plays the *qopuz*, a lute, and presumably sings. He appears at certain phases of the narratives as a wise counselor of the society with saintly behavior and practitioner. Dede Korkut is a singer (ozan); this is explicitly stated when it is said that ‘the ozan speaks from the tongue of Dede Korkut’.<sup>31</sup> He is a bard, but a bard of special importance and capability; a vizier or counselor, a bard and oral chronicler, and an exceptional figure of ethical authority. (689)

From the “Huns” to the Turkish Republic of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Turkish dynasties has left an “Oral Tradition” folklore which is performed by Ozans/ Âşık; and has become a culture that contains master-apprentice institution. As an institution it includes many literary and social aspects that play a vital role on the life and development of oral and written language, culture and social interaction that has messages of didactic lessons, entertainment, humor, history and folklore that fed the folk both socially and psychologically.

### 3. OZAN / ÂŞIK CULTURE AS ORAL TRADITION

Ozan culture, having its folkloric context from ancient Turkish tribes, even before written documentation, has developed into a culture that is presented through traditional performances by bards, minstrels of troubadours with a joined name Ozan. The oral literary inheritance of Turkish ancestors was developed into several inter-related titles during the reign of the Seljuk and the Ottoman dynasties; such as Badeli-Âşık, Âşık, Ozan, Halk Ozanı, Halk Şairi, Hak Ozanı, Meydan Şairi, Sazlı Ozan, Saz Şairi, Çöğür Şairi; which are all within the thematic frame of oral literature. Among these traditional names, “Âşık and Ozan are the most commonly preferred titles” in twentieth century. (Oğuz, 1994: 19) In fact, these definitions have some procedural nuances of the process when the candidate bards or minstrels are trained, or learn and practice to achieve the traditional title, Ozan or Âşık. The word Âşık (an Arabic loan-word) means ‘lover’ and underlines the important role that love (divine and worldly) plays in their poetry. A classical ‘Badeli-Âşık’, for instance, is the one who starts his profession (Âşıklık) with a dream, where a saintly person or a messenger appears to him and offers him a spiritual cup of a drink that has the function of putting him in an upgraded sense of cognition, activating his skills and abilities of literary muse. A second variation of ‘Badeli-Âşık’ is that the candidate ‘âşık’ meets with his unique love in his dream, and lives a picaresque life in search of his dream love.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> For details; Günay, Umay. (1999) *Âşık Tarzı Şiir Geleneği ve Rüya Motifi* Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara



The common aspects of Âşiks can be specified as follows: 1- âşık must have an audible voice; a voice that has a musical quality that would attract the audience/listeners. 2- He must have the literary muse or the ability of using language or words according to the needed principles of the profession. 3- He must have an ardent love, willing desire, meticulous attitude, and patient challenge for this profession. 4- He must have a powerful memory to keep the archival repertoire of the master-âşiks, and the necessary musical knowledge to be used when/where necessary. 5- He must be someone who has mastered the art of playing ‘saz’; it must be noted that ‘âşıklık’ – the profession of being a bard – has specific musical compositions (makam), and techniques (usul) that are obligatory to be mastered by a candidate. 6- He must have the ability of reciting poems extemporaneously. 7- He must know the ethical principles of attending âşiks-meetings (âşıklar divanı), and the art of dual performance of âşiks (atışma), which contain humor, puzzles, and many other specific devices that test the knowledge and skills of rival âşık. 8- He must have a low-hearted and virtuous personality. 9- He must always be well and clean-clothed, as he will be addressing an audience paying attention to such details.

Considering the living environment of the minstrels and the major theme they focused on, Başgöz classifies the minstrel schools into five categories: 1. Religion and Sufi Poets, 2. Peasant Poets, 3. Town and City Poets, 4. Janissary Poets, and 5. Nomadic Poets. (Başgöz, 1968: 9) The fact that the oral tradition has had a developing process both in content and in various representative sub-branches, is a proof both of its vitality and richness and of its demanding populace. In addition to above classification, the âşiks may also be classified according to the historical periods they lived, the scope of their artistic features, the specific folk they address and the major theme they focus on. There are figures that have exceeded national borders, such as Pir Sultan Abdal; while there are ozans who belong to a certain tribal community, such as Dadaloğlu.

The master-apprentice period was one of the inevitable initial training doors into ozanlık. A master feels responsible to train new candidate ozans, thus, he will be transferring the content, principles and ethics of the art of doth oral tradition and of performance. The preference of a master and choice of a candidate is not casual. To decide about his master, a candidate ozan will have to consider the harmoniousness of his voice with the master's, besides standing loyal to the schedule determined by the master. As to the master, he has the privilege to look for some aspects of the candidate ozan. He would like to train a candidate who has a personality, character, artistic skills and self esteem of someone to be trained. The candidate must have a background of knowledge of what it means to be ozan, and an experience of playing the “saz/bağlama” (lute); for it is not like a student who starts the primary school education. The candidate is expected to have good voice, a willing desire, a patient struggle, a powerful memory and the ability of extemporaneous performance. Once accepted, the progress rate of the candidate will be decisive about the future of apprenticeship. The master will be teaching him all necessary forms of oral tradition, besides all the details of artistic and ethical principles of performance including mastering the accompaniment of his saz, which is a modified form of ‘kopuz’.<sup>7</sup> The candidate ozan is permitted to attend the âşık-performances at “âşıklar-divanı”, if the master believes that the candidate ozan has reached the necessary level of knowledge and performance. The candidate âşık is a source of pride for the master, a branch of the folkloric tree of oral tradition who is responsible for growing new branches. The final fruit is the success of “building a bridge between the past and future on behalf of creating a collective consciousness” (Boratav, 1968: 342)

