

TRADITION AND POLITICS:
NEW YEAR FESTIVALS IN TURKEY

DISSERTATION

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By

Yücel Demirer, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:

Professor Margaret A. Mills

Professor Richard Davis

Professor Theodore G. Hopf

Professor Dorothy P. Noyes

Approved by

Adviser
Interdisciplinary Graduate Program

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the observance of the solar new year marked by the spring equinox in Turkey. It looks at two contested versions of this celebration and their cultural and political effects in the Turkish political scene. Through a comparison of the developments of the solar new year celebrations, this dissertation seeks to identify and analyze the relationship between the sphere of culture - specifically, traditional culture - and the political decision-making processes. This study may best be described as the mapping of a specific domain of culture that also seeks to analyze political ramifications.

Using this approach, performance is viewed as crucial to the process of identity creation and collective communication. The consciously repeated modes of behaviors stand as testament to the cultural outcome of the constructed power relations and provide multi-layered frames in which various readings of reality are possible. This research proposes that by studying the difference between actual and ideal, we would be able to create a new series of lenses to observe the deeper layers of socio-political reality. In this sense, this is primarily a work seeking a deeper understanding of the cultural operations that correspond to the political sphere.

By highlighting the impacts of folklore on the political process, this work participates in a long overdue search for fresh and alternative approaches to studying insufficiently-represented issues. This project claims that under specific circumstances,

ethnography appears as an innovative tool and methodology for opening up inquiry and enriching other methodologies. Thus, this work explores the application of an already well-developed political ethnography in this type of research, and provides an argument that the method not only provides cross-cultural readings of the political, but also suggests grounds on which to assess existing scholarship.

annem, Necla Demirer
ve
babam, Kemal Demirer'e

To my mother, Necla Demirer
and
my father, Kemal Demirer

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VITA

June 25, 1963..... Born - Turgutlu, Manisa, Turkey

1986..... B.A. Political Science, Ankara University,
Ankara, Turkey

1989..... M.A. Political Science, Istanbul University,
Istanbul, Turkey

1997..... M.A. Sociology, Fisk University, Nashville,
Tennessee

1998 - present Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State
University

2000 - 2001..... Research Associate, Mershon Center, The Ohio
State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Interdisciplinary Graduate Program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation concerns the observance of the solar new year marked by the spring equinox in Turkey. It engages two contested versions of this celebration and their cultural and political effects in the Turkish political scene. Through a comparison of the developments of the solar new year celebrations, this dissertation seeks to identify and analyze the relationship between the sphere of culture - traditional culture in specific - and political decision making processes. What is intended in this study can be best described as mapping a specific domain of culture and describing the political ramifications of it. The study involves both archive and field work and, like every similar endeavor, it has a great deal of personal background or history.

It would not be accurate if I were to describe the development of this dissertation as a strictly planned endeavor and introduce myself as an ethnographer since the beginning. When I came to the Ohio State University, I had a keen academic interest in the politics and culture of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. However, I did not have the outline of a concrete project in mind. Deciding on a dissertation topic was no easy task. My scholarly universe, based on previous graduate degrees in Political Science and Sociology, was rather restrictive with regard to my aims. Besides the limitedness of

archival and quantitative data, various aspects of the intellectual climate and academic traditions in Turkey were affecting the utilization of some specific research methods to produce original research on these sensitive issues.

I did not want to replicate research oriented toward national and international political strategy, which mostly depended on secondary sources, nor did I want to stifle my work with the limited data. These, of course, were not minor obstacles. However, I felt that the concerns related to the surrounding security matters and political situation had to be dealt with within the framework of responsible scholarship. The lack of first hand chronicles illustrating the real experiences, and the often poor historical records that were kept by non-official agencies created a difficult setting. Surrounded with a boldly defined and politically charged set of accepted research norms, and limitations in reaching some of the data, one's effort for innovation can easily be seen as unscientific and value-ridden. For instance, making use of survey methods was not only difficult because of the security related concerns but also highly discouraged and interrupted by the politically driven systematic condemnations of this type of previous research in Turkey.¹ In a highly divided and politicized research setting, in which the idea of random selection easily loses its meaning, it was impossible to depend upon sampling. One who attempts to make inferences about the whole population by studying a portion of it, can easily be blamed for being biased in a highly polarized setting. In the middle of sharply divided agendas and security concerns, similar difficulties should be acknowledged for

¹ For instance, after publishing his *Doğu Sorunu: Teşhisler ve Tespitler, Özel Araştırma Raporu*, (1995), a limited study of the ethnic Kurdish issue of Turkey, Doğu Ergil, a political sociologist from Ankara University, was harshly criticized for the methods of his work. Some of the critics, disregarding the surrounding factors, preferred to focus on the shortcomings of the project and the informative aspect of the

tape recorded intensive interviewing, and collecting oral histories that include personal information.

My search for a research project both meaningful and doable, in C. Wright Mills' words a study that can "complete[d] its intellectual journey," was encouraged by an imagination that has the capacity ". . . to shift from one perspective to another -- from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessments of the national budgets of the world. . ." (Mills 1959: 6-7). During this phase, my discovery of the Folklore discipline played a crucial role in defining my research methodology. Folklore not only assisted me in enriching my scholarship, but also shaped the future of my scholarly life. Enrolling in every single Folklore and culture oriented class, my "new path" opened the doors of traditional and popular culture and introduced me to a new set of tools that gave me hope in dealing with the mentioned inadequacies and difficulties of a politically sensitive research topic. The position of the Folklore discipline and its ever continuing identity search became a perfect match for my own pursuit. Its somewhat "marginal" position in academia perfectly fit my "marginal" interest and created a disciplinary home for my research. The dynamism attached to the continuous identity search of the Folklore discipline, and the open mindedness in Ohio State's Folklore circles, led me to apply my previous background and interest towards studying the culture politics connection in the Kurdish minority in Turkey with the newly discovered set of lenses and research tools.

A graduate seminar taught by Margaret Mills on traditional Persian culture brought me to some readings on *Shahnameh*, the "Book of Kings" written by the 10th

century Persian epic poet Ferdowsi. Gradually, I ended up reading of the Noruz celebrations in Iran, and this phase opened up the world of ancient new year celebrations in the Middle East and Central Asia, which brought Nevruz and Newroz celebrations to my attention as a valid scholarly research venue. The crucial parts of this decision-making process were, first, to bring novel sources to study the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Second, the observation of a deep void of research on the cultural aspects of the given issue encouraged me to create a project that drew research on the Kurdish issue into the cultural sphere. On the basis of this belief, I wanted to analyze the symbolic practices of these festivals, which could shed new light on the problem and its peaceful resolution. In the case of Newroz, studying the temporary communal disorder that takes place at the festival site, I intended to display the temporary alternative order and analyze it to make better sense out of the Kurdish ethnic culture and the characteristics of the Kurdish opposition in Turkey. By studying Nevruz, on the other hand, I wanted to reveal and analyze the cultural aspects of the official discourse and the social and cultural dynamics that are at play in terms of minority policies in contemporary Turkey.

The preparation process was demanding but fulfilling. Considering the underutilization of research in conflict-laden situations, I wanted to produce research which might provoke action and provide a framework for the resolution of this deep-seated conflict in Turkey. The uniqueness of the topic and the surrounding conditions required a holistic perspective suitable for taking various variables into account. Developing expertise which is informed by multi-disciplinary collaboration on the studied tradition required a long list of readings from a variety of disciplines. Preparing

myself for unique field research also required searching for a prevailing innovative methodological design. In the process of preparing to produce insightful, credible, and applicable work, I learned immensely from the intellectual environment in which I was newly embedded.

I should specifically mention the discussions over the Rigoberta Menchu affair in Dorothy Noyes' graduate seminars as part of my preparation. Rigoberta Menchu Tum is a Nobel peace prize laureate (1992) and the daughter of a Mayan activist who was burnt to death on 31 January 1980 in the Spanish embassy in Guatemala. Her testimonial text, *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984) describing the campaign of military terror was later accused by the *New York Times* on 15 December 1998 as being nothing but a set of lies and distortions. This news was based on Anthropologist David Stoll's book, *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999). Stoll's work and the following series of discussions on politics of academic work, academic authority, and the responsibility of a researcher under political controversy and human rights related concerns, created a useful venue to further my interest, and provided a constant reminder of the ethical aspects of my research.²

The Historical Background of the Contested Re-Appropriations

The Turkish national rebirth took place after the end of the Ottoman rule. The Ottoman State's defeat in World War I was followed by a political and military resistance led by Kemal Atatürk and his close circle of comrades. After the victorious end of the war of independence, the Turkish republic was founded on 29 October 1923. The newly

² For an account of the issue, see Arias 2001.

established regime led to a series of reforms to exceed the western framework for the creation of the new state and society. The main principles of Kemalism became the road map for the development of the newborn republic: Republicanism, laicism, nationalism, populism, statism and revolutionism (Jung 2001: 59-62; Gülalp 1997: 54-56; Gellner 1994: 81-91).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding leader of the Turkish republic, was born in 1881 in Salonica into a family of modest means. He was educated in military schools. As a cadet he learned French and became acquainted with liberal ideas. The Ottoman poet of liberty, Namık Kemal became his main source of youthful inspiration. He was influenced by western philosophy and was particularly attracted to Positivism as a crucial framework for dealing with the causes of the decline of the Ottoman regime. He believed that education was the engine of progress and impediments to the creation of universal civilization had to be removed (Mango 2002: 9-16; Ahmad 2003: 75-76).

Later on, during his volunteer service in Libya, he personally observed the powerlessness of the idea of Islamic brotherhood while facing revolts of the Arab independence movements against the Ottoman State. While serving there, he not only lost his “romantic, patriotic optimism, characteristic of his generation of officers,” but also his hopes for the continuance of Ottoman multi-nationalism (Mango 2000: 103-108). The Balkan Wars and the following 1913 treaty that ended the war brought another reason to support his lack of hope for the future of the Ottoman regime. As part of the mass population exchange, his mother and sister had to leave Salonika and settled in İstanbul. This added a significant personal dimension to the military and political defeat that the collapsing Ottoman state was facing (Mango 2000: 122, Kinross 1965: 65). When the

Ottoman war ministry and the military leadership were starting to be subordinated by German officers in 1914 in order to carry out reforms that were considered necessary after the Balkan wars, the power struggle was observed cautiously by a group of military leaders, including Atatürk (Mango 2000: 124-127). This, along with other factors, estranged Kemal Atatürk from the ideas of the then popular *Ottomanism* - the union of the various religious and ethnic communities under the Ottoman reign, and *Islamism* - reconstruction of the empire on the basis of Islamic principles, and eventually to his initiation of a nation state.³

During the difficult ten years between 1913 and 1923, *Anatolia's* population and socioeconomic structure had dramatically changed.⁴ The cities became less habitable because of war, and the emigration of the non-Muslim populace left them devoid of most of the entrepreneurs and skilled labor, thus depleting Anatolia of a promising economic base (Zürcher 1998: 172). Under these circumstances, in the words of Adam Lebor, “as arch-westernizer, he [Kemal Atatürk] was determined to drag Turkey into the twentieth century” (Lebor 1997: 222). After a strenuous independence struggle, in 1923, Ankara, then a small, unknown Anatolian town with lack of connection to old power structures, became the capital of Turkey and the base for momentous social and political change.

To complete the cultural component of this political achievement, the leadership of the new republic intended to change the public sphere radically.⁵ In 1923 the Republican People's Party, then the leading single party, was formed, the treaty of

³ The definitions of Ottomanism and Islamism are taken from Zürcher 1998: 132.

⁴ The peninsula of Anatolia is considered the heartland of Turkey. (*Anadolu* in Turkish). For brief information on the region see Howard 2001: 6-7.

⁵ Dietrich Jung argues the success of this campaign that “most social structures, especially in the periphery” was not affected by these reforms (2002: 78-79). By claiming the lack of mass support and Kemalist

Lausanne which secured the international status of Turkey was ratified, and the Turkish republic was proclaimed. The caliphate, the potential rival to the republican leadership, was abolished and the last caliph exiled. The *medreses* and *mektebs* - religious schools - were closed and all schools put under the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of *Şeriat* (Islamic Law) and *Evkaf* (Islamic Charity) was terminated. The courts in which the Islamic Law was administered were abolished. Religious endowments came to be controlled by an office directly under the prime minister. Series of symbolic revolutions such as the banning of the *fez* - a cylindrical red hat - and similar cultural measures carried the campaign into a new phase. The Gregorian calendar was accepted. The entire legal system of the country was renewed and translations of the laws from various European countries came into use. The Latin alphabet was adopted and the public use of Arabic alphabet was prohibited. Polygamy and the veil were outlawed; by 1930, women had the right to vote (Lewis 1968: 260-279; Davison 1998: 147-165). Parallel to this campaign, and consistent with its goals, was a new set of official or semi-official agencies that was created to implement the new cultural policies.⁶

Within the framework of the Turkish revolution, the locus of national identity shifted from Ottoman-Islamic culture to the pre-Islamic Asiatic culture of the Turks.⁷ In the late Ottoman era, the word “Turk” had negative connotations and defined the unsophisticated peasant or dweller (Ahmad 1993: 78; Ahmad 2003: x).⁸ To deal with this

dependence upon the traditional leaders as brokers between center and periphery, he finds the outcome questionable. For a similar comment see Poulton 1997: 121-122.

⁶ See, for example, Öztürkmen 1994.

⁷ According to Navaro-Yashin reminiscence of a Turkic past in Central Asia was not existent among people of Anatolia in the early twentieth century (2002: 11).

