THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

RADIO KURDISTAN: IRAQI KURDISH MUSIC, COLONIAL POWER, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF TRADITION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

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For Mindy

بۆ خوشکه گیانەکەم

ڕۆحت شاد بێت

Tell me what shall I do so that the camphoric cries
of Zellm Lake do not die down?
Tell me what shall I do so that this obstinate colt of my tears
does not get tamed?
Just tell me, what shall I do? What should I not do?
So that in this pretty moon's wake
God comes down, at least for a short while,
To sit amongst us?
Tell me what shall I do?
tell me what…
tell me…
tell…

How sudden the bushes of scream in this field
Flower and grow into green almonds.
How sudden the fallen songs in this field
Germinate and turn into tulips.

– from *Butterfly Valley* (*Derbendî Pepûle*), Sherko Bekas (trans. by Choman Hardi)

پێم بڵێن من چی بکەم بۆ ئەوەی گریانیی کافوریی
ئەم زەڵمەم لووزەوی کەم نەکات؟
پێم بڵێن من چی بکەم بۆ ئەوەی ئەم جوانووە
سەرکەشەی هەنیسکم ڕام نەبێت؟!
دەبڵێن من چی بکەم، چی نەکەم؟ بۆ ئەوەی
خوا بێتە خوارەوە و هیچ نەبێ بۆ تاوێ
لە پرسەی ئەم "مانگ"ە جوانەدا
لەگەڵمان دانیشێ؟!
پێم بڵێن من چی بەکەم؟
پێم بڵێن من
پێم بڵێن!
پێم.

لەم دەشتەدا، چۆن وا لە پڕ ئەم بنجکی زریکانە
گوڵیان کردوو بوون بە چواڵە؟!
لەم دەشتەدا، چۆن وا لە پڕ ئەم گۆرانییە وەریوانە
ڕوانەوە و بوون بە لالە؟!

– لە "دەربەندی پەپوولە"وە، شێرکۆ بێکەس (وەرگێڕانی چۆمان هەردی)

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A Note on Transliteration

Throughout the dissertation, I utilize a simplified version of the IJMES (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) transliteration system for Arabic and Persian words, eliminating the use of diacritical marks for easier reading. Exceptions to this, as noted in the chart below, include the use of special characters to represent *hamza* (ʾ) and ʿ*ayn* (ʿ). I have chosen to retain the use of diacritical marks when transliterating from Sorani Kurdish (utilizing the romanization table provided by the Library of Congress, or LOC). My reasons for doing so are twofold: first, retaining diacritical marks will allow interested readers to look up words or phrases in Sorani using the correct spelling. Second, I acknowledge that the work of standardizing Kurdish dialects and fostering further connections between them remains both incomplete and ongoing. Using proper transliteration is therefore an important part of this process.

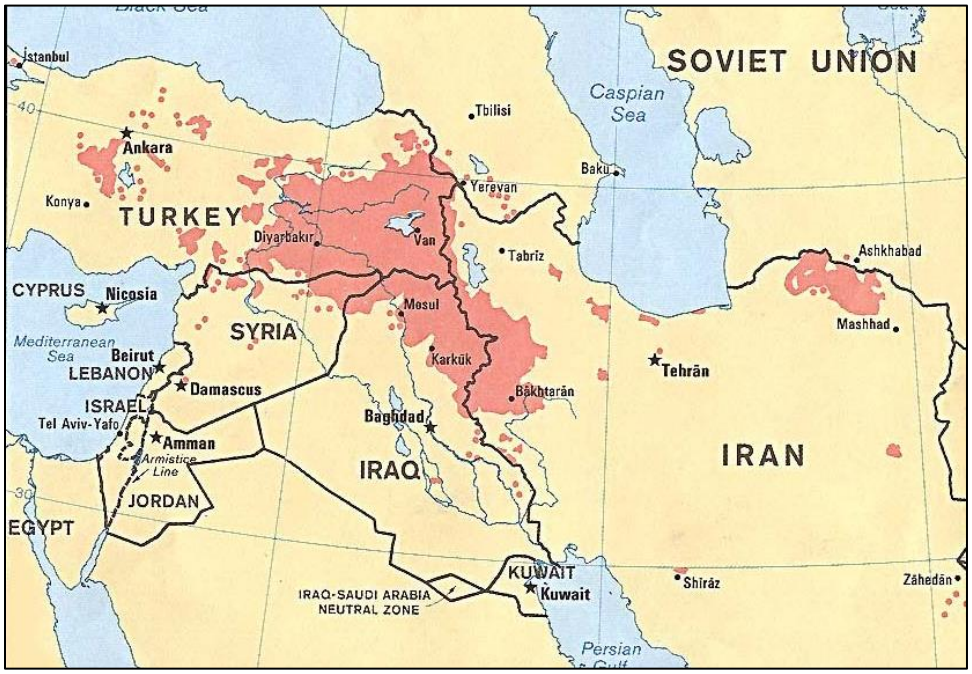
Despite my general commitment to transliterating Sorani in accordance with LOC guidelines, there are a few exceptions to this rule. For example, I do not use diacritical marks in certain words that appear with some regularity, or in those whose transliteration might be unduly confusing to my readers. These include the names of Kurdish dialects like *Kurmanji* (rather than *Kurmancî*) and *Sorani* (rather than *Soranî*). When citing the names of people, I have chosen to utilize the romanized spelling used by these individuals themselves (if applicable). If this transliteration differs from the "correct" method of transliteration, I provide the "correct" transliteration in parentheses following the first occurrence of the name. As one example, the surname often romanized as *Hawrami* would be written *Hewramî* according to the LOC romanization table. In this case, the name appears as follows: Hawrami (*Hewramî*).

Transliteration System (based on IJMES and LOC standards)

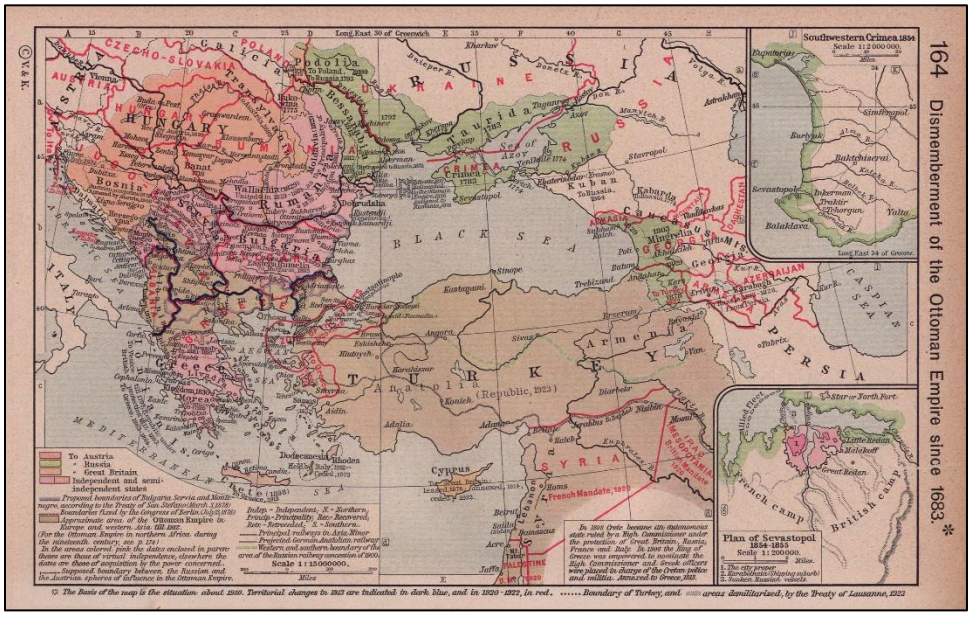
	Sorani	Arabic	Persian
ء	– (initial vowels begin with a *kursî hamza*, as in ئەگەر)	ʾ	ʾ
ا	A a	A a	A a
ب	B b	B b	B b
پ	P p	–	P p
ت	T t	T t	T t
ث	–	Th th	S s
ج	C c	J j	J j
چ	Ç ç	–	Ch ch
ح	Ḧ ḧ	H h	H h
خ	X x	Kh kh	Kh kh
د	D d	D d	D d
ذ	–	Dh dh	Z z
ر	R r	R r	R r
ڕ	R̄ r̄	–	–
ز	Z z	Z z	Z z
ژ	J j	–	Zh zh
س	S s	S s	S s
ش	Ş ş	Sh sh	Sh sh
ص	Ṣ ṣ	S s	S s

ض	–	D d	Z z
ط	–	T t	T t
ظ	–	Z z	Z z
ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ
غ	Ẍ ẍ	Gh gh	Gh gh
ف	F f	F f	F f
ق	Q q	Q q	Q q
ک	K k	K k	K k/ G g
گ	G g	–	G g
ل	L l	L l	L l
ڵ	Ł ł	–	–
م	M m	M m	M m
ن	N n	N n	N n
ه	H h (initial and medial forms, as in هەر and لەهی) E e (final and independent forms, as in ئەوە and ڕەنگ)	H h	H h
و	W w (if preceded by a vowel) U u (if preceded by a consonant)	W w/ U u	V v/ U u
ۆ	O o	–	–
وو	Û û	–	–
ي	Y y (if preceded by a vowel) Î î (if preceded by a consonant; the short “i” is not written in Sorani)	Y y/ I i	Y y/ I i
ێ	Ê ê	–	–

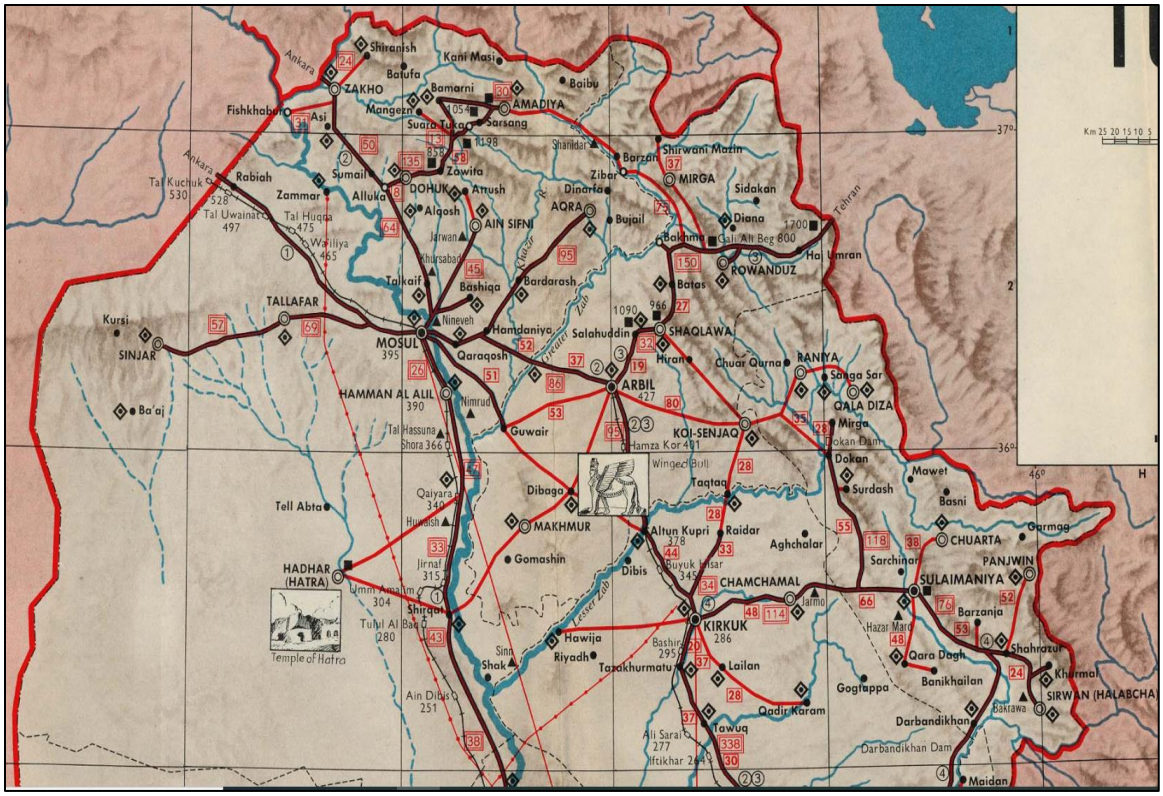
Maps



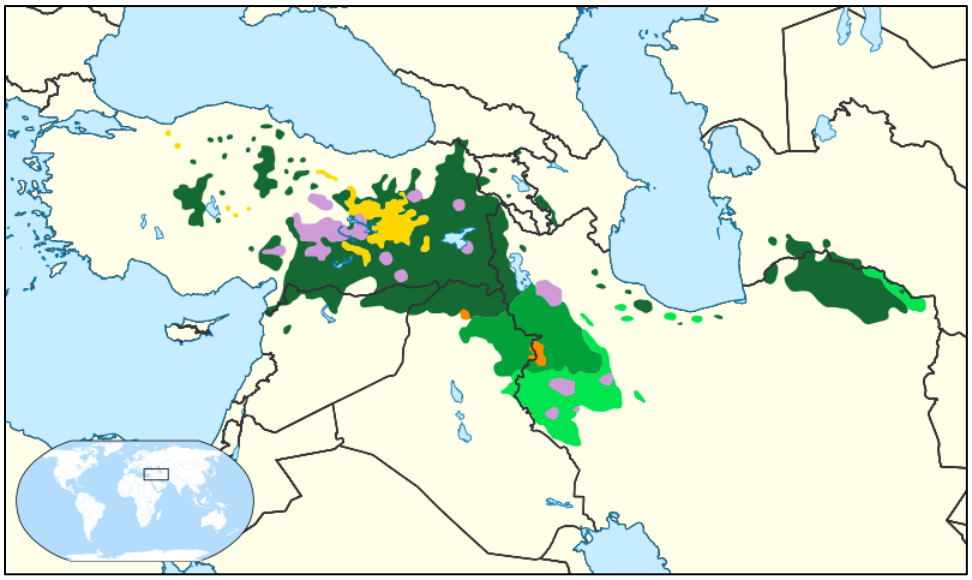
Map 1. Map of Kurdish-inhabited areas produced by the United States CIA in 1986. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



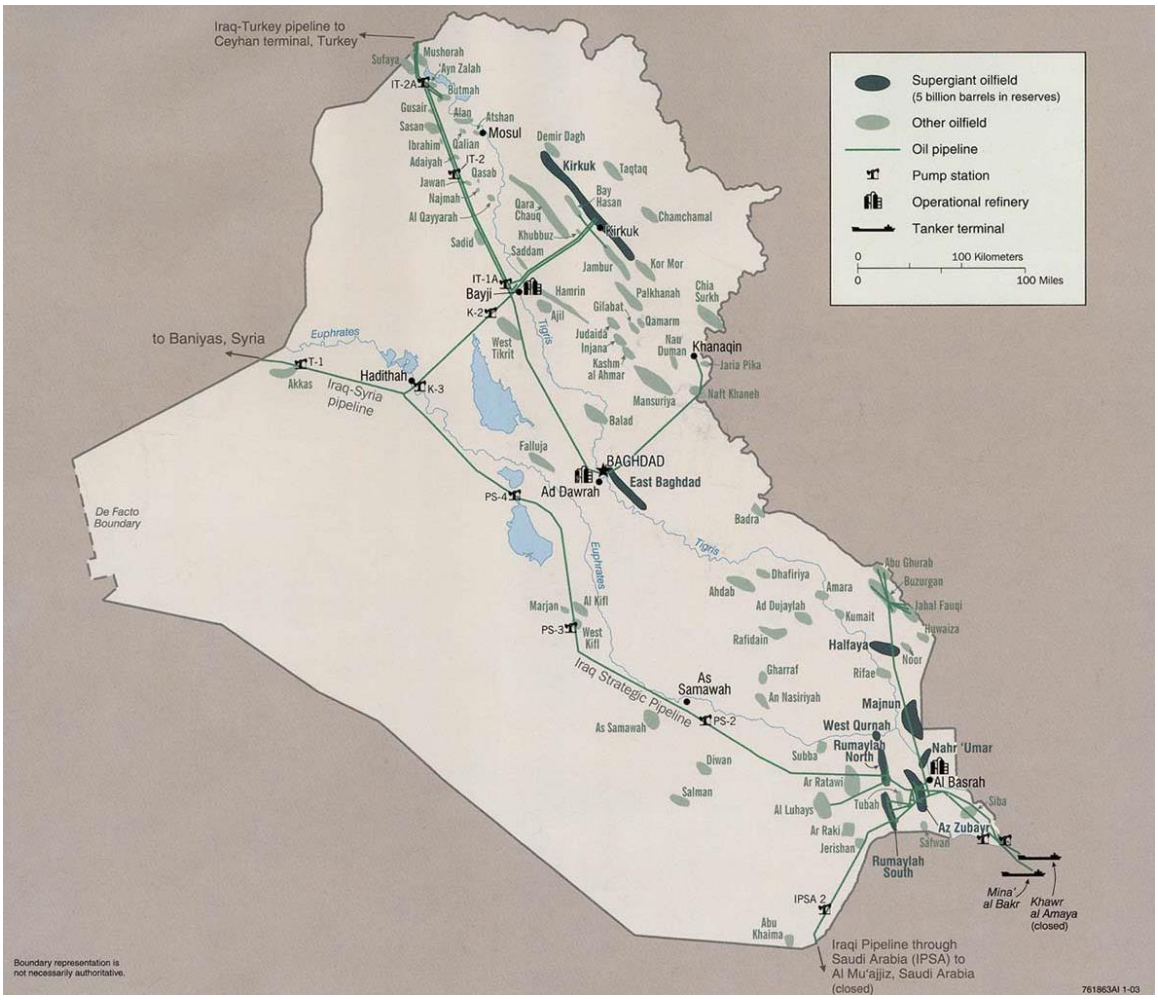
Map 2. Map illustrating the divison of the Ottoman Empire after 1923. From William R. Shepherd, *The Historical Atlas* (1923). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



Map 3. Inset of a tourist map of northern Iraq. The brown and red lines represent paved and unpaved highways, respectively. Produced by the Iraq Tourist Administration (ca. 1970). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



Map 4. Distribution of Kurdish language. The three shades of green indicate Northern (Kurmanji), Central (Sorani), and Southern (Kirmashani) Kurdish. Yellow indicates Zazaki, orange Gorani, and purple mixed areas. Map reproduced without changes. Source: ArnoldPlaton, Wikipedia Commons. Licensed by Creative Commons (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode).



Map 5. Map of Iraqi oil infrastructure produced by the United States CIA in 2003. Note the prevalence of major oil fields in Iraq's Kurdish north. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Acknowledgements

We often talk about dissertation research as if it were a solo activity carried out by individual graduate students tucked away into dark corners of countless libraries all across the globe. But the truth is that no one ever really researches alone. Each and every project builds on the knowledge of those who came before—whether the generations of preceding authors, or those whose life practices have been documented by others—and of those who walk alongside us on the journey—listening to our budding arguments, offering comfort and support, and helping us to sharpen our approaches and our focus over time. To those who have made my own research possible, I offer my sincere and heartfelt gratitude. Foremost among those worthy of mention is the Music Department at the University of Chicago, which graciously welcomed me into its academic community and has provided innumerable resources along the way (including financial support for my research). To the faculty and staff in particular: Each of you has played some role in shaping this project and my own relation to the field of Music Studies. Thank you for the courses you've taught, the feedback you've offered, and the countless casual conversations that have encouraged me far more than you could ever know. Likewise, to members of my cohort and to those with whom I have taken courses and lived alongside for the past several years (both in the department and beyond): thank you for listening, for sharing of yourselves and your own work, and for always pushing me to want to do and to be better.

To my committee members (Dr. Philip Bohlman, Dr. Robert Kendrick, Dr. Orit Bashkin, and Dr. Anna Schultz), I offer my appreciation for your time, your energy, your feedback, your never-ending support, and your mentorship. Thanks also to my advisor, Dr. Philip Bohlman, for playing such an instrumental role in shaping my scholarly development over the past several years. Our regular Skype calls during the early days of pandemic lockdown still make me smile,

and, perhaps more importantly, make me think. Likewise, weekly meetings with my Kurdish teacher, Dr. Michael Chyet, have been a real highlight of my research journey. Dr. Chyet (مامۆستای بەڕێزم), you have taught me so much more than grammar and vocabulary (important as those may be), and I thank you for your impact on my work and my life. I would also like to thank the following organizations that have offered crucial support—financial or otherwise—for my research at various stages: the American Musicological Society, the Society for Asian Music, the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, the Humanities Division at the University of Chicago, the Franke Institute for the Humanities, the Kurdish Cultural Center of Illinois, Kashkul, the American University of Iraq–Sulaimani, the Kurdistan Institute for Strategic Studies and Scientific Research, Jheen Research Center, and the Kurdish Heritage Institute (especially Mazhar Khalegi and Rezhan Hassan).

I save two final words of thanks for my family, who have weathered more and bigger storms this past year than any family ever should (*xoşewîste gyanekem*, your support means everything to me), and for my friends and interlocutors in Kurdistan, to whom I offer my gratitude in Sorani:

سپاسی هەموو ئەو کەسانەی لە کوردستاندا دەکەم کە یارمەتییان دام. زۆر سپاس بۆ بەش دانی دەمتان، ماڵەکانتان، زانیاریتان، مێژووتان، بیرتان، کتێبتان، موزیکتان، دەنگتان، تەنانەت چێشتیشتان لەگەڵما. سپاس بۆ بەش دانی وڵاتە جوانەکەتان و کەلەپوورتان لەگەڵما. هیوام وایە کە ئەم توێژینەوەیەم ڕێگایەکی خۆشکەر بێت بۆ پێش خستنی لێکۆڵینەوەی موزیکی کوردی. کەلەپووری کورد دەریایەکی ئەوەندە قوواڵە کە تا ئێستا هەر بە نوێ فێری مەلەوانیی تێدا بووم. تا بتانبینم، دووبارە سپاس.

Abstract

For centuries, Kurds have lived at the edges of empire. This liminal status has often resulted in the suppression or outright decimation of Kurdish language, culture, and bodies. When Western colonial intervention in the early twentieth century led to the creation of the modern Middle East, Kurds found themselves once again divided by political boundaries created to serve the needs of colonial powers. This dissertation examines the ways in which this division has impacted musical practice among Iraqi Kurds. Rather than arguing (as do some postcolonial scholars) that colonial ruptures have rendered musical tradition impossible, I contend that the realm of musical practice represents a key site for the contestation and critique not only of colonial power, but also of the temporal and spatial logics underpinning that power and ensuring its continuing legacy into the present. Central to this response have been technologies of sound, a category within which I include more obvious examples such as recording and broadcasting technologies, but also the human voice. Even while acknowledging the ways in which colonial power made certain of these technologies possible in the first place, I argue that Iraqi Kurdish musicians have used these technologies to define themselves in ways that defy the designations of their colonizers.

In Chapter 1, I examine historical representations of Kurdish musical practice in a wide range of documents including nineteenth-century travelogues and twentieth-century liner notes, drawing out the ways in which many of these works reflect certain colonial logics of place and time. In Chapter 2, I examine the impact of colonial power on various sound technologies, interrogating the ways in which these same technologies ultimately became sites of resistance. In Chapter 3, I offer a historical overview of Kurdish radio broadcasts, which have contributed to the formation of a transnational Kurdish listening public and have shaped contemporary Kurdish

musical practice in profound ways. Finally, in Chapter 4, I build on ethnographic research to examine the ways in which contemporary Iraqi Kurdish musicians and music educators are now involved in relating broader histories of Kurdish musical tradition and are invested in transmitting this tradition to future generations.

Introduction

In late December 2020, Kurdish vocalist Bokan Hawrami (*Hewramî*) performed on a television program aired by KurdSat, a satellite tv station founded in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Silêmanî in the year 2000. After a brief conversation with the show's four female hosts, Hawrami, who hails from the Iraq-Iran border region of Hewraman and who performs in the Hewramî and Soranî dialects of Kurdish, announced that he would be singing "Bom biłê toze toze" ("Sing for me little by little").[1] In addition to naming the song's title, Hawrami credited the song to Ḧesen Zîrek (1921–1972), a famous Kurdish vocalist from Iranian Kurdistan who is said to have recorded as many as 1,000 songs during his lifetime. Hawrami then paid homage to a later version of the song performed by Adnan Karim (*ʿEdnan Kerîm*, b. 1963), a contemporary Iraqi Kurdish singer widely known for adapting classical Kurdish poems into songs.

Like many Kurdish music performances, Hawrami's began with an instrumental introduction establishing the melodic content of the song to follow, as well as its main theme (see Figure 1). The five accompanying instrumentalists—all men, and all regulars in the world of KurdSat-sponsored performance—played the violin (a common substitute for the timbrally similar *kamancheh*), the acoustic-electric *oud*, the *qanun* (a plucked zither common in Middle Eastern musics), the *daf* (a frame drum lined with small metal rings on its interior), and the *tombak* (a Persian goblet drum similar to the *darbuka*). Behind the performers on stage, a giant

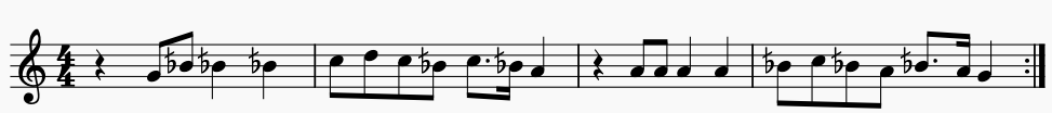


Figure 1. Main melodic theme of "Bom biłê toze toze"

[1] This translation assumes that the implied verb is *goranî bêjan/wutin*; this interpretation retains the meaning of the original title in Arabic, as well as other Kurdish versions of the song (such as Zîrek's "Bom biłê nerme nerme").

screen displayed moving images of rotating golden treble clefs and eighth notes interspersed with flashes of light, creating an effect reminiscent of the screen saver craze of the early 2000s. On either side of the screen, short stretches of wall temporarily stained red by stage lighting displayed the name of the program in Latin characters: KurdSat Magazine. On the floor in front of the performers and the show's hostesses, who sat to the right of the musicians, additional stage lighting created rotating circles of white light that at times seemed to mirror the gentle swaying of one or another of the hostesses as they listened.

Alongside its transmission to television sets, KurdSat later streamed Hawrami's performance on its Facebook page, thereby providing access to Kurdish viewers among the global diaspora, and to me, as I watched from my couch at a distance of more than 6,200 miles. On the one hand, the very ability to access Hawrami's performance, like various facets of the performance itself—accompanied as it was by modern instruments like the Godin "MultiOud," contemporary videography techniques, and the luminous displays on every side of the performers—foregrounded a reliance on modern technologies ranging from microphones to satellites. At the same time, certain elements of the performance also reinforced a sense of the "traditional." This was evident in the use of acoustic instruments accompanying the electric oud, in the clothing worn by the performers and the hostesses, in Hawrami's tracing of the song's genealogy through two central figures in recent Kurdish music history, and in the intense vibrato of Hawrami's vocal style (a style characteristic of the region of Hewraman, which is often described as one of the few remaining repositories of "authentic" Kurdish culture).

This complex and, at times, uneasy relationship between technology and tradition is a central feature of Kurdish music-making over the last century, though admittedly, it took me far longer than it should have to see it. In my own journey of discovering and learning about

Kurdish music, the very first research project I undertook (in late 2015) was a weeklong trip to Nashville, Tennessee, home of the largest Kurdish population in the United States. I had planned the trip in hopes that a friend of a friend who lived in Iraqi Kurdistan for several years before settling in Nashville might be able to introduce me to members of the local Kurdish community. As part of my exploration of the city, I visited an area known as "Little Kurdistan," which is comprised of a strip mall near the intersection of Elysian Fields Road and Nolensville Pike. The "inhabitants" of Little Kurdistan include a mosque as well as several Kurdish-owned bakeries and other small shops. In one of these shops, I noticed a *tembûr* (long-necked lute) hanging on the wall. I asked the storekeeper if he had any recordings of Kurdish music for sale, but unfortunately, he did not. Undeterred, I decided to make the most of my trip's timing, which coincided with the 2015 Eid al-Adha holiday, and to attend a large Eid service held at a shopping mall not far from Little Kurdistan. After the service was over, I eagerly introduced myself to several of the attendees, asking if they could help me find some Kurdish music. Their response was the same as that later offered by a Kurdish family I met during my final night in Nashville: if you want to find Kurdish music, just look on the internet.

I will admit that at the time (having taken time off from work in addition to driving almost eight hours to Nashville), I was disappointed by this answer, though more than five years later, I would think of it again and smile while listening to Bokan Hawrami perform thousands of miles away in Silêmanî. Even if it took time, I finally came to understand that it is impossible to discuss Kurdish music in any great depth without dwelling at some length on the relationship between tradition and technology. By way of return to "Bom biłê toze toze," remember that Hawrami traced his genealogy through other recorded versions of the song, a process reflecting both a major shift away from older methods of song transmission and a reliance on new forms of

national and musical collectivity enabled by recorded materials. Adnan Karim's rendition of the song, which is titled simply "Toze Toze," can be found on his 2012 album *Badey Gułrēng* (*Florid Wine*). Likewise, earlier versions of the song performed by Ḧesen Zîrek are documented in multiple recordings posted on various internet platforms such as YouTube. Interestingly enough, one fact Hawrami did not mention during his 2020 performance—one that further highlights the importance of recording technologies in the song's contemporary transmission—is that the song's composer, Ḧesen Zîrek, borrowed the primary melody from Egyptian composer Zakariyya Ahmad (1896–1961). Ahmad wrote the song ("*Ghani li shwayya shwayya*") for the Arabic film *Sallama* (1945), and it was first performed by Egyptian superstar Umm Kulthum.[2]

To point to this song's comparatively recent origins in Arabic is not, of course, to suggest that it cannot also be deeply meaningful to Kurdish listeners; even so, bits of melody aside, differences between the Arabic and Kurdish iterations of the song are quite stark. In Kulthum's version, for example, the song's introduction includes repetitions of the melody transcribed in Figure 1. In "*Ghani li*," this melody, written in the common *jins* of Rast, forms the basis of a broader exploration of Maqam Suznak, which begins on Jins Rast and ends on Jins Hijaz (see Figure 2).[3] The genre of Ahmad's original composition is *taqtuqa*, a popular Arabic vocal form that typically includes verses and a fixed refrain organized around a series of maqam modulations.[4] Though many songs utilizing the *taqtuqa* form feature a fixed melody for the

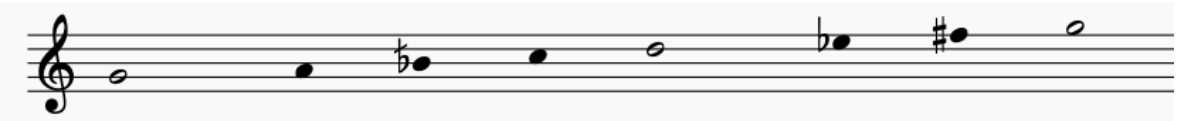


Figure 2. Pitch outline of Maqam Suznak, with Jins Rast beginning on G and Jins Hijaz beginning on D

[2] Johnny Farraj and Sami Abu Shumays, *Inside Arabic Music: Arabic Maqam Performance and Theory in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 294.

[3] *Jins* is the basic melodic unit of Arabic music and is often compared to the tetrachord, though some *ajnas* (pl.) contain fewer or more than four notes.

[4] Farraj and Abu Shumays, 133-134.

verses and another for the chorus, Kulthum's "*Ghani li shwaya shwaya*" is more complex, with each verse utilizing a different melody. This complexity allowed Kulthum to fully explore Maqam Suznak via detours through other *ajnas*: Bayati, Saba, Nahawand, and Sikah, among others.[5] Kurdish versions of the song, however, are stanzaic, and thereby provide a contrast to the kinds of prolonged vocal improvisation characteristic of Kulthum's performances.

Another noticeably distinctive feature of the three Kurdish versions of the song—Zîrek's, Karim's, and Hawrami's—is the use of new lyrics in Kurdish. Karim and Hawrami both performed the song using the same set of lyrics, although recordings of Zîrek indicate that he performed the song using several different sets of lyrics over time. Perhaps the most obvious result of this switch from Arabic to Kurdish is a shift in phrasing within the song's main melodic theme (Figure 1 represents the phrasing in Kurdish; see Figure 3 for a transcription of the song's original phrasing in Arabic). In addition to this textual variation, Zîrek also explored the use of several different melodic phrases added on to the song's original theme. By the time Karim's recording was produced more than fifty years later, the new melody for "Bom biłê toze toze" had been all but solidified (see Figure 4).

In addition to providing the song a more rigid (strophic) form, Zîrek's introduction of new melodic materials also provided what is now the most common instrumental introduction for this tune, as well as the opportunity to highlight new areas of pitch emphasis. In both Karim's

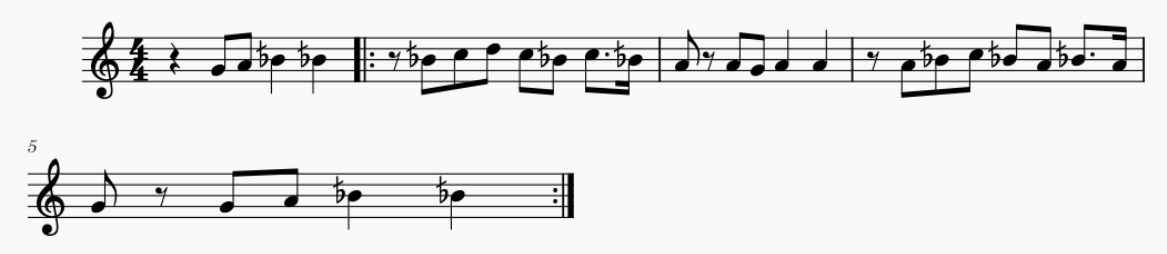


Figure 3. Main melodic theme of "Ghani li shwaya shwaya"

[5] Farraj and Abu Shumays, *Inside Arabic Music*, 295.

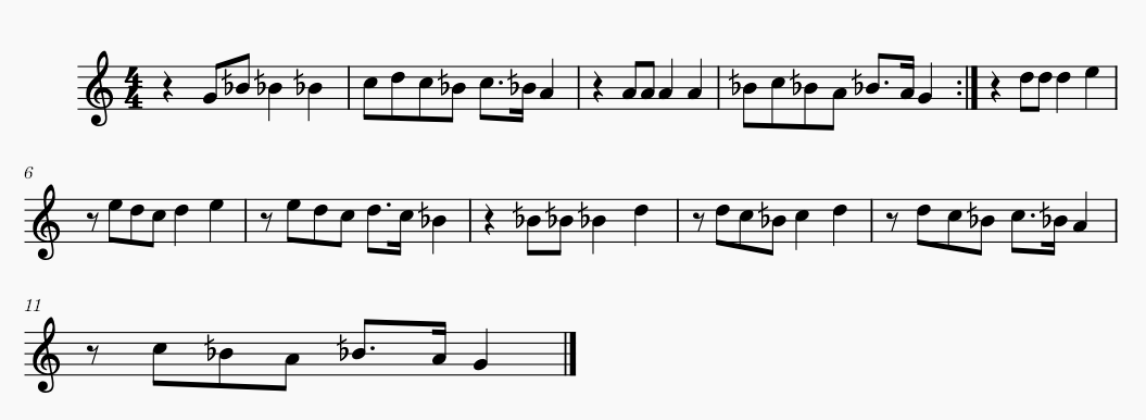


Figure 4. Expanded melody of "Bom biłê toze toze."

and Hawrami's recordings, the instrumentalists accompanying the singer begin by playing the song's new melodic section (mm. 5–11) in unison. A solo violinist then plays the song's original opening (mm. 1–4), lingering on the dissonant quality of the B half-flat through a series of extended ornaments. The intonation of this third scale degree of Jins Rast tends to differ from region to region in the world of maqam-based musics.[6] In these Kurdish recordings, the intonation varies throughout each individual performance, with the interval between the third and fourth scale degrees expanding and contracting to the extent that the third scale degree often sounds like a B natural rather than a B half-flat.

I discuss these differences here not because of some innate desire to prove the song's "Kurdishness," but rather as a way of illustrating a set of concerns that have guided my exploration of Kurdish musical practice. As I have already suggested, these concerns in large part stem from my own attempts to understand the complex relationship between *tradition* and *technology*. These two concepts often seem to exist as polar opposites, yet songs like "Bom biłê toze toze" reveal that technology can just as often sustain and reshape tradition (an idea I explore further in Chapter 2). This truth is especially pertinent to histories of Kurdish music-making and

[6] Farraj and Abu Shumays, *Inside Arabic Music*, 208.

other forms of cultural production given the mass suppression of Kurdish identity and the destruction of Kurdish villages and bodies by numerous entities throughout the twentieth century. In large part, this physical and cultural violence was (and still is) perpetrated under the umbrella of colonial power, and later, of power wielded by nation-states founded on colonial models. Even as Kurdish musical tradition has been threatened time and time again, technologies of sound—one of the most important of which, as I later explain, is radio—have continued to provide Kurdish musicians and their listeners (as well as others involved in the music's production) new forms of response and resistance. In order to fully understand the role of sound and sound technologies in this context, however, it is necessary first to consider several important aspects of Kurdish political, social, and cultural history.

Who Are the Kurds?

Often described as the "world's largest stateless nation," Kurds inhabit the mountainous region wherein lies the intersection of the modern Middle Eastern nation-states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran (see Maps). Kurds are ethnically distinct from other regional groups including Turks and Arabs, though they bear some relation to Persians and other Iranian peoples. It is impossible to narrow down the exact origins of the Kurds in ancient history, but some historians believe they may have migrated to the region alongside other Indo-European tribes as early as 2000 BC. Many Kurds claim to be descendants of the Medes, an ancient Iranian people who helped to ensure the downfall of the Assyrian Empire (612 BC) and who were later conquered by Persian king Cyrus the Great around 549 BC. Others believe that the earliest forebears of the Kurds found in history are the *Kardouchoi* who attacked Xenophon's retreating armies in 401

BC. Centuries later, the Arabs who converted local populations to Islam during the seventh century AD called the peoples they encountered "al-Akrad."[7]

Contemporary estimates of the number of Kurds worldwide range from twenty-five to thirty million; exact figures are nearly impossible to deduce given the tendency of several of these states to undercount their Kurdish population, as well as the tendency of some Kurdish communities to overinflate their numbers. According to political scientist Michael Gunter, "A reasonable estimate is that there may be as many as 15 million Kurds in Turkey (20 percent of the population of that country), 8 million in Iran (11 percent), 6 million in Iraq (20 percent), and 2 million in Syria (10 percent)."[8] Another 200,000 Kurds live in former Soviet territories, and as many as 1.5 million Kurds have migrated to Europe since the 1960s.[9] Over the past several decades in particular, a large number of Kurds have also relocated to North America, especially the United States (lower estimates range from fifteen to twenty thousand) and Canada (approximately six thousand).[10]

A majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslim, though others adhere to Shi'i Islam, Alevism (*R̄êya heqî*), Yarsan, Yazidism (*Êzîdî*), or other religious traditions. Since 2014, the invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan by ISIS (ISIL/Daesh) has prompted many Iraqi Kurds to rethink their relation to religious practice, spurring some to assume a more "conservative" air in public (in case of future invasions), to claim no religious affiliation whatsoever, or to convert to other religions such as

[7] Michael M. Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, third ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 1–2.

[8] Gunter, 1.

[9] Gunter, 1.

[10] "The Kurdish Diaspora," Fondation-Institut kurde de Paris," accessed February 17, 2022, https://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/.

Neo-Zoroastrianism.[11] Although contemporary Kurdish nationalism often assumes a secular air, religious leaders have played a crucial role in Kurdish society for centuries, especially since the destruction of the last Kurdish principalities by the Ottomans (who were assisted in this task by the Germans) in the mid-nineteenth century.[12] The most important of these leaders—the shaikhs (Sorani, *şêx*)—belonged to one of two Sufi orders present in Kurdistan: the Naqshbandi or the Qadiri.[13] Two of the most prominent shaikhly families in Kurdistan, the Barzinjis and the Talabanis (who still play a major role in Iraqi Kurdish politics today), belonged to the Qadiri order.[14]

In addition to the multiple religious groups to be found among the Kurds, there are a number of other minority ethnic and/or religious communities who have also inhabited the land known as "Kurdistan" for centuries. These include Nestorian Christians, Assyrians, Turkomans (not to be confused with the Turkmen of Turkmenistan), Armenians, and Jews, though mass deportations and even genocides have altered the demographics across much of Kurdistan considerably over time. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Western colonial powers began making moves to control the region, a new set of tensions was reflected in clashes among religious groups, particularly as Sunni Muslim Kurds feared the treatment they might receive under the rule of imperialists thought to be more sympathetic to Christian sects (this particular anxiety does have historical parallels, of course—after all, the great Saladin, defeater of the Crusaders in the twelfth century AD, was a Kurd). In the mid-nineteenth century, the activities of American and European missionaries (as well as a bitter rivalry between these two groups) were

[11] Edith Szanto, "'Zoroaster Was a Kurd!': Neo-Zoroastrianism among the Iraqi Kurds," *Iran and the Caucasus* 22 (2018): 96.

[12] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books Ltd, 1992), 229.

[13] Van Bruinessen, 210.

[14] Van Bruinessen, 200–221.

among the factors prompting Bedir Khan Beg, ruler of the Bohtan principality, to brutally attack Nestorian communities on two separate occasions.[15]

These and other factors point to the impossibility of discussing Kurdish society and culture as if they were completely bounded in time or space (as yet another example, some Yazidis resist being identified as "Kurdish" at all). Another area of complexity in this regard involves language. There is no scholarly consensus as to the exact number of Kurdish languages/dialects (scholars also disagree as to whether these stem from the northwestern or southwestern branch of Iranian languages), but most linguists generally agree that the main language groups include Kurmanji (*Kurmancî*), Sorani (*Soranî*), Zaza-Gorani (*Zazakî/Goranî*), and Kirmashani, or Xwarîn (*Kirmaşanî*/*Kurdî xwaring*).[16] The two most widely spoken variants of Kurdish are Kurmanji, the native tongue of approximately half of all Kurds worldwide, and Sorani, which is spoken by more than six million Kurds in southeast Iraqi Kurdistan and Kurdistan of Iran.[17] Kurmanji and Sorani are more closely related to one another than are the other language groups, with the exception of certain dialects of Zaza-Gorani, which are usually considered part of the same language group and are spoken in distinct pockets in northwest and southeast Kurdistan (see Maps). According to Gunter, Kurmanji and Sorani differ from each other grammatically as much as do English and German, whereas in terms of vocabulary, the two are as closely related as are German and Dutch.[18] Figure 5 contains additional data for these and the other language/dialect groups mentioned above.

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[15] Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 62–74.

[16] Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918–1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 19. Gunter mentions only three of these groups: Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza-Gurani, the latter of which he describes as two separate languages.

[17] Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, 294–295.

[18] Gunter, 294.