The process of training is followed by the phase of giving a pseudonym; which is fulfilled with a specific traditional ceremony that has remained from the earlier âşık generations. Generally the master is honored to give a pseudonym, but there are cases that the trained âşık is allowed to find a pseudonym himself or the audience or the listeners find an appropriate one. When trying to find an appropriate pseudonym, several contextual features might be taken into consideration: Âşık might take his pseudonym from his hometown, such as “Erzurumlu Emrah”; his pseudonym might be a symbol of his low-heartedness; such as “Âşık Fakiri”; it might be taken from his dominant theme; such as “Âşık Dertli”; it might be taken from his surname, such as “Çobanoğlu”; it might be taken from tribal identity, such as “Dadaloğlu”; it might be taken from his dominant ability, such as “Katibi”; it might be taken from the religious sect he belongs to, such as “Pir Sultan Abdal”; it be taken from a symbolic inspiration from natura, such as “Reyhani”,

<sup>7</sup> “Kopuz” is accepted as the father of “saz/bağlama”, but the “kemençe” is also used by some âşiks, especially in Black Sea region of Anatolia.

“Çağları”; it might be taken from an important incident happened in his family, such as “Köroğlu”, or simply the name and surname of might be used, such as “Şeref Taşlıova”.

When compared with Kurdish literature, Turkish Oral literature has got the advantage of having a live and developing written language and documentation. Heroic epics, romantic picaresque epics, didactic, humorous or tragic folk tales, and lyric poems of âşiks have created an archive of “âşık literature” as a branch of Folklore Studies. (Boratav, 1968: 340) Köprülü also identifies the oral literary forms produced in this style as “âşık poetry” (Köprülü, 1962: 29). But although the oral literary products are documented and preserved in written texts, âşiks are expected to memorize them, because the power of memory is accepted as an important aspect of âşık. Live performance from memory empowers the effect of the ‘word’ on the audience, and is a sign of self-reliance and mastery of putting the theoretical oral art into practice. Another factor which must be underlined here is the ingeniousness of playing the saz; the musical partner of ‘word’ and ‘voice’. The saz is adding an aesthetic feature to the performance and functioning as a means of empowering the effect of ‘word’, capturing the attention of audience and letting the ozan to pick up the appropriate expressions within the memorial store. (Durbilmez, 2010: 157) Consequently, ozan is commemorated with saz and “the accompaniment of saz is a vital aspect in Turkish oral tradition” (Boratav, 1968: 340).

Âşiks are considered to be the masters of extemporaneous presentation, which depends on ability, experience and the large memory store of knowledge they have been achieving. During the dual performances (atışma) of âşiks, usually the âşık higher in the rank, considering the age and experience starts with a certain melody (ayak açma/verme) that determines the rest of dual performance. The âşık who joins the extemporaneous dual has to follow the melody determined by the master âşık, designing his words, expressions and the technical rhyming of the performance accordingly. Âşiks’ welcoming-performances (karşılama) have some subtitles which can be defined as follows; “welcoming” (hoşlama), “remembering” (hatırlama), “advising” (öğütme), “puzzle solving” (muamma), “informing” (sicilleme), “satire” (taşlama), “chasing” (kovalama), “reciting” (tekellüm), “phrasing” (deyişme), “dual reciting” (atışma) and “expostulating” (karşıberi), “reduction” (daraltma), “seeing off” (uğurlama), “style following” (nazire yapma) “I said-he/she said style” (dedim-dedi tarzı),<sup>8</sup> all these variations are different extemporaneous âşık styles of oral performances that prove the mastery of performers depending on the reflections of the audience.

One of the major oral narrative forms that an Ozan performs is epic, *destan* borrowed from Persian “dastan”. The word epic is used for both anonymous folk narratives and as a genre in Turkish âşık tradition. Destan has a social context that reflects the folkloric, cultural, ecclesiastical, and ethical values of the period as well as giving a probable chronological setting of time. The protagonist of the heroic epic usually has extraordinary power to use against the antagonist rival; the antagonist may be nature, a storm, a hurricane a fire, or a flood for instance; it may be a giant with supernatural physical body and powers, such as an underground beast, a two or many headed snake; or it may be a rival chevalier representing the evil side. The major theme of an epic may deal with social, cultural, economical, educational, political, religious or ethical, natural or ecological relations human; such as famine, migration, war, natural disasters, and heroic deeds of a brave man. Ozan, while performing the epic, may stay loyal to the former oral stylistic principles, episodic structures and musical melodies or he may compose and present it with his own style. With exciting, sentimental, fluent and touching plots, epics remind us the ancestral folklore and somehow the present generations find something that they feel belong to and become happy.

The *Dede Korkut* Ozans have changed into travelling âşiks who recite epics, fairy tales, folk tales and stories (hikâye). Many of hikâyes have real contexts, but they do have epic elements and their episodic plots have been adapted and transformed into to the tastes and mentality of the time; inevitably, these artistic oral forms have been affected by social and cultural contexts. Hikâyes are narratives that contain regional, national or international folklore, traditions, customs, mythological and historical symbols, religious and ethical norms, the nostalgic culture, presented by performances whit harmonized ‘words’ and ‘music’, maintaining auras of social interaction and communication. Many of these tales have multinational contexts; such as Turkish, *Kerem ile Ashi*, *Köroğlu*, *Ercişli Emrah ile Selvihan*; Persian,

<sup>8</sup> The translated definitions are probable translations, for the expressions are cultural and not translatable, and could only be understood by participating in the performances.

Indian and Arabic *Yusuf ile Züleyha*, *Leyla ile Mecnun*. Hikâyes were recited by “meddah-s”<sup>9</sup> in the past, but âşiks have taken over this oral activity performing them interchangeably both in verse and prose forms. Oral folk tales are also sample narratives which reflect intercultural relations and the living conditions of different nations; often, the plot is centered on the struggle between good and evil, so the heroes of different nations may collaborate for the sake of the victory of the good. Today, unfortunately, this oral form has come to the stage of extinction.