⁸ In his 1998 article “From Ottoman to Turk: Self-Image and Social Engineering in Turkey” historian Selim Deringil criticizes this view and considers the comments on the inferior position of Turks during the Ottoman era as part of “the standard jargon of Turkish official historiography” (Deringil 1998: 217).

stereotype and create a new sense of national identity that was distanced from the Ottoman multi-nationalism and idea of Islamic brotherhood, the Turkish History thesis was created. In Stanford Shaw's words this thesis was created “to show the Turks what they have done in history” and used as “weapons to achieve the Republic's aims” (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 376). This thesis, first launched at the First History Congress in 1932, was a junction of the reaction against perceived European views of the Turks as inferior and the need for nation building. It asserted that the Turkish nation was a part of the history of civilization prior to entering to the Islamic world. This official thesis emphasized both the Asian-Turkic roots as well as the early civilizations of Anatolia (Mardin 1981: 211; Poulton 1997: 101-109).⁹

Through this move, the new Turkish republic attached itself to the nationalist values of the western world and distanced itself from the Islamic world and civilization. Besides systematically repudiating the Ottoman past, the Kemalist project created and employed new sources for the Turkish nation-building process and the transformation of a traditional society. These actions required the creation and promotion of a collective national identity. During the implementation of these processes, civic education became central to the creation of the national project and widely deployed cultural items, especially the traditional celebrations. However, the Turkish modernization/westernization project did not create a political and administrative system based on well-defined rights of citizenship (Owen 1997: 249). This situation left the door

Against the works of Ahmad that I mentioned above, Berkes (1964) and Lewis (1961), Deringil brings the findings of more recent research showing that “even in the ‘Golden Age’ of the empire,” the ruling elite had a clear notion of their Turkic identity and were proud of it (Fleisher 1986: 286-290). Since my research is more about the implementation and the results of the great Turkification project of the republican era, I disregard Deringil’s valuable challenge at least for this work.

open for future radical cultural and pedagogical policy-making and implementation both by and against the Turkish State.

The Kurdish Dimension

As a result of systematic efforts to organize Muslim elements against the occupation, the independence struggle led by Kemal Atatürk was highly supported by the Kurds of Anatolia (Bruinessen 1992: 272-273; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997: 75; Perinçek 1999: 111-129, 197-212). Because of war-related mortality, epidemics, large-scale migration and post-war population changes at the end of Turkey's War of Independence, the non-Muslim population of Anatolia had declined. Two large Muslim groups, Turks and Kurds, constituted 98 percent of the land's population within the boundaries of the Turkish Republic (Zürcher 1998: 170-172).¹⁰ The Turkish ethnic framework used to make the Turkish republic was defined in these terms in October 1919 by Kemal Atatürk:

Gentlemen, this border is not a line which has been drawn according to military considerations. It is a national border. It has been established as a national border. Within this border there is only one nation which is representative of Islam. Within this border, there are Turks, Circassians, and other Islamic elements. Thus this border is a national boundary of all those who live together totally blended and are for all intents and purpose made up of fraternal communities (Quoted in Ahmad 2003: 80).¹¹

⁹ For the minutes of the First History Congress see *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi, Konferanslar, Müzakere Zabıtları* 1932. For a comprehensive account of the Congress see Behar 1992.

¹⁰ The last census to include the question of language, which functioned to show native speakers of other languages including Kurdish, was conducted in 1965. Because of the official census policies of Turkey, there is no accurate demographic data available to know the Kurdish population of Turkey exactly. For the history of census in Turkey, see Dündar 1999. For an example of an assessment which was produced on the available data see Andrews 1989 and 2002, Özsoy, Koç and Toros 1992, Mutlu 1995 and 1996. See also Frey 1965: 147, footnote 23 for an early example of lack of statistical data on Kurds in Turkey [Frey's note is taken from Jafar 1976: 44].

¹¹ For a useful discussion on the effects of Ottoman past and Islamic heritage on post-Ottoman identity creation in Turkey see Findley 2000.

After the success of a difficult struggle and a series of wars, however, the newborn republic was based solely upon the Turkish national and cultural identity. The search for national identity within the newly established Turkish republic followed a one-dimensional path succinctly summarized in *The Economist's* "Survey of Turkey" published in 1996:

Turkey is more like a tree, with roots in many different cultures and ethnicities. In its early years it was pruned and trained to grow strictly in one direction: Turkish. Now, in its maturity, its branches tend to go their own way, seeking their own kind of light. (Quoted in Nachmani 2003: 33).¹²

In the aftermath of the World War I, the treaties of Sevres (1920) and Lausanne (1923) shaped the political future of the region. According to the Treaty of Sevres, an international commission would prepare the Kurdish dominated region for its autonomy, and if the Council of the League of Nations agreed, the Kurdish population of the designated areas would have the right to vote for independence (McDowall 2000: 136-137, 464-465; Kurubaş 2004: 95-102).¹³ However, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed after the successful war of independence, took an extremely firm stand against the terms of the Treaty of Sevres and presented a very different future for the Kurdish people. The Turkish Republic's sovereignty was established, and the redrawing of national borders divided the Kurds into five different states (Aydın 2002: 91).¹⁴

The Treaty of Lausanne was thus the first blow to Kurdish nationalism. The second blow came in 1924, when the new constitution did not have the same stipulations

¹² See Yeğen 1996 for a comprehensive analysis of the exclusion of the Kurds.

¹³ For details of the area which was designated as Kurdistan and the articles of 62, 63 and 64 of the Treaty of Sevres relating to it see McDowall 2000: 464-65; Kurubaş 2004: 99-100; Bayrak 1993: 101-108.

¹⁴ For an outline of the diplomatic history of the period, see Macfie 1996. For a detailed analysis of the position of minorities in the Treaty of Lausanne see Ürer 2003.

for Kurdish local rights granted in the previous 1921 constitution.¹⁵ Leading up to the foundation of the Turkish republic Mustafa Kemal preferred to use the term “Nation of Turkey,” though he employed the term “Turkish Nation” in his later speeches (Oran 1996: 37-38). Since then, the Turkish founding fathers’ ideology, focusing on modernity and westernization, structured the nation state solely on the basis of the Turkish national identity. This preference was exercised not only in the political sphere but also within the cultural sphere to respond to all sorts of oppositions.¹⁶

The establishment of this national framework was followed by a series of rebellions organized by the Kurdish oppositions.¹⁷ The first major wave of these revolts was harshly repressed and ended in 1938. Thousands of Kurdish citizens of Turkey were forced to emigrate from various part of the country (O’Ballance 1973: 27-29, Kabacalı 1991, Bruinessen 1994 144-154, and Chailand 1994: 36-39). Further responses by the Turkish republic included closing religious organizations thought significant to the organization of these rebellions. Another important outcome that shaped the general understanding of the Kurdish issue in Turkish society was the gradual portrayal of any opposition to the national agenda as a movement of traitors bent on collapsing society rather than establishing their own due rights (Olson 1989, pp. 159-160).

This explanation, of course, addresses only one aspect of the equation. Internal factions and lack of a unified voice among the Kurdish political elite also contributed to

¹⁵ For instance, in the 1924 constitution, citizenship called for an explicit acceptance of Turkishness (Barkey and Fuller 1998: 10).

¹⁶ For a brief summary of the Turkish government policies for the Kurdish issue see Fuller 1999: 232-233. Especially for the cultural policies see Chailand 1993: 73-77.

¹⁷ There is a continuous debate on the nature of the Kurdish rebellions. While some consider these as religious uprisings started by reactionaries, other explain the religious nature of the early Kurdish movements by the priority of wide coalition making. See Olson 1989: 153, Mumcu 1991, Ciment 1996: 46, Bozarslan 1992: 96.

their exclusion.¹⁸ After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, during the relatively promising political climate of the period for the Kurds in the late Ottoman era, a number of political clubs and schools founded by intellectuals, army officers and some *aghas*, used Kurdish as their language of education.¹⁹ The first series of Kurdish newspapers was also published during this time. However, these activities did not lead to a growth of a unified political movement. The Kurdish social structure continued to be dominated by tribal loyalty, in which the traditional elite was concerned more with the continuance of their local power than with making wider coalitions with other factions of the Kurdish leadership.²⁰ The traditional elites' - *aghas*' - mistrust of the urban Kurdish intellectuals and their campaigns to raise literacy and political consciousness endangered their position; this also hindered attempts at a unified voice and identity (McDowall 1992: 30-31). These factors, along with the dominant Western discourse of modernization produced an image of Kurdish social structure as backward and feudal. Thus, the political antagonism between the Turkish national project and Kurdish nationalism could easily be presented as a clash between secular Turkish modernism and "tribal, backward, custom bound, ignorant, fanatically religious" tendencies of the Kurds (Bruinessen 1992: 274; Houston 2001: 89).²¹

¹⁸ For a brief but comprehensive argument of the Kurds' exclusion, see Güneş-Ayata and Ayata 1999: 130-131.

¹⁹ In the Kurdish terminology, *agha* defines the leaders of a tribe or clan. It implies landlordship and is also used for the children and brothers of the actual landlord. In current use, it defines the one who rules. (See Kinnane 1964: 11 and Bruinessen 1992: 80). For an informative argument of Kurdish tribalism and its evolution see White 2000: 17-22.

²⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of the tension between the various factions of the Kurdish nationalism in that period see Özoglu 2004.

²¹ Yeğen also notes that "whenever the Kurdish question was mentioned in Turkish state discourse, it was in terms of reactionary politics, tribal resistance or regional backwardness, but never as an ethno-political

The construction of post-war normality came with both reforms and connected problems. Consistent with the dominant political developments of the post World War I era and as a reaction to the deficiency of the multi-national Ottoman political and administrative heritage, the founding fathers of the Turkish republic imagined a nation state (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983, 1994; Hobsbawm 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In this process, “the monopolisation of the means of symbolic reproduction and the monopolisation of the means of physical force” served the goal of creating an homogenous nation (Jung 2001: 69).²² This preference, predictably, brought the sense of exclusion for other ethnic identities. The resulting processes of Turkish nation building caused still unsolved conflicts.

After some relatively quiet years of Kurdish Opposition, the Kurdish “ethnic quest for identity” (Fernandez 1986a) surfaced in a new format in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Starting from this era, the Newroz tradition was appropriated as a venue to create and promote Kurdish historical consciousness and a sense of independent identity.²³ As a response to the state policies, Kurdish political leadership, then mostly young educated urban activists, re-appropriated and promoted Newroz as a Kurdish ethnic narrative.

question.” (Yeğen 1996: 216)

²² For an insightful analysis of the construction of the Turkish culture, see Navaro-Yashin 2002.

²³ This point does not disregard the deep historical roots of Newroz within the Kurdish culture. For instance, Ely Bannister Soane, in his account of the journey that he made to the region between 1907-1909, makes this interesting point: “The Persian legend has it that Kurds are descendants of those young men who were saved from the voracity of the serpents of the monster Zohak of the Persian mythology, which were fed upon human brains at the devil’s suggestion, and which were deceived by having the brains of goats substituted for those of the two youths who were to become the progenitors of the Kurdish race” (Soane 1979 [1912]: 368). The similarities between Soane’s point – published in 1912 - and the current Newroz framework in which “Zohak” appears as merciless tyrant “Dehak” - seem very interesting. Nicole Watts, researcher of another era of Kurdish history, notes how the leaders of the Dersim uprising of 1937 chose Newroz as the point to start their attacks (Watts 2000: 21). Thomas Bois also remarks on the celebration of Newroz by the Kurds in much earlier periods (Bois 1966: 7 and 67). For an analysis of the position of Newroz in Kurdish culture before the 1970’s, see Aksoy 1998 and Cengiz 2003.

Consistent with the surrounding conditions that starved cultural production, the Kurdish “rise of the cultural” (James 1989) took the stage as a revival of this tradition. Thus, Newroz became a useful legendary source in shaping Kurds’ collective response toward the Turkish political system. These in a way became, in Barbara Myerhoff’s words, “moments of teaching, when the society seeks to make the individual most fully its own, weaving group values and understandings into the private psyche so that internally provided individual motivation replaces external controls” (Myerhoff 1982: 112). This move had dual functions. While on the one hand it was appropriated to respond to the official cultural hegemony, it also became a widely used practical instrument to revitalize the political opposition at the popular level.

For the reason that the Kurdish national movement has successfully utilized this festival to differentiate and underline its identity, the Turkish state began in the 1990s to officially promote the Turkish version of the same celebration in an effort to eliminate and undermine the Kurdish utilization of the tradition. By the beginning of the 1990s, the intensive re-appropriation of Nevruz began. This timing also matches the heightening significance of Newroz within the Kurdish opposition’s discourse and its success in promoting their political agenda. In 1991, the General Directorate of Folk Culture Research and Development (HAGEM), one of the main service units of the Turkish Ministry of Culture, began to guide the rebirth of the Nevruz celebration all over Turkey. In a short period of time, the events surrounding Nevruz evolved into something on a more grandiose scale. It was then positioned and framed as an international festival of the Turkic people. This move was also related to the Turkish state’s then popular

coalition-making attempts with the newborn post-Soviet states of Central Asia.

Participants and artists from all over Central Asia were invited to the celebrations.

The Turkish Ministry of Culture's records of Nevruz, together with other documents, show that although Nevruz has been a part of Turkish culture and was briefly officially celebrated in the republic's very beginning years, eventually it stayed in the private sphere and was not a major celebration in the official celebration repertoire. It was in the beginning of the 1990s, after observing the popularity of Newroz within its Kurdish population, that the Turkish state started to promote its own official version to override the Kurdish version and maintain the Turkish national identity-oriented political order. In Bakhtin's words, the official Nevruz "did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. In contrast, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. The link with time became formal; changes and moments of crisis were relegated to the past. Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present" (Bakhtin 1984: 9).

From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, cultural sources were highly utilized as an extension of the political agenda by the state as well as its various oppositions. In this study, these two festivals are taken into account as part of this heritage, therefore, as venues of cultural production and competition. By combining the findings of both field and archival research and contrasting the celebrations, I argue that the two versions can provide a reliable venue to study and re-map the Kurdish minority issue of Turkey.

While functioning as a nurturing force in preserving Kurdish identity even before the creation of the Turkish Republic, the Kurdish re-appropriation of the Newroz tradition by the 1980s created a new Kurdish nationalist discourse of struggle based on

differentiating Kurdish and Turkish cultures. The Newroz celebrations have become a significant showroom for cultural and political purposes. Moreover, Nevruz, its re-birth and re-structuring, particularly within the framework of historiographic re-invention, will also be investigated to deepen the comparison. While I focus upon the case of the Turkish state's recent adaptation, my main argument will center on ways in which the official ideology of Turkey has attempted to re-shape ideas of national identity through the Nevruz tradition as a response to the unofficial Kurdish conception of Newroz that resonated with its own nationalist discourse.

