Georg August University of Göttingen

The Politics of Dance and the Poetics of Space: Kurdish Dances in Germany

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by

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Politics of Dance and the Poetics of Space: Kurdish Dances in Germany

This dissertation explores a popular form of collective dancing known as *govend* in Kurdish and *halay* in Turkish. Intrigued by how the dance can be a politically contentious topic in Turkey as it is often labelled as "ideological halay," the study pursues the transnational journey of the dance from Turkey to Germany. With a special focus on *Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan*, the text aims to explore the effects of collective dancing. As an annual dance festival that takes place in a different city each year on the long Pentecost weekend, *Mîhrîcan* includes a parade, exhibition, and a dance competition, which is the main component of the festival. The history of Mîhrîcan spans more than three decades and it grows to be a professional dance festival as a corollary of the Kurdish political migration to Germany. The festival attempts to preserve the elements of Kurdish culture in the diaspora and helps the first generation transmit the tangible and intangible culture to the second generation. By involving yearlong preparations for the organization and the dance competition, the festival also keeps the community together. Introducing the historical background and the political context of the migration, the text offers an in-depth analysis of the relationship between folklore and questions of nationalism and identity. It also explores the appropriation of folklore for different purposes. In an attempt to understand the power of collective dancing in space making, the text moves from the case of Mîhrîcan and examines different purposes of collective dancing diachronically. The research is based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with the festival organizers and participants, most of which were conducted in the festival context.

Interviews not conducted at festivals were made in different cities in Germany. The research also includes autoethnographic elements relevant to the topic of this study.

Zusammenfassung der Dissertation

Die Politik des Tanzes und die Poetik des Raumes: Kurdische Tänze in Deutschland

Diese Dissertation untersucht eine beliebte Form des kollektiven Tanzes, die auf Kurdisch als *Govend* und auf Türkisch als *Halay* bekannt ist. Ausgehend von der Frage, inwiefern dieser Tanz in der Türkei ein politisch umstrittenes Thema sein kann, da er oft als "ideologischer Halay" bezeichnet wird, verfolgt die Studie die transnationale Reise des Tanzes von der Türkei nach Deutschland. Mit einem besonderen Fokus auf Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan zielt der Text darauf ab, die Auswirkungen des kollektiven Tanzes zu untersuchen. Als jährliches Tanzfestival, das jedes Jahr am langen Pfingstwochenende in einer anderen Stadt stattfindet, umfasst Mîhrîcan eine Parade, eine Ausstellung und einen Tanzwettbewerb, der der Hauptbestandteil des Festivals ist. Die Geschichte von Mîhrîcan erstreckt sich über mehr als drei Jahrzehnte und es entwickelt sich zu einem professionellen Tanzfestival als Folge der politischen Migration der Kurden nach Deutschland. Das Festival versucht, die Elemente der kurdischen Kultur in der Diaspora zu bewahren und hilft der ersten Generation, die materielle und immaterielle Kultur an die zweite Generation weiterzugeben. Mit den jahrelangen Vorbereitungen für die Organisation und dem Tanzwettbewerb ist das Festival auch ein Weg, die Gemeinschaft zusammenzuhalten. Der Text stellt den historischen Hintergrund und den politischen Kontext der Migration vor und bietet eine eingehende Analyse des Verhältnisses von Folklore zu Fragen des Nationalismus und der Identität sowie der Aneignung von Folklore für verschiedene Zwecke. Um die Macht des kollektiven Tanzes in der Raumbildung zu verstehen, geht der Text vom Fall

Mîhrîcan aus und untersucht verschiedene Zwecke des kollektiven Tanzes diachronisch. Die Forschung basiert auf teilnehmender Beobachtung und halbstrukturierten Interviews mit den Festivalorganisator*innen und -teilnehmer*innen, die größtenteils im Kontext des Festivals, teilweise aber auch in verschiedenen Städten Deutschlands geführt wurden. Die Untersuchung umfasst auch autoethnographische Elemente, die für das Thema dieser Studie relevant sind.

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Glossary

davul: a large double-headed drum played with sticks

govend: Kurdish line dances

halay: the word for line or circle dances in Turkish

kofi: Kurdish women's hat covered with silk scarves and accessories

mîhrîcan: festival in Kurdish

newroz: Kurdish celebration of the new year and arrival of spring on March 21

Pfingsten: the word for Pentecost in German

şal û şapik: Kurdish suit of clothes

teşi: wooden tools to weave wool, weaving bobbin in Kurdish

zurna: a double reed woodwind instrument with high frequency sound

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Vita

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2019 "Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan: A Kurdish Dance Festival in Germany," Doktorand*innenkolloquium, June 7.

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Introduction

For centuries, we danced around the Newroz fire with
the hope of being free. And we dreamed of independence
but it never happened. There was no Newroz fire this year,
and there was no govend. Who knows,
maybe this time, freedom comes.[1]
Ümit[2]

Newroz is the celebration of the new year in Kurdish culture. It is performed on March 21 and is celebrated with fire and dance. Although Kurds living in different places celebrate the holiday with regional variations, wearing colorful traditional clothes and having a fire are the common features of Newroz. In many places, people also dance *govend* around the fire. Newroz is also a symbol of cultural and political identity for the Kurdish community, which constitutes the largest stateless society in the world.[3] Since Kurds are living in an unofficially-recognized region known as Kurdistan, which includes south-eastern Turkey, northern Syria, northern Iraq and north-western Iran, the variations in the celebration of Newroz reflect the political context of the country. Similarly, the Kurds in the diaspora celebrate Newroz as a unifying political expression.[4]

In Turkey, where the largest Kurdish population is living with about 20 million Kurds making up 25% of the total population, Newroz has become an expression of the Kurdish political struggle. Although Kurdish society embraces Newroz as an essential part of their cultural identity, the celebration has been a contentious subject in political discourse over the last few decades.

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[1] Ümit, interview by author, Göttingen, March 24, 2020.
[2] Throughout the dissertation, pseudonyms will be used instead of the real names of the research participants.
[3] Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 51, Kindle.
[4] Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 244.

Today, Newroz is celebrated with big demonstrations that typically involve fire-jumping ceremonies encircled by *govend*. *Govend* refers to a group of traditional Kurdish dances wherein participants hold hands as they dance in a line, circle, or a semi-circle. It is an organic element of daily life as well as political expression. In Kurdish culture, dance is an essential part of weddings, casual gatherings, family visits, and celebrations as well as protests and demonstrations. Research participants express that in addition to joy, sadness can also be shared and expressed through govend. Additionally, according to interviewees, the guerillas in the mountains dance together before they go to the front to fight. "It is a celebration of being together as some of them might not be able to return,"[5] says Mahir, a politically active Kurdish exile.

After the Turkish military coup in 1980—and especially after the beginning of the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish armed forces in the mid-1980s—the criminalization of elements of Kurdish culture intensified. For example, during the 1990s, dancing govend, known as *halay* in Turkish,[6] started to be recorded as "dancing ideological *halay*" in the accusations against university students and activists. It was even used as a reason for legal persecution. On the other hand, since govend has gained symbolic meaning as a political act, people from many political orientations and perspectives have embraced govend as part of their collective cultural and political expression. After the 1990s, the dance became integrated into demonstrations and

[5] Mahir, interview by author, Hanover, June 09, 2019.
[6] The dance is called *govend* in Kurdish and *halay* in Turkish. Both words are generic names for circle dances from regions extending between the Middle East and the Balkans. In Turkey, the word halay is more commonly used because there is more interaction between the Kurdish and Turkish communities and also because the Kurdish community in Turkey speaks Turkish in everyday life, whereas in Germany the word govend is more common when talking about the Kurdish dances. Accordingly, in this text, the word halay will be used to refer to the dance in Turkey and govend will refer to the dance in Germany.

protests in Turkey. Also, it has become a common metaphor in political statements referring to standing together or celebrating freedom.

This dissertation explores the transnational journey of govend from Turkey to Germany based on ethnographic fieldwork on *Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan* (The Festival of Kurdistan's Dances), which is an annual festival of Kurdish culture with a special focus on dance. Each year, the festival takes place in a different city in Germany during the weekend of the Pentecost Holiday (*Pfingsten*). Mîhrîcan is the oldest and biggest festival of Kurdish culture in Europe. With the motto "Our culture is our resistance!"[7] the festival attempts to preserve the culture in its authentic form and aims to make the Kurdish culture visible in Europe. While the festival hosts dancers from different European countries, including France and Switzerland, the majority of the participants come from Germany.

The festival is intended to be an agent of preservation of Kurdish culture and identity in the diaspora by transferring the elements of culture to the younger generation. Just as the colors of the costumes remind festival goers of their homeland's geography and climate, so too do the songs and the lyrics enable the younger generation to get familiar with the language. The two-day festival program starts with a parade in the city. Dancers and most of the attendees wear traditional, colorful dresses representing different Kurdish regions or cities. *Davul* and *zurna*, the drum and the shrill pipe, accompany the parade with a 2/4 beat. The crowd stops at several points to make a big circle and dance govend. The parade ends at a big hall where an exhibition, short concerts, and a dance competition take place.

[7] "Unsere Kultur ist unser Widerstand," accessed May 24, 2018, https://anfdeutsch.com/kultur/mihrican-unsere-kultur-ist-unser-widerstand-4497.

The competition takes place on the second day of Mîhrîcan and it is the main component of the festival. The duration of the competition varies each year depending on the number of participating groups. One can see different dances from different regions of Turkey's Kurdistan. It is possible to see examples of circle, semi-circle, or straight-line dances. Interlacing pinky fingers or clasping hands are the most common handholds. In some of the dances, participants dance tightly shoulder to shoulder holding hands with their arms beside their torsos. Although there are slow dances, most are fast and require agile movements. Knees seem to initiate the movement in most of the dances. The shoulders usually accompany the movement that comes from the knees.

The word *mîhrîcan* means "entertainment, feast, celebration" in Kurdish. Genealogically speaking, *mehregan* in Persian refers to the second biggest festival of Zoroastrianism after Newroz and is celebrated as the Festival of Autumn in Iran on October 2. In its early days, the festival did not have a specific name. Inspired by *mehregan,* the organization committee decided to name the festival Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan and wanted it to take place in the ninth or the tenth month of the year. However, it was fixed to the *Pfingsten* holiday in 1997 for practical reasons.

The first Mîhrîcan took place in 1987 in Germany as a corollary to a growing number of Kurdish diasporas in Europe. It started as a small event with music and dance performances to boost morale and uplift the mood of the Kurdish political migrants from Turkey. The idea of having a competition was introduced after a few years and it became instrumental in attracting more people to join the event. As a result of growing interest and an increasing number of participants, the music and dance festivals were separated.

This text is based on two ethnographic observations of Mîhrîcan in 2018 and in 2019, both occurring consecutively in Hanover. In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic and

the subsequent lockdown made the conditions of govend as well as the Mîhrîcan festivities impossible. With the coronavirus pandemic, human contact became unimaginable, let alone dancing together hand in hand. Therefore, there was no Mîhrîcan nor big govend.

The restraints that were accompanied by the pandemic rendered a third fieldwork at Mîhrîcan impossible. On the other hand, the pandemic year crystallized two key points of this text: home and body. The human body has come to the forefront with its mortality and vulnerability. While different countries reacted to the pandemic in different ways, "not letting people die" or "making them live" became the top of the agenda for many countries, particularly those in Europe. In many countries, restrictions were imposed on the number of people who could gather outside. Likewise, individual bodies were distanced from each other and brought in isolation for their survival.

While the possibility of death became an imminent peril under coronavirus, an ugly truth showed itself even more clearly and made the gap between the value of lives in *the west* and *the rest* blindingly obvious, even in mathematical terms. *One* has become a real number when western bodies are concerned, but when it comes to the rest, even hundreds or thousands are treated as *zero*. At the same time, home turned into a shelter from the pandemic, acquiring new meanings and functions during lockdowns. Thanks to internet facilities, homes turned into a schools and workplaces. "Stay at home" was the slogan of the year 2020 as authorities encouraged people not to leave their homes to protect themselves and others. Some activists in various parts of the world brought the paradox to attention by spraying these words on walls of cities or by sharing them on social media: "You can't stay home if you don't have a home."

Meanwhile, in places like Moria, a refugee camp in Lesvos, Greece, there are 12,000 people living although the camp was designed for 3,000 people.[8] This is only one example of the many places where people are forced to live in inhumane conditions even within the geographical borders of Europe. The number of displaced people in 2020 alone was 11.2 million. Today, in total more than 82 million people are displaced. This means that these people did not have a home to shelter in during the coronavirus pandemic. Home today, both literally and symbolically, has become a big concept and the inequalities between homes and homelands have grown too big to ignore.

One thing the pandemic has shown us in its own peculiar way is that we are all connected. When one has the virus, it is a possibility that another one will be affected, too. Let me make a disturbing analogy; when there is a war out there, it is a possibility that we will be affected here. People will flee to survive wars or catastrophes, even for the sake of leaving their homes behind. Scientists say that when we are in danger, we either fight or flee, these are the natural responses to survive. Imagine those people who fled the war in Syria, or the Uyghurs who escaped the genocide for their survival, only two examples among many others of our dystopic world today. While ugly shades of racism are haunting the world and instrumentalizing migrants and refugees for promoting chauvinist sentiments, it is a good time to remember that survival has the same meaning for all of us, and that we are all connected

[8] The number of people living in the camp was stated as 20,000 in April 2020. About 8,000 must have been evacuated in the following months because the number of the people staying in Moria was reported as 12,000 after the fire on September 9, 2020. "Sie waren schon als Gesunde nicht willkommen" ("They were not accepted even as healthy") April 4, 2020, accessed April 12, 2020, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-04/fluechtlingslager-moria-lesbos-griechenland-zustaende-coronavirus-solidaritaet?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

just as the virus reminds us. When there are wars in the *rest* of the world, we will not be completely safe in our homes in the West.

The topic of this dissertation is people who left their homelands, homelands that denied their cultural identity and either tried to assimilate or oppress them. In this context, one of the motivations behind this dissertation has been to counter the necropolitics in Turkey where Kurdish identity and culture have been highly criminalized and persecuted. Dance, as an enlivening and animating topic, could serve as an antidote and provide a fresh angle to look at the human body and being-in-the-world. For example, the popular Irish music and dance performance Riverdance took place in 1994, when the Irish Republican Army declared a ceasefire that resulted in a peace process. Inspired by the relationship between peace and dance, this dissertation is partly an attempt to contribute to a constructive discourse in decriminalizing Kurdish identity and culture.

Another strong motivation of mine was to study corporeal and visceral aspects of collective dancing. As I came across Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan in 2018, I thought this could be the right setting to explore the "muscular bonding" that occurs during dancing and its power to transform space. Although I was aware before starting my research that I was stepping into the highly politicized field of Kurdish culture, I was surprised to uncover many new layers that would add to my discourse about dance in the diaspora. My writing also explores the processes of nationalism, identity, and migration in a transnational context as well as the dynamics of dance and embodiment.

Dance is embedded within the broader frameworks of the politics of culture and embodiment.[9] Mîhrîcan, in this sense, provides a perfect setting to explore the relationship between dance, politics, and space. Observing how music and dance can be

[9] Susan Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 503.

used to flex the lived experience with "an intensification of the sensation of being in the world which, in turn, allows those partaking in music and dance to make the world their own through sound and body movement,"[10] this study is an attempt to gain a deeper insight into the intricate relationship between space and human movement.

Focusing on Mîhrîcan as an ethnoscape[11] and as a home-making practice among the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, this dissertation examines human movement at the intersection of transnational migration and dance studies. Chapter 1 introduces the background for the historical and political context of the Kurdish migration from Turkey to Germany. Starting with a discussion of the construction of the Turkish nation state, the chapter examines the particularities of Turkish nationalism in relation to migrations to and from the country throughout the 20th century. After a discussion of the impact of migration on national identifications, the chapter focuses on the sensory aspects of the migration experience. Then the chapter explores how the embodied experience negotiates the national and the diasporic in the construction of home in a transnational context. The analysis brings us to the discussion of folklore and its appropriation by nation state ideologies.

Chapter 2 starts with a descriptive account of my fieldwork observations of Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan in 2018 and in 2019 in order to give the reader the opportunity to make their own interpretations. Followed by a brief explanation of the history of the festival, the chapter continues with the analysis of the components of the festival as a performative assembly. Analyzing the authenticity claim of the festival, the

[10] Birgit Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: *Le hip hop* as Homing Practice," *The World of Music* 8, no. 1 (2019): 49.
[11] Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University Press of Minnesota, 2005).

chapter explores the lability of folklore and continues with the analysis of the festival through a discussion of the anthropology of the event and experience.

Chapter 3 has dancing bodies as its focus. After a literature review of dance anthropology, the chapter delves deeper into the power of moving bodies together in time to the same music. The chapter then discusses spatiotemporal aspects of collective dances to show how dancing together can create make-believe space. The second half of the chapter explores different functions of collective dancing through examples from different dances in different contexts.

The fourth chapter explains the auto-biographical aspects relevant to the dissertation topic and tries to contextualize the writing process through the lens of anthropology of experience. Discussing the methodology, positionality, and the choice of the writing style, the chapter complements the main body of the text by opening up the space for further questions that could not have been included in the rest of the text.

The conclusion starts with the discussion of current border regimes and contextualizes the topic of the dissertation within the broader framework of border regimes of nation-states. After summarizing the main arguments of the text, it points out the limitations as well as possibilities for further work in collaboration with the festival community.

Chapter 1: The Historical Background of the Migration from Turkey to Germany

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter introduces the historical background of the construction of the Republic of Turkey and the particularities of the Turkish nation state in dealing with its multicultural demographic composition. A diachronic look at the twentieth century of modern-day Turkey shows us how migration was used as a means to expel the others while encouraging immigration of Turkish and/or Muslim populations from former Ottoman territories to Turkey. The history of migration from Turkey to Germany, with a particular focus on the Kurdish migration, is followed by a discussion of how transnational migration deterritorializes national identifications.

Then the chapter continues with an analysis of folklore and a discussion of its appropriation for sustaining national ideologies. Despite nationalism's purported ownership of folklore, the chapter points to the commons among different cultures across nation states. Focusing on the role of sound in creating a sense of belonging, the chapter lays the ground for the following chapter, which will offer an in-depth analysis of a dance festival of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany.

From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Nation State

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the multicultural, multi-religious and multilingual Ottoman Empire gave way to different nation states. One of these states, the Republic of Turkey, was founded in 1923 in the location of Anatolia, southeastern Thrace, and northern Mesopotamia. The new nation state claimed a break from the Ottoman and Islamic past and identified itself with the West. There

were reforms that aimed to transform the social, political, and cultural life to construct the identity of modern Turkey. [12]

The reforms of the Turkification process were meant to create a civic state under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk. However, the question of whether Turkey is a civic or ethnic nation state is still a controversial topic. The following expression from Ismet Inonu, the first Prime Minister of Turkey, reveals that it actually started as an ethnic nation state with territorial aspirations from the beginning: "Nationalism is our only factor of cohesion . . . In the face of a Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. We must Turkify the inhabitants of our land at any price and we will annihilate those who oppose the Turks or 'le Turquism.'"[13]

Despite the ethnic diversity of the population living in these territories, the newly founded nation state was determined to create an ethnically homogenous nation. The national identity was defined in ethnoreligious terms and only the Turkish population and its culture was fully ensconced in the national imagination. Although the new nation state was meant to be a secular state breaking from its Islamic past, the religious identity continued to be a marker of the sovereign identity.

Migration as a Homogenization Valve

Throughout the twentieth century, international migration has served as a vital means for nation states to deal with inconsistencies. During times of economic instability, certain parts of populations have been either sent or received depending on

[12] Bülent Gökay and Tunç Aybak, "Identity, Race and Nationalism in Turkey—Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 108.
[13] Bilal Simsir, *İngiliz Belgeleriyle Türkiye'de Kürt Sorunu: 1925-1938 [The Kurdish Question in Turkey in British Documents: 1925-1938]* (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991) 58, quoted in "Identity, Race and Nationalism in Turkey—Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 108.

the surplus or lack of labor force. Also, ethnic conflicts and civil wars have caused people to flee their homelands to seek asylum in other countries. Political oppression and discrimination have been among other common factors that result in migration of people to other countries.

A diachronic overview of the last century of the Republic of Turkey shows how migration has been instrumentalized to maintain ethnic or religious unity in the country. The other who do not fit in the national imagination, mostly non-Muslim populations, have been systematically expelled. Meanwhile, the immigration of Turkish and/or Muslim populations from former Ottoman territories to Turkey has been welcomed.

Until the 1980s, homogenization attempts mainly targeted non-Muslim communities. In 1923, more than one million Greeks had to leave through population exchanges between Turkey and Greece. Most of the remaining Greek population in Turkey left either after the Istanbul pogrom in 1955 or after the Cyprus crisis in 1964. The number of individuals within the Greek population in Turkey decreased from 340,000 in 1923 to 2,500 in 2006. Similarly, the Jewish population living in Turkey has shrunk dramatically over the last century. The mob attacks in Thrace in 1934 and in Istanbul in 1955, the conscription of non-Muslims to serve in labor battalions in 1941 and 1942, and the wealth tax that affected the non-Muslim population turned out to be the main push factors for the Jewish community to leave Turkey.[14] In addition to the non-Muslim population, in 1925, thousands of Kurds had to leave to Syria after the failed Sheikh Said rebellion.[15]

[14] "Turkey: Jews," *Minority Rights,* last modified June 2018, accessed January 20, 2020, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/jews-6/.
[15] "Sheikh Said Rebellion," *Wikipedia,* last modified June 29,2021, accessed January 23, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh_Said_rebellion.

When it comes to the immigration of Turkish and/or Muslim populations to Turkey, the first immigration was from Greece during the same population exchange between 1922-1938 when 384,000 Turkish people arrived in Turkey. Then in 1924, 1936, and 1953, there were migration waves from Macedonia. 79,287 people migrated from Romania between 1923-1949. Since the foundation of the republic, 305,158 people from Yugoslavia migrated to Turkey. There were several migration waves from Bulgaria throughout the twentieth century and about one million people migrated to Turkey. In 1988, 51,542 people migrated from Iraq and about one million migrated from Iran in 1979. In recent years, about 3.5 million people migrated from Syria to Turkey.[16] In addition to hosting irregular labor migration from former Soviet countries, Turkey has also been a transit country for people who are trying to reach western countries from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan.

Since its creation, the Turkish nation state entailed the elimination of the other not only at a spatial level but also at a discursive level.[17] While the primary other has changed at different times in Turkey, the Kurds have been persistently otherized and anti-Kurdish discourse has been one of the main tenets of Turkish nationalism since its establishment. The Kurdish population that constitutes about 15% to 20% of the overall population in Turkey has been the target of forcible assimilation throughout the last century.

Criminalization of elements of Kurdish identity and elimination of its associations from public life started in the 1920s. One of the earliest attempts of the Turkification process was to establish Turkish as the official language and the language of education. Kurdish identity was officially denied and Kurds were categorized as "Mountain Turks"

[16] "Immigration to Turkey," *Wikipedia*, last modified July 15, 2021, accessed January 20, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_Turkey.
[17] Biray Kolluoglu, "Excesses of Nationalism: Greco-Turkish Population Exchange," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 3 (2013): 532.

until 1991. The Kurdish provinces in Turkey that my research informants call Kurdistan is referred to as *the east* or *the southeast* in the official Turkish discourse, where the use of the word Kurdistan has been strictly forbidden. The Kurdish population has not been safe from emigration or internal displacement like all the others of the Turkish nationalist discourse. This othering, marginalization, and unequal treatment contributed to Kurdish mobilization such as the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan-Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK). Since the beginning of the armed conflict in the Kurdish regions in 1984, between one million and three million people have been displaced. The displaced went to urban centers in Turkey; some migrated to Europe.

The Migration from Turkey to Germany

Emigration from Turkey is a relatively recent issue as travelling in and out of the country was accepted as a basic right only in the 1961 constitution.[18] In the same year, the bilateral agreement was signed between Turkey and West Germany. With this, the migration from Turkey to Germany started.[19] The agreement was signed to meet the mutual needs of both countries; unemployment was high in Turkey and there was a need for an increase in the labor force in Germany. With this agreement, the migrants were recruited as guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) and their stay was thought to be temporary. However, many guest workers opted to stay, a permanence made possible between 1974 and 1988 with the right to family reunification. Today, totaling up to more than three million,[20] migrants from Turkey constitute 5% of Germany's population, of these, 1.8 % were born in Germany and constitute thus a second generation.[21]

[18] Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Turks in Europe: From Guest Worker to Transnational Citizen* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011) 7.
[19] Ibid., 11.

The military memorandum in 1971 marks the beginning of the political emigration from Turkey to Germany. This wave continued after the coup d'état in 1980 when many people migrated to Europe or the US to escape political repression and persecution. While the following decades were relatively quiet in terms of Turkish emigration, especially since the failed coup attempt in 2016, the growing authoritarianism resulted in the exile of many leftists and dissidents including journalists, scholars, and activists.[22]

Although Kurds have been migrating since 1961, they were categorized as Turkish in their host countries because of their country of origin. With the political migration, the Kurdish identity started to become more visible in Germany. While economic needs had taken precedence during the first two decades of the migration, ethnic identities and political mobilization became more pronounced after the 1980s. During the tumultuous 1990s, when the clashes between Turkish armed forces and the PKK in the Kurdish

[20] "Turks in Germany," *Wikipedia,* last modified August 13, 2021, accessed January 23, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turks_in_Germany; David P. Conradt and Eric Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 10th ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013) 114–115; Michael Curtis, *Jews, Antisemitism, and the Middle East* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013) 69.

[21] Susanne Worbs, "The Second Generation in Germany: Between School and Labor Market," *The International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (2003): 1014; Jörg Hartmann, "Do Second-generation Turkish Migrants in Germany Assimilate into the Middle Class?" *Ethnicities* 16, no. 3 (2016): 369.

[22] Ilker Ataç, Gerda Heck, Sabine Hess, Zeynep Kaşlı, Philipp Ratfisch, Cavidan Soykan, Bediz Yılmaz. "Contested B/Orders. Turkey's Changing Migration Regime. An Introduction." *movements, Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 11. Accessed September 10, 2021. http://movements-journal.org/issues/05.turkey/01.atac,heck,hess,kasli,ratfisch,soykan,yilmaz--contested.borders.turkey.migration.regime.introduction.html.

regions intensified,[23] many Kurdish dissidents had to leave Turkey and seek asylum in European countries.

While there is a Kurdish diaspora in different countries including France, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, the largest part of the Kurdish diaspora is based in Germany. It is hard to estimate the exact number of Kurdish people who are from Turkey.[24] The difficulty arises from the fact that Kurds from Turkey are subsumed under the category of Turkish migrants due to their citizenship.[25] My research participants estimate the number to be around one and a half million while Wikipedia estimates it to be around one million.[26]

Constituting the largest stateless diaspora and the most politically active migrant group in Europe,[27] the Kurdish community continues its political activities about the Kurdish issue in Turkey. While the main activities are directed towards putting pressure on Turkey for the resolution of the conflict as well as creating awareness about the Kurdish issue in daily life and civic issues,[28] the diaspora is also actively engaged in preserving the culture and keeping traditions alive.

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[23] Bilgin Ayata, "Kurdish Transnational Politics and Turkey's Changing Kurdish Policy: The Journey of Kurdish Broadcasting from Europe to Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 19, no. 4 (2011): 523-525.

[24] Kurds also live in (and migrate from) Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

[25] Kenan Engin, "Göçmen Kürt Gençleri Birçok Aidiyeti Aynı Anda Yaşıyor" [Migrant Kurdish Youth Are Having Multiple Belongings at the Same Time], October 12, 2020, accessed November 5, 2020, https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/prof-dr-kenan-engin-gocmen-kurt-gencleri-bircok-aidiyeti-ayni-anda-yasiyor-haber-1501503.