Language	Region spoken	Alphabets in use	Dialects	Alternative names
Kurmanji	Turkey (except Zaza-speaking regions), Syria, northwest Iraq, northern Iran, parts of the former Soviet Union	Modified Latin (since the early 20th century), Perso-Arabic, Cyrillic, Armenian	Bohtani, Marashi, Ashiti, Bayezidi, Hekari, Shemdinani, Badini, Shikaki, Silivi, Mihemedi	Kurmanc/Kurdî (in Kurm. literature); Behdînanî (in Iraq); Northern Kurdish, or Northern Kirmanji
Sorani	Southeast Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran	Perso-Arabic	Babani (Silêmanî), Sanandaji/Ardalani, Sorani, Mukriyani, Hewleri, Germyani, Jafi	Kurdî (in spoken and written Sor.); Central Kurdish, Middle Kirmanji
Zaza-Gorani	Northwest and southeast Kurdistan	Modified Latin, Perso-Arabic	Gorani: Hewrami, Bajelani, Shabaki, Sarli	Zaza/Zazakî (from Turkish); Dimlî (Kurdish); Goranî/Guranî*
Kirmashani/ Xwarîn	Iran (in and around the city of Kirmashan)	Perso-Arabic	Bijari, Qorwa, Kolyayi, Bilawar, Dinawar, Sahana	Kurdîy xwaring; Southern Kurdish, or Southern Kirmanji
*Those who classify Kurdish languages using the categories Northern (Kurmanji), Central (Sorani), and Southern (Kirmashani) Kurdish typically do not consider Zaza-Gorani to be Kurdish languages at all, but rather separate Iranian languages spoken by ethnic Kurds in these regions.				

Figure 5. Kurdish language groups[19]

In addition to reflecting the long history of Kurdish culture and settlement in the region, the diversity of Kurdish language also bears witness to several other important historical factors: namely, the lack of state support for the preservation and standardization of Kurdish language throughout much of the twentieth century, and second, the importance of local cultural and political alliances across time. As Hassanpour notes (as of 1992), "Organized linguistic and cultural activity by the Kurds has generally been considered 'illegal' in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey."[20] Before the founding of these modern nation-states, semi-autonomous Kurdish

[19] Much of the information in this table, which is not exhaustive, is gleaned from Hassanpour, pp. 19–25. Note that while Kurmanji and Sorani are identified as "languages" above and not as "dialects," I most often use the word *dialect* when discussing these two branches of Kurdish since they do "fade into" one another in linguistic border regions (particularly in Behdînan in northern Iraqi Kurdistan), unlike Zaza-Gorani, for example, which is spoken in distinct pockets.

[20] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 446.

principalities such as the Babans, who founded the city of Silêmanî near the end of the eighteenth century, and the Erdełans, who ruled for centuries from modern-day Sine (Sanandaj) in Iran, controlled large swaths of territory across Kurdistan. In each of these principalities, Kurdish poets enjoyed courtly patronage. The Erdełans, for example, supported a number of poets who wrote in Gorani; the Babans, on the other hand (who were the primary rivals of the Erdełans), encouraged the poets in their employ to begin writing poetry in the local dialect of Silêmanî, therefore elevating what would later be known as *Sorani* to the status of a literary language.[21] Even in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan, differences in political leadership are often reflected in language use. In the areas controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), for example, Kurmanji is the primary dialect of Kurdish, whereas Sorani-speaking areas are controlled by the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).[22]

Despite the importance of language as a historically central feature of Kurdish identity, various state policies banning the use of Kurdish language (particularly those of modern Turkey, where speaking Kurdish in public and in private has been banned repeatedly since 1923) have resulted in a growing number of Kurdish young adults worldwide who do not speak Kurdish. I met several individuals for whom this is the case in 2018 while taking lessons in Kurdish dance (*govend* in Kurmanji) offered at the Kurdish Cultural Center of Chicago.[23] One cold winter night, after the end of our lesson, the group's instructor Gönül graciously offered to drive me to a nearby CTA Red Line stop to spare me the grueling transfer between the Blue and the Red Lines. On our way to the stop, Gönül explained that she had grown up speaking Turkish at home, even

[21] Joyce Blau, "Kurdish Written Literature," in *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, ed. Philip Kreyenbroek and Christine Allison (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1996), 21–22.

[22] Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, 211.

[23] At the time of writing, this organization, which is now known as the Kurdish Cultural Center of Illinois, no longer has a public meeting space for events such as dance lessons. The community does still host a number of events such as *Newroz* (Kurdish New Year) celebrations in other nearby spaces.

though her parents' mother tongue was Zazakî.[24] When she was just five years old, Gönül's parents asked her if she would like to learn Zazakî, explaining in detail before she could answer the dangers of ever using the language in public or of letting anyone know about the endeavor. Ultimately, Gönül decided against her parents' proposal. Decades later, she would find other ways to connect to her Kurdish heritage and identity, particularly through the use of music and dance (I take up this theme again in Chapter 3).

As the preceding paragraphs suggest, the flourishing of the modern Kurdish nationalist movement is a direct result of the cultural and political policies of various states that have worked to suppress the potential for broader Kurdish alliances and autonomy. During the era of semi-autonomous Kurdish emirates or principalities (roughly the 16th through the 19th centuries), local allegiances such as tribal affiliation shaped the nature of political discourse, prioritizing the resolution of inter-tribal conflicts and questions of land use and ownership, which were determined locally in accordance with tribal and Islamic law, as well as Ottoman and Persian feudal systems.[25] As urban migration began in earnest after the turn of the twentieth century, and as private land ownership policies were implemented (many of which still required tribal ownership of certain areas), new possibilities for the formation of various social collectivities such as those based on class began to emerge.[26] These, of course, were typically slow to take root and remained localized for quite some time; furthermore, these emerging collectivities often pitted one group of Kurds against another. Accordingly, the Sorani poet Hejar (a pen name

[24] Native speakers of Zazakî often prefer the term *Dimlî* given *Zaza*'s origins as a pejorative. I use the term *Zazakî* here because it is the one that was used by Gönül herself. I also acknowledge that some scholars and native speakers of Dimlî do not describe themselves as Kurdish at all; Gönül, however, does consider herself to be Kurdish. For more on this issue, see Victoria Arakelova, "The Zaza People as a New Ethno-Political Factor in the Region," *Iran and the Caucasus* 3/4 (1999/2000).

[25] Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh, and State*, 53.

[26] Van Bruinessen, 6, 18, 53.

meaning "poor") relates in one of his autobiographical works that the powerful Şikak tribe in Iranian Kurdistan entered the city of Mehabad around 1921 during a clash with the Persian army and looted the homes of urban Kurds there, even tossing the infant Hejar into a trash heap.[27]

Scholars of Kurdish history disagree regarding the exact temporal origins of modern Kurdish nationalism, which historian Hakan Özoğlu defines as "an intellectual and political movement that is based mainly (though not entirely) upon two premises—the belief in a consistent Kurdish identity, which is rooted in ancient history; and the conviction of an unalienable right of self-determination in a historic Kurdish homeland or territory."[28] In *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, Iraqi historian Wadie Jwaideh suggests that Kurdish nationalism began to crystalize, or at least reached a new milestone in its formation, during the armed revolt of Shaikh Sayyid Ubeydullah of southeast Anatolia during 1880–1881.[29] By contrast, Kurdish Studies scholar Martin Van Bruinessen suggests that the birth of Kurdish nationalism was tied to a 1925 revolt led in Turkish Kurdistan by a local Naqshbandi leader named Shaikh Said.[30] Van Bruinessen identifies the existence of a political party and the dissemination of political propaganda throughout the revolt as two main reasons for the movement's continued existence even after the death of Shaikh Said, who was captured and hanged by Turkish authorities shortly after the revolt began. He also identifies these traits as important markers of a new stage of Kurdish nationalism, "a stage that has not yet been superseded."[31]

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[27] K. R. Eĭiubi and I. A. Smirnova, *Kurdskiĭ dialekt Mukri* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968), 143. "Belam salêk ke le temenim ṟabird, ʿeşîretî Şikak ke hatûn, Mehabadyan le çeng ʿEceman der(h)ênawe w xełkî ṣarîṣyan talan kewtuwe. Tenanet lanik w desrazey minîṣyan birduwe w minyan le ser xołemêṣ fīṟê dawe."

[28] Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 207.

[29] Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 76.

[30] Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 265.

[31] Van Bruinessen, 265.

Identifying the birth of Kurdish nationalism as having taken place somewhere between these two alternatives, Özoğlu suggests that Kurdish nationalism came into existence alongside the collapse of the Ottoman Empire near the end of World War I. British forces who entered the Ottoman Empire from Basra (in modern-day Iraq) shed light on this issue in various records they left behind; political officer Cecil J. Edmonds, for example, wrote in 1957 that after the Treaty of Sévres (which contained promises of autonomy for the Kurds) was abandoned in favor of the Treaty of Lausanne, "progress in solving the Kurdish problem" had been complicated by the "fire of nationalist exaltation."[32]

No matter the exact date at which Kurdish nationalism might be said to have begun, a common feature of each of the theories cited above involves the association of Kurdish nationalist thought with armed revolt against political authority, be it that of the Ottoman representatives, the newly founded Turkish Republic, or the British Mandatory Powers. Furthermore, each of these theories highlights (even if indirectly) the leadership of a single, charismatic individual, be it that of Sayyid Ubeydullah or Shaikh Said in Turkish Kurdistan, Mahmud Barzanji in Iraqi Kurdistan, or Simko Şikak in Iranian Kurdistan. While the influence of these powerful individuals certainly should not be understated, the question still remains as to how everyday Kurds experienced and responded to these movements, particularly after the formation of the modern nation-states that now encompass all of Kurdistan. After all, as Middle East historian Albert Hourani asserts, "Nationalism is not a system of thought; it is a single idea which does not suffice by itself to order the whole life of society."[33]

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[32] C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel, and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 313.

[33] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 343.

Throughout the dissertation, I argue that the experiences of early twentieth-century Kurdish musicians and other artists provide a strong counter to these "oppositional" theories of nationalism—not because these artists did not believe in or even champion the right to Kurdish autonomy, but rather because of the uncertain and often tenuous nature of political discourse, alliances, and rule that characterized the region for decades. I look to Kurdish cultural forms such as music not as directly correlated to the developing forms of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, but rather as illustrative of the wide range of possibilities for action stirred by popular nationalist sentiments. In fact, Kurdish nationalists and Arab nationalists often shared similar goals before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and Arab nationalism was likewise often posed as a remedy for the failure of Ottoman policies aimed at centralization and more effective administration.

Colonial Logics of Place and Time

Although Kurdish nationalism might be considered a modern movement, Kurdish group consciousness dates back centuries and has often been a direct reflection of Kurds' liminal status between empires. In the seventeenth century, poet Ehmedê Xanê (1650–1707) lamented this status in his Kurmanji codification of the famed love story *Mem û Zîn*, writing:

Bifkir ji ʿEreb heta ve Gurcan	Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians
Kurmanc çi bûye şibhê burcan	The Kurds have become like towers.
Ev Rûm û ʿEcem bi van ẖesarin	The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them
Kurmanc hemî le çar kenarin	The Kurds are on all four corners.
Her dû terefan qebîlê Kurmanc	Both sides have made the Kurdish people
Bo tîrê qeza kirîne amanc	Targets for arrows of fate.
Goya ku li serẖedan kilîdin	They are said to be keys to the borders
Her taʿife seddekin sedîdin	Each tribe forming a formidable bulwark.
Ev qulzimê Rûm û Beẖrê Tacîk	Whenever the Ottoman Sea [Ottomans] and the Tajik Sea [Persians]
Hindê ko dikin xirûc û teẖrîk	Flow out and agitate,
Kurmanc dibin bi xûn milettex	The Kurds get soaked in blood
Van jêk vedikin misalê berzex	Separating them [the Turks and Persians] like an isthmus.[34]

[34] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 55. Translation by Hassanpour.

Two centuries later, the poet Ḧajî Qadirî Koyî echoed this same sentiment in Sorani: "*Le mabeynî kiław sûr û kiław rēṣ/ Perêṣanîn, debîne misalî gay beṣ*" ("[Trapped] between Red-hats [Ottoman Turks] and Black-hats [Persian]/ We are wrecked, and will be like branded cattle").[35]

In the twentieth century, colonial power was directly responsible for the formation of the modern Middle East after World War I, a fact which supports political theorist Partha Chatterjee's observation that "the national question [in the non-European world] is, of course, historically fused with a colonial question."[36] For most of the world, the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 signified a welcome relief from the violent land disputes that had raged since the beginning of World War I between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers, who would soon make their own colonial claims in the region. For the Kurds, however, the replacement of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres officially dashed all hopes of Kurdish autonomy in the region, dividing up the land of the Kurds—*Kurdistan*—among the USSR and four new nation-states: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Aside from its national and political implications, this historical moment of rupture set into motion a series of processes that would soon result in the subjugation, oppression, and even decimation of Kurdish populations within these nation-states. This would forever alter future representations of Kurdish politics and culture as well as the conditions in which forms of cultural production such as music-making would take place. This moment still looms large in collective memory in contemporary Kurdistan, as does the role of colonial power in cementing its own legacy in the region. Iraqi Kurdish poet Choman Hardi (*Çoman Herdî*) describes the

[35] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 55. Translation by Hassanpour.

[36] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 18.

absurdity of this process of division in her poem "Lausanne, 1923": "Sitting around an old table/ they drew lines across the map/ dividing the place/ I would call my country."[37]

I explain the broader impact of colonialism on the historical development of Kurdish music in greater detail in several different parts of the dissertation (especially in Chapters 1, 2, and 3). As a way of foregrounding the continuing legacies of colonial power (and of drawing out the relationship between colonial power and my opening concepts of *tradition* and *technology*), I repeatedly use the phrase "colonial logics of place and time." By this, I mean simply those sets of assumptions about place and time that through a form of internal coherence provide a unifying structure to the varied activities often described collectively as *colonialism.* Although Kurdistan was never subject to settler colonialism (colonization) as were Canada, the United States, Australia, and South Africa, to name a few prominent examples, I use the term *colonial power* in this context given the subjugation of Kurdistan by various empires—including the Ottoman, Safavid, Qajar, British, French, and more recently, (US)American empires—for centuries.

Although some might suggest *imperialism* is a better descriptor for the Kurdish context, I use both *imperialism* and *colonialism* interchangeably. I do this not because I see no difference between the two concepts, but rather because Kurds have been subject to both forms of power historically. Sociologist George Steinmetz offers one explanation of the difference between these two concepts and their relation to empire as follows:

> The concept of empire encompasses colonialism and imperialism. Empires are political organizations that are expansive, militarized, and multinational, and that place limits on the sovereignty of the polities in their periphery. In colonialism, the conquered polities or populations are not just ruled over by foreign conquerors but are configured as inferior to their occupiers—inferior in legal, administrative, social, and cultural terms. Imperialism involves political control over foreign lands without the annexation of land or sovereignty.[38]

[37] "Choman Hardi," *The Poetry Archive*, accessed February 22, 2022, https://poetryarchive.org/poet/choman-hardi/.

[38] George Steinmetz, "Empires and Colonialism," *Oxford Bibliographies*, accessed February 22, 2022, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0090.xml.

A broader definition of *imperialism* is provided by historian Stephen Howe in his *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. According to Howe, *empire* is "a large, composite, multi-ethnic political unit, usually created by conquest," and *imperialism* refers to "attitudes or actions which create or uphold such political units."[39] Taking into account changes in colonial interference in and governance of Kurdistan over time, those political entities I list above qualify as empires according to either set of definitions; likewise, as I show throughout the dissertation, their activities in Kurdistan might be described as both imperial and colonial.

By emphasizing colonial *logics* of place and time, I aim to draw attention to those systems of power and knowledge that continued (and continue) to impact former sites of colonial interference through the modern nation-state despite their nominal independence from colonial power. This lingering presence is not, of course, unique to Kurdistan. In the words of poet and anti-colonial theorist Aimé Césaire, "In general the old tyrants get on very well with the new ones, and . . . there has been established between them, to the detriment of the people, a circuit of mutual services and complicity."[40] One explanation for this widespread phenomenon is that colonial powers were often either directly involved in the ordering of governing bodies and procedures in newly independent states they had once controlled, or indirectly used as models for these new governments. Another factor especially pertinent to discussions of colonialism in the Middle East and Africa (one I discuss at greater length in Chapter 1) involves the discovery of exploitable natural resources such as oil in these locales throughout the twentieth century.

[39] Stephan Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.
[40] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, [1955] 2000), 43.

Colonial interference and domination among Iraqi Kurds have unfolded in a series of distinct historical phases.[41] The first of these is the Ottoman phase (1831–1920); the Ottoman Empire was a multicultural, multilingual empire that only gradually tightened control over the semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities located on its peripheries toward the end of its reign. During this period, Kurdish culture flourished in imperial centers such as Istanbul, and many Kurdish intellectuals participated in scholarly and political movements advocating constitutionalism under the banner of pan-Islamism. As Ottoman Kurds were to discover, however, "[Sultan] Abdülhamid II's pan-Islamism was not a revival of Islam as a religion per se, but the revival of Muslim subjects' political identity within a Turkish cultural context inside Ottoman boundaries."[42] His policies ultimately came to include aspects of "educational and linguistic Turkification."[43]

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Iraqi Kurds entered yet another phase of colonial domination: the British phase (1920–1931), which began when Britain was assigned Mandatory responsibilities for Iraq. Groups all across the country revolted against British rule in 1920, leading the British to respond with immense force (utilizing the recently formed Royal Air Force, or RAF). This disastrous start to their rule led the British to begin thinking about how they could install a local government friendly to British interests rather than continuing to rule directly. This policy ultimately led to the implementation of an Iraqi monarchy, thus initiating Iraq's monarchical phase (1932–1958). As I later explain in further detail, the installation of an Iraqi king did little to rid the country of British interference and influence. During this troubled

[41] These phases are generally the same as those outlined in Tripp 2007.

[42] Kamal Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms in the Middle East, 1876-1926* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 93.

[43] Soleimani, 93.

period, Iraqi, Arab, and Kurdish nationalists revolted against British influence in the country, and many Kurds joined causes with left-leaning groups such as the Iraqi Communist Party, or ICP.

The end of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 saw the beginning of yet another new phase: the Republican phase (1958–1968). This period began with a military coup that ended the Hashemite dynasty's rule in Iraq. The figurehead of the "July 14 Revolution" was General Abdul Karim Qasim (whose mother was Kurdish). Under Qasim's rule, Iraq enacted a new constitution that promised equal rights for both Kurds and Arabs in Iraq; Qasim also proved sympathetic to the ICP. The relatively short period of peace between Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad ended in 1961, when Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani (*Mistefa Barzanî*) led an armed revolt against the central government, which many viewed as increasingly authoritarian. In February 1963, Arab nationalists unhappy with Qasim's embrace of *Iraqi* nationalism joined forces with officials in the Baʿath party to remove Qasim from power, subsequently initiating a massive purge of Iraqi Communists from the government. By 1968, the Baʿath party had seized power yet again (despite being banned in Iraq since November 1963), thereby instituting the Baʿath phase (1968–2003) of Iraqi history.

The leader of Iraq for most of this period was Saddam Hussein, who officially rose to power in 1979. Hussein wasted no time in cracking down on Shiʿa and Kurdish political dissidents, and his authoritarian government ordered a series of vicious attacks against the country's Kurds on multiple occasions spanning decades. The most heinous of his decrees involve those implementing Arabization in and around Kirkuk (a process which involved the depopulation and destruction of Kurdish villages in an effort to secure government control over Iraq's northern oil fields; see Maps), the genocidal "Anfal" campaign of the late 1980s (which resulted in the mass murder of as many as 200,000 Iraqi Kurds), and the chemical attacks on

Halabja (*Hełebce*) on March 16, 1988. These attacks killed 5,000 people and injured as many as 10,000 more, some of whom still live with the lingering physical effects of exposure to the chemical agents used in the attack.

These and other actions finally led Western powers (no doubt fueled by colonial motivations of their own) to establish "no-fly zones" in northern and southern Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991. In 2003 (the beginning of the current phase of Iraqi history), a US-led coalition toppled Hussein's government and seized control of the country, a move that provided certain new opportunities for Iraq's Kurds even as it resulted in the destruction of much of the country's infrastructure, a hardening of sectarian boundaries in Iraqi society, and the eventual creation of ISIS, which claimed control over Mosul in 2014 and massacred thousands of Yazidis.

As these different historical phases show, colonial power has been central to Iraqi history, even in periods characterized by broad resistance to colonial interference. Building on this observation, I understand colonial *logics* as the primary temporal and theoretical connection point between empire and the contemporary states it helped to craft. From the viewpoint of those subject first to colonial power and then to state power based on colonial models, these logics might even be seen as a tool used to transfer colonial power to the modern state. The intellectual and ethical imperatives of decolonial scholarship must therefore be understood not as rooted in some murky or unknowable past, but rather as very much rooted in the present. I was reminded of the importance of this truth while hiking with a group of university students in the mountains of Hewraman (southeast of Silêmanî) in October 2019, shortly after US President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from northern Syria.[44] While the group stopped for a

[44] Bill Chappell and Richard Gonzales, "'Shocking': Trump Is Criticized for Pulling Troops from Syrian Border," *NPR*, October 7, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/10/07/767904589/shocking-trump-is-criticized-for-pulling-troops-from-syrian-border.

Figure 6. The mountains of Hewraman, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. October 2019.

moment to enjoy a much-needed break amid breathtaking scenery (see Figure 6), our local tour guide pulled me to the side and asked if my fellow US citizens were aware that Trump had "sold"/sold out (*firoştin*) the Kurds in Syria, a description echoing concerns of subsequent ethnic cleansing in the region that were also voiced by the Syrian Democratic Forces and the mostly Kurdish YPG (People's Defense Units: *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*). The desperation in his voice and the wringing of his hands as he spoke were a powerful testament to the anxieties still produced in the twenty-first century by legacies of unfettered colonial control.

Perhaps the most palpable object of colonial fascination historically has been the quest for more land, more territory, more space. In her 2005 book *For Space,* social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey argues for what she calls an "alternative approach to space," which

she expounds via three propositions: first, that space is a product of interrelations and of interactions at multiple levels; second, that space is a locus of multiple trajectories and is characterized by plurality; and third, that space is always under construction.[45] Massey suggests that human understandings of space, reflected in "the imagination of space as a surface on which we are placed, the turning of space into time, [and] the sharp separation of local place from the space out there," represent "ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents."[46] She goes on to argue that these conceptions of space and of place (which she suggests are not polar opposites but are rather co-constitutive) are "produced through and embedded in practices, from quotidian negotiations to global strategizing."[47]

Space and place, in other words, do not simply exist but are instead constructed through the process of human exchange. Each new realm that was conquered by empire therefore represents not only a series of new interactions between differing spatial understandings, but also a clash between competing conceptions of *space* and *place*. According to social geographer Alastair Bonnett:

> A place is a storied landscape, some*where* that has human meaning. But another thing we have just started to learn, or relearn, is that places aren't just about people; that they reflect our attempt to grasp and make sense of the non-human; the land and its many inhabitants that are forever around and beyond us. It can be an unnerving exchange, especially when what we hope to see is something purely natural, and what we find instead is our own reflection.[48]

Reflected in the places that comprise Kurdistan are not only the myriad layers of human meaning that have worked to cultivate an indigenous sense of physical and temporal relation to the land (one that, as I later show, is expressed in part through musical practice), but also the colonial

[45] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., [2005] 2008), 9.
[46] Massey, 7.
[47] Massey, 8.
[48] Alastair Bonnett, *Beyond the Map: Unruly Enclaves, Emerging Lands, and Our Search for New Utopias* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 4.

disruption of these relations that ultimately led to the imposition of artificial national boundaries in the early twentieth century.

The colonial logics insisting that Kurdistan was merely a space to be cordoned off (rather than one imbued with local meaning) are evident in its planned division by British advisor Sir Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot, who met in May 1916 to divide the Ottoman territories claimed by their respective nations. In a further reduction of Kurdistan to a kind of two-dimensional space more easily absorbed by empire, these two men made their claims by simply drawing a line on a map from the "e" in Akrê (in northwest Iraqi Kurdistan) to the "k" in Kirkuk (in the southeast).[49] These spatial logics continued to direct colonial governance of Kurdistan—first, as the British refused to designate Iraq's Kurdish regions a single province during the Mandate period (1920–1932), and later, as Kurds were (and continue to be) excluded from the global political stage given their inability to represent themselves through the lens of the nation-state.[50]

In music scholarship, space/place has been central to works such as Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (1989), Rebecca Bodenheimer's *Geographies of Cubanidad: Place, Race, and Musical Performance in Contemporary Cuba* (2015), and Marié Abe's *Resonances of Chindon-Ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan* (2018). For Finnegan, understandings of space/place grow out of her observation that two commonly held assumptions—first, that the city is a large and heterogenous and therefore impersonal space, and second, that "community" is comprised of individuals in a particular place bound by personal ties—did not always prove entirely true in her research. This

[49] Michael Quentin Morton, *Empires and Anarchies: A History of Oil in the Middle East* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2017), 83.

[50] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 106–107.

led Finnegan to discuss musical practice using the (spatial) metaphor of "pathways," a concept that emphasizes the importance of multiplicity, overlap, and belonging in processes of music-making.[51] For Bodenheimer, the spatial represents not some predetermined locus of place, culture, ethnicity, and identity, but rather a site within which (at least in Cuba) these connections are constantly "entangled with processes and discourses of racialization."[52] Finally, according to Abe, "Sound and social interactions don't happen *in* space, or move *across* space; rather, *space comes into being* through the dynamic interrelations of multiple sounds, social encounters, and histories."[53] Collectively, these works reveal that music plays a central role in the complex processes of spatialization and of place-making.

In addition to the role of space/place in colonial histories of Kurdistan, I am also interested in the role of the temporal. While time may not seem as obvious an object of colonial conquest as space, I argue throughout the dissertation (but especially in Chapter 1) that Kurds have been subject to colonialism's temporal logics just as they have its spatial logics. This claim builds in part on the work of Communications scholar Sarah Sharma. In her 2014 book *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, Sharma builds on scholarly interventions often described collectively as the *spatial turn* to suggest that we cannot ignore the temporal aspects of the power inherent within systems such as colonialism—power that is most often discussed in terms of the spatial. Sharma therefore advocates a view of temporality (which she suggests exists in multiple and sometimes even contradictory forms—in other words, as *temporalities*) as the unfolding of power relations in time. As she explains:

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[51] Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, [1989] 2007), 299, 323–324.

[52] Rebecca M. Bodenheimer, *Geographies of Cubanidad: Place, Race, and Musical Performance in Contemporary Cuba* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2015), 10–11.

[53] Marié Abe, *Resonances of Chindon-Ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 29.

> Temporalities are not times; like continually broken clocks, they must be reset again and again. They are expected to recalibrate and fit into a larger temporal order. . . The temporal subject's living day, as part of its livelihood, includes technologies of the self contrived for synchronizing to the time of others or having others synchronize to them. The meaning of these subjects' own times and experiences of time is in large part structured and controlled by both the institutional arrangements they inhabit and the time of others—other temporalities.

In a certain sense, this approach toward temporality seems remarkably suited to scholarship focused on the work of musicians—after all, what is musical time if not a form of intentional synchronicity, and at that, one that bears within itself the marks of certain power relations? At the same time, as music scholars increasingly grapple with the histories and legacies of colonial power and their impact on contemporary music-making, we must remember that colonial power has forever altered not only space—in the form of political boundaries, urbanization, and extraction of labor and resources—but also the temporalities of colonized peoples across the globe. Understanding colonial logics of time therefore requires us to question inherited notions of time, as well as those of history, progress, modernity, and tradition.

Let's Talk about Tradition

For many of us, the concept of *tradition* is a personal—perhaps even intimate—one, one that connects deeply with various aspects of our emotional, familial, and communal lives and histories. Even though the practices we call "traditions" might include acts as banal as sharing a can of jellied cranberry sauce every Thanksgiving, the very words we use to talk about tradition (words like *observe, honor*, and *respect*) reveal the collective value underlying tradition at the conceptual level. At the same time, tradition is just as often seen as a kind of historical baggage (for several years now, there has been a meme circulating online that describes tradition as "peer pressure from dead people") or as a kind of hindrance to growth or progress.

In common usage, then, the invoking of tradition seems to imply a call for stasis or an unrelenting reliance on predetermined (i.e., historical) patterns of behavior. In "Tradition, Heritage, History: A View on Language," musicologist Reinhard Strohm seems to support this interpretation, arguing, "The 1981 name-change of our admirable musical council [the International Council of Traditional Music, formerly known as the International Folk Music Council] replaced an essential reference to social structures (*folk*) with another to continuities in time (*tradition*)."[54] Strohm goes on to suggest that interrogating these continuities remains an essential component of the work of (ethno)musicologists, not least because national administrations are often all too eager to lay claim to these traditions as their own.

The underlying problem with Strohm's argument is that understanding tradition as a series of continuities precludes much of the work scholars associated with the ICTM are committed to undertaking. For example, in the case of the Kurds, changes in political and social structures as well as shifts in the importance of particular musical practices throughout the twentieth century in particular would seem to preclude their having any musical traditions at all. Yet as sociologist Joseph Gusfield points out, tradition need not be understood as merely the polar opposite of modernity, nor as one side of a continuum between the two. As Gusfield asserts:

> Tradition is not something waiting out there, always over one's shoulder. It is rather plucked, created, and shaped to present needs and aspirations in a given historical situation. [People] refer to aspects of the past as tradition in grounding their present actions in some legitimizing principle. In this fashion, tradition becomes an ideology, a program of action in which it functions as a goal or a justificatory base.[55]

[54] Reinhard Strohm, "Tradition, Heritage, History: A View on Language," *IMS Musicological Brainfood: Tasty Bite-Size Provocations to Refuel Your Thinking* 2, no. 1 (2018): 6, https://brainfood.musicology.org/tradition-heritage-history/.

[55] Joseph R. Gusfield, "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change," *American Journal of Sociology* 72, no. 4 (January 1967): 358.

In other words, it is the invoking of tradition that demands some historical basis, not necessarily the practices thought to comprise tradition.

In ethnomusicology, scholars have utilized the idea of a "Great Musical Tradition" to explain certain similarities among various musical systems of the Middle East and Central Asia. These scholars suggest that the region's "Great" tradition, which is most evident in similar approaches toward modal systems of melodic organization, began in the pre-Islamic era, flourished in the courts of great Islamic empires, and ultimately evolved into more localized musical systems such as those of the Arabs, Turks, and Persians. It is important to note that this application of tradition within ethnomusicology reflects the conceptual influence of Robert Redfield, an anthropologist who taught at the University of Chicago beginning in the 1930s, as well as that of his colleague Milton Singer. In particular, it was Redfield and Singer's "Comparative Civilizations Project," which received funding from the Ford Foundation in 1951, that prompted them to propose the terms "great" and "little" traditions as a way of considering the relationships between historical civilizations and local communities in South Asia. The core component of this project was the production of a "general model of social change through intensive field experience in contemporary places."[56]

In addition to sharing a similar conception of *tradition* as a series of practices repeated across time, both of these paradigms (ethnomusicology's "Great Tradition" and Redfield and Singer's "great and little traditions") share two key shortcomings: the first is a reliance on the supposed dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The second is the failure of these paradigms to account for the importance of conflict within tradition (after all, who gets to decide

[56] Nicole Sackley, "Cosmopolitanism and Uses of Tradition: Robert Redfield and Alternative Visions of Modernization during the Cold War," *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 3 (2012): 590.

which cultural practices become tradition, or which traditions belong to or represent a particular group of people?). As anthropologist Kathleen Morrison argues in relation to Redfield and Singer's model, "The 'great' tradition of South Asia is by no means universally accepted as such. To put it mildly, this disagreement has never been politically neutral. Indeed, the contemporary electoral politics of India are impossible to understand without reference to ongoing attempts to define *the* great tradition of India in precisely the way Redfield and Singer did."[57]

The implications of these shortcomings are perhaps nowhere more evident than in geographic locations formerly subjugated by colonial powers. As many academics have in recent decades collectively sought to acknowledge the histories and ongoing impact of these colonial legacies, some have struggled with how to reconcile the supposed continuities of tradition with the destructive weight of colonialism, which in many cases ensured the erasure of local forms of knowledge and cultural production. This devastating impact has led various postcolonial scholars to describe tradition as either rendered impossible by colonial rule,[58] useless in the struggle against colonial power,[59] inferior in the minds of the colonized compared with colonial notions of "progress" or "civilization,"[60] or a mere fantasy devised by the powerless.[61]

Rather than abandoning the concept of *tradition* altogether, however, I aim to forge an alternative model of its importance in contemporary societies. This model is based in part on the

[57] Kathleen Morrison, "Constructing 'the Great Tradition': The Comparative Civilizations Project at Chicago in the context of South Asian Studies." Accessed February 23, 2022. https://www.academia.edu/8906344/Constructing_the_Great_Tradition_The_Comparative_Civilizations_Project_at_Chicago_in_the_context_of_South_Asian_Studies, 2.

[58] Bibhash Choudhury, *Reading Postcolonial Theory: Key Texts in Context* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 12–13. Here, Choudhury is summarizing Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965).

[59] Choudhury, 48–52. Here, Choudhury is summarizing Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

[60] Choudhury, 59. Here, Choudhury is summarizing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Portsmouth, NH: J. Currey; Heinemann, 1986).

[61] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xi.

work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who popularized the idea of an Aristotelian moral tradition in his 1981 work *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. An essential component of MacIntyre's main argument throughout the text is his assertion that the "various concepts which inform our moral discourse were originally at home in larger totalities of theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived."[62] In extolling the foundation of moral discourse in Aristotle's theory of morality, MacIntyre highlighted tradition's possibility for social embodiment, its inability to serve as a timeless truth for the ages, its inclusion of at least one central functional concept, its association with historical accumulation, its tendency to foster dialogue, and its reliance on institutional support in one form or another.[63] MacIntyre also insisted that moral traditions inherently impact the formation of society's understandings of Self (and, by extension, of the Other).[64]

Together, these assertions already seem to paint a different picture of *tradition* than that provided by Redfield and Singer, and thus, the model of tradition employed within ethnomusicology. The main (albeit subtle) distinction between these theories of *tradition* is that in Redfield and Singer's model, tradition serves as a sort of shorthand explanation of the relationship between a perceived practice and history (or History), whereas in the other (MacIntyre's model), tradition is a way of describing the ways individuals within a given society employ, interpret, or transform their own history/histories, often with material social and political effects.

[62] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 10.

[63] MacIntyre, 23; 51; 58–59; 146; 165; 194.

[64] MacIntyre, 34.

A recent advocate of MacIntyre's theory of tradition, anthropologist Talal Asad describes Islam as a "discursive tradition" in "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." Asad begins this work by offering three potential answers to the question, "What, exactly, is the anthropology of Islam?" Of these three possible answers, the one Asad spends the majority of the article discussing is the idea that "Islam is a distinctive historical totality which organizes various aspects of social life."[65] Critical of those (like Gellner) who come to this answer by comparing Christianity or Judaism with Islam, Asad asserts that this approach caused them to ignore differences in the "production of knowledge [that] are intrinsic to various structures of power," differences that exist "not according to the essential character of Islam or Christianity, but according to historically changing systems of discipline."[66] He therefore goes on to assert later in the article that "Islam as the object of anthropological understanding should be approached as a discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledge."[67]

In this formulation, *tradition* cannot be understood as "a distinctive social structure nor a heterogenous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals."[68] Instead, for Asad, tradition is primarily a discursive way of ensuring correct practice in ways that relate to the past, the present, and the future. Tradition therefore need not involve mere imitation of behaviors or practices from the past, and not everything practitioners of a particular tradition say or do can be considered part of that tradition. Furthermore, since tradition requires engagement on the part of

[65] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 2.
[66] Asad, 7.
[67] Asad, 10.
[68] Asad, 20.

its practitioners, it will always invite reason and argument, results which further illustrate the importance of power and resistance.

In the case of Kurdish musical practice, it is this model of *tradition* that I employ in the dissertation, for it is this model that offers 1) a framework within which to consider multiple forms of music-making by Iraqi Kurds and not just those involving the performance of "traditional" musics in the typical sense, 2) a justification for considering musical practice within a single Kurdish region (Iraqi Kurdistan) whose institutions and forms of power differ from those in other Kurdish regions, and 3) a conceptual justification for bypassing simplistic designations of terms and practices as "naturally" or exclusively Arab, Iraqi, Kurdish, etc. This framework also offers the best model through which to examine contemporary practices in relation to the past without insisting that such relationships represent the mere repetition of musical norms (or "continuities in time") from one generation to the next. This, of course, is a far cry from the way most of us typically understand tradition in a general sense. Yet this is precisely the intervention I hope to make: resisting the normalized conception of tradition as a set of practices repeated across time, I argue for the supplanting of practice-based conceptions of tradition in favor of examinations centering discursive relationships toward place and time. As in Asad's formulation, this reorienting requires the reevaluation of tradition's own internal logics (in this case, the concept of history as a kind of linear or teleological progression) as part of a larger examination of colonial logics of place and time.

Research Methods, Limitations, and Commitments

In the preceding pages, I hint at several key questions that have driven my dissertation research over the past several years. More explicitly, these include questions such as the

following: what is the relationship between tradition and technology in Kurdish music? Is there such a thing as Kurdish musical tradition? If so, how has it responded to the imposition of colonial power, especially throughout the twentieth century? These, of course, are questions I only began to formulate several years into the research process. Initially, my exploration of Kurdish music began with a much simpler question: what does Kurdish music sound like? This basic inquiry first piqued my curiosity around summer 2015 after I read an article about Iraqi Kurds in a dusty issue of *National Geographic* I had picked up for free at the local library. Having recently graduated with a master's degree in ethnomusicology, I assumed I would find an answer to this question (in prose, at least) spread out amidst a collection of academic articles, book chapters, and a monograph or two. Making the most of the fact that I still enjoyed online access privileges, I began my quest for information, heading straight for jstor.

Much to my surprise, I found very little—whether on jstor or elsewhere. There were a few sources, of course, and over the next several weeks, I eagerly worked my way through them (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of this literature). As I read, I realized that much of what I was seeing was several decades old; certain works even felt quaint given the numerous changes that had occurred in Kurdish politics and society in recent years, particularly since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Reluctantly leaving the realm of academic scholarship, I began looking for more public-facing contemporary works on the Kurds. Although I purchased and devoured a few books, these too left me generally unsatisfied, largely because their authors tended to use language that painted Iraqi Kurds both as blessed benefactors of the US' military mission, and as the key to future *US* aims and policies across the entire Middle East. Neither of these characterizations prioritized Kurdish voices or perspectives.

By the time I entered the PhD program at the University of Chicago in autumn 2016, I had decided that my dissertation would focus on Kurdish music, or, more specifically, Iraqi Kurdish music. I chose Iraqi Kurdistan as the geographic center of my project given the historic and theoretical importance of ethnographic fieldwork within ethnomusicology, and the implausibility of conducting such fieldwork in other parts of Kurdistan. Once I arrived at the University of Chicago, I began taking classes in Arabic (there were none in Kurdish) and reaching out via email to a few Kurdish Studies scholars who had recently published works related to Kurdish music (it seemed to me then that an awakening—or perhaps a reawakening—of scholarly interest in Kurdish Studies had finally begun). As I spent more and more time researching Kurdish music, culture, and history as do many other graduate students—on my cell phone during idle moments, I noticed that my social media apps had started to pay attention to my research interests. Facebook even began recommending friends who lived in Iraqi Kurdistan. Several of these suggested friends were holding musical instruments in their photos and used English on their personal profiles.

I began reaching out to some of these individuals, explaining who I was and how I wanted to learn more about Kurdish music. I noticed that many of the young musicians I was reaching out to lived in Silêmanî, which is touted by the region's Board of Tourism as the "cultural capital" of Iraqi Kurdistan.[69] Two individuals in particular—both of whom have since become dear friends—graciously offered to meet with me should I ever find myself in Silêmanî. After securing research funding from the Department of Music, I made my first trip to Iraqi Kurdistan in August 2017. I had not yet learned any Kurdish, but the English-speaking friends I

[69] "Sulaimaniya Province," *Official Site of General Board of Tourism of Kurdistan—Iraq*, accessed February 24, 2022, http://bot.gov.krd/sulaimaniya-province. Likewise, the gate at the entrance of Silêmanî's central bazaar says "*Silêmanî: Paytextî Rōşinbîrî* (Silêmanî: Capital of Culture)."

had made on Facebook welcomed me to the city and ensured that those two weeks were filled with live music performances and lively conversations about Kurdistan and its music and culture.

After returning to the US, I began regularly engaging with scholars in Kurdish Studies through a series of conferences and other events. At one of these, I met Dr. Michael Chyet, a linguist and cataloguer of Middle Eastern languages at the Library of Congress. Dr. Chyet was preparing to teach an online course in Kurmanji at the time; although my goal was to study Sorani, I jumped at the chance to learn any Kurdish at all. When that first course ended approximately seven months later, Dr. Chyet began teaching an online Sorani course. Now, nearly three years later, I still study Sorani with Dr. Chyet on a weekly basis.

Although my initial goals for this research included spending up to a year in Iraqi Kurdistan, it became evident fairly early on in my project that this was likely not to be. One of the major factors involved funding as I found myself prohibited from submitting several of the larger fellowship/grant applications given the geographical locus of my project: Iraq. Instead, I found more success proposing shorter research trips to key archives in the United Kingdom, where in 2018 I visited the National Archives outside of London as well as the special Kurdish collection housed at the University of Exeter, and in Paris, where I attended a weeklong "Kurdish Studies Summer School" at the Kurdish Institute of Paris (*Institut kurde de Paris*) in September 2018.

In fall 2019, I returned to Silêmanî for approximately three months of ethnographic and archival research. In addition to attending live music performances, I continued to interview local musicians and music scholars (most often with the aid of my paid research assistant, Mîrako, who helped me with translation) and to research at local archives, including Zheen

Archive (*Binkey Jîn*) and the Kurdish Heritage Institute (*Instîtyutî Kelepûrî Kurd*), which was founded by Kurdish vocalist Mezharî Xaliqî in the early 2000s. In 2020, I was awarded three small grants for additional research in the UK, Paris, Berlin, and Silêmanî. Unfortunately, I was unable to make any of these trips as planned given the onset of the global coronavirus pandemic. Instead, I continued my research online when possible and continued working my way through the dozens of Sorani texts I had purchased or photocopied during my last visit.

I chose to utilize ethnographic fieldwork methods during my time in Silêmanî (and among diasporic Kurdish communities in Chicago; Nashville, Tennessee; and Harrisonburg, Virginia) for several reasons. First, as I have already mentioned, ethnographic fieldwork, which ethnomusicologists Timothy Cooley and Gregory Barz define as "the observational and experiential portion of the ethnographic process during which the ethnomusicologist engages living individuals as a means toward learning about a given music-cultural practice," is a historically important and respected research tool among ethnomusicologists.[70] In his book *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions*, Bruno Nettl writes:

> Principally, ethnomusicology is study with the use of fieldwork. As already discussed, we believe that fieldwork, direct confrontation with musical creation and performance, with the people who conceive of, produce, and consume music, is essential, and we prefer concentration on intensive work with small numbers of individual informants to surveys of large populations… [W]ithout fieldwork there would be no ethnomusicology.[71]

This is not, of course, to suggest that all ethnomusicologists utilize the same theories, methods, and epistemologies of fieldwork, nor that such frameworks have gone unchallenged over time.

[70] Timothy J. Cooley and Gregory Barz, "Casting Shadows: Fieldwork Is Dead! Long Live Fieldwork!" in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, second ed., ed. Timothy J. Cooley and Gregory Barz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[71] Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions*, third ed. (United States: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 16–17.