The Position of the Presented Work in This Framework and Its Method

There have been various outcomes of the presented official discourse and its implementations on various levels in the history of the Turkish state. At the scholarly level, the Kurdish minority of Turkey and the issues related to them has become one of the most sensitive issues in Turkey's intellectual circles. Consistent with the state discourse and related limitations, the cultural dimensions of the presented conflict have been generally overlooked and under-studied. Therefore, the abundance of studies on these issues were occupied by the political and international security related dimensions of the issue and dominated by technical jargon, and internal-Orientalist²⁴ discourses. The

²⁴ I use the concept of "internal-Orientalism" as structured and systematic othering practices within a nation state and as an extension of Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (1978). My understanding of the "Orient within," in the context of Turkey, takes off from Said's framing of Western representations of the East and hegemonic "othering" processes. I first encountered the concept in the works of Louisa Schein (2000: 100-131 and 2002: 386-389). Then, through the work of Schein, I reached earlier discussions such as Tölölyan's (1991) and Gladney's (1994: 113-114). My use of "internal-Orientalism" was also greatly affected by Ashis Nandy's "internal colonialism" argument regarding post-colonial India (1983). Following Said's general model, the mentioned works are used to define the Turkish way of understanding and dominating its other. In this process, the internal other plays a significant role in differentiating the identity of the dominant. In my understanding, during the quest for homogeneity, the common history with the

majority of the studies are hindered by a lack of data and therefore tends to be repetitious. These works place strong emphasis on international politics and prioritize the political stability in the region.

This dissertation, written by a folklorist, attempts - at least in part - to extend the presented framework of scholarship by utilizing the popular and traditional culture in the account. As a modest response to the challenges and obstacles that have constrained the study of Kurdish minority issues in Turkey, it applies a performance- and oral culture-oriented approach. It explores the development and function of contrasting political and cultural agendas through the Nevruz and Newroz celebrations and draws out their comparative implications for the study of the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

The Nevruz and the Newroz together are one of the most visible expressive venues to present the cultural aspect of this deep-seated conflict in Turkey. This approach situates itself in a belief that performance is crucial in the process of identity creation and collective communication. These consciously repeated modes of behaviors stand as the cultural implementation of the constructed power relations and provide multi-layered frames in which various readings of reality are possible.²⁵ In Richard Bauman's words all performance encompasses an awareness of doubleness. In a performance setting, any performative action is produced for a mental comparison with a potential or an ideal model (Bauman 1989 cited in Carlson 1996: 5). Therefore, studying the difference

other was overshadowed and the other was placed in a different temporal frame within which it can more easily be handled (Fabian, 1983). For a general framework, see Said 1989, 1990, 1995, 1997 [1981], Ayouni and Ruin 2000, and Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001.

²⁵ In this work, I will be using the concept of performance and festival interchangeably. Considering the different connotations of the word performance within various academic disciplines, I should note that by performance I mean the aesthetic/expressive practices which intend to create an inventive reality to bring alternative awareness. These situate participants in a specific time and space and create venues for creation of individual and collective identities. For a comprehensive overview see Bauman 1986 and Kapchan 1995.

between actual and ideal creates a new series of lenses to observe the deeper layers of socio-political reality. Preliminary research suggests that the contrary appropriations of the Nevruz and Newroz festivals are intertwined in a complicated process, in the socio-political, social organizational, and cultural utilization of tradition. In this sense, this is primarily a work, which attempts to understand cultural operations that reinforce other operations in the political sphere.

This dissertation, therefore, looks at the development and execution of these contested versions of the solar New Year celebration and considers unique re-appropriations of the “old” cultural sources intended to establish (and/or protect) identities required (and/or challenged) by “new” socio-political circumstances. It also demonstrates the central role that these celebrations have come to play in shaping and reproducing the opposite themes for different projects for the future. What is specifically important here are such issues as the relations between the surfacing of certain cultural practices, policy-making patterns, and social and political legitimization processes.

At the intersection of these concerns, the presented work examines the alternative versions of the solar new year festival by applying several theoretical frameworks, including; Performance and Festival Theories along with Marxist Criticism,²⁶ Postcolonial Theory,²⁷ - especially Orientalism,²⁸ Deconstruction Theory,²⁹ Cultural

²⁶ From the founding work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to the various versions of it such as The Frankfurt School; Antonio Gramsci; Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton, various works of Marxist criticism enlightened my research. I should specifically mention Thompson 1991, Stallybrass and White 1986, Eagleton 1976 and 2000, Williams 1976, 1977 and 1983, Benjamin 1985 [1968], Jameson 1997 and 1999, Jay 1996.

²⁷ Quayson. 2000, Goldberg and Quayson 2002, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, Bhabha. 1994, Spivak 1988, Landry and MacLean (Eds.) 1996.

²⁸ See footnote 24.

Materialism,³⁰ Critical Pedagogy, and other combined works of scholars which need to be covered separately. Knowing that theory is strained from reality but also that it leads and forms reality by shaping our comprehension of it, these approaches are applied to propose some linking dynamics already at work between various spheres of social and political life.

The following insight on the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary work, provided by Muzafer Sherif, a Turkish scholar, cues this work to utilize interdisciplinary methods and strategies appropriate to the suggested topic:

After all, no scientific discipline is an island unto itself. It cannot develop firmly in isolation from others. Deliberate assessment by one discipline of what is needed from other disciplines and who it needs to transact with will provide a center of gravity for its own development that is conducive to probing its problems at any degree of intensiveness desired. In fact, intensive study of its own domain will gain both in depth and scope. (Sherif 1969: 8)

Besides considering interdisciplinary inquiry as a process to gain both “depth and scope,” I also hope to utilize various theories to enrich my framework, extend the scope of the research, and bring more dimensions into the picture.

At this point, I would like to clarify my understanding of the use of those mentioned theoretical frameworks. During the last couple of decades, a significant amount of theories in various social science disciplines were developed. Understandably, as in the case of other disciplines and other historical times, they came with attached

²⁹ Derrida 2001 and 1998, Culler 1982, Ryan 1982, and Norris 1991.

³⁰ American scholars of this line are known as “New Historicists.” See Higgins 1999, Brannigan. 1998,

antagonisms. In some cases, the scholarly sphere is greatly divided into territories according to theoretical, approach-related differences.³¹

In this work, I dealt with the presented issues with - sometimes - limited and politically modified data. I applied various sources to deal with the rigid research traditions and the one-dimensional disciplinary boundaries. Knowing that the complex and slippery material that is brought into this work can only be understood with clear classifications, during this process, considering the complexity and unconventional nature of the material that I am dealing with, I did not hesitate to make selective utilizations of various theoretical angles, and in spite of some irreconcilable elements and debates within those, I have found the utilization of the presented theories in various doses illuminating and effectual.

The theoretical frameworks of this work were chosen to produce socially responsible, creative, and hopefully applicable research. Various mixes of different angles which are based upon different and even contradictory sources and methodologies are made to expand and refine their capabilities. However, I should make it clear at this point that I have a number of problems with some of the outcomes of different theoretical approaches listed above.

For instance, my understanding of critical theory highly values Christopher Norris' critiques of Baudrillard's relativism, which distances itself from engagement of concrete problems, including political ones (Norris. 1992). In another realm, even though my work has been influenced and more importantly encouraged by the post-colonial theoretical line, I find the critiques of, among many others, Ahmad Aijaz (1992, 1996),

Geertz 1999, Callagher and Greenblatt. 2000.

Stephen Slemon (1995), and Arif Dirlik (1996) crucial to situate post-colonial theory into the political map of the scholarship. These scholars claim that in brief, post-colonial theory is nothing but a fresh medium through which the authority of the West is imposed over the dominated parts of the world. They even go one step further and situate post-colonial theorists in the international academic division of labor authorized by imperialist capitalism.

My reservations about some of the utilized theoretical frames are not solely limited to political issues. Some language-related preferences such as in the case of post-structuralist texts also have to be mentioned here. As it will be seen, there is a wide utilization of “discourse analysis” and some neighboring arguments in this work. However, I would not want to proceed without mentioning my annoyance with the showy style that one encounters in this line of texts. Even though I am familiar with how the text and the interpretation ultimately dictate meaning, and how language is not considered as a venue to portray reality, and that the language preference of the text has been influenced by a constant search for new ways of communicating by the post-structuralists, I still consider the lack of transparency in those writings problematic.

There is a further matter which needs airing here. Much of the available scholarship presents the cases of Nevruz and Newroz as purely historical, folkloristic and political cases. There is, however, no available research that actually takes these as contesting identity-creation and re-claiming processes. Considering this gap, and since this study seeks to investigate the processes by which these contested nationalist cores are established, the main focus here is not to compare the two versions of the same new year

³¹ For an interesting argument that shed light to my discussion on this matter see Becher 1989.

celebration *per se*, but to compare how the celebrations are used to propose and support opposing social and political claims. Therefore, this study is structured neither as a dissertation on what these festivals are nor a history of them. It does not claim to discover any new historical facts that are not known. It does not aim to present the histories and the historical analysis of the Nevruz and Newroz traditions so much as it aims to display how politics and ideology operate in important ways in the cultural sphere of Turkey. I have come to be convinced, through close readings of the counter-history creation processes and their background in Turkey, that the state-supported official history-making efforts and the counter-claims that were produced to respond to these have some common problems and characteristics.

Thus, I reached a conclusion that the more I manage to distance myself from the highly contested and disputed counter historiographies the more I can be successful in unpacking and articulating these celebrations and their socio-political outcomes. It needs to be clarified here that the reasons for these limitations are not only technical and professional but also tactical and practical. As will be seen in the following chapters, the contradictory appropriations of the same tradition are constructed upon very different historical frameworks. Considering the ongoing clash of contrary historiographies, I purposefully preferred to refrain from any claim regarding essential meaning and complete history of the celebrations that I study. Since I am troubled that my work could be overshadowed by arguments regarding the “true origin” of the tradition, I deliberately devoted little space to the histories and counter-histories of these celebrations and checked my appetite to study their origins pending future works.

In this dissertation, therefore, I would like to understand what the two contrary appropriations of the same tradition tell us about the history and the development of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. This is why I put emphasis on a theoretically informed perspective and abstain from pure historical and folkloristic departures. Hence, the focus is on the similarities and differences in the ways in which the contested projects display and negotiate boundaries. In the presented celebrations, while on the one hand the Kurdish opposition promotes a mass political movement, the Turkish state appropriates the tradition in order to identify it as its own significant past. In other words, what it means to be “Kurdish,” or “a good Turkish citizen,” was sought to be defined, and thus this study will focus on the discursive element of the competing new year festivals and their effect on social transformation.

Since my project is a comparative investigation of the historical, political and socio-cultural circumstances of the survival and development of the Nevruz and Newroz festivals, this investigation is conducted under the umbrella of the concept of culture as well as a number of emergent themes such as language, history, myth and memory.

In this study, as I learned from Natalie Zemon Davis, I sought previously ignored voices. Learning from Davis’ use of pamphlets, letters, plays, gifts, judicial and other official records and many other material, I hunted for new lenses. I collected pamphlets, drawings, pictures, and objects. Remembering her imaginary dialogue with Laurent Joubert, a sixteenth century scholar, at the end of her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975: 267), or with her subjects in the beginning of her *Women on the Margins* in “Thoughtland” (1995: 1-4), especially at the writing stage, I found myself

having imaginary dialogues with various participants of the festivals to make sense out of these loaded events.

Another justification of the proposed method and the scope comes with the consideration of the history of the Turkish state. Ever since the Turkish Republic was established, the cultural sphere has been utilized as a critical venue for the creation of Turkish national identity. Language, literature, as well as folklore and various oral traditions have become the arenas in which the Turkish republic implemented its continuous cultural policies.³² In a way, the political movement of the Kurdish opposition modeled itself after this tradition and started to utilize the “cultural” for political purposes throughout its history. Consequently, the political dispute became mirrored in the cultural arena, and there, opposing exchanges took place in complex discourses.

The presented methodological preference is also based on the existence, and the necessity of understanding, the method and works of *Ibn Khaldun*. Ibn Khaldun (1322-1406) was a great Arab historian and thinker not remembered only as the “father of historiography,” but also as a pioneer scholar who approached history as a science (Glasse 1991: 171). Although the title of his major work, *Kitab al-‘Ibar*,³³ is interpreted

³² The scope of this study, in excluding the Ottoman era, is not a matter of convenience or preference. The expansion of the Ottoman state in various periods brought significant numbers of Muslim and non-Muslim communities under its sovereignty. This multi-national and multi-cultural entity was dealt with, within the *millet* system that compartmentalized the communities rather than assimilating them (see Poulton 1997: 39-49). According to Sonyel, the term for minority (*ekalliyet*) would have meant nothing to the Ottomans of the sixteenth and the eighteenth century and obtained its current meaning only after the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 (Sonyel 1975: 67-68, 97-98 in Deringil 1998: 217). Although there was a Kurdish nationalist discourse available prior to the foundation of the Turkish Republic (see Klein 2001: 28-30), only after the one-nation-oriented social engineering and its following failed assimilation of the Kurdish minority did a political and cultural civil dispute arise in Turkey. Therefore, this study limits itself only to the republican era. For details of the ending of the Ottoman state and the security difficulty of the establishment of the Turkish republic see Jung 2001. For an excellent account of social engineering and the shift from Ottoman to Turkish identity see Deringil 1998.