[26] "Kurds in Germany," *Wikipedia,* last modified July 20, 2021, accessed July 25, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurds_in_Germany.

[27] Making up the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, the number of Kurdish people is estimated to be around 25 to 35 million.

[28] Bahar Baser. *The Kurdish Diaspora in Europe: Identity Formation and Political Activism,* Bogaziçi University-TÜSIAD Foreign Policy Forum Research Report, DPF 2013-RR 01, accessed November 14, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/1814/28337.

Making Borders, Marking Identities

As Benedict Anderson contends, "[n]ation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone analyze." Still, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time." According to Anderson, a nation is "an imagined political community" that is limited and sovereign.[29] It is imagined because the members of a nation do not know most of their fellow-members but they are confident about their connection.[30] Looking at a nation through Georg Simmel's approach to society, it can be argued that it is a form of interaction among the members of a group. "Society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction."[31] From this perspective, a nation state appears to be an institution regulating this interaction.

Nationality is thought of as something natural, it is based on the presumption of a group of people with a shared language, culture and history inhabiting a unified territory.[32] Although this presumption does not always match the demographic reality and its attendant linguistic and historical diversity, the reality is made to fit the presumption. Defining the borders of a territory and claiming unity and homogeneity of the population living there, especially when the demographics show otherwise, is an unnatural phenomenon. The creation of the Turkish nation state is an obvious example of this sharp contrast between the objectives of the state and the demographic composition of the territory where it was built.

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[29] Benedict Anderson, "Introduction" in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 3.
[30] Ibid., p.6
[31] "The Significance of Simmel's Work," accessed January 9, 2020, https://socio.ch/sim/work.htm.
[32] Bülent Gökay and Tunç Aybak, "Identity, Race and Nationalism in Turkey—Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): p.107.

A nation state cannot be imagined without borders[33] with which a national identity is conferred to a particular territory. Thus, territorialization of national identity is naturalized with the make-believe borders of a nation state and the accompanying discourses, as is the case in most nation states. As Gloria Anzaldúa phrases it in the preface of her *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory."[34] She further states that "[a] border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."[35]

A border also draws the lines between the self and the other. Demarcating inside and outside, borders help to define *us* and *them* on both a territorial and a social level. As Michael Billig notes, "[h]aving a national identity also involves being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations. And, only if people believe that they have national identities, will such homelands, and the world of national homelands, be reproduced."[36] As something at the intersection of similarities and differences, a border entails attachment to one's homeland and to one's nation while it detaches *us* from *them*.

In his seminal work on identity, William Connoly argues that identity involves a dialectic of inwardness and outwardness. Identity establishes itself in relation to a series of differences that are essential for its being and turns these differences into otherness. "[I]dentity is thus a slippery, insecure experience, dependent on its ability to define

[33] Shahram Khosravi, '*Illegal' Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.
[34] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), Preface.
[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.:Sage, 1995), p. 8.

difference and vulnerable to the tendency of entities it would so define to counter, resist, overturn, or subvert definitions applied to them." Identity is inconceivable without difference. Difference is the constitutive outside of identity and it is a site of conflict, struggle, and negotiation between the self and the other. Identity and difference are bound together; they presuppose one another in their construction and formation. This means that identities are never given or fixed but always constructed, relational, and fluid. All identities are marked by difference,[37] and all differences are grounded in power.[38]

On the other hand, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth indicates that difference is overemphasized in explaining ethnic boundaries, stating that there is "no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences." [39] He says that "[t]he features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant." According to Barth, actors might use some of the cultural features to mark their differences from others while playing down or denying some other significant differences.[40] In the case of national identities, differences are mediated by nation states to draw the borders and determine which differences are significant.

Most of the time, belonging to a nation equals love for one's nation, which may imply hatred for the other for their differences. As Sara Ahmed asks, "who has the right to name themselves as acting out of love"[41]? From the Turkish perspective, Turks have the right to love their nation. However, when a Kurdish person loves their nation,

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[37] William Connolly, *Identity/ Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 44.
[38] Habibe Şentürk, "The 1989 Migration from Bulgaria to Turkey: Nationalism and Identity among the Migrants" (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2010), 24.
[39] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.), 14.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Sara Ahmed, "In the Name of Love," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.

this makes them a traitor or a separatist, as they live as a minority within Turkish national territory and have Turkish citizenship. Any association of Kurdish culture is met with overt hatred at social and institutional levels.

In his analysis of nationalism, Billig suggests that the ideological habits of established nations and the daily reproduction of nationalism in the West is not considered a problem and often goes unnamed as nationalism. For example, in the Turkish context, the Turkish flag is ubiquitous, there is a flag in front of every public building as well as in each office inside the buildings. Besides, it is usual to see Turkish flags hanging from windows or balconies of private houses not only on national holidays, but also on ordinary days. The Turkish flag, as a national symbol, is frequently used to invoke national sentiments as a sign of patriotism.

On the other hand, Billig argues that the nationalism of smaller groups is usually identified as a problem. In these cases, even symbols of identity can be treated as a threat to the national identity of the sovereign. Similarly, in the Turkish context, the components of the Kurdish culture are suppressed. Be it in publications or songs, the Kurdish language was banned until recently;[42] speaking Kurdish in public places can be met with aggression or even lynching. Dancing govend or having the Kurdish colors, green, red, and yellow can be seen as treason and be used as reasons for legal accusations.

[42] The official ban on Kurdish language was lifted in 1991. However, this remained only at a legislative level since use of Kurdish language continued to be suppressed in daily life. It is not unusual that people get attacked or killed because of speaking Kurdish in public.
Nathalie Tocci, *The EU and Conflict Resolution: Promoting Peace in the Backyard* (London: Routledge, 2007), 61 in Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 63, Kindle.

(To) Appropriate Folklore for the Nation

Since the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, folklore has been utilized for sustaining national identities and nationalist ideologies.[43] During the decline of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and the rise of nationalism, different ethnicities focused on collecting and studying their "own" folklore, which were afterwards manipulated for the needs of nation state ideologies.[44] In the transition from the Ottoman to a "homogenous" Turkish society, folklore of the other is either denied or appropriated to serve Turkish nationalism. As in other examples of nation building, folklore was used to construct the nation and promote national sentiments in the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

In contemporary Turkey, the connection between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic has been a politically contentious issue until today. To put it simply, secularist segments of the society see the republic as a sharp break from the empire while Islamists refer to the Ottoman ancestry as the real origins of the Turkish identity. As Eric Hobsbawm argues, nationalism needs continuity.[45] Thus, even though there may be a cutoff at a certain point, nationalism refers to its own relevant past[46] by inventing its own traditions. "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain

[43] Richard M. Dorson, Folklore and Fakelore: Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Venetia J. Newall "The Adaptation of Folklore and Tradition (Folklorismus)" *Folklore* 98, no. 2 (1987): 131-151; Regina Bendix, "The Uses of Disciplinary History" in *Radical History Review* 84 (Fall 2002): 110-114.
[44] Arzu Öztürkmen, *Türkiye'de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik* (Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey), (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), 16.
[45] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Canto Classics) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7, Kindle.
[46] Ibid., 2.

values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past," according to Hobsbawm.[47]

Among the invented traditions in Turkey, folk dancing has greater importance when compared to other elements of folklore. As a hugely popular form of collective performance and pleasure, folk dance also intersects quite acutely with various modalities of cultural and ethnic identification. Furthermore, folk dancing has been one of the ways to reproduce national belonging in Turkey.[48] In the nationalization process, while the folklore of the sovereign identity is sanctified, that of the other is oppressed, prohibited, or in some cases, appropriated. When referring to dance competitions in Turkey, one of the research participants, Ismail, a folk dance teacher in Berlin, revealed that the same dance can win a competition when it has a Turkish name, but be disqualified if it has a Kurdish name.[49]

Despite the nationalization of folklore, there are common dances between the Turkish and the Kurdish culture as well as with the other cultures that have lived in modern-day Turkey. For example, if we look at the folklore in Mesopotamia[50], Mediterranean, or the Balkans, we will see that cultures living close to each other share more than what they exclude. There is a bulk of shared culture among different nations living in the region. One can find the same song with different lyrics in different languages and people who do not speak the same language can dance to the same dances. Claiming ownership, hence, purports to make the elements of culture fit into national categories, which, in most cases, excludes the other from a shared common.

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[47] Ibid., 1.
[48] Berna Kurt, *Ulusun Dansi: Türk Halk Oyunlari Geleneginin Icadi* (The Dance of the Nation: The Invention of Turkish Folk Dance Tradition) (Istanbul: Pan Yayincilik, 2017), 146.
[49] Ismail, interview by author, Berlin, April 25, 2018.
[50] Mesopotamia is the region that lies between Tigris and Euphrates rivers encompassing present-day Iraq, and parts of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Kuwait. It is often used as "Mesopotamian peoples" in the Kurdish political discourse to refer to the ethnic diversity of the region.

The documentary film *Whose is This Song?* successfully shows this discrepancy between shared culture and national identities by following the journey and transformations of a song. “Kâtibim” (*My Clerk*) also known as "Üsküdar'a Gider İken" (*While Going to Üsküdar*) is an popular old love song from Istanbul. In the Turkish lyrics, the lover praises a clerk as they travel to Üsküdar,[51] which is a residential neighborhood on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus. The documentary director, Adela Peeva, first heard the song in Istanbul and before pursuing its trajectory towards the Balkans. She summarizes the story in the synopsis:

> In a small nice restaurant in Istanbul I was having dinner with friends from various Balkan countries—a Greek, a Macedonian, a Turk, a Serb, and me, the Bulgarian. There I heard The Song.
>
> As soon as it sounded we all started singing it, everyone in his own language. Everyone claimed that the song came from his own country. Then we found ourselves caught in a fierce fight - Whose is this Song?
>
> The event in the Istanbul restaurant did not leave my mind at rest. I knew from my childhood that the song was Bulgarian. I wanted to find out why the others also claimed the song was theirs. This is how the film started.[52]

When Peeva talks with people in Istanbul, they say that it is originally a Turkish song. Then she visits Greece, Albania, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria, learning that “in the different countries, it has different faces and exists as a love song, a military march meant to scare the enemy off, a Muslim religious song, a revolutionary song, an anthem of the right nationalists, etc.”[53] Everyone claims confidently that “it is our song, not theirs,” which Peeva explains as part of typical Balkan traits, “including our constant strife to usurp somebody else's possession and at the same time keep what is ours to ourselves.”[54]

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[51] “Katibim,” *Wikipedia,* last modified June 27, 2021, accessed February 23, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A2tibim.
[52] “Whose is This Song? Short Synopsis,” accessed February 24, 2021, https://www.adelamedia.net/movies/whose-is-this-song.php.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

What the documentary shows is that cultural products travel; people transform them and make them their own. It is not unusual to hear the same melody with lyrics in different languages across different cultures living in and around modern-day Turkey. Before the interruption by nationalism and nation states, peoples living in the same regions were interacting with each other. However, the nationalist trait to turn an expressive form into a commodity in the service of nationalist imagination[55] tends to deny this fact and claim ownership to elements of folklore.

Cultures do not exist in neat and tidy national formations[56] as profoundly territorialized entities.[57] However, the extant national order of things still holds onto the premise that national boundaries are natural boundaries. As a result, cultural products that are shared by people of different "nations" can become objects of appropriation or antagonism. Tracing folklore without any nationalist agenda brings us to the commons between cultures rather than their differences. If we look at cultural forms among different nations, we can find that different cultures are sharing more than what they exclude.

[55] "Whose is This Song?" (November 23, 2008), accessed February 02, 2021, https://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=403.
[56] Paul Gilroy, "One Nation under a. Groove: The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Racism in Britain," in David Theo. Goldberg, ed., Anatomy of Racism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 268, quoted in Liisa H. Malkki, "Introduction: An Ethnography of Displacement in the National Order of Things," in *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 12.
[57] Liisa H. Malkki, "Introduction: An Ethnography of Displacement in the National Order of Things," in *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15.

Migration as a Challenge to Territorialized National Identities

Just like the aforementioned song, people move across the borders of nation states. Transnational migration, therefore, challenges the demographic conception of a nation state[58] and deterritorializes both sending and receiving nation states, which emphasize territoriality and national homogeneity. Identities become detached from their homelands and people imagine themselves as a nation outside of the territorial boundaries of the state. Turning into the "quintessential other of the nation state,"[59] migrant populations denounce the claims of national homogeneity of the host country and challenge the national unity of the receiving states.

Transnational migration interrupts the identity processes of the migrant populations and renders changes in the perceptions of homeland and belonging. Ethnic and national belongings need to be redefined in a new country as traditions, language, religion, and political conditions of are usually different from those of the homeland. As transnational migration deterritorializes national identifications, identification processes are reterritorialized in the host country, where national belongings turn into diasporic attachments. Also, in the wake of migration, national identities are highlighted more during both bureaucratic processes as well as social interactions. In turn, "portable nationality," as Anderson names it, is on the rise since people are on the move beyond the borders of nation states.[60]

Considering that national identity, like any other identification, "is to be found in the embodied habits of social life,"[61] the national order of things continues to dominate despite the challenge posed by transnationalization because, as Billig asserts, "[h]aving a

[58] Sara Ahmed, "Home and away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999), 332.
[59] Barzoo Eliassi, *A Stranger in My Homeland: The Politics of Belonging Among Young People with Kurdish Backgrounds in Sweden* (PhD Dissertation, Mid Sweden University, 1990), 72-79.
[60] Benedict Anderson, "Mapping the Nation," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 9.
[61] Billig, *Banal Nationalism,* 8.

national identity also involves being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations. And, only if people believe that they have national identities, will such homelands, and the world of national homelands, be reproduced."[62]

From this perspective, migration appears to be—in terms of anthropological ritual concepts—a liminal phase[63] between here and there. It is a threshold that brings along the stages of separation, liminality, and re-assimilation.[64] Migrant subjects are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony[y]."[65] "Starting from the zero" is a phrase used constantly by migrant subjects when they refer to their life after arrival in a new country. As a result of being deskilled after migration, one starts a long learning process of adaptation, which entails learning the language.

During this liminal phase of migration and in the aftermath, national and cultural identities might become more salient. Regardless of how much a person embraces it prior to migration, national identity is accentuated more frequently during everyday life in the host country. As the number of bureaucratic encounters increases, so does the emphasis on nationality. Thus, identity may become more tangible and conscious in different parts of daily life. The color of one's skin or hair, the types of clothes one wears, the food one eats, and other elements of daily life may acquire different meanings.

In his foundational essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall explains two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first view sees identity as a shared, collective culture, an essence that remains unchanged over time and purports to be 'a true

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
[64] While Arnold van Gennep used the term with regard to rites de passages, Victor Turner expanded the term to understand the transitional phases when individuals are liminal entities.
[65] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas" in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 359.

self.'[66] It is a still point which provides us with "an ultimate guarantee" in this changing world. The logic of identity in this sense assumes continuity.[67] The second view, on the other hand, defines identity as a process of *becoming* that acknowledges discontinuities and that it is subject to transformation at the interplay of history, culture, and power.[68] According to this second view, identification is a conditional process, never complete but always contingent, operating across difference, which "entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects.'"[69]

Transnational migration, in this regard, attests to both conceptions of identity. Mobility clearly manifests that identification is a process of becoming. At the same time, identity as an unchanging frame of reference[70] becomes more pronounced after migration, when being an outsider impacts identity construction. In this regard, a migrant subject resembles Simmel's "stranger," "the fundamentally mobile person [who] comes in contact, at one time or another, with every individual, but is not organically connected, through established ties of kinship, locality, and occupation, with any single one."[71]

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[66] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 223.
[67] Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (1989): 10.
[68] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223-226.
[69] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs `Identity`?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity,* ed. Stuart Hall and P. Du Gay, 1st ed. (London: Sage, 1996), 3.
[70] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223.
[71] Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 403 - 404.

Migration and Embodiment: The Sound of Home

Migration is the physical movement of bodies within and across spaces.[72] As transnational migration processes deterritorialize national identities, the migrated body becomes 'foreign' in the host country. "The body stands . . . as the ground of identity"[73] and the condition of embodied social presence. "One is marked by one's body," says Meena Alexander.[74] "No matter what passport one carries, the body that looks 'foreign' is subject to a variety of gazes—from the curious and rude to the dangerous and violent."[75] The metaphor of a tree is often used by migrants to explain the experience of migration. "Imagine a tree that is removed from its habitat and planted in a new place. It can survive, but neither the place where it was uprooted, nor the tree itself will ever be the same again."[76]

In *The Book of Human Emotions,* Tiffany Watt Smith writes about "nostalgia" which is cross referenced to "homesickness." As Smith explains, the word nostalgia comes from *nostos*, "homecoming," and *algia*, "pain" in the Greek language. Diagnosed as a fatal condition in the 18th century, nostalgia continued to be a cause of death until 1918.[77] As Smith explains,

> In 1688 a medical student named Johannes Hofer wrote a treatise on a mysterious disease which had broken out among Swiss mercenary soldiers fighting abroad. It began with the soldiers being distracted by thoughts of home—often, wrote Hofer, brought on by hearing cowbells chiming in the distance. Then it would progress to lethargy and sadness, 'frequent sighs' and 'disturbed sleep.' Strange physical symptoms followed—lesions, heart palpitations, and from there a 'stupidity of

[72] Sara Ahmed, "Home and away," 332.
[73] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World,* trans. Carmen Ruschiensky (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), Kindle.
[74] Meena Alexander, "Alphabets of Flesh," quoted in Susan Stanford Friedman, "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora Author(s)" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2004), 190-191.
[75] Ibid., 191.
[76] Azad, interview by author, Göttingen, October 5, 2019.
[77] Tiffany Watt Smith, *The Book of Human Emotions: An Encyclopedia of Feeling from Anger to Wanderlust* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2015), Kindle.

> mind'—a kind of dementia. Some soldiers died of the illness, wasting away from a refusal to eat. Others attempted to return home—the only known cure—and were executed for desertion. "[78]

Possibly due to an increased mobility and advanced communication technologies, "homesickness" has ceased to be a fatal condition in today's psychosomatic diagnostic toolkit. Still, this explanation gives us insight about the importance of feeling a sense of belonging and being connected to the place that is called home or homeland. Just like a tree that needs to reground to survive, the sense of belonging needs to be created in the wake of migration. The body is more than the physical body, and being-in-the-world is immersion of an embodied subject in its environment and in social relations.[79]

In our embodied immersion and sensory experience of the world, hearing has a different prominence. Like the cowbells chiming in the distance, sound has a different power when compared to other senses. Sounds fill the space and affect the environment. Sounds have somatic effects through the power to arouse emotions.[80] Sounds can carry meaning, memory, and facts through language and music.[81] Sounds can be designed by an individual or group of individuals, or can be the byproduct of historical, political, or cultural processes.[82]

A soundscape is "a powerful tool that helps humans relate to their surroundings."[83] Sound has the power to unify space and to unite people if they are hearing the same

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[78] Tiffany Watt Smith, *The Book of Human Emotions: An Encyclopedia of Feeling from Anger to Wanderlust* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2015), Kindle.
[79] Thorsten Gieser, "Embodiment, emotion and empathy: A phenomenological Approach to Apprenticeship Learning," *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 3 (September 2008), 299.
[80] Regina Bendix, "Pleasures of the Ear: Toward an Ethnography of Listening," *Cultural Analysis* 1, (2000), accessed 28 July 2018, https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume1/vol1_article3.html#return7.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Marinna Guzy, "The Sound of Life: What Is a Soundscape?," Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, May 4, 2017, accessed December 1, 2020, https://folklife.si.edu/talkstory/the-sound-of-life-what-is-a-soundscape.
[83] Ibid.

sound, singing the same song, or shouting a slogan together. It is transient and temporally limited, yet it can provide a strong feeling of belonging and unity.[84] "Soundscapes define communities—their boundaries, their actors, their geographic intricacies, and industries. They arise through the interactions between external and internal forces within a community."[85]

Sound is perceived due to the brain's reception of acoustic waves.[86] A sound accommodates many possibilities to find its meaning waiting to be decoded by the hearer. The same sound can have different meanings in different contexts to the same person. Rendering utterance and meaning possible, auditory stimuli constitute the seat of communication. In some societies, hearing is associated with intelligence and thought.[87] More importantly, hearing makes language and communication possible. In "a world held together by voice,"[88] meaning is first incarnated in an utterance in order to communicate with the other.[89]

We rely on language to communicate; even sign language is the transliteration of spoken language into body language. There is no meaning inherent in sounds; language is arbitrary. We attribute meaning to sounds. The power of auditory experience becomes more visible with migration, wherein sound becomes a vessel of memory as well as of communication. A research participant named Azad once told me about his first months in Germany. Without being able to speak or understand the language, "You hear the

[84] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World,* trans. Carmen Ruschiensky (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), Kindle.
[85] Ibid.
[86] There are also sounds that human beings cannot perceive.
[87] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World,* trans. Carmen Ruschiensky (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), Kindle.
[88] Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967) quoted in David Le Breton, *Sensing the World,* trans. Carmen Ruschiensky (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), Kindle.
[89] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, Kindle.

language only as a clatter," he says. "Then you have to focus on the facial expressions and the intonation of the speaker to get a sense of what they are saying." He then adds, "Well, of course you learn the language in time and what you hear starts to make sense."

In our embodied being-in-the-world, we navigate a sensory universe tied to our personal histories.[90] With migration, the conditions of the sensory context changes. As we navigate through a new universe of stimuli, memories can be triggered or left dormant in the unconscious while new meanings emerge as new memories are constructed. In this context, familiar soundscapes play a big role in bringing sensations of home and homeland. As Martin Stokes acknowledges in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, "Music informs our sense of place,"[91] in a way that it does not "simply provide a marker in a pre-structured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed."[92]

Chapter Summary

The 'national order of things' has been the dominant order since the late 19th and early 20th centuries and has been taken for granted as the 'natural order of things' despite its recency. It is based on the imagination that a group of people sharing the same language and culture live in a defined territory. However, people and elements of cultures do travel, and, as in the case of the Turkish nation state, different cultures might exist on a given territory.

As the documentary *Whose Is This Song?* exposes, a strong attachment to nationalism, which claims ownership to elements of culture, can deny the simple fact

[90] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, Kindle.
[91] Martin Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place,* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 3.
[92] Ibid.,p. 4.

that the same song exists in Turkey, Greece, Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. As Hall asserts, identity, as a process, does not obliterate difference after it is established, but constantly applies to this constitutive outside for marking and maintaining symbolic boundaries,[93] which serve to exclude the other for their differences. Borders, then, help to distinguish *us* from *them*, resulting in a more pronounced interpretation of differences between national identifications despite the shared commons across borders.

Both in their construction and maintenance, nation state ideologies are constructed out of the larger cultural systems that preceded them.[94] Folklore, as a reservoir of traditional cultural expressions, plays a significant role in the embodied habits of social life. Hence, it has been functional both in reinforcing as well as in subverting national identifications through (re)invention, adaptation, or appropriation of these traditions. In this context, this chapter has laid the ground for gaining a deeper insight into the role of the embodied and sensory experience in reproducing national and diasporic homelands. With a particular focus on music and dance practices, the next chapter will present and analyze the fieldwork observations of Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, an annual dance festival of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany.

[93] Hall, "Who Needs Identity," p. 1.
[94] Benedict Anderson, "Cultural Roots," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 12.

Chapter 2: The Politics of Dance at Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter starts with a descriptive account of the fieldwork observations and experiences of Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan (The Festival of Kurdistan's Dances) in 2018 and in 2019 in Hanover. The description, as it is narrated from the first-person point of view, reveals the sensory experience and the impressions of the ethnographer. The narration of the thirty-first Mîhrîcan is followed by the account of the year from 2018 to 2019 and the political developments relevant to the festival context. The account continues with the description of thirty-second Mîhrîcan in 2019.

After a brief overview of the development of Mîhrîcan as a festival, the chapter attempts to analyze the elements of the festival including costumes, music, and dance. Through references to interviews, the chapter tries to explore the significance of the festival for the Kurdish diaspora. The analysis continues with the discussion of anthropology of performance and anthropology of experience to gain a deeper insight into the festival.

Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan in 2018

Parade

It is a *Pfingsten* Saturday in Hanover in 2018.[95] At 10:30 in the morning, exiting the central train station towards the Ernst-August-Platz, one can hear the sound of the beat to a 2/4 rhythm of the *davul*, a bass drum, and *zurna,* a woodwind instrument. There is a colorful crowd of about two hundred people. The colorful dresses of the women

[95] This descriptive account of the fieldwork experience is mainly based on the Mîhrîcan of 2018 because the festival contents were quite similar both in 2018 and 2019. The festival took place in Hanover in 2018 and 2019 consecutively.

and the guerilla costumes of the men called *şal* u *şepik* grab my attention. The thirty-first Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan (The Festival of Kurdistan's Dances) is taking place.

Figure 1. The flyer for Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, 2018.[96]

The parade begins as the crowd starts to move slowly in the direction of the southeast. A police car is taking the lead. There is a girl on a horse held by a horsebreaker right behind the police car. The girl's face is covered with a bridal veil. The crowd is walking behind the girl. As it is a holiday weekend, the streets are relatively empty. Arriving in the square in Kröpcke, people make a big circle and the first govend of the festival starts. It grows quickly as more people join. In a few minutes, there are more than a hundred people holding hands and dancing. People in the dance look happy and excited. Most of the people who are not dancing are watching the dance. Some are taking selfies, some are taking photos or videos of the dance. Some of the

[96] Photo from "Tanz: 31. Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan 2018," accessed August 26, 2021, https://pavillon-hannover.de/event/details/27671/31-mihricana-govenden-kurdistan-2018/.

passersby stop to watch the dance, looking curiously at the costumes and the dance.

Figure 2 and 3. The girl on a horse leading the parade in Hanover in 2018 and 2019. Photo from 2018 © Habibe Şentürk, Hanover, May 19, 2018. The photo from 2019 is from ANF English's website.[97]

The govend continues for about fifteen minutes, then the parade continues walking. After a few hundred meters, the parade stops for the second govend. The dance starts with about twenty people, a number that doubles in less than a minute. This time, some passersby also join the dance. After about ten minutes, the girl on the horse turns back and starts walking. The crowd follows. Going back through the same route, the parade finishes at the starting point in front of the train station. Back at the Ernst-August-Platz, there is a pause with a relaxed atmosphere. The music continues sporadically. People are talking with each other.

[97] https://anfenglish.com/culture/mihrican-festival-ended-in-hannover-after-great-success-35536

Figure 4. The second govend during the parade. © Habibe Şentürk, Hanover, May 19, 2018.

There is someone holding two identical wooden objects. Moved with curiosity, I approach the person who is holding them. He explains that they are called *teşi*. They are used to spin wool and they are going to be used during one of the choreographies. Then he points out to a group of girls wearing dresses decorated with flowers. He introduces me to his wife and his daughter, both of whom are going to perform at the competition the following day. They are going to use these *teşi* in their choreography.

Figure 5. *Teşi*.[98]

[98] "Yüksekova'da 'öreke 'teşi' geleneği' sürdürülüyor" ('Distaff 'teşi' tradition continues in Yüksekova") accessed August 20, 2021, https://www.yuksekovagundem.org/yuksekovada-oreke-tesi-gelenegi-surduruluyor-26990g.htm.