One of the major epistemological shifts in recent years involves the reorienting of fieldwork toward "experiencing and understanding music" rather than simply "observing and collecting."[72]

The particular ethnographic methods I utilize in my research include observation, ethnographic interviews, content analysis, elicitation methods, audiovisual methods, and collection of cultural artifacts.[73] In total, I observed nineteen live music performances during my fieldwork. These performances often lasted for several hours, and they took place in venues ranging from private homes to restaurants to public performance spaces like Silêmanî's Şanoy

Figure 7. Şanoy Āromanî ("Roman Theater") in Silêmanî's Parkî Hewarî Şar, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. September 2019.

[72] Jeff Todd Titon, "Knowing Fieldwork," in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, second ed., ed. Timothy J. Cooley and Gregory Barz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25.

[73] For more on these methods, see "Table 6.1: Data Collection Methods" in Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction* (United States: AltaMira Press, 2010), 175–179.

R̄omanî (“Roman Theater”; see Figure 7). I also conducted sixty-one ethnographic interviews. About two thirds of these were informal in nature, usually taking place alongside other activities such as listening to music, eating, hiking, or riding in the car. The rest were more formal, or structured, in nature; these typically involved meeting an individual or group of individuals at a predesignated time and location, I with notebook and audio recorder in hand. During these interviews, I asked a series of fairly general questions (questions such as “What is the impact of radio on Kurdish music?” “What is the role of maqam in relation to Kurdish music?” etc.), thereby allowing the interviewee to set the course and the pace of the conversation.

During my visits to various archives, I prioritized gathering data related to Kurdish musical practice as much as possible; in many cases, I had to expand my purview to include data regarding wider political or cultural issues. At the National Archives outside of London, for example, I viewed a number of files related to British Mandatory control of Iraq. The most valuable archive of Kurdish musical materials by far was Silêmanî’s Kurdish Heritage Institute, or KHI. I cannot stress enough how welcoming and helpful I found the staff at KHI, who fed me lunch on several occasions, answered my seemingly endless questions about Kurdish music, and allowed me to photocopy books in their library. They were also the first to point me in the direction of Kurdish radio.

At the beginning stages of my dissertation research, my advisor, Dr. Philip Bohlman, cautioned me that this would be a difficult dissertation. He was right. In addition to funding issues and the postponement of additional ethnographic research arising from the pandemic, I have also been hindered by the general difficulty of accessing archives of Kurdish materials, a difficulty reflecting both the historic lack of state support for collecting and preserving these materials and the lingering effects of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Collectively, these and

other constraints highlight a few of this project's limitations: first, devoting so much time to the study of Sorani has required me to spend less time than I would like with Arabic sources, which I hope to include more of in future iterations of this work. Second, my reliance on a wide range of sources—including Facebook profiles and other "unofficial" sites of Kurdish musical discourse—means that some of the data I provide may prove to be inaccurate. While I have tried my best to cross-reference data as much as possible, certain details will no doubt continue to emerge over time.[74] Third, my own positionality as a white (US)American male (I discuss this positionality further in the following section) has largely precluded me from conducting ethnographic interviews with female musicians and music scholars (in Iraq, at least). This is not to say that I have not talked about Kurdish music with women, but rather that the vast majority of my structured ethnographic interviews have been with men.

Largely as a result of pondering these limitations, I developed a series of research commitments over time that have ultimately come to shape the writing process. The first of these is to amplify Kurdish voices whenever possible; this involves not only citing Kurdish sources, but also using the very words of my interlocutors whenever I can. Second, I am committed to highlighting the importance of women and non-Kurds within histories of Kurdish music, thereby resisting simplistic nationalist iterations of recent Kurdish history that prioritize the experiences of Kurdish men. Third, I am committed to sustaining the relationships and partnerships I have built thus far, and to continuing my ethnographic and archival research in the future. Because of my understanding of this project as a lifelong one, my readers will no doubt encounter several aspects of Kurdish musical practice about which I could perhaps say more but do not. This is

[74] The ongoing digitization of several important Kurdish archives, including the archives at KHI, will no doubt enrich my project (as well as those of others) in the future. At the time of writing, however, these digitization projects remain incomplete, and therefore, these archives inaccessible.

because I generally restrain myself from passing along mere speculation or incomplete data in certain areas in the hopes of gathering additional information in the future.

Authorial Subjectivity

My own positionality vis-à-vis my research and the interlocutors who have informed it is one that I have grappled with since the beginning of this project. As a white male citizen of the United States who is a native speaker of English, I have no doubt enjoyed privileged access to certain data, individuals, and physical locations and spaces in ways denied my interlocutors. In a certain sense, even my choice of this area of inquiry—guided as it was by free time and sheer curiosity—reflects a level of privilege not shared equally among all academics.[75] My response to these inequalities throughout the research process (in addition to those responses described above as research commitments) has been three-fold: foregrounding the ways in which I have benefited from certain forms of privilege, responding to my interlocutors' requests that I use that privilege in ways that benefit their own career and personal interests, and initiating regular, ongoing conversations with my interlocutors about the potential benefits and risks of my involvement in this project.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to fulfill all of my interlocutors' requests; I was unable, for example, to help anyone obtain a US visa (or even to offer insight regarding the approval process), or to sway universities' admissions decisions. I have been able, however, to help a few individuals in small ways, whether by reviewing their CV's, sending email introductions, or purchasing musical equipment unavailable in Iraq. Most importantly, many of

[75] Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 40.

my interlocutors have urged me along the way to continue this project, reminding me on multiple occasions of its importance—not only culturally and politically, but also personally. By introducing Kurdish music to new audiences (as I hope this project will do) and by contributing to the scholarly corpus of works on Kurdish music, I can only hope that I have honored those requests.

A Note on Terminology

I use a number of terms throughout the dissertation that warrant a brief note of explanation. The first of these is *Kurdistan*, which means simply "the land of the Kurds." No part of Kurdistan has ever been identified politically by this term, with the exception of the province of *Kordestan* in modern Iran.[76] When referring to the parts of Kurdistan that fall within the political boundaries of certain nation-states (I will use Iraq here as an example), I use either *Kurdistan of Iraq* or *Iraqi Kurdistan*. As I have already acknowledged, the historical inhabitants of Kurdistan include many other groups besides the Kurds; the use of this term should therefore not be understood as an attempt to downplay the importance of historical interactions with these groups nor the ongoing struggles of those seeking political recognition and equality. Likewise, millions of Kurds now live outside of Kurdistan or do not speak a Kurdish language; nevertheless, many of the issues I discuss are without a doubt equally pertinent to many of these individuals, regardless of their language use or physical location.

Although my work is nominally limited to Iraqi Kurdistan, which is often referred to using the name of its semi-autonomous administration (the KRG, or Kurdistan Regional

[76] Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, 186. Here, Gunter also notes that "Kordestan covers only part of the historical Kurdish area in Iran. Kurds also live in Kirmanshah, Western Azerbaijan, Ilam, and Hamadin."

Government), my research shows that the national boundaries dividing greater Kurdistan have often been quite porous, especially for those involved in cultural production industries such as radio. Even in discussions of "Iraqi Kurdish" music, then, it should be noted that this is not always an entirely useful designation. At the same time, the most immediate legacy of recent colonial intervention in the region remains the division of Kurdistan into distinct nation-states in which Kurds remain a minority. State policies and actions have affected Kurds in each of these nations differently, resulting in different possibilities for collectivization and resistance, as well as the particular means by which these aims were achieved. For this reason, I retain the use of *Iraqi Kurdish* as a meaningful historical and heuristic category.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into six parts; these include an Introduction, a Conclusion, and four chapters in between. In the Introduction, I have aimed to provide a general overview of Kurdish history and the struggle for Kurdish self-determination, and to explain the interrelationship of certain recurring themes such as *colonial logics of place and time* and *tradition*. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of extant (non-Kurdish) literature on Kurdish music; in addition to liner notes and reference works such as encyclopedic entries, I examine a number of travelogues written over centuries by European visitors to Kurdistan. Many of these travelers were directly supported by colonial powers in their endeavors; connecting these older sources with more recent ones, I show how certain colonial logics of place and time came to influence the representation of Kurdish musical practice in many written sources.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the historical importance of technologies of sound (a category within which I include the human voice) in Kurdish musical practice, beginning to tease out the

ways in which Kurdish musicians and their listeners have used these technologies to resist the imposition of colonial power. I trace the influence of this power on the early recording and broadcasting industries, highlighting the particular anxieties surrounding global crises such as World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, all of which contributed to the expansion of Kurdish broadcasting and thus to the development of a transnational Kurdish listening public. In arguing for a broad understanding of *technology* in these contexts, I push back against the colonial temporal logics that would relegate all Kurdish cultural activity to the realm of *tradition*.

Chapter 3 contains a case study of Kurdish Radio Baghdad, the Kurdish section of Iraq's state-run radio station which broadcast from 1939 until 2003. Drawing on contemporary Sorani sources and ethnographic interviews with former employees of the station, I analyze the role of radio in Kurdish music history, interrogating the ways in which radio and other mass media might become sites of resistance, as well as sites of musical transmission and exchange. I argue that music broadcasting in particular spurred certain changes within Kurdish society and musical practice.

In Chapter 4, I examine processes of musical transmission in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. I focus in particular on the state of music pedagogy and music publishing, as well as recent attempts to use music and media to promote images of a united Kurdistan (most notably in the 2017 show *Kurd Idol*). Finally, in the Conclusion, I briefly discuss the contemporary proliferation of media in Iraqi Kurdistan since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. I show how radio and other media remain a contested site, even as they enable new forms of cultural and political discourse. I also summarize the findings of my research and propose several new directions for the future of Kurdish music research.

Chapter 1

"Myriad Songs, Simple and Pretty": Colonial Epistemologies and Historical Representations of Kurdish Music

In 1954, newsreel and feature film company Associated British-Pathé—known internationally for having filmed the explosion of the *Hindenburg* (1937), the Battle of Dunkirk (1940), and the D-Day landings (1944)—released two new reels of footage collectively titled *Ageless Iraq*. The film, which runs approximately twenty minutes, is described on British Pathé's website today as a documentary about life in Iraq—its "political history, religion, traditions, industry, etc."[1] At the beginning of the film, as the opening credits fade from sight, grainy, close shots of an ancient Mesopotamian bas relief give way to impressive aerial views of an airplane in flight over some undesignated span of Iraq's dusty countryside. This shift in perspective from the ancient to the decidedly modern is one that occurs again and again throughout the documentary.

Even from the film's opening (and likewise from its title), it is clear that this shifting perspective is precisely what its viewers are meant to experience. Sonically, this temporal coexistence is referenced as early as the opening credits, which are accompanied by an Arabic orchestra featuring traditional percussive and melodic instruments as well as a distinctively modern string section (see Figure 8). Also emphasizing the importance of the temporal to the film's theoretical underpinnings are the very first words uttered by the unseen but seemingly all-knowing narrator:

> At the center of our world lies the Middle East, and at its very heart, the ancient land which is Iraq. Two great rivers span its length—the Tigris and Euphrates. In the plain made rich and fertile by their waters, the earliest civilizations known to man were born. Out of this ancient heritage, citizens of one of the world's youngest nations are building a new life and a modern state.[2]

[1] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1 (1954)*, directed by Graham Wallace (British Pathé: 1954), accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.britishpathe.com/video/ageless-iraq-reel-1.

[2] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1*.

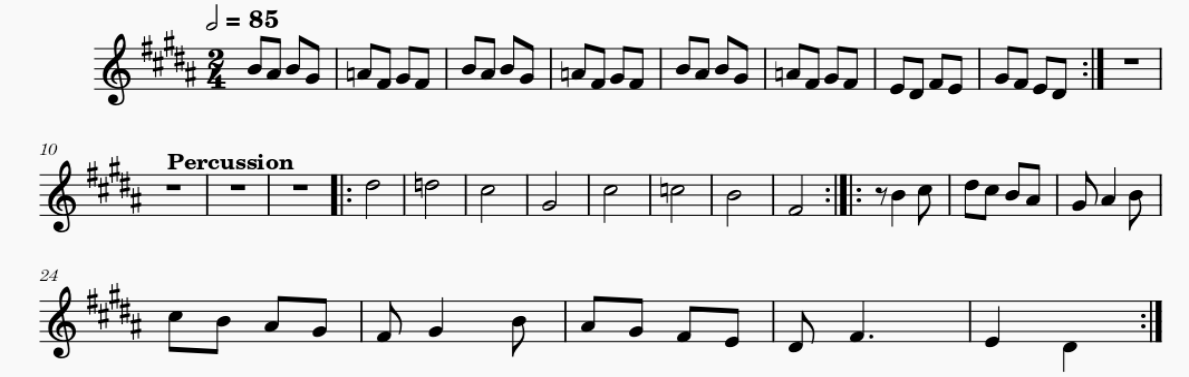

Figure 8. Transcription of the melody accompanying the opening credits of *Ageless Iraq* (1954)

This short paragraph is filled with references to the passing of time: the *ancient* land and its accompanying heritage where the *oldest* human civilizations were formed are said to have given way to a *young* nation, a *new* life, and a *modern* state. The coexistence of these temporal spaces—ancient and young, early and modern—might seem at first to represent a mere comparison of different points in time—what we call "history." As the film continues, however, it becomes clear that *ancient* and *young*, *early* and *modern* are also understood in this context to be markers of space.

This relationship between space and time is demonstrated further in the film's first reel. The opening portion of the documentary centers on Baghdad, Iraq's capital and at the time, seat of the British-installed Hashemite monarchy's power, prestige, and wealth. Emphasizing the recurring contrast of past and present, the narrator insists that the very name *Baghdad* "conjures up all the romance of Harun al-Rashid and the Arabian nights of a thousand years ago."[3] As shots of shoeless boys and slow-moving water buffalo congregating near the banks of the Tigris give way to clips of girls in school uniforms playing volleyball, the narrator informs his listeners that in Baghdad, "the tempo of an age-old way of life contrasts with the swifter rhythm of the

[3] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1*.

new."[4] Subsequent clips zeroing in on swimming pools, shiny red buses, and high-rise buildings cement the association of Baghdad as a particular space or place and certain markers of industrial modernity. This association reaches its rhetorical zenith as the narrator confidently declares: "The twentieth century has come to Baghdad, with steel and concrete, with shining cars and wide streets."[5] The most obvious question invited by this assertion, of course, is this: despite common tropes about "Middle Eastern time" (and all its local variants), how had Baghdad managed to enter the twentieth century five decades late? And what did this portend for the rest of the country?

Withholding any obvious answers to these questions, the film itself continues its interweaving of space and time just moments later, as visual icons of Baghdad's modernity give way to footage of villages, mountains, and shepherds tending scattered flocks. These clips feature the Kurdish regions in the north of Iraq. This shift is marked sonically by the replacement of the lively urban orchestra heard at the beginning of the film with the much simpler sounds of a single Kurdish shepherd playing a short, repetitive melody on the *bilwêr*, an end-blown flute often made of reed or wood (see Figure 9). In the commentary accompanying these sounds, the narrator once again makes comparisons emphasizing the supposed timelessness of Kurds in Iraq: "Here the life of the Kurdish tribes—farmers and hunters all—still follows an age-old pattern set by the sun and the changing seasons. When you visit one of their villages, you begin to

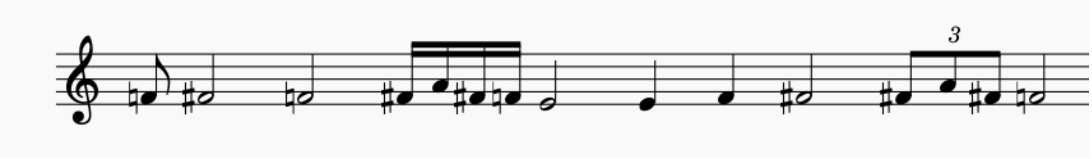

Figure 9. Outline of the melody played by a Kurdish shepherd in *Ageless Iraq* (1954)

[4] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1*.
[5] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1*.

remember Jacob and his flocks, and Rebekah at the well."[6] Since the film never goes on to suggest that Kurdish cities too (like Baghdad) might be modern, the idea expressed here is clear enough: the twentieth century had come to Baghdad, but *not* to the Kurds living in Iraq's north. According to this logic, traveling the approximately 150 miles separating Iraqi Kurdistan from Baghdad represents not only movement across space, but also through time.

Discourse on colonialism often highlights the spatial aspects of colonial conquest, yet, as *Ageless Iraq* and other contemporary sources reveal, *temporal* redefining, relegating, and gatekeeping was just as central a feature of colonial power, especially as it unfolded in Iraq following the British invasion of Basra in 1914. In the case of *Ageless Iraq*, which was produced some forty years after this initial move, at a time when Iraq was at least in theory no longer subject to British imperial presence, the levers of colonial power had simply been recast and repurposed in a new pursuit: of oil. In fact, the company that sponsored the production of *Ageless Iraq* was the Iraq Petroleum Company (or IPC), which, despite its name, was not actually under Iraqi control (and would not be for another two decades). The forerunner of the IPC was the TPC, the Turkish Petroleum Company, which in 1914 had awarded 50 percent of its shares to the British-controlled Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 25 percent to Royal Dutch Shell, and another 25 percent to Germany's Deutsche Bank.[7] The makeup of shareholders would change over time, with the Germans being pushed out after World War I, even as France and the US demanded increasing participation and ownership.[8]

For the British, interest in securing the region's natural petroleum resources was couched in language promoting the "liberating" and "civilizing" or "modernizing" potential of imperial

[6] *Ageless Iraq: Reel 1*.
[7] Morton, *Empires and Anarchies*, 76–84.
[8] Morton, 76–84.

interference; as Middle East historian Michael Quentin Morton notes, however, "These were empty promises. The British government had already agreed to an Anglo-French carve-up of the Middle East under the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). The oil resources of the region were considered the spoils of war, and a strategic prize worth securing."[9] This approach went hand in hand with the British decision to convert the primary fuel source of its naval vessels from coal to oil. A 1918 memorandum titled "Petroleum Situation in the British Empire" touted the potential for striking oil in Iraq's north, even while insisting, "There must be no foreign interests."[10] By the end of World War I, seizing control of this part of Iraq from the Ottomans had become a "first-class war aim."[11] Following the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement and the San Remo Conference of 1920, at which Britain and France were assigned Mandates for Mesopotamia and for Syria respectively, foreign control of Iraqi oil became the law of the land. Even decades later, in 1944, US President Franklin Roosevelt would remind Britain's ambassador to Washington, "Persian oil is yours. We share the oil of Iraq and Kuwait. As for Saudi Arabian oil, it's ours."[12]

The early twentieth century was not the first time the region we call the "Middle East" was swept up in "modernizing" ambitions originating further west. In fact, as historian On Barak asserts in his book *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, it was the development of railway and telegraphy in the nineteenth century that gave the region this designation (the *Middle* East) in the first place, since Egypt stood between Britain and its colonial offices in India.[13] Summarizing the relationship between spatial/temporal epistemologies and modernization/colonial expansion during this era, Barak argues:

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[9] Morton, *Empires and Anarchies*, 11–12.
[10] Morton, 82.
[11] Morton, 83.
[12] Morton, 147.
[13] On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 35.

> Nineteenth-century European supremacy was brought into relief with technical gauges provided by the new transportation and communication networks that welded together the metropole and colonies, offering a continuum along which the East could be demonstrated to be spatially peripheral and temporally backward.[14]

Logically, these processes rely on what postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty has deemed *historicism*, which he defines as "the idea that to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development."[15] As he goes on to explain:

> Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. . . Historicist consciousness was a recommendation to the colonized to wait. . . This waiting was the realization of the 'not yet' of historicism.[16]

This sort of temporal paradox is precisely what we see in the assertions of *Ageless Iraq*—that Baghdad could be "led in" (or "let in," to be more precise) to the twentieth century owing to the accumulation of oil wealth and industrialization, even as denying the equal distribution of this wealth among Iraq's citizens (including Kurds and other minorities) relegated them either to the past or to a realm altogether outside the temporal—i.e., "timelessness."[17]

As it relates to the temporal, colonial logics thus include the notion that time represents a certain teleology with progress and modernization as its logical outcomes. Historically, this logic was used to position colonial overlords such as the Mandatory Powers as essential to the modernization of Middle Eastern nations, and later, to justify the US-led destruction of Iraq's military and civil infrastructure beginning in 2003, thereby demarcating US forces the supposed keepers of democracy and Iraqi citizens as not yet capable of nurturing and sustaining

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[14] Barak, *On Time*, 2.

[15] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.

[16] Chakrabarty, 22.

[17] Middle East historian Sara Pursley provides specific examples of what she calls "future-oriented discourses" in twentieth-century Iraq and evaluates their impact on Iraqi society in *Familiar Futures: Time, Selfhood, and Sovereignty in Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

democratic governance. "Not yet" became the rallying cry of US propaganda, as were empty promises of "maybe someday."

In terms of the specific discursive mechanisms by which colonial logics, or spatial/temporal conceptions, were and are at work in this case, I propose two different processes which have helped to ensure the continuation of certain of these logics even in the postcolonial age: these include *erasure* and *caricature*. In her 2015 book *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*, Hanadi al-Samman discusses erasure in regard to Arab women authors as "an experience denoting rejection and the threat of total annihilation of the physical and symbolic existence of the female self," as well as the "suffocation of political freedom, the legitimate demands for democracy and social justice, and the curbing of feminine potential."[18] Although gender is not my primary focus in the dissertation, al-Samman's understanding of erasure as threat, annihilation, suffocation, and curbing, is no doubt relevant here. Caricature, on the other hand, arises from the problem that erasure often remains incomplete, thereby inducing a greater reliance on processes of exaggeration and likeness.

These two concepts—erasure and caricature—are reflected in much broader colonial strategies of dispossession. For Kurds, they are evident in the realm of the spatial via the rejection and annihilation of claims to Kurdish national autonomy (erasure) and, after 1923, in the fraudulent insistence that the new national governments installed or supported by colonial powers were beholden to their citizens despite continued colonial interference (caricature). Temporally, these concepts are evident in the erasure of local Kurdish ways of observing and marking time (a process I describe further in this chapter's Conclusion), and in the discursive

[18] Hanadi al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship, and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 45.

relegation of Kurds and other minorities, along with their "traditions," to a sort of perpetual pre-modernity (a claim which presents a mere caricature of Kurdish cultural practice).

Rather than following one from the other, erasure and caricature demonstrate an uneasy coexistence complicated by the fact that the lives of Kurdish people—including all facets of their cultural practice—spill over the boundaries that are meant to contain them. As a way of acknowledging this truth, and of providing a deeper introduction to Kurdish music writ large, the following sections are devoted to analyses of various historical sources on Kurdish musical practice (most of which are European in origin). After offering a brief introduction to major themes and genres in Kurdish music, I focus on a series of travelogues written by British explorers and military personnel who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to compiling the particular features of Kurdish music these authors describe, I analyze the ways in which colonial logics of place and time (often realized through the processes of erasure and caricature) underpin these works. I then examine a collection of contemporary texts on Kurdish music—these include liner notes, academic articles, monographs, and encyclopedia entries—interrogating the ways in which colonial logics sometimes continue to inform scholarly representations of Kurdish musical practice.

Kurdish Music and Its Caricatures in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Travelogues

Contemporary Kurdish musical practice is in many ways a direct reflection of Kurdish cultural and political history over the past few centuries, affected by processes of migration, inter- and intracultural exchange, and urbanization. Many contemporary Kurdish scholars believe that the first inspirations for Kurdish music were the sounds of nature; according to Mela Bestûn, a researcher who has devoted years of his life to studying the use of maqam in Kurdish music, these sounds include the wind, the song of the *bulbul* (nightingale), and even the buzzing of

flies.[19] During our interview, Bestûn also insisted that religious groups were the first to accept and utilize music as an integral part of society, pointing out that singing religious poetry is still central to contemporary religious practice (Sufi poetry in particular represents an important historical influence on Kurdish music). Whether religious or otherwise, poetry has been a celebrated idiom among the Kurds for centuries, and many of the lyrics of even contemporary Kurdish songs originated as poems.

Regional differences in Kurdish musical practice depended historically on factors such as tribal affiliation, seasonal migration patterns, proximity to urban centers or Kurdish principalities, and linguistic usage. Regarding the third of these factors, Iranian Kurdish singer Mezharî Xaliqî, who founded the Kurdish Heritage Institute in Silêmanî, once began one of our conversations about Kurdish music by talking about the longevity and political power of the Erdałan dynasty, which was based in Iranian Kurdistan for centuries until its demise at the hands of the Qajars in the late nineteenth century.[20] The Erdałans were serious patrons of music and of poetry, and their proximity to elite Persian courts was reflected in an affinity for Persian courtly culture. Even in 2019, a music store owner named Şwan quipped that Kurdish music was born in Iran but raised in Silêmanî.[21]

Throughout much of Kurdish history, villages have been viewed as important sources for various oral traditions, and famous Kurdish singers such as Ḧesen Zîrek often visited villages looking for new songs and performed for local village leaders (*aẍas*). The destruction of Kurdish

[19] Mela Bestûn, interview by author and Shene Mohammed (translator), personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, October 7, 2019.

[20] Mezharî Xaliqî, interview by author, personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, November 20, 2019.

[21] Şwan (last name unknown), interview by author and J. Andrew Bush (translator), personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, September 15, 2019.

villages in Iraq in the last few decades of the twentieth century has therefore resulted in certain widespread anxieties that urban centers like Silêmanî are incapable of sustaining oral culture in the same way.[22] Nevertheless, major cities like Silêmanî, Hewlêr (Erbil), Dihok, and Kirkuk have developed their own reputations for unique musical styles that are reflected in local music groups that were founded in the latter half of the twentieth century (groups such as *Tîpî Mosîqay Silêmanî, Tîpî Mosîqay Hewlêr*, etc.).

Notable genres of Kurdish music include *lawik*, a genre of sung epic generally focused on love or war; *ḧeyran*, another epic genre typically set in Maqam Beyat; *qetar*, a genre featuring movement between various maqams (the word *qetar* means "train"); *stran* or *goranî* ("song"), which are typically shorter than songs in other genres and are non-narrative; *hore*, a "sad" genre that often takes up religious themes and is performed in a number of regional variants such as the *horey Caf* (among the Caf tribe) and *horey Hewraman*; and *siyeçemane*, a genre native to the region of Hewraman. Another important genre in Sorani-speaking areas (I have not yet heard of its occurrence in Kurmanji-speaking areas) is *meqamî Kurdî*, or *Kurdish meqam*.[23] In multiple interviews, Iraqi Kurdish scholars stressed that many of these genres reflect important differences between regions, including geographical differences. Mela Bestûn, for example, told me that songs from Germyan (the region surrounding Kirkuk) were often very long in the past because the roads are straight and long, and people needed something to sing as they walked or worked. By contrast, songs from the genre *siyachemane* are short and high, reflecting the hilly and difficult working environment of Hewraman.[24]

[22] This was a concern that came up in multiple interviews and even in casual conversations with taxi drivers.

[23] I use the Sorani spelling *meqam* when referring to the genre of Kurdish meqam, whereas I use the Arabic spelling *maqam* when referring to the transregional system of melodic organization. I explain Kurdish meqam in further detail in Chapter 2.

[24] Bestûn, interview.

Historical documentation of these and other genres in Kurdish is generally inaccessible, if not altogether nonexistent. I turn now, then, toward an examination of the works of five different men who visited Kurdistan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and who left written records of their impressions of Kurdish history, society, and culture. These include Claudius James Rich (1787–1821), James Brant (1789–1860/1), Ely Bannister Soane (1881–1923), Edward Noel (1886–1974), and Cecil J. Edmonds (1889–1979). I approach these works fully aware of their limitations as historical and ethnographic record, and I acknowledge that their authors occasionally perpetuated historical inaccuracies or demonstrated a clear bias against certain aspects of Kurdish society and/or cultural practice. Keeping these limitations in mind, these works nevertheless raise a series of important questions: First, on a basic level, what do these documents reveal about musical practice in Kurdistan at the various points in time these men visited the region? Second, what was the role of colonial power in producing these works, and how did colonial logics of place and time inform these representations of musical practice? Finally, how might contemporary scholars use these works as a historical basis from which to begin documenting the ways musical practice in Kurdistan has shifted, consolidated, or been transformed in the nearly two centuries since the earliest of these works was published?

In the following paragraphs, I aim to provide answers to these questions first by introducing the author of each work and then by providing a short summary of what each of these men had to say about the musical performances they witnessed in Kurdistan. As a genre, travelogues rarely focus on providing detailed or technologically precise information regarding musical practice, yet the works I discuss here do include a number of ethnographic vignettes that feature musical performance. Furthermore, these authors occasionally describe in varying detail certain musical instruments they encountered, as well as the names of particular songs (or their

lyrics), dances, or musical genres. At the end of this section, I discuss several important themes that emerge from these works as a whole.

The first (and earliest) of the documents under consideration here was written by Claudius James Rich, an Englishman born in Dijon, France, in 1787. As a child, Rich demonstrated remarkable linguistic ability, learning not only English and other European languages, but also Hebrew, Syriac, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic.[25] At the age of sixteen, Rich became a cadet for the East India Company (EIC), a position he soon traded for civil service work with the EIC.[26] At the time, the company itself was undergoing a major transformation "from a profitable trading company into a full-fledged empire," owing especially to the EIC victory at the 1757 Battle of Plassey and the passing of the 1784 "India Act," which ultimately curbed EIC authority in India in favor of more direct British imperial control.[27]

Rich's position within the EIC allowed him to travel extensively before settling in Bombay in 1807 and throughout his career. Approximately one year after arriving in India, Rich accepted a company position in Baghdad, where he remained stationed until his death in 1821.[28] Although widely known today for his exploration of the ancient site of Babylon in 1811, Rich was also interested in excavating other local sites, including the ruins of Nineveh, which he had visited during trips to Mosul. In 1820, Rich and his wife began a journey that would take them from Baghdad northeast to Silêmanî, westward back to Mosul, down the Tigris, and finally, eastward to the ruins of Persepolis. Rich died of cholera in nearby Shiraz in 1821; in 1836, his widow Mary published her husband's records, journals, and letters from their trip under the title

[25] "Claudius James Rich: British Businessman," *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* accessed March 3, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Claudius-James-Rich.

[26] Benjamin Colbert, "Claudius James Rich," *British Travel Writing,* accessed March 3, 2022, https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1168.

[27] Dave Roos, "How the East India Company Became the World's Most Powerful Monopoly," *History,* accessed March 3, 2022, https://www.history.com/news/east-india-company-england-trade.

[28] Colbert.

Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh; with Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis.

Rich's *Narrative* begins with a brief explanation of his motivations for visiting Kurdistan: "To escape the intense heat of a Bagdad summer, I have this year determined upon a visit to the mountains of Koordistan, where we are informed we shall meet with a very different climate to that of Bagdad."[29] The remaining text, which includes over eight hundred pages published in two volumes, include several descriptions of events at which music was performed. These occasions for music-making include religious ceremonies, late-night visits among gentlemen friends, celebrations of Ramadan, weddings, funerals, and even the crossing of a river.[30] Occasionally, Rich describes musical events in some detail; one example includes the following account of a wedding he attended near Silêmanî under an entry dated October 2:

> Being informed that there was a wedding feast at a house in the outskirts of town, I determined to become a spectator of it. In order to avoid attracting attention, Mr. Bell and I put shawls about our heads, and concealed our dresses with black … cloaks, and … we set forth at night to see the show. After a long walk we arrived at the place of the feast, an ordinary house; on the roof of which, not six feet above the ground, we established ourselves among a great crowd of people. The courtyard, which was the scene of revelry, exhibited a crowd of Koords of every age and degree … Most of them were linked by the hand in the dance called the Tchopee, forming a ring not joined at the ends, which nearly enclosed the court-yard. These evolutions consisted in swinging to and fro with their bodies, and marking time, first with one foot, then with the other, sometimes with good heavy stamps in a way which reminded me of [an] Irish song … ; while the gaiety of their hearts would occasionally manifest itself in wild shrieks… Numbers squatted down in the centre of the dancers' line, among whom were the piper and the drummer…
>
> The dancers had been at it above an hour when we arrived. After having enjoyed their exercise for about half an hour more the music ceased… [After a break] the music then struck up again the notes of the Tchopee, and a string of about thirty ladies hand in hand advanced with slow and graceful step, resplendent with gold spangles, and party-coloured silks, and without even the pretext of a veil.[31]

[29] Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh; with Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis*, vol. 1 (London: James Duncan, Paternoster Row, 1836), 1.

[30] Rich, vol. 1, 104, 137–138, 281–284, 301, 351.

[31] Rich, vol. 1, 282–283. "Tchopee" (*çopî*) is one of the terms still used in Sorani for the noun *dance*; others include *sema* and *helperkê*. As further evidence of the widespread local use of *copî* in particular, see Rawlinson 1839 (p. 58), in which a contemporary of Rich's, Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (who was also a British EIC cadet turned Orientologist) describes witnessing a Lurî grave in 1836 that included images of "a band of women dancing the chupí."

In addition to the pipe (*zurna*) and drum (*dehol*) mentioned here, Rich describes several other Kurdish instruments throughout the text, including the "tamboureh" (*tembûr/tenbûr*), a long-necked plucked lute; the "bilwar" (*bilwêr*), a reed or wooden flute whose tones he describes as "soft and agreeable"; and the "shemshal" (*şimşal*), a wooden shepherd's flute that is now often made of metal.[32] Rich also provides the names of several Kurdish songs, including "Leili Jan," "Mulki Jan," and "Ben Kuzha Benaz," in addition to mentioning a song that began with the words "Az de Naleem," and a Yezidi song "about the carrying off of a very celebrated beauty named Gazhala, from among the Yezidis of Sinjar, by Hassan Pasha, father of the celebrated Ahmed Pasha of Bagdad."[33] Throughout these accounts, Rich repeatedly describes the overall sound of Kurdish music as "dismal" or imitative of wailing, insisting at one point, "The Koords are greatly given to music; all their music is of the melancholy cast."[34]

Just two years after the publication of Rich's travel account, another Englishman—James Brant—temporarily left his post as British Consul in Turkey's Erzurum for a visit to Kurdistan. Born in London in 1779 to a silk merchant father and a mother whose family hailed from Smyrna, Brant demonstrated a lifelong interest in international trade, and his efforts to ensure regular British commerce with Persia (in defiance of growing French and Russian influence in the region) led to the establishment of British Consulates in Trabzon, Erzurum, Batumi, Samsun, and Kayseri.[35] During his journey into Kurdistan, Brant was accompanied by his surgeon, Dr. Edward Dalzel Dickson, and Adam Gifford Glascott, a member of the British navy who

[32] Rich, vol. 1, 138; Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh with Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1836] 2014), 86.

[33] Rich, vol. 1, 138, 319; Rich, vol. 2, 86.

[34] Rich, vol. 1, 138, 319.

[35] Ahmet Dönmez, "The Role of James Brant in the Process of Structural Changes in British Consulates," *Adalya: The Annual of the Koç University Suna & İnan Kıraç Research Center for Mediterranean Civilizations* 22 (2019): 363–365.

volunteered to map the travelers' route.[36] In 1840, Brant published a record of his journey in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*.

Brant's writings about this journey contain just one mention of musical practice; nevertheless, this single account includes several interesting details. Brant encountered these music performances on August 24–25, 1838, while visiting a village near Lake Wan (*Van* in Turkish) in Kurdistan of Turkey. The occasion for these festivities was a Christian festival. According to Brant:

> Outside the village, I was met by some horsemen sent as a compliment by the Ṣú-Báshí, who presides at the festival, to maintain order, and several bands of the rude music of the country also came out to meet me, not to do me honour but to obtain a present. The festival attracts people from all the surrounding country: the love of pleasure, however, has quite as much to do with their assembling as devotion. Dancing seemed to be the principal amusement of the women, of whom various groups were seen treading with solemn pace the circular dance, to the sound of their usual harsh-sounding drum and fife. The women were all dressed in red cotton petticoats, with white cotton veils over their head reaching to the waist. The male portion of the assemblage were amused by the exhibition of dancing boys, or the antics of a bear. Every now and then came in a fresh party from a village, the chiefs of which were mounted on horses; the females followed on mules, asses, or oxen, with their young children clinging round them. Music and young men dancing preceded the cavalcade… By similar parties the crowd kept hourly increasing… The scene was noisy enough, and certainly extraordinary, but the separation of the sexes renders such exhibitions very tame in eastern countries.
>
> A little before sunset, the Ṣú-Báshí mounted, and, attended by a concourse of Kurd horsemen, made the circuit of the tents. In a field below our camp, the Kurds for a short time amused themselves in their martial exercises, galloping and wheeling their coursers about, firing their pistols, brandishing their lances, advancing and retreating in mimic warfare, after which the whole cavalcade continued its progress. The dancing and music was kept up until after midnight, when the noisy crowd, exhausted by fatigue, sunk into repose.[37]

Although the last six decades of the nineteenth century saw the publication of additional travelogues and military records describing journeys through Kurdistan (most notably by William Ainsworth, Frederick Forbes, R. J. Garden, R. N. Glascott, Viscount Pollington, H. C. Rawlinson, and J. G. Taylor), few of these contain information about musical practice.[38] In the

[36] James Brant and A. G. Glascott, "Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistán, in the Summer of 1838," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 10 (1840): 341.

[37] Brant and Glascott, "Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistán," 399–400.

[38] For more on these other authors, see Mirella Galletti, "Kurdish Cities through the Eyes of Their European Visitors," *Oriente Moderno* 20, no. 81 (2001).

early twentieth century, however, E. B. Soane, a British citizen often described as the "Lawrence of Arabia of Kurdistan," published several works that touch on Kurdish music. Soane was born in Kensington in 1881, and he first moved to what is now Iran as an employee of Britain's Imperial Bank of Persia, later holding posts at the Iran Imperial Bank in Kirmaṣan (Kermanshah) and the Iran-British Petrol Company.[39] While living in the region, Soane learned a number of local languages, and at some point, he converted to Islam. In 1909, he published "A Southern Kurdish Folksong in Kermashani Dialect" (see Appendix 2).

Also in 1909, Soane decided to journey through a greater expanse of southern Kurdistan, setting out from Istanbul (Constantinople at the time) and passing through Beirut, Aleppo, Amed (Diyarbakır), Mosul, Hewlêr (Erbîl), Kirkuk, and Silêmanî.[40] Throughout his travels, Soane disguised himself as a Persian Muslim from Shiraz (using the name *Ghulam Husain*). He ended his journey at Hełebce (Halabja—see Figure 10), where he found employment as a Persian these travels under the title *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise with Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan*. Soane ultimately became a fierce advocate for Kurdish political autonomy, with his employment by the British ending after the 1921 Cairo Conference.[41]

In "A Kurdish Folksong," Soane provides the text and English translation for a song he insists is "heard at every gathering in Kermanshah."[42] He describes the meter of the song as

[39] Eslîxan Yildirim, "About E. B. Soane and His Works," in *To Mesopotamia in Disguise with Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan*, ed. Eslîxan Yildirim (London: Weṣanxaneya Azad, [1912] 2013): 5–6.

[40] C. J. Edmonds, "Soane at Halabja: An Echo," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 23, no. 4 (1936): 624.

[41] Yildirim, "About E. B. Soane," 6. The Cairo Conference of 1921 laid the theoretical and political foundation for subsequent British control of Iraq and Transjordan.

[42] E. B. Soane, "A Southern Kurdish Folksong in Kermanshahi Dialect," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Jan. 1909): 36.

Figure 10. Present-day Hełebce, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017

"very simple"— "as is the case with all such poetry"—and notes that the poem is organized into rhyming couplets. Like the widespread *ghazal* poetic form, in which rhymed couplets are known as *beyt*, Soane notes that this form allows performers of the genre to shorten or lengthen the performance as necessary. The lyrics, which are included in full in Appendix 2, repeatedly reference the pain and sorrow of unrequited love (thereby representing another point of comparison with ghazals). Couplets 13 and 14, for example, read as follows:

> *Dam gird a mam gird, pisht i pāshna gird / Masī yi chaōwakat min la dunyā bird.*
> *Har chan manīshim sāl dumātir / Khwashīm kam maii talkhīm zītir*.
>
> Round mouth, round breast, round heel, / Intoxication of thy eyes took me from this world.
> The longer I remain succeeding years / My pleasure decreases, my bitterness grows more.[43]

Also interesting to note in the song's lyrics are references to two famous love stories codified by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209): *Shirin and Farhad* and *Layla and Mejnun*, the

[43] Soane, "A Southern Kurdish Folksong," 43. The transliteration and translation here are those of Soane.

latter of which English poet George Byron once described as the "Romeo and Juliet of the East."[44] Unlike ghazals, which are often limited to no more than fifteen couplets, the song described by Soane spreads across thirty-one; furthermore, the rhyme of each couplet in the Kurdish song is distinct and does not reproduce the rhyme found at the end of the first couplet, which would be the case in a ghazal.

Like Rich, Soane describes several different events at which music performances were featured. These include carriage rides, evening gatherings, picnics, religious ceremonies, military and government-sponsored events, and daily auctions.[45] The only instruments Soane mentions are those used in military bands and exercises, yet he does include at least partial lyrics to three different songs. The first, which he describes as a "song of the Erzinjan Kurds" (in Kurdistan of Turkey), includes just two lines: "*Chauakanam kaot ba chul u raikada / Halmbari chu be vairan jakada"* ("My eyes were turned towards the solitude and road, / And I rose up and went to desert places").[46] The second and third are both Mukri songs (originating in Iranian Kurdistan); only their English lyrics are provided by Soane as follows:

> I would across the hills and far away, wife,
> Say, shall I go, or shall I stay, wife?
> If you would go, God guard you on the track,
> And I will watch you from the pass, till you look back;
> I shall stand there in the sun until your clothes are shining white,
> Til you overtake the pilgrims that are travelling towards the night.
> What like of wife am I if I should weep or wail for you?
> Or leave neglected home and field to make a child's ado?
> Christian, Turk, and Persian whimper thus, and fear.
> Come, kiss me, and go swiftly, man and Mukri, Ah! My dear.[47]

[44] Lord Byron, *The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale*, 8th ed. (London: Thomas Davison, Whitefriars, 1814), 61.

[45] Ely Bannister Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise with Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan*, ed. Eslîxan Yildirim (London: Weşanxaneya Azad, [1912] 2013), 82, 176, 351, 144, 223–224, 379, 77.

[46] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 43. The transliteration and translation here are those of Soane.

[47] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 467–468.