Âşık would not reject his audience for the appropriateness of ‘place’, but there are certain places that âşiks fulfill their live performances; âşık coffee houses, khans, village rooms, mentions, houses or ceremonial platforms are the places where âşiks and their audience meet. The oral tradition has certain rules for the Audience; as a sign of respect and interest the audience has to listen to the âşiks in tranquility, which has a tremendous effect on the concentration of the performers. Usually a listener would not leave the place after the performance has started. As a sign of interest and attendance, the listeners are allowed to use expressions that will exhilarate the motivation of the performer. Personal untimely exclamations will not be appropriate during the performances. The place of performance has become one of the major problems of oral tradition today.

The traveler âşık usually leaves far from his homeland (gurbet): For the classical “dream- âşık the reason was his ‘lover’ he was shown in his dream; for a modern âşık of 20<sup>th</sup> century it is a way of life to make a living; this theme is among the major themes of his lyric poems; he often complains about it, and accuses the fate or destiny (felek). As an outcome of his travels, âşık plays the role of a newsagent; he shares the news of one region with the audiences of the other. In a way, he is a chronicler, reflecting the important social and historical events, often giving the exact dates in Hegira, Gregorian or Julian calendar including day, month, year, sometimes adding the hour; with a pleasant style that goes with the composition of the text.

Including folkloric relics, religious teachings, philosophical views, ethical principles and social norms, culture has a significant effect on the art of a society. Turkish culture has not had the tolerance of letting women âşiks to flourish within Turkish society. Consequently, women âşiks are rare within patriarchal Turkish society. There seems to be some cultural, religious, ethical and social reservations of a woman âşık to take part in the performances of masculine âşık groups. Despite all prejudices, there have been women âşiks in different regions of Anatolia.

Oral tradition has got a function of constructing communicational ties between different ethnic societies, even with those who have different religious beliefs and cultures. Music is accepted to be the universal language of art, and the artist’s choice of language is closely related with his living conditions and personal preference, not forgetting the effects of the dominant language. There has been Armenian âşiks in Turkish oral tradition who are called “aşuğ”, and have certainly contributed to the tradition with their authentic lyric poems and special taste and mood of performance.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. THE KURDISH ORAL TRADITION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Michael Eppel in his article “The Kurdish Emirates” claims that the major Kurdish tribal dynasties were the Hasanwahids (Hasanwiya) (959–1095), Banu Annaz (Annazids) (990–1116), Shaddadid (951–1075), and Banu Marwan (Marwanids) (984–1083)” (Gunter, 2019: 37). However, Dr. A. Ghassemlou explains that historians and scientists affirm that the Kurds were from the stock of the Zagros tribes. Another claim refuted by Modern studies is that the name of “al Akrad / Kurds” with the tribal name *Kardouchoi* was used by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*; which alludes for a warlike people [the Kurds] living in the mountainous country on the left bank of the upper Tigris; in the Zakho gorge. For Ghassemlou the most plausible theory of Kurds origin is that they were the descendants of the Medes who conquered Nineveh in 612 BC. The Medes were Aryan people closely related to the Persians, with whom they shared a largely common heritage and customs. (Aboona, 2008: 89) Sharaf Khan al Bidlisi, wrote about the history of the Kurdish emirates in *Sharafnama* (1597), and lists the major emirates of his day, mainly in southern and eastern Mesopotamia as, Hakkari, Soran, Baban, Ardalán, Bidlis, Chizire (Cizire, al-Jazira), Bahdinan (Bhadinan), Muks, and Chemiskezek in Dersim. He also mentions the emirate of Hasankeyf, whose emirs

<sup>9</sup> Meddah: (noun) Arabic 1. The artist who imitates and entertains the public by telling a pleasant story. 2. Someone who praises excessively. (Parlatir, 1998; 1523)

<sup>10</sup> For more information check; Köprülü, 1999; Banarlı, 2002; Pamukçıyan, 2002.



had accepted the suzerainty of the Turkmen White Sheep [Akkoyunlu] tribal confederation in 1455. (Gunter, 2019: 37)

In the eleventh century, the Seljuk sultanate maintained a major force in the Muslim world. The Kurdish emirates and dynasties were either submitted to the Seljuk rulers or incorporated into their political arenas. The prominent Kurdish dynasty that were known as Muslim fighters under Seljuk rule was the Ayyubi dynasty of Salah al-Din al Ayyubi (1137–1193) (Gunter, 2019: 37) The Seljuks were also the first large wave to head to Mesopotamia and, while crossing Azerbaijan, they were joined by the Kurds, and were rewarded for their services; which means the Seljukian occupation of Mesopotamia in 1055 achieved important consequences for the country and its indigenous inhabitants. They were the first ruling dynasty to distribute agricultural land to their Kurdish supporters, both to keep them loyal and to induce them to join forces in subjecting the people. (Aboona, 2008: 94) Although the Kurdish emirates experienced varying degrees of autonomy, they continued to work collaboratively with successive Muslim overlords – the Abbasid, Seljuk, Turkmen, Ottoman, and Iranian (Safavid and Qajar) states and dynasties. (Gunter, 2019: 37)

The empowered relation of Kurds with the Ottoman Empire was a Muslim brotherhood of alliance against Shah İsmail's shia invasion. Sultan Selim I. succeeded in directing Idris al Bidlisi to persuade the Sunni Kurds against the Safavid Shi'a: twenty-five Kurdish leaders and their followers participated in the Battle of Chaldiran on 23 August 1514, and the sultan rewarded them by allowing them to occupy the newly gained territories along the western Persian border of northeastern Iraq. The alliance between the Ottoman sultan and the Kurdish leaders shows that for the next 150 years, the Kurds kept their commitment towards the Ottomans. (Aboona, 2008: 100) Consequently, "the Kurdish population has been living in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria; and they have been trying to adopt the dominant Turkish, Persian and Arab cultures," as well as challenging to keep Kurdish alive, their native language. (Blau, 2010: 1)