Figure 6. A choreography with *Teşi* by Govenda Baran, Frankfurt 2016. Photo from Govenda Baran's Facebook page.[99]

I briefly introduce myself and tell him that I am doing research on Kurdish dances. Then I ask if I can ask a few questions about the festival. He is willing to answer. When I ask him if I can turn on the voice recorder, he accepts. The device creates an atmosphere, evident in how Ahmet[100] adopts a more serious tone while the gazes turn to us. He tells me that people must be thinking that I am a journalist. As Ahmet explains the importance of the festival for the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, I learn a lot from him about Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan.

After about half an hour, the crowd starts to move again and walk towards the northeast. The voice recorder is off but the conversation with Ahmet continues. We talk a bit about the political situation in Turkey and he expresses his hope for the next election in Turkey. In the meantime, we arrive at Pavillon Kulturzentrum. Ahmet tells me that the rest of the festival will take place in this hall.

[99] https://www.facebook.com/Govenda.Baran/photos/266536320360035
[100] The names used in this text are pseudonyms.

Exhibition

Entering the foyer of the Pavillon Kulturzentrum, one can see the models that represent the geographical and historical places in Kurdistan. A watermelon and a diorama of the City Wall of Diyarbakir—two symbols for which the biggest Kurdish city in Turkey is famous—welcomes guests upon their entrance. There is also a model of the historical Malabadi Bridge and a *şark köşesi,* which is a sitting place designed in an oriental style. In the background, one can see a big poster of Abdullah Öcalan, the founding members of the PKK.[101]

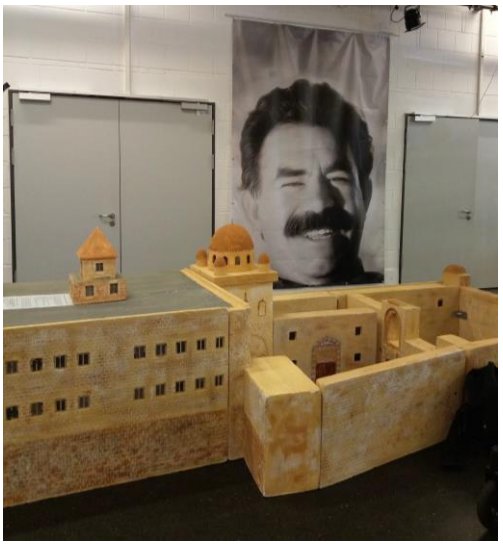

Fig. 7 and 8. The Exhibition at Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan © Habibe Şentürk, Hanover, May 19, 2018.

There is one stand that has just opened. There are a few young women selling colorful bracelets made of thread. I approach one of them and ask if I can interview her. She accepts the interview but refuses to speak with the voice recorder on. I tell her that I will use a pseudonym if I use her words and that her identity will not be revealed, which does not help to change her mind. We have a short conversation without the

[101] The Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê*) known as PKK is the armed guerilla movement based in southeastern Turkey.

voice recorder. Already after this second conversation, I can sense the importance of the festival for the participants.

Then I approach another woman who must be in her forties. She hesitates to talk to me and asks if I am a journalist. After learning that I am a student, she agrees to talk but she strictly refuses to speak when the voice recorder is on. I ask her about the girl on the horse and what it represents. She expresses her happiness about seeing that image. The Mîhrîcan festival makes her feel at home. The girl on the horse reminds her of her childhood and brings nice memories. She remembers the weddings back then when the bride used to go from her parents' village to her future home on a horse and the villagers from her hometown would accompany her on the way. Her voice indicates how emotion-laden the event and its accompanying memories are for her.

In the meantime, there is a relaxed atmosphere in the foyer. Most of the people know each other. People are having tea or coffee and talk with each other. For some people, it is a reunion. Young dancers are practicing here and there, either rehearsing their part or dancing for fun. After about half an hour, a man makes an announcement in Turkish with a strict intonation. He says that the program will start at 1:00 p.m. and the audience is supposed to get tickets. People in the foyer are instructed to leave the building and come back in an hour when the program starts.

I get a ticket and leave the foyer. There is a group of young people dancing in front of the hall with their costumes on. They seem to be very excited; it looks like they are rehearsing for the dance competition. I feel like talking to someone, but everyone looks busy with either conversation or dancing. I sit at the cafe in front of the Pavillon Kulturzentrum and observe the scene, letting the atmosphere suffuse my body. As I observe more carefully, I can see that the first generation is more excited about the

reunion with friends and acquaintances while the second generation is dancing or rehearsing. The others are busy with the organizational hustle.

The entrance opens around 1:00 p.m. There are two young men wearing *şal u şepik.* They behave like security, looking at the tickets and checking our bags. During 2015 and 2016, a tumultuous time in Turkey,[102] the need for security soared. Indeed, security was present even at small events. Checking the bags, therefore, was probably a repercussion of the insecure atmosphere in Turkey as well as the anxiety of Turkish aggression against Kurdish people here in the diaspora. Having recently arrived in Germany from Turkey, this looked quite normal to me at that time.

Entering the Pavillon, then passing through the exhibition at the foyer, one arrives in the performance hall. A big poster decorate the stage's background. It shows a drawing of a brush, a *teşi,* and a carpet motif overlayed on the map of Kurdistan. The presenters take their places on the stage. There is one woman and one man on the stage wearing traditional costumes and welcoming the audience. They present the program and look very professional and experienced in presenting. Their intonation and body language catches the audience's attention. Afterwards, I learned that they are experienced television broadcasters.

The anchorwoman speaks in Kurdish first, then the anchorman translates into German. They read the name of a dance group and invite one representative from each group to the stage. The group representatives draw numbers from a raffle that show the order in which their groups will perform the following day during the competition. Then they say their numbers aloud and take their places on the stage, standing in a line. At the

[102] In 2015 and 2016, there were about 20 suicide attacks resulting in more than 400 fatalities and about 2,000 injuries carried out by different groups.

end, the thirty-one group representatives announce their names and numbers before exiting the stage.

Next, the jury is invited to the stage to dance a govend. They dance for a few minutes and then they leave the stage. The program continues with two concerts of traditional Kurdish music. The first includes traditional instruments like *baglama*, *kaval*, and percussion while the second one includes guitar and violin. The presenters announce the details of the program for the next day and the audience leaves.

Dance Competition

On Sunday morning, the program starts around 10:00 a.m. as announced. The dance competition starts, and the groups perform their dances according to the numbers they picked the day before. The hall is about half full in the morning and by noon it fills completely. It gets so full that people start sitting on the stairs in the hall. This becomes an issue for the rest of the day, as the presenters repeatedly announce that people must not sit on the stairs as those should be kept empty for emergency cases. These announcements are the only moments when Turkish is spoken on stage—making clear that for these Kurdish festival goers, Turkish is coded as the language of control even here in Germany. After each announcement, people empty the stairs. Then, the dance performance starts, and people take back their places on the stairs to be able to see the performance better.

The jury sits in front of the stage. The spatial arrangements resemble the Kurdish version of a big talent show. The first performance starts with a *mis-en-scène* where two groups are having a conflict that ends in peace, which is a common theme that is choreographed in the performances at the festival. Most of the choreographies have a story that one can follow. It might be a love story, enacting the harvesting or doing

handicrafts together, or the story of eagles eating an animal, which is a popular dance known as “eagle dance.” There are performances that do not necessarily tell a story but have a choreography that is based more on the geometry of the stage. Most of the dance groups are composed of either female dancers only, or with very few male dancers—only in two groups are the number of female and male dancers equal.

Figure 9 and 10. A choreography of war and peace.

Figure 11. The jury at Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, Hanover, May 19, 2018.

The stage is colorful and vibrant. There is no pause between the groups. In between the dances, the presenters make short speeches about the importance of embracing one’s own culture and preserving it. They also emphasize the importance of

voting in the upcoming election that will take place in Turkey soon.[103] The broadcasters emphasize that each vote is vital in this critical election. Voting for Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-leader of the People's Democratic Party, is encouraged.

All the choreographies on stage seem to be the result of diligent training. One can see that the performances are made to meet the jury's high expectations. The music is played by a group of musicians who are also wearing traditional clothes. Some of them are professional musicians while others are students of music. Some appear to be dancers for one group and musicians for other groups. There are mainly two instruments, *davul* and *zurna*. In some of the choreographies, there is only music, however, in others, people sing together while dancing.

During the break at midday, lunch is served at the back of the Pavillon. There is a food booth where meatballs and salad are served as a sandwich along with some other home-made snacks. After the lunch break, the program continues right away.

During the morning hours, the number of the audience is lower when compared to the rest of the day. Throughout the day, the hall gradually gets packed with spectators, the number of whom peaks in the afternoon. After the name of each performing group is announced, there is an applause and an ovation from a different part of the audience. Relatives and friends of the performers make up a large part of the audience.

By 9:00 p.m., a few more performances are still left, which causes a lot of stress among the organizers and presenters on stage. They announce that the hall should have

[103] The Presidential election took place in Turkey on June 24, 2018. It was the first election after the constitutional referendum that was held on March 16, 2017 under a state of emergency. As a result, the office of the Prime Minister was abolished and the parliamentary system was replaced with the presidential system.

been left earlier, which was not possible because the program had to continue. Therefore, the award ceremony goes quite fast. The winning groups were Evina Welat from Basel, Govenda Baran from Cologne, and Koma Lalîş from Celle, who is ranked second. Govenda Baran also got the special prize for best costume and best research.

At the end of the day, everyone looks quite exhausted but delighted, including the dancers and the audience. Before the day concludes, I ask some contacts I made earlier if it is possible for me to get insight into the criteria used by the jury. Güney, who is part of the organization as well as the jury, approves my request willingly, but tells me to get it from Serdar, the person responsible for the printer so he can print the criteria for me. I hesitate a bit when I realize that Serdar is the organizer who looked very stressed and nervous all day. Still, I approach him. Gathering all my courage, I introduce myself briefly and ask if I can get the evaluation criteria of the jury, adding that some others in the organization have already approved it. Serdar strictly refuses saying that it is an official document, and they have to discuss it with the administrative committee first.

The festival for that year is over. It is a bit disappointing to see that there is no govend that includes the participation of the audience. Afterwards, I learn that there is a big govend every year at the end of the competition, a govend that goes on for some time with the audience and the performers dancing together. However, it was not possible this year due to the time constraints arising from the high number of dance groups; thirty-one groups danced at the competition.

As the 2018 festival ends, I approach Selda, who becomes my gatekeeper to the festival community. Selda is a first-generation migrant living in Switzerland already for more than twenty years. We were introduced to each other at the foyer on the first day of the festival. While I was engaged in small talk with someone, I said that I am writing my dissertation on the festival. Then this person immediately introduced me to Selda, who

afterwards introduced me to her partner Güney, one of the key persons in the organization of the festival over the last two decades.

Between Two Mîhrîcans: From 2018 to 2019

In the following months, I interviewed with people who were actively engaged in the organization of the festival. The acquaintances I made at the festival directed me to common names. I had to talk to Baran and Güney, as the two were repeatedly pointed to as key players in the organization. After interviewing them in Cologne and in Bielefeld respectively, I was advised to contact one of the dance trainers, Mehmet, in Salzgitter. After many unsuccessful attempts to reach Mehmet, I followed the recommendation to contact his brother Murat, who is in the same govend group Koma Şiyar. Finally, I was able to reach Murat after two attempts. He apologized for not returning my first call. Obviously, both of them were working very hard and did not have the time for an interview. Still, Murat agreed to meet me in Salzgitter and introduce me to the govend group. He thought he might be able to participate in an interview and promised that he would arrange somebody else in case he did not have time for it.

We made a few appointments in between, but all of them had to be cancelled at the last minute because of unexpected work-related reasons. Perhaps, I should have looked for other contacts at that time, but I was hopeful because Murat was promising to meet me soon. Then, about a month later, towards the end of January, I decided to call for the last time and see if it would work. Murat answered the phone immediately and apologized, saying that it was a difficult period in his life because of the health problems of a family member. As we spoke, he revealed he was in Turkey for the funeral. He said he would call when he was back in Germany.

When I didn't hear from him, I called back a few weeks later. Murat told me that they cancelled the govend lessons until the hunger strikes ended. Leyla Güven, the *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (The People´s Democratic Party) MP for Hakkari, a predominantly Kurdish city, had gone on a hunger strike on November 7, 2018 to protest the solitary confinement of the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan, who had been denied any contact with his lawyers since 2011 and with family since 2016.[104] At the time, Güven herself was also in prison—mainly for criticizing Turkey's invasion of Afrin in northwest Syria and for other political speeches. Her sentence was set to be from 17.5 to 31.5 years.[105] About 250 imprisoned Kurdish people joined the indefinite hunger strike. Two hundred days later, on May 26, Güven ended the strike, heeding a call from Öcalan.[106] Eight people died during the hunger strikes.

Güven's hunger strike was joined by 300 other political prisoners throughout different prisons in Turkey.[107] The hunger strikes received a lot of attention and solidarity from the Kurdish diaspora living in across Europe. There were solidarity actions as well as alternate hunger strikes in support of Güven's demands. During our phone call, Murat told me that all the groups stopped their training in order to direct their energies to organize protests, as well as solidarity events and activities.

After learning that, I did not make further attempts to continue with my fieldwork and decided to wait until the 2019 festival. Later at the festival, the hunger strike was one of my main focuses of inquiry. There were different views about how to continue during

[104] "Statement of Solidarity with HDP Deputy Leyla Güven," January 10, 2019, accessed, March 18, 2021. https://www.guengl.eu/statement-of-solidarity-with-hdp-deputy-leyla-guven/.
[105] After 79 days of hunger strike, Güven was released pending trial. On 21 December 2020, she was sentenced to over 22 years.
[106] Daren Butler, "Kurdish MPs, prisoners end hunger strike in Turkey," May 26, 2019, accessed May 5, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-kurds-idUSKCN1SW08H.
[107] "Petition Launched for Leyla Güven," January 21, 2019, accessed April 20, 2019, https://bianet.org/english/human-rights/204656-petition-launched-for-leyla-guven.

the hunger strikes. Some people were surprised to hear that other groups stopped their training. One person commented that it did not matter whether Salzgitter practiced or not because they were great dancers anyways, adding that Salzgitter had won different prizes for several years.

Apparently, the decision to stop the training for the competition was not a consensus, in contrast with what Murat had indicated on the phone. Those who argued for continued training emphasized the importance of dancing govend even in difficult times, adding that giving up govend equals to losing to the enemy. "It is our solidarity and resistance," some people said. However, after the news about the first few deaths of the hunger strikers reached, people did not feel like dancing anymore, as they recalled.

Others, like Koma Şiyar from Salzgitter, stopped the dance classes after the condition of the hunger strikers started to deteriorate. For some, it was not imaginable to dance govend in this dire situation. Meanwhile, for others, govend was a means to show solidarity and respond to the situation. One of the main organizers, Musa, who is well respected by the community as an experienced and knowledgeable person, told me about his visit to a govend class a few weeks before the festival. The young performers were confused about what to do in the face of the hunger strikes, as they felt like it was not the right moment to dance while others were dying. They sought advice from Musa, who told them that they should not dread, but keep on dancing govend even in these dire circumstances.[108]

[108] Musa, interview by author, Hanover, June 9, 2019.

Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan in 2019

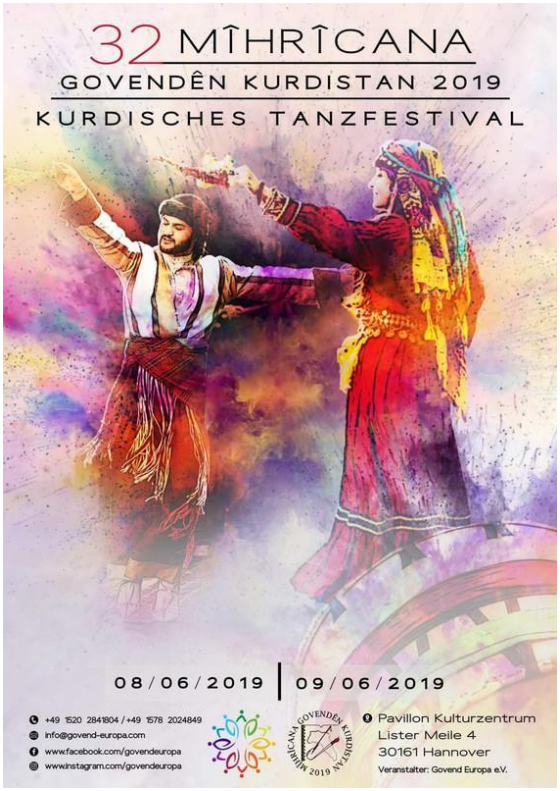

Figure 12. The flyer for Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, 2019.[109]

Unlike the invitations of the 2017 and 2018, the flyer for 2019 does not present the program of the festival. Instead, it depicts two people dancing, a man and a woman with handkerchiefs in their hands. Looking at the invitations between 2016 and 2019, one can see that the handkerchief is a recurrent motif. Closely associated with govend, the handkerchief itself can be seen as an invitation to the dance.

In 2019, the festival took place in Hanover for the second time consecutively. The solidarity events and demonstrations for the hunger strikes had been a priority. Therefore, the preparations for the organization of the festival did not start until late February. When the organization team started looking for a place for the festival, one of the organizers, Güney, called me to ask if I would be interested in organizing the festival

[109] Photo from "Tanz: 31. Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan 2018," accessed August 26, 2021, https://pavillon-hannover.de/event/details/27671/31-mihricana-govenden-kurdistan-2018/.

in Göttingen. I was new in the city and did not know a hall which was big enough for the Mîhrîcan to take place. He understood and explained that they were having difficulty in finding a place, as the halls that were available were too expensive for the budget of this self-organized festival.

When I asked him why the festival took place in Hanover two years in a row, Pîroz replied, “Once you hold the festival in one place, it is easier to organize it in the same place again, because people know you there. It is not only in Hanover, the festival also took place twice in Hamburg and Essen. For example, it took place four or five times in Frankfurt. It is not unusual that the festival takes place in the same place more than once. Still, our aim is to bring it to a different city each year so that more people get to know the festival."[110]

The festival structure was the same in 2019. The parade follows the same route and everything takes place more or less at the same time as the previous year. The experience gave a *deja vu* feeling during the parade, exhibition, and the first day´s program of speeches and mini concerts. However, my personal experience of the festival was different this time. One of my contacts offered to arrange sleeping places for me and my three friends who were there filming. Although only two of us needed a sleeping place as the other two were going to sleep in their van; the Yezidi family, who was hosting us, insisted that our two friends should stay in their home instead.

The night we stayed there was special for all of us. The warm hospitality of the family was very touching to me, even though I was already familiar with the hospitality of the Mesopotamian people. My other three friends, who were Spanish, Catalan, and half-British half-Spanish, had never experienced this nature of hospitality before. That evening, Suzan, a Kurdish woman we met earlier that day, came to visit us there. The

[110] Pîroz, phone interview by author, Hamburg/Göttingen, May 4, 2021.

international atmosphere in the house was highly appreciated by our hosts as well as the other guests who were there. They were sometimes making video calls with their friends and comrades to share the excitement of having international guests in their home as well as at the festival. The evening we spent there kept our hearts warm throughout the festival as well as during the following days.

Another factor contributed to the excitement that evening. The eleven-year-old daughter of our host family, Gülda, was going to perform the following day, not as part of the competition but as part of a special guest group of child performers. Her parents were visibly proud. Gülda herself looked forward to the performance with excitement. She planned to perform as part of the children's group from Hanover. Gülda liked her dance group and was determined to continue dancing when she grew up.

The second day of the festival was a busy day like the previous year. The groups were performing one after another. However, this year, there was time for govend that included the participation of the audience. There was one at the beginning of the competition and one at the end of the day. I was invited by Melek, one of the contacts I had made the day before. She held my hand and took me to the govend. She praised me for dancing well. Afterwards, she explained that she was deeply engaged in the festival as well as with other Kurdish cultural and political activities. She was wearing a traditional dress. Her friends were surprised to see that she was wearing a dress from Erzurum instead of Botan, the region she hails from. She was very friendly to me and told me that she would have brought a dress for me if she had known that we would meet.

The dance competition was similar to the previous year. At the end of the day, the prize ceremony took place. There was a little change in the ranking. The first two prizes

went to Dilana Roj Arya from Paris, two men's and women's teams. The third went to the Group Siyar from Salzgitter. There was a special prize for the best costume, which was awarded to the Dilana Roj Arya men's and women's groups. The best research prize went to Govenda Baran from Cologne. The special jury awards went to Govenda Rengin from Darmstadt and to Koma Deran from Limburg.

An Overview of the Festival

Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, the festival of traditional dances of Kurdistan, has been taking place since the early years of the political migration from Turkey to Germany. The festival attempts to open a space for the tangible and intangible forms of cultural expression and bring together Kurds from different parts of Europe. Looking at Mîhrîcan diachronically, we see the transformation of a traditional dance to a theatrical dance in the wake of migration as a small-scale music and dance event gradually develops into a large-scale professional dance festival.

The festival started as a small-scale music and dance event in 1987 that brought the Kurdish diaspora together. That decade was marked by an exodus from Turkey to Germany in the aftermath of the coup d'état in 1980 and during the martial rule that reigned for the next three years. That was a time of intensification of nationalism; it was a retreat from democracy as well as a time of violent suppression of the left and the Kurdish movement. Although there were Kurdish political migrants arriving in Germany from Turkey in the 1980s, the majority of the Kurdish political migrants arrived in the '90s—or "90lar." 90lar is a concept used to refer to brutality and lawlessness of the '90s,

when severe human rights violations were committed in the Kurdish regions.[111] The history of Mîhrîcan parallels the history of Kurdish migration from Turkey to Germany, starting with an upshot of the first wave of political migration, *ilticacilar,* as Pîroz calls them.

Iltica means asylum in Turkish, while *ilticaci* literally means *asylum seeker*, an unusual synonym for the more common *mülteci,* which means *refugee.* When the first *ilticacilar* came, as Pîroz explains, who himself is an exile in Germany since the 1990s, the newly arriving political migrants needed a space to relax from political activities to boost the morale.

That's how a music and dance event, which would in time evolve to be Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, started. The festival went through a process of specialization in the '90s, when several folklorists as well as folklore enthusiasts and dance performers joined the organization team. Since the mid-90s also witnessed the arrival of a lot of Kurdish political migrants in Germany, the decade marks an important time in the history of Mîhrîcan, as the festival grew both in qualitative and quantitative aspects.

What we see as Mîhrîcan today used to be an evening. Toward the end of the '90s, the organizers decided to name it mîhrîcan, which means "celebration" in Kurdish. Inspired by the Persian and Zoroastrian festival *mehregan*—held to honor Mithra, the Zoroastrian the divinity of covenant and light—Mîhrîcan was, like *mehregan,* initially planned to take place in the tenth month of the year. However, due to practical reasons, the date was fixed to the Pentecost Holiday that takes place on the fiftieth day after Easter. Pentecost, *Pfingsten* in German, is a long weekend, with Monday being a public holiday in many countries in Europe. Thus, it allows for additional travel time for the attendees of the Mîhrîcan. Likewise, the empty streets and squares provide enough

[111] Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts*, 60-61.

space for the parade and govend.

Combining discursive and performative means, Mîhrîcan allows for the expression of cultural forms and traditions. Thus, it transforms physical space into a means to assert and preserve the Kurdish cultural identity in the diaspora.[112] Constituting a space of artistic communication among the community, with both the performers and the audience being part of the same reference group,[113] Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan can be defined as a folkloric act in Dan Ben-Amos´ terms. Both the performers and the audience are in the same situation,[114] and their regular interactions ensure the transmission of cultural forms.

As Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala assert in the Preface of the editors of *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* "Ethnicity is a creative response to personal and social problems."[115] The genealogy of Mîhrîcan in Germany shows an innovative adaptation of old forms to a new context, as there is no Mîhrîcana Govendên as such in Kurdistan. As an example of creative ethnicity, "[s]tability and change exist in dynamic interplay"[116] at Mîhrîcan. Traditional forms are presented in novel ways while familiarity and variability, past and present, there and here, intertwine in the festival context. "Folklore may be 'old wine in new bottles' and also 'new wine in old bottles,'"[117] says Ben-Amos. Mîhrîcan, in this regard, is old wine in old bottles but

[112] Olivia Cadaval, "Making a Place Home: The Latino Festival," in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* eds. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991), 205.
[113] Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context." *Journal of American Folklore 84* (1971): 12-13.
[114] Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," cited after Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore´s Grasp on Social Life (*Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 22, Kindle.
[115] "Preface, "in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* eds. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991), IV.
[116] Stephen Stern, "Introduction," *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* eds. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991), XII.
[117] Dan Ben-Amos "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," p. 5.

made in a new wine cellar. The festival event itself is an invention of a new tradition in the name of preserving the old ones. At the same time, it involves processes of adaptation as old forms are taking place in new conditions for new purposes.[118]

Performative Assembly: Homing in the Diaspora

Looking at the mass public demonstrations that erupted in 2011 in different parts of the world—from the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street Movement—Judith Butler analyses the bodily and performative aspect of these assemblies. She contends that the bodies that come together claim a public space and that "collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture."[119] In addition to claiming a public space, these assemblies are at the same time "a struggle as well over those basic ways in which we are, as bodies, supported in the world—a struggle against disenfranchisement, effacement, and abandonment."

In order to explain this quandary of claiming the space as well as struggling for the support to lay the claim, Butler applies Hannah Arendt's concept "space of appearance." Referring to Greek *polis*, Arendt says that it is not the city-state in its physical location, but that the true space lies between people; it arises out of people acting and speaking together no matter where they happen to be.[120] This "sharing of words and deeds" creates the space which "could find its proper location almost anywhere."[121] Stine Krøijer compares performative rituals and protests contending that both organize time and

[118] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Canto Classics) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5, Kindle.
[119] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," September 2011, accessed October 6, 2018, https://transversal.at/transversal/1011/butler/en.
[120] "Hannah Arendt," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, first published Jul 27, 2006; substantive revision Jan 11, 2019, accessed June 11, 2020,*
https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/#ActPowSpaApp.
[121] Ibid.

space as acts in themselves.[122]

The embodied agency and the performative power of the parade in Mîhrîcan creates a "space of appearance" for the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. Enacting the Kurdish culture affectively, symbolically, and materially,[123] this space enables a *homing* practice through the relationship between leaving home and the imagining of home.[124] Homing entails processes of home-building[125] and the (re)creation of "soils of significance[126]. . . in which the affective qualities of home, and the work of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materialities of rooms, objects, rituals, borders, and forms of transport that are bound up in so many processes of uprooting and regrounding."[127]

Mîhrîcan's practice of taking place in a different city each year as an annual festival is in itself transitory. However, spanning a history of about three decades in Germany, it appears to be a cultural space in which a local historical trajectory flows into a transnational context.[128] It creates a space for social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity at the historical and experiential rift between the

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[122] Stine Krøijer, "Figurations of the Future: On the Form and Temporality of Protests among Left Radical Activists in Europe," *Social Analysis* 54, no. 3 (2010), 140.
[123] Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, "Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 2.
[124] Ibid., p.7
[125] Ghassan Hage, "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-building," in Home/World: Communality, Identity and Marginality in Sydney's West (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1997), 106, in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 9.
[126] Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Minerva, 1989), 278, in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 9.
[127] *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 9.
[128] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University Press of Minnesota, 2005), 65.

location of residence and the location of belonging.[129] In this regard, Mîhrîcan is an "ethnoscape," as Arjun Appadurai conceptualizes the term, enabling genealogy and history to confront each other with the alternative and interactive modernity of this ethnoscape.[130]

In his article on the relationship between ethnic food and migrant home-building, Ghassan Hage discusses "home as an affective construct" and home-building "as the building of the feeling of being 'at home.'"[131] Hage refers to "an imagined homely experience in the past: an experience of 'back home' . . . Homing, then, depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names, and histories that have been uprooted—in migration, displacement, or colonization. Inherent to the project of home-building *here and now,* is the gathering of 'intimations' of home,"[132] says Hage. These intimations are "imagined metonymies" in that they are fragments which are imagined to be traces of an equally imagined homely whole, the imagined past 'home' of another time and another space."[133]

In "Making a Place Home: *The Latino Festival,*" Olivia Cadaval looks at the nascent history of the Latino festival in Washington D.C. The festival has become a means for both expressing culture and modifying it to the new context among the Latino immigrant groups. Cadaval articulates that "as a temporary center of power, the festival brings together large numbers of Latinos, unifies space, and generates action, during which

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[129] Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London and New York: 2000), 124, in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), p. 7.
[130] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large,* 64.
[131] Ghassan Hage, "Migration, Food, Memory, and Home-Building," (1997), 2, accessed August 23, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/12916012/At_Home_in_the_Entrails_of_the_West_Multiculturalism_Ethnic_Food_and_Migrant_Home_Building.
[132] *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 9.
[133] Hage, "Migration, Food, Memory, and Home-Building," 6.

symbols and traditions are manipulated, cultural forms are given expression, Relationships are negotiated, and new social identities are forged."[134] This applies to the Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, where Kurds living in different European countries come together once a year and reconfigure the festival setting as Kurdistan in a German city.