> A three-fold anklet jingles in thy skirt,
> Ah, Amina, then turn about this way;
> Dancing forward, rustling here and there, O flirt.
> Shake thy bangles, naughty one, in play.
> But love will catch thee while thou yet mayst dance.
> And catching thee, will stay the tripping feet
> That turn thee round, to meet a sudden fiery glance:
> The head will whirl, the feet stand still, the heart will beat.
> Ah, Amina, thy budlike mouth awhile will sing thy song,
> Ah, Amina, then turn about this way;
> But love will take his toll, before so very long,
> And age, that poor old hag, will have her day.[48]

Immediately following this third set of lyrics is Soane's explanation that "there are many more of this kind of song, some of love, some of war and others of nothing more than comic histories, such as the Kurds love, and a collection, once started, would never end."[49] Elsewhere, Soane suggests that Kurds have something of a natural disposition toward musical expression. He writes:

> Outside, in the plain and upon the mountainside one hears myriad songs, simple and pretty [a phrase I have borrowed in this chapter's title], for the Kurds are a race naturally gifted with all the kindred abilities to the linguistic sense, and it is extremely infrequent to meet one whose memory (unweakened by the use of memoranda and the art of writing, and unburdened by too many ideas) is not a storehouse of ancient folk-songs.[50]

After the start of World War I, the British presence in Iraq took on new imperial dimensions. This is reflected in the work of the fourth individual under consideration here: Lieutenant-Colonel Edward William Charles Noel, whose *Diary of Major Noel on Special Duty in Kurdistan* was published in 1920. Little is known of Noel's life and military service, other than that he began his career in the Indian Army and later served as the British Vice-Consul in Ahwaz, Persia.[51] During World War I, Noel was involved in a number of secret missions, and in

[48] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 469–470.
[49] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 468.
[50] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 467.
[51] David Fitzpatrick, "Edward William Charles Noel—Political Officer and Spy," *Untold Lives Blog, British Library*, April 14, 2016, https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2016/04/edward-william-charles-noel-political-officer-and-spy.html.

1919, he served on special duty in Kurdistan. Like Rich and Soane, Noel includes in his diary a number of pertinent details about occasions for music-making, instruments, and particular songs and dances. In regard to the first of these, Noel describes both weddings and funerals as important occasions for music-making among the Kurds. At the weddings he witnessed, men and widows who were not marrying for the first time were not allowed to participate in the "dances, games, and festivities" otherwise associated with these joyous occasions.[52]

Noel also noted his impressions of several different kinds of Kurdish dance. Under an entry dated August 31 (1919), he wrote the following:

> There has been a considerable awakening of Kurdish national sentiments and feeling owing to our visit. This morning a drummer and a fife player have been found, and to the strains of a somewhat wild and uncouth music, the local Kurds have taken to dancing. The national dance of the Kurds is very similar to the GREEK HORA. The performers join hands in a semi-circle and balance their bodies backwards and forwards, marking time first with one foot then with the other, accompanying their movements with wild shrieks at intervals. The step is, however, less animated and varied than the HORA, and has been described as "A soft undulating movement of the whole circle in harmony with the music, like a field of corn set in motion by the breeze."[53]

Elsewhere, Noel describes what he considered a "rather inane form of amusement"—a kind of dancing game known as *tura* (in Sorani, *tûre* means "angry" or "furious").[54] During this game, a man would beat another's back with a length of rope while both men danced toward a crowd of male spectators. Once they reached the crowd, the "victim" would toss his unused rope to another man in the crowd, who would then begin beating the original perpetrator.

While Noel offers few other descriptions of musical practice, he does provide the words to at least two different Kurdish songs. The first, which Noel heard performed in a village near present-day Gaziantep, Turkey, is a lullaby sung by a Kurdish grandmother grieving the death of

[52] Edward William Charles Noel, *Diary of Major Noel on Special Duty in Kurdistan* (Basrah: Government publication, 1920), 51–52.
[53] Noel, 13.
[54] Noel, 13–14.

her daughter while rocking her infant granddaughter. The words, which an old man sitting nearby described as "nothing more than what she has invented herself," were as follows:

Dargusha min zhe daira	My cradle of wood,
Min daye kave aira	I have put by the side of the fire.
Min chai bekam wai dargushe	But what can I do;
Dargusheke bai khaira	It's a cradle of ill omen.
Lori lori dargush lori	Rock the cradle, rock the cradle
Nani dakam nani naba	I hush it to sleep but it will not sleep;
A sewia kadi naba	It is doomed to be an orphan without anyone to tend it:
Giri y a ash naba	It cries and will not be comforted.
Min dasa khwa daya dore	I will put my arms around it for protection.
Zhelada la dila daka zore	Tyrants there are who oppress our hearts.
Lori lori dargush lori	Rock the cradle, rock the cradle.[55]

The second song provided by Noel is one he identifies as *stran*, a "string poem chanted to music in the Gregorian scale."[56] The title of the *stran* is "Wilat a Min Nina," and Noel provides the following lyrics and translation:

Wilat a min nina	This is not my country (i.e., I am an exile).
Nizam a qanun a wilat a zhairina	Here we have the laws and customs of the lowlanders.
Kasara dil a min wilat a zhorina	The citadel of my heart is with the highlanders.

Taking a negative view of these lines, Noel suggests that the ultimate meaning of the song, which references seasonal patterns of migration, lies in its "inherent sentiment of clannishness and exclusiveness."[57]

The final individual I consider here— Cecil J. Edmonds—was a British political officer who served in Mesopotamia and northwest Persia with the British Expeditionary Forces, and later in the civil administration of the newly-formed nation of Iraq. Edmonds was Kurdish lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London from 1951 until 1957, and he collaborated with Kurdish writer and politician Taufiq Wahby (*Tewfîq Wehbî*, 1891–

[55] Noel, *Diary of Major Noel*, 5. The transliteration and translation here are those of Noel.
[56] Noel, 67.
[57] Noel, 67.

1984) on a Kurdish-English dictionary that was published in 1966.[58] In his 1957 book *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel, and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919-1925*, Edmonds offers a blend of political commentary, descriptions of archaeological sites, and ethnographic vignettes. Like the other authors referenced above, Edmonds notes a number of occasions for music-making; these include religious ceremonies, evening gatherings, and even a hunting party.[59] Providing even more detail in the realm of Kurdish dance, Edmonds writes:

> As far as I can see, [the *chopiy* of Silêmanî] is very similar to, if not identical with, dancing as practised by villagers in other parts of Kurdistan, in Western Persia, and no doubt Asiatic Turkey. The variations are known by special names, but I cannot be sure whether the difference is always in the step or sometimes only in the tune or the words of the accompanying song. Most varieties have this in common that the dancers form a line, have the arms hanging at their sides, and hold hands at the level of the hips [see Figure 11]; the music is provided by two or more pipers (*zurnajen*), so that it can go on indefinitely, and perhaps drummers (*deholjen*); the performer on the extreme right of the line is the leader (*serchopiykêsh*) and both he and the outside man on the left wave scarves with the free hand in time to the music; the dance consists

Figure 11. Three Kurdish young men dance as others look on, Hewraman region, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. October 2019.

[58] Taufiq Wahby and C. J. Edmonds, *A Kurdish–English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

[59] C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel, and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919–1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 84, 237, 358.

> of a series of steps which cause the line to sway backwards and forwards and also sideways; newcomers join in, or individual dancers drop out as they tire, without interrupting the figure.[60]

Edmonds goes on to identify several variants of this dance, including "*Rhoyne* (Andante)," which he suggests is the "the commonest variety"; "*Sêpêyiy*," or "three step"; "*Milanê*, during which dancers press their shoulders close together; "*Shêkhaniy*," a faster, more playful dance; "*Ayishok*," which is accompanied by "the words of a love song celebrating little 'Little Aʿisha'"; and "*Rhesh belhek* (Motley)," which Edmonds identifies as the name given the dance when women in the villages join in.[61]

In another description of his travels throughout various tribal territories, Edmonds notes his attempt "to organize a concert" late one summer evening. He had asked some of the attendants to sing songs in Kurdish, but they were hesitant to do so, regularly reverting to singing Persian songs instead. One of the local villagers finally complied with Edmonds' request, however, and "bawled his piece with great gusto."[62] According to Edmonds, the song "seemed to me most monotonous, each line being a repetition of the last, which ended in an excruciating gasp as if the performer was trying to drive the last ounce of breath out of his body."[63] This description, albeit not one offering a positive impression of the song Edmonds witnessed, seems to highlight several important musical and poetic characteristics: these include the consistent use of the same melody for each line of the song, the substantial length of each poetic line, and the performer's dedication to performing each line in a single breath. Finally, Edmonds includes the text and translation for the following poem written by famed Sorani poet ʿEbdułła Goran (1904–1962), whose poems have

[60] Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, 84.
[61] Edmonds, 84.
[62] Edmonds, 110.
[63] Edmonds, 110.

often been turned into songs (indeed, the very name of this poem—*Goranî*—means "song" in Sorani):

Gorani	Song
Eshq y êwarê y sererhê y kaniy	Courting at evening on the spring road
Ber edat e chem gihlpe y goraniy	Lets loose across the valley a blaze of song.
Rhoj awa ebê, chem tariyk da yêt	The sun goes down, darkness descends on the valley.
Deng y 'Kina Leyl' her dwayi' nayêt.	The music of 'Kina Leyl' goes on unending.
Mang helh d'ê, be triyfey shax ebê keyl;	The moon comes up, the crag is bewitched by her beams;
Hêshta her germe nalhe y 'Kina Leyl.'	And still persists the plaint of 'Kina Leyl.'
'Siyachemane! Siyachemane![64]	Dark eyes! Dark eyes!
Behesht y eshqe em Hewramane	A paradise for courtship, this Hewraman.
Ewande y daru berd y Hewraman	Every stick and stone of Hewraman
Shabash le jin y bejnu balha cwan.	A tribute is to its graceful girls.
'Siyachemane! Siyachemane!'	Dark eyes! Dark eyes!
Hewraman cêga y siyachemane.	Hewraman is the home of dark-eyed beauties.[65]

Collectively, these five authors—Rich, Brant, Soane, Noel, and Edmonds—provide a number of useful details regarding Kurdish musical practice in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Figure 12). Their observations indicate a Kurdish musical sphere informed by regional difference even as it took part in more widespread musical and literary forms, and in which music created opportunities for both individual and collective expression—whether of joy, grief, or any number of emotions in between. Music was also used to coordinate social activities, ranging from sacred ceremonies and major life cycle events to military exercises to more mundane tasks like hunting or crossing a river. These accounts also reveal that singing and dancing might be considered the most exalted of the Kurdish musical arts (an observation to which I return in Chapter 2).

Equally important to note is that these accounts highlight what Vanessa Agnew calls "the traveler's vantage" in her 2008 book *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other*

[64] While "dark eyes" is an appropriate translation of this term, *siyachemane* is also the name of a sung genre native to Hewraman. Note also the reference to yet another song named "Kina Leyl."

[65] Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, 179. The transliteration used here is that of Edmonds.

	Rich (1836)	**Brant (1840)**	**Soane (1912)**	**Noel (1920)**	**Edmonds (1957)**
Occasions for music-making	Religious ceremonies/celebrations, visits among friends, weddings, funerals/grief, crossing a river	Religious celebration	Social events, religious ceremonies/celebrations, state/government-sponsored events, daily auctions	Weddings, funerals	Religious ceremonies, evening "concerts," hunting parties
Musical instruments	Tembûr, bilwêr, ṣimṣał	Drum, "fife"	Military band instruments (including brass)	Drum, "fife"	"tambourine," dehoł, zuṙna, "small kettle-drums"
Songs	"Leili jan," "Mulki jan," "Ben kuzha benaz," "Az de Naleem," Yezidi song about Gazhala		"A Kurdish Folksong," "My eyes were turned," "I would across the hills," "A three-fold anklet"	"My cradle," "Welat a min nina"	"Courting at evening," "Kina Leyl"
Dances	"Tchopee"			A dance "similar to the Greek hora," "tura"	"Chopiy"—"Rhoyne," "Sêpêyiy," "Milanê," "Shêkhaniy," "Ayishok," "Rhesh-belhek"

Figure 12. Kurdish music in nineteenth and twentieth-century travelogues

Worlds. According to Agnew:

> Traveling [in the eighteenth century] meant physical mobility, and with this mobility came the crossing of social, political, religious, and ethnic boundaries. This transgressive quality inclines us to think of the traveler as a lone individual, an outsider occupying a position of vulnerability within the host environment. Yet the traveler has always been an arbiter of difference. This helps to explain the special status of travel in the eighteenth century, for it was the traveler who held the ability to exercise a special set of judgments that tested and exposed the limits of the host's sociability.[66]

Even though the works referenced above were written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Agnew suggests travelers' accounts began to reflect an inward rather than an outward orientation, the tone of these works is much closer to that of the eighteenth-century travel writings analyzed by Agnew. The most obvious reason for this temporal discrepancy is that all of

[66] Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29. Agnew also discusses what she calls "the symbolic capital of travel" (p. 23). The expectation that travel itself would bestow a sort of social or epistemological capital on the traveler seems apparent here in Brant's complaining that several musicians approached him not to show him honor but to solicit a "present." In fact, these were probably peripatetic (non-Kurdish) musicians/instrumentalists who relied on such presents for their livelihood (see Chapter 2).

these men—like their eighteenth-century counterparts—were seen as "experts" capable of distilling certain forms of knowledge from the mash of their experiences in Kurdistan. Their proximity to colonial power—drawn from their positions as military leaders, or, in the case of Soane, as a local agent of imperial business—ensured not only that these men were provided the vast resources necessary for undertaking these travels in the first place (resources which, for Soane, resulted in the ability to hide his true identity altogether), but also that their subsequent writings were taken seriously in a clear instance of "epistemological advantage" (remember also the exalted reputation of certain of these authors even today within academic disciplines such as archaeology).[67]

For these men, "Travel produced a specific form of knowledge making based on a common set of experiential and observational modes like eye witnessing and comparison. The traveler could compare the unfamiliar with the familiar, the strange with the yet stranger, and the past with the present."[68] These epistemological expectations help to explain the number of comparative references seen in these texts, such as Rich's comparison of Kurdish dance to an Irish song, or Noel's understanding of Kurdish dance through comparison with the Greek *hora*. They also explain the near infatuation of each of these authors with the role of women in Kurdish music and dance. It matters little whether these comparisons or observations might be understood as "right" or "wrong"; what is important here is how they show that even direct observation is always interpreted through the lens of prior knowledge, experience, and expectations.[69] This truth also explains these authors' descriptions of Kurdish music using words such as *wild, noisy,*

[67] Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus*, 30.
[68] Agnew, 30.
[69] Even ethnographic "truths," then—as well as the knowledge they aim to represent/reproduce—are always both partial (see Clifford and Marcus 1986) and situated (see Narayan 1993).

inane, or *uncouth*. These, of course, are descriptors neither of sound nor of bodily movements, but rather of their authors' culturally and socially informed perceptions of these events.

To understand these travelers as having been exalted to the position of ultimate arbiters of truth is also to acknowledge the dismissal of the Kurdish populations visited by these men as inferior in the realm of worldly knowledge and cultural practice. It is in this sense that even Soane, the fiercest advocate among these authors for Kurdish political and national demands, describes Kurds as "unweakened by the use of memoranda and the art of writing, and unburdened by too many ideas."[70] This (patently false) attitude, which is expressed in some form in every one of these works, suggests that to these men, Kurds were simply part of a different temporal trajectory than were the natural-born subjects of modern colonial powers like Britain.

Writing about Jean-Baptiste Lully's musical representation of American "sauvages" in the 1685 ballet *Le Temple de la paix*, musicologist Olivia Bloechl argues, "The absolutist logic of royal spectacles demanded the symbolic integration of colonial peoples as quasi-French subjects; yet the threat that this posed to the integrity of a developing French cultural identity also encouraged performance of their difference."[71] Although Kurdish populations were not necessarily seen in this case as any sort of threat to British culture or hegemony, these works operate discursively in a manner similar to that of Lully's *La Temple de la paix*: by depicting Kurdish society both as vastly different from British society (and therefore inferior) and as dependent upon British influence and control in initiating the processes responsible for modernization. Drawing on postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, Bloechl argues, "The ambivalence of colonial mimicry stems from its presentation of the colonial as an amenable

[70] Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 467.
[71] Olivia Bloechl, "Savage Lully," *Cahiers du dix-septième: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11 (2006): 46–47.

object, that only just eludes regulation or representation."[72] In the works under consideration here, the conditions upholding this mimicry include a perpetual reliance on *erasure*—evident in the privileging of non-Kurdish ways of knowing and experiencing Kurdish music—and *caricature*—apparent in depictions of Kurdish musical practice that mask its deeper social and cultural meaning.

Contemporary Literature on Kurdish Music

Just as colonial logics continued to inform the goals and policies of new states like Iraq after the nominal departure of colonial governments in the early to mid-twentieth century, the colonial logics relegating Kurds and their cultural practices to another time and place (or *time/placelessness*) continued to impact subsequent scholarship on Kurdish music. In the 1950s, record companies began introducing Western audiences to Kurdish music via music recordings and their accompanying liner notes.[73] The 1955 Folkways record *Kurdish Folk Songs and Dances* (released as part of Folkways' Ethnic Series), features music that was recorded by archeologist Ralph Solecki in 1953 during excavations at Shanidar Cave in northern Iraqi Kurdistan (northeast of Akrê/Aqra; see Maps). In the liner notes, Solecki credits "Mrs. Fadhil al Jamali of Baghdad" (the wife of Iraq's Prime Minister at the time) with lending him the equipment used to make the recordings.[74] The woman credited here is Sarah Powell Jamali, a Canadian citizen who first met her future husband while attending a summer school at the University of Chicago, and who published a book of Iraqi folktales in 1965.[75] Jamali recorded

[72] Bloechl, "Savage Lully," 47.

[73] As I discuss in Chapter 2, there are records of Kurdish music from as far back as 1916; nevertheless, these early records were often marketed to "ethnic" communities themselves rather than to a general audience.

[74] Ralph S. Solecki, Liner notes, *Kurdish Folk Songs and Dances*, Folkways Records (FE4469: 1955), 4.

[75] Michelle Stefano, "'The Gal Who Will Use the Recording Machine': Insights into the Sarah P. Jamali Collection," *Folklife Today* (blog), Library of Congress, June 20, 2018, https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2018/06/the-gal-who-will-use-the-recording-machine-insights-into-the-sarah-p-jamali-collection/. Of note is that Powell first

these folktales using the same equipment she had earlier loaned to Solecki—an Eicon tape recorder, two microphones, a generator, and a battery.[76]

Solecki's descriptions of Kurdish society and culture often seem designed to satisfy avid readers/listeners longing for a taste of the exotic—a musical encounter with the Other. He writes the following about Kurdish songs:

> The Kurdish folksong, like many others, is a song which sounds best in its natural setting in the still of a mountain valley. The Kurdish song preserves the folk culture and tradition. The songs played here are the classic Kurdish songs, called the "LAWK" or "HAIRAN." Recorded far from regular communication in northern Iraq, these songs are pure and unspoiled.
>
> Sung in falsetto, with a quality of yodeling, some songs are plaintive and chant-like in execution. Others, particularly those associated with the folk dances, while repetitious, are very lively. A noteworthy quality of the singing is the use of "implosives," or the forced intake of air. Clearing the throat for effect is also common. On occasion of the dances, the audience can hardly restrain itself from adding an accompaniment of hand claps, joyous whoops, or the peculiar liquid "lu-lu-lu" sound, a sound of happiness.[77]

Solecki's insistence that the songs on the album are "pure" and "unspoiled," and that they sound best in their "natural" setting, seems to stress the Otherness of these songs—you can listen to them in your home thanks to the marvels of modern recording, but they simply won't sound the same as they do in that distant land called Kurdistan. In addition to stressing the "faraway" nature of these songs' origins, Solecki also seems to imply that Kurds themselves exist outside the normal bounds of time and of history, declaring, "The Kurds are baked on the arid hillsides and steppes in the summer, and chilled to the marrow in the winter, a process which tempers them like steel"—as if the temporalities of Kurdish societies (and the personalities of all Kurds) are pre-determined only by the ceaseless oscillation between annual climatic extremes.[78]

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began translating the folktales found in her book (see Jamali 1965) into English while on house arrest in Baghdad after the 1958 military coup known as the July 14 Revolution.

[76] Stefano. As Stefano notes, Jamali received this equipment, which was valued at $400 in 1952, from the Library of Congress following personal correspondence with Luther H. Evans, the Librarian of Congress from 1945 to 1953.

[77] Solecki, Liner notes, 5–6.

[78] Solecki, Liner notes, 2.

In yet a further entangling of place and time, Solecki writes, "Much like the ballads of our Appalachian mountaineers, who the Kurds resemble in temperament, the songs deal with universal things, such as love, troubles, and war."[79] This comparison reveals the ways in which colonial logics' universalizing tendencies ultimately obscure—that is, erase and caricature—the particularities of local contexts. Just as *Ageless Iraq* had implied that 1950s Iraq somehow existed outside of time (at least, the parts of the country that had yet to "modernize"), Solecki's comparison of Iraqi Kurds to Appalachian mountaineers (another group often described as "backward" and seen as bearers of "tradition") forcefully uproots both communities, relegating them discursively to a realm altogether beyond the reach of time and space.

Challenging this assumption are the liner notes written by ethnomusicologist Dieter Christensen for his 1966 album *Kurdish Folk Music from Western Iran* (also produced by Folkways for its Ethnic Series). Here, Christensen pushes back against the notion of Kurds as timeless, centering instead the recent political changes that had disrupted historical migration patterns among nomadic Kurdish tribes and had prompted increasing urbanization. These changes are reflected in Christensen's division of Kurdish music into three different "classes" or types, the first of which he identifies as urban popular music.[80] By and large, Christensen saw urban music-making as the realm of professional musicians and radio as its primary means of dissemination. His second and third classes of Kurdish music, which he describes as the realm of musicians who do not or cannot support themselves full-time as musicians, are rural music (a category within which he includes not only *lawik* and *heyran*, but also epic songs, or *beyt*, and *qetar*) and music accompanying daily/life activities (i.e., lullabies, play songs, work songs,

[79] Solecki, 5.

[80] Dieter Christensen, Liner notes, *Kurdish Folk Music from Western Iran,* Folkways Records (FE 4103: 1966), 1-2.

wedding songs, dance songs, and songs for celebrating *Newroz*, the Kurdish New Year).[81] Although Christensen's categorization of Kurdish music represents a welcome change from the determinist assumptions of prior authors, it should be noted that these categories are still imperfect, particularly since they tend to obscure historical patterns of interaction between village music/musicians and urban professional vocalists (a theme I pick up again in Chapter 3). Furthermore, as I discuss in this chapter's final section, the very insistence that Kurdish music be represented through familiar categories belies the typical experiences of many Kurdish musicians.

One final recording worth considering here is the 1974 album *Kurdish Music*, produced by UNESCO as part of its "Musics and Musicians of the World" series. The liner notes for the album were written by ethnomusicologist Christian Poché, who describes Kurdish music by way of comparison and contrast: "Kurdish music belongs to the same family as Persian music, but its main characteristic is the pentacord." He goes on to argue:

> At first sight, the way a Kurdish musician considers his art may appear disconcerting to a Westerner, for there exists no terminology indispensable in defining the phenomenon of sound. There are no precise terms relating to the art of making music; the rules, the forms, the musical scales are all in the Kurdish language all associated with concrete phenomena.[82]

In these words, we seem to find lingering once again the temporal logics of colonialism: Kurdish music is all but said to lag behind in comparison with Western music, which has proven its supposedly advanced nature via the codification and canonization of musical terms over the centuries (never mind the rich variety of regional Kurdish music terminology, the use of which certainly makes Kurdish musical practice as a whole no less complex). Continuing his

[81] Christensen, Liner notes.

[82] Christian Poché, Liner notes, *Kurdish Music*, UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World, Musical Sources (1974), 2.

interpretation of Kurdish music through the lens of established Western models, Poché suggests that all Kurdish music is based on some variant of the Dorian scale, which testifies to its ancient character. In terms of classification, he describes only two general types of Kurdish music: daytime music, or music for festivities; and night music, which he describes as less "noisy" and more expressive.[83]

By the 1990s, political changes within the various parts of Kurdistan had led to massive population shifts as thousands of Iraqi and Turkish Kurds in particular began emigrating to Europe and other parts of the world. Subsequent literature about Kurdish music naturally took these changes into account, with ethnomusicologist Stephen Blum and Kurdish Studies scholar Amir Hassanpour arguing that "the scope and intensity" of contact among Kurds from different regions during this period marked a new era of Kurdish cultural history.[84] It was also during this period (particularly following the 1967 banning of public expression in Kurdish in Turkey) that the circulation of Kurdish music via cassettes became an essential marker of "separatist" sentiments among Kurds.[85] This is not, of course, to suggest that "Kurdish music" as a discursive category suddenly came to represent a monolithic form of cultural practice; in fact, despite the increase in regional contact, local differences in terminology and in practice continue to thrive in many ways. This is in part because, as Dieter Christensen asserts in the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, "[Kurdish] communities live in environments that are quite different from each other."[86] Nevertheless, the formation of a transnational Kurdish listening public (a process I

[83] Poché, Liner notes, 4–5.

[84] Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour, "'The Morning of Freedom Rose Up': Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival." *Popular Music* 15, no. 3, Middle East Issue (Oct. 1996), 331.

[85] Blum and Hassanpour, 326.

[86] Dieter Christensen, "Kurdistan," in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 6: The Middle East, eds. Virginia Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2002), 770.

describe in further detail in Chapter 3) effected a number of important changes in Kurdish musical practice.

Since the early 2000s, the lifting of various restrictions in Turkish Kurdistan has enabled the publication of scholarship dedicated to the musical practice of *dengbêj*, "the art of storytelling in sung verse."[87] In *The Sung Home: Narrative, Morality, and the Kurdish Nation*, cultural anthropologist Wendelmoet Hamelink argues that the songs of the *dengbêjs*…

> … tell of a distant Kurdish past, and sketch, apart from the adventures of rulers and nobility, also the pursuits of the Kurdish commoner and give an interesting view on their life world…The dengbêjs and their songs [in defiance of colonial logics of place and time!] create a tangible Kurdish past, a Kurdish geography, a place of belonging and nostalgia, set within the landscape of Turkey and the surrounding (nation-)states.[88]

Political anthropologist Marlene Schäfers has also discussed the art of *dengbêjî*, albeit through the lens of gender. She argues that the experiences of female *dengbêjs* in Turkey are illustrative of contemporary gendered politics characterized by ambiguity and contradictory effects in regard to the perceived agency of their voices in the public sphere.[89]

Decolonizing Studies of Kurdish Music

In summer 2018, historian Nilay Özok-Gündoğan wrote an essay inspired by two recent Kurdish Studies conferences hosted by US universities. In the essay (titled "Kurdish Studies in North America: Decolonizing a Field that Does Not Quite Exist, Yet?"), Özok-Gündoğan asserts, "Kurdish Studies is currently caught between seemingly contradictory but equally vital agendas: building the field as an independent field of inquiry in North America while

[87] Wendelmoet Hamelink, *The Sung Home: Narrative, Morality, and the Kurdish Nation* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016), 1.

[88] Hamelink, 1.

[89] Marlene Schäfers, "'It Used to Be Forbidden': Kurdish Women and the Limits of Gaining Voice," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 1 (2018): 3–24.

simultaneously struggling to free it from the paradigm of area studies."[90] Often associated with US imperial aspirations during the Cold War, the birth of area studies has rightly come under criticism in recent years as glorifying the ideal of the nation-state at the expense of other social, cultural, and political formations, and as inseparable from foreign policy decisions, despite the fact that scholars of the Middle East in particular have been decreasingly involved in (or consulted on) US foreign policy.[91] For Özok-Gündoğan, the challenge ahead of Kurdish Studies, then, is two-fold: first, to legitimize Kurdish Studies as an area of study backed by institutional support, and second, to incorporate Kurdish Studies into broader expanses of interdisciplinary research that avoid the pitfalls of the area studies paradigm.[92]

The task of decolonization has also been a primary focus of many music scholars. As one example, the theme of the Fall/Winter 2016 edition of *SEM Student News*, a graduate student-run publication of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), is "Decolonizing Ethnomusicology." The issue's call for submissions "invited critical discussion of ethnomusicology as a field of practice, asking contributors to draw attention to the significance of diversity in perspectives and representation" while also inviting "reflexive critique of our positions, actions, responsibilities, and relationships within communities where we are engaged as graduate students and ethnomusicologists."[93] Following the call for submissions, editors of the newsletter's "Student Voices" column released a voluntary online survey on the subject of decolonizing ethnomusicology as a discipline. In the survey's second section on participants' personal views on this process, the twenty-five participants provided answers that were subsequently grouped

[90] Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, "Kurdish Studies in North America: Decolonizing a Field that Does Not Quite Exist, Yet?," *Jadaliyya* (ezine), June 20, 2018, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/37676.

[91] Walter Armbrust, "Introduction: Anxieties of Scale," in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2–6.

[92] Özok-Gündoğan.

[93] Davin Rosenberg, "Letter from the Editor," *SEM StudentNews* 12, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2016): 1.

into four categories in the final publication: "1) decentering ethnomusicology from the United States and Europe; 2) expanding/transforming the discipline; 3) recognizing privilege and power; and 4) constructing spaces to actually talk about decolonizing ethnomusicology among peers and colleagues."[94] The problems raised by these goals are strikingly similar to the five chronic problems outlined a decade earlier by ethnomusicologist Steven Loza in his article "Challenges to the Euroamericentric Ethnomusicological Canon: Alternatives for Graduate Readings, Theory, and Method." The problem areas outlined by Loza include 1) the general dependence of the university on "Euroamericentric" canons, theories, and methods; 2) hegemonic views of issues such as time, place, and metaphor; 3) the lack of minority representation among academic faculty and researchers; 4) the lack of diversity in university curricula; and 5) the problematic fetishizing of "Theory" in academic research.[95]

Despite decades of widespread calls such as these aimed at decolonizing music scholarship, the process of decolonization is one with which many scholars continue to grapple. After all, as this chapter shows, the boundaries of the contemporary Middle East are not the only result of imperial Western forces flexing their colonial power; academic discourse emanating primarily from the West has also created boundaries of its own that make projects such as decolonizing the study of Kurdish music difficult. One potential reason for this seeming paradox is the association between modern power, which is never too far removed from academic discourse, and destruction. As Talal Asad explains in his 1992 article "Conscripts of Western Civilization":

> My concern … is to stress something that is not in dispute: that a new world has been forcibly created as a consequence of the West's imperial adventure, and that the categories (political,

[94] Ana-María Alarcón-Jiménez, "Decolonizing Ethnomusicology: A Survey," Student Voices: A Student Union Column, *SEM StudentNews* 12, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2016): 6.

[95] Stephen Loza, "Challenges to the Euroamericentric Ethnomusicological Canon: Alternatives for Graduate Readings, Theory, and Method," *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 362.

> economic, cultural) in terms of which that world has increasingly come to live have been put in place by characteristic modalities of modern power. Destruction—whether it was carried out by Europeans or by non-European rulers anxious to defend themselves by attempts at Westernization—interests me here only to the extent that it is integral to modern power, especially the power of the modern state.[96]

One of the more immediate implications of this kind of destruction for Kurds is related to the continued elevation of the nation-state as the only appropriate model for dignity and self-determination. Such an insistence not only ignores centuries of preexisting social and political formations among the Kurds, but also redirects contemporary discourse on Kurdish nationalism toward the founding of a Kurdish state and away from other important problems such as political corruption and human rights abuses in areas where some degree of Kurdish autonomy has already been attained. It also stands to reason that in addition to the destruction wrought by the exaltation of the nation-state, Western categories of knowledge and knowledge production (which inform many of the works discussed above) can be just as damaging as they marginalize local ways of knowing and responding to colonial power. The resulting destruction of local discursive categories inflects the way these scholars access, interpret, and represent the histories of those among whom they work.

One important example of this latter kind of destruction can be seen in discourse related to the notion of Indigeneity. While the concept is often utilized as part of an attempt to acknowledge the colonial past and to move toward a decolonial future, it can just as often be used (wittingly or unwittingly) to reinforce the non-native categories through which Indigenous voices are expected to respond. As media scholar Jo Smith and English professor Stephen Turner assert in relation to New Zealand, "A more recent global love of all things Indigenous disguises continuing colonialism: New Zealand is probably a world leader here … In this context,

[96] Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization," in *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond*, ed. Christine Ward Gailey (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992), 340.

postcolonialism describes new as well as more established measures of controlling a Māori body that will ultimately not be governed in non-Māori terms."[97] For Kurds, the problem is not that they have yet to be given access to Indigeneity as a particular kind of status, or that settler logics disavow local ways of thinking, acting, and being (particularly since the British never attempted to settle Iraq), but rather that pervasive colonial logics of place and time proscribe the very notion of Indigeneity (particularly in the global-political sphere), thereby preventing the emergence of other, more localized expressions.

Two important examples in this regard—both from other peoples residing in the Middle East—involve the Bedouin population of the Negev in Israel and the Assyrian Christians of Iraq. For the most part, discourse on Indigeneity has largely ignored the Middle East, highlighting instead those geographical areas subjected to centuries of European settler colonialism. In recent years, however, both of these groups have made claims to indigeneity before various legal or international assemblies. For Israel's Bedouins of the Negev, the claims to indigeneity reflect the desire of various members among the Bedouin leadership to circumvent the Ottoman-era legal framework that recognizes them only as Arabs or Palestinians, and therefore demarcates their land as state land.[98] For Iraq's Assyrian Christians, the attempt to claim Indigenous status is a direct response to the erasure of Assyrian culture and history, as well as the forced removal from ancestral homelands that was carried out by Islamic State militants in June 2014. Sargon George Donabed and Daniel Joseph Tower describe some of the problems associated with Assyrian claims to indigeneity as follows:

> Indigenous peoples such as the Assyrians break the mold of the discussion, because the actions of European colonizers form only one part of the group's history. Briefly, Assyrians were colonized by

[97] Jo Smith and Stephen Turner, "Indigenous Inhabitations and the Colonial Present," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 271.

[98] Seth J. Frantzman et al, "Contested Indigeneity The Development of an Indigenous Discourse on the Bedouin of the Negev, Israel," *Israel Studies* 17 (2011): 96.

> the British and French, as were most other Middle Eastern peoples. They had also experienced colonization in a different context at the hands of Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries, who were unable to make much headway in predominantly Muslim communities. Even earlier, Assyrians had experienced multiple waves of Arab/Islamic colonial conquest. They now live amid a burgeoning Kurdish nationalist project. In other words, colonization is not a solely European-oriented matter.[99]

Highlighting the common association of resistance to colonial projects with heroism, Donabed and Tucker go on to assert that "Middle Eastern indigeneity, it seems, doesn't exist without a Western gaze."[100]

Although discourse on Indigeneity has not been particularly central to Kurdish nationalist movements, there is a growing sense that Kurds, too—particularly those in Turkey—should begin to claim Indigenous status as a way of demanding equal citizenship, communal recognition by the state, the right to education in Kurdish, and the right to self-determination.[101] While this may seem like a worthwhile endeavor, the previous cases illustrate the particular difficulties of demanding that Indigeneity be recognized as applicable to the entire Middle East so long as international bodies such as the United Nations refuse to acknowledge the political implications of self-determination for all Indigenous peoples. Of course, the greater problem I am attempting to outline here is not that Indigeneity is a weak principle politically, but rather that it often requires the acceptance of particular (colonial) logics of place and time. Whenever it elevates the supposed *a priori* land rights of Indigenous peoples above all other aspects of Indigenous expression, the very notion of Indigeneity demands a linear historical encounter with colonial power (the colonizer) that preceded the forcible removal of a group of people (the colonized)

[99] Sargon George Donabed and Daniel Joseph Tower, "Reframing Indigeneity: The Case of Assyrians in Northern Mesopotamia," Viewpoints, *Perspectives on History*, January 1, 2018, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2018/reframing-indigeneity-the-case-of-assyrians-in-northern-mesopotamia.

[100] Donabed and Tower.

[101] Aynur Ünal, "Indigeneity Discourse within Kurdish Political Movement," *Securitologia* 2 (2017): 65.

from a specific piece of land. As Donabed and Tucker make clear, this narrow definition of Indigeneity excludes most of the Middle East.

In a seminal article detailing Kurdish-Armenian relations at the turn of the twentieth century, historian Janet Klein reveals that the question of land ownership among minority groups is often far more complex than the average historical narrative tends to reveal. In the case of southeast Anatolia during the late Ottoman Empire (the latter decades of the nineteenth century), Klein argues that nomadic Kurds and settled Armenians often shared access to the same land over the course of a year, and that the development of violence among these two communities can be seen as a direct result of political and social changes that disenfranchised both Armenian and Kurdish peasants.[102] The colonial logic of land as reflective of a particular type of claim to Indigeneity therefore works to exclude groups such as Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians from Indigeneity as a category of representation and affirmation. Likewise, the insistence of the colonial logic that Indigenous peoples lived in definable geographic clusters of space in a time period pre-dating the arrival of (primarily European) colonizers does not allow space for the particular histories of groups with complex and repeated historical interactions not only with multiple colonizers, but also with each other. To put it rather bluntly, the histories of Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians did not begin when the British invaded Iraq in 1914.

In addition to the constraining nature of discourse on Indigeneity, the decolonizing of research on Kurdish music must also account for the artificial boundaries that have been constructed between "folk" and "popular" forms of music-making. As music scholar Ross Cole asserts in a recent edition of *Ethnomusicology*, the theory of "folk song" popularized by Cecil Sharp in early twentieth-century Britain (one that remains influential today) was ultimately

[102] Janet Klein, "Conflict and Collaboration: Rethinking Kurdish–Armenian Relations in the Hamidian Period (1876–1909)," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (1 and 2): 155.

responsible for the creation of a logic that equated the peasant with the primitive, the nation with "a racial community with sacred ties to the soil."[103] At its most extreme, Cole asserts that this principle is not so different from fascist ideology, and that the "folk song was a less pernicious expression nonetheless predicated on the very same system of thought."[104] Like discourse on Indigeneity, this understanding of "folk" music as a particular representation of a group of people or as reflective of an "essential reference to social structures" relies on colonial logics of place and time insofar as it demands a particular relation to both modernity and the nation (in the literal geographic sense).[105] For Kurds in Turkey, the politicization of folk songs beginning in the 1990s offers one recent example of the breakdown of the boundaries between "folk" and "popular" forms of Kurdish music-making, particularly since politicized folk songs arranged in various Western styles have become a common feature among diasporic Kurdish youth musicians whose networks are formed through cultural centers in metropolitan areas.[106]

Conclusion

I began this chapter by focusing on the ways in which colonial logics of place and time inform depictions of Iraqi Kurds and their music in the documentary *Ageless Iraq*. Through language emphasizing the supposed "timelessness" of Kurdish society and culture, the film ultimately portrays Kurds as existing in a temporality far removed from modern life and, through the processes of erasure and caricature, masks the reality of Kurdish lived experience. I argue that these same logics inform not only nineteenth and twentieth-century travelogues, but also

[103] Ross Cole, "On the Politics of Folk Song Theory in Edwardian England," *Ethnomusicology* 63, no. 1 (2019): 32–34.

[104] Cole, 35.

[105] Strohm, "Tradition, Heritage, History," 6.

[106] See Ozan Aksoy, "The Politicization of Kurdish Folk Songs in Turkey in the 1990s," *Music and Anthropology: Journal of Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean* 11 (2006), https://www.umbc.edu/MA/index/number11/aksoy/ak_0.htm.

some of the more recent literature on Kurdish musical practice, particularly by privileging Western authors as "experts" and Western frames of reference as the only possible epistemologies for understanding otherwise "foreign" ways of being in the world.

While these effects are evident largely in the realm of the discursive, Kurdish populations have also been subjected to these logics in other, more tangible ways. Take, for example, the adoption of the Gregorian calendar as the "official" marker of time for publications and government administration (and later, for broadcasts) beginning in the nineteenth century. As had earlier Arabic presses in Egypt, Kurdish publications began printing the date using the Arabic month names corresponding to the Gregorian calendar. Before this period, the primary Kurdish calendar in widespread use, like others across the region, was a lunisolar one, with lunar months but solar years. The names of the months in this system, which is still known in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan, reveal local understandings of time in relation to the surrounding landscapes. The first month of the Kurdish year, for example, is *Cejinan*, the first month of spring whose name comes from the word for "festival" or "feast," and which no doubt bears reference to Newroz, the Kurdish New Year. Other month names reference the typical weather patterns associated with particular months (for example, *Gułłan*, the second month of spring, means "flowers," and *Befiran*, the first month of winter, means "snows") or other visible phenomena such as the appearance of *Gelawêj*, a star which is visible in the region every year during the second month of summer, and which gives this month its name.[107]

Other impositions of the new global standard time include those found in Iraq's first constitution, the Organic Law of 1924, which was formed in collaboration with the British and

[107] Other variants of these names exist; see Michael Chyet, *Ferhenga Birûskî: Kurmanji–English Dictionary*, Vol. 1: A–L (London: Transnational Press London, 2020), xxxi–xxxii.

which cemented standard clock time as the new nation's official time in multiple ways. It legislated, for example, that the country's monarch would reach majority at the age of eighteen, a determination requiring standardized methods of determining age.[108] The Organic Law also dictated the terms of members of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, as well as the precise dates (in Gregorian time, of course) on which sessions of the legislature should begin.[109] In the realm of media, the rise of recording and broadcasting technologies in the twentieth century also brought new standards of time—both as the temporal limitations of phonograph records began shortening performances that had once lasted many times as long, and as broadcasting schedules began requiring the subdivision of each day into precise minutes.

Despite the apparent triumphs of colonial power and logics, Kurdish linguistic and cultural practice—including musical practice—might be understood as resisting or subverting these processes. One example is the ongoing use of the four cardinal directions to refer to the various regions of Kurdistan: *Bakur* (north) is used for Kurdistan of Turkey, *Başûr* for Kurdistan of Iraq, *Rojawa/Rojava* (west) for Kurdistan of Syria, and *Rojhełat* (east) for Kurdistan of Iran. Another example involves the words *pêş* and *paş*, which denote "before" and "after" in regard to time but are also used to mean "in front of" and "behind" respectively. According to this logic, the past is always in front of one rather than behind, and the future behind one rather than before. While this logic is also hinted at in English with the use of the word "before" in reference to both physical location and time, this logic is largely undermined for native English speakers in other ways. In Sorani Kurdish, however, this logic extends to other expressions such as the word *paşeroj*, which means "future." In this way, the Kurdish linguistic conception of time directly

[108] The Organic Law of ʿIraq, Part II.
[109] The Organic Law of ʿIraq, Part III.

challenges the historicist consciousness, or empty, homogenous time that places past, present, and future within teleological succession.

Musically, we can hear echoes of this orientation in songs such as "Demî R̄aperîn" ("Time of Awakening"—see Figure 13; Appendix 2), a *sirûd*, or nationalist hymn, authored by 'Ebdołła Goran. The musical setting of the song is decidedly modern as far as Kurdish music is concerned, making use of Western instruments and utilizing a march-like tempo. In the text, however (and perhaps surprisingly so for a nationalist hymn), Goran resists teleological predictions of the future; after all, the future (*paṣeroj*) is, well, *paṣ* (behind). Instead, the song centers a sort of eternal present, with the past always inherent in its calls to action, and the future always unknown. The song also resists the "speed is best" logic of modernity, instead encouraging the Kurdish nation not to act in haste (*dirişt taku wird, nekeyn dest u bird*).

Whereas I translate the title of the song above as calling for an awakening, I should note that the word *r̄aperîn* also means "uprising."[110] This dual meaning further enhances the song's resistive capacity, especially considering its addressing of all Kurds as a single audience and its broadcasting over the radio in the 1940s, albeit not from a nation with a Kurdish majority of its own (see Chapter 3). In this sense, the song demonstrates (as do many others) that Kurdish music has proven a key site for resisting the imposition of colonial logics of place and time; in Chapter 2, I show how various technologies of sound are central to this process.

[110] *R̄aperîn* is, in fact, the name given to the historic uprising I discuss in the Introduction to Chapter 2.