³³ The full title of the book is; *Kitab al-Ibar, wa Diwan al-Mubtada wal Khabar, fi Ayyam al-Arabi wal Ajami wal Barbar, wa man Asrahum min zawi al-Sultan al-Akbar* (Enan 1962[1941]: 134). *Kitab al-‘Ibar*,

as “world history,” or “universal history”³⁴ and the word *‘ibar* is simply reduced into “instructive examples,”³⁵ Muhsin Mahdi elaborates on those and provides information for a better understanding:

It [*‘ibar*] means, among other things, to pass over and to pass by. . . Thus, it means to travel, to cross, to go beyond the borders of a city or a land, as well as to invade, to go beyond, and to violate a border. It also means to pass from the outside to the inside of a thing. (Mahdi 1964: 64-65).³⁶

Mahdi’s point indicates that Ibn Khaldun’s object was to transcend the world of circumstances and sensible things to grasp the reality behind those concrete happenings (Cox 1992: 152). Ibn Khaldun called this inquiry “new science.”³⁷ By this “methodological revolution” (Bonte 2003: 53 and Hassan 1982: 124), he attempted to establish the criteria of the true, the authentic knowledge by creating a classification on the basis of *nasab*, origin. In his framework *nasab* was never considered as a key to trace the origin in a narrow sense.³⁸ Instead;

Nasab is a matter of imagination, not a reality. Its utility resides in the fact that the social links and sentiments of affiliation that it creates appear as natural (*tabi’a*) in *mentality*. (Ibn Khaldun, I. 128-129, Translated by Hames 1987 in Bonte 2003: 55).

wa diwan al-Mubtada’ wal-khabar fi ayyam al-’Arab wal-Ajam wal-Barbar was man ‘asarahum min dhawi as-sultan al-akbar (Al-Azmeh 1982: 5). It consists of three books. The first is about the nature of history and society. The second is the history of Arabs. The third is the history of Berbers. The foreword of the first book is widely known the *Muqaddima*, preface.

³⁴ See Pasha 1997: 57.

³⁵ For instance, Al-Azmeh translates the title as “Exemplars and the Record of Narrative and its Principles Concerning Arabs, Persians, and Berbers, and those Nations of Great Might Contemporary with Them” (Al-Azmeh 1982: 5).

³⁶ I first encountered Mahdi’s comments on *‘ibar* in Cox 1992.

³⁷ He called his new science *ilm al-umran*. For an extensive review of the concept, see Baali 1988: 11-25. Especially see footnote 22 in Baali 1988: 13 and 122.

³⁸ The only exception for this was the line of the Prophet Muhammad.

According to Ibn Khaldun, to learn the truth, historians should search for the “inner meaning” through the surrounding social, economic, and political conditions that inform the patterns of life. Thus, this work intends to deal with the presented festivals to “go beyond the borders” in an Ibn Khaldun sense.

The reasoning of the proposed method can be detailed as follows. The study considers and develops the Newroz celebration as one of the key components of the Kurdish ethnic cultural repertoire in Turkey. As an extension of the conventional sources, it examines the Newroz and Nevruz celebrations as competitive narratives. Although the cases may seem merely just another example of “invention of a tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), or an efficient search for a “usable past” (Commager 1967 in Tuleja 1997: 2) at first sight, the details of the opposite political and cultural operations make this competition unique. By drawing on shared symbols and pieces of history, both Newroz and Nevruz “establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger observed, traditions do not pass completely unchanged through the generations, but are often interpreted and reinterpreted to satisfy the needs of the current generation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1).

In instances like Nevruz, the state remakes and attempts to reclaim a tradition, especially following its success on the popular level. The cultural stance of the Turkish state continuously repeats itself in the unlearning of the Kurdish Newroz. When symbols such as the Nevruz are institutionalized and reiterated through the “state ideological apparatus” (Althusser 1971), educational systems, and other various social institutions, the officially endorsed symbols and meanings become incorporated as part of everyday lived experience. This goes a long way in “maintaining the ‘official’ universe against the

heretical challenge” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 99) and in the socialization of the population to accept the official Nevruz version as the only “true” one. Nevruz and its associated activities, then, are “learned as objective truth in the course of socialization and thus internalized as subjective reality.” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 62) This brings the discussion to the utilization of folklore and its function in the political process.

Coming from a geography in which folklore has been utilized to condition everyday life and politics, folklore, to me, is not a frozen heritage of the past or documentation of distant lifestyles and traditions, but a significant and functional part of our own time. Unlike the more idealistic descriptions which situate folklore on the intersection of people - “folk” - and their recognized cultural heritage - “lore,” highlighting artistic, traditional and unofficial aspects,³⁹ in my understanding folklore stands as a communicative behavior that exercises a significant influence over patterns of meaning making and expression. Thus, folklore-related selection and counter-selection processes bring us to the political sphere, and the ways of deploying folklore in the political process appear as a venue to search for the silenced voices.

Recognizing the power of the utilization of folklore in the political process, this work participates in a long overdue discussion to search for fresh and alternative approaches to studying insufficiently represented issues under difficult conditions. I believe the chosen method of this study might bring some progress to finding a voice for the silenced in the MENA region and Central Asia. Besides its specific applications to Turkey, this work, on the basis of the fieldwork experience that my findings depend on,

³⁹ See Oring 1986, Glassie 1989 and Ben-Amos 1972 for good arguments of what folklore is.

illustrates the unintended capabilities of ethnography-oriented studies under sensitive conditions with regard to human rights.

This project claims that in the absence of effective mediating mechanisms and established scholarly routines, ethnography appears as an innovative tool and a methodology for opening up the zones where people are silenced and isolated. Thus, this work talks about the application of - already well developed - political ethnography and argues how it not only provides cross-cultural readings of the political, but also creates testing grounds for the already produced scholarship. In sum, while this work proposes a fresh approach to study the major minority issue of Turkey, it also continues to discuss the importance of ethnographic work in unstable places.

This study touches upon the fusion of performance studies and conflict mitigation. It emphasizes the potential of the conflict-mediation and conflict-resolution capabilities of the current Nevruz/Newroz dichotomy. To explore how these contrary versions of the same celebration can be employed and rendered as a source of mutual understanding and peace, I frame the dichotomy as a politically-charged performance that translates political agendas. Subsequently, I suggest an approach of reciprocal insight and peace through the festivals.

In doing this, I discuss the social processes that I believe highlight cultural bridges and promote mutual understanding. While these conflicting social texts - the interpretations of the new year celebrations - are each presented as the only correct way to interpret and teach the tradition, their common characteristics become visible. A set of historical and psychological barriers that were once offered and articulated as divisive border-marking stones suddenly seem to be the bricks for building peace. Thus, as one of

the very limited number of venues that brings “the Kurdish question” into the spheres of culture, celebration, and civic education in Turkey, I find the festivals to be in a crucial position for such conflict resolution examination. In my view, positing multiple readings of the new year festival would present an opportunity to the various actors to examine the pre-judgments of their subjective knowledge and experience, and the knowledge and experience of the larger world.

Claiming to reach these objectives by studying two versions of a one-day celebration may seem an overstatement of quantitative and/or written data-oriented points of view. However, it should be remembered that these celebrations constitute crucial moments in which many values and social processes are expressed; the brevity of the moment in fact intensifies its effect. Besides this, there are many compelling reasons to consider these celebrations for the stated goals. As specifically contextualized events, these celebrations occupy a significant position in both traditional/cultural and political settings. In Cantwell’s words, these events, with their strong performative characteristics and colorfulness, “[turn] the world outside in, inside out, and upside down” (1993: 109). As “living museum[s]” (1993: 140), the competing social and political projects are manifested within them.

What is finally important about the nature of the Nevruz and Newroz dichotomy is the potential for it to demonstrate the larger cultural process of debate. There seems to be an almost unwritten covenant that Newroz stands for Kurdish identity among both Kurds and Turks. Newroz allows Kurds to feel common ground. In Bakhtin’s words, Newroz provided Kurds of Turkey an “atmosphere of unbridled carnivalesque freedom” (1984: 266), in which “the utopian truth is enacted in life itself” (1984: 265). Through

this process, Newroz glorifies the values without which the national identity could not have been preserved. It passes the “knowledge that the great which once existed, was at least *possible* once and may well again be possible sometime” (Nietzsche 1957: 16).

The research draws on field work and archival research conducted over a period of three years. The problem of studying and comparing one popular and one official celebration made me rely on different kinds of sources. Since official and unofficial rationales differed immensely, the two versions were studied using different sources. Occurring in a mostly oral medium, Newroz was studied mostly through the fieldwork material. The space from which it has been excluded, namely archives, libraries, etc. was replaced with the material compiled in the field. Nevruz on the other hand was mostly studied through archival and written sources.

Finally, sharing a sentiment of Ashis Nandy’s, I need to clarify my preference of writing style and language:

My work on the future can be read as a political preface to the inevitable process of democratization, linking up with the language and categories of those who constitute a majority of the world. However, I am also aware that this could be a severe threat to those who want to be the voice of the voiceless and the intellectual spokespersons for the oppressed of the world. For we live in a world where the obvious has to be justified in ornate, almost baroque language of scientized social analysis or packaged in the esoteric textual analyses to be legitimate to the intellectual community. (Nandy 1996: 638)

Any text, including a dissertation, could have been written in a variety of ways. The style/language you will see is the result of a preference. I believe that not only in our ideas but also in our writings; we situate ourselves on the map of scholarship and reproduce and exercise traditional distinctions. I am also aware that the decision to write in a specialized discourse instantaneously restrains some readers who might not have

access to the specific terminology that we have. In spite of having no doubt that non-academic readers are also pretty competent at understanding thoughts presented here, and understanding dissertations are written for the limited scholarly audience, I still value writing in a language without intellectual superiority and unnecessary jargon. I hope that one day this work will be read by non-specialists, by those who have general interest in the political utilization of celebrations and by the people in the field that I wrote about, who are the flesh and bone of this study.⁴⁰

In the alienated world of academia, this is not, of course, the only reason against speaking in a highly specialized discourse, though one risks not being taken seriously as utterly intellectual. Very much at the heart of this way of writing is the belief that we, the people of academia in various levels, need to learn - or I should have said remember - to explain concepts in as straightforward a manner as possible. For this reason when I became excessively involved in the particulars of theoretical debates, I filled up the text with footnotes to preserve the flow of the main text.

However, some pages were interrupted by quotations and/or references. Since this work was written as part of a doctoral study and will constitute one of the “performative” aspects of a graduate degree, in some pages, the rules of performance preceded the priority of a smooth flow of the text. On the other hand, the reasoning of multiple referencing is related to the sensitivity and the polarity that my topic entailed. While covering the competing festivals, in many occasions I wanted to provide references from the two very different ends.

⁴⁰ For excellent accounts of text, fieldwork, and audience related issues see Brettell 1993.

Dissertation Overview

It would be appealing to divide the chapters according to a clear-cut historical or case-by-case order. However, a strictly structured format does not necessarily correlate with the questions that I aim to answer and the specificity of the given case. In order to bring various dimensions to the discussion in the most informative way, each chapter is devoted to a specific set of issues, as follows. I have structured this dissertation so as to demonstrate these celebrations, to enact them and not merely to argue for or articulate them. When I present these traditions in the given format, I am hoping they will serve as a research site in which the presented theories are enacted and evaluated.

This study is divided into seven chapters, including this introduction. In the first five chapters, the argument is summarized and the theoretical context discussed. Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings of the research. In addition to these, there will be an appendix in which I will pick up where the research leaves off, projecting possible further studies and frameworks for the festivals as conflict resolution and transformation processes.

Chapter two illustrates the interrelated growth and utilization of Newroz within the Kurdish minority of Turkey in order to create a distinct Kurdish identity. In this chapter, I argue that the Newroz tradition was only one of their popular traditions and had a limited position among the Kurdish people of Turkey until the 1980s. Kurdish political leadership of the period re-appropriated and promoted Newroz as its own ethnic narrative to articulate its identity. In the Kurdish case, the rise of the cultural is associated with the emergence of ethnic consciousness and is not distinct from the revival of tradition. Thus, Newroz became a powerful tool distinguishing the Kurdish minority from the Turkish

state discourse and promoting the Kurdish culture and politics.

Chapter three displays and interprets my field observations of Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır. After the presentation of the field conditions and the discussion of my specific position as a fieldworker, the findings of my 2001 and 2002 Diyarbakır Newroz celebrations will be presented. The chapter will explore the appropriation of Newroz as part of the political expression of the Kurdish political opposition. This chapter will demonstrate how Newroz portrays and maintains Kurdish claims and operates through the spreading of an “historical truth” that facilitates people with the historical, cultural and social capabilities to resist a single nation-based state structure and demand a different political environment for their rights.

Chapter four lays the groundwork for the early history of the Turkish Nevruz tradition since the beginning of the republican era and prepares the reader for the consequent contrary operations of the new year celebrations. It examines the evidence gathered from the Ministry of Culture Archives, the Turkish National Library and the Library of the Turkish National Assembly in Ankara. This section, which traces the beginning of the multidimensional and complex ways in which the state has used concepts of “tradition” (Briggs, 1986), provides a detailed historical account of Nevruz up to the time when Kurdish appropriation starts.

The analysis of the various findings reveals that the Nevruz tradition has had popularity among the Turkish population historically. However, until the Turkish Ministry of Culture’s appropriation of the 1990s, it was not on the list of principal celebrations that have crucial functions for socialization and were promoted by the Turkish state. Besides providing the background of Nevruz, this chapter presents an

overview of Turkish national cultural policies and strategies. This allows me to give more broad consideration to general shifts in the “nation-making” rationale during the initiation of the Turkish republic. This chapter, therefore, provides a historical context for the discussions of the current social engineering operations conducted by the Turkish state and counter operations against them.

Chapter five continues to investigate Nevruz but moves on to consider its rebirth in the 1990s. My detailed analysis of this post-Newroz Nevruz is based on the official records of this state-administered re-birth along with material that was published to promote the Turkish state way of understanding the tradition. In the chapter, I argue that Nevruz was created to reproduce and support the official Turkish policies within a newly re-visited venue. As I mentioned above, the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic formulated elaborate programs to purify the national culture, language, and history. In the nation-creation setting, these national purification campaigns served to create an homogenous nation. At the beginning of this grave nation-building process, Nevruz was among the events that were celebrated. However, it eventually faded and was left out of the Turkish official celebrations until its return in the beginning of the 1990s. The chapter considers the re-birth of Nevruz as part of the state’s dominance in the cultural sphere and contextualizes it as part of the Kemalist continuous revolution.