Mîhrîcan reconfigures the space in which realities of place and fantasies of elsewhere disseminate.[135] The transnationalism of the first generation builds the past home for the next generations[136] by gathering elements of cultural and political contexts together, thus seeking to create the metonymies of the homeland in the diaspora. Intended to be a miniature of Kurdistan, the festival provides the first generation, most of whom are exiles, with a space to ease their homesickness in remembering Kurdistan, and feeling "as if at home," while also enabling the second generation become familiar with that home. Home, in this context, "isn't musically encoded in music and dance," but "comes about as bodily experience and movement."[137]

Costumes

As the nexus of somatic and symbolic details,[138] bodies dressed in traditional clothes have a prominent role in the affective creation of Kurdistan in Mîhrîcan. The colorful clothes and the sound of the music exhibit, serve as audiovisual elements of Kurdish culture for observers. Both in the parade and in the hall, the clothes make a strong impression with their bright contrasting colors. Not only the dancers but the

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[134] Olivia Cadaval. "Making a Place Home: The Latino Festival," in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* eds. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991), 205.
[135] Birgit Abels, *Sounds of Articulating Identity: Tradition and Transition in the Music of Palau, Micronesia*, (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2008), 5.
[136] Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts*, 6, Kindle.
[137] Birgit Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: Le Hip Hop as Homing Practice." *The World of Music* 8, no. 1 (2019): 53, accessed August 20, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26654369.
[138] Deidre Sklar,""All the Dances Have a Meaning to That Apparition": Felt Knowledge and the Danzantes of Tortugas, New Mexico," *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (1999): 14-33.

majority of the participants wear traditional clothes during the festival. This helps to dissociate the festival's time and space from that of everyday life.

While the research participants expressed that the costumes, music, and dances complement each other in order to create Kurdistan in the festival setting, they also underlined the importance of each costume separately. Almost each research participant emphasized the significance of the costumes, which can represent the region, ethnicity, religion as well as the social and marital status of the person wearing these particular clothes. Besides, looking at a costume, it is possible to have an idea about the climate and the geography of the area where it comes from.

Women's clothes consist of *shalwar*, wide trousers with tight lower part; an ankle length dress, usually with very long sleeves; a vest; and a headscarf or a cap known as *kofi*. Women's clothes stand out with their bright colors. Sometimes, there is an apron on the dress. It is possible to see jewelry either around the waist or on the *kofi.* The way a woman wears her headscarf can give clues about the her family, marital status, and financial status. Green, red, and yellow, *kesk u sor u zer*—the colors associated with the Kurdish culture—are the dominant colors. When it comes to men's clothes, they mostly wear baggy trousers made of woven wool and a short, embroidered jacket known as *şal û şapik.* These are the most common men's clothes.

As expressed by all the organizers and most of the participants interviewed, the authenticity of the costumes is an important criterium to be maintained at the festival. Fieldwork in Kurdistan is highly encouraged and remunerated in the award ceremony. Looking at an overview of the last few years' winners at Mîhrîcan can offer a better insight into the significance of costumes. For example, in 2017, the special award for best costume which went to Koma Gelawej from Basel. In 2018, the special award for best research went to Govenda Baran from Cologne, who also got the second place in the

dance ranking. In 2019, there were three costume awards that went to men's and women's groups of Dilana Roj Arya from Paris and to Govenda Baran from Cologne.

It is not a coincidence that Govenda Baran from Cologne has received several awards. Traditional clothes, which are also closely associated with identity, are seen as vitally important for preserving cultural heritage. When explaining the importance of preserving traditional clothes, some interviewees referred to the geographical destruction in Kurdistan while others spoke to the cultural assimilation that forbids traditional clothing. Bawer, one of the organizers of the festival—as well as a dancer and trainer of Govenda Baran from Cologne—explains the importance of having authentic costumes with an anecdote:

> On that Sunday, we wanted to make a demonstration wearing traditional clothes. Do you know why? There is a city called Aleppo, you know, and there are a few other cities in Iraq. These cities are being destroyed because of ISIS. These are the places where these clothes are made. There were three factories in total that manufactured the fabric for these clothes, now they are all demolished. That means we can't have these costumes any longer. That was the reason for our protest.[139]

Then Bawer adds that several years before the factory in Iraq was destroyed, he managed to travel there in order to get costumes for his group. In that sense, as expressed by another interviewee, Mîhrîcan serves as a living museum of Kurdish dances as the festival accommodates the elements of Kurdish culture that suffer from the conditions of war, assimilation, and migration.

Azad, a research participant who migrated to Germany to seek political asylum, tells an anecdote from his journey after leaving Turkey in 2018. He talks about a young boy who changed his clothes immediately after crossing the border to Greece. He put on *şal û şapik* thinking that he was now free to wear it as he left Turkey. Then, the smuggler got worried and asked him to take off the *şal û şapik,* saying that otherwise they will

[139] Bawer, interview by author, Cologne, August 8, 2018.

certainly have trouble with the police.

The smuggler's anxiety has something to do with the perception of *şal û şapik* in Turkey. In March 2015, the government passed an internal security bill and described *şal û şapik* "as uniforms for illegal organisations' that "[require] a prison sentence up to three years for those who wear them."[140] *Şal û şapik* is closely associated with the Kurdish guerillas and appears to be a visual manifestation of a cultural and political identity. Güney, a folklorist who did research on the costumes in Kurdistan, offers a detailed explanation of *şal û şapik:*

> the wool is woven in a 30 cm frame, it is a special way of spinning. They put two 30 cm pieces together and they make patterns on it. It can be the emblem of the tribe or any other pattern. They use a dye obtained from plant roots; they call it *boyaxa kok giha*. It can be in different colors such as brown, purple, dark blue, [and] white. It's a men's costume. It is to be worn in the mountains. The crotch of it is higher when compared to other *shalvar* types because people wear it while herding the sheep, so you might need to jump over stones or water. Therefore, the crotch needs to be higher and it resembles trousers. . . If you look at the weddings in Hakkari, in which about 2000 people come together, girls wear traditional dresses and boys wear *şal û şapik* or what we call *leşkeri.* Kurds have been wearing it since *peşmerge. Leşker* means soldier. This is accepted by the society. For example, what the guerilla or *peşmerge* are wearing are now used as casual clothes.[141]

Costumes are an important symbol of ethno-religious identity as well. In changing the name from *Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdî* to *Mîhrîcana Govenden Kurdistan*, the festival organizers aimed it to represent different Kurdish cultures living in the region. For example, in 2018, the two jury members were wearing costumes that looked a bit different from typical Kurdish costumes. One of them, Güney, was wearing a loose, completely white outfit. Afterwards, he explained that it is the color of the Yezidi religion:

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[140] "Turkey's Kurds Protest Ban on Traditional Clothes," *EKurd Daily,* March 26, 2015, accessed May 18, 2020, https://www.kurdishinstitute.be/en/turkeys-kurds-protest-ban-on-traditional-clothes/.
[141] Güney, interview by author, Bielefeld, September 27, 2018.

> It is called *derpe qiras*, the piece that you take off through the feet. It is one of the first ancient costumes. It goes back to Yezidis, Zoroastrians, Alevis; their sheikhs were wearing these clothes. There is a saying in Kurdish which translates [to] 'They wear white; they are Yezidis. They are deserving of heaven.' The historical origins [of these clothes] are very old."[142]

Another jury member, Pîroz, explains the importance of costumes with an example. He says that the traditional white headscarf that his mother was wearing was always a reason for her discrimination in Turkey. Adding that the traditional costumes of Kurdish culture are either discriminated against or officially banned, he explains that wearing them is about making a claim to one's own culture. When I ask him about the costume he was wearing in 2018, he explains that it comes from Hawraman.

Called *dimil*, meaning two shoulders, the vest has two pointed shoulders and is part of Hawraman, a word that refers to both the Hawramani culture and the region in western and north-eastern Iran. Explaining that the Hawramani and Zazaki languages are closer to each other than Zazaki and Kurmanji, he expresses his discontent with the fact that Mîhrîcan focuses too much on the north, which refers to Turkey's Kurdistan. He adds that wanted to wear *dimil* to call attention to the affinity between different communities in Kurdistan beyond its nation state borders by wearing *dimil*.

Figure 13. A photo of two men wearing *dimil.*[143]

[142] Güney, interview by author, Bielefeld, September 27, 2018.
[143] Dana Taib Menmy, "Teacher translates Quran to save endangered Kurdish dialect" January 30, 2020, accessed August 25, 2021, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/01/kurdish-dialect-for-hawrami-struggles-for-survival.html.

Moreover, the costumes may contain hints about the larger context in which they are embedded. Güney, during a conversation with his friend's mother, learns that women in the Botan region were wearing *kofi* in the past. As a folklorist who studied folk dances and did a lot of field research in Turkey, he is surprised, as the women in Botan do not wear *kofi* today. The mother of his friend explains that women used to wear either golden or silver *kofis* depending on their financial situations. However, when the Assyrian and Armenian populations had left the region, the production of *kofis* stopped, as these people were the main manufacturers of the *kofis* as well as the accessories for them. *Kofi* can also have symbolic power. For example, in the case of a fight between two families or two tribes, if a woman intervenes by throwing her *kofi* into the middle of the fight, then the fight has to end, and peace should reign afterwards.

Figure 14 and 15. Two different *kofis* from Colemêrg/Hakkari. Photo from Govenda Baran's Facebook page.[144]

[144] June 27, 2019, Govenda Baran's Facebook page, accessed September 1, 2021, https://m.facebook.com/Govenda.Baran/photos/a.891425334537794/891431114537216/?type=3&source=54&ref=page_internal;

Exploring the significance of traditional clothing for the Kurdish community in "Kurdish Folk Costume and Clothing," Anthony Shay refers to the Slovakian example by quoting from Petr Bogatryrev. "The Slovakians in Slovakia resisted Magyarization by preserving their national clothes."[145] Adding that Kurds have been exposed to oppression in five different countries, Shay says that clothes can be a significant symbol of an ethnic group who is fighting for the preservation of their national identity.[146] Shay ends his text by saying that, as long as the assimilation attempts continue, Kurds will continue to wear their traditional clothes as an ethnic signifier. He adds that no matter how assimilated, well-off, or urbanite a Kurd might be, they will have a set of traditional clothes in their wardrobe to wear on special days. Each participant interviewed at the Mîhrîcan context confirms Shay's observations on the importance of costumes for the Kurdish culture.

Music

The concept of "folk music" is an ideologically and politically loaded concept in Turkey. State-coordinated efforts in collecting and archiving folk music have been decisive in the constitution of a Turkish folk music repertoire.[147] In dealing with its multicultural composition, the Turkish nation state deployed music as a means to assert homogeneity either by denying or appropriating the music of the other. The documentary *Whose Song is This?* shows the negotiation of national identity through a

[145] Anthony Shay, "Kürt Halk Kostümleri ve Giysileri" ("Kurdish Folk Costume and Clothing") in *Kürt Müzigi, Danslari ve Şarkıları* (*Kurdish Music, Dances and Songs*), ed. Mehmet Bayrak, (Ankara: Özge Yayinlari, 2002), 287 - 288. Originally published as "Kurdish Folk Costume and Clothing" *Folk Dance Scene* 23, no. 9, (1989).
[146] Ibid.,287.
[147] Liselotte Sels, "Türkü and Halay Between Ghent and Turkey: An Ethnographic Study of Turkish Folk Music in a Transnational Context" (Ghent, Belgium: Ghent University, 2014).

shared song across borders of different nation-states. In the Turkish case, though, a song is made to fit to "one state, one nation" even though different languages are audible and different ethnicities are visible. Music, then, is only allowed in official language or silenced if it is Kurdish, Armenian, or Greek.

A literal example of this silencing by the Turkish sovereign dates back to 1943. One day, Musa Anter, a prominent Kurdish intellectual, was taken to the police station from his workplace. The police officers started beating him. At one point, he tried to stop them and to learn the reason why he was being beaten. His so-called crime was that he was whistling in Kurdish He was arrested not for singing in a forbidden language, but for whistling a melody that was apparently seen as a crime by the authorities.

Another tragic example of denying the Kurdish identity through music happened during an annual music awards ceremony televised on one of the biggest TV channels. During the annual music awards ceremony of the Magazine Journalists Association in 1999, Ahmet Kaya, a very popular Kurdish Turkish singer, was going to be receive the award for the musician of the year. On stage, Kaya said that he was of Kurdish background and that he would like to make music in Kurdish. When he announced that he recorded a song in Kurdish for his next album, he faced an angry reaction from the other celebrities at the event. One singer sang a popular song with improvised nationalist lyrics while others threw forks and spoons at Kaya. Soon after that ceremony, Kaya left the country. In the meantime, he was sentenced to three years and nine months with charges of spreading separatist propaganda because of what he said at the music award ceremony.

Another common Turkification method is appropriating the Kurdish traditional music under the banner of Turkish music with Turkish lyrics. My interviewee Güney give a few examples. While talking about his educational background,

he says that he studied at Turkish Music State Conservatory at the Department of Turkish Folk Dance. "You see, there are two times 'Turkish' in the name. Don't get me wrong, it is okay to call it, if it really is Turkish, but there are many dances that belong to other ethnicities."[148] Ismail, a first-generation political migrant who is a dance teacher, also speaks about his experience in folk dance competitions in Turkey: "The same music could win a prize if it has Turkish lyrics, but would immediately be discarded if you claim that it actually has Kurdish lyrics."[149]

In *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes argues that music "provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them."[150] He says that "… musical performance, as well as the acts of listening, dancing, arguing, discussing, thinking, and writing about music, provide the means by which ethnicities and identities are constructed and mobilized."[151] Stokes further argues that "Ethnicities are to be understood in terms of the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of boundaries, and not on the putative social 'essences' which fill the gaps with them." The term ethnicity, according to Stokes,

> "allows us to turn from questions directed towards defining the essential and 'authentic' traces of identity 'in' music (a question with which much nationalist and essentially racist folklore and ethnography is explicitly concerned) to the questions of how music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect boundaries, to maintain distinctions between us and them, and how terms such as 'authenticity' are used to justify these boundaries."[152]

Music, in this regard, is a frequently applied means to assert an ethnic identity in the Turkish context; it is used both for the sovereign's hegemony and the subaltern's resistance.

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[148] Güney, interview by author, Bielefeld, September 27, 2018.
[149] Ismail, interview by author, Berlin, April 25, 2018.
[150] Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music,* 5.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music,* 6.

The appeal of music for identity construction comes partly from its spatiotemporal effect. Le Breton states that "Sound possesses the virtue of being able to interrupt the existing temporality and instantly create a new ambiance, delineating and unifying an event's different manifestations."[153] In its ephemera, "[s]ound imposes a before and an after. Listening to the sounds of the world forces us to experience the passage of time," as Le Breton puts it succinctly. Sound also "unites people under its banner. As a shared expression, it provides a strong feeling of belonging, that of speaking with a single voice," and "fosters solidarity among people."[154]

Combining the knowledge of architecture and sound, Greg J. Smith affirms that there is an indivisible relationship between space and sound, in other words "an acoustic experience is, by its very definition, a spatial one as well."[155] Sound affects the space and influences our perception of our surroundings. At the same time, sound is affected by space. According to Smith, sound and space determine "the capacities of the other, not only in a physical sense but also as they feed imaginations, ideas, and experiments. This is how sound begins to shape culture and knowledge."[156] It is not a one-way relationship, though. Culture and knowledge shape our perception of the sound and how we respond to it.

By confirming that hearing "constitutes the pivotal sensory channel"[157] in a culture, music constitutes a pivotal role at Mîhrîcan festivities. Several research

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[153] David Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, Kindle.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Greg J. Smith, "How Does Space Shape Sound?" accessed November 15, 2020. http://www.surroundingsound.ca/essay-one.htm.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Rafael José Menezes Bastos, "Apùap World Hearing: On the Kamayurá Phono-Auditory System and the Anthropological Concept of Culture." *The World of Music* 41, no. 1 (1999): 92, quoted in
Regina Bendix, "Pleasures of the Ear: Toward an Ethnography of Listening," *Cultural Analysis* 1, (2000), accessed 28 July 2018, https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume1/vol1_article3.html#return7.

participants mentioned that hearing music is like an invitation to dance. For example, Melek, a first-generation political migrant who has been attending Mîhrîcan since 1987, says that "For example, a Kurd just starts dancing when they hear [traditional] music; it is like an automatic response. When we hear a nice song on TV at home, one of us grabs the handkerchief and starts the govend, and the others join."[158]

Also, singing without instruments and dancing to the naked human voice is an important part of Kurdish expressive culture. *Dengbêj* denotes both the person who sings and the tradition of singing itself. When literally translated, the word *deng* in Kurdish means "voice" and *bêj* means "to say."[159] Different sources[160] as well as research participants indicate that Kurdish oral history is transmitted through the long narratives in verse sung by a *dengbêj* who can be compared to a bard, minstrel, or troubadour. These long rhythmic and rhyming stories can be about fateful events such as natural disasters, catastrophes, wars, or conflicts. Also, stories that have left a mark in the collective memory like eclipses, uprisings, conflicts, or love stories are part of the *dengbêj* repertoire. The *dengbêj* travels from village to village to collect these stories and sings them.

While explaining the musical background of dances, Pîroz explains the prevalence of *dengbêj* tradition in different parts of Kurdistan. Referring to the stereotypical image of *dengbêj,* Pîroz says that people think it is not only about singing *uzun hava,* which is a long piece of unmetered slow song, but "also about signing upbeat

[158] Melek, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
[159] Michael L. Chyet, *Kurdish-English Dictionary, Ferhenga Kurmancî-Inglîzî* (New Heaven, London: Yale University Press, 1984), accessed August 23, 2021.
[160] Muhsin Kizilkaya, "Toplumsal Hafiza ve Dengbêjler" ("Collective Memory and the Dengbêj") in *Uluslararasi Sempozyum Bildirileri: Dengbêjlik Kültürü ve Dengbêjler* (*International Symposium Report: Dengbêj Culture and the Dengbêj*) *Şirnak University Publications* 23, 2019; M. Zahir Kayran, "Kürt Folklorunda "Dengbêj"lik Gelenegi," ("Dengbêj Tradition in Kurdish Folklore") in ed. Mehmet Bayrak, *Kürt Müzigi, Danslari ve Şarkıları* (*Kurdish Music, Dances and Songs*), ed. Mehmet Bayrak, (Ankara: Özge Yayinlari, 2002), 510-514.

songs and it is common to dance to it. For example, a group at the front sings one part, and the other group at the back responds or repeats. In the meantime, they are dancing."[161] He adds that *dengbêj* is very common in the regions extending from Hakkari to Serhat—although the tradition has become extinct in Dersim and Koçgiri.

This makes me wonder why the tradition of *dengbêj* is not represented accordingly at Mîhrîcan. Pîroz explains that recently it started to get the attention it deserves. He says that, when Koma Lalis from Celle staged it five or six years ago, elderly women sang *dengbêj* and the group danced to it. He adds that Govenda Baran included it in their choreography in 2019 in the form of a call-and-response wherein one person sang and the others repeated or responded while dancing. After that, he continues by saying that "yes, normally the performers sing, but this is a rather recent thing at Mîhrîcan. You know the young, they are shy about it, they are worried that they might sing off the tone on stage or might not be able to sing properly. In the past, the elderly, however, never sang off the tone when they sang at weddings."

Part of the reason for the rarity of *dengbêj* at Mîhrîcan is attributed to the popularity of *davul* and *zurna.* A few interviewees who are actively doing research on Kurdish folklore explained that *davul* and *zurna* were incorporated into Kurdish music more than a thousand years ago when the Romani people were migrating from India and Karachi towards Europe. Despite the dominance of *davul* and *zurna*, interviewees addressed the diversity of instruments in different parts of Kurdistan. Ismail says that *erbane,* a type of tambourine that is also used in religious music, is common in Yezidi music. Meanwhile, in Mardin, *kemence* is the most popular instrument. Additionally, Pîroz mentions that *girnata* is used in Elazığ and Erzincan.

[161] Pîroz, phone interview by author, Hamburg/Göttingen, May 4, 2021.

Çığırtma, a wind instrument made from the wing bone of an eagle, is also played in Elazığ while *kaval* can be found in different parts of Kurdistan.

Dances

Govend is an indispensable part of the Kurdish culture. As highlighted by different interviewees, "[Kurds] start dancing when they hear the music; this is a typical characteristic of a Kurd."[162] "I can't call someone a Kurd if this person cannot dance govend."[163] "Dancing govend equals resisting for us."[164] "Experiencing the Kurdish culture, finding ourselves, returning to our essence, well, that is to say, govend is a part of us. Having the freedom to dance it, I feel that it is a symbol of freedom, that's what I feel when I dance it."[165]

Danced to a 2/4 beat, govend is a generic name for Kurdish dances that are danced in a line or in a circle. The dancers either hold each other's hands, shoulders, or pinky fingers. The dance typically starts with one's right foot and goes towards the right though there are some exceptions. Shoulders and knees initiate the movement in most of the dances. The arms, the hands, and, in some dances, the head complement the movement. In some dances, the hands are not visible from the front and the shoulders touch each other. The first dancer, called a *sergovend,* usually has a handkerchief in his or her hand and adds its movement to their dance while leading the govend. Traditionally, the main instruments are *davul*, a bass drum, and *zurna*, a wind instrument. It is also very common to dance to the naked voice.

[162] Yasemin, interview by author, Hanover, June 9, 2019.
[163] Ismail quotes from Mustafa Barzani, interview by author, Berlin, April 25, 2018.
[164] Engin, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
[165] Lorin, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.

Since it is common to dance to the unaccompanied human voice, people can start dancing in any casual gathering without needing any instruments. It is also a vital part of wedding ceremonies, which might last from three days to three weeks in Kurdistan. At weddings, there are very big circles of govend. Depending on religious affiliations, men and women can dance together or separately, which can mean dancing either separate circles or in separate places.

In addition to weddings and celebrations, research participants mentioned that they also dance govend while mourning. Being very slow moving, these lamenting govend can be seen in the funerals of the guerillas when their body remains are returned to their families. Several research participants also expressed that govend is very common among the guerillas. They said that the guerrillas come together to dance govend before going to the front line to fight. Without knowing who will return alive, it is a celebration of being together for the last time, says Melek. There is even a govend called *guerilla halayı.*

In addition to its ubiquity in daily life in Kurdistan, govend is also a politically loaded symbol. Especially since the 1990s, it has turned into a common metaphor in political statements referring to standing together or celebration of freedom. In Turkey, people from different leftist groups have embraced *halay* as a part of their collective political expression. It became an inevitable part of demonstrations and protests as a symbol for embodying resistance and solidarity. Besides, it has turned into a common metaphor in political statements referring to standing together or celebration of freedom.

In her article where she discusses how "music and dance can be used towards a

flexing of the lived experience,"[166] Birgit Abels explains that,

> [e]ngaging in music and dance transcends the binaries of mind–body, inside–outside, form–content and immateriality–materiality by way of its experiential quality; at the same time, it relates to both parts of the presumed dichotomies. Thus, a non-dichotomous realm arises, where a specifically and intrinsically musical mode of human dwelling in the world takes place. Dwelling, in this article, refers to the Ingoldian notion of being in the world, i.e. the s i t u a t e d process of engagement with one's surroundings which yields human embeddedness in the world.[167]

The time structure of music and dance opens a space for corporeal and visceral aspects of the culture to be realized. Such a being-in-the-world also transcends the binary of here and there, home and away.

Birgit Abels calls music and dance a dwelling practice and argues that "[a]s dwelling practices, music and dance do not merely represent or occupy time and space. Instead, they become strategies of (felt-)bodily practicing and rearranging time and space."[168] Music and dance play a similar role at the Mîhrîcan context. It fills the space and turns it into Kurdistan. The soundscape determines the place and enables the participants to make the space their own.

"For the young generation who have been living in Europe since childhood but originally are from Kurdistan, [Mîhrîcan] gives such a feeling that as if you are there [in Kurdistan]. When I joined for the first time and saw 100 to 200 young people holding hands in govend, I felt as if I was there," says Engin, who grew up in Germany as a second-generation immigrant. When I asked him what exactly it is that makes him feel as if he was there, he adds that,

> "That is a characteristic of govend. Making a circle all together, you know, a circle as a geometric shape represents peace and balance. When there is a circle and when everyone is holding hands and making the same step synchronously to the

[166] Birgit Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: *Le hip hop* as Homing Practice," *The World of Music* 8, no. 1 (2019): 49. Accessed January 9, 2020. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26654369.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

same rhythm, this creates an atmosphere, and I think it is something in this atmosphere that gives such a feeling."[169]

Competition

In most of the interviews, the narratives of the research participants showed a discursive consensus about the significance of the Mîhrîcan festival for the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. However, the topic of dance competition appeared to be contentious—among the first generation. Several interviewees expressed that different cultures or the elements of a culture should not be brought into competition with each other. They also expressed their wish that dances can be represented without having winners or losers.

Despite this concern over holding a competition, it is an incentive that encourages participation in Mîhrîcan. "For example, when a group from Northern Germany wins the competition, it is a big motivation for the other groups in that region, too" says Melek immediately after expressing her dissatisfaction with the idea of having a competition.[170] Then, Musa from the organization team says, "We have been discussing this for about 20 years. We even tried to make the Mîhrîcan like a festival without a competition. Then, the number of the participating groups decreased from twenty-six to twelve. So, we continue with the competition, but we also keep discussing it."[171]

Mert, who is a second-generation dance teacher, asserts that "Dance students can easily lose motivation unless there is a performance at the end. Having a performance with costumes is a good motivation to keep the students focused."[172] Also, when there is a competition, everyone is more careful and attentive to details according to some

[169] Engin, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
[170] Melek, interview by author, Hanover, June 08, 2019.
[171] Musa, interview by author, Hanover, June 09, 2019.
[172] Mert, interview by author, November 12, 2019.

research participants who take part in the competition. They say that they prepare the dances, the costumes, and the music better when there is a competition.

Suat and Leyla, second-generation dancers, express two opposite views when asked of their opinions on competition. Suat says, "Everyone prepares better and takes it more seriously when there is a jury." Leyla agrees, but then adds:

> Of course, the groups put more effort when there is a jury. Still, it is not a good idea because it creates a sense of competition between different groups. This is sad because it does not make any sense when we are competing against each other. What we are trying to do is to show our dances to our people . . . All of this means nothing when we see each other as competitors. We should be happy, not sad, to see a good dance on the stage. For example, we shouldn't think like 'look at that team, they are very good; we have to be better than that.' Instead, we should think like, 'They performed the dance very well, for example, they dance Kocgiri so well that they brought Kurdistan to the stage, to Europe.' That is how we should think.[173]

Despite some dancers' dissatisfaction regarding the competition, it serves its purpose in terms of encouraging participation, particularly that of the younger generation. It also helps to have high standards of authenticity and enhance the quality of the performances. Being a good dancer is something admired also outside of the competition and the festival context. Usually, it is the *sergovend* or *halaybaşı* who dances well and leads the dance. In the festival context, though, the competition ensures that all the performers excel at dancing.