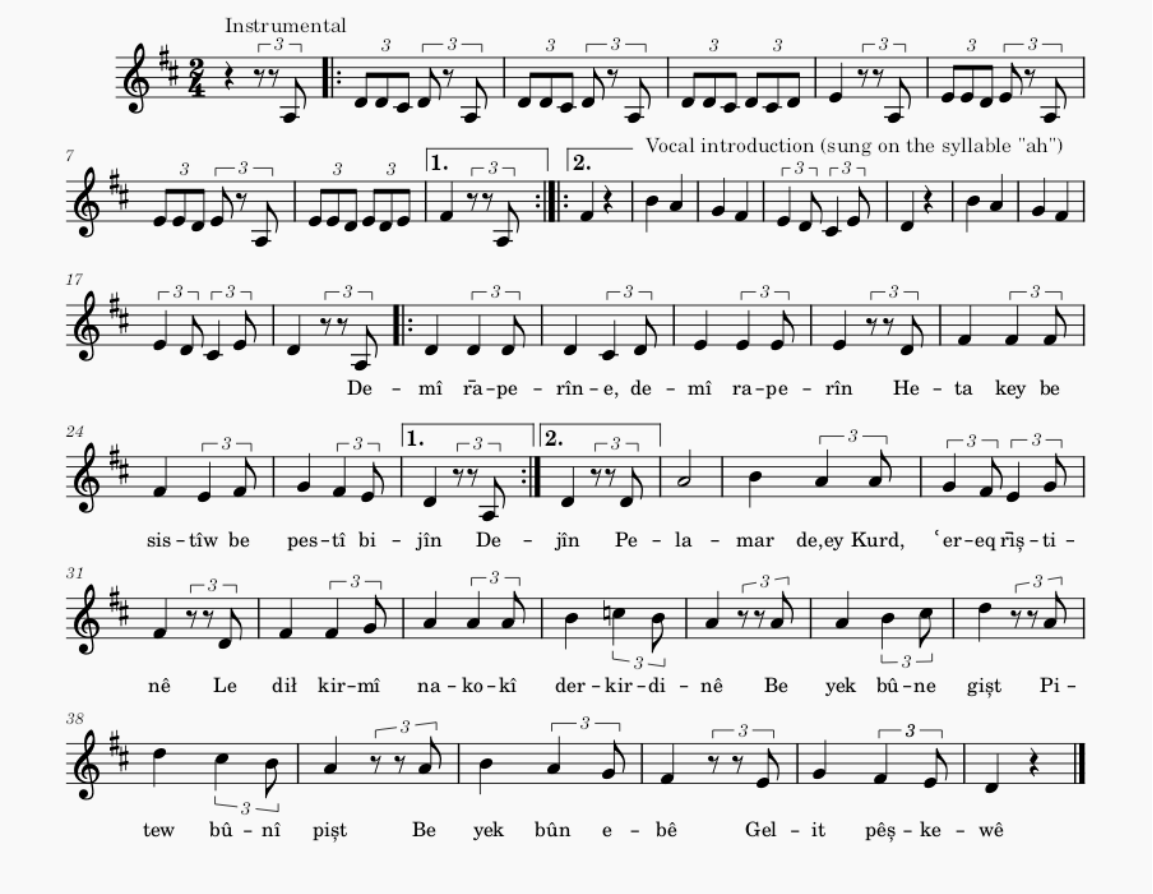

Figure 13. Transcription of “Demî Rāperîn.” Lyrics by ʿEbdułła Goran (see Appendix 2 for additional lyrics), musical arrangement by Enwer Qeredaxî.

Chapter 2

Sounding Tradition:
Technologies of Sound as Sites of Resistance

Not far from Silêmanî's bustling city center lies the imposing *Emne Sûreke* ("Red Prison"; see Figure 14), the former Baʿath party regional headquarters and torture chamber that was liberated by the citizens of Silêmanî in 1991 and subsequently converted into a museum. The primary purpose of this museum is to commemorate the atrocities of the Baʿath regime in Iraq—atrocities including Saddam Hussein's *Anfal* campaign and the use of chemical weapons in Hełebce (Halabja). The name *al-Anfal*, an Arabic term which means "the spoils of battle," was borrowed from the eighth sura of the Qurʾan as a means of providing a religious justification for the destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages, as well as the mass murder and forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s (near the end of the Iran–

Figure 14. The courtyard of *Emne Sûreke*, which remains as it was the day it was liberated in 1991. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

Iraq War, 1980–1988).[1] The primary motivations for this genocidal campaign included the loss of Iraqi control of large swaths of territory in the country's Kurdish north, failed negotiations between Baghdad and Kurdish political leaders, and the collaboration of rival Kurdish parties enabled by the help of mediators in Tehran.[2] Operationally, *Anfal* was led by ʿAli Hasan al-Majid, a first cousin of Saddam Hussein widely known as "Chemical Ali." The massacre at Halabja, which took place on March 16, 1988, was in part an attempt to punish the local population for their support of Kurdish rebels.[3]

Although much of Emne Sûreke's exterior remains as it was the day it was liberated, other areas of the building complex reflect an artist's deliberate and thoughtful touch, whether in the hall of lights and broken mirrors meant to commemorate the thousands of villages destroyed during *Anfal* (see Figure 15), or the statue of a Kurdish flag-bearing figure whose white robes remain miraculously unstained by pools of red clearly meant to symbolize the blood of Kurdish martyrs (*şehîd*; see Figure 16). When I first visited Emne Sûreke in August 2017, I was struck by the haunting silence of these and many others of the museum's exhibits, which include the tiny cells where countless men and women awaited their final moments in squalid conditions. As I made my way through the exhibits on that first trip, guided by a friend and local musician, silence seemed the only appropriate response—after all, what better way to commemorate the silenced voices, hopes, and dreams represented there than to allow oneself, even if for just a moment, to become enveloped in silence?

[1] Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, 41.
[2] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 234–236.
[3] Tripp, 235–236.

Figure 15. Entrance hall to Emne Sûreke. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

Figure 16. Statue at Emne Sûreke honoring Kurdish martyrs. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

In Sorani, the word for "noise" or "sound" is *deng*, a word also used to denote "voice." To be silent, then—*bê deng* (literally, "without sound")—is also to be without voice, just as acts of state violence perpetrated against Iraqi Kurds throughout the twentieth century led to the equating of sound (or voice) with life, and silence (or voicelessness) with death. These concepts resonate historically within Kurdish musical practice, particularly since voice has long been considered its primary instrument, and since the sounds of performance are often thought to echo the sounds (or voice) of nature.

If a deliberate lack of sound is the most immediate response to the brutalities documented at Emne Sûreke, the importance of sound as a key component of Kurdish culture and resistance in reinforced in other ways throughout the museum. On one wall, for example, seven Peshmerga (*pêşmerge*) tunes are preserved in Western notation (see Figure 17), and in a nearby glass display case rests a dusty violin that once belonged to a Peshmerga fighter.[4] Among these sonic artifacts, there is also a Philips shortwave radio (see Figure 18), next to which is a small plaque containing the following words in Sorani and in English:

Lêre dengî gelî Kurdistan.	Here is the voice of Kurdistan's people.
Lêre dengî şorişî Kurdistan.	Here is the voice of Kurdistan's revolution.
Lêre dengî Kurdistan.	Here is the voice of Kurdistan.

The plaque goes on to describe both radio and an undesignated radio station using the metaphors of a carrier pigeon and a guest with a lovely countenance. Finally, the plaque suggests that because of radio, "the door to courage has been opened." For many local museum visitors, these words (and the preceding metaphors) most likely call to mind the importance of clandestine radio stations that broadcast warnings to Kurdish forces regarding the movements and planned attacks of Iraqi troops throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century (I discuss histories of Kurdish radio further in Chapter 3). The broader implications of these words, however, point to a much larger truth—that radio, voice, and other sound technologies writ large have played a key

[4] According to Gunter (*Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, 266): "The *peshmergas* ('those who are willing to face death for their cause') were the Iraqi Kurdish guerillas who first fought under Mulla Mustafa Barzani. The term came to have a very patriotic connotation to it as opposed to the term *josh* ('little donkeys'), Kurds who fight on the side of the Iraqi government. The Kurdish term *peshmergas* is similar in meaning to the Arabic word *fedayeen* ('fighters willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause'). Originally, *peshmergas* referred to Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas but later came to be used sometimes also for Kurdish guerrillas elsewhere."

The Peshmerga tunes represented at Emne Sûreke include "Kełkî Qeywan," "Sinûr," "Şehîd," "R̄êy Xebat," "Hokakî Pêşmerge," "Deba Faşîyekan," and "Asûde Bin."

Figure 17. Peshmerga tunes in Western notation. Emne Sûreke, Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

Figure 18. Philips radio on display at Emne Sûreke, Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

role in Kurdish resistance efforts, and in the very formation of an Iraqi Kurdish musical tradition that is inseparable from various forms of colonial power.

In a certain sense, *technology* is often understood as a sign of modernity, with the use of more advanced technologies indicating a society's more advanced phase of civilization. This understanding has in part shaped the way most of us think about human history. As archaeologist Paul Bahn asserts:

> Archaeology has always relied enormously on the tools left behind by our forebears—everything from a chip of stone to a battleship; and for a long time, human progress was seen largely in terms of technology. In fact, scholarship chose to divide the human past into a succession of 'ages'—Stone, Bronze, and Iron, with numerous subsequent subdivisions—that was based on technological development.[5]

This way of thinking is not at all unlike the colonial temporal logics designating colonial powers themselves the harbingers of modernity and progress. As a way of resisting these logics—and likewise, the relegation of Kurds to a perpetual timelessness or pre-modernity—I utilize a much broader understanding of *technology* throughout this chapter, arguing that even the voice itself might be understood as a kind of sonic technology. In this sense, I aim to reposition the colonization of Kurdistan in the twentieth century not as a story detailing the "modernization" of Kurdish society by the Ottomans and later by the British, but rather as one in which Kurdish musicians have consistently utilized every sonic tool available to them in the transmission of Kurdish musical tradition.

Although *technology* and *tradition* might seem incompatible on a certain level, studies in ethnomusicology have shown that technologies of sound often play a crucial role in negotiating the relationships between musical expression, tradition (particularly as it relates to national

[5] Paul G. Bahn, *Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24.

identity), and modernity. In India, for example (another site colonized by the British), Peter Manuel argues that the circulation of popular music on cassette tapes helped to disseminate grassroots music, to unsettle large companies' monopoly on recording, and to popularize various political movements in the latter decades of the twentieth century.[6] Likewise, in nearby Afghanistan, the cassette has served as a reminder of both the forces of modernity (insofar as recording and broadcasting at Radio Kabul reflected the desire to develop a national music compatible with Islamic values) and, in its "disemboweled" form, the struggle for power resulting in Taliban rule beginning in 1994.[7] Indeed, as Amanda Weidman argues in relation to Karnatak (South Indian) music, the very quest to blend the "classical" and the "modern" in music—often one of the aims of nationalist cultural policy—is itself a product of the colonial encounter.[8] Even in the midst of struggles to define the nation's music, then, technologies of music circulation are never far from colonial logics of place and time.

Positioning *tradition* and *technology* as co-constitutive rather than as polar opposites provides greater insight into the ways Iraqi Kurdish music (as discursive tradition) relates to the various forms of colonial power that have shaped contemporary Iraqi history and sheds new light on possibilities for resisting this power. Several key questions that arise from this line of inquiry are as follows: first, how might we understand the relationship between tradition and technology in ways that do not reinforce the temporal logics of colonial power (i.e., of time as teleological, of tradition as "backward")? Second, how have various sound technologies aided the Kurdish struggle in Iraq across various historical periods and informed the creation of an Iraqi Kurdish

[6] Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[7] John Baily, *War, Exile, and the Music of Afghanistan: The Ethnographer's Tale* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

[8] Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

musical tradition? Finally, how have changes in technological mediation informed particular struggles and afforded new methods of responding to individual events?

In this chapter, I examine the role of radio, voice, and other sound technologies, including recording/broadcasting technologies, in histories of Iraqi Kurdish music. I begin by situating voice within (Iraqi) Kurdish musical practice as an important form of sound technology essential for the transmission of musical tradition. I then pivot to a historical overview of the early recording industry in Iraq, highlighting not only the centrality of colonial power to the global spread of recording technology and commerce, but also the ways in which these same technologies afforded new possibilities for resistance. In the following section, I discuss differences in British colonial administration in Iraq and in Egypt, showing how these differences ultimately informed the technological capacities available to Iraqi Kurds as well as to the nascent Iraqi government. In the chapter's conclusion, I argue that despite the influence of colonial power on sound technologies, Iraqi Kurds have used these technologies to define themselves in ways that defy the designations of their colonizers.

Voice, Technology, Tradition

In ethnographic research, the stories people tell are often just as important as the songs they sing, and of the dozens of Kurdish singers who were recorded in the early twentieth century, one of those whose story I hear most often in ethnographic encounters is that of Kawês Aẍa (1889–1936). Affectionately remembered by many today as the "nightingale of Kurdistan" (*bulbulî Kurdistan*), Kawês Aẍa was born into the Herkî tribe, members of which today live in

several different regions of Kurdistan and speak the Kurmanji dialect.[9] During the first World War (when Iraq was still a part of the Ottoman Empire), Kawês was forced to flee the city of Ṟuwandiz (also Ṟewandiz, Ṟiwandiz), as were many of the city's other inhabitants, when the Russians attacked the city as part of the Caucasus Campaign in 1916. After the war, he chose not to return to the city, and in 1930, having learned a large repertoire of regional songs and having become quite famous in various parts of Kurdistan, he decided to travel to Baghdad in the hopes of winning a recording contract.

Despite the strength and clarity of his singing voice, Kawês Aẍa reportedly stuttered while speaking. According to several accounts, the recording executives in Baghdad laughed at his stammering pleas for a record deal, retorting, "You can't even speak; how could you possibly sing?" Broken hearted, Kawês Aẍa went across the street to a Kurdish-owned teahouse, where he sat down and started to sing a song called "Genc Xelîl."[10] The melancholic sounds of Kawês Aẍa's voice filled the air, forcing their way through the windows of the recording company's office. Before long, the record company executives who had initially turned him away came running across the street to see whose voice they were hearing. Upon realizing their mistake, they apologized profusely and offered a recording contract. Fittingly, the first song Kawês Aẍa recorded was "Genc Xelîl."[11]

Far more than just a story hidden in some dusty archive, the narrative of Kawês Aẍa's success is still a part of musical discourse in Iraqi Kurdistan, and it is telling of broader attitudes

[9] Herkî leaders had played an active role in supporting the nationalist aims of Shaykh 'Ubayd-Allāh, who led a revolt in eastern Anatolia in the late nineteenth century, as they later would those of Qadî Miḥemed, who led the short-lived Mehabad Republic in Iran in 1946.

[10] The lyrics for this song are included in Appendix 2.

[11] *Kawîs Aẍa*, compact disc with accompanying booklet in Sorani Kurdish (Silêmanî: Kurdish Heritage Institute, 2013). Note that the title for this work in Latin characters is *Kawîs Aẍa*, whereas the performer's name in Sorani is typically spelled *Kawês Aẍa* (کاوێس ئاغا).

toward both the Kurdish recording industry and Kurdish resistance to colonial power. As I see it, the story is one that speaks directly to the threat that colonial power unleashed against Kurdish language and culture more broadly, and to the power of small acts of resistance on the part of Kurdish musicians. At its most basic level, the story is a powerful testament to the strength of Kurdish musical practice; after all, it was singing and not speaking that revealed the recording executives' gross underestimation of the beauty and value of Kurdish culture. Furthermore, the very site from which Kawês Aẍa challenged the recording executives' narrative was a teahouse, and one owned by Kurds. In the early days of recording, Kurdish teahouse owners were among the first to purchase phonographs and later radios, and teahouses became important sites for listening to music communally. The Kurdish owners of the teahouse in the story were no doubt less likely to silence the broken-hearted musician (traditional Kurdish songs often deal with the grief of death or separation), and the teahouse's proximity to the recording studio provides a powerful illustration of the relative proximity (and yet invisibility) of Kurdish culture in Iraq. At the same time, it was the recording industry and not anyone in the nearby government offices in Baghdad that provided the possibility of preserving Kurdish (musical) culture for posterity.

Another important lesson gleaned from the story of Kawês Aẍa is related to the broader importance of voice in Kurdish musical practice and discourse. Voice has long been considered the most important instrument in Kurdish musical culture, with inflection and other vocal qualities often serving as an aural indicator of a singer's home region. In Hewraman, for example, a rural area that straddles the Iraqi–Iranian border to the southeast of Silêmanî (see Maps, Figure 19), the typical vocal style resembles an intense vibrato or warbling. In ethnographic interviews, I have been told (half-jokingly by some) that this style has the added benefit of warming the throats of performers high up in the mountains during the long, cold

Figure 19. Small village in Hewraman, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. October 2019.

winter months. One interviewee, Safen (*Safên*), told me that when he listens to the music of Osman Hawrami (*ʿUsman Hewramî*), a famous vocalist from Hewraman, his friends ask him if he too is cold and in need of a jacket.

To highlight the exalted nature of voice within Kurdish musical practice is not, of course, to suggest that all voices have always been considered equally worth hearing. Only in the past century, for example, have more conservative elements of Kurdish society come to accept the public performance of women in certain genres. In the realm of *dengbêj*, or melodic epic recitation, women's participation in Kurdistan of Turkey is often still situated as "a struggle for voice they [are] waging against patriarchal customs and norms."[12] In the early twentieth century,

[12] Schäfers, "It Used to Be Forbidden," 3.

many of the women who made recordings in Kurdish—women such as Miryem Xan (1904–1949), Daykî Cemal (1908–1979), and Nazdar and Esmer Ferhad (dates unknown)—were not ethnic Kurds, a fact which most likely contributed to their widespread popularity. In the case of Daykî Cemal, who was a Jewish convert to Islam originally known as Behîce or Ferḧe Yeʿqub, this success was somewhat precarious: her husband, a Muslim officer from Silêmanî, is said to have visited local teahouses that owned copies of her records (which she had made for Baidaphone and Odeon) and smashed them all.[13]

Conflicts such as this one aside, the longstanding importance of voice within Kurdish music only continued to increase throughout the first half of the twentieth century, as Kurdish singers like Kawês Aẍa began to perform for recording companies and later radio stations. In these early years, these performers were most often accompanied by instrumentalists who were largely non-Kurds.[14] Aside from informing and enriching the tradition that would characterize Iraqi Kurdish music-making, this practice meant that the most significant identifiers of a song's "Kurdishness" in those early days were all related to voice—not only via the language being used in performance, but also the unique vocal characteristics and techniques utilized by the performers. In this regard, it was the voices of Kurdish singers that made the strongest claims for a distinctly Kurdish approach toward music-making; after 1923, these claims became increasingly important as Kurds in various nations faced widespread linguistic and cultural suppression.

[13] *Yadgarîyekan Daykî Cemal*, compact disc with accompanying liner notes (Kurdish Heritage Institute: 2014).

[14] As I explain in Chapter 3, the orchestra at Kurdish Radio Baghdad was not comprised of a Kurdish majority until sometime around the 1960s.

As the voices, bodies, and villages of Kurds came under attack with increasing frequency in the latter half of the twentieth century, the disembodied voices[15] of Kurdish announcers and performers gave hope to thousands who listened to Kurdish radio broadcasts in secret, or who hid, sometimes by burying underground, secret collections of political or nationalist songs in Kurdish.[16] As I assert early in this chapter, this close connection between Kurdish voices and Kurdish bodies threatened with state destruction is apparent within the Kurdish language itself. As such, threats or violence against Kurdish bodies must be understood as capable of rendering not only silence, which often marks the absence or lifelessness of human bodies, but also voicelessness, an existential threat to Kurdish musical practice.

An emphasis on the connections between sound and bodies has increasingly informed various debates within anthropology and (ethno)musicology in recent decades. For anthropologists, this emphasis on the body dates back at least as far as 1935, when French anthropologist Marcel Mauss proposed a new focus on the ways people in various societies "know how to use their bodies."[17] Mauss insisted that the pedagogical process by which humans acquire this embodied knowledge is essentially a social one involving not only a mechanical or physical aspect, but also a psychological and sociological aspect. Mauss thus laid the foundation for what others would later call the "anthropology of the body," while also suggesting that sites of bodily knowledge might sometimes become sites of resistance.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, anthropologist Talal Asad expanded Mauss' consideration of bodily technique to include an emphasis on memory, particularly those kinds of

[15] The "acousmatic," or disembodied voice, is one whose source is not immediately clear; numerous scholars in the field of sound studies discuss this phenomenon. See, for example, Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[16] At least two of my Kurdish interlocutors have mentioned this practice in interviews. In the early twentieth century, the poet Hejar says that similarly, his father used to bury collections of Kurdish poetry (see Eĭiubi and Smirnova 1968).

[17] Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society*, 2.1 (1973), 70.

memory that reside in human bodies. Asad insisted that anthropologists could no longer speak of the body and of culture as separate domains, particularly since the embodied transmission of culture is always a process subject to particular forms of modern power.[18] As Asad explains, "If we [conceptualize] human behavior in terms of learned capabilities, we might see the need for investigating how these [are] linked to authoritative standards of regular practice."[19] This concept is echoed in the work of Carrie Noland, who argues in her 2009 book *Agency and Embodiment* that the body is essential for "the perpetuation of cultural regimes," and is "the material on which these regimes are first inscribed."[20] As Noland asserts, "The social production of the body and the body's production of the social are inextricably intertwined rather than chronologically successive."[21] It is in this sense that the voice as sonic technology relates not only to the individual body, but also to the broader social body (and thus remains a contested site).

In her work on the castrato (male singers whose vocal range remained high, typically as a result of castration before puberty), musicologist Bonnie Gordon insists that "to consider the castrato's made voice is to insist not only that the voice is mediated but that it is materially constructed."[22] Although Gordon's work centers on those whose bodies became the sites of technological interference and violence, her insistence that we consider the voice in ways that move beyond descriptions referencing the process of manufacturing and instead toward a process of "bringing forth" seems productive here. After all, if the bodies (and voices) of twentieth-

[18] Talal Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45–47.

[19] Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," 47.

[20] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (United States: Harvard University Press, 2009), 20–21.

[21] Noland, 20–21.

[22] Bonnie Gordon, "It's Not about the Cut: The Castrato's Instrumentalized Song," *New Literary History* 46.4 (Autumn 2015): 649.

century Iraqi Kurds were in danger of destruction (a danger rooted in colonial and state power), we might say that their recorded voices—the very parts Gordon suggests are imbued with life itself—offered a means of survival that transcended the fear of failure or death (precisely because they could continue to reach new generations of Kurdish musicians and listeners). In this way, resistance—as an embodied technique related to both knowledge and power—might be seen as inseparable from the act of performance, at least in cases where the transmission of Kurdish musical practice defied the aims or commands of the state.

The twentieth century recording and broadcasting of Kurdish voices that allowed for the technical (read *embodied*) sustaining of certain forms of musical knowledge as well as the resisting of other forms of knowledge made possible not only the survival of various songs and genres, but also the collective negotiation of meaning ascribed to these musical objects. As literary scholar Bruce R. Smith suggests, the "*embodiedness* of an oral performance… embraces not only the individual performers' bodies but the social body," an interpretation that allows us to understand communication (in this case, the communication characteristic of a musical performance) as a "process, not of *transferring* meaning, but of *negotiating* meaning."[23] Although this process may be most apparent in the live oral performances that dominated much of Kurdish music-making before the twentieth century, Kurdish recordings and broadcasts no doubt expanded this process, albeit transforming it in subtle ways.

One obvious and tangible result of this possibility for negotiating musical meaning can be seen in the plaques commemorating Peshmerga tunes in Western notation at Emne Sûreke (see Figure 17). It is presumably not the notation itself that imparts the importance of resistance to the collective body of museum visitors, but rather the solidification and objectification of musical

[23] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 16, 24.

artifacts that attest to the collective meaning and value placed upon these sonic objects in the decades preceding the museum's founding.[24] In other words, the physical presence of these objects, which are paradoxically rendered voiceless as museum exhibits even as they reference the very importance of voice within Kurdish musical culture, testify both to the success of past acts of resistance and to the futility of attempts to destroy Kurdish culture.

In his book *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*, Josh Kun asserts that "music functions like a possible utopia for the listener" and "is experienced not only as sound that goes into our ears and vibrates through our bones but as a space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, learn from."[25] Kun utilizes the concept of *audiotopia* in order to question the ways (US)American music producers and consumers have inhabited conceptual spaces distinct from the actual racial divides of everyday life in the American sphere. In the case of Kurdish musical culture, the socially negotiated meanings growing out of the embodied performance-as-resistance allow for expressions of Kurdish culture that are intimately connected with notions of place and time, often in direct opposition to colonial logics. In the realm of space/place, Kun's concept offers insight on the ways we might understand musical performance (and listening) as capable of accessing and creating collective memory, and of creating new spheres of relation between bodies inhabiting a shared conceptual space, however that space has been occupied or divided up by Western powers or attacked by the Iraqi state. In this case, that space includes actual geography, mountains, villages, and territories, yet it also provides access

[24] Marlene Schäfers discusses the importance of other sonic artifacts such as cassette collections among Kurdish women in Turkey in her 2019 article "Archived Voices, Acoustic Traces, and the Reverberations of Kurdish History in Modern Turkey" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 2, 447–473).

[25] Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (United States: University of California Press, 2005), 2.

to the same geographical territory reimagined without violence, imposed boundaries, or repression.

One instance of this reimagining might be seen in the ways Kurdish songs often reference various locales in the region without regard for modern political timelines, designations, or boundaries. As one example, consider the song "Cwanîy Kwêstan" ("The Beauty of the Highlands"; see Figure 20, Appendix 2), which was performed by Selaẅ Miẅemed and the Hewlêr Music Group (*Tîpî Hûnerîy Hewlêr*) for television in 1978.[26] Throughout the performance, the singers repeat the following chorus over a lilting 10/8 accompaniment (subdivided as 3 + 2 + 2 + 3): "Ba biçîne Kwêstan bo geṣtî em nawe/ Cwanîy cîhanî Xwa bem ṣwêney dawe" ("Let's go to the highlands for a journey to its interior/ The beauty of God's world has been given to this place"). Aside from echoing a common emphasis on spending time in natural settings, the song also bears reference to the nomadic Kurdish past, when some tribes migrated seasonally between the lowland plains (*Germyan*, a name which also references the region surrounding Kirkuk) and the highlands (*Kwêstan*). In addition to centering this important history, the song also hints at the use of sonic technologies to create another kind of spatial reimagining: one that views the Kurdish highlands as imbued with natural beauty by God himself, who surely must care little for colonial boundaries. In this sense, the song resists both the temporal and spatial logics of colonialism, highlighting the importance of voice (and other sound technologies) as central (even if contested) sites of resistance.

[26] Moe Garmyani, "سەلاح موحەمەد – جوانی کوێستان," YouTube video, 7:10, uploaded February 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/WzOJalhoRaA.

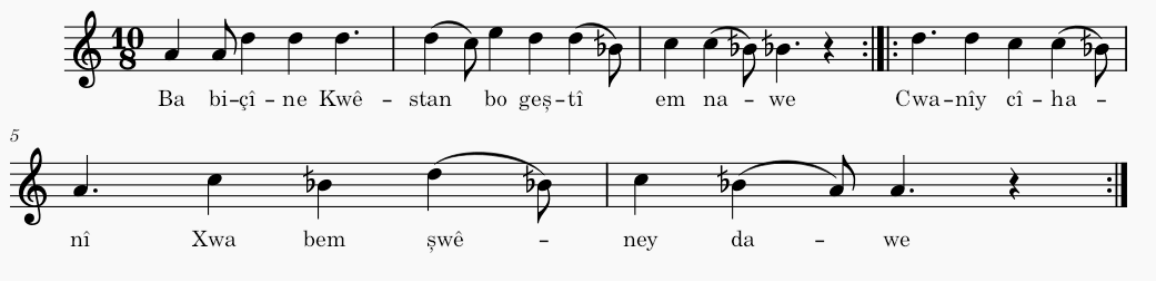

Figure 20. Transcription of "Cwanîy Kwêstan" ("The Beauty of the Highlands")

Recording during the Colonial Era

The earliest known recordings of Kurdish music were made in the Ottoman Empire in March 1902, when Austrian ethnographer Felix von Luschan recorded five Kurdish songs on wax cylinders.[27] In the United States, music performed in Kurdish was first recorded in 1912 in New York City, where Syrian immigrant and violinist Naim Karakand arranged a recording session for Columbia Records that featured Assyrian singer Kosroff Malool.[28] Columbia had been created before the turn of the twentieth century as the result of a merger between the Volta Graphophone Company and the American Graphophone Company.[29] Its largest competitor, the Victor Talking Machine Company, was formed in 1901 by Eldridge R. Johnson and Emile Berliner, an American immigrant who was the first to utilize flat-shaped discs and to use the name "gramophone."[30] The earliest impetus for producing "ethnic" recordings for a US audience may have come with the realization early on that immigrants to the United States had the potential to form a lucrative market for these kinds of recordings. In 1909, Columbia encouraged

[27] Robert F. Reigle, "A brief history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey," *Hellenic Journal of Music Education and Culture* 4, Article 2 (2013): 3–4.

[28] Ian Nagoski, "An Undersung Legacy: Naim Karakand," *The Baltimore Sun*, Accessed May 6, 2020, https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcp-120215-music-naim-karakand-20151201-story.html.

[29] "History of Gramophone – Who Invented Gramophone?" *Sound Recording History*, Accessed May 14, 2020, http://www.soundrecordinghistory.net/history-of-sound-recording/history-of-gramophone/.

[30] "History of Gramophone."

its dealers not to overlook ethnic communities who retained the "habits and language" of the "old country," insisting that "to these people RECORDS IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE have an irresistible attraction, and they will buy them readily."[31]

Early recording companies such as Columbia, Victor, the Gramophone Company (Victor's sister company headquartered in England), and Edison should not necessarily be viewed as beacons of equality in their quest to produce and market "ethnic" recordings. Instead, they were merely responding to increasing global demand for records and recording equipment, and within the US, to the fact that by 1900, more than 13 percent of the nation's population had been born elsewhere.[32] In their drive to reach global markets, these and other recording companies worked tirelessly to establish offices all around the world, seeking to record in as many nations and languages as possible. By 1907, Edison had established offices in New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Mexico City, Sydney, and Buenos Aires, and Gramophone had recorded in nearly every European and Asian country.[33] As record companies expanded their global reach, the numbers of "ethnic records" they produced offer a glimpse of just how profitable these markets turned out to be. Between 1908 and 1923, for example, Columbia produced approximately 11,000 records, 6,000 of which were "foreign" records in their "E" series.[34]

It would certainly not be too far a stretch to imagine the massive Western recording companies mentioned above as sonic colonizers, using their power and privilege to cross the

[31] Pekka Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings: An Introduction," in *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1982), 3.

[32] Gronow, 5.

[33] Gronow, 4.

[34] Gronow, 5.

globe in search of sounds both exotic and otherwise unavailable to those who had fled their homelands or who lacked the means of producing their own recordings. As Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio assert, "The development of recordings has, ultimately, been guided by those who, invisible to the public eye, are responsible for the choice of repertoire and who reconcile the sometimes conflicting claims of art and commerce."[35] Far more than just a competition between the dreamers and the money-makers, the early history of the recording industry reflects the importance of colonial power, alliances, and access.

As one example of the importance of colonialism with the context of the recording industry, consider the relationship between the US-American Victor Talking Machine Company and its sister company headquartered in London, the Gramophone Company. In 1900, Gramophone became the first company to record in the Ottoman Empire, and around 1907, the company established an office in Alexandria, Egypt.[36] At the time, Britain's relations with the Ottomans had not yet soured, and Egypt was still considered a protectorate of Britain. As other major recording companies raced to establish offices all across the globe, the sister companies Victor and Gramophone reached an agreement whereby Victor would focus on the Western hemisphere, China and Japan (all regions where US influence was growing), and Gramophone would take the East, where British colonies ensured no shortage of ready and available markets.[37] Simultaneously, as the Germans began increasing their presence in the Middle East as part of the country's "drive to the East" (*Drang nach Osten*), German company Odeon made the

[35] Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio, *An International History of the Recording Industry* (London: Cassell, 1998), ix.

[36] Joel Bresler, "78 RPM Sephardic Recordings," accessed June 15, 2020, https://www.sephardicmusic.org/78survey.htm.

[37] Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings," 4.

most of its exclusion from any such agreement, sending agents all over the world, and producing 11,000 Arabic, Greek, and Turkish records alone by 1906.[38]

As tensions between colonial powers like Britain, France, and Germany began to rise around the turn of the twentieth century, and as nationalist movements started to ignite in the Middle East alongside the apparent decline of the Ottoman Empire, smaller record companies such as Macksoud, which specialized in Arabic recordings, began to loosen the grip of the commercial giants. The spread of recording technology also allowed the rise of companies outside Western centers like New York or Berlin; one such company, Hājī Fatḥī Chaqmāqchī & Sons (later known as Chakmakchi or Chakmakchiphon—the Chakmakchi family was of Kurdish origin from Mosul) was founded in Baghdad in 1918.[39] Originally a seller of electronics and other imported materials,[40] Chakmakchi eventually began producing its own records around the mid-twentieth century; the records were pressed first in Sweden and later in Greece.[41] Although Chakmakchi is most widely known today for its role in recording well known Iraqi singers such as Nazim Al-Ghazali and Muhammed Al-Qabanji,[42] the company also recorded a number of Kurdish singers.[43] These include Ēesûl Gerdî (1924–1994) and Miḧemed ʻArif Cezîrî (or Cizrawî, 1912–1986), whose recordings of voice and tembûr (long-necked lute) are still popular on radio stations and on social media today.

[38] Paul Vernon, "Odeon Records: Their 'Ethnic' Output," accessed June 15, 2020, https://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/odeon.htm.

[39] "Jaqmaqji fi Shariʿ al-Rashid. Dhakirat al-ʿIraq al-Musiqiyya," *Al-Takhi*, accessed May 14, 2020, http://altaakhipress.com/printart.php?art=30218.

[40] "Jaqmaqji fi Shariʿ al-Rashid."

[41] Jonathan Ward, "Abdul-Wahad Ahmad—Qoyrat (Beshiri)," *Excavated Shellac*, accessed May 14, 2020, https://excavatedshellac.com/category/iraq/.

[42] Ward.

[43] Chakmakchi would later establish an office in Silêmanî—see Moneer Cherie, "The Chakmakchi Story," *Excavated Shellac* (blog), September 8, 2020, https://excavatedshellac.com/category/iraq-kurdish/, accessed March 4, 2021.

Wealthy landowners and government employees in Kurdistan and the surrounding areas began purchasing gramophones in the early twentieth century,[44] and many of their earliest records featured songs performed in Arabic, Turkish, or Persian.[45] The first Turkish record company, the Blumenthal Record & Talking Machine Company, which issued its recordings under the label Orfeon Records, was founded by brothers Julius and Hermann Blumenthal around 1910.[46] The Blumenthals released not only records in Turkish, but also records targeted at Ottoman minorities such as Sephardic Jews and Kurds.[47] By 1920, Orfeon had issued at least seven records performed in Kurdish by Ḧesen and Miḧemed Efendî; unfortunately, it is unknown whether any of these records survived.[48] Around the same time, several other recording companies including Columbia, His Master's Voice,[49] Baidaphon, HomoKurd, and Polyphon also began producing phonograph records of Kurdish music performed by singers from Iraq, Iran, and Syria.[50] These include such well-known figures as Iranian Kurdish native 'Elî Esẍer Kurdistanî (c. 1889–1936), who recorded for Polyphon, and Miryem Xan (1904–1949), a female singer who was adopted by a Kurdish family after the Armenian genocide and who went on to record for Odeon, His Master's Voice, and Bashirphone.

Another local recording company that produced recordings of Kurdish singers was Baidaphon, which was founded in Beirut around 1907 by five members of the Lebanese

[44] Hassanpour notes that in 1908, two merchants from Silêmanî became the first to bring a gramophone and phonograph records, which they had acquired in Moscow, to the region (346).

[45] Blum and Hassanpour, "Kurdish Popular Song," 328.

[46] Bresler, "Sephardic Recordings."

[47] Bresler.

[48] Reigle, "Kurdish Music Recordings," 4–5.

[49] From Hassanpour (346): "By the mid-1920s, His Master's Voice was producing records of Arabic and Turkish music in Baghdad. A shopkeeper who was selling records in Sulaymaniya approached the company (1926-27) and inquired why there were no Kurdish records. He found out that it was because of the unavailability of singers and the uncertainty of sales. The shopkeeper provided singers and promised a large receptive audience. Thus, the well-known singer Hamdi Afandi was dispatched to Baghdad and the first record was made. It proved to be a success."

[50] Blum and Hassanpour, 328.

Christian Bayda family.[51] Interestingly, the company chose to found its first office and begin producing its records in Berlin, a decision ethnomusicologist A. J. Racy argues could suggest the aid of representatives from Odeon.[52] Over the next few decades, as Middle Eastern intellectuals across the region participated in debates related to pan-Arab and other forms of nationalism (and as many began cultivating close ties with the Germans), Baidaphon experienced immense success, establishing new offices in Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Marrakesh. Following its newfound success, Baidaphon soon began using Arab nationalist tropes as a central feature of its marketing. After 1911, the company started printing a gazelle on its record labels; the gazelle had long been invoked in Arabic literature as a symbol of grace and beauty, unlike the common dog that was featured on labels produced by His Master's Voice.[53]

In addition to its recordings of Middle Eastern star vocalists such as Egyptians 'Abd al-Wahhab (1902–1991), ʿAbd al-Hayy Hilmi (1857–1912), and Sayyid al-Safti (1875–1939), Baidaphon also began producing a series of blatantly nationalist recordings. In 1928, for example, the company offered to bring the Jewish Tunisian actress and singer Habiba Messika (1903–1930) to its main office in Berlin. Messika had first risen to fame in the 1920s after recording for Pathé and later Gramophone, but traveling to Berlin, far from the eyes of Tunisia's French colonizers, provided her the opportunity to record nationalist songs praising Egypt's King Fuʾad; Muhammed VI, Bey of Tunis; and even King Faisal of Iraq.[54]

As these examples make clear, the Middle East was swept into the international quest for a monopoly on the recording industry shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, as US-

[51] A. J. Racy, "Record Industry and Traditional Egyptian Music: 1904–1932." *Ethnomusicology* 20, no. 1 (January 1976): 39–40.

[52] Racy, "Record Industry," 41–42.

[53] Racy, "Record Industry," 42.

[54] Chris Silver, "The Life and Death of North Africa's First Superstar," accessed June 15, 2020, https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/life-and-death-north-africas-first-superstar.

American, European, and Middle Eastern (and other regional) record companies began competing for access to commercial markets, recording technology, and the best regional singers. In many cases, the ensuing battles were fought along lines reflective of pre-existing or contemporary colonial conquests and alliances, particularly as colonial powers sought to expand their reach into the region. For Kurdish singers in particular, many of whom remained Ottoman subjects until the Empire's collapse following World War I, the race for commercial success provided new opportunities to record for those who could afford to travel to cities like Baghdad, and dozens of companies (both global and regional) produced records featuring Kurdish singers.

Those who did make the long journey to Baghdad in the hopes of recording their songs in those early days often did so at their own expense or for hardly any pay.[55] The instrumentalists who normally accompanied these singers rarely joined the vocalists on their journey; instead, they rehearsed with the singers in their local towns. The singers were then accompanied by groups in Baghdad who worked for the recording companies and who were comprised largely of Arab and Jewish musicians.[56] Even though local markets were still constrained to those able to afford expensive imported equipment at this time, artists themselves were being given new opportunities to take part in a rapidly growing global enterprise.

For the Kurdish artists who recorded during this phase of history, recording allowed not only the potential for growing audiences both at home and abroad, but also the space in which to imagine themselves part of a larger global community of musicians, and to stake a sort of claim for the existence of Kurdish musical culture. Before World War I, it was impossible to imagine

[55] From Hassanpour (346): "Kurdish singers from Iran, Turkey, and Syria went to Baghdad to record their songs for a very nominal fee (two dinars for each record, according to singer Ali Merdan; each dinar equalled one British pound)."

[56] 'Ebdułła ʿEbbas, interview by author and Shene Mohammed (translator), personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, October 1, 2019.

just how important this task would become, particularly since the colonial erasure of hopes for Kurdish unity had not yet occurred and since debates still raged among Arabic-speaking intellectuals as to whether the "nation" should include all Muslims or all those in Arabic-speaking regions. For these and other reasons, fully formed Kurdish nationalism was not often understood as a central feature of the songs recorded decades before the founding of radio stations such as Radio Baghdad (f. 1936). Nevertheless, these early recordings would come to be seen in a very different light once the region's new nation-states began to view Kurdish culture and identity as a threat to national unity.

The lack of a political center for the Kurdish nationalist movement in the first few decades of the twentieth century does not, of course, mean that Kurdish musicians were unaware of or unable to respond to colonial power. Participation in the recording enterprise was often reflective of an artist's individual goals, which were sometimes explicitly anti-colonial. Kawês Aẍa, for example, recorded dozens of songs that would later be broadcast over radio after his death in 1936. At least three of these were songs in the genre known as *lawik*[57] praising Kurdish nationalist leaders Simko Aẍa (1887–1930), who led a revolt in Persia in 1922; Ṣêx Eḧmed Barzanî (1896–1969), brother to the famed nationalist leader Meła Mistefa Barzanî (1903–1979); and Ṣêx Meḧmûd Berzincî (1878–1956), a powerful leader who revolted against British colonial rule on two separate occasions (first in 1919, and again in 1922), each time declaring Silêmanî the capital of an independent Kurdistan. The *lawik* "Ṣêx Meḧmûd," which Kawês Aẍa performed in the Badînî dialect, recounts the story of his first defeat by the British in June 1919 at the Battle

[57] *Lawiks* often narrate epics or stories related to love or war, and they are still regarded as a difficult genre to perform. It seems likely that the genre originated in the Turkish regions of Kurdistan (often referred to as *Bakûr*), but within Iraq, the genre is now most often associated with the region of Badînan, where the local dialect is related to Kurmanji (the most common dialect in Turkish Kurdistan) rather than Sorani (the predominant dialect in Iraqi Kurdistan).

of Bazyan Pass. The battle followed a particularly embarrassing loss for the British as Ṣêx Meḧmûd's forces resisted their first attempt to reassert their authority over Silêmanî and the surrounding areas. As Britain's civil commissioner in Baghdad at the time, Sir Arnold Wilson, expressed regarding the British defeat:

> This 'regrettable incident' confirmed the now general belief of the inhabitants of Southern Kurdistan that we were no longer able to control events; the rebellion spread across into Persian territory, and several tribes rose against the Persian Government, proclaiming themselves partisans of Shaikh Mahmud and of his scheme for a free and united Kurdistan.[58]

The British retribution, which included attacks from two infantry brigades, cavalry forces, armored cars, and an air force unit, resulted in the wounding and subsequent capture and exile of Ṣêx Meḧmûd in another British colony—India.[59]

As the British response to these events illustrates, the greatest threat to British colonial rule was not necessarily the prospect of armed rebellion, but rather the perception among Kurdish leaders that the British were not strong enough to maintain control of the region—in other words, that colonial power was a farce. Along these lines, the British eventually acknowledged their need for the shaykh's broad support base and brought him back to Kurdistan. In November 1922, however, Ṣêx Meḧmûd revolted once again; this time, the government responded by flexing its power over the skies, bombing the shaykh's headquarters multiple times and conducting a months-long series of air demonstrations over the city of Silêmanî.[60] For some, like Kawês Aẍa, resistance to these acts meant preserving the heroic feats of leaders like Ṣêx Meḧmûd in epic form, matching one technological threat (bombing from the air) with another (voice/recording).