Chapter six examines the pedagogical utilizations of these contested festivals. It explores the development and function of contrasting, pedagogical activities through Nevruz and Newroz and composes their comparative implications for the alternate identity creation/promotion processes. Further, it reviews the context of social engineering over the history of the Turkish Republic, the origins of the counter civic

education and pedagogical policy-making and implementation processes, and the actors who participate in both.

The seventh and final chapter contains one final comparison; it assesses how “the political” is constituted and deployed within these celebrations. I argue the recent construction of tradition and culture through Newroz and Nevruz has had an explicitly political agenda. At the same time, it is important to point out that the messages that were written on these bulletin boards are always interacting and changing. These competing changing constructions of traditional culture throughout the Turkish republican period most importantly reflect changing utopian visions of a modern idea of nation and identity.

The appendix is about the conflict transformation capacities of the presented festivals. It explores the possible role of the Newroz and Nevruz festivals in conflict settlement, marking the direction for an alternative interaction venue in order to promote peace and resolve this deep-seated conflict through peaceful means.

CHAPTER 2

Articulating and Positioning a Collective Ethnic Identity through Performance:

When, Why and How?

Festivals and public performances, in general, are often the sites where the dominant and subordinated groups compete to assert their own definitions. Even though festivals and public performances, as temporary forms of cultural expression has no direct link with the surrounding political circumstances, they usually provide the opening for subordinated groups to redefine social relationships and put their own spin on the current state of affairs. Besides providing a space for entertainment, celebration of the community, expression of community solidarity, these celebrations also serve as sites for enactment of the world turned upside down (Burke 1978: 188, 199-200).

One such tradition in Turkey is Newroz, a celebration of the observance of the solar New Year, marked by the spring equinox. This chapter investigates how Newroz was appropriated and re-produced by the Kurdish minority as part of the group's identity creation project in Turkey. In particular, my study seeks to establish Newroz as a socio-political production that responds to the surrounding circumstances by taking on the role of the master narrative. In so doing, Newroz not only becomes the showcase for ethnic and cultural uniqueness, but is also the site for the Kurdish minority to come together in a collective effort to create a Kurdish identity.

First, I will begin by providing a historical background to the roots of Newroz and describing the re-development of Newroz's political adaptation in Turkey. I will, then, present how Newroz was chosen, appropriated, and canonized as a Kurdish tradition and as a visible site for the Kurdish political struggle against the Turkish government, thus facilitating the group's effort at creating a Kurdish historical consciousness and constructing a collective past.⁴¹ Finally, I will examine why Newroz was used and why this tradition was chosen, among other available modern and traditional sources for "practicing identities" (Roseneil and Seymour 1999).

The following are some of the main questions addressed in this chapter:

- 1) How was Newroz chosen and re-appropriated in the first place?
- 2) How was a festival performance selected over a written form?
- 3) How Newroz, instead of other possible traditional performative venues?
- 4) How and under what specific decision-making mechanisms did this utilization process take place?

Before I start, I would like to borrow "a note of caution" from Janet Klein, in her work on the origins and the nature of Kurdish nationalist discourse during the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, Klein wants her readers to constantly keep in mind the complexity of Kurdish history. For the question of "when and how did the Kurdish nationalism

⁴¹ I am aware of the problems associated with using the term "canonization" and relating the concept of canon with an unwritten "text" such as Newroz. In the frameworks of literary and cultural studies, the term defines a process of establishing a standard literature and creation of a norm and hierarchy. It also implies a junction between teaching and socialization through national literature, and the construction of national identity. My use of canon in regard to the Kurdish identity search through Newroz highlights the culture and socialization junction and considering the subordinating circumstance of the Kurds, the use of the concept of canon may be justifiable. As we learned from the literature on nationalism, historical memories and shared narratives are crucial for shaping national identities. In my research, I am more interested in the absence of the "deep functional utility" (Greenblatt 1997: 462 cited in Gluzman 2003: 2) of literature. For a

begin?," she offers the following response: "it began at different times, in different places, and out of different historical realities for different Kurds" (Klein 1996: 1-2).

Consistent with Klein's point, the multiple aspects of the Kurdish culture that are shaped by various factors have to take into consideration the multiple aspects of the Kurdish history and culture.

I should also make clear at the outset that I do not claim to have the satisfactory responses for all of these questions. The level of institutionalization in the Kurdish opposition in the era that Newroz was established, the difficulty to obtain written material due to their marginal position, and the lack of private collections hampered my efforts to provide a satisfactory calendar of political resurrection of Newroz in Turkey. My personal communications and interviews with individuals who were politically active in some of those circles confirmed the re-appropriation of Newroz in Turkey. However, I have been unable to pin down a specific day or event, or a specific political group that started this crucial politico-cultural movement. The gaps in the data require a further study, which can only be filled with an oral history project that exceeds the focus and time frame of this dissertation. But it provides myriads of possibilities for future research.

In this chapter, I claim that the utilization of Newroz is neither a total invention nor a limited transformation of an already accepted and widely celebrated festival. Instead, it appears as the re-appropriation of a deep-seated tradition for the purpose of identity creation. In the case of Newroz, the primordial notions of the Kurdish past was

good parallel argument, see Rodriguez 1996. For an argument of the canon-making institutions and the idea of "alternative canon," see Golding 1995.

re-discovered and utilized to create common bonds, to structure cultural awareness, and to spur political mobility within the Kurdish minority in Turkey.⁴²

From the outset, this appropriation, obviously, was not conducted or controlled by an established central mechanism or a centralized decision-making body. Instead, it arose as a result of various intervening factors. Therefore, this section will also explore the political appropriation of a tradition in a non-state context and seek to map the major characteristics of the operation through its evolution.

In the following section, I will introduce the city of Diyarbakır, which is host to the flagship of Newroz festivals in Turkey. Subsequently, I will present the key concepts that will be used to make sense of this politico-cultural operation. I will, then, discuss how, and why, the traditional symbols of Newroz were appropriated to heighten Kurdish social and political identity.

The City of Diyarbakır

I have never encountered an ethnographic work in which the author does not find the studied field and the people unique, and the presented field experience terribly important, I have no intention of breaking this unwritten rule here.

I had my first trip to Diyarbakır in early 1980s. As a university student living in Ankara, I visited my friends on various trips and spent time there. I did not know at that

⁴² By making this point and describing Newroz as a useful source for generating primordial notions of the Kurdish past, I do not claim to subscribe only to the primordialist's view. In fact, in the later part of this chapter, I also highlight the constructivist aspect of the Newroz operation when describing how the modern nationalist leadership in Turkey has appropriated the tradition. For a proficient argument on Kurdish nationalism and the major theoretical approaches, see Vali 2003.

time that I was doing “preliminary work” that would later enrich my understanding of the city and its people immensely.

Diyarbakır⁴³ is the biggest city of southeastern Turkey with an estimated population of 700,000.⁴⁴ The majority of its population is Kurds, along with Turks, which are around 20 percent, and Arabs and Christians, which are less than 1 percent.⁴⁵ The city is located in a steppe-like plain on the west bank of the upper Tigris (Dicle) river. The old city, the center of the town, is surrounded by a well preserved, five kilometer city wall, which was built by the Roman Emperor Constantinus II in 349 and second in size only to the Great Wall of China.⁴⁶ The wall divides the city into two. The old city, with its narrow streets and quarters, once divided the population of the city according to religious background. As a pivotal station on the ancient trade route from the Persian-Arabian Gulf to the Mediterranean ports and, via Byzantium, to the West, Diyarbakır has the second largest number historical buildings in Turkey,⁴⁷ after Istanbul (*İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1994: 469-472, Yılmazçelik 1995: 11-98, Arslan 1999, *Baedeker Turkey* 1999: 279, *Fodor’s Exploring Turkey* 1999: 220).⁴⁸

⁴³ During the beginning of the republican era, the city was called “Diyarbakir.” In 1937 with the order of Kemal Atatürk it later became “Diyarbakır” (*İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1994: 471 and Vedat Cetin “Diyarbakir Nasıl Diyarbakır Oldu?” *Radikal*, 25 March 2001). Yılmazçelik states that during Ottoman era while “Diyarbakir” defined the whole province, “Amid” designated for the city center (2001: 1-2). In his dictionary of Ottoman place names, Nuri Akbayar agrees with Yılmazçelik (Akbayar 2001: 46). In the contemporary Kurdish nationalist context it is very common to see the use of Amid instead of Diyarbakır. For an historical account of the name of the city see Yılmazçelik 1995: 1-3. For Evliya Çelebi’s account of the city’s name, see Bruinessen and Boeschoten 1988: 115.

⁴⁴ According to the results of 2000 census, the population of Diyarbakır city is 671,000. Şeyhmus Diken estimates the current day population as one million, night population as 700,000. With the dependent villages and towns the population reaches 1.5 million. (Personal correspondence with Şeyhmus Diken).

⁴⁵ Şeyhmus Diken notes that the majority of the Turkish population consist of public servants and their families, including police officers and soldiers. (Personal correspondence with Şeyhmus Diken).

⁴⁶ For a thorough account of the wall and the gates see Yılmazçelik 1995: 17-25. For Evliya Çelebi’s view of the walls see Bruinessen and Boeschoten 1988: 129 and 161.

⁴⁷ See Tuncer 1996 for an extensive account of Diyarbakır mosques.

⁴⁸ For additional information on Diyarbakır and its history see Konyar 1936, Beysanoğlu 1992, Akbulut

The regional importance of the city dates to thousands of years before the Roman conquest. Although there are estimates that the foundation of the city was laid in 3000 B.C., the origin of urban settlement and the early urban forms of Diyarbakır are unknown. The historical data suggest that throughout its history, the city was one of the grain storage, distribution and trade centers for agriculturally rich Mesopotamia. Located between major trade routes, it also hosted significant military power. The use of land for the city, its division into various districts, and the quality of housing display well established urban life throughout its long history. Of course, the evolution of the city, like other cities, has not been a linear process. Consistent with the surrounding political conditions, the structure of the city has changed throughout its history. During the late formative periods, a succession of different rulers shaped the cultural environment of Diyarbakır. The Roman Empire chose Diyarbakır as Mesopotamia's capital city by the fourth century, while the neighboring city of Nisibis (Nusaybin) was held by the Romans' biggest enemy in the region, the Sasanids. The Arab invasion of the city during the time of caliph Umar in 639 was followed by conquest and rule by Seljuks (1085-1232), Safavids (1507-1515), and Ottomans (1515-1923). Furthermore, during intervening periods the city was ruled by various sovereign kingdoms that also shaped the character and evolution of the city (Arslan 1999).⁴⁹

1996, Tekin 1997, Altunboğa 1999, and especially Beysanoğlu et al. 1999.

⁴⁹ The accounts of some travelers of the last five centuries such as Nasir-i Hüsrev (1046), M. D. Aramon (1555), Simeon of Poland (1612), J. B. Tavernier (1630), Evliya Çelebi (1654-55), Paul Lucas (1701), Carsten Niebuhr (1766), Inciciyan (1804), J. S. Buckingham (1815), William Heude (1817), Helmut Von Moltke (1838), Xavier Hommaire (1847), and Heinrich Petermann (1853), Amand Von Schweiger-Lerchenfeld (1881), Lamec Saad (1890), Edmund Neuman (1890), Max Kirsh (1924) provide valuable information about the city's central position as a trade and cultural center of the region (Yılmazçelik 1995:

Since in most cases Diyarbakır was chosen as a regional administrative center by the new occupiers, it hosted the region's political, economic and cultural elite throughout most periods. These left eloquent examples of their power, imagination and influence in various forms. Their mark is apparent in the city's history of scrupulous planning and wealth, while the city's long-lasting eminence can be seen throughout the built environment: the city walls, a range of architectural features spread throughout various districts, ceremonial spaces and advanced water systems can still be seen in contemporary Diyarbakır. The economic and architectural marks of the previous civilizations parallel the current cultural inheritance of the city. Not only the width of the streets, the site of the buildings, and the methods of dealing with the rough climate, but also the cultures of the people who carried these were blended over the centuries. This produced what Şeyhmus Diken calls, “the mosaic of religions and cultures” (Diken 2002: 249). When the metropolitan mayor of Diyarbakır, Osman Baydemir, introduced himself to the French President Jacques Chirac, during the Congress of Cities and Local Governments in May 2004, he did so as “the mayor of the capital of Mesopotamia, the host of 26 civilizations.” This move, I believe, emphasized the importance of Diyarbakır as a common social space for various cultures, and testifies to its richness as a cultural landscape.⁵⁰

According to the first census of the Republican Period, taken in 1927, the population of the city was around 30-35,000. A few years after the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, Diyarbakır was selected as the center of the Inspectorate General (Birinci Genel

14-15, Pınar 1999: 147-163, Kaçalın 1999: 109-129).

⁵⁰ *Özgür Politika*, 4 May, 2004 (Internet version). (Congres des Cites et Gouvernements Locaux Unis, 2-5

Müfettişlik) to forward Turkish republican reforms in the region in 1928. Along with the construction of a railroad line to Diyarbakır in 1935, the city retained its position of central importance within the new state structure.

The most important changes in the urban fabric did not come until the late 1980's and 1990's, when the population of the city increased immensely.⁵¹ The main reason for this growth was the forced displacement of the village population of the region, as a result of the then-ongoing civil war. Along with a few other metropolitan centers, Diyarbakır had to absorb the majority of the displaced people, facing the challenges associated with this rapid urbanization process. During the last two decades, hundreds of thousands of people immigrated to Diyarbakır. The result brought fundamental changes in the social structure of the city. People, for the most part, were abruptly forced to abandon their previous ways of life and migrate to Diyarbakır. Because of the massive influx in a very short period of time, the city was unable to generate sufficient housing or employment for the entire population. Houses and apartments started to be shared, with two or three families sometimes being forced to live in the same one-family unit. The forced and unplanned expansion of the city brought new ways of life and new sets of issues into being. The issues of the village/small town environment were combined with

May 2004).