Kurdish belongs to the Iranian group of the Indo-European family of languages. D. N. MacKenzie, classifies the Kurdish dialects as follows:

The dialects of the northern group, generally called Kurmancî (or Badînanî in Iraq) are spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Syria, the former USSR, and by some Iraqi and Iranian Kurds. The dialect of northeast Iraq is called Soranî. The neighboring dialects of Iranian region are called Mokrî, Kordî or Sene'î, while the southern group includes the heterogeneous dialects spoken in Ilâm, Kermânshâh and Lorestân. (MacKenzie 1961: 62)

Lokman Meho's identification of the dialects of Kurdish falls into two main groups; Kurmancî and Pahlawanî group. He claims that, Kurmancî dialect is spoken by more than 75 percent of the Kurds and is composed of two major branches; Kurmancî (or Bahdînanî, North Kurmancî) and Soranî, (or Central Kurmancî). The Pahlawanî group, Meho argues, is spoken by the rest of the Kurds, which is also composed of two major branches: Dimilî (or Zaza or Hawramî) and Goranî (or Kermanshahî or South Kurmancî). (Meho, Maglaughlin, 2001: 5-6) Hasan Arfa also agrees that the most widely used dialect of the Kurdish language with regional accents is the Kurmancî, and Lorî (Lurî) is the dialect spoken by the Lorî and Bahtiyar Kurds, while Goranî is spoken in Kirmanşah and Zaza (Dimilî) in the north. (Arfa, 2006: 9)

Depending on historical, geographical, social, economical and political reasons, illiteracy was widespread in Kurds until the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kurdish literature, especially in Kurmanjî (Northern Kurdish), remains oral. This is not to say that Kurdish society is at a "pre-literate" level, with a uniform "oral" world-view prevailing over all those who have no reading skills. (Allison, 2010: 35) But there has always been a small educated and intellectual group, who wrote in the dominant languages of period, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, as well as in the native language Kurdish. Among the well known figures of Kurdish classical literature; Malâyê Jezîrî (1570–1640), who knew Arabic, Persian and Turkish, left a *Divân* (collection of poems) which includes over two thousand verses, and his qasides and ghazals remain popular and are still taught in the madreses" (Blau, 2010: 5). Mohammad of Miks, known as Feqîyê Teyran (The Birds' Jurist, 1590–1660), wrote *Hekayeta Sheikhe Senhani* (The Story of Sheikh San'ân), *Qewlê hespê Resh* (The Poem of the Black Courser), *Qeseya Barsiyayi* (The Story of Bersis), and an elegy on the death of his master Malâyê Jezîrî. (Kreyenbroek, 2010: 6) Ahmadê Khânî (1650–1707) was a mystical poet and philosopher who wrote *Mem û Zîn*, based on the popular romance *Memê Alân*. Roger Lescot's evaluation of *Mem û Zîn*, is as follows:



In the 17th century, when Ehmedê Xanî tried to raise his maternal Kurmancî to the rank of a literary language, by composing a purely Kurdish inspiration, he took *Memî Alan* as the theme... Xanî's mathnavî never succeeded in replacing the popular version, transmitted by the illiterate dengbêj (troubadours), ... We are therefore in the presence of two independent poems, of spirit, style, and sometimes entirely different content, the Mêmê Alan of storytellers, and the Mem û Zîn of Xanî, which recounts the tale of the pure love of Prince Mem and Princess Zin. (Lescot, 1942: v)

The literature of the great majority of Kurds, of peasants and both sedentary and nomadic pastoralists was transmitted orally by the dengbêjes of Kurdish oral tradition as an alternative to the written documentation signified above by Lescot. These "illiterate dengbêjes" were protected by Mirs (or Emirs) who headed the tribes and the tribal, quasi-feudal principalities or emirates of Kurds in the pre-modern era. (Gunter, 2019: 37) The dengbêjes who recite the Kurdish oral tradition in Kurmancî are the basic focus of this study.

## 5. DENGEBÊJ CULTURE AS ORAL TRADITION

Throughout centuries the Kurdish social history has maintained a distinctive folklore by a structurally tribal social form that shared Kurdish Language with several dialects as a key to excess that folklore. The folklore, culture and traditional contexts are vital constructive domains of both written and oral Kurdish literature. The tribal structure of Kurdish societies and the neighborhood with different cultures such as Turkish, Arabic and Persian, have contributed to the Kurdish oral culture in becoming more inclusive and creative. Kurdish communities lived alongside Christians, Jews and Turkmen, speakers of Armenian, neo-Aramaic, and Turkish dialects. Not only did these languages share many oral traditions with Kurdish, but many members of minority groups spoke impeccable Kurdish, and some have been recorded performing Kurdish oral literature. (Bruinessen 1994; 29-37) Christine Allison argues that "much of the richness of Kurdish folklore comes, not only from the free exchange of oral traditions and their components between Kurds and their neighbors, but also from the interaction of the written with the oral" (Kreyenbroek, Marzolph, 2010: 35).

The store and performer of archival memory of Kurdish Oral literary forms is called dengbêj; the equivalent of bard, minstrel or troubadour in western culture. Dengbêj is a compound word, made up of "deng" and "bêj"; "deng" means "voice" and "bêj" means to tell, recite or narrate. Dengbêjes are "the scholar persons who have mediated the transmission of oral literary products to the present day". (Kevirbirî, 2005: 24) "By listening to the song narratives of Dengbêj, one can learn how the Kurdish societies have lived from the past to the present, the course of their daily lives, what their dreams were like and what they are; because the culture of oral tradition is the encyclopedia of the Kurds" (Celîl, 2011: 5). Mehmet Uzun defined dengbêj as "a master who inspires the voice, vivifies it and adopts it as a profession" (Uzun, 2009: 12). Truly, dengbêjes are the masters who give life not only to the "words" and "voice" but to the oral traditional forms of Kurdish literature and protect them in their memories. It would be unfair to minimize their knowledge to oral literary narratives, because they have a considerable knowledge of history, religion, ethics and social and historical events of both their own and in many cases, of their neighboring cultures.