During the interviews, research participants often referred to the dance competitions in Turkey and voiced their criticism about these competitions. Some interviewees had first-hand experience in these competitions and witnessed the overt Turkish nationalism in admissions as well as evaluations. In these competitions, dances with Kurdish names were not accepted, or a group did not have any chances of winning if

[173] Leyla, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.

the songs included Kurdish lyrics. These folk-dance competitions started in 1955[174]. Their popularity surged in the 1960s as a result of rural urban migration, the foundation of hometown associations, and the growth of the tourism industry.[175] National folk dance competitions, along with small-scale contests, were very popular—especially in the 1980s. However, they lost popularity in the 1990s.

In *The Dance of the Nation*, Berna Kurt asserts that a large number of dancers lose the movement style they learned in the local environment of a dance because of performing at dance competitions.[176] According to Kurt, "[i]n these contests, one of the primary goals is to dance 'like one body' in unity and perfect synchrony. Groups should dance in total harmony like the gears of a machine while performing the standardized movements with minimum error." This, according to Kurt, depicts a portrait of an anonymous public which looks like a coherent whole with no internal conflicts.[177] Although Kurt says this with regard to the folk dance competitions in Turkey, the observation holds true for Mîhrîcan.

Authenticity

During the interviews, almost every research participant expressed the importance of Mîhrîcan in terms of preserving the authenticity of the dances and music in Kurdistan. In an interview, Gül, a second-generation migrant who is both a dancer and a trainer at the festival, answers my question about the effect of migration on dances. She states that,

[174] Cemal Orhan Cetinkalp, "Türk Halk Danslari Calismalarina Yön Veren Bir Organizasyon Olarak "Milliyet Gazetesi Liselerarasi Müzik ve Halk Oyunlari Yarismasi"nin ilk 10 Yili Incelemesi" (Investigation of the Influence of the First 10 Years of the "Milliyet Newspaper's Folk Dance Competition Between High Schools" on Turkish Folk Dances") EÜ Turkish State Conservatory 2 (2012): 21.
[175] Öztürkmen, *Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey,* 193.
[176] Kurt, *Ulusun Dansi (The Dance of the Nation),* 120.
[177] Ibid., 115.

> [f]or example, when we look at the dances, we see that the dances are more authentic here [in Germany]. That is to say: here, the dances are danced exactly the same way as they are seen, experienced and danced there [in Kurdistan]. We are trying to bring them here in such a way that we are trying to preserve the culture. However, when we look at Turkey and how people are dancing there, we see that the dances are stylized, some important elements are discarded, so in a way the dances are assimilated. But we are attempting to preserve them here.[178]

Kurt suggests that *gurbetcilik* provokes the need for authenticity.[179] Although the dictionary translation for *gurbetci* is "expatriate," it is usually used to refer specifically to the guest workers. The word *gurbet* is often used to refer to foreign places or being away from home, implying a sense of homesickness. Away from their "natural" setting of the dances, performances get more conservative with an insistence on exact representation.[180] The search for authenticity, thus, serves to reduce the distance between past and present while restoring a sense of collective unity in the face of present contentions.[181]

Although the concern for authenticity is a result of migration on the one hand, it also seems to be a corollary of political and armed conflict in Turkey that causes destruction of places and changes in modes of production. The research participants emphasized the fact that culture and its elements are under threat of assimilation at varying degrees in different parts of Kurdistan. The assimilation by different nation states has been aggravated with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS) and the destruction caused by them. As in the case of the "authentic" costumes Bawer could fetch from Iraq, the pursuit of authenticity enables preservation of elements of Kurdish culture.

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[178] Gül, interview by author, Hanover, May 20, 2018.
[179] Kurt, *Ulusun Dansi,* 66.
[180] Charles L.Briggs and Richard Bauman "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2 (1992): 150, in Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 53, Kindle.
[181] Dorothy Noyes, "Group" in *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 53, Kindle.

In her analysis of the Irish Dances in the diaspora in *Dancing at the Crossroads: Memory and Mobility in Ireland,* Helena Wulff observes that "tradition relies on transmission between generations or cohorts when it is bound to change somewhat, otherwise it will not survive in the long run."[182] Similarly, in order to sustain the preservation of the culture in the wake of transnational migration, the Kurdish diaspora should ensure its transmission, which depends largely on how much the elements of the culture are embraced by the second generation, who are in turn seen as the "bearers of the culture."

For this purpose, the organization team of Mîhrîcan runs a training program that was established in 1997. There are "folklore camps" organized each year around the Christmas holiday. Some interviewees refer to this camp as "the academy of Kurdish folklore" while the others call it a "folklore camp". The curriculum includes education about Kurdish folklore and how to do fieldwork in Kurdistan. This self-organized academy gives certificates if the trainees can show an extensive knowledge of Kurdish folklore, including the dances. The trainees who get the certificate can work as dance trainers in their own cities and prepare a group of dancers for the next dance competition at Mîhrîcan.

To ensure authenticity, dance trainers travel to Kurdistan and do fieldwork there. They interview people, record videos, and learn the dances and the stories that come with them. Bawer explains their methodology and even advises me to follow the same method for my research:

> When we do research, we just observe. You should try not to interfere in the natural course of events. Do you know how you can make the best research? You should make your research participant feel comfortable in their natural

[182] Helena Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads: Memory and Mobility in Ireland,* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 18.

> environment. Don't make it obvious that you are doing research, the moment they understand that you are doing research, it is over, you lose the authenticity.[183]

This strong emphasis on authenticity is consolidated at the dance competition as it seems to be an important criterium of the jury. "What we look for is authenticity," is a consensus repeated by the jury members, which means that costumes, music, and dances should be exactly "as they are in Kurdistan." The authentic in Mîhrîcan means "dancing govend in the same way as it is danced in Kurdistan" to the music "that is not spoiled by technology" while wearing "the same costumes that people wear back home."

In explaining their attempts to preserve the folklore as it is back home, a jury member expresses that one of their main concerns is to fight against degeneration of the culture, particularly in music and dance. He says that technology corrupts local music because when traditional instruments get replaced by keyboards, music becomes standardized. When I asked the same jury member if this authenticity concern might bring along a conservative attitude towards dances, he said that they are ready to welcome change as long as it is accepted by the society. However, the performers on stage do not seem to be that welcoming of change as there is no improvisation or innovation.

Concerning authenticity, Wulff argues that "everything is authentic in its own way." Then she adds, "[N]o life form, cultural expression, or artefact is more authentic than any other, just produced at different points in time in different contexts than the very first form and expression." Finding it in "the chills running down one's spine during musical performances, for instance, moments that may stir one to tears, laughter, elation," Regina Bendix proposes that we see authenticity "as a quality of experience."[184] If we

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[183] Bawer, interview by author, Cologne, August 8, 2018.

[184] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies,* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) 13-14, Kindle.

consider authenticity as a quality of experience, this brings along the question of whether it is ever possible to reproduce that quality. Authenticity paradoxically implies a uniqueness yet seeks to retrieve it.

With regard to this attempt to perform the dances *as if* they were in Kurdistan, Richard Schechner asserts that

> [e]ven the bodies of performers—what they are supposed to look like, how they are supposed to move, what they think and believe-change radically over relatively brief periods of time. Not to mention the reactions, feelings, and moods of the audience . . . Even identical performances, in time, are not identical.[185]

Each performance, in this sense, "exists as second nature."[186] Each performance is an attempt to re-present an earlier performance.[187]

Notions of authenticity and identity are closely interlinked. As Martin Stokes suggests, "this is the music that makes us different from other people."[188] Therefore, in addition to preserving the culture after migration, the concern for authenticity is a means to define a category of Kurdishness and an attempt to maintain a coherent political identity.[189] Authenticity in Mîhrîcan subverts the dominant classifications and seeks to save the Kurdish identity from being the other defined by the dominant (Turkish and German) group. Authenticity, then, appears as a discursive tool with persuasive power.[190] "It focuses a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike 'this is what is really significant about this music.'"

Authenticity is constructed and contingent.[191] Instead of struggling to understand what the authentic is, Bendix suggests we try to understand questions like "who needs

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[185] Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7, no. 3 (1981) 4.
[186] Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," 2.
[187] Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," 7.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 8, Kindle.

authenticity and why?" and "how has authenticity been used?"[192] Posing these questions in order to understand the need for authenticity in Mîhrîcan brings us to the same answer that is repeatedly pointed out by the interviewees: preservation of the cultural heritage and its transmission to the next generation. However, "[c]ultural heritage does not exist; it is made." It is about the "privileged excerpts" chosen "[f]rom the warp and weft of habitual practices and everyday experience." Indeed, it is about the actors who choose these excerpts as well as their motivations and intentions.[193]

The organizers emphasize that the festival is an attempt to ensure that the Kurdish culture lives in the diaspora. In contrast, Bendix states that "cultures do not die, at best they change, along with those who live in them and thus constitute them."[194] The threat of extinction, however, serves as a foundation to create the festival. Mîhrîcan, in these terms, acts as the guardian of the culture and brings together the "privileged excerpts" of the Kurdish culture. Cultural continuity is thus sustained with the insistence of the first generation that the festival takes place; with the year-long preparations, which includes the participation of the second generation; and with the costumes, songs, and the body movements in the dances.

Authenticity, in this regard, functions like a slogan-concept, which serves to mobilize people for a common cause. As Noyes describes, a slogan-concept "is an abstraction that seems to validate concrete realities, the name of a purportedly eternal idea used to launch a time-specific project, a tent providing shelter to actors coming from all directions."[195]. Also, considering the different functions of a slogan-concept,

[192] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 21, Kindle.
[193] Bendix, "Heritage between Economy and Politics: An Assessment from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology," in Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds, *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2009), 255.
[194] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 9, Kindle.
[195] Noyes, *Humble Theory,* 412, Kindle.

authenticity offers a direction for the larger project of creating cultural continuity in the diaspora. It further disciplines behavior and attract marchers by defining all alternatives as negative—such as the corrupt mainstream or degenerate popular culture.[196]

Folklore

"A very thin line separates the desire for individual authenticity and the calling to convince others of the correctness of a particular rendering or localization of the authentic," says Bendix.[197] The claim to authenticity by the organizers of Mîhrîcan is at the same time a claim to authority over the culture declaring itself to be the way the culture is supposed to be. In the past, authentic folklore was often used to reinforce national identities and was instrumentalized in the foundation of nation states. From this perspective, the strong ambition to achieve authenticity evokes the same old story of folklore, which serves an (ethno-)nationalist project with the help of essentialist notions inherent in authenticity.[198]

Can we say that a similar process is taking place at Mîhrîcan? Does the statelessness of the Kurdish society make this essentialism inherent in authenticity less dangerous? Folklore has been deployed for purposes ranging "from a revolutionary force to a guarantor of stability and continuity."[199] As Noyes verbalizes, "[f]olklore proved politically labile: the same forms might be made to serve nationalist or separatist, imperial or anticolonial, fascist or socialist agendas."[200] Folklore can be used

[196] Ibid., 413-414.
[197] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 20, Kindle.
[198] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 7, Kindle.
[199] Regina Bendix and Ghalit Hasn-Rokem, eds, *A Companion to Folklore* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 4, Kindle.
[200] Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," *Humble Theory,* 68, Kindle.

for a project of domination or as a trajectory of resistance.[201] Mîhrîcan, in a way, exhibits an instance of folklore's malleability.

In their explanation of "the political contingency of folklore," Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem assert that

> [t]he "discovery" of the expressive power of group cultures has almost always occurred at moments of political transformation in territorial histories. Such discovery has been a part of firming and defining identities, often vis-à-vis other groups vying for space and control. It is not just during the often mentioned period of Romantic nationalism that this can be observed; liberation movements, especially in postcolonial situations, but also other subaltern assertions such as ethnic or social minority group rights' struggles, show this propensity to mobilize via taking recourse to expressive traditions (Gramsci 1985: 189–195; Scott 1990).[202]

From this point of view, folklore serves as a subversive repertoire for the Kurdish diaspora while also solidifying and sustaining ethnic belonging. For example, "Our culture is our resistance!" was the slogan of the thirty first Mîhrîcan.[203]

As what Lauri Honko terms a "functioning traditional system," folklore then serves as a factor that keeps the members of a group together.[204] Referring to James Scott, Noyes notes that this is the reason "why dominant populations so often regulate the assembly of subordinates" because "[a]ny such act creates a collective out of an atomized population [and] makes them realize the possibility of further autonomous action."[205] Giving the example of the Civil Rights movement, Noyes further recalls "how performance made these groups real to their potential members."[206] Mîhrîcan, in this

[201] Noyes, "Introduction," *Humble Theory,* 5, Kindle.
[202] Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, *A Companion to Folklore*, 4.
[203] "Unsere Kultur ist unser Widerstand," accessed May 24, 2018, https://anfdeutsch.com/kultur/mihrican-unsere-kultur-ist-unser-widerstand-4497.
[204] Lauri Honko, "The Folklore Process" in Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, ed, *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2013), 30.
[205] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) in Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 42, Kindle.
[206] Noyes, "Group," *Humble Theory,* 42, Kindle.

regard, appears as a technique of community-making given the fact that "[t]he reality of a community with which to identify comes from collective acts."[207]

One of the research participants, Davut, who introduces himself to be among the administration of the Kurdish culture movement in Germany, recapitulates what it means to have a Kurdish folk dance festival in Germany, saying that

> It is a serious problem to preserve the culture in the diaspora. It is not only a problem of the Kurds, but all the people have such a problem [in the diaspora] in Europe. There is a special aspect of this problem when it comes to Kurds. The Turkish Ministry of Culture has licensed whatever we have seen so far under the name of folklore. However, what we see here now [at Mîhrîcan] is a picture of a culture that is fifteen thousand years old, and it belongs to the Kurds, to the people of Mesopotamia. Here, we make this distinction. Since its foundation the Turkish Republic appropriated more than five thousand Kurdish songs, translated them into Turkish with stupid lyrics. The state used this method as part of the assimilation and destruction of the Kurdish culture. We are resisting against this at the same time. As the real owners of this culture, as a people on the move, we are responsible for showing it to the world. This is our duty.[208]

Davut is actively engaged in Tev-Çand, which is an umbrella organization for promoting Kurdish culture and art in Europe. Tev-Çand stands for *Tevgera Çand û Hunerê Demokratîk a Mezopotamya (Democratic Arts and Culture Movement of Mesopotamia)* and it has more than four thousand members in Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, the UK and in the Scandinavian countries. In the conference in 2018, the organization made a statement presenting a self-criticism that the culture and art activities were not able to respond to meet the needs of the time. Therefore, Tev-Çand decided to renew its policies and be more engaged with cultural activities, the main purpose of which is stated to be the freedom of the Kurdish people, which is identified with the freedom of Abdullah Öcalan. One of the conference results states that

> [Tev-Çand] takes measures and fights against the sovereign system's assimilation attempts towards our govends that represent material and spiritual unity of our democratic communal values as well as against the attacks in the name of "modern

[207] Ibid.
[208] Davut, interview by author, Hanover, June 8, 2019.

> dance" that try to rip the moral values embedded in the govends of their essence. It attempts to embrace all of our folkloric values in Kurdistan and acts with the responsibility to transmit them to the future. [209]

Although the conference is quite recent, the focus of Kurdish political movement on cultural and artistic activities goes back a long way. When he talks about leaving Turkey, Pîroz explains that he was active in Mesopotamia Culture Center in Istanbul but had to leave in order not to be persecuted for his political activities. One of his motivations was to focus on cultural activities as he sought asylum in Germany. Hearing that it took a few months for him to arrive in Germany, I ask how long it took him to dance his first govend after his departure. He laughs and says,

> It took very long. I arrived in Germany in the morning around nine or ten a.m. and we had this place called Kurdische Kulturhaus. I arrived there and had breakfast. At 12:00 at noon, the folk dancers the young who were interested in folk dances came there. Let's say it took me three hours to dance my first govend in Germany. Along the way, I passed Athens and Romania . . . I had to spend some time there, and I was already giving classes wherever I went . . . That was one of the motivations, to get engaged in folk dance activities in Europe.[210]

Folklore as Resistance

James C. Scott argues that all identities are socially constructed. "[P]articularly minority identities," according to Scott, "are at first imagined by powerful states." He continues,

> "Whether invented or imposed, such identities select, more or less arbitrarily, one or another trait, however vague—religion, language, skin color, diet, means of subsistence—as the desideratum. Such categories, institutionalized in territories, land tenure, courts, customary law, appointed chiefs, schools, and paperwork, may become passionately lived identities. To the degree that the identity is stigmatized by the larger state or society, it is likely to become for many a resistant and defiant identity. Here invented identities combine with self-making of a heroic kind, in which such identifications become a badge of honor. [211]

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[209] "Avrupa Tev-Cand'da Yeni Dönem" ("A New Era in Tev-Cand Europe") accessed May 16, 2020, https://anfturkce.com/kultur/avrupa-tev-Cand-da-yeni-doenem-107225.

[210] Pîroz, interview by author, Hamburg/Göttingen phone interview, May 4, 2021.

[211] James C. Scott, "Preface," *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), XIII.

In this regard, the elements of Kurdish culture that are stigmatized by the Turkish sovereign state are imbued with value in the Mîhrîcan context.

Kurds in Turkey have been "the denied other of the modern Turkish nation-state." Similarly, according to the statistics of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), there are officially no Kurds in Germany because they are subsumed as Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, or Turkish. While this creates a "paradox of a 'subject' who is 'present' in society but has no power of 'representation'," [212] Mîhrîcan as an ethnoscape poses a spatial and temporal challenge to this paradox because it defies the de-ethnification of the Kurdish identity. When we look at the festival context, with all the cultural and ideological symbols brought together in a defined space, Mîhrîcan appears as an attempt "to secure for a self-defined ethnocultural population collective autonomy, unity and identity by restoring its members to their historic homeland." [213]

Abbas Vali, a prominent political theorist working on the Kurdish issue, asserts that "[h]istory, more than any other discipline, has aided power in the construction and perpetuation of the strategy of the suppression-silence-absence which has stripped the Kurds of their 'subjectivity', turning them to beings with no voice in history." [214] In this regard, Mîhrîcan opens up the space to reclaim and realize the culture as well as the history as it enables a continuity in cultural and embodied memory. The festival yields an alternative historiography, and oral history as in the sense of the history of the other

[212] Abbas Vali, "Preface to the Turkish Edition: Stolen History," *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Istanbul: Avesta Publishers, 2005).
[213] Anthony D. Smith, "Diasporas and Homelands in History: The Case of the Classic Diasporas," in A. Gal, A. S. Leoussi and A. D. Smith (eds), *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publications, 2010) quoted in Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 5, Kindle.
[214] Abbas Vali, "Preface to the Turkish Edition."

whose voice does not get heard in history.

In his analysis of nationalism, Michael Billig suggests that the ideological habits of established nations and the daily reproduction of nationalism in the West is not considered a problem and often goes unnamed as nationalism. On the other hand, the nationalism of smaller groups is usually identified as a problem, even a threat to the national identity of the sovereign. Accordingly, the folklore of the sovereign identity is sanctified whereas that of the other is to be oppressed or prohibited. Eren, a professional musician who has been playing in Mîhrîcan since 2000, says, "I learned a lot about Turkish folklore in Turkey. When I came here, I came across new words. For example, the name of a dance was Turkish as I had learned it. However, when I came here, I saw the same dance with a Kurdish name. I learned that it is actually a Kurdish dance."[215]

There are many common dances between the Turkish and the Kurdish culture as well as among the other cultures who have lived in modern-day Turkey. One can hear the same melody with lyrics in different languages across different cultures. However, as in other examples of nation-building, folklore has been used for the construction of a new nation and the promotion of national sentiments in the foundation of the Turkish Republic, too. In the transition from the multi-ethnic Ottoman society to a "homogenous" Turkish society, folklore of the other is either appropriated or denied.

Folk dancing has been one of the ways to reproduce the feeling of being a nation and national belonging in Turkey. In her book *The Dance of the Nation*, Berna Kurt analyses the invention of Turkish folk dance tradition and illustrates how folk dance practices are representations of nationalism on stage. She adds that use of national symbols, such as the Turkish flag or pictures of Atatürk, is intended to

[215] Eren, interview by author, Hanover, June 9, 2019.

reproduce nationalism on stage and create a shared consciousness.[216] Mîhrîcan, from this perspective, follows a similar path in bringing folklore to the service of maintaining national consciousness.

Traditional dances, in this context, stand as a reference to collective identity. They enable a historical continuity taking on the sense of an inherent quality of the past. [217] Mîhrîcan is an "invented tradition," a term coined by Eric Hobsbawm that refers to customs that are both "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity."[218] Inhabiting the grounds of the present, Mîhrîcan enables creating both pasts and futures.[219]

While the experience of migration is repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees regarding their concerns about the survival of the culture, it can be inferred that it also opens up the space for freedom of expression of identity and culture in the transnational context. For example, the word *Kurdistan* is a banned word. Uttering it might have legal consequences in Turkey.[220] Although the ruling party can use it for their political propaganda,[221] this does not mean that there is a freedom to use the word in general. In his 2019 article titled "Who Can and Cannot Say Kurdistan in Turkey: A Guide," Murat Bayram explains that with a telling example:

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[216] Kurt, *Ulusun Dansi (The Dance of the Nation)*, 146.
[217] Richard Bauman, "Tradition, Anthropology of," in N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences,* Oxford: Pergamon/Elsevier Science, p. 15819.
[218] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1, Kindle.
[219] "Introduction" in *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 9.
[220] "'Kürdistan' kelimesi anayasal suç" ("The word Kurdistan is a crime") August 28, 2013, accessed June 16, 2020, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/5540/kurdistan-kelimesi-anayasal-suc.
[221] The ruling party has used the word Kurdistan twice, once it was Recep Tayyip Erdogan when he was the prime minister of Turkey in 2013, and once Binali Yildirim, the candidate of mayor for Istanbul, used the word Kurdistan for his election propaganda in the Kurdish city Diyarbakir where he asked for support from the Kurdish people in 2019.

> A five-member Iraqi family bought tickets to fly to İstanbul from Stockholm. They were going to pass to Erbil in transit. But there was a problem: one of the children's names was "Kurdistan." An employee of the Turkish Airlines stopped the family and said, 'Sorry, but you can't enter Turkey with this name,' refusing them to enter the country. The headlines said, 'There is no place for Kurdistan.'"[222]

Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan seeks to feature this imagined homeland—a homeland that is located in the past and creates a nostalgic loyalty to Kurdistan.[223] The festival connotes the previous contexts of dances as its integral part,[224] bringing together the phantasmatic and the tangible in unison.[225] Kurdistan, as evoked in the Mîhrîcan context, does not exist as a country on the map. This makes the naming of the festival an illocutionary act[226] at the intersection of nationalism and transnational migration. Recently, the festival organization created a map called the cultural map of Kurdistan, known as "*Nexşeya Govend û Çanda Kurdî*," (The Map of Kurdistan's Dances and Culture). Based on research in Kurdistan, the map shows different regions of Kurdistan:

Figure 16. *Nexşeya Govend û Çanda Kurdî* (The Map of Kurdistan's Dances and Culture).[227]

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[222] Murat Bayram, "Who Can and Cannot Say 'Kurdistan' in Turkey: A Guide," July 16, 2019, accessed June 16, 2020, https://bianet.org/5/110/210526-who-can-and-cannot-say-kurdistan-in-turkey-a-guide, retrieved on 16.06.2020.
[223] Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads,* 18.
[224] Dan Ben-Amos, ""Context" in Context," *Western Folklore* 52, No. 2/4 (1993): 211.
[225] Yael Navaro-Yashin, The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.
[226] John L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
[227] Photo from Güney, sent via Whatsapp, October 16, 2018. The map was prepared between 2009 and 2011 by some members of the festival committee.

As Martin van Bruinessen contends, "it was the exile that transformed Kurdistan from a vaguely defined geographical entity into a political idea."[228] Mîhrîcan, in this regard, plays a key role in this transformation.

The Event through the Lens of Anthropological Theories

In the context of the separation of space from place as a consequence of modernity, Stokes, following Anthony Giddens' notion of *locale*, asserts that music is one of the "countless ways in which we 'relocate' ourselves."[229] Then, he adds, "The musical event, from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity."[230] Noyes notes that the folk belong, strictly speaking, to a place.[231] Govendên, then, belong to Kurdistan and Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan is a way to enact it in the diaspora. When the folk are displaced and replaced, it is the moving bodies that sustain the culture "not through the abstract linkage of group to tradition but through empirically traceable instances of performance."[232]

According to Ben-Amos, the present mode of existence of a cultural form determines its folkloristic quality.[233] Being the crucial context for a folkloric act,[234] the

[228] Martin van Bruinessen, 2000 (as cited in Ann-Catrin Emanuelson, Bahar Başer and Mari Toivanen – "(In)visible spaces and tactics of transnational engagement: A multi-dimensional approach to the Kurdish diaspora". Kurdish Studies. Vol. 3, Number 2, pp. 128-150. October 2015:130) quoted in José Miguel Dias Rocha "The Kurdish Diaspora in Europe" April 2, 2018, accessed August 23, 2021, https://sahipkiran.org/2018/04/02/kurdish-diaspora-in-europe/#_ftn1.
[229] Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music,* p. 3.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Noyes, "Compromised Concepts in Rising Waters: Making the Folk Resilient," in *Humble Theory*, 410.
[232] Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," *Humble Theory,* 59.
[233] Ben-Amos, Dan. "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context." *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 331 (1971): 14.
[234] Ibid., 5.

performance situation occupies “a particular position in the temporal sequence of the social, economic, and political activities of a group.”[235] In Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, representing the traditional dances from Kurdistan in the mode of a festival in Germany is inventing a tradition as “a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition.”[236]

As Turner says, it is structurally unimportant whether the past is "real" or "mythical," what is important is “whether meaningful guidelines emerge from the existential encounter within a subjectivity of what we have derived from previous structures or units of experience in living relation with the new experience.”[237] Mîhrîcan, in this context, emerges as a vital communication and a dialectical dance between the present and the past.[238] Generating a cultural fiat, it helps to deny the passage of time,

> “Eliade has argued, persuasively, that major rituals, viewed cross-culturally, aspire to annihilate measurable temporality, and evoke, in order to reinstate, that generative time of beginnings, to draw on its unfailing, unstinted, and ineradicable efficacies, to redress the failures of the present "time," to purify it of its stains, sins, and stigmata, and to restore the primaveral past as paradigmatic reality.”[239]

A festival event like Mîhrîcan is rather an immanent moment which is “part of the historical process, in a time sequence, with meaning emergent from performance, but emergent with reference to the semiogenetic, meaning-begetting past.”[240] Mîhrîcan is an event intended to invoke the past and materialize a collective restoration of unity[241] in the diaspora. The sensory material brought together in Mîhrîcan reassembles the

[235] Ben-Amos, “Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres.” *Genre* 2, no. 33 (1969): 287.
[236] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition,* 4, Kindle.
[237] Victor W. Turner Victor, “Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience,” in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 36.
[238] Edward M. Bruner, “Introduction,” in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 13.
[239] Victor Turner, "Images of Anti-Temporality: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience." *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 2 (1982): 244.
[240] Edward M. Bruner, “Introduction,” in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 13-14.
[241] Noyes, “Group,” *Humble Theory*, 43.

metonymies of home and past. The festival is part of a collective attempt at homemaking in the transnational context. The time-structure of music and dance constitutes a present which tends both forward and backward in the very moment of its presentation to the senses.[242]

As a product of coordinated collective action, Mîhrîcan intensifies the sense of communal belonging[243] since the event creates a consensus as in the etymological sense of "feeling together."[244] Besides, with the year-round preparation for the annual performance, the festival expands the feeling of community to a larger social body.[245] Selda, who is a first-generation political migrant giving sporadic music workshops to performers, asserts that the large turnout at the festival—as well as the enthusiasm of the participants—is a very positive thing for the Kurdish diaspora. She further explains, "I don't know if you have noticed, or maybe you already heard about it from someone else that there are also couples here who met during the dance classes. Some even got married and have kids now. This is a great picture."[246] Mîhrîcan, in this sense, does not only create its own social base but also reinforces it "by fostering dense and potentially multiplex interaction."[247]

By bringing the memories of Kurdistan to the festival context in Germany, the event provides the space for passing the traditions *per manus*[248] between the first and the second generation. Kapferer explains that an event is "vital in the definition and

[242] Bruce Kapferer, "Performance and the Structuring of Meaning and Experience," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 198.
[243] Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," *Humble Theory*, 67.
[244] Noyes, "Group," *Humble Theory*, 43-44.
[245] Ibid., 42-43.
[246] Selda, interview by author, Hanover, May 20, 2018.
[247] Noyes, "Group," *Humble Theory*, 42-43.
[248] Noyes, "Tradition: Three Traditions," *Humble Theory*, 107.

reproduction of social and political relations,"[249] in which critical dimensions of socio-cultural existence reveal new potential for the ongoing formation of socio-cultural realities.[250] In that, an event is the affirmation and realization of a potential[251] and an attempt to actualize a space where culture can be expressed freely. The festival is momentous because it is an annual event.