⁵¹ In the preface to Orhan Cezmi Tuncer's *Diyarbakır Camileri: Mukarnas, Geometri, Orantı*, former Diyarbakır mayor Ahmet Bilgin, while mentioning the services that were provided in his tenure, sheds light to the population increase and chaotic life conditions of the masses in the city. According to Bilgin in a rather short period of time the population of Diyarbakır expanded from 300,000 to 1.5 million. He also states that it is very common to see 3-4 families settled in a single apartment unit (Tuncer 1996: 5). Comparing the current population with the following population increase data can give a better idea about the mentioned population increase. 1935 - 34,642; 1955 - 61,224; 1965 - 102,653; 1970 - 149,566; 1985 - 305,940; 1990 - 381,144 (İslam Ansiklopedisi 1994, Cilt 9: 471). For the accounts of current internal

the familiar problems of urbanization, and the distinction between urban and rural ways of living became blurred.

The impact of this massive shift, primarily a result of political factors, has been varied and mostly negative. The city had already been unable to create a sufficient employment for the pre-immigration resident population, and the forced expansion of its population made poverty the main characteristic of life for many in Diyarbakır. Significant social and environmental problems developed. Already poor living conditions declined.⁵² Today a significant portion of Diyarbakır's population conduct their lives without secure employment and income. This leaves thousands of people facing a lack of food, social security, safety, housing, food and other basic services. Because of the current high unemployment and immigration rates, a significant number of people in Diyarbakır have been forced to develop informal employment for themselves. Whenever they have a chance, women and especially children enter the market in the informal sector and become breadwinners, of sorts, for their families. Poverty, inequality in access to social services, exploitation in various forms, and various types of corruption constitute only some of the social problems that now beset the city.⁵³

In spite of its difficulties, however, Diyarbakır is still considered the cultural center and the heartland of the Kurdish identity in Turkey. It has been at the core of every historical event in the history of the Kurdish minority. This “always-the-same” and “ever-

displacements in Turkey see Panico 1994, Freilick 1999 and *Internally Displaced People* 2002: 164-167. For the social outcomes of the displacements see Diken 2002: 145-153.

⁵² See *Bölgeiçi Zorunlu Göçten Kaynaklanan Toplumsal Olayların Diyarbakır Kenti Olçeginde Araştırılması* 1998.

⁵³ In his research on homeless children of Diyarbakır Sevil Atauz finds 2370 homeless children (in Diken 2002: 152). According to the journalist İsmet Berkan, in 30 August 1998 reception, the highest ranking general in Diyarbakır, Yaşar Büyükanıt, stated that there were 2000 homeless children between the ages of

new” city, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, historically has had multiple roles.⁵⁴ It was not only a generally-recognized historical, social, economic and cultural center, but also the heart of Kurdish culture. Even in its difficult moments it has retained this cultural status. This capability, of course, lies much deeper than the contemporary situation of the city. It derives from a historic imagination that connects the city with all important aspects of the Kurdish identity in Turkey. From being the main target of the Sheikh Said forces, the rebel army of the 1925 Kurdish rebellion, to hosting Prison No. 5, the legendary military prison during the post 12 September 1980 coup, the city is rich in symbolic rallying-points from Kurdish history. This history continues into the present, shaped anew by current factors. From the book signings of Mehmet Uzun,⁵⁵ a well known contemporary Kurdish novelist, to the screening of the film version of *Mem-u Zin* epic,⁵⁶ one of the oldest texts, versified by Ehmede Xani in 1696, Diyarbakır continues to occupy a significant position in Kurdish political and cultural life.

The significance of Diyarbakır has never been limited to the insiders of the city. Besides displaying the Kurdish identity for both insiders and outsiders, the city also constituted an embodiment of the Kurdish minority for the central Turkish authority. Diyarbakır’s symbolic significance for Turkish officials is similar to that of Barcelona for their Spanish counterparts. In his *Urban Change and the European Left, Tales from the New Barcelona*, Donald McNeill describes Barcelona as capital of *la anti-Espana* on the

8-12 in Diyarbakır (*Radikal*, 1 September 1998 cited in Diken 2002: 152).

⁵⁴ Benjamin’s quotes are taken from Gunn 2001: 6.

⁵⁵ For an account of book signing of Mehmet Uzun, and his take of its social and psychological meanings see Uzun 2003a: 27-28.

⁵⁶ The full title of *Mem u Zin* or *Mem o Zin* is *Mami Alan o Zini Buhtan* (Izady 1992: 176). For a brief but comprehensive account of Mem u Zin and its most popular version’s author Ehmede Xani, see Özoğlu 2004: 31-33.

basis of the nationalist and socialist identities prominent in Catalonia and the Basque country (1999: 58). It would not be inaccurate to describe Diyarbakır in similar terms. For these reasons, in times of peace and war, the central government of Turkey has retained a skeptical view of the city.

According to urban sociologist Sharon Zukin, “building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labor, and capital.” She continues; “but it also depends on how they manipulate symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what - and who - should be visible and what should not. . .” (Zukin 2000: 133). The current “look and feel of” Diyarbakır results from a profound blend of the past and present. The varied rich images of the past interact with successfully tailored and highly contested versions of the present, marked as it is by dramatic antagonisms. For instance, a permanent banner connecting two sides of a street and facing the governor’s office in Diyarbakır reads “Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene – How Proud I am that I am Turk.” One block away a billboard that was rented by the municipality, which is run by the pro-Kurdish party⁵⁷ mayor, reads “Kendimizi ve Kentimizi Yönetiyoruz - We govern both our city and ourselves.” The Turkish street names, eye-catching, state-built statues, busts of Atatürk and monuments in the central positions in the city, are confronted with contrasting images. The addresses in daily use contradict official street names; the state's statuary is confronted with historical monuments that go back to the pre-republican era and these are sometimes faced with

⁵⁷ During the last two decades political parties which focused on the Kurdish issue have been closed for various reasons. Even in the period that this research is conducted the party was closed and replaced by a newly founded one. Because of this constant changes and not to confuse foreign reader for this politically forced party inflation I will mention these as "pro-Kurdish political party" rather than providing a full title.

counter-displays, often making intensive use of the colors red, green, and yellow, the combination that is recognized as symbolizing the Kurdish ethnicity; Kurdish shops are frequently given ethnically-conscious names. All of these factors embody and reproduce an oppositional, grass-roots Kurdish cultural dominance in the city.

To the casual visitor, Diyarbakır seems no different than any other Turkish city of similar size. The competition of symbols, monuments, public performances and the extensive and ever-shifting images of the city, however, adds extra layers to the symbolic environment of the city. The bold contradiction between the symbols of the central government and the local ones, manifestations of the political-historical contradictions that provide the pretext for them, causes people to create their own mental landscapes of Diyarbakır, based largely on their ethnic and social locations. As we learn from Lefebvre, every freeing and empowering politics inevitably involves a spatial strategy. The struggle occurs not just in a space, but for a space: “a space that the difference can be told” (Lefebvre 1991).⁵⁸ Thus, the city of Diyarbakır does not only host specific images, manifested in expressions, conduct, and behavior, but also provides the location for the ultimate symbolic Kurdish expression, the Newroz celebration held on March 21st every year.

⁵⁸ The quote from Lefebvre is borrowed from Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1997: 13.

**“Coping with the Unavailability of the Nation:”⁵⁹ The making of a Political
Memory Via Tradition**

Newroz in Turkey, in Ernest Gellner’s words, appears as a way of saying that we “were [here] all the time and . . . the past matters a great deal” for the Kurdish minority of Turkey (Gellner 1999: 32). By highlighting this point, I do not mean to suggest a premeditated search for a constitutive myth to construct historical memory. Instead, I describe an effort to fill the gaps of a necessary ethnic narrative from an available tradition, in an effort to provide a framework for fostering ethnic belonging, cultural homogeneity and “confidence of community of anonymity” (Anderson 1991: 40).

In the model that I am suggesting, a modern ethnic-based construct was built on the primordial notions of the Kurdish heritage. This highly rigorous effort was necessary for the formation of a shared ethnic consciousness, and as a pedagogical undertaking to raise the level of ethnic consciousness and the political participation of the Kurds in Turkey. In the presented case, the Newroz tradition stands as a venue for what Anthony Smith calls “cultural primordialism” (Smith 2000: 20). In this process, the necessary modern ties that are required by the social and political circumstances are generated from a rich symbolic reservoir of Newroz tradition. According to Clifford Geertz, ethnic and national ties spring from the “cultural givens” of social existence. In the Kurdish case, the Newroz has occupied this role and, with its “overpowering coerciveness,” has provided

⁵⁹ “Coping with the Unavailability of the Nation” is a sub-title in E. Valentine Daniel’s article on the Tamil immigrants’ suffering in Britain, in which Daniel specifically studies what occurs when the notion of

the elusive source of the Kurdish ethnic identity (Geertz 1973: 259 cited in Smith 2000: 21).⁶⁰

Anthony D. Smith's theory of "ethno-symbolism" explains how the relationship between the cultural products and the idea of nationhood or the collective ethnic identity functions. Smith's theory acknowledges the role of culture and symbols in the ethnic identity formation process and identifies the significance of various forms of arts and performances as the concrete archetypes of ethnic cultures and symbols (Smith 2002: 30 cited in Leoussi 2004: 144).⁶¹ In this respect, Newroz appears to be a good example of Smith's framework, as it has proved to be a cogent medium for the re-creation and promotion of the ethnic idea.

Before reviewing the evolution of Newroz and discussing in detail how the festival became canonized as tradition, I would like to clarify what I understand for the role of "tradition" in the creation of a collective memory. In her article on Okiek ceremonies in Kenya, Corinne A. Kratz describes the concept of tradition as "an attitude towards and way of evaluating and understanding experience ... implicated in the representations and understandings of history and identity through time" (Kratz 1993: 31). Additionally, she expands on the three common approaches of the English notions of tradition, which also correlate with Okiek notions of tradition. The three approaches are: 1) tradition as differentiation; 2) tradition as ideology; and 3) tradition as cultural creation.

the nation is lost within the immigrant Tamil community (1997: 320).

⁶⁰ Also, see Smith 1998: 151-153 for the same argument.

The first and most prevalent approach uses tradition to differentiate societies and their members. When it is used to categorize societies, the concept is described as opposed to the modern or progressive. However, this type of concept has also romanticized and situated tradition as something received from previous generations and, thus, one that assumes continuity.

The second approach emerges as a response to this view and challenges the romantic generational continuity. It considers tradition as part of an ideology that is used to mask power relations.

In contrast, the third approach undermines the distinguishing elements of the first and the function-oriented focus of the second, by highlighting the social interaction involved in the emergence of tradition. This approach focuses on how cultural practices are negotiated in situated interaction and constantly reproduced and transformed (Kratz 1993: 32-35).

Kratz's extensive fieldwork data and comparative work on the English and Okiek notions of culture provide a useful argument on how Okiek create their understanding of tradition, and sheds light on the Newroz appropriation. Among many other significant points, Kratz discusses how "the Okiek sense of tradition . . . is at once absolute and differentiated in perspective, personal and collective, part of ethnic identity and individual identity" (1993: 38). She describes how the Okiek are able to create periodization in their discourse of their everyday life in the forest by speaking in two very contrary modes and juxtaposing the "then" and "now."

⁶¹ For a brief summary of Smith's ethno-symbolic approach see Guibernau and Hutchinson 2004: 1-4.

However, the historical division in the Okiek discourse is not categorically defined by or with respect to other cultures: “Neither colonial punctuations of Then or Now nor the national independence noted in the Now are crucial watersheds from the local Okiek viewpoint” (1993: 41). As a whole Okiek ceremony “neither falsifies history nor intentionally obfuscates, but produces a picture of overriding continuity and creates a tradition which enshrines and justifies ceremonial practice” (Kratz 1993: 54).

Kratz’s valuable arguments on the use of tradition for “periodization,” a sense of continuity, and the ethnic-individual identity junction, which I will return to at the end of this chapter, would be further enhanced with Aleida Assmann’s clarification regarding the concept of memory.

Discussing Günter Grass’ doubts about the concept of “collective memory,” Assmann divides and details the concept of “collective memory,” first coined by Maurice Halbwach in the 1920’s, into three categories: 1) “social memory;” 2) “political memory”; and 3) “cultural memory.” Grouping the political and cultural memory into the same category, Assmann argues that these memory types can proceed from one generation to another by integrating those that have no firsthand knowledge of the history through education and various performative participations. “As we step across the boundary from *short-term* to *long-term* durability, an embodied, implicit and fuzzy *bottom-up memory* is transformed into an institutionalized *top-down memory*.” What Assmann calls the “top-down memory” is really the one that has an immediate impact on collective identity formation and political action. Here, the memories emanating from a specific experience boundlessly open the gates of meaning for the current and future generations (Assmann 2004: 25).

While elaborating on and refining Halbwach's widely used concept of "collective culture" by offering her additional categories, Assmann also rightly cautions the reader about some possible misconceptions:

It must be emphasized that the step from individual to political memory is not achieved by an easy analogy. Institutions and collectivities do not possess a memory like individuals; there is of course, no equivalent to the neurological system or the anthropological disposition. Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church or a firm do not 'have' a memory, they 'make' one themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and monuments (Assmann 2004: 25-26).

In addition, she describes how political memory differs from personal and social memory:

Firstly, they [political constructions of memories] are not connected to other memories and the memories of others but tend towards homogenous unity and self-contained closure. Secondly, political memory is not fragmentary and diverse but emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message. And thirdly, it does not exist as something volatile and transient, but is anchored in material and visual signs such as sites and monuments as well as in performative action such as commemoration rites, which periodically reactivate the memory and enhance collective participation (Assmann 2004: 26).

In the next section, I examine the making of Newroz and its persistent establishment as the crucial element in the creation of Kurdish identity of political memory. I argue that Newroz became the main object of collective ethnic identity creation among the Kurds of Turkey due to the political circumstances and related language-based difficulties that interrupted the commonality of a common literary heritage among the Kurdish masses. Through the Newroz, the Kurdish identity is not only created, but also performed.

This chapter is particularly concerned with the process of selection of Newroz as an ethnic narrative. It looks at how folklore - Newroz, in particular - came to be utilized outside of the vernacular use and how such a conceptualization was instituted and reconstructed. Using available data and the presented theoretical framework, this chapter addresses Newroz's capacity for "overpowering coerciveness" and tries to make sense of the decision making mechanisms which enlisted Newroz for the construction of a shared memory.