[58] Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 181.
[59] Jwaideh, 182.
[60] Jwaideh, 195–202.

For Kurdish musicians who witnessed firsthand events like those described above, colonial power was no doubt a central feature of life; even in the recording studios of Baghdad, however, these musicians were forced to respond to the rapid changes being wrought by colonial power across the region. In Turkey, this process reached a new milestone in 1923, when the newly formed Turkish Republic instituted what some have called "linguistic genocide" against its Kurds. Turkish was promoted as the official language, with Kurds facing fines, violence, or even separation from family members for speaking or writing in Kurdish.[61] Iraq's Kurds fared only slightly better under the British Mandate, since Kurdish was not used in schools after the level of primary education, bureaucratic documents and announcements were only sporadically issued in Kurdish, and Kurdish language reformers were not permitted to Romanize the Sorani alphabet, as Kurmanji-speaking reformers would soon do for Kurmanji.[62] In neighboring Iran, Persian was declared the nation's only official language, and under Reza Shah, Kurds could face arrest and even torture for speaking in their mother tongue.[63]

Since it had the loosest restrictions on speaking and singing in Kurdish during this period, Iraq (and Baghdad in particular) became an increasingly important site for recording Kurdish singers crossing the borders from Turkey and Iran. The emerging importance of Baghdad as a center for music education and recording possibilities for Kurdish musicians cannot be overstated; as a former employee of Kurdish Radio Baghdad told me, in those years, anyone with dreams of any kind went to Baghdad.[64] Two of the most famous singers to leave Turkey and subsequently record in Iraq were Miryem Xan and Miḧemed 'Arif Cizîrî, who often produced

[61] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 132–134.
[62] Hassanpour, 118.
[63] Hassanpour, 126.
[64] ʿEbbas, interview.

records together, and who fled their homes after speaking Kurdish had been declared a criminal offense against the state.

As these and other performers brought songs and genres from Turkish Kurdistan into Iraq, they ultimately began a process of cross-fertilization among various genres; at the very least, this process helped to popularize regional genres like the *lawik* that had previously been associated with only certain parts of Kurdistan. Aside from providing the early radio stations with Kurdish music for broadcasting, the process of producing these records also contributed the commercial frameworks for the establishment of a growing network of Kurdish musicians who would ultimately become leaders in these industries. More importantly, Kurdish nationalist resistance would soon enter an entirely new phase as colonial Western powers moved to occupy the Middle East during World War I and later to divide the spoils of war amongst themselves following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Particularizing Iraq's Colonial Legacies

On a warm, sunny afternoon in September 2019, I sat down in the dining area of a food court located in Rand Galery, one of several malls in Silêmanî. I was waiting for my friend Khara (*Xare*), a local clarinetist, to arrive—this was our first meeting since my return to the city for dissertation research, and coincidentally, this was also the same food court where I had first met Khara two years earlier. I did not wait long before Khara arrived, and after exchanging pleasantries and a bit of catching up, we both ordered coffee milkshakes from the nearby Blue Café, a favorite workspace for young male professionals. As we waited for our drinks, Khara began talking about how his life had changed since graduating from the Music Department at the University of Silêmanî and embarking on a full-time career in music. Not far into our

conversation, he went on to complain that as of yet, Kurdish music lacks a systematic and unified theory (of maqam[65] in particular). I jokingly responded that perhaps what Kurdish music needed was a musical congress like the one that had convened in Cairo in 1932.

This conversation was not the first time Khara and I had discussed the Cairo Congress, which was a three-week-long symposium and festival of Arab music, one whose stated aims included the standardization of features such as maqam. Khara had once proudly told me that Iraqi Kurdish singer ʾElî Merdan, still known today as the "king of maqam" among many Iraqi Kurds, had attended the Congress with the Iraqi delegation, and that several of the music professors at his and other universities had, in fact, recently attempted to convene something like a local version of the Congress with musicians and professors from several different cities, including Hewlêr (Erbîl), the region's capital. The meeting had been convened in Silêmanî at the Grand Millennium Hotel (Figure 21), the crown jewel of the city's skyline topped with a rotating restaurant that completes one cycle every twenty-one minutes. Khara explained that unfortunately, the meeting had been largely unsuccessful in the views of his professors—they had agreed on little, and ultimately, it came to be viewed by some as just a pretense for old friends to get together and have a good time.

I recall these conversations here not only as a way of highlighting the connections between Kurdish and other regional musical practices in the early twentieth century, but also

[65] *Maqam* here refers to the modal approach toward melodic organization that is shared across much of the Middle East and central Asia; given the long history and vast spread of this system, regional approaches to the system of *maqam* often retain important differences (even the Cairo Congress did not succeed in creating one standard system for Arab music). Note also here the distinction between the modal system of *maqam* and the series of urban-art song practices known as *Iraqi maqam*/*Kurdish meqam*, which are arranged according to specific forms I discuss later in the chapter.

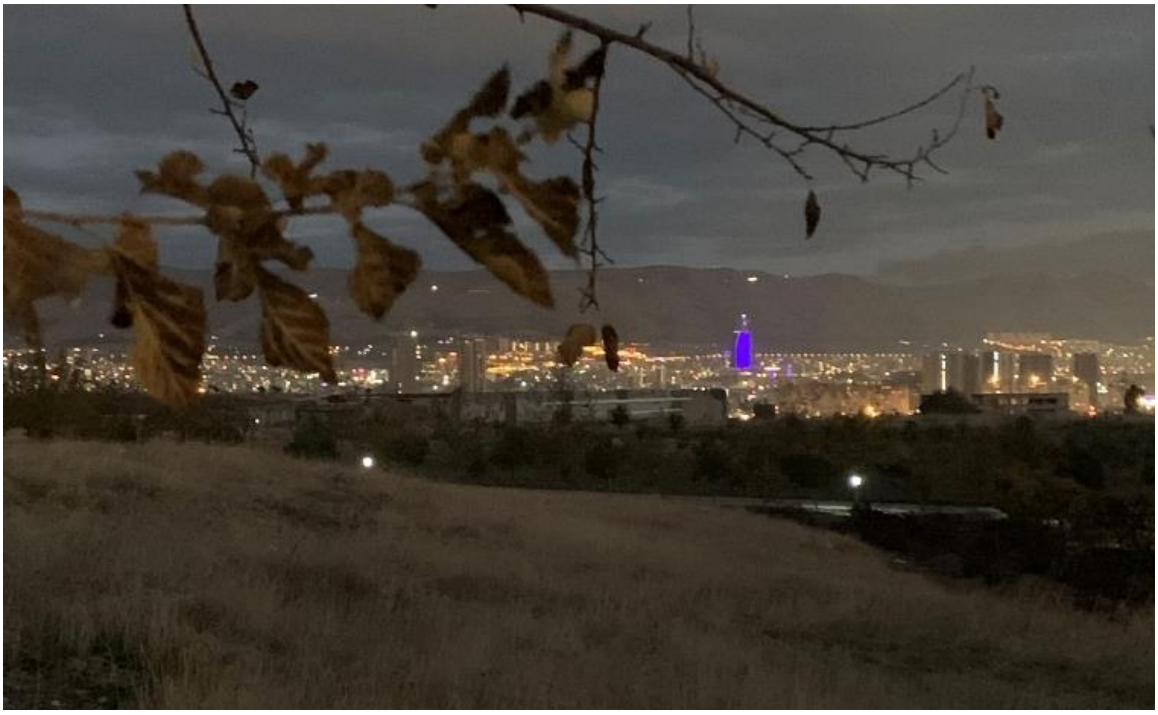

Figure 21. Silêmanî skyline with Grand Millennium Hotel visible in blue. Photo by author. October 2019.

because the Cairo Congress illustrates remarkably well both the impact and the legacies of colonial power on local forms of musical knowledge and transmission in the years immediately preceding the founding of radio stations across the region. For Khara, the Cairo Congress also serves as a reminder of something far more important—what he views as the lack of unity in Kurdish musical practice, a lack he insists is inseparable from the political realities of life in the Kurdish regions. That afternoon at Blue Café, he lamented several times, "they've always kept us apart"—not only politically, but also musically. He expressed a longing for Kurdish musicians to find what he called "a way," which I took to mean a distinctly Kurdish approach to maqam and other features of local musical practice.

In the following paragraphs, I offer an overview of the impact of colonial presence and power in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by examining the

ways the Cairo Congress reveals stark differences in the impact of colonial power in Egypt and Iraq. Identifying these differences serves not only to lay the groundwork for explaining why Egypt would later become a regional power in broadcasting even as Iraq's broadcasting capabilities lagged far behind, but also to provide greater historical context for the establishment of broadcasting in Kurdish. As recent scholarship by A. J. Racy and Israel J. Katz makes clear, every part of the Cairo Congress—from its planning phases to its execution to its aftermath—bears the impact of Western colonial presence in Egypt, particularly that of the French and the British. The French campaign in Egypt had begun in 1798, when Egypt was still an Ottoman territory. In the years following the French occupation—in fact, throughout most of the nineteenth century—Egypt's rulers were interested in reforming and modernizing the country's military and infrastructure, based largely on European models.[66] Throughout this period, many of Egypt's rulers received their education in Western institutions, and Egypt's internal politics remained beholden to outside forces reflecting political relations between the French and the British. In 1882, the British occupied Egypt, ruling without any legal authority until Egypt was declared a formal protectorate of Britain in 1914. This protectorate officially came to an end in 1922, although Egypt was unable to claim complete autonomy in its aftermath.

The year following the end of Britain's protectorate, 1923 (incidentally the same year in which the Treaty of Lausanne was signed), heralded what Katz calls "Egypt's liberal age," which was characterized by the rise of political and social elites who patterned their activities after European models of constitutionalism.[67] If there were a uniform goal among the various political parties at the time, it was to rid the country once and for all of British presence and influence;

[66] Israel J. Katz, *Henry George Farmer and the First International Congress of Arab Music (Cairo 1932)* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 84–85.

[67] Katz, 91.

nevertheless, it was the very fact of British presence that provided the terms of debate on which these and other political activists began reshaping society in multiple ways. In 1929, three years before plans for the Cairo Congress were actualized, Egypt's King Fuʾad I, who was educated in Geneva and Italy, participated in an inaugural ceremony for the new Royal Institute of Oriental Music. At the inauguration, King Fuʾad announced plans to "convene a Congress of Arab Music in Egypt wherein Western musicologists would participate with the aim of exploring ways to perfect Arab music, to provide it with indisputable scientific rules, and to spread its teaching" (note the references to colonial temporal logics, apparent here in Fuʾad's desire to "perfect" Arab music via "science"/modernization).[68] Early advisors for the project included Western musicologists Curt Sachs and Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger, who also took an interest in what he viewed as preserving and reviving the maʾluf tradition in nearby Tunisia.[69]

In addition to providing the context for King Fuʾad's announcement of his plans to hold a congress of Arab music, the Royal Institute of Oriental Music also served as the institutional home of the planning and administration of the congress (and would later provide its physical location). The history of the Institute can be traced back to 1913, when a group of musicians in Cairo began holding weekly meetings at the home of Mustafa Rida.[70] The group was concerned about what they viewed as Western influence on traditional Arab styles of music-making, and before the inauguration of the Royal Institute in 1929, the group had formed what they called the Oriental Music Club. Ironically, the group's final meetings took place in a room rented from the British-owned Gramophone Records.[71]

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[68] Katz, *Henry George Farmer*, 111–112.

[69] See Ruth Davis, "Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger," in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 6: The Middle East*, ed. Virginia Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[70] Katz, 114.

[71] Katz, 114–115.

The pattern in these events should by now seem extremely clear—in the case of both politics and musical expression, it was the presence and influence of Western powers (particularly the British) that provided *both* the source of *and* the solution to a series of political and cultural problems. Offering yet another example of this predicament, Racy describes how the Western musicologists and composers who took part in the Congress' recordings committee (figures like Curt Sachs, Robert Lachmann, Béla Bartók, and Paul Hindemith, to name just a few examples) caused similar problems—as gatekeepers of the recording technology, they took it upon themselves to decide which songs and styles were worth recording, ignoring or even denouncing what they considered styles and genres unduly influenced by urban centers or music from the West.[72] The irony inherent in these scenarios calls to mind anthropologist Talal Asad's insistence that as a result of the global spread of "western civilization," "social and cultural variety everywhere increasingly responds to, and is managed by, categories brought into play by modern forces."[73] In other words, the very categories that politicians, educators, and musicians might use to respond to colonial power and legacy are themselves products of colonial power.

In what ways, then, is this legacy of power and destruction (as well as local responses to this destruction) unique in the case of Iraqi Kurds, and how did this legacy impact the sound technologies available to Kurdish musicians? As I have already mentioned, there was at least one Iraqi Kurdish musician who attended the Cairo Congress—vocalist ʿElî Merdan. Merdan was born in the city of Kirkuk in 1904, and he would later become the first Kurdish singer to join the Kurdish section of Radio Baghdad after its founding in 1939. As a young person, Merdan traveled the region surrounding Kirkuk extensively with his father, who was a tobacco seller and

[72] A. J. Racy, "Comparative Musicologists in the Field: Reflections on the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, 1932," in *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl*, ed. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 142–146.

[73] Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization," 333.

the leader of a caravan that regularly crossed national borders (as Kurdish kołbars straddling the Iraq–Iran border continue to do today, often at their own peril). At some point early in his life, Merdan became fascinated by several local Qurʾanic reciters and performers of maqam, and as he visited regions with unique musical repertoires, Merdan himself began learning how to perform. During this time, he learned a number of Kurdish meqams such as those from his native region of Germyan: *Qetar*, *Xawker*, *Alawêsî*, *Xurşîdî*, and *Ay Ay*, a derivative of the widely known maqam *Beyat*. He also learned how to perform several Persian dastgahs and Arabic maqams, including Iraqi maqams, during visits to Baghdad and other major urban centers in the region.

When he attended the Cairo Congress in 1932, Merdan was still largely unknown outside Iraq, and his presence in Cairo was no doubt overshadowed by that of other members of Iraq's delegation, one of whom was the 20th century's most famous singer of Iraqi maqam, Mohammed al-Qabanji. Overall, the Iraqi delegation was received favorably by the recording committee, with Bartók later writing:

> The music of the Iraqi people (allegedly city musicians) did not at all lag behind the most interesting peasant music in terms of animation and vividness. Indeed the virtuosity and dramatic expression of these Iraqi musicians made their performances one of the highlights of the concerts. As a matter of fact I must confess that their music did not give me the impression at all of being urban in type; on the contrary, it reminded me of other village music.[74]

Despite Bartók's impressions of the overall kinds of music-making associated with villages or urban centers, the Iraqi maqam performances he witnessed were indeed associated with urban spaces, particularly Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk, Merdan's hometown. Beyond associations with urban space, the development of the Iraqi maqam tradition is also reliant upon

[74] Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók Essays: Selected and Edited by Benjamin Suchoff* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 58–59.

the ethnically and culturally diverse histories and peoples of the region, many of whom operated in musical networks that defied simplistic nationalist designations. As ethnomusicologist Bradford Garvey explains:

> *Al-maqām al-ʿirāqī*, the Iraqi *maqam* (henceforth IM), is the general name for a variety of urban art-song practices in Iraq that are related to but distinct from other regional ordered repertoires [*like the Persian dastgah*] … This sedimentation of styles and concepts is due to the highly cosmopolitan and multiethnic character of the IM's bearers, who unite confessional and ethnic groups, including Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Baghdadi Jews, and urban Christians, alongside Sunni and Shiʿī Muslims from throughout Iraq. The twentieth-century practice of the IM in Baghdad … is a historical product of the lived experiences of its performers in the urban spaces of modern Iraq; these performers have been accumulating its components, shaping its formal foundations, and implementing their aesthetic principles, orally and in writing, in a genealogical format since the late 12th century AH (19th century AD).[75]

The most important building blocks of the Iraqi maqam form or structure are the *tahrir*, which includes the main melodic theme of the performance; secondary melodies known as *qita'* or *awsul*; the *meyana*, the melodic climax generally comprised of a *qita'a* or *wusla* sung in a high register; the *qarar*, a descent into the lower register; and the *teslim*, which signals the end of the maqam performance and subsequent transition into a metered song (this transition is called *pesteh*).[76]

Reflecting the regional development of this particular structure, Kurdish meqams also include components known as *teḧrîr*, *mîyane*, and *teslîm*. Like the *tahrir* in both Arabic and Persian performance,[77] the Kurdish *teḧrîr* involves a free-meter, vocal introduction that establishes the tonal and emotional content for the rest of the performance. Though the singer often performs *teḧrîr* using syllables rather than a pre-composed text, singers do sometimes perform the *teḧrîr* using the text chosen for performance (or a combination of both syllables and

[75] Bradford J. Garvey, "The Doors of Melody: The Iraqi *Maqām* as a Tradition of Process," *Asian Music* 51, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2020): 59–60.

[76] Amir ElSaffar, "The Maqam of Iraq," *Iraqi Maqam* (blog), October 22, 2012, https://iraqimaqam.blogspot.com/2012/10/iraqi-maqam.html.

[77] For a discussion of *tahrir* in the Persian *dastgah* tradition, see Ann E. Lucas, *Music of a Thousand Years: A New History of Persian Musical Traditions* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

text). The texts used within performances of Kurdish meqam often recount stories of local significance, though poetry and love stories are also sometimes used in performance.[78] After the *mîyane*, which is usually situated at the interval of a fifth above the *teḧrîr*, Kurdish meqam performances conclude with a return to the original melodic material of the *teḧrîr* (this repetition comprises the *teslîm*), and movement into the *beste* (Sorani: "sense, meaning"), a metered song in the same maqam as that used during performance.[79] Perhaps as a direct result of similarities between the structure of Kurdish meqams and Iraqi maqams, it was not at all uncommon during Merdan's lifetime (nor is it still) for masters of these Kurdish meqams to perform Iraqi maqams as well.

If Western musicologists at the Cairo Congress imposed their ideas about characteristics of urban vs. rural musics of the region onto the music of Iraq, perhaps it was because the history of colonialism within Iraq was far less extensive than that within Egypt. While it is true that the British had helped to install King Faisal at the head of an Iraqi monarchy and would continue to remain influential in Iraqi politics for decades to come, they had only invaded the three Ottoman provinces that would eventually comprise the nation of Iraq in 1914. Another key difference between British colonialism in Egypt and Iraq can be seen in the development of education in each locale. During Egypt's liberal age, while many of its political and social elites were being educated in Europe, Kurdish intellectuals were far more impacted by a series of Ottoman educational reforms that were more reliant on the establishment of intellectual centers in Istanbul and Damascus. Although these centers were no doubt still impacted by European educational models and ideas, the generations who studied there were more directly affected by educational

[78] Meła Bestûn, interview by author and Shene Mohammed (translator), personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, October 7, 2019.

[79] Mustafa Abbas Ali, interview by author, personal interview, Silêmanî, Iraq, October 22, 2019.

policies such as those of Sultan Abdülhamid II, whose reforms included components of linguistic nationalism, Turkification, and pan-Islamism.[80] Meanwhile, within Iraq, Kurdish language standardization, an important aspect of local education, was hampered by the British government's refusal to designate its Kurdish regions as a single province, and to fulfill its promises to recognize the Kurdish language as an official language of education and bureaucracy.[81]

As I have already asserted, these and other differences between British colonialism in Egypt and that in Iraq are inextricably intertwined with the history of media in the region. Throughout most of the twentieth century, it was Egypt that led the way in terms of the development of broadcasting and other technological advances in media.[82] Though the circulation of musical materials via records began in Iraqi Kurdistan long before the founding of the state-run radio station in Baghdad, in comparison with other nearby nations, Iraq lagged far behind in the early twentieth-century race for superiority over the airwaves, both in terms of founding a state-run station and in terms of its delayed ability to reach receivers all across the country.

One of the benefits of this delay for Iraq's Kurds was that Kurdish-language broadcasts were often accessible (albeit variably, depending on the region and even the time of day) from other nations, including parts of the Soviet Union,[83] Armenia, and Iran. Another benefit was that while the Iraqi state was still stymied by the limits on its broadcasting capabilities, a growing

[80] See Soleimani 2016.

[81] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 118.

[82] Douglas A. Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 4.

[83] Hassanpour (282) notes, "The first radio broadcasts in the Kurdish language began in the autonomous Kurdish region established in the USSR between 1923 and 1929." I discuss this further in Chapter 3.

number of Iraqi Kurdish cultural figures were gaining valuable experience working at other radio stations such as the British-run station in Jaffa, which employed Iraqi Kurdish singer Ř efîq Çalak (1925–1973) and famed Sorani poet ‘Ebdołła Goran (1904–1962). Collectively, the unique characteristics of colonial and state power in fledgling Iraq I have described above helped to ensure that even as the Iraqi government continued to thwart the development of a broader Kurdish reading public by resisting efforts at Kurdish language standardization, the foundations of a Kurdish listening public were already being laid.

Conclusion

For all its political and literary importance over the last two centuries, contemporary Silêmanî is a *musical* city as much as it is anything else. From the crowded lanes of the city center to the desolate mountain tops overlooking the city from multiple directions, the importance of musical sound seems always just at hand—exemplified in the rhythmic chanting of merchants in the bazaar, the regular performances of musicians at local restaurants year round, and the (probably dangerous) singing and dancing often seen on passing crowded buses as they race out of town for picnics (*seyran*) in the mountains. From local venues like historic teahouses to the massive, new Roman-style amphitheater at *Hewarî Şar* (see Figures 22 and 23), music is not only performed, but celebrated as an intrinsic aspect of Kurdish life and culture.

In the Introduction, I argue that we might understand Iraqi Kurdish musical practice as a kind of “discursive tradition” that allows its practitioners to forge and express particular relationships toward place and time, both of which have been subject to colonial power in greater Kurdistan for centuries. The development of this tradition—as was the development of a Kurdish listening public—was informed historically by a number of sound technologies, including not

Figure 22. Historic teahouse (çayxane) with statue of Ḧesen Zîrek, Silêmanî. Photo by author. November 2019.

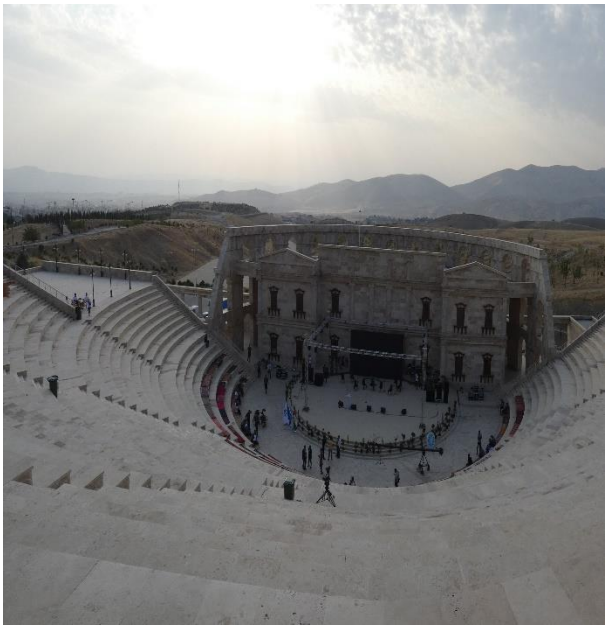

Figure 23. Roman-style amphitheater at Hewarî Ṣar, Silêmanî. Photo by author. September 2019

only voice, but also recording and broadcasting. The rise of these latter technologies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the broader region in the early twentieth century reflects the reach of colonial power, and yet it also reveals the potential for their use as a form of resistance. This is not to suggest, of course, that the actions of every Iraqi Kurdish musician might rightly be described as "resistance" in some vague fashion, but rather, that the reproduction of embodied musical knowledge always carries with it the inherent possibility of resistance given its relationship to knowledge (what is being passed down?) and power (who is passing it down, how, and why?).

In the case of Iraqi Kurds, it was the very same colonial power that sought to harness broadcasting and recording technologies toward its own ends that provided the means whereby a transnational network of musicians that included men, women, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Kurds and Arabs alike first began to forge a unique musical tradition defying colonial logics of place

and time. As I explain in Chapter 3, the introduction of radio to the region in the early twentieth century proved a major catalyst for this process.

Chapter 3

Transmitting Tradition, Part 1: A History of Kurdish Broadcasting

For more than a century, radio broadcasting has been providing music listeners the soundtrack of their lives. Many of us are still taken back when we hear certain songs, our minds flooded with memories—where we were, how old we were when we first heard them—as well as the emotions—whom we loved, whom we hated, what we worried about most at the time—first given life through an encounter with radio broadcasting. For many, radio conjures up memories tied to past experiences of collective listening. My late grandmother, for example, never forgot how as a child, her family home in eastern North Carolina became the site of weekly communal gatherings coinciding with broadcasts of the Grand Ole Opry, since hers was the only home in the neighborhood with a radio set. Even today, radio remains intimately connected to present lived experience, often coordinating daily tasks such as grocery shopping, studying, or working out, or offering a sonic backdrop protecting workers in various industries from boredom or, even worse, from unwanted conversations with coworkers. Likewise, radio broadcasting provides, if not glimpses of the future, at least a space through which its listeners might collectively imagine what the future might be.

One of the most valuable characteristics of radio as an object of study is that these aspects I have just described are not limited to one part of the world. Memories like my grandmother's are just as common in Iraq as they are in the rural US; the "elevator music" of American shopping malls is no more aurally stimulating than that played in Silêmanî's Majdi Mall. Radio's global reach, then, provides a broad framework through which we might examine the impact of historical events (events such as colonization or the discovery of exploitable natural resources) in disparate locales over the last century. At the same time, radio's seeming ubiquity must not be

confused with some sort of homogenizing, impersonal force. Just as governments have utilized broadcasting technologies as a tool for surveillance and propaganda, radio has also empowered unique, local forms of resistance—both providing the raw materials for subverting state aims and enabling an invisible form of community not easily identified or defined by physical boundaries. Within the larger sweep of global history, this might be seen as a sort of paradox—that even as various colonial and state powers provided the technologies and infrastructures required for the rapid spread of radio in the first half of the twentieth century (a process I examine in relation to recording technologies in Chapter 2), radio became a powerful tool of subversion and resistance among groups such as the Kurds eager to defy the aims of their colonial or state rulers. Radio's power to connect, while essential to its utility, is all but impossible to predict or to control.

Owing in large part to this subversive potential, radio has played a central role in recent Kurdish political and cultural history on a number of levels ranging from the personal or individual to the collective. During ethnographic interviews conducted in 2019, several former employees of Kurdish Radio Baghdad spoke to me with great emotion of their memories of radio and their time at the station. For them, radio was not merely a source of information, entertainment, and employment, but also something intimately associated with the names and personalities of local announcers, musicians, and other broadcasting staff, as if each and every one were an old friend (often, they were). It was clear during these interviews that radio was immensely valuable to my interlocutors on a personal level, and not simply through a collective or national lens. When I spoke with Omar Halmat, for example, who worked for Kurdish Radio Baghdad in the 1950s and who passed away in December 2020, Halmat's friendship with various Kurdish musicians who performed at the station was a recurring theme of our conversation. Halmat even named one of his children after the singer Şemał Saʿîb (1931–1986), one of the

station's regular performers. For ʿEbdołła ʿEbbas, who worked at Kurdish Radio Baghdad in the 1960s and 70s, the loss of the station's archives and recordings following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a source of deep regret and sorrow, further compounded by the fact that deteriorating conditions in Baghdad subsequently forced ʿEbbas to leave the city that had been his home for decades.[1]

In countless other cases over the past several decades, radio has engendered multiple forms of Kurdish collective identity and resistance, allowing new political communities to take form, and becoming an instrument to warn of state military actions or movements, combat state propaganda, or convey the news of strategic successes or defeats. Each new form of collectivity and resistance reflects the particularities of the Kurdish struggle in relation to time and place. As one example, in 1980s Mehabad (in Iranian Kurdistan), large numbers of Kurds accused of ties to resistance groups such as Komała were held as political prisoners; it was radio that informed the local community which prisoners had been released.[2] It is no wonder, then, that radio has such a seemingly exalted status in Kurdish individual and collective memory, one celebrated even in refugee camps like Arbat (see Figure 24). In terms of Kurdish musical practice, radio provided new technical means for establishing broader consensus regarding which "musical languages and idioms were worthy of representing the nation and its people."[3]

In their article "'The Morning of Freedom Rose Up': Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival," Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour argue that radio was the primary catalyst for the formation of a transnational Kurdish "listening public" in the latter

[1] ʿEbbas, interview.

[2] Farah Shareefi, "Breaking the Bars of Home and Becoming a Peshmerga," in *Kurdish Women's Stories*, ed. Houzan Mahmoud (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 61.

[3] Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2015), 4.

Figure 24. One of the buildings at Arbat Refugee camp outside Silêmanî; this camp houses refugees from northern Syria. Silêmanî province, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author, November 2019.

decades of the twentieth century.[4] On one level, it is important to note that this claim bolsters more recent arguments within scholarship in radio and media studies regarding radio's capacity to both form and inform the nation. This unique propensity toward collectivization has been apparent since the dawn of commercial radio broadcasting. In the US, the very first chief commissioner of the FCC, Anning S. Prall, argued in 1936 that radio might be understood as "a combination of the schoolhouse, the church, the public rostrum, the newspaper, the theater, the concert hall—in fact, all media devoted to the education, enlightenment, and education of the people."[5] Radio's value has thus long extended far beyond mere entertainment, encompassing

[4] Blum and Hassanpour, "Kurdish Popular Song," 330.

[5] Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio "Introduction," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi.

the potential for shaping collective action and values among members of a given community—or "imagined community."[6] In the early days of radio, as nearly the entire globe grappled with the lingering effects of World War I and the Great Depression, nation after nation found in radio a powerful new device for confronting widespread anxieties and fissures that seemed poised to fracture their social and political order. As media historian Kate Lacey explains, "In various ways, and to various political ends, radio was seized upon as a tool that could bind the various constituents of the nation together, wherever they were and whatever their circumstances."[7] These attitudes helped to fuel the spread of radio in colonized regions as well; in 1930s Palestine, for example (another of Britain's Mandatory possessions), the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) was touted as a tool capable of "modernizing" Palestine's diverse population and of furthering Britain's perspective on its national difficulties.[8]

The problem for Kurdish radio, of course—from the vantage point of those grasping the levers of global power throughout the twentieth century—was that Kurds were not a nation, at least not in the modern sense in which *nation* seamlessly gives way to the nation-state. Despite numerous petitions for Kurdish political autonomy in the early twentieth century, Western powers and local states have worked hand in hand to prevent the realization of Kurdish statehood. As I suggest above, however, Kurdish radio was used in important ways to thwart the aims of those intent on suppressing Kurdish culture and identity, and to further invigorate various nationalist and guerilla movements. I spend the remainder of this chapter ruminating on the following contradiction: even as Kurdish broadcasting relied on infrastructures and resources

[6] I borrow this term from Benedict Anderson; it is one to which I return in the following pages.

[7] Kate Lacey, "Radio in the Great Depression: Promotional Culture, Public Service, and Propaganda," in *Radio Reader: Essays on the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.

[8] Andrea L. Stanton, *This Is Jerusalem Calling: State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 3–4.

located in the very state apparatus that had resolved to prevent Kurdish self-governance, radio came to provide a discursive space through which Kurds labored to challenge the suppression and erasure of Kurdish cultural forms such as music and language. I argue that, while inseparable from colonial and state power, broadcasting provided the means through which Kurds both responded to that power and began to articulate their own collective music history in defiance of colonial logics of place and time.

Kurdish radio provides a particularly compelling case study of these processes for several reasons: first, since there is no Kurdish state, Kurdish radio broadcasts were transmitted from many different stations, often in neighboring countries and therefore reflective of competing aims. A study of Kurdish radio, then, provides certain nuances not immediately apparent in more common studies of national or state-sponsored radio in a single locale (many of which also focus exclusively on Western nations).[9] Second, as I explain elsewhere, the region known as *Kurdistan* has been occupied by multiple colonial powers over the centuries, a fact which draws attention to the importance of colonial power and legacies within broader histories of radio and other sound technologies. Finally, as I describe in further detail in the following section, the development of a Kurdish listening public was entirely dependent not only on radio broadcasting, but also on musical practice.

The Formation of a Kurdish Listening Public

For Blum and Hassanpour, the contemporary transnational Kurdish listening public (transnational in the sense that Kurds living in Kurdistan are divided among several different nation-states, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria) is comprised of "anyone who expresses

[9] Lacey, "Radio in the Great Depression," 36.

approval or disapproval of performances offered by Kurdish musicians."[10] Though it may seem an obvious point, it is worth acknowledging here that this definition (rightly) does not assume that members of this listening public listen(ed) to the same songs or radio broadcasts, or that they entertain(ed) specific views on Kurdish nationalism or other political issues. In other words, the Kurdish listening public is, and always has been, a diverse one, and the radio stations reaching these audiences broadcast from several different nation-states, in several different languages and dialects of Kurdish, over a period spanning decades (beginning in the early 1920s).[11] Some of these stations were government-run, while others belonged to guerrilla resistance groups. Collectively, these stations were characterized by a wide range of technological capacity, as well as policies related to expressions of Kurdish nationalism or other political content. Though some stations would eventually be able to reach listeners across wide swaths of Kurdistan, the formation of a more widespread Kurdish listening public was a gradual process with multiple contours, geographic centers, and influencing factors. Music played a central role in this process, particularly in cases where state-sponsored stations (such as Radio Baghdad) prohibited the broadcasting of political or nationalist content. In cases such as these, musical practice provided a way of reinforcing transnational cultural practice without explicitly calling for the unification of the Kurdish nation politically (though, as I later explain, some of the songs broadcast from various stations were indeed explicit in their calls for unification).

Another point worth noting is that the very concept of the listening public, as Blum and Hassanpour acknowledge, is inherently related to that of the reading public, a central theme of

[10] Blum and Hassanpour, "Kurdish Popular Song," 327.

[11] Sardar Saadi, "Episode 1: The History of Kurdish Radios," *The Kurdish Edition* (podcast), accessed May 4, 2020, https://thekurdishedition.com/archive. As Saadi notes, the first radio broadcasts in Kurdistan (in Soviet "Red Kurdistan") were not in Kurdish, but rather in Azeri Turkish. This fact only heightens the importance of Kurdish music in this station's broadcasts.

Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism. Why, then, this shift in emphasis from a reading public to a listening one? And what might the processes leading to the formation of a Kurdish listening public reveal that are not as apparent within examinations of a Kurdish reading public? Even more importantly, how does the concept of a Kurdish *listening public* relate to that of the Kurdish *nation* as a political entity stifled by colonial and state power? In the remainder of this section, I focus on a cluster of concerns related to these questions: namely, the factors enabling the formation of a Kurdish listening public in the twentieth century (as well as those delaying the concurrent development of a widespread reading public), and the implications of this historical process for understanding the relationship between Kurdish music/music history, broadcasting technologies, and the Kurdish nation.

If I might return to reading publics momentarily, Anderson argues that the novel and the newspaper in particular "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation."[12] He suggests that this is primarily because these genres of writing rely upon a particular understanding of simultaneity that grows out of broader conceptions of "homogenous, empty time." As he explains:

> The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, simultaneous activity.[13]

The conception of time sustained by the form of the novel and the newspaper, then, is one that, like the simultaneity of radio broadcasting, encourages readers (or listeners in the case of radio)

[12] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 25.

[13] Anderson, 26.

to think of others as experiencing time and the events that fill it in exactly the same way as they themselves do. On a political level, this simultaneous experience makes possible an ordering of national histories within which citizens of the nation are able to locate themselves and their fellow citizens. In terms of the Kurdish listening public, radio broadcasts of significant news events no doubt made it easier for Kurdish listeners to imagine themselves as part of a larger Kurdish nation (though again, not necessarily a nation-state), particularly as political and cultural suppression were levied against Kurds in multiple locales time and again. In music broadcasts, which tended to favor the more widespread and more easily performed genres of *stran* and *goranî* (songs in these genres are typically short and non-narrative), Kurdish listeners likewise experienced a kind of simultaneous musical time on multiple planes: via their enjoyment of music broadcasts at the same time as other listeners, but also by listening to a relatively small number of performers and genres and thereby experiencing a common bond through a series of unified listening practices (practices that would ultimately come to inform notions of a broader Kurdish music history).

As colonial powers such as Britain and France shaped the contemporary formation of Middle Eastern states throughout the first half of the twentieth century—accompanied by the introduction of new technologies—standard time ultimately took on the role of "official" time (a process I consider in Chapter 1). As I have already suggested, there is but a small gap between the simultaneity of lived experiences of time and the ability to situate collective experience within time. In colonial contexts, this slippage took on somewhat more sinister implications, ultimately providing a justification for colonial interference itself. In fact, this fateful combination of a temporal conception of time as teleology—as a simultaneous, empty unfolding toward "progress"—and a historicism highlighting the West's supposed role as the keepers of

modernity accompanied British and French incursions into the Middle East in the early twentieth century.

In addition to justifying the military presence and control of more "advanced" colonial powers, this conception of time also allowed colonial powers to paint local populations as a mere foil for modernity and progress. However, colonial notions of temporality did not simply replace local, Indigenous conceptions of time, which are often coded as *tradition*. Instead, as historian of modern Egypt On Barak argues, the modernity accompanying twentieth-century colonial projects, for all its reliance on new technologies like recording and broadcasting, telegraphy, and railway travel, served in many ways to reinforce the traditional, and to introduce new ways of demarcating the refined, modern classes from those "backward" peasants perceived to be stuck in the past. It is not surprising, then, that the 1934 inaugural lecture of the Egyptian broadcasting service (which aired two years before the beginning of national radio in Iraq, and five years before the advent of Kurdish broadcasting in Baghdad) was titled "The Radio as It Was Perceived by a Bedouin from the Desert."[14] The broadcast emphasized the sheikh's fear of the physical device, which he was said to have regarded as a statue or a wooden skull in which an *ʿifrit* (a malevolent supernatural being popular in Islamic mythology and folklore) was imprisoned. Derision of this superstitious attitude led naturally into a rational, middle-class explanation of how the device actually worked. In this way, reinforcing the supernatural (in this case, the ʿifrit imprisoned in a wooden skull) allowed the growing, refined effendi classes to mark themselves as part of a different temporal trajectory than that of the "backward" masses of peasants. Likewise, after bringing a radio set to Kurdistan in the early 1930s, engineer A. M. Hamilton, who was employed by the British to build a road across southern Kurdistan, wrote of

[14] Barak, *On Time*, 100.

Kurds coming from near and far to witness for themselves the "mysterious box that brought noises from the air."[15]

New technologies, then, rather than ushering entire populations into the "modern age" at once, were just as often used to divide those thought to experience different temporal trajectories—that is, they allowed colonial powers to claim for themselves certain powers of governance and surveillance, and to relegate the populations they aimed to control to a sort of perpetual pre-modernity. This is not to say, of course, that Kurds themselves had no interest in modernizing and standardizing Kurdish society, politics, and culture. In fact, Kurdish authors and other scholars had already been discussing how to standardize and modernize the Kurdish language and various forms of Kurdish cultural expression for decades. Nevertheless, colonial and state powers resisted these efforts, highlighting their own perceived role as the gatekeepers of modernity and of Kurds as not yet ready for modernization and democratization. This process—as well as the ways in which radio broadcasting, and music broadcasting in particular, proved capable of challenging these aims—helps to explain why the development of a Kurdish listening public far outpaced the development of a Kurdish reading public.

As might be expected, much of the cultural policy hindering Kurdish literary expression was tied to language. As I explain in Chapter 2, a number of new state policies in 1920s Turkey and Iran effectively rendered teaching or even speaking in Kurdish illegal, and even in Iraq, where the use of Kurdish was not outlawed, British Mandatory officials deliberately hindered the standardization and of Kurdish and its widespread adoption as a language of government and education. Additional challenges to the formation of a Kurdish reading public during this time

[15] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 282.

included high rates of illiteracy, the delayed development of a Kurdish economic middle class, and the particular challenges of language standardization in areas without state support for such efforts.[16] For Kurds, then, despite early attempts at publishing a wide range of literary materials, the development of a widespread reading public was delayed until the latter half of the twentieth century.

I highlight these hindrances to the development of a Kurdish reading public not to suggest some sort of disjunct dichotomy between sight and sound (indeed, radio has its own forms of visual culture), but rather to underscore the importance of both musical expression and sonic technologies with regard to the contemporaneous flourishing of a transnational Kurdish listening public. The arrival of gramophones in the first decade of the twentieth century, though still limited to those able to make such extravagant purchases, had signaled the beginning of a new era of collective listening in tea houses and in the homes of the wealthy, one that would later extend to radio. Even after the advent of broadcasting in Kurdish, the factors mentioned above, which prevented the use and/or standardization of Kurdish language, ensured that many Kurds were excluded from understanding these broadcasts, either because they had never learned Kurdish as a result of state restrictions on its use or because they were unable to understand the dialect of the announcer. These limitations, in addition to heightening the importance of acts of resistance, only enhanced the importance of music in radio broadcasts, since music could reach a much wider audience and communicate in ways language alone could not.

Kurdish broadcasting—no matter how fierce its rejection of colonial and state power at times—would have taken a drastically different trajectory were it not for the involvement of

[16] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 442–445.

those same powers in multiple capacities. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, for example, before radio had become widespread, gramophone companies scoured the globe looking for places to record new and exciting "ethnic" songs (see Chapter 2). As modern nations such as Turkey moved to ban expression in Kurdish, singers like Meryam Xan (1904–1949) and Miḧemed ʿArif Cezîrî (1912–1986) crossed the border into Iraq, where they later produced records that would continue to circulate for decades (a process that would help to ensure the continued possibility of resistance by Kurds in Turkey, even when broadcast from a state-run radio station in Iraq). By the advent of global radio broadcasting, colonial anxieties had, in large part, shifted to the unpredictable outcome of World War II. These anxieties would fuel the start of new Kurdish broadcasting around 1941 from Jaffa in Palestine, where the British set up a station aimed at combating Italian and Nazi propaganda broadcasts, and in Beirut, where the French government also began broadcasting in Kurdish.[17]

After the end of the war, Western involvement continued to shift from direct colonial control to interference and heavy-handed influence with the aim of ensuring continued access to natural resources such as oil. Regional tensions and dissatisfaction with this Western presence in the region led to strategic diplomatic efforts including additional broadcasting in Kurdish. One of the most significant of these new programs came from Egypt's Radio Cairo, which began transmitting a 45-minute program in Kurdish in 1957.[18] Although Kurdish station personnel had been able to broadcast nationalist songs from the station in Jaffa and perhaps from others as well, the Kurdish programming in Cairo directly attacked Western powers and what many viewed as

[17] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 282. For more on radio in Mandatory Palestine, see Stanton 2013.