As Max Gluckman stated "the event is a productive instance that shows the processual nature of social life, and the creative agency of the people involved in it." [252] The festival's historiography, in this sense, shows a process of improvisation and creative ethnicity. The event here, however, is not taken as a representational moment of a social group or of society. In *Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey*, Arzu Öztürkmen reminds us that those actors who do not participate or refuse to take part in the establishment of institutions also play a role in shaping these institutions.[253] Mîhrîcan, in this regard, presents a partial picture of the Kurdish diaspora as there are also those who are not involved in the festival neither as performers nor as members of the audience, although the festival organizers declare Mîhrîcan to be *the* festival of the Kurdish diaspora.

Mîhrîcan, in this context, purports to efface present contentions.[254] Like the rituals of affliction in Turner's analysis, Mîhrîcan underlines "the unity and continuity of the widest group to which all belong by birth and tradition."[255] This is reflected in the

[249] Bruce Kapferer, "Introduction," in Lotte Meinert and Bruce Kapferer, eds. *In the Event: Toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments*. (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 2–3.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid., 2.
[252] Marcelo González Gálvez, "What an Event Does/Is (and What it Does/Is Not)" review of *In the Event: Toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments*, by Lotte Meinert & Bruce Kapferer (eds). Anthropology News, March 13, 2016, accessed August 3, 2020, https://anthrobookforum.americananthro.org/?book-review=what-an-event-doesis-and- what-doesis-not.
[253] Öztürkmen, *Türkiye'de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik* (*Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey*), 43.
[254] Noyes, "Group," *Humble Theory,* 43.
[255] Turner, "Images of Anti-Temporality," 244.

discursive unity regarding Mîhrîcan's meaning. The organizational committee has a narrative about the festival, and this is taught in dance classes to the dancers. As a result, many of the research participants repeat the same ideas, often using the same words.[256] The words can be repeated, so asking different participants the meaning of Mîhrîcan can produce similar responses regardless of differences in age, gender, class or status of first or second generation. If we look at Mîhrîcan from this perspective, it difficult to grasp how the festival might hold the same meaning for a 16-year-old second generation individual born in Germany and a 60-year-old first generation individual born in Kurdistan and exiled for years in Germany. While cultural forms find expression, the corporeal and experiential diversity are lost in the narrative. The anthropology of experience herein offers us the tools to go beyond this ostensible unanimity.

The Experience through the Lens of Anthropological Theories

In his text "Performance and Structuring of Meaning," Bruce Kapferer writes that there is an aspect of the "uniqueness" of human experience[257] that "is generalized and lost in a set of culturally constituted constructs, concepts, or typifications." In that, culture "mediates the relations of individuals both to their material terms of existence and to each other."[258] He also argues that although it is possible to overcome or transcend this aloneness in the world through sharing lived experiences with others, it is impossible to experience another person's experience.[259] While it is not possible to experience

[256] There was a research participant who came to Germany less than a year ago to seek political asylum. Her narrative about the importance of govend for the Kurdish culture and the significance of having Mîhrîcan in the diaspora was similar to what the other interviewees reported; she said the same things in her own words.
[257] Bruce Kapferer, "Performance and the Structuring of Meaning and Experience," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 199.
[258] Ibid., 189.
[259] Ibid., 188.

another person's experience,[260] it is possible to share an experience intersubjectively.

In order to understand experience, Victor Turner proposes that we pursue the "meaning" that is attributed to an experience as a relational structure between past and present.[261]Meaning, according to Bruner and Turner, "arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallized from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life…[A]ll human act is impregnated with meaning, and meaning is hard to measure, though it can often be grasped, even if only fleetingly and ambiguously."[262] As Geertz puts it, experience requires us to pay attention to an array of "expressions-representations, objectifications, discourses, performances, whatever-that we traffic: a carnival, a mural, a curing rite, a revitalization movement, a clay figurine, an account of a stay in the woods."[263]

In the case of Mîhrîcan, the medium of expression is movement. Our attempts to grasp the meaning, however, are dominated by "a sort of text-positivism,"[264] and there is too much reliance on the verbal expression of experience. Although we need to use words to describe movement,[265] it is an immediate corporeal experience that cannot completely be translated into words.[266] Deidre Sklar argues that "It is through the interplay of corporeality and abstraction that cultural edge gathers conviction and

[260] Ibid.
[261] Victor W. Turner, "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience," 36.
[262] Ibid., 33.
[263] Clifford Geertz, "Making Experiences, Authoring Selves," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, 373.
[264] Ibid., 374.
[265] Deidre Sklar, "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance," in *DCA (Dance Critics Association) News,* (Summer 1991).
[266] Ibid.

force."[267] When we look at movement, we see "socially sedimented meanings embodied in movement systems."[268] Sklar calls movement a bodily discourse, which is mutually generative with verbal discourse.[269]

While trying to understand these meanings, Sklar turns to the larger question of "making belief,"[270] and how it is embodied in rituals.

> Acknowledging a baseline in bodily ways of knowing, we can move on, or back, to the interpretation of embodiment and abstract symbols. Movement embodies socially constructed cultural knowledge in which corporeality, emotion, and abstraction are intertwined. When a person kneels in church, for example, he is not just doing and feeling something in his body. He is worshipping.[271]

Sklar draws attention to the "immediate bodily experience in the production of knowledge and epistemologies."[272] She suggests further that different movements generate different somatic and affective experiences.[273]

Words are needed in order to understand the cultural meanings of movement, however, they cannot reveal the corporeal experience of movement.[274] As a solution based on her research and dance experience, Sklar proposes corporeal imitation of movement.[275] A somatic engagement with movement can allow for perceiving kinetically, providing a better sense of the corporeal and visceral aspects of the experience.[276]

This implies that, while movement can be interpreted symbolically as if it were a

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[267] Deidre Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" *The Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 423 (1994): 13.
[268] Deidre Sklar, "Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge," in *Migrations of Gesture*, edited by Noland Carrie and Ness Sally Ann, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 92.
[269] Deidre Sklar, "On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (1991): 6.
[270] Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 14.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 12.
[273] Ibid., 11.
[274] Ibid., 13.
[275] Ibid., 14.
[276] Sklar, "Movement Observation Guidelines," p. 2, accessed March 9, 2021, http://acceleratedmotion.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/movement_observation.pdf.

> text, it is also immediately available to be experienced vicariously in mimesis. If, for example, I go beyond the visual observation of someone slouching to then reproduce their slouch in my own body, I do more than objectify a cultural expression; I transpose the expression into an experience. Moving from distanced visual observation to close corporeal imitation can provide clues to experiences that are usually considered to be inaccessible. It can open avenues toward understanding the way cultural knowledge is corporeally constituted.[277]

This proprioceptive approach, as Sklar names it, can release ethnographic research from the limits of text positivism to a great extent. While it provides the opportunity for a more accurate translation between movement and words, acknowledging that one can never experience the experience of another, it raises the question of embodied capital, which is an acquired habitus.

Still, when I dance govend as part of a big circle at Mîhrîcan, my corporeal and visceral experience will be different from those of first and second generation individuals dancing the same dance. In another instance, I asked an interviewee to dance govend with me. While we were dancing, he told me that I dance like a Turk. When I asked him what I was doing wrong, he said that I was dancing correctly, however, "there is something about the manner or it is just a feeling that I can't describe in words," he said. In this regard, Sklar refers to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and explains that,

> The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought (like the notion of competence which is part of the Chomskian lexis). Moreover, by habitus the Scholastics also meant something like a property, a capital. And indeed, the habitus is a capital, but one which, because it is embodied, appears as innate.[278]

The Mîhrîcan festivities, seen from this perspective, succeed in transmitting the embodied capital to the next generation.

As Sklar contends, "[m]ovement knowledge is a kind of cultural knowledge."

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[277] Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 14.
[278] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993), 86.

Different steps, movements, and postures are not only kinesthetic movements, but they embody different social and cultural realities.[279] Intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge, movement is an essential aspect of culture.[280] As Sklar states, "[t]he concrete and sensory, in other words bodily, aspects of social life provide the glue that holds world views and cosmologies, values and political convictions, together." Also, "movement inevitably involves feeling … to move is to feel something."[281] Therefore, it is always an immediate corporeal experience. We utilize words to describe and understand the symbolic meanings, still, words escape what can be known through movement.[282]

Chapter Summary

"Acting in common makes community"[283] and "[c]ommunity is made real in performance."[284] By enabling transmission of elements of expressive culture from one generation to the other, Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan ensures continuity of cultural memory. In Stokes' encapsulation: "Musics are invariably communal activities, that brings people together in specific alignments, whether as musicians, dancers or listening audiences. The 'tuning in' through music of these social alignments can provide a powerful affective experience in which social identity is literally 'embodied'."[285] Mîhrîcan thus provides the space for affective attunement among the Kurdish diaspora.

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[279] Deidre Sklar, "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance," in *DCA (Dance Critics Association) News,* (Summer 1991).
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Noyes, "Group," *Humble Theory,* 42.
[284] Ibid., 43.
[285] Alfred Schutz, "Fragments on the Phenomenology of Music" in *In Search of Musical Method*, ed. F.J. Smith, (London, New York, and Paris: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers) quoted in Martin Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place,* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 12.

Considering that the body does not serve only as a source of physical and metaphorical means for the expression of culture, but also as an existential ground for its creation and recreation,[286] the govend in Germany serves as a shield against the dissolution of identity in the diaspora,[287] enabling different generations to sustain the continuation of their cultural capital. In the course of continuity, however, there is change. The govend at Mîhrîcan tend to become more theatrical as they are staged. Govend is also danced in daily life; as the interviewees expressed, they dance govend when there is music on TV and at weddings, picnics, and demonstrations; the festival of Kurdistan's dances is only one part of a larger picture of govend in the diaspora.

When we look at the festival community, it involves a diverse group of people from different ages and socio-economic backgrounds; the ethnic identity and the unity in political discourse draws them together, while the festival provides a space for their bodies to act together. The festival context at Mîhrîcan greatly resembles a village or neighborhood where everyone knows each other. It is an intergenerational cultural space that provides a setting for continuity of embodied expressive culture. By handing down the govend from Kurdistan to the younger generation, the festival community guarantees that the next generation will be dancing govend in Germany. "Sometimes we even dance at school during the breaks," says a fifteen-year-old festival participant, which exemplifies success in achieving the festival's main goal.

[286] Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst "Introduction," in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 2, quoted in Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: "I move therefore I am*," (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.
[287] Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 4.

Chapter 3: Dance and the Poetics of Space

Introduction to the Chapter

Dance is a central cultural practice for the Kurdish diaspora. This chapter steps back from the case studied in my dissertation to offer a literature review on dance anthropology—not least because the performative and competitive deployment of dance in forging connection within a diaspora may hold relevance beyond the Kurdish case. At the end of the chapter, I link my own dance experiences with the reviewed literature in order to find further interpretative possibilities for the role of govend in the Kurdish community.

Dance anthropology developed in three phases. During the 1960s and 1970s, there were attempts at creating the outlines of research methodology, arguing for the validity and relevance of dance in anthropology and thus laying the groundwork for the anthropology of dance.[288] In the 1980s, the number of anthropological studies on dance showed a considerable increase, and dance scholarship flourished, becoming gradually more interdisciplinary. In the 1990s, dance scholarship boomed drawing from semiotics, phenomenology, as well as postcolonial, poststructural, and feminist theories.[289]

After presenting the key developments in dance research, this chapter continues with an analysis of different aspects and functions of dancing, with a particular focus on collective dances to gain a deeper insight into the power of dance in transforming a space. Through an analysis of the muscular and visceral bonding that are intrinsic to collective dancing, the chapter addresses the temporality of dance, considering both its transience and its connection with cultural memory enacted by means of repetition.

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[288] Susan A. Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 505.
[289] Ibid., 503.

Dance Anthropology: A Literature Review

In "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," Sklar illustrates the two trajectories in ethnographic dance studies that emerged in the last few decades. The socio-political trajectory looks at the ways "dance works and is worked upon in the changing contexts of world politics," while the kinesthetic trajectory seeks to gain a deeper understanding of kinesthesia as a way of knowing.[290] This dissertation, in this regard, falls into the first trajectory examining the migration experience of the Kurdish diaspora through *govend.* The main focus of this study lies in the intricate relationship between dance and politics, with a special focus on "the ways in which migration shapes dance performance and reception"[291] as well as how dance shapes the migration experience.

Despite the ubiquity of migration and dance both in history and in the modern world, these two topics have not attracted much attention in scholarship until recently. Eventually, anthropologists turned their gaze to the nexus of migration and dance, which share the common ground of movement and process.[292] In 2007, at the fortieth anniversary of The Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), the conference featured the topics of dance and migration. In addition to the impact of migration on dance, conference topics included discussion of identity, displacement, religious and political occupation, as well as the relationship between demography and choreography, providing a survey of the areas of research at the intersection of dance and migration.[293] In 2008, the *Dance Research Journal* was published with some of the essays presented at the conference.

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[290] Deidre Sklar, "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," Dance Research Journal 32, no. 1, (Summer 2000): 70.
[291] Paul Scolieri, "Introduction: Global/Mobile: Re-Orienting Dance and Migration Studies" *Dance Research Journal* 40, No. 2 (Winter, 2008): V.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

Looking back from the current scenario to the steps that led up to the nexus of movement and migration study in anthropology, we see that dance has been a topic of interest since the early days of modern anthropology, albeit as a secondary topic; early attempts were descriptive studies in which dance was not the primary focus. At the beginning of the 20th century, anthropologists including Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Evans-Pritchard studied the social functions of dances in a society. At that time, Zora Neale Hurston, who was also a dancer herself, staged dance choreographies for social justice and racial equality. Meanwhile in Europe, research on dance was complicit with the political powers. During the 1930s, Rudolf Laban and his colleagues developed the notation system known as Labanotation or Kinetography, which was considered as a breakthrough because it allowed researchers to translate dance movement into written language.[294]

Body is the condition of movement and movement is central to social action, production, and reproduction; movement is essential for the maintenance of life. Attempts to emancipate the body from the constraints of tradition and patriarchy in daily life found its echo in anthropological inquiry as the body was brought more deeply to the forefront soon after the second wave of feminism and the sexual/social revolution of the 1960s. Early studies on the body highlighted the attention to power and macro structures and focused on their grip on the body.

Michelle Foucault's genealogical method turned our gaze to biopolitics and the processes that disciplined docile bodies. In Foucault's words, "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks,

[294] Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 45.

to perform ceremonies, to emit signs."[295] Therefore, even after the body became a unit of analysis, the movement and agency of the body eluded analytical thinking because it was perceived to be a "static social object."[296]

Although it is surprising that the recognition of moving bodies was delayed for so long in social sciences, the delay could be explained upon considering the Cartesian mind/body duality along with the Eurocentric bias that dominated anthropological thinking until the 1970s. Although the turn to 'the body' *per se* had come earlier, as Brenda Farnell expressed succinctly, "the body is regarded as the mechanical, sensate, material locus of irrationality and feeling" since "the Western model of person provides a conception of mind as the internal, non-material locus of rationality, thought, language, and knowledge."[297]

In her book, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory—I move therefore I am*, Farnell proposes a second somatic turn that focuses on embodied social action and moving bodies. In this second turn, the primary focus shifts to the concept of "the human body as a moving agent in a spatially organized world of meanings."[298] It can be argued in part that this second turn has already been taken considering the extant research on dance in anthropology. Research on "the human body as a *moving* agent in a spatially organized world of meanings,"[299] is growing and becoming more intersectional, but there is progress to be made in overcoming the "Western ways of 'seeing' or 'not seeing' human body movement"[300] as well as disposing of the male gaze.

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[295] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage, New York: Vintage, 1979), 25.
[296] Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory,* 2.
[297] Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: "I move therefore I am*," (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.
[298] Ibid., 15.
[299] Brenda M. Farnell, "Ethno-Graphics and the Moving Body," *New Series* 29, No. 4 (Dec. 1994): 931.
[300] Ibid., 929.

The ethnographic account of Cashinahua offers us an inspiring example that shows different ways of knowing and perceiving the body that are unimaginable to the Eurocentric conception. In his work, Kenneth Kensinger tries to understand what counts as knowledge among the Cashinahuas who live in Western Brazil and Peru. According to the Cashinahua, knowledge is not located solely in the mind, but in the whole body. "When asked where specifically a wise man had knowledge, Kensinger's consultants listed his hands, his skin, his eyes, his ears, his genitals, and his liver. When asked, "does his brain have knowledge," they responded, "It doesn't."[301]

The Cashinahuan perception of knowledge is inspirational in going beyond a fragmented understanding of the body and mind. The body is viewed as obtaining knowledge not as a passive receiver of input from the outside, but through interaction with its environment. Not the mind alone, but also the body, knows through acting, thinking, and feeling.[302] The Cashinahuan perception highlights our embodied embeddedness in our environments as human beings, which seems obvious, yet, is still alien to West-centric thinking.

In "Dance Practice and Gendered Discourse: A Connected History," published in an issue of the French gender journal "Clio. Women, Gender, History" dedicated to dancing, Elizabeth Claire looks at dance research through the lens of feminist inquiry, discussing the possibilities of going beyond the Eurocentric and logocentric fallacies. Claire proposes a historical methodology "to engage a diachronic and connected historical approach to the interpretation of corporeal cultures of the past, while engaging with a diversity of periods, geographies and forms."[303] Reminding readers that dance is an embodied

[301] Ibid., 127.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Claire Elizabeth, "Dance practice and gendered discourse: A connected history," *Clio. Women, Gender, History* 2, no. 46 (2017): 11.

social practice,[304] Claire asserts that dance should be studied in connection with other practices while maintaining a feminist gaze.

From the 1960s until the 1990s

In 1960 Gertrude Kurath wrote the "Panorama of Dance Ethnology" and used the term "dance ethnology" for the first time. In an attempt to present the objectives of dance research, Kurath argued that the time was ripe for dance ethnology to define its "subject matter, the scope, and the procedures of this emerging discipline."[305] Although dance as a research topic received the attention Kurath intended a few decades later, this panorama is partly responsible for the establishment of the ethnographic study of dance as a branch of anthropology.[306]

In 1977, Adrienne Kaeppler wrote her dissertation on "The Structure of Tongan Dance." She also wrote several articles on the art of the Pacific Islands with a particular focus on Tongan dance during the 1970s. Kaeppler's method of studying dance is analogous to a linguistic analysis,[307] in which different levels of dance movement are identified and differentiated. Taking Kurath's article as a turning point for the field, Kaeppler highlights the importance of dance in understanding a culture and argues that

[304] Jane Desmond, "Engendering Dance: Feminist Inquiry and Dance Research," in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, ed. Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1999) 309-333; "Making the Invisible Visible: Staging Sexualities Through Dance," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane Desmond, 3-32. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) in Claire Elizabeth, "Dance Practice and Gendered Discourse: A Connected History," *Clio. Women, Gender, History* 2, no. 46 (2017).
[305] Gertrude P. Kurath,"Panorama of Dance Ethnology". *Current Anthropology,* 1, no. 3 (1960): 234.
[306] Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 31–49.
[307] Gay Morris, Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance (London and New Yor: Routledge, 1996), 227.

it is an integral part of the larger social structure, and that it should be analyzed as a surface manifestation of a deep structure.[308]

Around the same time, Alan Lomax, known for his recordings of folk music and dance, provided a substantial amount of data for dance researchers. His work was based on the hypotheses that dance is "patterned reinforcement of the habitual movement patterns of each culture or culture area," and that dance is analogous to a culture's subsistence activity.[309] His theory of *choreometrics,* which argues that "dance can be 'measured' or that it is a measure of culture," was viewed as pseudoscientific by some dance researchers.[310] He was also criticized due to his attempts for an evolutionary taxonomy of cultures based on dance.

Meanwhile, there were attempts to establish organizations that would bring dance researchers together. In 1969, The Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) was founded. Then in 1978, the Society of Dance History Scholars was established. These two non-profit organizations merged together in 2017 to form the Dance Studies Association (DSA).[311] Being the largest association for dance researchers, CORD defined its mission as promoting "a globally inclusive respectful dialogue" in dance research,[312] a mission that DSA continues today.

Written in 1969–1970, Joann Kealiinohomoku's "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" has been a seminal text in dance studies. In this paper, Kealiinohomoku harshly criticizes the Eurocentric biases of earlier dance researchers. In

[308] Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," 47.
[309] Alan Lomax quoted in Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," 42.
[310] Drid Williams, "On Choreometrics," *Visual Anthropology* 20 (2007): 233.
[311] "CORD and the Society of Dance History Scholars have merged into the Dance Studies Association," *Dance Studies Association,* July 11, 2017, accessed August 24, 2021, https://dancestudiesassociation.org/news/2017/cord-and-the-society-of-dance-history-scholars-have-merged-into-the-dance-studies-association.
[312] "About," *Dance Studies Association,* last modified January 4, 2021, accessed August 24, 2021, https://dancestudiesassociation.org/about.

this article, which takes us to the next phase in dance studies, Kealiinohomoku offers a comprehensive definition of dance, which is accepted by scholars:

> "Dance is a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognized as dance both by the performer and the observing members of a given group."[313]

In addition to the emphasis laid on rhythmic human movement, this definition Kealiinohomoku also emphasizes the recognition of certain movements as dance by the members of a particular society. According to Kealiinohomoku, it is crucial for the anthropologist to be loyal to the meaning attributed to dances by the members of a group while "applying the definition cross-culturally as well as setting dance apart from other activities which might appear to be dance to the outsider but which are considered, say, sports or ritual to the participants."[314]

In 1980, Anya Peterson Royce writes *The Anthropology of Dance*, which presents a methodological discussion and guideline for studying dance from an anthropological perspective. Kaeppler calls this work, which was not available at the time, "a first step toward modernization of the Boasian tradition in the field of dance."[315] The theoretical discussion is accompanied by ethnographic data about the dances of Isthmus Zapotec based on Royce's research in Mexico.

The number of anthropological studies on dance showed a considerable increase in the 1980s. In 1985 Paul Spencer edited *Society and the Dance: The Social Anthropology of Process and Performance*, in which he highlights the need to focus on the larger social

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[313] Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" (1970), ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, *Moving History: A Dance History Reader* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001): 38.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 35.

context while studying dance. This book is a collection of essays written by anthropologists focusing on non-Western dances. Then in 1988, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* was published. In this book Judith Lynne Hanna emphasized the utility of dance for gender studies suggesting that both consider the human body as their instrument. However, the book has been criticized for reproducing stereotypical gender images.[316]

From the 1990s to the present

In "The Politics and Poetics of Dance," Susan Reed argues that

> [s]ince the 1980s, the most significant developments in dance anthropology have been in studies of the politics of dance, and the relations between culture, body, and movement. Studies in these areas, which draw from semiotics, phenomenology, postcolonial, poststructural, and feminist theories, reflect the dramatic changes that occurred in anthropology in the 1980s.[317]

It seems that this argument holds true particularly for the 1990s as dance studies proliferated at that time. This "new dance scholarship"[318] as Reed names it, can be viewed as an offshoot of a growing interest in body studies in anthropology. During this period, dance is studied in connection with ubiquitous themes in anthropology including identity, gender, postcolonialism, and sensory ethnography.

With the emergence of dance and music as symbols of ethnic and national identities since the late 19th century,[319] the relationship between dance and identity became a topic of interest for researchers in the 1990s. Anis Mohd focused on South Asian performance traditions rather than focusing exclusively on dance, and offered an historical analysis of how the tradition transformed from a communal and participatory

[316] Randy Martin, review of *Work: Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* by Judith Lynne Hanna, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 4 (Apr., 1991): 723–725.
[317] Susan A. Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 505.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid., 510.

practice to being national and passively observed. Yvonne Daniel studies how rumba in Cuban society became a symbol of national identity eliminating race, gender, and class differences.[320]

Amy Stillman studied how competition can transform a traditional dance,[321] while Zoila Mendoza-Walker explored the role of dance and music in (re)defining ethnic and racial identities in the Andes.[322] In addition, Catalan identity and its association with the sardana dance as an invented tradition was analyzed by Stanley Brandes.[323] Jan Sverre Knudsen focused on *cueca* among Chilean immigrants in Oslo[324] and a more recent study by Judy Van Zile examined the Koreans in America and how dance facilitates the preservation of their cultural identity.[325]

The relationship between dance and gender has also been extensively researched. In 1991 Ann Daly wrote "Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis," arguing that the feminist perspective contributes heavily to dance research.[326] And in "Dance history and Feminist theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze,"[327] she questions the limits of the theory of the male gaze. In addition to

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[320] Yvonne Daniel, *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
[321] Amy K. Stillman, "Hawaiian Hula Competitions: Event, Repertoire, Performance, Tradition," *Journal of American Folklore* 109, no. 434, (1996): 357–380.
[322] Zoila Mendoza-Walker, "Contesting Identities Through Dance: Mestizo Performance in the Southern Andes of Peru," *Repercussions* 3, no. 2, (1994): 50–80.
[323] Stanley Brandes, "The Sardana: Catalan Dance and Catalan National Identity," *The Journal of American Folklore* 103, no. 407 (1990): 24–41.
[324] Jan Sverre Knudsen, "Dancing Cueca 'With Your Coat On': The Role of Traditional Chilean Dance in an Immigrant Community," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 2 (2001): 61–83, in "Introduction: Global/Mobile: Re-Orienting Dance and Migration Studies," *Dance Research Journal* 40, no. 2 (Winter, 2008): VIII.
[325] Judy van Zile, *Perspectives on Korean Dance* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001) in Paul Scolieri Source "Introduction: Global/Mobile: Re-Orienting Dance and Migration Studies," *Dance Research Journal* 40, no. 2 (Winter, 2008): VII.
[326] Ann Daly, "Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis." *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (1991): 2–5.
[327] Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," in *Gender in Performance*, Laurence Senelick, ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992).

these initial studies, which also attempt to lay the groundwork for research on gender and dance, Deborah Kapchan wrote an article on shikhat dancers in Morocco and investigated how attitudes towards the dancers reflects the role of women in society.[328] In addition to these studies, other studies have addressed how dance can be a form of resistance. In *Samba: Resistance in Motion,* Barbara Browning looked at resistance through movement while attempting to overcome the mind body division.[329] Randy Martin[330] addressed how performance can be a political act, while Marta Savigliano studied the political economy of tango and its transnational journey in an attempt to decolonize dance and identity.[331] A recent study by Sevi Bayraktar explored how folk dance could be used as a political force by activist women during demonstrations in contemporary Turkey.[332]

The relationship between dance and other forms of art, as well as the sensory experience of dance, are among research topics in dance studies.[333] Dance theory and methodology[334] continued to be studied throughout the 1990s. The influence of power and politics on dance, along with the relation between cultural studies and

[328] Deborah A. Kapchan, "Moroccan Female Performers Defining the Social Body," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 107, no. 423 (Winter, 1994): 82–105.
[329] Barbara Browning, Samba: Resistance in Motion, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).
[330] Randy Martin, *Performance as a Political Act: The Embodied Self* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1990).
[331] Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).
[332] Sevi Bayraktar, "Demonstrating Dance: Women's Mobilization of Horon as Protest in Turkey," (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2019).
[333] Kaeppler, A.. "Poetry in motion: Studies of Tongan dance." (1993); Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression, 3rd Edition with a New Introduction by the Author* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012.)
[334] Anca Giurchescu and Lisbet Torp, "Theory and Methods in Dance Research: A European Approach to the Holistic Study of Dance," *Yearbook for Traditional Music 23*, (1991):1–10; Andrée Grau, "Myths of Origin," *Dance Now,* (1993); Drid Williams, *Ten Lectures on Theories of Dance* (Metuchen, N. J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1991); Selma Jeanne Cohen, *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Theresa J. Buckland, *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods, and Issues in Dance Ethnography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

dance,[335] ritual dances,[336] the archaeology of dance,[337] and the use of dance for healing purposes[338] are among the other foci of dance researchers.