The (Un)Available Sources of Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism

My claim that Newroz plays a key role in the construction of an ethnic identity and even imagining a nation requires a more detailed explanation for the lack of use of more common mediums for this purpose. As I had mentioned above, Anthony D. Smith's theory of *ethno-symbolism* sees art as having an important role in the affirmation of ethno-cultural roots and creation of the national identity. Under Smith's framework, various lines of artistic production such as painting, music, and literature have presented concrete embodiments of ethnic cultures and symbols (Smith 2002: 30 cited in Leoussi 2004: 144).⁶²

In this section, even though I loosely utilize this theoretical framework, I do not plan to offer a thorough review of all forms of Kurdish artistic productions while applying Smith's theory of ethnic-symbolism to explain the creation of the Kurdish

⁶² Ethno-symbolists are rightly criticized for underestimating the differences between modern nations and earlier ethnic communities. The relationship between the cultural material of the past and the modern identity creation is also found problematic by some. Recognizing the criticism and even agreeing with some aspects of it, I still find ethno-symbolic argument useful for this section. See Özkırımlı 2000: 183-189 for the comprehensive critique of ethno-symbolism.

identity in Turkey. In fact, I abandoned my initial attempt to provide a wide, systematic treatment of Kurdish artistic productions because of the difficulty in obtaining written sources and Kurdish artifacts.

Instead, my approach has been to examine the contents of Kurdish literature and note its comparative lack of use in the construction of the Kurdish identity. This does not mean that modern Kurdish literature and the Kurdish literary language are undeveloped.⁶³ Available literary works show that there is a Kurdish literature and a well-established Kurdish language that one can talk about,⁶⁴ even though the language is divided in various dialects and alphabets. In Christine Allison's words; "although Kurdish society was largely illiterate until the twentieth century, throughout its history it has never been totally untouched by literacy" (Allison 1996: 31).

On the basis of the Kurdish-Ottoman journals, Janet Klein illustrates, for instance, how published literary work became a crucial part of Kurdish nationalist discourse in the creation of a sense of Kurdish national identity and how the publications of Kurdish history and literature served "to show other peoples that the Kurds were just as deserving of the title, 'nation,' as the others were, and on the other hand, to show the Kurdish people themselves that they had a proud – and national – past from which they could move into the future" (Klein 1996: 85).

⁶³ My presented approach is highly encouraged by Edmund Burke's note: "Since the craftsmen and peasants with whom we are concerned were often illiterate and better at using their hands than at using their words, the iconographical approach to their attitudes and values ought to be a fruitful one. The artifacts which they produced are our most immediate contact with the dead whose world we are trying to reconstruct and interpret, so much so that it may seem odd to call this approach 'oblique' at all. The reason for doing so is simply that history is written, so that when a cultural historian interprets an artifact he translates from paint or wood or stone into words" (Burke 1978: 80).

⁶⁴ According to Mehmet Uzun, a Kurdish novelist and the editor of the most recent Kurdish literature anthology, there is a modern Kurdish literature. However, it is not fair to compare this literature with the

Klein further discusses how, in the end, these published works failed to generate an enduring sense of Kurdish national identity due, in part, to the high numbers of illiterate Kurds, strictly enforced censorship, and the inaccessibility of the publications. Moreover, the Kurdish intellectuals were said to be “out of touch” with the Kurdish masses (Klein 1996: 122-123), which made it difficult for the intellectuals to spearhead a nationalistic movement. As a result, even though Kurdish literature existed and could have provided material for the construction of a Kurdish identity, these Kurdish literary works, unlike Newroz, were not easily accessible to the general public.

The success stories of nation and literature affinity, the Turkish, Greek, and various Middle Eastern examples of the process of identity creation, lend support to my approach. So do the works of Eric Hobsbawm (1992), Ernest Gellner (1983), Anthony Smith (1999) and Benedict Anderson (1991) and their formulation for the culture-nationalism-nation connection. In considering all of the above, this section starts with an attempt to find an answer to the question: “why was the Kurdish literature not a crucial factor for the invention of the collective Kurdish identity and an anti-establishment mass movement?” I believe phrasing a question in this nature would shed light on an understanding of the appropriation of Newroz in Turkey.

In a population that is now divided among at least five countries - aside from the immigrants all over the western world - and into various dialects and alphabets, a discussion of a single literature may seem inaccurate. It is perhaps misleading to refer to the Kurdish literature as a single complex entity and to carry on a discussion in such a general manner. However, both the scope of this dissertation and the common tendency

ones were established within nation states (Uzun 2003b: 16).

among scholars to describe Kurdish literature as a single entity convinced me of the usefulness in developing my research in this direction.⁶⁵

Keith Hitchins' article on the 20th century Kurdish literature provides the best summary of the current situations.⁶⁶

Kurdish literature in the 20th c. has been profoundly influenced by conditions over which Kurdish writers themselves have had little control. Lack of political unity and of national independence, together with social and economic underdevelopment, have impeded the growth of a modern literature. The partitioning of Kurdistan, as the area inhabited by the Kurds was commonly known, among Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran after World War I frustrated attempts to create a single literary language, while literary manifestations of Kurdish national sentiment often brought severe repression (Hitchins 1999: 683).

Except for a Kurdish literary movement produced in the Soviet Union that resulted in significant works, Hitchins notes the lack of systematic attention paid by Kurdish intellectuals to their literature. Noting that poetry was the favored category of the Kurdish literary voice for the first two decades of the 20th century, Hitchins observes that prose writers were quick to adapt political and social themes, especially in short stories between the two world wars. While noting the high artistic level of Kurdish poetry and short fiction, he claims that the novel and a modern theater have yet to make their appearance (Hitchins 1999: 684).

Mehrdad Izady draws a parallel between the situation of the Kurdish literature and the "absence of a standardized pan-Kurdish language, an alphabet that at least reflects the

⁶⁵ Christine Allison makes a similar argument for orality and offers the use of "oralities" instead: "An urban Muslim Kurd who can read Turkish novels is likely to have very different attitudes to history, the supernatural and aesthetics from, say, a Yezidi villager in Northern Iraq who has never been to school" (Allison 2001: 11-12).

⁶⁶ Meho and Maglaughlin's excellent annotated bibliography on Kurdish literature was used to reach some of the examples used in this section (2001: 197-213).

vocalic system of various Kurdish dialects would serve to reach a wider audience.”⁶⁷

According to Izady, the fragmentation of Kurdistan and politically charged historical reasons were the primary causes for the unequal development of some Kurdish dialects. While some regional dialects that were spoken by a larger population did not produce significant literary products, others have progressed in written forms and produced literary products (Izady 1992: 177-178). Joyce Blau, the compiler of an anthology of Kurdish literature (1984), agrees with Hitchins’ and Izady’s views on the reasons that kept Kurdish literature limited. Blau also highlights the development of an exile literature since 1980s and the significant steps that were taken for the institutionalization of Kurdish literature in Europe. She also notes the “extraordinary linguistic and ethnic vitality” of the Kurds and the well understood connection between “the cultural development and political freedom” among them (Blau 1996: 25-27).

Mehmet Uzun, one of the most prominent members of the post-1980s Kurdish exile literature that Joyce Blau mentions, also largely agrees with the stated explanations. According to Uzun, there is a modern Kurdish literature, but this literature should not be compared with the literatures created within the state borders. Giving an example from his experience, of how he started to learn more about the Kurdish literature produced outside of his native Turkey only after he moved to Sweden, Uzun underlines the difficulties for the expansion of the literary work within the entire Kurdish population. Drawing on his experience as an author of Kurdish literature, Uzun also provides an

⁶⁷ Since the focal point of the chapter is not linguistic, I use general concepts such as Kurdish language and Kurdish literature, instead of mentioning specific dialects that are used among the Kurdish population. For the origin of the Kurdish language and distribution of its dialects, see Hassanpour 1992. For the history and a comprehensive discussion of the position of Kurdish language in their separate identity claim, see Kreyenbroek 1992, Blau and Suleiman 1996, and Bulut 2002.

insight on the trials and tribulations that beset a Kurdish writer. Besides struggling with the usual language, thematic and style-related issues, Uzun notes, the Kurdish author also has to create readership from scratch (Uzun 2003b: 211).

Since a majority of the Kurdish writers, as well as readers, receive their primary education in languages other than Kurdish, this reality becomes the biggest obstacle at the forefront of literary engagements. At the reader-level, many literate Kurds are not adequately literate in Kurdish. At the level of the writer, a Kurdish writer has to start from ground zero in the writing process and needs to research issues that are readily available for writers of the other languages.⁶⁸ Most importantly, he observes that activists and leaders of Kurdish political organizations tend to see the writer as being at the forefront of political struggle, and this often affects the content and frequency at which such literature is produced (Uzun 2003b: 16-17 and 218).

Similar arguments were given by Hashem Ahmadzadeh and İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan. According to the young researcher İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan, since the first Kurdish novel “Şivane Kurd” was written by a Soviet Kurd Erebe Şemo, the level of writing has made little-to-no advancement. Aydoğan puts the blame for the underdevelopment of Kurdish literature squarely on Kurdish politicians who prefer to communicate in foreign languages. He believes that their preference to speak the language of the country in which they are living is the reason why no Kurdish novel was written between 1940 and 1970. According to Aydoğan, Kurdish literature has not grown

⁶⁸ The volume that he edited is full of examples of the parallel difficulties experienced by some major Kurdish writers. Kemal Burkay, whose poem was sung by Sezen Aksu in 2002 Newroz celebration in Diyarbakır, learned Kurdish only after his first trip to Europe in 1972 (his birth year is 1937), Mahmut Baksi humorously mentions how the exiles of the September 1980 coup helped the betterment of his Kurdish in exile. Musa Anter while in his visits to his uncle at Syria, encountered the work of Kurdish

in tandem with the increase in political resistance and the political mobility of the Kurdish people. Instead, it is during the time of decrease that we are seeing an increase in the Kurdish literary production. Aydoğan also claims that there is a negative correlation between the level of Kurdish literature and political success. He contends that it is only in the time of political failure that Kurdish writers are given the space to produce (*Özgür Politika*, 6 August 2004).

Hashem Ahmadzadeh's comprehensive work tracing the ascent of Kurdish and Persian novels deals with the interdependent relationship between the development of national consciousness and the novel. Studying five Kurdish novels in detail, Ahmadzadeh examines the various aspects of social, cultural and political aspects of the development of Kurdish identity.⁶⁹ He looks at how the unique attributes of these two nations were constructed in their novels. This recent work supports the general claims that Kurdish literature lacked of a role in Kurdish nationalism and the state of Kurdish literature.

In all the Kurdish novels that Ahmadzadeh studies, the suffering of the Kurds without a country they can call their own is seen, especially in works on the fight for national rights and on war and destruction. In analyzing these novels, Ahmadzadeh highlights the existence of the idea of Kurdistan and shows how the Kurdish language has been effective in creating a distinctive Kurdish identity contrasted with the neighboring ethnicities and nationalities. His work also informs us about the late emergence of the

literary figures that was unknown to him (Uzun 2003b: 191, 202, 246).

⁶⁹ The five novel that Hashem Ahmadzadeh (2003) deals with are *Jani Gel* (People's Suffering), *Par* (The City), *Guli Şoran* (The Şoran Flower), *Ewarey Perwane* (Perwane's Evening), and *Roni Mina Evine Tari Mina Mirine* (Light Like Love, Dark Like Death). (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 236-293).

Kurdish novel. Ahmadzadeh mentions that it was only after the 1990s that a slightly higher literary quality was seen in Kurdish novels (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 292).

Ahmadzadeh's work provides concrete examples for understanding the conditions that required a Newroz-type medium for the creation of the ethnic consciousness among the Kurds. For instance, even though *Jani Gel*, the novel of Ibrahim Ehmed, was written in 1956, it was not published until 1972.⁷⁰ Even then, it took another 20 years from its initial publication before the book was translated into Kurmanji, the most common dialect of Kurdish among the Kurds in Turkey. In another example, the second volume of a two-volume novel, *Şar* written by Hisen Arif, was published fifteen years after the first volume was released (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 236-237 and 246). The length of time between writing and publishing, the lack of availability of copies of novels due to oppressive conditions, and the difficulties in getting the novels translated have compounded the struggles of the Kurdish literati. In his work where he compares Persian novel with Kurdish novel, Ahmadzadeh illustrates while “the strong national feelings and the straightforward allusions to the country. . . and its constructed nation” appeared in Persian novels by the first decades of the 20th century, they appeared only in the last decades of the 20th century in the Kurdish case (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 295).

The foregoing seems to point to the significance of what Amir Hassanpour calls “the sword factor.” Hassanpour, in his groundbreaking work on the Kurdish language, launches a creative argument on the cultivation of the Kurdish language. In his discussion

⁷⁰ Because of the oppression in Iraqi Kurdistan, Ehmed had to disguise his real topic, which was Kurdish people and their struggle, by writing on the Algerian revolution. He dedicated the novel to the Algerian revolutionaries (Uzun 2003b: 160).

of Ahmadi Khani's⁷¹ and Haji Qadiri Koyi's⁷² verses, Hassanpour shows how these two early voices on the Kurdish intellectual scene were able to establish a relationship between language cultivation and national unification and liberation. That is, between state power (as symbolized by the sword) and the literary use of the language (as depicted by the pen).⁷³ According to Hassanpour, these two Kurdish voices from two very different eras had claimed that without the sword, the pen could not clear the way for emancipation (Hassanpour 1992: 86-94).⁷⁴ Although the discussed works and embedded opinions differ in their focus of interest, method, and the research scale, all of them mark the historical and political circumstances for the limitations of the Kurdish language and literature, and illustrate the surrounding factors that affected the development of the Kurdish literature.

Without a doubt, the literary aspect only partly explains the evolution of Kurdish ethnic consciousness. There are many other extenuating factors, which I will turn to in the next section.