For centuries, the dengbêj performances have been inevitable parts of social ceremonies and facilities, including entertaining the guests of tribe leaders. Claudius James Rich, the English traveler, visits Suleymaniye, in 1820 and reports one of the musical performances as follows:

"I spent the evening with Osman Bey, who had prepared a musical party to entertain me. The performers were but indifferent artists, being second rate Bagdad singers..." "... after dinner most of the guests went to the Pasha's Divan, while a few invited by the Bey, stayed to a musical party. The performers were those of the other night and were very indifferent." "... last night we were entertained by the performance of two Kurdish peasants on the *bilwar* or Kurdish flute [bilur], made of a reed. They played in unison. The tones were soft and agreeable... the best was a song called "Leilî Jan" and the other beginning as "ez dinalim" "milkî jan" "Ezîzê".<sup>11</sup> (Rich, 1836: Vol. I 123, 125, 138)

Rich's description of the scene from Osman Bey's house contains hospitality, history, culture and a sample performance of Kurdish oral tradition, though with a simplifying tone. The performance of oral traditional

<sup>11</sup> "ez dinalim" (I moan for), "milkî jan" (premises of life), "Ezîzê" (my dear).

forms has been a live institution for hundreds of years and has developed some principles for candidate dengbêjes: A dengbêj candidate must have a voice which has a tone and quality that will not bore the audience. He must have a keen desire, avid love, patience and perseverance to practice and achieve his goal. Different from aşık, he does not have to play any instrument; but this does not mean that he must not play any instrument and for modern candidates any theoretical or practical knowledge of music will be a plus. He must have a background of what it means to represent an oral tradition performer both in artistic and in social context, for the training process of becoming dengbêj is not casual and there are ethical principles of taking part in the “dengbêj-dîvans”; accepted as the platform of master skills. During the process of training, a candidate must study with a master, or choose an appropriate master as his muse and study accordingly. The authorities of plaudit of his progress are the masters and the audience. And, he must have a humble personality which is accepted as an important principle of being open to learning. The principles of a master to accept a candidate dengbêj are the same master-aşık and prentice mentioned above.

Compared with Başgöz’s classification of Turkish aşık poets of Turkish oral tradition, (Başgöz, 1968: 9), similar groups and their sub-branches are observable in Kurdish oral tradition. One group of dengbêjes are the nomadic bards who travel from one region or one village to the other, reciting deferent archival narratives of oral tradition and of their own lyrics, and sharing news from the former regions they have visited. The second group is the divan-dengbêjes of Pashas, Mîrs, Aghas or Beys; this group stands loyal to the family they serve, and travel and take part in the dual-performances with the permission of their patrons. The third might be defined as those who sing at various ceremonies and celebrations trying to make a living with this profession.<sup>12</sup> There are also dengbêjes who can be defined as tribe dengbêjes who mostly perform the oral narratives reflecting the archival events of a certain tribe. As in Turkish oral tradition, there are performers of religious or mystic narratives called qasîdebêj in Kurdish oral tradition.

Kurdish oral traditional genres might be categorized as popular, historical and philosophical narratives. The popular oral forms cover a relatively standardized canon, such as myths; historical, religious, and demonological legends; heroic and romantic epics; narrative songs (ballads); fables; fairy tales; jokes and anecdotes; as well as shorter forms of oral literature such as popular sayings and idioms; children’s rhymes; lullabies; and riddles. “As the products of creative and receptive popular imagination, oral literary forms do not adequately represent the true character and meaning of popular literature; consequently, it seeks to define popular literature on the basis of presentation or performance rather than formal content” (Kreyenbroek, Marzolph, 2010: xxxvii). ‘Epic’ and ‘romance’ are ‘tales of adventure’, in which heroic deeds are in the foreground; there is some consensus that epic is evaluated primarily heroic in outlook and romance is focusing on love adventures. (Reichl, 2012: 683)

Among the prevalent Kurdish oral forms, “efsane,” (fictional legend) “dastan,” (semi fictional epic) and “hikaye,” (partly fictional story) are the exceptional narratives recited by dengbêjes. “Efsane”, from a Kurdish cultural perspective, can be defined as a long, heroic or romantic narrative whose plot contains mythological and supernatural heroes and events, speculated to have happened in the far past, such as, *Mîrza Mehemed u Dêv*, *Mîrza Mehemed u Teyrê Sîmrix*. The term *destan* (a persien-loan word) is a long, elevated heroic or romantic narrative about exceptional people and events, recited in prose, or poetry, or both, such as *Memê Alan u Zîna Zêdan*, *Kela Dimdim* (a fortress on a mountain, whose plot pictures an important battle between the Kurds and the Safavid army, took place in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century) *Zembîlfiroş* and *Cembellî*. “Destans are capacious fictional prose narratives with branching plots, which relate the heroic-romantic adventures of their eponymous heroes, often with a religious, Islamic emphasis. Their composition and transmission are connected with the institution of professional or semiprofessional storytellers” (Rubanovich, 2012: 653). “Hikaye” brings the oral genre near the real context; it is a shorter narrative when compared with efsane and *destan*. It takes its major heroes from real context, but the events are overemphasized and exaggerated by dengbêj reciters; *Siyahmed u Xece*, *Heso u Naze*, *Senem Xanım* are sample hikayes.