Collective Dancing: Bonding in Synchronicity

Considering the experience of dancing, Farnell contends that dance can be viewed as "embodiment manifested itself as a radically heightened awareness of one's being-and-becoming in a world filled with joyful exuberance through creative physicality."[339] In this regard, Abel refers to Manning and says that the world is never something 'out there' but only rendered experienceable through movement,[340] and dance is "to open up to the complex meaningfulness of being right here, right now."[341]

This dissertation focuses mainly on collective dances in an attempt to understand the power of bodies moving in synchronicity. As music makes the soundscape, the moving bodies shape the space. By appealing to the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic sense channels, collective dancing is a way to create spacetimes collectively. As Manning beautifully expresses in the *Relationscapes,*

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[335] Jane C. Desmond, "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies," Cultural Critique 26, (1993): 33–63; *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1997).
[336] Deborah A. Poole, "Accommodation and Resistance in Andean Ritual Dance." *TDR (1988-)* 34, no. 2 (1990): 98–126; Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
[337] Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *The Dancing Goddesses - Folklore, Archaeology, and t: Folklore, Archaeology, and the Origins of European Dance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).
[338] Steven Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman,
The Performance of Healing (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[339] Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: "I move therefore I am*," (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), VIII.
[340] Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 13 quoted in Birgit Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: *Le hip hop* as Homing Practice," *The World of Music* 8, no. 1 (2019): 59.
[341] Birgit Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: *Le hip hop* as Homing Practice," *The World of Music* 8, no. 1 (2019): 59.

> Dancers can—like all other movers, only more obviously—breathe space, folding the space into the duration of a textured tactility that moves the air, creating a sense of a clearing. Dancers can walk space, such that the dimensions of space-time seem to compress. They can sound space, such that the vectors of space-time seem to inflect, curving experience. By creating such occasions of experience, the sensing body in movement alters experiential space-time such that space-time is felt in its emergence.[342]

While in some collective dances people dance independently, in others, people dance in a line or in a (semi)circle, with bodies connected by holding hands or shoulders. Through an ethnographic fieldwork on govendên from Kurdistan in Germany, this text pursues an understanding of the muscular and visceral bonding that occurs through music in collective dances in which bodies are connected.

Togetherness in time and space through movement creates a sense of cohesion that is not easy to translate into written words. In *Keeping Together in Times: Dance and Drill in Human History,* William McNeill points to the difficulty in expressing this affective experience of rhythmic collective movement and translating it into words. Referring to his memory from army drills, McNeill says that "[i]t was something felt, not talked about. Words, in a sense, destroy what they purport to describe because they limit and define."[343] There is always something that escapes words when describing the experience of dance.

Despite this elusive nature of dance, collective dancing has held an important role in social life since the early days of human history. With various aesthetic and symbolic values imbued, rhythmic collective movement has served various purposes and has been part of expressive culture. A dance circle can be imagined as one big body, it is one and many at the same time in different societies. Due to the synchronization

[342] Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2012), 71.
[343] William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2.

with music and movement, there is a sense of oneness that occurs among the dancing bodies. McNeill observes that responding to the same rhythm with the same movement creates a "muscular bonding" among bodies moving together in time and results in loss of boundaries[344] creating an esprit de corps.[345]

A recent neuroscience experiment conducted by Jessica Grahn from McMaster University in collaboration with LIVELab shows the effect of listening to live music and how it can create bonds between audience members. Measuring the brainwave data of audience members at a live concert and comparing the data from a recorded concert, the experiment shows that brainwave synchronization is greatest during a live performance. Furthermore, the results show that the synchronization is greater when people move to the same music. Regarding the experiment and the role of music in social bonding, Grahn expresses that "When people move together, there is evidence they feel a sense of community and are more altruistic."[346] There is a difference when one body moves alone to music and when many bodies move together; music allows groups of people to bond through moving in synchronicity.

It is not surprising that the cohesion generated through synchronized rhythmic movement is also manifested in military contexts. While hand holding is not involved, soldiers' the rhythmic movements and synchronized chanting creates a muscular and visceral bonding experience. As William McNeill recalls his experience from drilling in the army, he points to the similarity between dance and drill:

> Marching aimlessly about on the drill field, swaggering in conformity with prescribed military postures, conscious only of keeping in step so as to make the next move correctly and in time somehow felt good. Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling

[344] Ibid., 8.
[345] Ibid., 2.
[346] "Brain Waves Synchronize at Live Music Performances," April 9, 2018, accessed August 24, 2021, http://neurosciencenews.com/music-brain-synch-8740/.

> involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual.[347]

For the same reason, it is not unusual to find a martial art turning into a dance or vice versa. For example, when we look at movement practices such as *haka* of the Māori culture or *capoeira* of the Africans in Brazil, it is difficult to draw the line between martial arts and dance.

Conversely, dance can be used to maintain peace. As a Swazi King Subhuza II wrote about his subjects, "The warriors dance and sing at the Incwala [an annual festival] so that they do not fight, although they are many and from all parts of the country and proud. When they dance they feel they are one and they can praise each other."[348] To use Victor Turner's terms, collective dancing creates spontaneous communitas when the members of the society feel a social bond of a communion of equal individuals.[349]

Collective dancing serves as "the great leveler and binder of human communities, uniting all who participate"[350] as Barbara Ehrenreich explains in *Dancing in the Streets*.

> To submit, bodily, to the music through dance is to be incorporated into the community in a way far deeper than shared myth or common custom can achieve. In synchronous movement to music or chanting voices, the petty rivalries and factional differences that might divide a group could be transmuted into harmless competition over one's prowess as a dancer, or forgotten. "Dance," as a neuroscientist put it, is "the biotechnology of group formation.[351]

A collective dance can literally bind people; not only involving a physical connection between bodies but also creating a social connection.

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[347] William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2.
[348] Ibid., 8.
[349] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas" in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 360.
[350] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy,* (New York: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt and Co.), 24, Kindle.
[351] Ibid.

Possible Effects of Collective Dancing

One of the earliest uses of collective dance was in the context of religious rituals and ceremonies "in which the knowledge, symbols, and values of the group are embodied, enacted, and placed on public display."[352] With the accompaniment of music, in most cases, repetitive rhythmic movement results in a transformed state of consciousness. This can be used to help the performer(s) and even the audience to worship, pray, heal an ailment, or to bring about a change.

Throughout history, synchronized collective movement has also been functional in working together, either to make collective tasks easier by working to the rhythm or imitating the movements from work by formalizing them into dance steps.[353] For example, many Japanese workers perform *rajio taisō* every morning before they begin working. This tradition of performing exercises with music on the radio is less than a hundred years old in Japan, serving as a relatively new practice that harnesses synchronized collective movement to facilitate teamwork.

Group singing and dancing is one of the oldest forms of collective performance practice and entertainment. This function of dancing is still important today. Parties and discos are popular venues for dancing in the modern world. Weddings and celebrations are still among the most common dance settings. Happy moments are celebrated with dancing, which in turn contributes to a feeling of exuberance.

In addition to the goals mentioned above, a dance might have other purposes as Peter Kraus presents in *History of the Dance in Art and Education:*

1. It is a form of social affirmation, a means of expressing national or tribal loyalty and strength.

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[352] Richard Bauman, 'Tradition, Anthropology of', in N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon/Elsevier Science, 2001), 15820.

[353] "Division Between the Sexes," *Britannica,* accessed August 11, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/art/African-dance/Division-between-the-sexes.

2. It is a means of religious worship, as a form of ritual and direct means of communicating with the gods.

3. It is an art form, an outlet for self-expressiveness and personal creativity.

4. It may be a form of popular entertainment, appealing to a broader audience than when it represents an art form with a high level of aesthetic worth.

5. Dance may serve as a means of expressing physical exuberance, strength, and agility.

6. It offers an important social and recreational outlet, as a means both of restoring oneself physically and of finding social acceptance through group participation.

7. It provides a medium through which courtship can be carried on and attraction expressed between the sexes.

8. Dance serves as a means of education, in the sense that it is taught to achieve the specific purposes of education within a given society, just as art, music, or theater are taught as cultural forms.

9. Dance serves as an occupation; in increasing numbers, it offers a means of livelihood to performers and teachers.

10.Finally, dance serves as therapy; for many, it offers a form of physical and emotional release and rehabilitation; thus it is provided, along with other therapies, in many treatment centers.[354]

While this categorization of the "functions" of dance might seem exhaustive, different intentions may be melded together. Also, the purpose and meaning of a dance can vary from society to society[355] as well as among individual performers of the same dance. A dance might be danced for one purpose in one context and for another purpose in a different context. What is common across societies and individuals is as Yosef Garfinkel asserts, "a strong social context."[356]

Dance and Space

Since I started writing this dissertation, I have observed the effect of collective dancing on space as well as the atmosphere it can create. I also looked back retrospectively to the different contexts in which I had the chance to participate in or watch collective dancing. The music, the steps, and the manners can vary, but what is

[354] Yosef Garfinkel, *Dancing at the Dawn of Agriculture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 65.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid., 66.

common to collective dances is the power to reconfigure space through dance, which occurs when people hold hands and perform the same steps to the same rhythm.

While growing up, I was engaged with different dances, mostly folk dances from Anatolia, Greece, and the Balkans. This engagement was mainly through dance classes and workshops in Istanbul as well as dance festivals in other places. Although the aspect of dance to change the atmosphere could still be felt, it was not the same in dance classes. Dancing in a class setting or dancing at an event at which dance was an organic component made a perceivable difference. For example, at a wedding, people typically danced in their own distinctive ways while still performing the same basic steps, whereas in dance classes, achieving perfection in terms of synchrony and manner leaves little room for individual bodies to dance in their own individual way.

My experience with collective dance began during my childhood at street weddings in my neighborhood. These celebrations were special events for different generations of a migrant community. As a second-generation migrant, I learned dances from Bulgaria in our neighborhood in Izmir, a city in southwestern Turkey. The streets where we played as children during the summer holidays felt as if they had been transformed into Bulgarian villages. When the elderly musicians were in the mood, they grabbed their instruments and the atmosphere was visibly changed as they began to play music.

The younger participants usually began the dance, continuing with more vigorous steps as the music accelerated. The middle-aged joined in the middle of the circle, and at the end of the dance line we, the children, held the hand of the last person to learn the steps without disturbing the dance line. These were not spoken rules but happened naturally and spontaneously. As a child, I could feel a kind of “magic”

occurring when many people held hands and danced together, a magic that I am pursuing in this text.

Having attended Greek dance classes for three years in Istanbul, I had the opportunity to visit Imbros Gökceada[357] in 2014. During the Panagia on August 15th, also known as "Dekapendavgousto," I experienced a similar magic through collective dance as when I was a child dancing during street weddings. Panagia, which literally means "all holy," a title given to the Virgin Mary, is widely celebrated in Greece.[358]

In the Imbros Gökceada, the Imbrians who left in the 1960s and the 1970s began to return in the 1990s after the island's official status changed from a security zone to a tourist destination. As the Imbrians returned to their home island after a few decades, they renovated their demolished houses and made their villages a summer holiday destination, while some chose to live on the island permanently.[359] As the diaspora returns home, Panagia has become an occasion to celebrate the reunion of returnees.[360]

During the day of the Panagia, people visit the cemeteries of their ancestors, then gather at the church for the religious ceremony. During the ceremony, some people prepare food for the whole village. Meanwhile, the village square is prepared and the tables are set and decorated. People arrive in their best clothes. As the dinner starts, so does the music. Then, people start dancing; in some dances many people participate in

[357] The westmost island of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. Tenedos / Bozcaada and Imbros / Gökceada are the only two Aegean islands that belong to Turkey. They were mainly populated by the Greek Rum population until the late 1960s when they had to leave in large numbers because of the animosity against the Greek population in Turkey as a result of the Cyprus crisis. The Greek names Tenedos and Imbros were replaced with Turkish ones in 1970.
[358] "About the August 15th Panagia Celebrations in Greece," accessed July 31, 2021, https://www.greekboston.com/religion/panagia-celebrations/.
[359] Although most of the Imbrians return at least on August 15, the largest village Dereköy / Schoinoudi is still largely empty.
[360] As I saw it in 2014, the Panagia has become a tourist attraction, which seemed to annoy the returning Imbrians.

the circle dances, and in others, a few close friends or relatives dance according to their own choreography while others watch.

What makes the Panagia in Imbros so impressive is not only the physical space of the village or the island as hometown, but the affective space that emerges as a result of collective action[361] when Imbrians come together for the celebration. It is very similar to Mîhrîcan in this respect, where the dancing, organizing, parading, and moving bodies make the space for govendên from Kurdistan in Germany.

In *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*, an ethnography on space making in Northern Cyprus, Yael Navaro-Yashin discusses how recent literature in anthropology dissociated the phantasmatic from the material. Using "make-believe" as an analytical category, she argues that, **"**While scholars in the social-constructionist vein have emphasized the imaginative aspects of social formation, the new materialists have upheld the agency of nonhuman objects in distinction from (and against) the work of the human imagination."[362] By introducing the concept of "make-believe" she attempts to challenge "the opposition between these two approaches—the social constructionist and the new materialist—conceptualizing the phantasmatic and the tangible in unison by privileging neither one nor the other. The material crafting is in the making. The phantasmatic work is in the believing."[363]

In this regard, the material crafting and phantasmatic believing are both at work at the dance events both in Panagia and Mîhrîcan, where the affective attunement in tandem with bodies dancing together reconfigures the space.

[361] Noyes, *Humble Theory,* 42, Kindle.
[362] Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 5.
[363] Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 5.

That is the same power that creates a make-believe Kurdistan in the diaspora, through transforming the materiality of the place as well as imagining it to be Kurdistan. As a dance educator, Stacey Pepper Schwartz uses the metaphor that space can be thought of as a blank canvas that dancing bodies fill.[364] To quote from Manning, "[n]o event occurs in a vacuum—event and milieu are always cogenerative. This means that the milieu cannot be understood in spatial terms. It is an affective attunement more than a space, a field more than a form."[365] In this sense, both festivals are musical modes of dwelling[366] through engagement in dance and music.

Music contributes immensely to this reconfiguration of space, to the phantasmatic work in feeling that one is in another place. Sound affects the space and influences our perception of our surroundings. At the same time, sound is affected by space. Combining the knowledge of architecture and sound, Greg J. Smith contends that "in a strictly physical sense, *sound* and *space* cannot be separated; sound, as mechanical vibration, needs room to unfold, and matter to modulate."[367] Concerning this indivisible relationship between space and sound, according to Smith, each "determines the capacities of the other, not only in a physical sense but also as they feed imaginations, ideas, and experiments. This is how sound begins to shape culture and knowledge."[368] It is not a one-way relationship, though. Culture and knowledge shape our perception of sound and how we respond to it.

During different dance events and lessons, I heard different stories about how

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[364] "Space: Inside, Outside and Through," January 25, 2010, accessed July 28, 2021, https://www.danceadvantage.net/space/.
[365] Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 26.
[366] Abels, "A Poetics of Dwelling with Music and Dance: *Le hip hop* as Homing Practice," p. 49.
[367] Greg J. Smith, "How Does Space Shape Sound?" accessed November 15, 2020. http://www.surroundingsound.ca/essay-one.htm.
[368] Ibid.

space affects the way we dance. Even though this might sound like environmental determinism, one can find this sentiment in locals' explanation of dance steps. In narratives about dances, the movements or gestures carry traces of the environment where they originate. For example, I often heard that the dances of mountainous regions tend to involve keeping the feet on the ground or have smaller steps instead of bigger steps as there is relatively less space to move around. Or, as a local dancer and dance instructor from the Greek island Leros once said, the dances of coastal regions resemble the movement of the fish living there, the smaller and the faster the fish are, the faster the dances are. Somehow, that explanation fits the fast and small steps of *horon* of the Black Sea region, which is famous for its anchovies. Dance, in this sense, accommodates elements of the external world and manifests an embeddedness of being in the world, at least in people's accounts.

Dance and Time

The spacetime of a dance is here and now.[369] Dancing intensifies the sensation of the here and now in its transience. As the American dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham reveals, "[Dance] gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive."[370]

Dance "takes place in the present moment, its ontology exists in the act of its own disappearance."[371] While this is the case in contemporary dance, which focuses heavily

[369] In *Always More Than One,* Manning expresses that we have not succumbed to the promise of linear time yet, but instead we are living in *spacetimes* of experience (Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2012): 16).
[370] "Cage and Cunningham," *Northwestern Libraries,* Accessed August 11, 2021, https://sites.northwestern.edu/cageanddance/jcmc/.
[371] Elizabeth Claire, "Dance Studies, Gender and the Question of History." *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 46 (2017): 161.

on improvisation, traditional dances rely on memory and repetition. Even if it is newly created or invented, a traditional dance is typified by continuity accommodating references to the past. Enacting and reenacting cultural memory, repetition is key in traditional dances. Not only do the steps, gestures, and movements repeat as the tour of the dance circle repeats, but also a traditional dance repeats over time for generations.

Wulff contends that collective memory is "disturbed unequally in the minds of the members of a group" and it is shaped by the present. Cultural memory keeps changing "but it can be united at rituals and performances."[372] Wulff then references Paul Connerton, who explains that,

> our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order. And yet these points, though true, are as they stand insufficient when thus put. For images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past, I want to argue, are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances.[373]

As an embodied expressive form, dancing, in this regard, is a performative means in the recollection of the past and uniting the cultural memory in the present.

The dances at Mîhrîcan, similarly, with all accompanying elements, enable the Kurdish diaspora to ensure that the cultural memory is conveyed and sustained in the wake of transnational migration. Bodies dancing together serve as a guarantor for identity, memory, and collectivity. That is the reason why the Kurdish diaspora attribute so much meaning to a two-day festival that takes place once a year. Although the festival

[372] Ibid.
[373] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3–4.

is ephemeral, it opens up a symbolic space loaded with references to the past and the homeland.

Choosing to transmit the embodied expressive culture among others, the festival community guarantees the transmission of Kurdistan's dance traditions to the next generation. Because the preparations for the dance competition continue throughout the year, this transmission occurs over more than the span of the two-day festival, making govend a part of daily life for the second generation in Germany. As dance and music are expressive means that bring the community together, group cohesion is ensured through the transmission of communal practices.

Repetition, in this regard, is a significant aspect of traditional dances. One must repeat dance steps in order to learn them: the dances are composed of repeated movements and the dances repeat for years, decades, or centuries. An embodied expressive culture continues to exist only if it is repeated. When a dance ceases to be repeated only for one generation, it faces the risk of being forgotten. Repetition, in this regard, is essential for the continuity of any tradition.

The Politics of Collective Dances

When bodies move together in synchronicity, this creates a sense of togetherness. Moving together to the same music can even resemble a boundary loss and a feeling of oneness.[374] Watching a collective dance, one can observe it as one and many at the same time. Collective movement sustains group cohesion; it can be a muscular manifestation of

[374] William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 8.

group solidarity.[375] Considering that each body is a political entity, a collective dance can also be a means to make a political statement.

Perhaps, it is this power of dance that results in its prohibition at different times in different places. Turkey is not the only country where the sovereign has attempted to ban the dance and music traditions of a community. Irish dances were performed in secrecy during the 16th century in Ireland. Capoeira of African slaves was forbidden in Brazil in during the 19th century and listening to jazz or dancing to the "Negermusik" was prohibited during national socialism in Germany. Similarly, Sardana was forbidden during the 1940s in Spain.

Then, adjusting Gayatri Spivak's question, we can ask: "Can the subaltern dance?"[376] As a subversive strategy defying politics, with the embodied human agency inherent in dance, dancing can be a strong means to make a political statement. What makes moving together to music so contentious for the political powers is perhaps the mobilizing power of dance. As in *Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan*, celebrating the Kurdish culture in Germany is a clear example of making a political statement for the visibility of culture and identity given that such a festival is unimaginable in contemporary Turkey.

Conversely, dance can be used as a political means of power. For example, after its foundation in a multi-ethnic region, the Turkish state attempted to lay claim to elements of folklore from other ethnicities in its territory and called them Turkish. The point here is not to make an essentialist divide between what is really Turkish or what is not, but to provide an example of nation states deploying dance for their political agenda. Moreover, in the nationalization process of folklore, folk dance competitions

[375] Ibid., 10.
[376] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, ed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) in Elizabeth Claire, "Dance Studies, Gender and the Question of History." *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 46 (2017): 166.

have played a large role in the definition, representation, and acceptance of Turkish folk dances by the public. Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, in this sense, repeats the same fallacy, perhaps due to an aspiration to be a nation state. Despite being a contentious topic among the festival community, the dance competition remains the *raison d'etre* of the festival.

Still, the name and organization offer an alternative to an idea of folklore based on ethnic or national identity. Welcoming participation of different dances from different cultures living in Kurdistan, the festival encourages a perception of folklore based on a sense of regional belonging rather than ethnic identity. Hypothetically speaking, if the Turkish state had taken a similar approach, it could have embraced the multi-ethnic and rich folklore in its territory. Then, the folklore of the people, having common elements as well as their own particularities, would not have been as contested among the "imagined" divisions of national identities and ownership of the elements of culture. For example, Newroz could have been celebrated by Kurdish and Turkish people equally and simultaneously instead of being banned or denied to Kurdish people.

The Separation between Audience and Performer

Govend is the generic name for the collective dances of Kurdistan. During the fieldwork in Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, whenever I used the word "dance," it caused confusion among the research participants. Hearing the word dance, the research participants wanted to make sure that I was still referring to govend. The word "dance" for them is associated with dances like salsa, tango, or other types of ballroom dances.

In Kurdish, govend is a noun; "to dance govend" is expressed as "dîlan girtin," meaning *"to hold the dance,"* while, in Turkish, the word *dance* usually refers to partner dances. The term "to play" is more commonly used to refer to performing traditional

dances. On the other hand, *halay,* the Turkish word for govend*,* is also a noun in Turkish. *Halay cekmek* is used to mean to dance *halay,* literally "to lead the halay," while *folklor oynamak* (playing folklore) is used to refer to folk dances performed on stage.

In the early days of anthropology, encountering the dances of others, anthropologists described such dances with words like primitive, esoteric, and monolithic, as Kealiinohomoku harshly criticizes in "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance."[377] It is possible to see terms such as "the African dance" or "the Indian dance," which are inaccurate because there are various dances in a given culture that cannot be subsumed with these words.

Kealiinohomoku asserts that "[e]thnic dance should mean a dance form of a given group of people who share common genetic, linguistic, and cultural ties."[378] Then she refutes the presupposed distinction between ethnic dance and art dance by showing how ballet might fit into the category of ethnic dance using that categorization. She further suggests that rather than using the term ethnic dance, "traditional" and "theatrical" could be used as a more meaningful working classification, the former referring to "integral function of a society," while the latter refers to one that is "deliberately organized."[379]

Similarly, in "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," Kaeppler refers to the ethnocentric fallacy citing "the possibility that dance may not be 'art' (whatever that is) to people of the culture concerned, or that there may not even be a cultural category comparable to what Westerners call 'dance.'" She emphasized that "an adequate

[377] Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" (1970), ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, *Moving History: A Dance History Reader* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001): 33–34.
[378] Ibid., 39.
[379] Ibid., 43.

description of a culture should place the same emphasis on dance as given to it by the members of that society" (1967b:iii). She continues by saying that,

> Much social or religious ritual manipulates human bodies in space and time. But is the cultural manipulation of bodies among the Maring or Kaluli of New Guinea, for example, at all comparable to the Tongan manipulation of bodies in a formal *lakalaka*? Is participation in rock and roll in any way comparable to watching ballet? Indeed, should "dances of participation" and "dances of presentation" be classed as the same phenomenon either in our own or other cultures, let alone cross-culturally?[380]

Rather than proposing an answer and risking producing another fallacy in response to this question, I would humbly propose viewing the question as a reminder. If we should ascertain that dances can be grouped into "dances of participation" and "dances of presentation," it retains the risk of replacing the categories of "ethnic dances" and "art dances." Unless the dancing community itself categorizes the dances as such, it will still be the observer's point of view. Concerning this topic, Boas expresses that,

> song and dance accompany all the events of Kwakiutl life, and that they are an essential part in the culture of the people . . . Although there are expert performers, everyone is obliged to take part in the singing and dancing, so that the separation between performance and audience that we find in our modern society does not occur in more primitive society such as that represented by the Kwakiutl Indians.[381]

If we can ignore the choice of words such as "primitive" and "modern," this quote from Boas points to a fundamental difference resulting from the hierarchy of senses; it shows the encounter of the Western eye with participatory dances.

In contrast to the sharp separation between the performer and the audience in dances of presentation, in the Mediterranean and Balkan societies that I had the chance to observe, dances are predominantly participatory. In the Turkish context, for

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[380] Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 46.
[381] Franz Boas, "Dance and Music in the Life of the Northwest Coast Indians of North America," *The Function of Dance in Human Society* (New York: Boas School, 1994) quoted in Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," 35.

instance, all of the audience is expected to participate in dances when they occur. Here, I am mainly referring to weddings, which are the most common dance settings. "Are we here to sit?" is a popular phrase used to invite the audience to the dance floor. There are exceptions, when a specific group of people, for example the friends of the bride or the cousins of the groom, are invited to dance. Apart from this, all of the audience is welcome and strongly encouraged to be on the dance floor; the more the merrier.

When we look at the Mîhrîcan festivities from this perspective, it can be argued that the participatory character of these dances is sacrificed for the sake of presentation on stage. The research participants emphasized that govend is essential for them, and that it is an important part of daily life. Given the opportunity to continue my fieldwork in the future, I would ask: how does it feel to watch the govend without participating? Is the experience of seeing it on stage comparable to dancing govend? Unfortunately, these particular questions occurred to me only after the fieldwork was concluded.