[18] Another important Egyptian radio station founded by Nasser during this period was the Voice of the Arabs (*Sawt al-ʿArab*), which explicitly called for the overthrow of Iraq's monarchy. Ahmed K. Al-Rawi, *Media Practice in Iraq* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15.

their puppet government in Iraq. News programs therefore criticized the Iraqi government and its support for the pro-Western Baghdad Pact, and the musical selections included nationalist Kurdish songs such as "Ey Reqîb" ("O Enemy") and "Ey Kurdîne" ("O Kurds"). As Hassanpour notes, the words and music to these songs had not been heard on the air since the brutal destruction and dismantling of the Kurdish republic of Mehabad in Iran in 1946.[19]

These admittedly brief accounts of Kurdish radio broadcasting reveal several important insights regarding the processes affecting the widescale development of a Kurdish listening public. The first is that radio itself—like its listening publics—is not a monolith, but rather a contested site. Just as histories of state-run stations are central to emerging histories of global radio, so too are local individuals or groups who were drawn to radio by its comparatively low cost and simple operation. Even among state-run stations alone, however, differences in regional power were reflected in the broadcasting capabilities and histories of individual stations. In the late 1950s, for example (before the overthrow of Iraq's monarchy), Nasser's Egyptian broadcasts criticizing Iraq's support for policies benefiting the West prompted Iraqi officials to beg the United States for help obtaining higher power transmitters of their own in order to counteract the Egyptian broadcasts.[20] Here, radio plays a role as a site for the working out (and contestation) of certain power dynamics.

A second noteworthy insight (one I have already asserted elsewhere) is that resistance is a key theme in the history of Kurdish radio. Admittedly, I have yet to define what *resistance* means in this context, in part because resistance is, like radio, contested, contextual, and

[19] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 285–286.

[20] Douglas A. Boyd, "Radio and Television in Iraq: The Electronic Media in a Transitionary Arab World Country," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, no. 4 (1982): 400–401.

sometimes conflicting by nature. And it certainly should not be supposed that everyone ever involved in Kurdish radio—listeners, announcers, performers, producers, technicians—had resistance as their primary aim, particularly where there was money to be made or fame to be courted. Nonetheless, radio did provide new ways of defying colonial and state logics of place and time: through songs praising nationalist leaders or encouraging solidarity among Kurds, through news reports situating world events within a local perspective,[21] through references to places and events using their Kurdish names (in direct opposition to those provided by state or colonial powers), and, in some cases, through the mere use of Kurdish language. Furthermore, even where governments were successful in stymying Kurdish literary efforts, radio continued to reach wide audiences of men, women, and children, rich and poor, literate and non-literate alike. As Kurdish author Mahmut Baksı suggests in relation to music's potential for resistance, "Music cannot be stopped, crushed out, or killed by bullets."[22] The same proved true for radio waves.

One final insight is that music is central to histories of Kurdish radio, and, as the preceding quote illustrates, to various forms of Kurdish resistance. Not far from the radio displayed in Silêmanî's ʿEmne Sûreke, for example, are the lyrics and transcriptions of seven tunes associated with Peshmerga (freedom fighter) forces; one of these is the aforementioned "Ey Kurdîne." Nationalist songs like these abound in Kurdish, in which they are called *sirûd* (hymn, anthem). In the early 1940s, the station at Jaffa broadcast a number of sirûds; these include "Demî R̄aperīn" ("The Time of Uprising"), "Gułî Xwênawî" ("The Bloody Flower,"

[21] Some news reports (such as those broadcast from state-run stations) had to be approved by government agents; these, of course, would not have been as likely to stress differing viewpoints or perspectives. According to Margaret Kahn, the Kurdish news broadcasts from the government station in 1970s Urmê/Ûrmiyê (Urmia) in Iran were pared down and often parroted government talking points. Margaret Kahn, *Children of the Jinn: In Search of the Kurds and Their Country* (New York: Seaview Books, 1980), 64.

[22] Mahmut Baksı, *The Kurdish Voice: Shivan Perwer*, trans. Chahin and Bawermend (Australia: Helin House, 1986), 6.

written by ʿEbdołła Goran, a Sorani poet who worked at the station alongside famed musician Řefîq Çalak), and "Gułegenim" ("The Wheat Flower").[23] Even songs whose lyrics did not directly resist colonial rule played a role in connecting audiences together through shared musical styles, genres, melodies, and other features. As performers brought songs and genres from particular regions of Kurdistan to others via the radio, they ultimately began a process of musical cross-fertilization. At the very least, this process helped to popularize regional genres like the *lawik* (a genre of longer songs that often deal with love or historical subjects, depending on the region) that had previously been associated with only certain parts of Kurdistan.

As radio continued to fuel the growing popularity of individual singers who performed for numerous radio stations—singers like Ḧesen Zîrek, an Iranian Kurd who is said to have recorded as many as 1,000 songs during his lifetime, and who recorded in Tehran and Baghdad, among other locations—led to the establishment of a growing network of Kurdish musicians and other cultural figures who would ultimately become leaders in these industries, as well as central figures in recent Kurdish music history. These cultural networks spanned national boundaries as did the musicians and broadcasts themselves. Also significant to note is that music and sonic technologies such as recording and broadcasting even worked to effect certain changes within Kurdish society itself. One important example involves the public perception of music-making: before the advent of gramophone and radio, members of the middle and upper classes had been

[23] Endryos Bakurî, *Êzge: Mêjûy Damezrandinî* (Hewlêr, Iraq: Çapxaney Şehab, 2009), 172–181.

all but forbidden to pursue careers as singers.[24] Records and music broadcasting were to play a major role in shifting this perception over time.[25]

Kurdish Radio Baghdad

Until this point, I have focused largely on the factors enabling the development of a Kurdish listening public, as well as those which made music and radio broadcasting more widely available and more effective as tools of resistance than other, print-based forms of media. These include government policies suppressing the use and standardization of Kurdish language, the interest and anxieties of these same powers in relation to radio broadcasting, and the temporal and spatial logics underpinning the subjugation of Kurds within various nation-states (logics which made possible, for instance, the drawing of national boundaries separating Kurdish populations and the standardization of modern clock time). In the following section, I shift my emphasis toward an examination of just one of the stations central to emerging histories of Kurdish music and Kurdish broadcasting. There are dozens of other stations I could use as examples, such as Radio Yerevan, which began broadcasting in the 1930s.[26] Here I will focus primarily on the Kurdish section of Radio Baghdad, which began its Kurdish broadcasts in November 1939 and was destroyed in the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Radio sets first began to appear in the larger cities of Iraqi Kurdistan during Iraq's monarchical phase (1932–1958) in the early 1930s. The first radio in the city of Silêmanî was

[24] This prohibition also applied to playing musical instruments. Argun Çakir discusses the impact of the stigma surrounding music in relation to peripatetic non-Kurdish musicians in early twentieth-century Kurdistan in his forthcoming article (2022) "Shifts in the Stature of Professional Music-Making in Kurdistan (Or How Kurds from around Mardin Became Professional Musicians." The article will appear in a special issue of *world of music (new series)*.

[25] Blum and Hassanpour, "Kurdish Popular Song," 328.

[26] For more information about this station and its historical importance, see Ghazaryan 2019.

purchased in 1932 by the owner of a local teahouse (*çayxane*). The set is reported to have attracted the attention of many of the local men, who began visiting the teahouse after the evening *ezan* (*adhan*, or call to prayer) each day to witness the "wonderful device…which speaks without a person" and to listen to the Qur'ān.[27] Beyond the walls of local teahouses, the early 1930s was by and large a period of transition and, to some extent, upheaval in Iraq, which was formally awarded its independence from Britain in 1932. As historian of Iraq Charles Tripp asserts, however, Iraq's nominal independence did little to ease the grasp of British colonial interests. According to Tripp:

> The British presence [remained] as visible as before, with most of the British advisers and officials staying at their posts for the time being, a British military mission training the Iraqi army and the RAF retaining control of the bases at Habbaniyya and Shuʿaiba. British-owned companies were as conspicuous as ever in all the major sectors of the economy [including radio] and British influence on the king and his ministers remained strong.[28]

In September 1933, Iraq's King Faisal died while seeking medical treatment in Switzerland, and his son, Ghazi, became king in his place. Ghazi's rule, like his father's, was marked by significant changes in the government. In 1935, following the resignation of Prime Minister Jamil al-Midfaʿi, Ghazi chose Yasin al-Hashimi, who had already served as Prime Minister from August 1924 until June 1925, to assume the role in his place. Both al-Midfaʿi's resignation and Ghazi's appointment of al-Hashimi as Prime Minister were related to a growing tribal rebellion spearheaded by two powerful sheikhs from the Diwaniyya region. al-Hashimi was chosen to lead the government as a result of his ability to calm this rebellion through his own relationship with the sheikhs, though in truth, he had helped to instigate the rebellion in the

[27] Rādyoy Kurdî Komarî 'Êraqe le Beĕda (Facebook group), September 4, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2655459341173065&id=870394683012882&__tn__=K-R.

[28] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 75.

first place. After al-Hashimi helped to calm the uprising, the two rebel sheikhs, accompanied by an armed entourage, marched into Baghdad with a petition for the king. According to Tripp:

> This curious month of the tribal 'invasion' of Baghdad in April 1935 can be seen as a tribal swansong, reproducing as theatre that which had once been a real threat: the depredation of the city by rural tribesmen. It convinced many in Baghdad that this was a manifestation of the 'old Iraq' which needed to be eliminated by the march of progress.[29]

Apparently, for al-Hashimi, "progress" required the establishment of state-controlled broadcasting. Though test broadcasts had begun as early as 1932, in June 1935, al-Hashimi sent a letter to Iraq's chief ministers calling for the establishment of a national radio station. That same year, a government committee (of which both he and the Minister of Education were members) allocated 31,000 dinars from the national budget for the project.[30]

The first regular broadcasts from the state-run station Radio Baghdad began in the summer of 1936, when Iraqi English-teacher-turned-radio-broadcaster 'Abd al-Satar Fawzi announced in Arabic for the first time, "Here is the Iraqi government's wireless radio station in Baghdad."[31] At first, Radio Baghdad broadcast just two days each week, powered only by a single mediumwave transmitter. Nevertheless, the nation's leaders clearly thought about radio through the lens of its future potential for upholding the aims of the state. As a way of ensuring this power extended to areas all across the country, the government provided radios to various locales as follows: three for the villages surrounding Baghdad, three for schools in Anbar, three for Diyala, six for Mosul, five for Basra, five for Amarah, six for Diwaniyya, six for Nasiriyya, five for Hilla, two for Karbala, four for Kirkuk, two for Hewlêr, and five for Silêmanî.[32] King Ghazi himself was reportedly so fascinated by the technical and political potential of radio

[29] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 80–81.
[30] Bakurî, *Êzge*, 18–21.
[31] هنا محطة الاذاعة اللاسلكية الحكومة العراقية في بغداد
[32] Bakurî, 24–26.

broadcasting that he started a second radio station (al-Zuhur) for which he himself was the only announcer. In the coming years, Ghazi, who was fiercely anti-British, would occasionally even read reports that had been provided directly by the Nazis in Germany.[33] He also personally supervised the purchase of all radio equipment, which came from Chicago-based company Hallicrafters.[34]

On Sunday, November 19, 1939, just over three years after Radio Baghdad's first regular broadcast in Arabic, Kurdish broadcasting was allotted fifteen minutes of airtime following a short statement in Arabic announcing "the translation of the news in Kurdish."[35] The announcer was Silêmanî native Kamîl Kakemîn. Like so much of Kurdish history in Iraq and other nations where Kurds have faced state suppression in one form or another, the details of the first Kurdish broadcast do not seem to have survived. In his book describing the history of the Kurdish section of Radio Baghdad, renowned Kurdish singer Bakurî notes only that listeners to the first broadcast heard one or two records of Kurdish music and a news report focusing primarily on the quickly escalating second world war.[36] Even without additional details, what we do know about that first broadcast is telling. The first segment, which included Kurdish music, reinforces both the importance of the early recording industry in Iraq and the centrality of music to broadcast programming; the second segment highlights the impact of World War II on the emerging Iraqi broadcasting industry.

From 1939 until 1945, Kurdish broadcasts remained limited to fifteen minutes, owing largely to a lack of technical equipment and recorded materials, as well as the station's inability

[33] Boyd, "Radio and Television in Iraq," 400.
[34] Al-Rawi, *Media Practice in Iraq*, 15.
[35] Bakurî, *Êzge*, 4.
[36] Bakurî, 4.

to broadcast music live. Most of these early segments, like the first, featured a combination of recorded music and news reports in Kurdish.[37] In 1945, once the station was able to begin broadcasting live music (though it still lacked its own recording equipment), the daily broadcasting time was increased to one hour.[38] In part as a way of filling the allotted air time, the station's announcer Kamîl Kakemîn began traveling across Kurdistan to find singers to perform at the station in Baghdad. In these early years, since many Muslim Kurds still viewed music-making with suspicion, a number of important singers were non-Kurds. These included two sisters among the large Jewish community in Badînan (a predominantly Kurmanji-speaking region in northern Iraq): Xoxê Muṣê and Marî Muṣê, who hailed from the town of Akrê and who later went by the names Nazdar Ferhad and Esmer Ferhad. Accompanying these singers to Baghdad was another important vocalist, the first, in fact, to be employed by Kurdish Radio Baghdad: ʿElî Merdan.[39]

Merdan, remembered even today as the "king of maqam," was born in Kirkuk in 1904. He was known as a master of a wide range of musical genres, including not only regional Kurdish genres such as *meqamî Kurdî* (Merdan's first performance at Kurdish Radio Baghdad was the Kurdish meqam *Ay Ay*), but also Persian dastgahs and Arabic maqams, including several Iraqi maqams. Merdan's duties at Kurdish Radio Baghdad ultimately came to include teaching singers such as Nazdar and Esmer Ferhad traditional Kurdish songs, supervising the station's

[37] ʿEbbas, interview.
[38] Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, 283.
[39] "Nazdar û Esmer Ferhad," Liner notes for *Yadgarîyekan: Nazdar û Esmer Ferhad* (Instîtyutî Kelepûrî Kurd: 2015).

instrumentalists and serving as a manager of sorts for the growing number of vocalists who came to record in Baghdad, and overseeing a set of new programs that began airing around 1956.[40]

Acquiring the equipment to make its own recordings around the early 1960s proved a major turning point for Kurdish Radio Baghdad. The station began paying for musicians to come to Baghdad to perform, later selling the recordings to other radio stations and in local stores, in addition to playing them on air. According to ʿEbdołła ʿEbbas, music groups in particular (as opposed to vocalists) who traveled to the station were often not paid for their recordings, though they would occasionally receive a free meal. Singers, on the other hand, were paid according to a scoring system determined by Radio Baghdad. Famous singers were said to earn as much as those from Egypt.[41]

During Iraq's Republican phase (1958–1968), Qasim's new government (which had overthrown the Hashemite monarchy) wasted no time in utilizing media to achieve its aims: in 1959, state-run television stations broadcast the trials of political figures associated with the former monarchy, demonstrating the new government's power to any potential dissidents.[42] Meanwhile, in the studios of Kurdish Radio Baghdad (which shared floor space with the station's main Arabic section), the earlier ensembles which had been comprised largely of Jewish and Arab musicians gave way to majority-Kurdish ensembles for the first time. According to ʿEbdołła ʿEbbas, many of these Kurdish instrumentalists were blind and had received their musical training at homes for the disabled.[43]

[40] "Nazdar u Esmer Ferhad"; ʿEbbas, interview.
[41] ʿEbbas.
[42] Al-Rawi, *Media Practice in Iraq*, 15.
[43] ʿEbbas.

After the Baʿathist rise to power in 1968, the state tightened its grip on media even further. Nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1972 provided seemingly infinite new resources for funding programs aimed at furthering state objectives (these proceeds also funded Baghdad's war against Iraqi Kurds following Kurdish refusals to relinquish the oil-rich area of Kirkuk in 1974, and war with Iran beginning in 1980). From 1968 to 1973, the national budget allocated for radio and television grew from 650,000 dinars to 4 million dinars.[44] In its own media broadcasts, the ruling Baʿath party railed against what it claimed were "imperialist" and "colonialist" moves on the part of Western governments, even as it continued to siphon away the proceeds of oil sales. The party also began investing huge amounts into covert radio stations aimed at furthering Baʿathist ideology across the region.[45]

In the midst of these difficulties, Kurdish radio stations continued to grow in popularity. In the mid-1960s, Kurdologist and missionary Father Thomas Bois lamented that radio broadcasting (from "Radio Baghdad and from stations behind the Iron Curtain") was threatening to eliminate the role of professional singers in Kurdish society, "because even in the most remote villages today there are transistor radios."[46] By 1970, an estimated 70 percent of Iraqi villages had at least one radio.[47] Just one decade later, Margaret Kahn, a linguist who lived in Iranian Kurdistan and who witnessed firsthand the refugee crisis caused by Iraq's policies toward its Kurds, wrote that radio broadcasts (the majority of which were music broadcasts) were

[44] Al-Rawi, *Media Practice in Iraq*, 17.
[45] Al-Rawi, 23–24.
[46] Thomas Bois, *The Kurds*, trans. M. W. M. Welland (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 63.
[47] P. A. Marr, "The Iraqi Village, Prospects for Change," in *Readings in Arab and Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*, ed. Abdulla M. Lutfiyya and Charles W. Churchill (The Netherlands: Mouton, 1970), 331.

particularly important to Kurdish villagers, who "huddled around the battery-powered radios that were their only contact with the outside world."[48]

Whereas histories of music programming at Kurdish Radio Baghdad clearly demonstrate a commitment to sustaining and celebrating Kurdish music itself, this commitment did not necessarily come at the expense of other worldwide musical systems. As I have already mentioned, ʿElî Merdan was a master of multiple maqam-based musics, and he even traveled with the Iraqi delegation to the Cairo Congress of Arab Music in 1932. Other famous vocalists including Ḧesen Zîrek and Mihemedî Mamlê were outspoken about their use of melodies from neighboring musical traditions; both of these vocalists also produced recordings based on a melody composed for Umm Kulthum's "*Ghani li, Shwaya, Shwaya*," giving the song new lyrics in Kurdish. In terms of the programming itself, broadcasting schedules in Bakurî's work on Kurdish Radio Baghdad reveal that in the 1950s, slots were occasionally reserved for non-Kurdish musical selections, including "Western music" (*musîqay rojawayî*), concerts for piano and for flute, and even tangos.[49] Together, these factors illustrate the fact that Kurdish musical practice throughout the twentieth century was not at all backward or disconnected from modern experience, but was rather deliberately situated within regional and global practice of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In a certain sense, the fact that there is at all a history of Kurdish radio is rather remarkable. From states that banned the very use of Kurdish language to Western powers intent on carving up the Middle East to their satisfaction, Kurds have faced seemingly insurmountable

[48] Kahn, *Children of the Jinn*, 64.
[49] Bakurî, *Êzge*, 144, 156.

obstacles to their cultural (and physical) survival time and again. Nevertheless, radio has sustained Kurdish solidarity movements, brought hope to those daring to imagine a different world, and sustained Kurdish cultural practice in remarkable ways. This, of course, is not a story that ended in the 1960s, where I leave off my history of Kurdish Radio Baghdad, nor in 2003, when Radio Baghdad was destroyed. Indeed, there can be no doubt that music broadcasting remains of critical importance in contemporary Kurdish society. In Silêmanî, it can be heard nearly twenty-four hours a day, whether in the bazaar, in taxis, on passing buses heading for picnics in the mountains, or in restaurants and coffee stands.

From enabling the formation of a transnational Kurdish listening public to creating new sites of resistance, Kurdish radio might be considered a reflection of—or perhaps a parallel to—Kurdish music history itself. This is particularly true insofar as those musicians who are now considered of greatest importance in twentieth-century Kurdish music are by and large those who performed for radio audiences. Additionally, music has always been a central component of Kurdish radio broadcasting since its inception. In Iraqi Kurdistan, this attitude—of radio as central to and reflective of Kurdish music history—is also a direct result of the destruction of Radio Baghdad and its archives in 2003. The present moment therefore represents a crucial one in which Kurdish musicians, music scholars, and organizations such as the Kurdish Heritage Institute in Silêmanî are working as quickly and as thoroughly as possible to protect and reclaim the many particulars of recent Kurdish music history that went up in flames. This is no doubt a project that will (and must) continue for decades; it is also one that will no doubt continue to shed light on the role of sound technologies and musical practice in Kurdish society, as well as that still played by colonial and state power in the Middle East and across the globe.

Chapter 4

Transmitting Tradition, Part 2:
Musical Epistemologies in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan

In 2013, buoyed by the success of their recently released song "Were Were Yare" ("Come, come, [my] love"), the Kurdish trio Li Dinê released a new song called "Take Me Home," which, like many of Li Dinê's songs, features lyrics in both Kurmanji Kurdish and English (see Appendix 2). Ostensibly, "Take Me Home" is a love song, and it begins with the question "Dengê min tê te (can you hear my voice)?" The song's first Kurdish verse references a young couple forced to run away together, and in the song's English verses and chorus, a young male lover calls out to his female companion to join him on a summer night and ride away into the sunset. His lover, whose words are sung by Kurdish pop star and activist Dashni Morad (*Deşnê Morad*), responds with a series of questions meant to prove the depths of his love. Would he still love her, she asks, if she were a bad girl? Would he still want to run away with her if all the rest of the world were mad? The themes apparent here—passionate summer love, doubts about a lover's true intentions, willingness to abandon one's entire life for the sake of true love—are quite common ones, not only within Kurdish music, but also within various music traditions across the globe. And given Li Dinê's own stated mission of producing music that appeals to audiences both eastern and western, old and new, writing a love song makes perfect sense.

Beyond the song's overt and repeated references to love, the accompanying music video in particular makes clear that the song was conceived by the artists as far more than just a love song, and that the "home" referenced throughout represents far more than the familiarity of a lover's embrace. Just before the opening shots of the video, for example, atop a black screen appear the words "Always remember my son, that your home is where your heart is." As these

words fade away, viewers see several shots of children running and playing along hills dotted with livestock, the only sounds the wind and children's laughter. Interspersed within these scenes are short clips featuring a close-up of an older man's face, then his lower body as he kneels down to grab a handful of earth. Loose dirt falls from the man's clenched fist, slowly at first, and as the camera closes in on the man's face yet again, he deliberately (longingly, even) closes his eyes. He then releases the tension in his hand, allowing the rest of the dirt to fall. Just as the last bit of earth slips away, a tiny hand grasps the man's. As the camera view widens again, viewers see that he has been joined by one of the children playing nearby. As the other children run up to the pair and then run away together once again, the man, left alone, stands, following the children with his gaze. It is only at this point, over a minute into the music video, that the music actually begins.

The overarching imagery in these poignant scenes (which were filmed in Iraqi Kurdistan) is clearly meant as a gesture toward the notion that Kurdistan itself—the land, its very earth, together with its collective history, signified here by the inclusion of both the older gentleman and several members of its youngest generation—is the real home referenced in the song's title and lyrics. Indeed, as Rewan Riko, one of the two younger members of Li Dinê, once explained to a reporter for Rûdaw, "The video was a way for others to visually connect—we wanted to show them the country."[1] As the music in the video finally begins, viewers see Riko sitting in a large window in an otherwise dark room, his silhouette visible amid the light streaming in around him. With his face positioned toward the window, he begins to sing the question "Dengê min tê te?" in his signature smooth falsetto. The camera then returns to the gentleman featured in the

[1] Alexander Whitcomb, "In Music, Fashion, and Food, Kurdish Fusion Coming into Its Own," *Rûdaw*, May 21, 2014, https://www.rudaw.net/english/culture/21052014.

opening shots, who is popular Kurdish singer and saz performer Gare Sazkar, a native of Syrian Kurdistan and founding member of Li Dinê (as well as the father of Rewan Riko).[2] Still standing alone on the hillside where viewers last saw him, Sazkar begins to sing in Kurmanji Kurdish. In addition to the lyrics and the use of short, repeated melodic phrases, Sazkar's vocal style indicates that this portion of the song relies heavily on various Kurdish folk traditions, gestures that no doubt resonate with Kurdish listeners across the globe. After Sazkar finishes singing the opening verse, the camera pans to the other members of Li Dinê, who are pictured riding along the open road with singer Dashni Morad, and who begin singing the song's English verses, complete with references to the infamous US couple Bonnie (Parker) and Clyde (Barrow), whose years-long crime spree ended when the couple were killed by police in Louisiana in 1934.

As I have already suggested, the artists involved in producing "Take Me Home" have been quite open about their goal of producing music that will reach both Kurdish and broader Western audiences. After all, Li Dinê means "To the World." This approach has also characterized the music of other international Kurdish pop stars such as Helly Luv, who is based in the US, or Zhala (*Jale*), a queer singer based in Sweden. Many of these artists are themselves part of the international Kurdish diaspora, and they often discuss their music as a way of reconnecting with the Kurdish roots they were unable to explore for much of their lives. Dashni Morad, for example, was born in Silêmanî in 1986 (reportedly, one of her first memories is a radio broadcast warning about the imminent use of chemical weapons on Iraqi Kurds), and her family was forced to flee Iraq as refugees, eventually settling in Holland.[3] Similarly, Helly Luv, born Helen Abdolla (*Hêlîn ʿEbdułła*) in Iranian Kurdistan in 1988, spent much of her childhood

[2] Whitcomb, "Kurdish Fusion."

[3] Dashni Morad, "My Story: The Person, the Artist," web archive, accessed April 6, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20161003105715/http://paulonatal.com/dashni-morad-website/my-story.html.

as a refugee, later settling in Finland with her family.[4] As for the members of Li Dinê, Gare Sazkar and his family fled Syrian Kurdistan and settled in Denmark. According to the group's third member, rapper Samuel B. Sindi, "The music is how we reconnected ourselves. Our families left Kurdistan years ago, and we were missing that closeness to the place itself."[5]

The careers and musical interests of these and other artists reflect their own experiences straddling very different cultural and social worlds, as well as their attempts to bridge particular divides among Kurdish listeners themselves. Their role in the Kurdish popular music industry reflects a historical development that has relied heavily on members of the global Kurdish diaspora, and on the development of a transnational Kurdish listening public (a process I discuss further in Chapter 3). Given the acts of state aggression and genocide that caused these singers and their families to flee their nations of origin, Kurdish popular music as a transnational phenomenon might therefore be seen as reflecting the unique challenges of what sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis describes as the "politics of belonging."[6]

For Yuval-Davis, this concept, which is most often invoked in relation to nation, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, etc., refers to processes that typically arise when a broader sense of belonging is threatened among a particular collectivity. She argues that belonging itself is the result of emotional attachment that causes an individual or group to feel safe or "at home" in a particular context. When this sense of wellbeing is threatened, members of the vulnerable collectivity tend to respond in ways that not only reconstruct a shared sense of belonging, but

[4] Henry Austin, "Helly Luv: Meet the Kurdish Pop Star Fighting ISIS with Songs," *NBC News*, August 15, 2015, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/helly-luv-meet-kurdish-pop-star-fighting-isis-songs-n408526.

[5] Whitcomb, "Kurdish Fusion."

[6] Yuval-Davis did not coin this phrase, but I find her work on this topic particularly compelling given its insistence on viewing the politics of belonging through the lens of intersectionality.

also reshape/reimagine the collectivity itself. Rather than a striving toward a stable or fixed notion of at-home-ness, however, the politics of belonging is an ongoing and dynamic process, one that is often influenced by differences within the community itself. This process is therefore not necessarily an egalitarian one, and it is intimately connected with questions of power and the "'dirty work' of boundary maintenance."[7] As Yuval-Davis asserts, "when we carry out intersectional analysis [which represents an acknowledgement of differing power structures], we cannot homogenize the ways any political project or claimings affect people who are differentially located within the same boundaries of belonging."[8]

As the careers of several transnational Kurdish pop stars illustrate, the differences that are revealed in the process of re-constructing both the collectivity and its sense of belonging often lead toward conflict over differing visions of Kurdish belonging (as is the case in Kurdistan itself). In "Take Me Home," Iraqi Kurdistan seems to stand in for all of Kurdistan, as it has in recent years in public discourse highlighting its unique, semi-autonomous political status. During an interview with Medya Magazine shortly after the song's release, the members of Li Dinê explained that the choice of a location in which to film the music video for "Take Me Home" was made in collaboration with Dashni Morad, who returned to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2005 and has become increasingly involved in local activist projects aimed at increasing access to libraries (especially among refugees) and combating climate change.[9] Throughout the interview (in which

[7] John Crowley, "The Politics of Belonging: Some Theoretical Considerations," in *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe*, ed. A. Geddes and A. Favell (Aldershot: Ashgate), 30, quoted in Nira Yuval-Davis, "Borders, Boundaries, and the Politics of Belonging," in *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Minority Rights*, ed. Stephen May, Tariq Modood, and Judith Squires (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214.

[8] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality, and the Politics of Belonging," *FREIA Working Paper Series*, no. 75 (2011): 4, https://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/Documents/N.YuvalDavisintersectionality.pdf.

[9] Amed Sindi, "Exclusive Interview with Li Dinê," *Medya Magazine*, accessed April 6, 2022, https://medyamagazine.com/exclusive-video-interview-with-li-dine/.

Morad did not participate), the members of Li Dinê speak of their joy at returning to Kurdistan after more than a decade. What they do not mention during the interview, which lasts more than thirty minutes, is any indication that Kurdistan itself remains divided by state, linguistic, and other kinds of boundaries (even Kirkuk, where the music video was filmed, was reclaimed by Baghdad following the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum of September 2017), or the fact that they themselves are not native to this particular region of Kurdistan where the video was filmed, where even the everyday dialect of Kurdish (Sorani) is quite different from the Kurmanji performed by Sazkar.[10] Nevertheless, the deliberate invoking of themes such as nostalgia, rurality, and lovesickness throughout the song and the video are clearly meant to reach a wider Kurdish audience and to emphasize their understanding of a shared, pan-Kurdish history and "home."[11]

This, of course, is just one iteration of "Kurdistan" as a site of belonging; in lived experience, the boundaries of belonging are experienced differently among those who, for example, live in proximity to actual or disputed political boundaries, or who are dedicated to challenging misogynist ideas about the role of women in Kurdish society, or who transgress broader social norms of one sort of another. In the realm of music, the role of conflict in reimaginings of a modern, transnational Kurdistan is often apparent in widespread criticisms of

[10] Also important to note is that Kirkuk itself is now no longer under Kurdish military and administrative control since the 2017 Kurdish independence referendum. In March 2021, locals also complained that government signs, which had been printed in Arabic, Kurdish, Turkmen, and Syriac since 2012, were being reprinted in only Arabic and some English. This sparked fears of Arabization in the city, a tactic used by Saddam Hussein in the 1970s owing to the city's importance in the Iraqi oil industry. See Sirwan 2021.

[11] Anthropologist Nicholas Glastonbury argues that the contemporary pop songs of Helly Luv and others ultimately "tap into globalized discourses of liberal feminism, cosmopolitanism, and anti-terrorism that consequently redound upon the image of Iraqi Kurdistan as a potential nation-state." Importantly, he goes on to argue that the result of adopting these particular Western frames, especially as it concerns the gaze of Western audiences for these kinds of music, has been the projection "of Euro-American fantasy, serving political and ideological purposes in Europe and North America that legitimize the war on terror." "Building Brand Kurdistan: Helly Luv, the Gender of Nationhood, and the War on Terror," *Kurdish Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 114, 117.

and public discourse surrounding musicians themselves, as well as in discussions about the nature and history of "Kurdish music" writ large. In the case of Dashni Morad, gendered criticisms and threats originating in Kurdistan itself nearly ruined her early career.[12] Similarly, Helly Luv has admitted facing death threats owing to the content of several of her songs and music videos.[13] As these and other struggles are continually reflected and redefined in Kurdish musical practice (on both the local and the global levels), it remains to be seen how they will impact notions of belonging both among the global diaspora and in Kurdistan proper, where diasporic artists are increasingly engaging with local audiences.[14]

Given the political and symbolic importance of Iraqi Kurdistan in particular (as the only semi-autonomous Kurdish political entity recognized on a global level), the remainder of this chapter focuses on the processes by which contemporary Iraqi Kurdish musicians and music scholars are fashioning a politics of belonging through music epistemologies. These processes are worthy of particular attention in the present moment in light of the massive social and political changes ushered in by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan by ISIS in 2014. In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore focus on three key aspects of contemporary musical practice in Iraqi Kurdistan that illuminate the politics of belonging in this present moment: music pedagogy, music publishing, and what I call "musical mapping." Each of these areas highlights not only the recurring concepts of tradition and

[12] In 2020, Morad attracted international attention for criticizing misogynist comments made by singer Romi Harki (*Rōmî Herkî*) on a Rûdaw program. In his response, Harki insisted that Kurdistan is "our country, not hers." See Mosimann 2020.

[13] Orlando Crowcroft, "Kurdish Singer Helly Luv Dismisses Threats over Music Video," *The Guardian*, February 20, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/20/helly-luv-kurdish-singer-music-video-threats.

[14] In 2014, for example, the members of Li Dinê performed at the University of Kurdistan–Hewlêr, handing out free merchandise after their performance. "Li Dine Performance at UKH," *Erbil Lifestyle*, March 26, 2014, http://erbillifestyle.com/li-dine-performance-at-ukh/#.Ykw9wSjMJPY.

technology, but also the importance of power and conflict in ways that continue to shape the politics of belonging among Kurdish musicians and listeners.

Music Pedagogy

For much of Kurdish history, music transmission occurred primarily in local settings, as singers learned songs orally from those who performed in their own or nearby villages.[15] This is not to suggest that certain musical forms were not widespread or impacted by other regional musical systems (such as Arabic maqam, Iraqi maqam, or Persian dastgah), but rather that radio and other new technologies introduced during the twentieth century vastly increased the amount and scope of these contacts, shifting methods of music transmission and pedagogy along the way. In addition to these technologies, another major factor in this process was the founding of conservatories and other music education centers at local universities beginning in the early twentieth century. In 1936, Mosul native Hanna Petros (who was ethnically Assyrian) helped to found the Baghdad Conservatory, which continued to expand in subsequent years until it was ultimately absorbed into the Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad.[16] In these early years, a number of music students were sent to study at Western institutions, and many of the

[15] Blum and Hassanpour, "Kurdish Popular Song," 328.

[16] "Al-rajul Hanna Butrus juz' min tarikh al-musiqa fi al-ʿahd al-maliki (1896–1958) – Muʾdi wa fannan wa muʾallif wa muʿallim wa mushrif fi Idaʿa Qasr al-Zuhur," *Al-Dustur*, web archive, accessed April 8, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20120328094702/http://www.daraddustour.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84/tabid/94/smid/604/ArticleID/31615/reftab/123/Default.aspx. Also of note is that Petros (the spelling *Butrus* in the article's title reflects transliteration from Arabic rather than Syriac) first studied music with an Ottoman officer as a member of the Ottoman military during World War I. In addition to serving as the first director of the conservatory in Baghdad, Petros's legacy includes teaching and scouting for new music performers in Mosul, composing music for the Iraqi army, and supervising music at King Ghazi's Qasr al-Zuhur Radio.

earliest teachers at the Baghdad Conservatory, which taught only Arabic and Western musics, were not Arab at all, but rather Turkish or European.[17]

Other departments and institutions dedicated to the study of fine arts (*hunere cwanekan*) were opened in Kurdistan in subsequent decades; these include the Institute of Fine Arts (*Peymangay Hunere Cwanekan*), which was founded in the 1970s and operates in the cities of Silêmanî, Dihok, Hewlêr, and Ṟanye. Another major center of music education in Silêmanî is the College of Fine Arts (*Kolêcî Hunere Cwanekan*) at the University of Silêmanî (*Zankoy Silêmanî*), whose Department of Music was founded in 2010 and which offers courses in music composition, performance, and ethnomusicology.[18] Currently leading the Department of Music is Dr. Abdullah Jamal Sagirma (*ʿEbdułа Cemal Segirme*), a composer and music scholar who completed his bachelor's and master's studies in musicology at Baghdad University and his PhD in composition at Queen's University in Belfast. According to the department's website, students in the Department of Music focus on "the process of making music by different ways and standards," the "experience and process of the performance," and "musical performances in the political and social spheres," among other topics. Students of performance are able to study both "European instruments such as Violin, Viola, Cello, Counter bass, Flute, Obo [*sic*], Bassoon, Guitar" and "Kurdish traditional instruments such as Kamancha, Oad [*sic*] and Santur."[19]

In addition to providing post-secondary-level music education, the College of Fine Arts at the University of Silêmanî also represents an important site of public music performance (as

[17] Thamer Abdulkareem Khalil, "The European-Stylistic Orchestral Music in Iraq by Focusing upon Musical Career and Major Works by the Iraqi Composer Khalil Ismail Hakki" (master's thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2017), 22–23, https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2487518/Thamer_Ferdig.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[18] Abdullah Jamal Sagirma, "Music Department," College of Fine Arts web site, accessed April 8, 2022, http://art.univsul.edu.iq/FAR-Depts/department-of-music.

[19] Sagirma, "Music Department."

do other music education centers in the region). In October 2019, I attended a rehearsal and concert of the Silêmanî Symphony Orchestra (*Orkistray Semfoniyay Silêmanî*), whose conductor is Dr. Sagirma. Positions within the orchestra are paid positions, supported by the Ministry of Culture. Nevertheless, the orchestra must often bring in musicians from other regions (especially eastern Europe) to play instruments less common and/or available in Iraq (particularly brass). For the October 2019 program, the orchestra was supplemented by musicians from the country of Georgia. The program for the concert included Ludwig van Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, the first two (and only complete) movements of Franz Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, and compositions by three Kurdish composers who have all received training in Europe: Abdullah Jamal Sagirma; Hardi Majeed (*Herdî Mecîd*), who studied in Ukraine; and Dilshad Said (*Dilşad Seʿîd*), who studied in Wales and in eastern Europe. Their respective compositions performed at the October concert in Silêmanî are "Journey to Kurdistan," "Kurdish Inspirations," and "Two Kurdish Melodies for Orchestra."

The inclusion of both European and Kurdish musical selections on the program reflects the dual emphasis on both musical systems in the Department of Music at the University of Silêmanî. One potential reason for this emphasis (which was also reflected in the mostly-English program itself, with only the concert details and a note of thanks written in Sorani) is that promoting Kurdish orchestral compositions alongside those of internationally known European works and composers might be seen as an attempt to raise Kurdish music to a certain level of recognition and "refinement"—in other words, to stress that Kurdish music is equally suited to the concert hall. Bringing the two musical systems together, however, is an ongoing process, and one riddled with tension, as seen among various expectations and behaviors of the concert's attendees. Before the concert began, a group of students sitting behind me complained that the

concert, which listed a start time of 6:00 pm, had not yet begun at 6:25 (in reality, most—if not all—of the live music performances I attended in Kurdistan began well after the advertised start time). These students, it seems, were expecting a temporal manifestation of the formality of the concert hall (i.e., starting on time). As concertgoers continued to file into the performance space, one of the students expressed that he was "pleasantly surprised" that hundreds of people had shown up for the performance (admission to which cost 5,000 dinars). "For orchestra?! In Kurdistan?!" he exclaimed.

After the concert began, differences between the more "refined" concertgoers and those used to the liveliness of typical Kurdish performances continued to spill over into plain sight. During a pause in the *Egmont Overture*, for example, several attendees began to clap prematurely; the disapproving responses from other audience members (including shushing noises) lasted longer than had the ill-timed applause. Likewise, as some concertgoers recorded parts of the performance on their cell phones using the app Snapchat (another common practice at music performances in Kurdistan), the app's immediate playback of the recorded sound prompted more shushing and looks of disapproval from others in the audience. Interestingly, there was one segment of the concert during which Kurdish music's difference from European concert hall repertoire (and the expected behaviors associated with each) was not only acknowledged but seemed on full display—it involved the use of daf (a frame drum lined with small rings on the inside) in the Kurdish compositions. The two daf performers, unlike the rest of the orchestra members in their concert black and white, wore traditional Kurdish clothing and stood at the front of the stage (see Figures 25 and 26). Their performance drew enthusiastic responses from the crowd and clearly impressed the students sitting behind me: one of them

Figure 25. Male daf performer accompanied by the Silêmanî Symphony Orchestra. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. October 2019.

Figure 26. Female daf performer accompanied by the Silêmanî Symphony Orchestra. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. October 2019.

remarked after the concert (in English), "They seriously played dafs in this hall. That's the greatest fucking thing I've ever heard!"

In addition to college-level music pedagogy, other sites of musical transmission in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan include high schools dedicated to training in the arts, as well as other private institutions serving students of all ages. In August 2017, I visited the Institute of Fine Arts–Silêmanî, a secondary-level education center which offers training in music and other cultural/artistic practices (see Figure 27). The school was founded in 1981, and the Music Department in 1984. Students come to the school after completing the ninth grade and study for five years (at the time of my visit in 2017, there were ninety-four students total enrolled in the school). Like music students at the University of Silêmanî, students at the Institute of Fine Arts study both classical European and Kurdish musics (but *not* Arabic, Turkish, or Persian musics, I

Figure 27. Institute of Fine Arts. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

was told). The greatest problems facing the school involve a lack of resources stemming in large part from the invasion of ISIS in 2014, before which time the government was able to provide more regular financial sponsorship (the staff member who showed me around the school lamented that no one in Kurdistan has been happy since 2014). Now, the school struggles to provide enough instruments for all its students, and it has not been able to obtain any brass instruments at all. The number of concerts sponsored by the school has recently dropped from three or four per year to just two.

For those able to afford sending their children to private lessons, institutions such as Music House (*Malî Muzîk*; see Figure 28) have attempted to fill in the gaps created by a broader lack of government resources for education in the arts. The owner of Music House is Mustafa Abbas Ali, a violin/kemançe performer and composer originally from Baghdad who is well

Figure 28. Music House (*Malî Muzîk*). Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. August 2017.

known in Silêmanî for his work conducting the Silêmanî Symphony Orchestra and the orchestra accompanying the television show *Kurd Idol*. According to Ali, the school teaches around 120 students, ranging from age 4 to 67. During the summer, students come from Iran or even Baghdad to study. Unlike other local music schools that offer group instruction, Music House offers one or two hour-long private lessons each week, with the cost of two sessions only one and a half times the cost of one. Students are tested on their progress every three months.

Inside Music House, Ali's passion for music pedagogy and for his music school is obvious. Each room features some sort of musical décor, whether a set of *neys* (end-blown reed flutes) in different keys, paper roses made out of sheet music (by Ali's wife), photos of Ali in concert, or the following framed quote (in English) attributed to Plato: "Music is the movement

of sound to reach the soul for the education of its virtue." During my first visit to the school, Ali proudly told me that he had done all of the painting and made improvements to the building "with my own hands." In addition to making aesthetic improvements, Ali also built his own recording studio using equipment he purchased in Nashville, Tennessee in 2013.[20]

Like the other music institutions discussed thus far, Music House teaches not only Kurdish music (Ali, though not ethnically Kurdish, has been studying Kurdish music for over a decade), but also Western classical music. Pictures of Beethoven, Mozart, and Chopin adorn various walls, and Ali once told me that his future plans for the school include painting murals of famous musicians in each of the rooms designated for lessons on a certain instrument, such as the "Chopin room" for piano students. During one of my visits to the school, I spent some time working in the lobby; over the course of the afternoon, I heard students practicing diatonic scales, Mozart's "Turkish March" on piano, and Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" on violin.