There is a general distinction between the long poetic narratives and the shorter lyrical songs: *Stran*, *lavij*, *meqam*, *kilam*, *goranî* are general words for short ‘songs’: In Kurmançî speaking regions, the oral forms that are recited by dengbêjes are generally called “kilam”; which might have been derived from the Arabic

<sup>12</sup> “Mutrîbs or mitrîbs are musical groups of wedding and other entertaining ceremonies; unfortunately they are condemned for their illiteracy and for the job prefer for earning their life, and they are not considered within dengbêj traditions.

word “kelam”, means “speech, utterance. “Stran” is derived from the verb “strîn” which means “to sing”; almost all oral song forms performed with a composition of notes are called “stran”, a general name for “folk song” in Kurmancî Kurdish, “stranbêj” is an artist who has the ability to sing “strans”, mostly textualized and composed by poets and composers. A stranbêj has not got the ability of extemporaneous reciting and he/she has not got the obligation of knowing the story of the “stran-s” he/she sings. The longer ones are called lavik, heyranok, payizok, sinemok and seydik. Lavik contains an ethical or didactic theme, while heyran or heyranok often denotes love songs in particular. The secular oral forms that are mostly song by performers called stranbêj, usually in ceremonial celebration accompanied by strong rhythmic music, are called dîlan, govend, reqs or beste. There are various oral forms of traditional lullabies or lorî songs adopted into some dengbêj kilams such as *Cembellî*. There are also work songs with a rhythmic melody for grinding grain and cutting crops, called sitranên paletîyê. The oral laments for the dead are called shîn, dilok giriyan, mostly recited by women; a symbol of love and respect for the dead and an important social duty of kinship in all Kurdish communities. There are also requiem kilams or eulogies performed by male dengbêjes for remembrance of the dead heroes, or beloved family members. One of the fictional narrative genres which includes efsane, destan and hikaye is chîrok (chîrokbêj is the narrator). Qevlik or ‘qewlik’ (qevlikbêj the narrator) is an oral form which is short in length when compared with a story, and mostly contains a humorous plot, like a joke or anecdote that makes the audience laugh. The historical narratives which are called dîrok, or tarîx have factual context and are told by dîrokzan persons. Among the prose genre there are pendekan, gotinên mezin, gotinên pêshîyan, aphorismic sayings of the ancestors.

The initial process of classical dengbêj is similar to classical aşık: Ahmet Aras, in his meticulous research on the life of *Ewdalê Zeynikê*<sup>13</sup> (Zeyneb’s son Abdal), explains the phase before Ewdalê Zeynikê started to sing as follows:

Ewdal did not sing kilams until he was thirty years old. His intention was to get married and establish a settled life. However, he was in a mood that attracted the attention of his neighbors. Sometimes he used to quit his daily work, and leave the village to stay alone with nature, as if he has fallen in love with nature. He listens to birds’ chirping, bees’ buzz and wave-sounds of water. One day he has a very complicated dream. He awakens from the dream and vomits small corn grains. The next day, he goes to the old adviser (Aksakal) of the village and asks him to interpret his dream. Aksakal says a great fame is seen in his future. In the following days, Ewdal falls ill for six months. One day, his wife Eyşan witnesses that he is humming something strange in bed. Neighbors are notified, but no one understands this state of Ewdal. One day, Ewdal gets up from his bed, starts singing kilams and calls his wife and gives the good news that he has recovered. Ewdal’s dengbêj life begins after that day. (Aras, 2018: 24)

The oldest figure in Kurdish Serhed<sup>14</sup> *dengbêj* art is Ewdalê Zeynikê, the *dengbêj* of Sürmeli Memed Paşa’s *divan*. Ewdalê Zeynikê was born at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century in Cemalwêrdî, a village of Tutak, Ağrı. His father was Mistefayê Hesenê Silêman and his mother’s name was Zeynep, but was called Zeynê (Zeynik) as a sign of a beloved person. His father died when he was only three years old, so he got the nickname Ewdalê Zeynikê, a child known with his mother’s name. He lived more than a century and is known as the composer of many *kilams* in Kurdish Kurmanci dialect. (Aras, 2004: 13) Living a miserable childhood made him think “poverty is a worse destiny than death” (Aras, 2018; p.113). Ewdal’s period coincides with the time when Dadaloğlu, the tribal ozan of Avşar tribe of nomadic Turkmen clan, was composing his songs with rebellious themes. (Öztelli, 1953: 5-9)

One of the basic trends of Kurdish Oral Literature is that women are allowed to express themselves by songs (kilams, strans), while they do not have a rank of such a freedom in social life. During the ceremonial gathering of happiness and sorrow, feminine singing becomes a routine celebration facility of communication and sharing happiness and lamentation of neighbors. The songs are usually composed spontaneously on the occasion that has already happened as well as those composed beforehand on memorable events or the unforgettable heroes/heroines. The performances of women, (not dengbêjes because a woman or man would not be called dengbêj until he has reached an expected artistic confirmed by his master, so is well known publicly) are important cultural activities that create opportunity for

<sup>13</sup> Ewdalê Zeynikê was the last dengbêj of the Divan of Sürmeli Mehmet Pasha who was the leader of Kurdish Zirikî tribe in Eleşkirt in 1860s.

<sup>14</sup> “Serhed” is the definition for Ağrı, Muş, Erzurum and Malazgirt region; the *dengbêj* style of this region is without instrument.

feminine members of a family or tribe to share the idea that they are together in the days of happiness and sorrows. The themes of their songs are various; they are about tribal heroes, their husbands, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, lovers or the persons they wish to be loved by. Personal or general, any cultural occasion can be the context of a song; for instance, a woman while busy with daily tasks of her house may sing a song, on the related daily work such as baking bread, making cheese, sewing, weaving carpets and kilims, or getting yogurt-butter from *dew* in a clay pot, pushing and pulling to and fro.<sup>15</sup> The wedding ceremonies are the outstanding performances of oral traditional songs by both men and women singers – from the beginning when the father and mother of the bridegroom, and several other close relatives go to the bride's house to ask for the girl's hand, till the ceremonial day when the bride and bridegroom are married – they sing many songs of hopes and prayers for the bride and bridegroom's new family.