Chapter Summary

Although a moving body constitutes the heart of lived activities,[382] it remained a marginal topic until the late nineteen sixties. Despite the delayed attention to moving bodies in anthropology, dance studies have flourished over the last few decades. Looking at dance research in the second half of the twentieth century, this chapter presents the essential dance research relevant to the topic of this dissertation.

[382] Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: "I move therefore I am*," (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), VIII.

Following the literature review, this chapter focused on analyzing different aspects of collective dancing. It then presented an analysis of the spatiotemporal power of dance, along with the different functions and meanings of dancing. In an attempt to gain a deeper insight into the significance of collective dancing, this chapter provided examples of collective dancing from different contexts.

Chapter 4: Self-Reflection and Methodology

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter offers a self-reflective analysis and thoughts on the positionality of the writer. Through autobiographical accounts and anecdotes relevant to the topic of the text, the chapter attempts to tackle the sensory immersion of the researcher. Also, the chapter explains the methodology and the details of the fieldwork. Written as a first-person narrative, this chapter acts as a space for expressing the activist motivations behind the text, some concerns and constructively intended criticism regarding the festival organization, and things that are lost and found[383] during cultural translation.

Positionality

The Kurdish community in Turkey is the "quintessential other" of the dominant Turkish identity. In Germany, they are the migrant others, added to which is the discrimination and hostility towards migrants from Turkey at large. Perhaps only in Germany, as migrant subjects we get even with our Kurdish neighbors at least to a certain extent in terms of the discrimination faced. Everywhere, the national order of things puts us in categories of "us" and "them," creating "differences and hierarchies between an imagined dominant culture in contrast to cultures of the distant "others."[384]

Regardless of one's level of attachment to their national identity, it can be a strong determinant in social encounters. It mostly reveals itself through language, and it is part of the social and cultural capital that a person carries. During the fieldwork at Mîhrîcan, I could conduct interviews only in Turkish, which influenced my

[383] Helena Wulff, "Introducing the Anthropologist as Writer," In *The Anthropologist As Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 8.
[384] "Representations on Migration," *Critical Migration and Border Regime Research*, https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/444546.html, accessed August 24, 2021.

positionality in the field. It created a distance in the first instance, as I could see a glimpse of wariness in the research participants' faces. However, as I introduced myself, the research participants realized that I was not a mainstream Turkish nationalist with anti-Kurdish sentiments.

As I explained that I was affiliated with the Academics for Peace, their expressions immediately changed, and this detail seemed to establish a sense of trust during fieldwork encounters. Some interviewees from the first generation had their eyes filled with tears. A few research participants expressed their gratitude and respect for what we did by signing the Peace Petition and risking our privileges to stop the injustice against the Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey during 2015 and 2016.

To briefly explain who the Academics for Peace are, I provide the following quote from the website for the association in Germany:

> Who are the Academics for Peace?
>
> In January 2016, 1,128 academics signed the Peace Petition, titled 'We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime' in order to draw the public's attention to the brutal acts of violence perpetrated by the state in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. As a reaction to the heavy smear campaign which was immediately triggered by Turkey's President Erdogan's offensive remarks towards the signatories, the number of the signatories rose to over 2,212.
>
> What happened?
>
> Immediately after the release of the petition, many signatories were dismissed from their posts, prosecuted, and their citizenship rights, such as traveling were revoked. After the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the suppression on the signatory academics got fiercer; hundreds more academics were dismissed with statutory decrees, their passports were confiscated, they were banned from public sector employment, and criminal investigations were launched. Many of those academics have had to leave the country and are now facing extreme difficulties in resettling in a new place and continuing on with their professions. Violations of academic freedom and freedom of speech in Turkey have reached a dire situation. The court hearings of the peace academics started on December 5,

2017. Accused of making "propaganda for a terrorist organization" the signatory academics faced sentences of up to 7.5 years of imprisonment.[385]

Having faced investigation at the university where I was working, and being dismissed from my position at the beginning of 2017, I left Turkey soon before my passport was confiscated. As I began this research on Kurdish dances, I was a novice exile in Germany. Instead of taking the time to learn Kurdish or German before beginning the fieldwork component, I chose to start my research as the issue needed immediate attention and further endeavors that would pave the way to peace.

Understanding that this dissertation alone would not bring peace, I still aimed to remain connected to the reasons I had to leave Turkey, where demanding peace conditions in Kurdish regions was declared as supporting "terrorism" by the political powers. Therefore, I decided to focus on the festival of Kurdistan's dances despite the language barrier that limited the extent of fieldwork interviews. Still, it was possible to converse with most of the festival community as they could speak fluent Turkish. Sharing the same destiny with my research participants, most of whom were exiles expelled from their homeland due to their political activities and cultural identity, facilitated the fieldwork allowing for common ground to conduct research.

Between the Senses and Logos

In "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," Deidre Sklar compares two works from the early 1990s and looks at Cynthia Novack's *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (1990) and Sally Ness's *Body, Movement and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community.* Although their approaches differ, both ethnographies "incorporate felt kinetic knowledge to address the cultural meanings

[385] *Academics for Peace,* accessed September 2, 2021, https://www.academicsforpeace-germany.org/

inherent in movement."[386] As opposed to the traditional practice of erasing the researcher's body from the ethnographic text, both Ness and Novack engage bodily as they incorporate the felt dimensions of movement experience into their research.[387]

In terms of incorporating the writer's kinetic experience of the dances, I must admit that this text could have been much richer. For example, observing dance classes in preparation for Mîhrîcan could have provided a deeper insight into the proprioceptive aspects of the dances. Still, the interviews and observations from the festival context offered enough input to pursue, forcing me to think deeper about questions of transnational migration, nationalism, identity, and the connection between these concepts and our sensory immersion in the world.

During my fieldwork in the festival context at Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, I observed that the festival helped to make the experience of exile more bearable for the first-generation research participants. In a way, by bringing Kurdistan to Germany, the festival context with its embodiment of the homeland provides relief from nostalgia by easing homesickness. As the research participants expressed, the festival setting makes them feel as if they are in Kurdistan.

Although a deeper kinetic involvement in the field proved impossible, it is important to note that this writing process has been a way of knowing for me. Swinging between the sensory and the logos, I was trying to make sense of the experience of exile myself. As I reflect on the experience of working on this dissertation, I ask myself if I

[386] Deidre Sklar, "On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (1991): 70.
[387] Ibid., 70–71.

may have projected some of my feelings about exile onto my field and my research participants. Alternatively, perhaps my field has been holding a mirror to me, revealing some aspects of the exile experience that I could not see otherwise. Either or both are distinct possibilities. This dissertation, in the end, has provided me with the opportunity to think and read more about the importance of sensory experience in the diaspora.

Oftentimes, I tried to make sense of the experience by applying it to texts from writers in exile. Perhaps, the conditions of exile today are different from those of Hannah Arendt's, Salman Rushdie's, or Edward Said's, as it is easier to alleviate nostalgia, to a certain extent, in a globalized world of increased mobility and communication. Still, Arendt's "We Refugees," Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands," and Said's "Reflections on Exile" became my companions as I read them over and over again.[388] While reading about exile made it easier to manage, I still felt that there was more to it than intellectualizing the experience. Feeling like a stranger in somebody else's homeland, these years in Germany also provided me with an opportunity to observe different ways of directing and disciplining the sensorium among different cultures.

Kurdish and Turkish cultures respond similarly to music: "We dance even to a door creaking," which is a stark contrast to the German response. I would like to explain with an anecdote from a concert in Göttingen, a university town in midland Germany. I was new to the city, and I went to listen to live music at a small concert hall called Nörgelbuff to familiarize myself with the music scene in the city. That day, there was a band called Azul Balam who played very lively and energetic Latin music. Of course, I

[388] Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees" in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1994); Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2012); Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Vintage, 2010).

started dancing while listening to the music; it was not a conscious decision but a habitual response to the music. In a few minutes, seeing the serious gazes that turned to me, I noticed that I was the only one among the audience who was moving. People's looks gave me the impression that I was doing something unusual.

Hence, I learned that not every society responds to music in the same way. After almost five years in Germany, I learned to not move to music but to watch (something I hope to unlearn one day). Leaving the personal aspects of this experience aside, it reveals a fundamental difference between ways of being in the world dominated by different senses. The emphasis laid on the sensory channel has a considerable influence on how we perceive the world and how we respond to it. As Ong explains,

> "Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer… Vision comes to a human being from one direction at a time… When I hear, however, I gather sound from every direction at once: I am at the center of my auditory world, which envelops me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence… You can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound. There is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight."[389]

Methodology

In conducting this research, I applied the classical methods of anthropology. The analysis of Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan is based on ethnographic fieldwork that includes interviews and participant observation. The main part of the fieldwork was conducted during the annual festivals of 2018 and 2019, both of which took place in Hanover. Unfortunately, the festival did not take place in 2020 due to the Covid-19 lockdown; otherwise, attending the festival for the third time would have provided the opportunity to substantiate the conclusions from the earlier fieldwork.

[389] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 72.

This study is based on 26 interviews, 18 of which were made while Mîhrîcan was taking place in Hanover. The interviews conducted during the festival were semi-structured, with most questions focusing specifically on the festival. The rest of the interviews were in-depth, and were conducted in different cities, including Berlin, Bielefeld, Cologne, and Göttingen; all except one were done face-to-face. Twenty-two of the interviews were carried out with people who were directly involved in the festival, either as organizers, dancers, or as audience members. Seventeen of the interviewees were first generation migrants. Among the research participants, 16 were men and 10 were women.

In addition to the interviews, participant observation was an essential component of the fieldwork. The major part of the observation is based on attending the festival; in some cases, remembering instances of dancing *halay* from the Turkish context enabled me to think comparatively. In addition, I attended several dance workshops in Göttingen and in Berlin, including BalFolk events, where European folk dances are taught and practiced, as well as several Kurdish, Mediterranean, and Jewish dance workshops. These workshops provided me with a deeper insight into proprioceptive analysis of different movement techniques.

Meanwhile, I encountered a substantial challenge. Translating the spatiotemporal power of collective dancing and the festival context into words revealed the gap between a verbal account and the sensory aspects of an experience. Although interpersonal communication is mostly dominated by verbal expression, an experience itself is highly multi-sensory, and expressing an experience in its totality entails more than words. There has been a limited understanding of the sensory experience as a consequence of the unreflected preference for writing and print since the 19th century, as Bendix contends. This is changing now, and "ethnographers are beginning

To recover sensuality and corporeality as a vital part of understanding expressive culture."[390]

Still, the question remains as to how we can grasp and express an experience in its multi-sensoriality. I admit that this text remains incomplete in terms of doing justice to the sensoriality of my field. For example, if you were watching an ethnographic film about Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan instead of reading this text, you could aquire a much better feeling of the festival, perhaps the sound of the drum would echo in your mind even after the film was over. At least, it would appeal more to your senses rather than solely to your eye. In other words, the effect of the multi-sensory and corporeal aspects of the festival would have had a different influence with audiovisual material rather than being limited to words.

Writing Style: An experiment

In addition to the limits of logocentrism, two questions preoccupied me while writing this dissertation. Spending hours among the books and in front of the screen, I kept asking myself: Who is going to read this text? My supervisors, a few fellow academics, and perhaps some master students. I should admit that as I wrote this text, I mainly considered my research participants as the target audience. I hope they will read this text from the beginning to the end without getting bored. That was one of the main motivations for my use of simple language. I do not mean to suggest that they would not enjoy reading a complicated text, but that it was an opportunity for me "to write badly". Like Michael Billig "I never became a fluent speaker, let alone a thinker, of the academic

[390] Regina Bendix, "Pleasures of the Ear: Toward an Ethnography of Listening," *Cultural Analysis* 1, (2000), accessed 28 July 2018, https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume1/vol1_article3.html#return7.

dialect."[391]

Therefore, I tried to write this dissertation in the simplest and clearest way possible. In an age when the language of communication is undergoing a drastic change, I believe there is an opportunity for the social sciences to update its language. Must we insist on using jargon that is not accessible to many people? Wouldn't it make more sense for the "real" world and the academic world to be more in touch with each other, at least in terms of language?

As an activist researcher, I am dedicated to making knowledge more available to the public, as well as changing the conditions of the problems I am writing about. Therefore, the second question I asked very often was: What is the meaning of writing such a text? Will it serve any purpose other than decorating a bookshelf? Will it affect any positive change in the real world? I do not expect a dissertation to bring about a substantial change, but at least I would like for this text to do more than help me advance my academic career. Contributing even a little bit to the decriminalization of the Kurdish culture in particular, or unsettling a nationalist who defends the elimination of the other from social and political life in general, will be more than enough.

A Criticism

The Kurdish political movement in Turkey is actively working to create conditions of peace so that different cultures can live together harmoniously. It is also famous for the women's struggle, whose fight not only helped raise the consciousness of Kurdish women, but also of Turkish feminists, and it improved conditions for Kurdish

[391] Michael Billig, *Learn to Write Badly* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2, Kindle.

women at a practical level. I must admit that during the festival, the implicit nationalist agenda and the palpable gender disparity created a dilemma in which I could not decide between expressing criticism and remaining silent.

Seeing that the intricate relationship between nationalism and folklore were at play in the diaspora, I was motivated to challenge the research participants. However, I decided to remain silent on this issue for two reasons. First, it did not seem fair to criticize the nationalism of a stateless society, as the conditions of their nationalism are different from those of a nation-state. As in this case, for the Kurdish diaspora, it means resistance against homogenization attempts of a nation-state rather than serving homogenization or oppressing other cultures. Second, although the organizers' insistence on preserving authentic folklore could be compared to a nationalist agenda, the festival clearly meant something else for the attendees, a social context that evoked 'home' and brought it to the diaspora.

Regarding the topic of gender disparity at the festival, I found it more difficult to remain silent as a feminist, but I did. During the parade at the first festival I attended, I could not help feeling uncomfortable when I saw the girl on the horse. This image reminded me of the first Kurdish wedding that I attended back in Istanbul. I had known the groom but not the bride. When I saw the bride at the wedding, I was a bit worried that there was something wrong as she looked quite sad. As the wedding went on and the people were dancing, I went to her table and asked her if everything was all right. She said that everything was ok, yet seeing me confused, there was a sign of a smile on her face, and she immediately hid her smile. She didn't say anything further.

When I went back to my table, my friends asked what I was talking about with the bride. I told them the reason and they burst into laughter. They said, "Don't you know that a bride is supposed not to smile during her wedding?" No, I did not know that! I did not

know that the bride is supposed to look sad because she is leaving her parents' house. If she looked happy, that would mean that she was unhappy at her parents' house and that she was happy to leave.

When I saw the girl on the horse during the parade in Hanover, I remembered this moment from the wedding in Istanbul. It was easy to talk about it openly with friends. In the end, it was an intercultural encounter, and within a circle of friends it was acceptable to be understandably surprised, or even criticize the elements of a culture that limits women to fixed roles. However, as a researcher, I was not sure if it was appropriate to discuss my impression and criticism.

Still, I know that preserving culture is a selective process. Why should one choose to preserve this? As a feminist, I wanted to criticize it harshly, but as an anthropologist in training, I thought I should reserve my criticism and try to understand. Therefore, I asked the first woman I interviewed expecting a similar unease. She told me that this was one of her favorite images in the festival. This bride on the horse reminded her of her childhood and their life in the village back home. When there was a wedding, she said, the people from the groom's village would go to pick the bride up from her village. With the bride at the front on her horse, all the villagers would follow her until they reached her new home. It was just like the parade in Hanover, as she explained.

I know that I should communicate people's accounts of their experiences and the meanings attributed to them rather than criticizing. Still, I would like to emphasize that the urge to criticize the image of the bride on the horse is part of a feminist criticism that the festival organization deserves. At Mîhrîcan, ¾ of the dancers and the audience are women. In contrast, the jury was composed of 5 men and 2 women. The organization team, too, is almost all men with only a few women. As soon as I noticed this gender

disparity, I voiced my concern to some people from the festival community, including the organizers and the audience, expecting to hear similar perspectives. However, most of the research participants did not see it as a problem and said that the older men are responsible for the organization because they are the ones who know better, therefore they are in these administrative positions. When I shared my criticism with one of my main interlocutors, Güney, he agreed and expressed his wishes for a big change.

Still, I wanted to hear a similar stance from a woman. At the festival in 2019, I asked a young woman who refused to speak to the voice recorder because she was politically very active and did not want her identity to be revealed. When I asked her if she saw a problem in terms of the gendered division of labor, she was completely content with older men being in charge. When I insisted on asking, she said maybe it was problematic, but it was changing. Then, she gave the example of two women who were playing the *davul* at the parade. She said, "Look at them. Normally it is men who play the *davul*. This year, there were two women who were playing the davul. This is a sign that things are changing." On the one hand, this was a valid answer, still, one might expect that a Kurdish dance festival that is committed to the principles of the Kurdish movement could do much better in terms of gender equality.

Some Thoughts and a Confession

As I chose the topic of dance for my dissertation, I was conscious that I would work on a topic that will be empowering both for me and for the research participants. My determination to avoid a topic that could result in retraumatizing people was due to a background experience from my masters. For my thesis, I focused on questions of identity and nationalism among a migrant community to which I belong (second generation). The Turkish minority living in Bulgaria migrated to Turkey throughout the 20th century,

and the biggest migration wave took place in the late 1980s in the aftermath of Bulgaria's violent assimilation practices. During the interviews, I was surprised to hear narratives that I had never heard before. It seemed as if there was an unspoken consensus among the migrants, including my family and relatives, about not speaking of the bad memories of the past.

It was obvious how hard it was for the research participants to recollect the memories of assimilation, the stories that were buried in silent corners of their minds, even somehow forgotten. While telling the stories of leaving their homes and arriving in a new land that was supposed to be the "ancestral homeland," the research participants recalled earlier moments from their assimilation as if they had chosen not to remember until somebody directly asked them. Asking them to tell their stories might be seen as a valid approach, as it was for the sake of academic research. However, seeing that people were retraumatized while narrating their stories left me puzzled with the question of whether it is ethical to extract people's stories, even when it is in the name of science. For me, this question is still unanswered.

I strongly believe that stories should be told, because in many cases, individual stories are lost while history keeps a record of the stories of the powerholders. Therefore, it is important and even necessary to collect the stories and share them with a wider audience. Still, it does not feel completely right to obtain such stories through interviews. As researchers, we leave them in their reality after the interview is over and go back to our desks to put their stories into academic texts for the academic market.

In addition to these concerns, I would like to make a confession. After I decided to do my fieldwork at Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan, although as an activist researcher I was confident with my topic, there were times when I was worried that studying this

topic might increase my difficulty in returning to Turkey one day. The word Kurdistan is a forbidden word in Turkey. Having newly arrived from Turkey to Germany, the fear of using a forbidden word showed itself during the first interviews. When a research participant was using the word Kurdistan, I almost shushed worrying that someone could hear us. Moreover, in my early field notes on Google docs, I did not write the word Kurdistan but used a "safe" word instead. With time, I realized that my worry was not productive, and I opted instead to write it down. As a researcher, I was not free from the mental and emotional baggage I was carrying; this deserves to be acknowledged.

As I became accustomed to the relatively more liberal atmosphere in Germany, this fear gradually subsided. When I look back now, I can see that it was not only one word but a feeling—a feeling that resulted from the politically oppressive atmosphere in Turkey. The feeling doesn't disappear upon simply leaving the country. Although I am not afraid anymore, I know that in the Turkish context, the name of the festival as well as the content of this text will be seen as a breach of law by authorities. That being said, I still humbly hope that this dissertation will open up some space for forbidden words, music, and dances, thereby echoing the resistance of the people as well as their wish for peace and freedom.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offers an account of the writer's situatedness in the socio-political context of the festival. In addition to the positionality of the writer and the methodology used, this chapter genuinely shares some thoughts and criticisms about the festival context. Also, explaining the motivation behind the choice of topic and writing style, this chapter provided a space to narrate, question, criticize, and confess the thoughts and

anecdotes that are relevant to the dissertation but could not be explained in previous chapters.

Conclusion

"If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptional opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the 'stranger' presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics;" Georg Simmel begins his brief essay "The Stranger" with these words. Simmel, then, adds that "spatial relations are only the condition, on the one hand, and the symbol, on the other, of human relations."[392] This telling definition of The Stranger as a sociological type is also a concise summary of the condition of a migrant subject in certain respects. A transnational migrant, in this regard, constituting an inevitable unity of roots and routes, interacts with spatial orders both as a condition and a symbol of identity.

In today's world, spatial relations are governed by border regimes, which regulate territories by marking them, thereby including or excluding human populations. Nation states, which appear to be the ubiquitous form generating border regimes, are taken for granted as the natural order of things despite their recency and proneness to change. For example, the borders of former empires were segmented into nation state borders only about a century ago; in the case of many post-colonies, the formation is even younger. There was no Republic of Turkey as such about a hundred years ago. Germany was divided until three decades ago.

Two significant effects of borders are relevant to the topic of this dissertation, and thus are discussed in depth throughout the text. The first is that borders aim to contain human populations and regulate human movement. Borders inhibit movement of people, but only in a certain direction; a citizen of a European country can travel freely to almost anywhere in the world, while someone from a non-European country needs

[392] Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 403.

to submit stacks of papers and prove that they have financial resources as part of the application process for a visa (which may not be approved) in order to legally enter a European country. Borders, in this sense, reproduce and reinforce extant inequalities in terms of the movement of people—in slogan form: between the *west* and the *rest*.

Borders also create an inside and outside, emphasizing differences at discursive and practical levels. Nationalist discourses, accordingly, suppose homogeneity within their borders, either in reference to outsiders beyond the borders, or to migrants within the borders of a nation state. "We" are different from "them," but very similar to each other within our borders. Despite the claims for homogenization, we know very well that, for example, the Republic of Turkey or the Federal Republic of Germany, actually and factually host heterogeneous and diverse populations.

This dissertation explores the Kurdish transnational migration through the lens of a newly created festival. Kurdish society in Turkey and the diaspora in Germany, by de facto, defies homogenization discourses. Kurdish populations, as the quintessential other in the Turkish nationalist discourse, continue to be exposed to dynamics of othering in Germany, where migrants in general, and migrants from Turkey in particular, confront racist discourse and practices. As a stateless society amidst the extant border regimes and the national order of things, the Kurdish diaspora intensively focuses on preserving a collective culture in the wake of migrations.

Pursuing the Kurdish transnational migration from Turkey to Germany, this dissertation focuses on Mîhrîcana Govendên Kurdistan (The Festival of Kurdistan's Dances). As an annual dance festival that takes place in a different city each year, Mîhrîcan provides a space for preserving selected elements of culture against the effects of migration and assimilation. With a special focus on govendên from Kurdistan (Kurdish

collective dances), the festival attempts to transmit the knowledge of costumes and music, as well as the narratives of a homeland that accompany dances, to the second generation in Germany.

Taking place on the long Pentecost weekend, the festival enables the diaspora to come together once a year and reconfigure the festival space as Kurdistan. Also, with the yearlong preparations for the festival in the form of folklore camps for trainers and weekly dance classes for the performers, the festival guarantees that the second generation is actively engaged with the Kurdish culture. With references to a past that extends beyond the history of nation states and a sense of belonging in terms of regional identity, the festival attempts to hold elements of Kurdish culture together. Its history of three decades illustrates how a small event that emerged out of a need to come together developed into a professional festival.

The persistence and the development of the festival is closely related to the importance of collective dancing in Kurdish culture. Almost every research participant emphasized that govend is an important part of Kurdish cultural and political expression. Although this may have been influenced by the research partners being interviewed in the festival context, it is an established truth that collective dancing plays an important role in Kurdish cultural and political expression.

In addition to its significance for the Kurdish diaspora in particular, the persistence of the festival also shows the power of dance in general. As a means of cultural expression, dance and music are elements of expressive culture that bring people together. Collective dancing, throughout history, has served various purposes and has been instrumental in sustaining a sense of community. Particularly in participatory dance events and social occasions of which dance is an organic part, moving together to the same music creates a sense of coherence through physical and affective bonding.

Mîhrîcan as a case study exhibits that a dance event can encompass material and affective aspects of a culture, bringing tangible and intangible cultural heritage together. The costumes, the music, and the dancing bodies are influential in turning the festival setting into a make-believe Kurdistan. Sound and music pervade the space, and the moving bodies in synchronicity reconfigure the space. By evoking cultural and bodily memory, collective dancing also fuses the personal and the social. While the meanings attributed to a dance can change as a result of its function and significance in a given context, the power of dance and music as a means to bring a community together perseveres.

In pursuit of the power of collective dancing, this dissertation also examines how elements of folklore have been appropriated by nation state ideologies. Music and dance have often been the targets of nationalist discourses as a means of expression of nationalism. Claiming ownership to elements of cultures and denying the other of sharing the same song or dance is a common fallacy of nationalism's appropriation of folklore. In that, the festival organization reclaims what belongs to Kurdish culture. Although this resembles the same nationalist fallacy in terms of claiming ownership, a critical difference lies in whether a sovereign or a subaltern claims ownership.

Mîhrîcan, in this sense, demonstrates that folklore can also be used as resistance to hegemonic discourses and can empower a community. Mîhrîcan is an aesthetic form of inventing a tradition collectively by repurposing traditions from the homeland. By keeping the first generation together and attracting the second generation to learn and practice the dances of Kurdistan, the festival provides a space for community resilience.

This research, therefore, attempts to create an academic space for the acknowledgment of the significance of the festival for the Kurdish diaspora. Aiming for a

constructive discussion of questions of nationalism, border regimes, migration, and resilience through the lens of collective dancing, the text offers an in-depth analysis of a Kurdish dance festival in the diaspora. In this attempt, it also includes three shortcomings that are visible to the writer's eye. First, individual migration stories or life narratives of the research participants deserve a larger space in such a text. While this dissertation explores the historical and political background of the Kurdish transnational migration deeply, the narratives of the participants are present only in relation to the festival context.

In terms of expressing the rich sensory environment to the reader, this research could be much richer if it was complemented with audiovisual material. Due to the limits of textual expression and the occularcentrism inherent in textual representation, it proved inadequate to translate the rich multisensory festival environment into text. Moreover, a textual representation involves the writer as an intermediary between the reader and the festival. Although audiovisual material also involves mediation, it gives the audience more space to arrive at their own interpretations.

Finally, there is the gender perspective. The text points out gender-based hierarchies in the organization of the festival and stops there. Ideally, there would be equal representation of women and men among interview participants. Considering these limitations as opportunities for further research, I would like to find the means to complement this text with audiovisual material—perhaps through podcasts and video interviews that include participants in the festival community, which could be incorporated into a webpage. Such a medium could offer first person narratives with the presence of the actors and actresses themselves. In that, giving priority to interviews with women will be crucial to help overcome the gender gap and give more space to herstories in the face of history.

Such a multimedia environment would also provide an opportunity to compensate the Mîhrîcan community in ethical terms. This dissertation would not be possible without the collaboration of research participants in the field. It is likely that the present work will result in personal academic benefits, such as a title or academic career opportunities for myself, whereas the benefits of this dissertation for the festival community, if any, will be much less visible. With this uneasiness and a feeling of responsibility, I hope to maintain collaboration with the festival community and continue further research on Mîhrîcan in particular, and dancing in the diaspora in general.

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5. Selda, Hanover, May 20, 2018.
6. Eylem, Hanover, May 20, 2018.
7. Gül, Hanover, May 20, 2018.
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11. Engin, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
12. Berivan, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
13. Melek, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
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15. Leyla, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
16. Suat, Hanover, June 8, 2019.
17. Eren, Hanover, June 9, 2019.
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20. Mesut, Hanover, June 9, 2019.
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