Collectively, the three music-pedagogical spaces discussed above offer several important insights regarding the contemporary state of music pedagogy in Iraqi Kurdistan. The first is that education in Western classical music is generally considered desirable at every pedagogical level. In a certain sense, this attitude reflects the sort of global cosmopolitanism that has characterized aspects of Kurdish cultural expression (including poetry) for decades, if not centuries. At the same time, as a student of clarinet at a university in Silêmanî once complained, claiming to teach Western instruments is often merely aspirational, as many music education centers in Iraqi Kurdistan lack the teachers or the equipment necessary to do so.

[20] Ali traveled to Nashville to take part in the Kurdish Arts Festival, which he said began in 2012 and ended in 2013 owing to a lack of permanent funding.

A second insight provided by examining these three institutions is that the global Kurdish diaspora and its accompanying musical networks have been instrumental in offering continued support for music pedagogy and collaboration in Iraqi Kurdistan. Whether through the Kurdish community in Nashville, the Georgian musicians who played with the Silêmanî Symphony Orchestra in October 2019, or the number of Kurdish music scholars, composers, and conductors who received training in Europe before returning to Kurdistan, these networks have provided technologies unavailable in Iraq, insulated certain aspects of Kurdish music pedagogy from the devastating financial losses experienced since the invasion of ISIS, and connected Kurdish diasporic audiences with musicians and musical events back in Kurdistan. This process of exchange might be seen as rendering the "politics of belonging" within Kurdish music far more than a local phenomenon.

A third and final insight regarding music education is that discourse surrounding the "Kurdish" nature of Kurdish music is central to many music education centers in contemporary Kurdistan. Though it may seem an obvious point, there is no singular view of what "Kurdish music" means, and this fact occasionally leads to conflict. For some, the results of such conflict are reflected in daily life in matters far more important than mere arguments about terminology or intonation, impacting instead these musicians' ability to obtain or retain certain career positions, and affecting the nature of their interactions with other musicians and even government agencies.[21] In a certain sense, of course, public discourse regarding the Kurdishness

[21] I acknowledge that this description is a bit vague, but I hesitate to offer more details lest I inadvertently reveal sensitive aspects of certain individuals' experiences. I nevertheless find it worth mentioning that debates over what Kurdish music is and who is capable of performing/understanding it often have deep and meaningful consequences in people's lives.

of Kurdish music is to be expected; after all, only in recent years has Kurdish cultural expression received any sort of government support on a large scale.

Music Publishing

In addition to music pedagogy, music publishing represents another key site for the transmission of musical knowledge in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. During Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqi publishing was largely controlled by the state, with publishing houses dedicated to "presenting official discourse and official viewpoints."[22] Since 2003, however, hundreds of new publishers have begun operating, thereby providing unprecedented opportunities for Kurdish authors. Likewise, several areas outside Kurdistan with large numbers of Kurdish immigrants have also become important sites for publishing works in Kurdish. In the winding streets of Silêmanî's bazaar and city center, bookshops and small publishers are tucked away into every space imaginable (see Figure 29); some vendors simply lay out their books on sheets spread across the sidewalk for passersby to inspect. Far more than just purveyors of print, bookstore owners are often portrayed and tend to carry themselves as keepers of knowledge, able to discuss the majority of books in their possession in impressive detail. On several different occasions, I traveled to shops in the bazaar with local friends in search of particular books on the history or some other aspect of Kurdish music. Even when store owners were unable to provide the books I was after, they could often talk about those books at some length, occasionally even referring me to other nearby bookstores who might have copies.

[22] Khulud al-Fallah, "Iraqi Publishing Industry Faces Challenges in Fast-Moving Landscape," *The Arab Weekly*, July 13, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/iraqi-publishing-industry-faces-challenges-fast-moving-landscape.

Figure 29. One of the many bookstores in Silêmanî's main bazaar. Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by author. December 2019.

For music education centers such as Music House, the growth of Kurdish publishing in recent years (both in Iraq and in other nations as well) has enabled the use of written Kurdish language materials in music pedagogy, perhaps for the first time. What remains to be seen is how these kinds of pedagogical works will engage with certain music-theoretical aspects in the long term in relation to other regional systems such as Arabic maqam and Persian dastgah. In 2017, Music House began using three new books that were published in Tehran. Each of the books includes famous Kurdish songs (both transcriptions and lyrics) set in a single dastgah (*destga* in Sorani): Beyat, Sêga, and Deștî. Whereas I have encountered a number of Iraqi Kurdish musicians who describe Kurdish melodic pitch collections via reference to Arabic maqam rather than Persian dastgah, it is possible that the geographic proximity of Silêmanî in relation to Iran and the books' publishing in Iran led the authors to choose to emphasize dastgah as an organizing melodic principle rather than maqam. At the very least, these differences reveal that Kurdish music has experienced historical interactions with both systems of melodic organization, even if certain aspects of Kurdish musical practice fit comfortably within neither.

Among the dozens of Sorani books on Kurdish music that have been published in recent years, prominent themes include expansive histories of Kurdish music as well as various topical explorations. An important work in the first of these two categories is Miḧemed Ḧemebaqî's *Mêjûy Muzîkî Kurdî* (*History of Kurdish Music*), which I have only been able to access via its English translation.[23] Exemplary works from the second of these categories include Twana Hama's (*Ḧeme*) *Muzîk u Siyaset* (*Music and Politics*; Silêmanî: Serdem, 2017), Nizar Sabir's (*Sabîr*) *Nasiyonalîzm u Muzîk* (*Nationalism and Music*; Leck, Germany: Clausen & Bosse,

[23] Tracking down particular books in Silêmanî can often prove quite difficult, as many publishers sell their books directly to bookstore owners operating in the bazaar.

2011), and Rezhan Hassan's (*Rêjen Ḧesen*) *Tembûr le Muzîkî Kurdîda* (*Tembûr in Kurdish Music*; Silêmanî: Karo, 2018). Other more general works include Ḧemebaqî's *Muzîk u Goranîy Kurdî* (*Kurdish Music and Songs*; Hewlêr: Hîvî, 2011) and Wişyar Eḧmed Eswed's *Deng u Mîlodî* (*Voice and Melody*; Hewlêr: Aras, 2012).

Perhaps the single most important producer/publisher of Sorani and Kurmanji texts on Kurdish music in recent years is the Kurdish Heritage Institute (KHI), whose published titles include works such as the anthology *Ṙolî Ḧesen Zîrek le Muzîkî Kurdîda* (*The Role of Ḧesen Zîrek in Kurdish Music*; Silêmanî: Şivan, 2004) and collections of local songs from regions all across Kurdistan. Examples of this latter type of work include *Beyt û Baw: Nawçekanî Mukriyan, Pîranan, Serdeşt u Feyzûłłabegî* (*Beyt u Baw: The Regions of Mukriyan, Pîranan, Serdeşt and Feyzûłłabegî*; Silêmanî: KHI, 2014), *Stranên Folklorîk ên Botanê* (*Folkloric Songs from Botan*: Istanbul: Berdan Matbaacılık, 2007), and *Komek Stranên Folklorîk ji Devera Silîvan, Mûş, Şirnex, Xerzan, û Batmanê* (*A Collection of Folkloric Songs from the Regions Silîvan, Mûş, Şirnex, Xerzan, and Batman*; Hewlêr: Aras, 2009).

As several of the titles referenced above indicate, Kurdish books on music are not limited to those discussing only Kurdish music. Ḧeme's *Music and Politics*, for example, discusses the Western composers Jean-Baptiste Lully, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Richard Wagner, among others.[24] Likewise, Sabîr's *Nationalism and Music* references a Bulgarian folk music troupe alongside Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti and English pop star Robbie Williams in a discussion on the differences between folk, art, and popular musics.[25] Other works are devoted entirely to discussions of Western composers and their music; one notable example is *Şimşałî Efsunawî:*

[24] Twana Ḧeme, *Muzîk u Siyaset* (Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan: Serdem, 2017), 25–29.
[25] Nizar Sabîr, *Nasiyonalîzm u Muzîk* (Leck, Germany: Clausen & Bosse, 2011), 62–68.

Derbarey Mozart (Silêmanî: Yad Bazaṛî Soz, 2008), a Sorani translation of Egyptian author Anis Mansur's *Al-Nay al-Sihriy Mutsart* (*Mozart's Magic Flute*; Sixth of October City, Egypt: Nahda Misr, 2002). As more and more music education centers in Iraqi Kurdistan begin to teach Western music history and theory alongside Kurdish music, the number of Sorani books dedicated to these subjects will no doubt continue to increase. Likewise, local interest in Western composers and music traditions will likely continue to grow in the years to come (indeed, a local friend and music student in Silêmanî once described the singer Ḧesen Zîrek as the "Kurdish Mozart," and in April 2021, a self-styled "flash mob" of instrumentalists regaled Silêmanî's city center with a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.)

Whereas more research is needed to determine the ways in which these and other Kurdish texts understand and explain the historical development and theoretical particularities of Kurdish musical practice (and where authors diverge from one another on these topics), the very flourishing of music publishing (and discourse) in recent years reveals that there is widespread interest in tackling these kinds of questions among Kurdish musicians and music scholars. Several common themes are already beginning to emerge. Histories of Kurdish music, for example, tend to emphasize nature as a primordial source for Kurdish melodies, local geography as a decisive factor in regional styles, and non-Islamic religions such as Zoroastrianism, Yazidism, and Ahl-e Haqq as instrumental in the development of Kurdish music. For Ḧemebaqî, these themes emerge within the first few pages of his *History of Kurdish Music*.[26] In conversation, these themes have also emerged in a number of ethnographic interviews.

[26] Miḧemed Ḧemebaqî, *The History of Kurdish Music*, trans. Hawkar Hussein (Silêmanî: Karo, 2012), 7– 9. The tendency to downplay the role of Islam in emerging histories of Kurdish music may be a result of one or more of the following factors: the historical prohibition of certain forms of music-making in some Islamic circles, the disillusionment experienced by many Kurds in relation to Islam after the invasion of ISIS in 2014 (see Szanto 2018), or the desire to promote a more palatable version of Kurdish culture to the self-proclaimed "secular" West.

Musical Mapping: *Kurd Idol* and the Limits of Togetherness

If music pedagogy and music publishing reveal key insights regarding the politics of belonging within Iraqi Kurdish music, gestures expressing the perceived relationship between this one region and the rest of Kurdistan (efforts which represent a sort of musical mapping on a trans-national level) shed light on how Iraqi Kurdish musicians understand their relationship to Kurdish music writ large. This relationship is often on display in subtle ways, as in local concerts hosting Kurdish performers from other regions. But occasionally, it is also reflected in large-scale efforts to bring musicians together from all four parts of Kurdistan. One of the most significant of these attempts to date occurred in 2017, when KurdSat produced the television reality show and music competition *Kurd Idol* (*Kurd Aydil*). The show was part of the world-renowned Idols franchise created by Simon Fuller, and the negotiations between KurdSat and the UK-based parent company Freemantle took three years to complete.[27]

The basic format of the show remains the same no matter the country of production: potential contestants audition in front of the show's organizers, and a panel of judges eventually narrows down their selections until they have determined the show's final participants. During the show's "Theatre round" (while there are still hundreds of potential participants), contestants perform in groups of up to ten, then in smaller groups of two to four, and finally, solo. The judges choose which participants to send home after each round, until finally, just two or three contestants remain for the Grand Finale. Occasionally, a performer who was eliminated in an earlier round is brought back at a later stage; this is called the "Wildcards" format. Audience

[27] Tanya Goudsouzian and Lara Fatah, "'Kurd Idol' Brings Welcome Fun and Music to Iraqi Kurdistan," *EKurd Daily*, February 18, 2017, https://ekurd.net/kurd-idol-music-kurdistan-2017-02-18. Shows in the Idols franchise often air more than one season; to date, however, there has only been one season of *Kurd Idol*.

participation is encouraged throughout the series, with home viewers able to vote for their favorite performers via telephone, SMS, or various apps.

In keeping with the show's clear goal of celebrating pan-Kurdish musical culture, the judges of *Kurd Idol* in 2017 were all widely known Kurdish vocalists hailing from Turkish, Iraqi, and Iranian Kurdistan.[28] They included three male singers—ʿEdnan Kerîm (from Iraqi Kurdistan), Nizamettin Ariç (from Turkish Kurdistan), and Bîjen Kamkar (from Iranian Kurdistan)—and one female singer—Kanî (also from Iraqi Kurdistan). Auditions for the show were held not only in Kurdish cities (including Wan and Mêrdîn in Turkish Kurdistan, Hewlêr and Silêmanî in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Sine in Iranian Kurdistan), but also in cities with sizable diasporic Kurdish communities: Yerevan, Tbilisi, Istanbul, Stockholm, Berlin, and Düsseldorf. Similarly, audience voting was enabled not only in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, but also in Germany, Sweden, France, and Denmark. For the show's Theatre round, nearly two hundred contestants converged in Silêmanî (organizers of the show described the logistics of such widespread participation across multiple countries as a "nightmare").[29] Among the eighteen contestants who advanced to the show's final rounds, seven hailed from Iraqi Kurdistan, four from Turkish Kurdistan, two from Iranian Kurdistan, two from Syrian Kurdistan, and three from cities outside Kurdistan (Istanbul, Tbilisi, and Göteborg, Sweden).[30]

For Iraqi Kurdish musicians, the potential rewards of participating in *Kurd Idol*, which promised both fame and a coveted recording contract to the winner, were many, particularly since so many have been struggling financially since 2014. In fact, by 2017, three Iraqi Kurds

[28] The near total lack of representation of Syrian Kurds was an unfortunate result of the ongoing war in Syria.

[29] Goudsouzian and Fatah, "Kurd Idol."

[30] One of the finalists from Turkey, Hêvî Zîn, reportedly left the show due to political problems; Zîn was replaced by Silêmanî native Eṣkan ʿEbdulreẖman.

had already participated in another Idol franchise: *Arab Idol*, whose four seasons aired in 2011–2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016–2017. A Silêmanî-based musician and friend of mine once remarked that the judges of *Arab Idol* tend to advance Kurdish participants through to the last round (although none of the show's winners have been Kurdish); in his opinion, this is a way of keeping Kurdish viewers engaged and therefore, of making more money. Although this friend does not suspect that the judges of *Arab Idol* displayed any racist or otherwise untoward behavior toward the show's Kurdish contestants, online video clips of the show's 2016 season (Season 4) show the judges staring at each other in bewilderment as contestant Bezhan Jaza (*Bêjen Ceza*), a popular vocalist in Silêmanî and the surrounding regions, introduces himself. The judges ask Jaza to repeat his name several times until one of them finally asks, "Enta Kurdi?! (are you Kurdish?!)"

Kurd Idol, of course, displayed its own commitments to musical and linguistic purity, despite the fact that many of the participants—whose dialects of Kurdish included Sorani, Kurmanji, Gorani, and Zazaki—were all but unable to understand one another in everyday conversation. For some involved with the project, the choice of Mustafa Abbas Ali as conductor of the show's orchestra also raised concerns since Ali is not Kurdish. Nevertheless, Ali himself spoke with me about his time at the show in positive terms, stressing that singing together in multiple variants of Kurdish over a time period spanning months ultimately created a better understanding among the show's participants. Musically speaking, the show's producers chose to use both traditional Kurdish songs and songs influenced by hip-hop (including rap). A former employee of the show's production team told me that the producers and judges eschewed what they deemed to be musical influences from Arabic or Turkish musics, but that rap was allowed because of its Western origins (he joked that this made it "artistic").

The regional diversity of Kurdish musical styles and genres ultimately led to moments of conflict, as judges and musicians involved in the show argued about certain songs' origins. One person involved in the show told me that the judges even tossed out a few songs from other regions, insisting that they were not Kurdish at all. These arguments reveal that despite decades of radio and television broadcasting from multiple parts of Kurdistan, there is no widespread consensus regarding the parameters of a pan-Kurdish musical practice (several interlocutors have blamed contemporary media companies for this problem, suggesting that they indiscriminately broadcast Turkish or other music styles with Kurdish lyrics). One of the ways the show's producers tried to circumvent this issue involved creating new songs for the contestants to sing (Ali told me that he had written hundreds of new songs over the show's production span of seven months) and the use of nationalist lyrics. This latter solution ultimately proved tenuous. A former employee of the show told me that when the participants were asked to sing a particular song with explicitly nationalist lyrics, more than a dozen of the participants who came from nations other than Iraq politely refused to participate, worried that the recorded footage might jeopardize their safety upon returning home. This incident was not the only one during which political anxieties and conflicts spilled over into open view.[31]

Conclusion

In music classrooms frequented by Iraqi Kurds young and old alike, in dozens of publishing houses and bookshops across thousands of miles, and in new global media promoting visions of a united Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdish musicians and their listeners are reshaping a politics of belonging centered on musical epistemologies. In this messy, contested realm, scholars defend

[31] I refrain from offering additional details here (just as I have resisted using the names of most of those I interviewed on this subject) out of respect for the potentially sensitive nature of these topics.

their versions of authentic Kurdish music history, performers face accusations of yielding to foreign influence (or the *wrong* foreign influence, to be more precise), and students and career musicians alike compete over insufficient resources. Questions lead to intense debates concerning *who* can represent or embody Kurdish music, and of *how* to represent Kurdish music as a whole. Meanwhile, media technologies such as Snapchat and YouTube have enabled new forms of global connection, promising new visions of Kurdish society and new ways of challenging longstanding cultural norms. At the same time, for those living in states that continue to suppress Kurdish cultural expression, the promises of global media are often overshadowed by the deadly potential of its use as state surveillance.

The conflict surrounding epistemologies of Kurdish music and society is no indication of the weakness of Kurdish music as *tradition,* but rather speaks to its vibrance and vitality. In Silêmanî, issues like those cited above are not just issues for online forums or stuffy academic conversation: for many, discourse about Kurdish music and musicians is part of everyday life. In these conversations, these classrooms, these digital spaces, Iraqi Kurds continue to defy the logics of colonial power—those logics that have threatened Kurdish culture and survival in countless ways throughout the past century alone—and to transmit the musical tradition they hold so dear, even as it is reshaped to meet present needs.

Conclusion

Just as the Iraqi state had relied on broadcasting and other forms of mass media to achieve its aims for decades, the United States began broadcasting in Iraq on December 12, 2002, three months before launching a full-scale invasion of the country. The broadcasting station, dubbed "Information Radio (*Radyo al-Maʿlumat*)," transmitted messages criticizing Saddam Hussein in the hopes that these messages would boost support for American intervention in the country (or at least to weaken public support for Hussein ahead of the invasion). American forces dropped leaflets over various locales indicating that interested listeners could tune in daily from 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm on "693 and 756 kHz on mediumwave, 9715 and 11292 kHz shortwave and 100.4 MHz FM." These operations were organized as part of what the US called "Psychological Operations," or PSYOP.[1]

In the years since the US-led invasion, as Iraq has struggled to rebuild, radio, television, and other forms of mass media in Iraqi Kurdistan have flourished, continuing a trend that started with the end of the First Gulf War in 1991. Finally free from the grasp of Baghdad's control over every aspect of media expression, political parties in particular have utilized their newfound freedom to start dozens of new radio and television stations. I have mentioned that KurdSat, a satellite tv station based in Silêmanî, is owned by the PUK, but the other two satellite tv stations in the region, Kurdistan Satellite TV and Zagros TV (both in or near Hewlêr), are operated by the rival KDP.[2] Given the current tenuous political environment, these and other parties, who

[1] Mika Mäkeläinen, "Monitoring Iraq: War of the Airwaves," DXing.info (website), February 24, 2003, http://www.dxing.info/articles/iraq.dx.

[2] Kareem Abdulrahman, "Guide: Iraq's Kurdish Media," BBC News, December 4, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7094973.stm.

operate the majority of Iraqi Kurdistan's radio and television stations, tend to prioritize music broadcasting over political broadcasts in their programming.

While it may seem that all this newfound freedom (won at the expense of an entire country) has only blunted Iraqi Kurdish media's capacity for the sorts of resistance and empowerment I have discussed throughout the dissertation, media remains a contested site in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. In December 2019, for example, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) enacted a new law banning taxi drivers (of whom there are an estimated 92,000 in the region) from playing the radio without their passengers' consent.[3] The law was announced alongside a ban on smoking in taxis and buses; both are part of a series of new laws aimed at closer regulation of taxi drivers and their behavior.

While I can claim no insider knowledge of the KRG's particular apprehensions about the use of radio in taxis, I suspect that this issue may be related to the widespread enjoyment among taxi drivers of a genre known as *goranîy mîllî* (the local radio station that broadcasts this genre is called Radio Taxi). Even among my interlocutors, feelings about *goranîy mîllî* (which means "people's song" and is typically fast, rhythmically driven, and accompanied by improvised lines of poetry) varied widely. Some admitted they enjoy listening to it from time to time, whereas others abhorred the genre altogether, pointing out that it is considered "low brow," or that some performers of the genre have celebrated sexual attraction to young teenage girls in their music. As a whole, the genre remains immensely popular among the public (performers can sometimes make up to $5,000 for a single performance), and a local performer of the genre was even elected to Parliament in recent years.

[3] John J. Catherine, ed., "Taxi Reform in Kurdistan Continues with Smoking Ban, New Radio Laws," Kurdistan 24, December 9, 2019, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/21485-Taxi-reform-in-Kurdistan-continues-with-smoking-ban,-new-radio-laws-.

In debates surrounding the place of *goranî mîllî* in contemporary Kurdish music (and in a myriad of others), radio, television, and media writ large continue to represent a space in which Iraqi Kurdish musicians and their listeners are working out the particulars of their musical tradition. Circumstances have changed drastically over the past several decades, and yet, Kurdish music and musicians have continued to thrive and to meet the challenges of any given moment. As Iraq's Kurds continue to grapple with ongoing legacies and logics of colonial power and with other colonial attacks that remain ongoing, music will no doubt continue to operate as a site for resisting these logics and for reshaping Kurdish society itself.

For now, I have so many ideas regarding future directions for the study of Kurdish music and media that it is hard to even begin to articulate them. Perhaps the most obvious place to start is mentioning the work still needed to continue documenting histories of Kurdish radio, including the stories of those who made Kurdish broadcasting possible. Future studies might also examine the histories of various regional genres, the relation of these genres to each other and to other regional musical systems such as Arabic maqam and Persian dastgah, the importance of dance in Kurdish musical practice, or the role of gender and sexuality in Kurdish music history and performance. In the meantime, I know that Kurdish scholars themselves will continue researching and bringing new observations and questions about Kurdish music to light, even in difficult circumstances. I am humbled and challenged by their example, and I can only hope that I have played some small part in transmitting the wonderful, living tradition that is Kurdish music to the world.

Appendix 1:
Discography

A Spiritual Epic: Improvisations on the Kurdish Lute (Tanbur), Ostad Elahi. Truspace Records: 1998, compact disc.

Axir Sefer. Not on label (released in Iraq): 2001, compact disc.

Badey Gulr̄eng, ʿEdnan Kerîm. Nawendî Endêşe: 2012, compact disc.

Badey Gulr̄eng 2, ʿEdnan Kerîm. Nawendî Endêşe: 2015, compact disc.

Barde Du Kurdistan (La Tradition Et L'Exil), Temo. Ocora (France): 1981.

Beyt û Baw: Nawçekanî (Mukiryan, Pîranan, Serdeşt, Pişdeşt û Feyzullabegî). Enstîtuya Kelepûrê Kurdî (Kurdish Heritage Institute), 2014, book and compact disc.

Chants D'exil Du Peuple Kurde, Temo. Ocora (France): 1991.

Chants du Kurdistan, Şivan Perwer. Musique Traditionnelles Auvidis (France): 1989.

Chants et Musiques Du Kurdistan, Groupe Koma Zozan. Arion (France): 1983.

Chants et Musique Kurdes/Kurdish Songs and Music, Temo, Nasir, and Bedrixan. Auvidis Ethnic (France): 1995.

Destan Halay (Enstrümental), Şivan Perwer. Raks (Turkey): year unknown, cassette.

Dway Salêk, Bana Shirwan (*Şîrwan*). BANA (Iraqi Kurdistan): 2022, compact disc.

Ez Kurdistan im: Musica dal Kurdistan in Italia. Block Nota (Italy): 2016.

Fire of Passion: Kurdish Tanbur Music of Iran, Ali Akbar Moradi and Pejman Hadadi. 7/8 Music Productions: 1999, compact disc.

I Love Kurdish Music. Suna Bar (Germany): 2009, compact disc.

Iraq Cradle of Civilization: Seventh Conference of Heads of State of Government of Non-Aligned Countries, Baghdad 1982. Ministry of Culture and Information (Iraq): 1982, boxed set of 3 vinyl albums.

Keçe Kurdan, Aynur Doğan. Kalan Ses Görüntü (Turkey): 2004, compact disc.

Kermashan (*Kirmaşan*), Nasr R̄ezazî. Stran Music: 1999, compact disc.

Kilamên Yêrêvanê: Emê Gozê, recorded by Radio Yerevan (Armenia). KOM Müzik Yapım (Turkey): 2001, compact disc.

Kobane, Nishtiman Project. Accords Croisés (France): 2016, compact disc.

Komek Dûrik Ji Folklora Kurdên Sûriayê (*A Collection of Songs from Syrian Kurdish Folklore*), collected by Salihê Heydo. Enstîtuya Kelepûrê Kurdî (Kurdish Heritage Institute), 2009, book and compact disc.

Komek Stranên Folklorîk Ji Devera Silîvan, Mûş, Şirnex, Xerzan û Batmanê (*A Collection of Folkloric Songs from the Regions of Silîvan, Mûş, Şirnex, Xerzan, and Batman*), 2nd ed., collected by Mustafa Gazî. Enstîtuya Kelepûrê Kurdî (Kurdish Heritage Institute), 2009, book and compact disc.

Kurdish Dance, Yosuke Yamashita. Verve Records: 1992, compact disc.

Kurdish Electronic Meditation, Jin&Daun. Zeon Light (Sweden): 2014, cassette.

Kurdish Folk Music from Western Iran, recorded by Dieter Christensen. Folkways Records: 1966.

Kurdish Folk Songs and Dances, recorded by Ralph S. Solecki. Folkways Records: 1955.

Kurdish Melodies on Zorna, Zadik Zecharia. Bo'Weavil Recordings (UK): 2007, compact disc.

Kurdish Music. Philips (Netherlands and Japan): 1974, LP.

Kurdish Music I, from *A Musical Anthology of the Orient* series. Bärenreiter-Musicaphon (Germany): year unknown, LP.

Kurdish Music/Musique Kurde. UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music: 1974.

Kurdistan: Iran-Iraq-Turquie, Nishtiman. Accords Croisés (France): 2013, compact disc.

Kurdistan: Voci e suoni di un populo in lotta. Libera Informazione Editrice (Italy): 1996.

Kurdistan-Melodie, Berliner Tanzorchester. Telefunken (Germany): 1965, 45 RPM vinyl.

Min Bêriya Te Kiriye, Şivan Perwer. daquí (France): 2003.

Moonlight (Kurdish Music), Ali Akbar Moradi. Personal release: 2012, compact disc.

Music from Kurdistan, Kamkars Ensemble. Mariposa (Germany): 1999.

Music of Kurdistan, Dursan Acar. Mabuhay Records (Australia): 1997, compact disc.

Music of Kurdistan, Hakan. Koch Records Europe (Austria): 1999, compact disc.

Musique Populaire Du Kurdistan. Disques Alvarés (France): year unknown, vinyl.

Rabe Cotkar/Militano, Koma Sirvan. Türküola (Germany): year unknown, cassette.
Roj U Heyv, Şivan Perwer. Ses Plak Yapım (Turkey): 2000.

Sare, Şivan Perwer. Ses Plak Yapım (Turkey): 2002.

Stranen Bijartî/Kürtce Uzun Havalar, Şivan Perwer. Post Müzik: year unkown, cassette.

Tamburi D'Iran, Sarawan. Finisterre (Italy): 2002, compact disc.

The Collection 5: Kî Ne Em?, Şivan Perwer. Pelrecords: 2012 (originally 1979).

The Kurdish Troubadour/Çiyayê Agirî, Şivan Perwer. Immigrantinstitutet (Sweden): 1984.

To, Navid Zardi (*Nevîd Zerdî*). Famous Productions: 2018, compact disc.

Traditional and Contemporary Music of Kurdistan, Dursan Acar. ARC Music: 1998, compact disc.

Viisi Laulua Pohjois-Kurdistanista/Five Songs from Northern Kurdistan. Love Records (Finland): 1970, vinyl.

Xewna Min- Dr. Qasimlo, Şivan Perwer. Ses Plak Yapım (Turkey): 1998.

Ya Star, Şivan Perwer. Ses Plak Yapım (Turkey): 1995.

Zhala, Zhala (*Jałe*). The Control Group: 2016, compact disc.

Zînê, Nizamettin Ariç. Koçer Production (Turkey): 1998.

Appendix 2:
Kurdish Song Lyrics

"Toze Toze," ʿEdnan Kerîm

Bom biłê toze toze
Hewrî le milan ałoze
Bom biłê toze toze
Hewrî le milan ałoze
Baskim we jûr serî da
Ce hemdem deṣkê goze
Le ber bedkar nawêrim lêy kem cejne pîroze
Were destim de sto ke, bew germa w tep u toze
Awrî le min berdawe xałîṣî lê pîroze

Bejin rêkî wekû to, le hîç kwê nebîrawe
Zułfit çinurî kawan, bê baran sewz krawe
Brot mangî yek ṣewe, çon wa cwan çemênrawe
Rûmet befirî gimoye, xwênawî pya rijawe
Çawit pyałey mestane, ṣerabî têkrawe

Birjangit wêney peykan, rast u tîj dadrawe
Cute lêwî qeytanit le ser yek danrawe
Deʿinit wekû mirwarî, be wirdî rêz krawe
Rûmet befirî gimoye, xwênawî pya rijawe
Çawit pyałey mestane, ṣerabî têkrawe

Bom biłê toze toze
Hewrî le milan ałoze
Bom biłê toze toze
Hewrî le milan ałoze
Baskim we jûr serî da
Ce hemdem deṣkê goze
Le ber bedkar nawêrim, lêy kem cejne pîroze
Were destim de sto ke, bo germa w tep u toze
Awrî le min berdawe, xałîṣî lê pîroze

"A Southern Kurdish Folksong" (1909)[1]

1. Khīāl parkanda, dil tarfītünam Chün Farhād, shāhid i Bisītünam.	Of thoughts scattered, my heart is distressed; Like Farhad, martyr of Bisītūn am I.
2. Khīālī makai la tū dürem Mar mirdin buwait nāmit la wīram.	Think not that I am far from thee Unless death take thy name from my memory.
3. Wa maīlī yārān qarib i dil rish Wa giān i Kishbar wa Sāmeranīsh.	By the love of friends near the heart's wound, By the soul of Kishbar in her Sāmera.
4. Wārān buwārit batīa bakai tar Wa Sāmera chīm wa māl i Kishbar.	Let the rain rain and wet my cheek. I go to Sāmera, to the house of Kishbar.
5. Māl i dūs bar kird wa nā rezā i dil Allah yārī būt manzil wa manzil.	The friend's steed they loaded with unwilling heart God be his friend from stage to stage.
6. Bichīm wa jākai Farhād i kihinakan Bidaīm wa sardā rīza i pāra i sang.	Let us go to the place of Farhād the mountain-breaker And strike our heads with fragments of stone.
7. Agar Musalmānī rām la jāmita Zardi o zaīfīm paī shamāmita.	If thou be a Musulman, mercy is in thy garments. My pallor and weakness are because of thy delicacy.
8. Yeh chi dardī bī, bī wa duchāram Sar bī wa sālār, lash bī wa bāram.	What malady was this, it was from our meeting. My brain is swelled, my body dead with my load (of love).
9. Nīshī wa zhangit manīt wa jarda Manīt wa sepāi tāzeh fatḥ karda.	Thy lashes and eyebrows are like a robber, Like an army newly come from victory.
10. Cha bikam wa dast i yeh naō namāma Shaō la pazhāraī khaō l'īm ḥarāma.	What can I do at the hand of this fresh beauty? At night, from thought of her, sleep is forbidden me.
11. Ham kaft wa wīram khāsī yi Shaukat Shīrīnī yī annām zhīr i kulkwat.	Also fell to my mind the goodness of Shaukat, The sweetness of her figure under her tunic.
12. Khānum khānumān bān wa ʿamārat Wa pām mashq makat, wa chaō ishārat.	The lady of ladies upon her housetop Dances for me with her feet, and beckons with her eyes.

[1] Soane, "A Southern Kurdish Folksong," 37–51. The transliteration and translation here are those of Soane.

13. Dam gird a mam gird, pisht i pāshna gird
Masī yi chaōwakat min la dunyā bird.

Round mouth, round breast, round heel
Intoxication of thy eyes took me from this world.

14. Har chan manīshim sāl dumātir
Khwashīm kam maii talkhīm ziātir.

The longer I remain succeeding years
My pleasure decreases, my bitterness grows more.

15. Khānumī la mulk i Kalhur kirdia tür
Dinān chün sadaf, qāmat chün bulür.

A lady from the Kalhur land has quarrelled,
(Her) teeth like mother of pearl, her stature like crystal.

16. Khānum tuna Ali, chomas, tuna Dāūd
Pīchakat lāwa ta bünam chaōwat.

Lady, for Ali's sake— (thou of love) frenzied eyes—for David's sake,
Remove thy veil, that I may see thy face.

17. Min ki sufīm sāf taōba kirda bīm
Qamar sīmā dīm īmān harda bīm.

I who am a Sūfī had entirely renounced (Sufism).
(When) I saw the silvery moon I was released from faith.

18. Kāfir küshtītam magar khünītam
Kushtai khālakaī chāli tanītan.

Pagan, thou hast slain me, am I at feud with thee?
Killed (am I) by the mole in the hollow of thy neck.

19. Khālī wa tū naīm mar wa Sekīna
Humā kūtasaī wa takht i sīna.

A mole like thine I never saw, except on Sekīna;
She had moulded it upon the breadth of her breast.

20. Dastam bikīshīn wa kur giānī
Wa māli dūs chīm shaō wa mīmānī.

Lead me by the hand, me of little strength;
To the lover's house let us go to-night to the feast.

21. La Sari Mil banürī Kerind diyāra
Har kas dūs dirit chaō intazāra.

From Sar i Mil, by her light, Kerind is visible.
Who has a lover sits with expectant eyes.

22. La düro hātim bishnāsa dangam
Garta qarībī nīshtīa la rangam.

I am come from afar, hear my cry;
The dust of strange (lands) has settled upon my face.

23. Kamarchīn i makhmal, gūshwārān wa gūsh
Mirda la mazār tiārat wa hūsh.

Her tunic is of velvet, earrings in her ears,
The dead from the tomb she brings to life.

24. Lāl bām la zwān paī Laīlī nāmī
Khāl dānai ferang, zulf dasta i dāmī.

May I be dumb of tongue, of one named Laīlī
(Her) mole (is) of rare beauty, her locks a cluster of nets.

25. Banā kird ghārat i sarmāya i hūsham
Lungi Majnūnī aō dā wa dusham.

She undertook the plunder of my stock of sense,
The cloth of Majnūn she gave me for my back.

26. Chan jaur chan jefā, chan khākisāri Shwān i bī muz u haqq nā diyārī.	How much trouble, how much anguish, how much lamenting? Nights without reward, and right unrecognised!
27. Sa jwōām ka ta dil nīā būm Kam das la dāmām Shaikh o mulla būm.	Then release me that my heart may be at rest, That my hand be not stretched out to skirts of Mulla and Shaikh!
28. Fedāī mālakai pāyi Paraōit bām Fedai dīdakai shaō bī khaōit bām.	May I be the sacrifice of thy house at Paraō's foot, Sacrifice of thy eyes upon sleepless nights.
29. Har tīaīt har chīt cham wa gilāwa Chün kaok i nisār khīāl wa hilāwa.	(Thou) ever coming, ever going, with straining eyes, Like a partridge of the desert rising to fly.
30. Chaōm kaft wa zīd u māwān i Laīlī Anūm jüsh hāwird, gīriyām khaīlī.	My eyes fell upon the place of Laīlī; My grief came to boiling, and my tears many.
31. Min ki Kerind shār dīm wa wīrāna Sar i Pul dīm wa jāy bāyaqush khāna.	I (who) have seen Kerind town a ruin, And Sar i Pul the place of owls' nesting.

"Demî Ārapērîn," ʿEbdulla Goran

Demî ārapērîne, demî ārapērîn
Heta key be sistî w be pestî bijîn
Demî ārapērîne, demî ārapērîn
Heta key be sistî w be pestî bijîn
Pelamar de, ey Kurd, ʿereq rīştinê
Le dił kirmî nakokî derkirdinê
Be yek bûne gist
Pitew bûnî pişt
Be yek bûn ebê
Gelit pêşkewê

Belada bike çakî merdayetî
Dirêxî meke gyan le Kurdayetî
Belada bike çakî merdayetî
Dirêxî meke gyan le Kurdayetî
Bigirmêne wek şêr, biçore neberd
Biłê: kwanê heqî jînî Kurdanî merd?
Dirişt taku wird
Nekeyn dest u bird
Be heq çon egeyn?
Pişû çon edeyn?

“Genc Xelîl,” Kawês Aẍa[2]

Delê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were nemayê.

Ezî qarîṣ mîṣ ṣakem, kurmamê xol xeweke ṣîrîn rakem qarîṣ mîṣ ṣakem,
Kurmamê xol xeweke ṣîrîn rakem ezî rakem çekmeke ʿamudî di pîyakem, ṣerwalekî ṣiftelî di linga kem, ʿebayekî tentenî dimlakem, xencerekî Saliḧ Begî diber rakem, coteke demançekê ṣolî ṣarî nemayê binim li ser dakem, ezê Genc Xelîl Aẍa kurmamî xobeme cot bazarî meydanî Şamê ragirim rojeka bêt oẍlêrî ʿUsmanlîye ewê rojê dił nadem kurmamî xo le çi dewarra swarkem, ezê bînim xo bikeme mayneke seglay bînim xo debin Genc Xelîl kurmanê xokem, serê bab u birader u cîranê gundê xo ezê bînim bi xulamî serê kurmamê xokem.

Nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê.

Le paṣî Genc Xelîl kurmamê xo nemînim li dinyayê.

Yo yo yo, delê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, ezê rabim kale zînekey bo kurmamê xo dirust bikem, serzînekî bo kurmamê xodirust biken, kale wî zînî çê bikem jimercanê, rikêba bo bînim li ṣarê Erzîcanê, qayṣan u bera bo bînim li qayṣa Hemedanê, rimeka rûte gurganî çê bikem li dare ḧeyzeranê, serzînekî dirust bikem li tûkî perî neʿamê, ezê gîfkan u lîfkan lê bidem ṣewketî kulîka çardey nîsanê, Genc Xelîl kurmamê xo dilo nemayê bibeme cot bazara meydana Şamê, belê xemê kurmamê min zor gelekin, da xemê xo pê birewînî. Dem deme, pê bika teqle zêdebarî cilîtanê.

Nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê.

Delê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê.

Ḧefset dibê: Yarebî Xudê dilê min gelekî wane. Ḧefset dibê: Yarebî Xudê dilê min gelekî wane, Genc Xelîl kurmamê min li wilatê ẍerîban u ẍurbetê, gelekî nexoṣe wezê rabim nwînan raêxim ket ketê naz balîfan bideme pale, ezî rabim kemera li piṣtê xo bişkênim bo espî Genc Xelîl bikeme nale, baznî destî xo bişkênim bikeme hurde bizmare, biskê xo bibirim bikeme ser rêşme, kezyan bikeme toq u ser hewsare Genc Xelîl bînim swarkem li kimêteketale, belê li Furatî Şamê li naw ʿUsmanlîye dabête xara dakes lomey kurmamê min neken. Belê nebêjin swarekî Kurde çendî bê kar u bare.

Nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê.

Dil paṣ Genc Xelîl kurmamê xo nemînim dilo li dinyayê.

[2] Serdar Mentik, Facebook post, *Kurdewarî*, November 12, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=1875780335851909&story_fbid=1939501826146426. There are many different versions of this *lawik*; this is the version recorded by Kawês Aẍa.

Delê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê, were lê lê.

Genc Xelîl Aẍa çawê xo bilind kird u be ẍerîbî digirya, nefesekî qelunê xwastîye, Ḧefset dibê Yarēbî Xudê rabim qelunekî bo kurmamê tê kem qelune zêrnîṣane, baskî Estembole, modîne bi karebane, pelekê dare darbeē u bînim bi mişarê bibirīm bi mebredê qeretanê bînim serqelu na Genc Xelîl kurmamê xo danêm, nemayê, belê bêjim kurmamê min Ḣeft sale kewtiye ser destûrê romya. Bi Turkî bûrim efendim qelun jiteŗa.

Nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê, nemayê.

Dił paṣ Genc Xelîl kurmamê xo nemînim dilo li dinyayê.

“Ciwanîy Kwêstan,” Cilal Coyar

Ba biçîne kwêstan bo geṣtî em nawe
Cwanîy cîhanî Xwa bem ṣwêney dawe

Em nawçe cwane ṣwênî koçeryane
Hobe be hobe rēṣmałyan hełdawe

Le çiley hawîna naw behar bibîne
Qendîl mendîlî her firê nedawe

Ta çaw lêy diyare çîmen u gułzare
Pirē coge w kanî w rûbarî befirawe

Bilwêrî ṣwanî le berzî telanî
Kîj le ser kanî dênête semawe

Ba biçîne kwêstan bo geṣtî em nawe
Cwanîy cîhanî Xuda bem ṣwêney dawe

“Take Me Home,” Li Dinê ft. Dashni Morad

Dengê min tê te?
Dengê min tê te?
Dengê min tê te?
Dengê min tê te?

Herê Kinê lê lê, mala minê wey wey
Tek rihana lê lê, av li binê wey wey
Çûme Kinê dêranê, nedan min ê wey wey
Bûm e micbûrê te, u revandinê wey wey

They say it’s wrong
It feels so right
My home is in my bag
Yeah yeah
Like Bon’ and Clyde
We love and die
We’re never looking back
Yeah yeah

This summer night
It’s time to ride
Put your hand in mine
Cuz I’m ready to go
No white flag
No no no first class
Everybody got their love for sale
We got no price tag

Would you leave me alone
If I was a bad girl?
Leave me alone
If I told you it’s a mad world?
And if you knew
It was love at first sight
I wanna know, I wanna know
Would you take me home?

Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.
Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.
Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.

Herê Kinê lê lê, mala minê wey wey
Tek rihana lê lê, av li binê wey wey
Çûme Kinê dêranê, nedan min ê wey wey
Bûm e micbûrê te, u revandinê wey wey.

We run and hide
Get out of sight
We won’t be quiet, let’s start a riot
Aaa haa
We’ll make a sound
Let’s get out of town
Hayê hayê li vê dinyayê

This summer night
It’s time to ride
Put your hand in mine
Cuz we’re ready to go
No white flag
No no no first class
Everybody got their love for sale
We got no price tag

Would you leave me alone
If I was a bad girl?
Leave me alone
If I told you it’s a mad world?
And if you knew
It was love at first sight
I wanna know, I wanna know
Would you take me home?

Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.
Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.
Dengê min tê te?
Take me home.

Ez ne kinim lo lo, ne kinikim wey wey
Reṣrihana lo lo, pel hûrikim wey wey
Eqlê xorta dêrano, sivik dikim wey wey
Melûlo
Vê felekê çima bi me wekir

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