As a researcher and performer of Kurdish “dengbêj art” for ten years now, I have explored that the Kurdish *dengbêj* culture varies in literary, musical and artistic aspects regarding the different lands where Kurdish population live. A general regional classification of Kurmançî *dengbêj* culture could be; ‘Botan’, ‘Serhed’, ‘Êrîvan’ and ‘Xwiresan’ regions. The kilams are performed in ‘Kurmançî Dialect’, and are communicable to all the listeners living in the regions mentioned above. In ‘Botan’, ‘Êrîvan’ and ‘Xwiresan’ styles we see instrumental accompaniment; the *blur* (flute), *dûdik* (flute with reed mouthpiece), *mey* (short flute with flat reed mouthpiece), *zirne* (thin reed oboe), and the *tenbûr* (Kurdish lute) are the principal instruments used. But the ‘Serhed’ *dengbêj* style has no musical accompaniment; the performance is done with sole voice of the *dengbêj* who has a craft of fast (rap) presentation and a powerful memory of keeping the kilams in mind. These kilams are performed with a free melody, but almost all can be composed with musical notes; the basic ‘maqams’ (tune composition) are; hicaz, huseyni, uşak, talyan, etc. which can be matched with those in Turkish, Arabic and Persian music.

## 6. PERFORMANCE AND AUDIENCE

The art of performance has criteria which is valid for both Turkish aşık and Kurdish dengbêj. Performance is a particularly important factor to be considered in oral traditional presentations, which has a great impact on social and communicative interaction between the performer and the audience. The aura, and physical conditions of the ‘place’ of performance, the appropriateness and the punctuality of organizational schedule, the proper installment of the technical equipments, the platform and seats arranged for the performers and the attitudes of the working staff have an important effect on the psychology and esteem of aşiks and dengbêjes. Besides, all the tasks fulfilled willingly and meticulously to prepare the necessary atmosphere for the performers is a sign of respect and a matter of endeavor and energy. The places of aşiks and dengbêjes may both be public or private; teahouses, village rooms, platforms of festivals and fairs, a mansion, a house and the divan/divanxane (a special room for performers) are among some of the most common ones.

Until relatively recently, most villages also had a dîwanxane, where local men would gather in the evening and guests passing through would stay, news would be exchanged, stories told and songs sung. (Allison, 2010: 36) In some respects dîwanxane is different from aşık-divans: From past to present, dengbêjlik has been a ritual to host relatives, neighbor visitors and guests were the keen listeners of dengbêjes at dîwanxane, who made the divan feel nostalgic, relaxed, excited and proud when they heard folkloric kilams. Mir, Agha and Bey families hosting the guests would have taken care of this tradition and its performers; built the room, divanxane, outside the premises of the house, and outsiders would meet the host and other neighbors attending the divan, and would be hosted with the best possible hospitality. Not forgetting Mir, Ağa, Beg's responsibility of supporting the dengbêjes financially and morally. Mirs were “enthusiasts and supporters of not only oral, but also of other written literary arts” (Kreyenbroek, Marzolph, 2010: 36). “Evliya Chelebi's description of the skills of Abdal Khan Bitlîsî, was no doubt founded on a real reputation as a patron of arts and sciences” (Dankoff, 2006: 100-101).

The interaction between the performers and audience in the divanxane has necessitated some ethic principles on behalf of both the listeners and the performers: The time of performance was decided by the host of the divanxane, which means it was not an everyday routine facility; most probably at times when there were guests from other villages or regions. There was a principle of sitting in divanxane and it was known both by the guests and by the villagers and dengbêj participants. The start of performance was

<sup>15</sup> Among the daily tasks of women was getting yogurt-butter early in the mornings, by shaking, pushing and pulling a clay-pot to and fro, which contained watered yogurt (dew).



permitted by the Wiseman – the eldest person in divan – or by the host, and the eldest dengbêj would start performing if there were other dengbêj participants; the performance of the young candidate dengbêjes was also allowed by the Wiseman, the host or in some cases by the eldest dengbêj. If anything was served during the performance, it would be done in silence, trying not to halt the concentration of the performer and the listeners. Talking among the listeners was not allowed during the performance; as well as any tactless behavior, and clapping hands or applause after kilams. Only some motivating expressions could be said such as “Sihet Xweş!” (well done), “Can, Can Can” (perfect), “Deng li Dinê” (May your voice live long) could be used by the elderly in the divan. The new guests would also obey the rule of silence, when they are late for the performance. The guests were not allowed to smoke during the session. Women were not allowed to enter into the divan, but they could listen somewhere outside the divan. At the end, if the host agreed, the guests would reward the dengbêj for his performance.

## 7. SOCIAL INTERACTION

Marzolph argues that “popular literature is appreciated and/or practiced by collective consent by a considerable number of people, conveniently termed the “folk” (Kreyenbroek, Marzolph, 2010: xxxviii). The “folk” underlined by Marzolph is the creator of “lore” which is the background of oral literature that has a comprising capacity of all forms of literature transmitted orally or in writing. Probably literacy would play a plus role for the performers of oral literature, but although illiterate, they are endowed with special skills and creative abilities of harmonizing ‘words’ and ‘voice’ to create a dimension of social interaction. That dimension of face to face oral communication involves interaction between performer and audience with notions of sincere and frank intentions by using different dimensions of language and speech both lexically and contextually including the aesthetics of language use. The oral traditional performances demonstrate the ‘orality’ of language which is the primary channel of communication for social interaction. Edmonson Munro argues that language is incredibly related to words / speech, because among tens of thousands of languages spoken throughout human history, only about 106 languages have literary language that can produce literature, and explains that only 78 of the 3000 languages available and spoken today have a literature. (Edmonson, 1971: 323-332) The oral literary forms demonstrated by the performers “preserve the living culture of organic communities, and claims that literature is a treasure that includes everything valued in human experience” (Leavis, 1972: 27).

In a way, aşiks and dengbêjes undertake the role of production and distribution of oral forms, and the sociological and psychological implications of the reception of oral culture. Oral performance as a facility is a social act of sharing, the time period of performance can be considered as contributing social existence, which Martinez underlines as the possibility for people “to express their species being,” (Martinez, 2015: 25) the articulation of ideas and values; shared, jointly perceived with different views of the audience, with different perceptions and preconceptions. Whether they are indeed shared, in the sense of believed rather than simply jointly perceived, depends upon the context of previous [interactive] articulation, differing views among the listeners, and a whole range of other considerations relating to differential perceptions and experience. (Furniss, 2005: 3)

Both within aşık and dengbêj traditions, there are different cultural parameters, depending on the regional and dialectical differences, each culture, or sub-culture, will have its own aesthetics of presentation variations that are considered appropriate to different circumstances. Bernstein argues that “linguistic differences, other than dialect, occur in the normal social environment and status groups may be distinguished by their forms of speech. This difference is most marked where the gap between the socio-economic levels is very great” (Bernstein, 2003: 46). Aşiks and dengbêjes must take these differences into consideration to maintain the maximum interaction with the audience while reflecting the social contexts of orality, and the embedded nature of the event which is not possible with recorded copies of documentation. The time of performance is coincided with the assemblage of people in a real time period and perception in which notions of ‘folk’ are constituted and identities forged, through the artistic presentations in which the performer addresses the audience. It is an interactive time of both presenting and creating knowledge, articulating and reminding values, and sharing ideas and information from a shared cultural domain; from the private sphere into the public with all the implications that can have for inter-relations between people and groups.

Ethnologists agree that in the second half of the twentieth century “Kurdish oral traditions were in decline, as a result both of general modernizing processes found in many developing societies” (Allison, 2010: 39).

As one eminent scholar has written, “not a day goes by but Kurdish oral tradition loses something of value” (Celil, 1985: 5-6, 9). Although numerous academic research studies have been done on Turkish aşık tradition and have filled the shelves of libraries, performances are textualized and the details are noted, considering the wider significance of live aşık performances in the community, little has been done to regain the aşık tradition which has been losing its prestige for the last decades of twentieth century.

The traces of ancient orality is still alive in Turkey, both in song and in epic or romance, but the basic oral traditions, are gradually becoming extinct” (Reichl, 2012: 683) Köprülü, as a distinguished scholar of Turkish language and culture, evaluates that the “âşık culture” only lives in provincial regions and has totally become extinct in urban life, because of technological innovations, living conditions, and the social change after the foundation of new Republic. (Köprülü, 1962: 11) It would not be a misevaluation to say that the oral tradition that sustains “aşık and dengbêj culture” is on the decline, and the new aşık and dengbêj generations are about to lose contact with the masters of oral narratives. Besides, there is a weak demand from the audience populace, because, their attention, energy and time is consumed on to the consumerist program.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Artistic forms of Oral Tradition are the reflections of the ‘lore’ created by a ‘folk’; depending on the social internalization, grows into an authentic culture and finally are performed by aşiks and dengbêjes – bards, minstrels or troubadours<sup>16</sup> – creating an opportunity of social interaction that have therapeutic communicative effects on the audience/listeners. The performance has no alternatives of being carried out, which means, it is an artistic facility that needs time, energy, endeavor, desire, scheduling, attending, reflecting and exchanging ideas with other people gathered with the same purpose. It is a real time when the listeners remember the folkloric roots they belong to; to see how far they are away from or the distance and the domain they have reached at; to be introduced or re-introduced with the protagonists who had fought with the evil or the foe; to get to know with the lovers who had done their best to save their love; to hear the music which – in Turkish expression – ‘will clean the rust of their ears’; and to share their time with those who has come to share with them.

The aşiks and dengbêjes are addressing a privileged populace that appreciates the art, content and context of the oral songs, interactivity of the narrative, style of presentation and the conclusions which present learning, entertaining, sharing and socializing. They perform oral forms from historical chronicles to lyric poetry, from legends to epics and folk narratives which are harmonized with music in order to create an aura that will help the audience to perceive easily and thus hand down that culture to posterity. The rank that the aşiks and dengbêjes have achieved with the approval of public will maintain the intuition to compose lyric songs which, in future, will achieve anonymity through the intermediary of new aşiks and dengbêjes.

But today, the aşiks and dengbêjes of oral traditions are face to face with the danger of being extinct, because of the new technological innovations that let the audience have the advantage of being able to access the recorded replicas. Besides, the consumerist life style has made the individuals so busy that they would not attend any traditional oral performance as it was ‘once upon a time’, because they have the alternative of watching them at anytime, anywhere they like. The attention of the potential aşiks and dengbêjes is made so busy that it is not within their reach to have a dream that will lead them to be aşık or dengbêj. The master-apprentice training tradition has lost its prestige, because the techno-culture enables the candidate aşiks and dengbêjes to follow a master without face-to-face training. The reluctant audience will not spend time and energy to attend an oral performance, for he is programmed to buy, consume and change. Aşık is not willing to hold his ‘saz’ and attend a presentation, because he believes that it will be a waste of time; and knows that it will end with an economical loss, and a dengbêj does not rely on Agha or Bey to support and protect him in return for his performances.

<sup>16</sup> Bard: (Celtic) Welsh, *bardd*; Irish and Gael. *Bard*, a poet; Greek: To speak. (Skeat, 1980: 39)

Minstrel: (French) Middle English; *ministr*al, or *menestral*. Old French; *Menestrel*, *menestral*, Late Latin; *ministralis*, a servant; retained hence one who played instruments or acted as jester. Latin; *minister*, a servant. (328)

Troubadour: (Provençal. Late Greek.) French modification of Provençal. *Trobador*, also *trobaira*: a *troubadour*; inventor of songs or verses. (574)



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