⁷¹ Khani wrote *Mem u Zin* in 1693-94. His work was considered the national epic of Kurds because of its clear representation of ethnic consciousness. The acceptance of Khani's work as the forerunner of the modern Kurdish nationalism is a controversial issue in Kurdish studies scholarship. Even though, for instance, Basil Nikitine refers to Khani as the "Kurdish Firdousi" (Nikitine 1975: 281 cited in Strohmeier 2003: 27), Martin van Bruinessen disputes this type of reading of *Mem u Zin*. He claims that the condition that leads to the flourishing of a national identity was absent not only among the Kurds but also in Europe at that time. He even challenges the existence of an ethnic identity for the given period among the Kurds. Therefore, he sees consideration of Khani as the father of Kurdish nationalism an exaggeration (Bruinessen 2003a: 40-57).

⁷² Koyi was a nineteenth century poet and religious scholar.

⁷³ Abbas Vali also criticizes Amir Hassanpour for his essentialist assumptions for his handling of Ahmadi Khani's and Haji Qadiri Koyi's works (Vali 2003: 90-97).

⁷⁴ For a brief account of the "Sword and Pen" argument, see Hassanpour 1993: 41.

Other Factors that Affected the Creation of a Nationalist Discourse⁷⁵

Several additional factors must be taken into consideration when tracing the evolution of the Kurdish ethnic consciousness. According to Benedict Anderson, the novel was highly affected globally by niche-marketing in the second half of the 20th century. This process produced the lines of novel production such as the crime novel, the spy novel, the pornographic novel, the science fiction novel, the historical novel. In turn, each of these novels produced their own conventions and readership. In today's world, Anderson claims, the previous functions of novels are filled by two institutions that were not around a century ago: the ministries of information and culture. Therefore, he believes, the nations with states have less and less need for the novel as a nation-building tool (Anderson 1998: 335).⁷⁶

Even though Anderson makes this argument to explain the decline of the novel in nations with states, it is imperative to note that writers-without-nation are dependent on the educational system of the states in which they live. And this might also help to explain why Kurdish literature has played such a minor role in the identity creation of the Kurds.

A more specific reason for the inclusion of Newroz in the historical discourse can be discussed on the basis of the work of Abbas Vali. In an argument that he makes for the cases of Turkey and the Pahlavi state of Iran, Vali mentions the governing constructions of national identities of Turkey and Iran as “uniform and indivisible,” and as rejecting

⁷⁵ Throughout this chapter I used the concepts of ethnic-national, ethnicity-nationality interchangeably. I recognize the difference and the importance of these differences. However, the frequent shifts between a struggle for ethnic consciousness and national identity, or a fight for cultural rights to full national/federalistic rights necessitates this approach.

⁷⁶ I first encountered this work in Ahmadzadeh 2003: 7.

ethnic and cultural differences under the banner of modernity. As a result, by rebelling against Turkey's politics of territorial centralism and the culture of modernity, the Kurdish leaders inevitably reinforced the widespread notion of the Kurds as tribal and uncivilized, as opposed to the sovereign nations' image of civilization and modernity (Vali 1996: 44).

One immediate outcome of this is the rise of the image of the Kurds as "the other." Under those kinds of conditions, "spoken Kurdish was no longer the language of the difference, but of otherness - of antagonism and opposition" (Vali 1996: 45). More importantly, the described repression of the Kurdish language resulted in the expulsion of the Kurdish mind from the sphere of writing.

Of course, Vali offers just one explanation for the dominance of the orality of the Kurdish culture. We must also remember that the Kurdish history is a construction of the past. As Christine Allison convincingly argues, the Kurds were able to provide their own accounts of their history because of the lack of a central authority, education system, and media to control this construction process. As a result, oral traditions have played a significant role in the process of conservation and development of the Kurdish culture (Allison 1996: 29-30).

However, the central role of orality in the construction of the Kurdish identity does not necessarily imply the "backwardness" of the Kurdish culture. As the presented cases have shown, several Kurdish writers have produced written literary products in the Kurdish language. As such, "Kurdistan has never been . . . a truly 'oral' society, that is, a society where writing is unknown for many centuries" (Goody 1996: 14 cited in Allison 2001: 10). Moreover, Allison was also quick to dispel the notion of the Kurdish language

as a pre-literate and primitive language and orality as filled with “outdated ideas” (Allison 2001: 8). Successfully weaving an argument on the basis of the works of Eric Havelock, Albert Lord, Walter J. Ong (1982), Brian Street (1984), Ruth Finnegan (1990: 143-46) and Rosalind Thomas (1992: 15-20), Allison reminds her readers that “orality is not just a negative, a lack of literacy, nor is it such a dominant characteristic that it determines all the features of a group's oral culture and cognitive processes. It is only one of a number of important factors, and it is culture specific” (Allison 2001: 8).

When the written history is controlled by the dominant power centers and the written language is inaccessible, “oral communication is often the vehicle of minority discourses, of tendencies deemed to be subversive; oral tradition, with its hallowed accounts of the people's past, provides a whole fund of folkloric examples which can be used to justify political courses of action, to rouse a rabble, or to fuel a revolution” (Allison 2001: 5-6). Allison cites a familiar example to support her claim: “During the 1990s, the Newroz myth of the Iranian New year (as told in Kurdish tradition rather than the Persian version of the *Shahname*) was used as a symbol of Kurdish liberation in Turkey, sparking widespread unrest in towns and cities every March” (Allison 2001: 5-6).⁷⁷ Thus, Allison's framework situates Newroz as the symbol of Kurdish liberation and identity creation in and through oral tradition.

The Quest for Identity Through Newroz

In the first half of his book, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish*

⁷⁷ Although Allison's work specifically studies Kurdistan's religious minority Yezidis, her comments and observations and comments are also applicable to Kurdish Muslims.

National Identity (2003), Martin Strohmeier studies the emergence of Kurdish nationalism from the late 19th century up to its decline in the mid-1930s in Turkey. In the second half of his book, he continues discussing a revival of the nationalist movement in exile in Syria.⁷⁸ In this work, Strohmeier focuses on the “publicistic efforts” of the Kurdish nationalists in exile. According to Strohmeier “their job was to create textual representations which would, at best, both inspire an inner Kurdish identification and enhance the image of Kurds as they were perceived in the West” (Strohmeier 2003: 3).

The establishment and the utilization of the Kurdish newspapers for these purposes, in particular, stands as an important example of how the Kurdish nationalists sought to articulate and promote a positive image for the Kurds. This specific era and the use of newspapers also illustrate how the political elite tried to “awaken” their fellow Kurds by responding in writing to the questions of who the Kurds are, how distinct they are, and the reasons for the situation that they are in. While explaining these, Strohmeier aptly adds that although the Kurds had followed the European model for their struggle, they “did not take it on lock, stock and barrel. Rather, they selected from the repertoire of national symbols and concepts such as the ‘Awakening,’ adding and discarding as prospects for success dictated” (Strohmeier 2003: 4).⁷⁹

Although focusing on a very different medium from a different era, Strohmeier's work highlights how Kurdish intellectuals decided to “remake” the Kurdish identity so that it would survive the surrounding political and cultural circumstances (Strohmeier

⁷⁸ Even though there are other significant developments for the Kurdish nationalism, for instance in Iraq, during the same period, Strohmeier only focuses on the movement that flourished in Syria. See footnote 6 in Strohmeier 2003: 3.

⁷⁹ Strohmeier uses the term “awakening” for the expansion of ethnic consciousness within the masses.

2003: 200-201). In a similar vein, the conditions of political oppression and immobility provided the impetus for the choice of Newroz, a traditional festival that involves participation of the masses, for the purposes of constructing a Kurdish identity.

As I had discussed in Chapter 1, the previous conceptualization of nationhood as arising from the multi-ethnic and multi-religious traditions of the Ottoman empire was systematically discarded in the early years of the Turkish Republic. By focusing on the pre-Islamic Turkic cultural basis, the founding fathers of the Turkish state offered a territory-based Turkish national framework for the multi-ethnic population.

Comprehensive socio-political and cultural campaigns were organized to accomplish national, cultural and linguistic unity. Consistent with the western notions and models of nationhood, these campaigns presented and promoted the Turkish national framework as the only model for the future.

This nation-building process produced impressive outcomes. In a very short period of time, a dynamic republican state was structured. Even though it was continuously interrupted by military coups and its human rights track record has been problematic, the Turkish republic has made remarkable progress and is one of the very limited number of democracies and relatively open societies in the Middle East. However, where some specific issues such as the position and the rights of the minorities are concerned, the “one-nation” solution did not create the necessary consensus within the given legal, political and administrative framework and some basic aspects of democracy and human rights were not successfully established.⁸⁰ In particular, the failure

⁸⁰ See Gürsel 1996: 1-7, for a good analysis that puts the Kurdish issue into perspective in terms of history, economics, and politics. See Ekinci 2001, for a discussion of the Kurdish minority rights in Turkey in the

of the minority policies of the young Turkish republic left the door open for ongoing disputes within the Turkish political system. As a result, the cultural scene became the site for political and cultural contestation.

On the issue of the Kurdish minority, the dominant school of thought of the 1950s and 1960s held that mass migration towards urban centers, social, cultural and economic integration with the rest of the country, and increased communication would soften differences and make Kurds lose their distinctive identity in Turkey. However, the outcome has been vastly different from these predictions. Even though the Kurds successfully integrated into the economies where they live, increasing contacts with other nations made them even more aware of their distinct ethnic identity. In contrast to these expectations, these big cities became sites where cultural institutions flourished and national awareness was revived anew (Bruinessen 1990: 35-36).

After World War II, a relatively liberal political climate developed in Turkey. The new political environment of the 1950s eased assimilation practices (Bruinessen 2000: 227). Although the military coup in 1960 revived anew the Turkish government's heavy handed policies toward the Kurds, the 1961 constitution created a more liberal environment that was embraced by the Kurdish opposition. The patron-client nature of the Turkish political system saw several traditional Kurdish leaders from mainstream parties being elected to the National Assembly. In another major shift on the Turkish political scene, several candidates from the popular Marxist party, Turkish Workers Party, won parliamentary seats in the 1965 elections (Bozarslan 1992: 97-98). The

resolution of the fourth congress of the Turkish Workers Party on the Kurdish issue became critical to push the Kurdish minority issue to the forefront of mainstream politics:

1. The Kurdish nation inhabits the East of Turkey;
2. In respect of the Kurdish nation a policy of repression, terror and assimilation is being pursued;
3. Blame for the backwardness of the eastern regions lies both on the policies of the ruling circles and on the law of uneven development of capitalism;
4. The eastern question is not only a problem of regional development;
5. Support by our party for the constitutional democratic struggle of the Kurdish nation is its revolutionary duty, as our party is implacably opposed to all anti-democratic, fascist, repressive and chauvinistic streams;
6. To unite the national-democratic struggle of the Kurds with the socialist revolution, Kurdish and Turkish socialists must work together in the party . . . (Lipovsky 1992: 78).⁸¹

Another boost to the Kurdish national struggle occurred in late 1969, when major worker demonstrations took place on the streets of Istanbul, the largest city of Turkey. Students of Kurdish origin affiliated with the DDKO (Eastern Revolutionary Cultural Centers) were also turning to radical methods to raise awareness for their nationalistic cause. These cultural centers soon expanded, weaving a network across many Kurdish towns and urban centers of Turkey (Bozarslan 1992: 99-101, Fırat 2003).

The work of these centers apparently resonated with young, educated Kurds in major cities, because many became active in political parties and organizations that were associated with the Turkish left. This growing political activism among educated Kurds had a significant impact on the Kurdish population of Turkey, as it brought the Kurdish

⁸¹ For further information on the position of the Turkish Workers Party for the Kurdish issue see Aren 1993: 70-72; Sargin 2001: 509-525, 962-969, and 995-1001. For a lucid analysis of the Turkish Workers Party between 1961-1971 see Unsal 2002.

issue to the forefront of the political scene and planted the seeds for the growth of the opposition seen in Turkey today (Bruinessen 1990: 44-45).

The period from the 1960s to 1980s was a response to the previous era that saw many bloody clashes.⁸² After the harsh repression of a series of rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s, many people of Kurdish origin found themselves displaced in the society they were living in. The military policies that concluded the Kurdish rebellions were followed by a series of political decisions:

It was decreed that the Kurds were Turks and they were forced to give up their traditional culture. Their language was forbidden, Kurdish folklore was banned, Kurdish villages were given Turkish names, people with distinctly Kurdish names had to change them, and assume Turkish family names. Calling oneself a Kurd was considered an act of subversion. The Kurdish provinces were the most backward of the country, and until recently there was little effort to develop them, so that the Kurds felt that their region was deliberately kept underdeveloped. Because of this underdevelopment, large numbers migrated from Kurdistan to western Turkey in search of work and education, and this paradoxically contributed to the resurgence of a Kurdish movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Bruinessen 1990: 44-45).

Like many parts of the world in the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey saw an increase in revolutionary ideas during this period, a phenomenon many scholars observed as the result of the post-World War II era. The industrialization of the economy, the mechanization of agriculture, and progress in education, transportation and communication created two major social developments; a) the creation of an educated

⁸² Hamit Bozarslan divides the history of the Kurdish movement into five periods: “i. The interregnum period of 1919-1923, characterized by a power vacuum, which allowed relatively free conditions to Kurdish political and cultural activism; ii. The period of establishment and enforcement of Kemalist rule in Turkey, accompanied by repeated Kurdish insurgency, from 1923 to 1938; iii. The period of silence, throughout the 1940s and 1950s; iv. The period of the renewal and expansion of Kurdish nationalism, from around 1960 to the beginning of the 1980s; v. The current period . . . beginning with the guerrilla warfare

and politically active elite that was not dependent upon the state, and b) rapid urbanization and the dissolution of the traditional social structure.

This is the first time in the history of the Turkish republic that a new group of modern elite has developed independently of the state. This group not only challenged the hegemony of the founding elite of the republic and their successors, but also markedly changed the political scene. The second outcome of the post-World War II era was the rapid urbanization and disintegration of traditional ties. It also marked the beginning of the end of “the strict physical separation between the centre and the periphery” (Jung 2001: 91).

For the first time in the history of Turkey, non-state revolutionary organizations and their non-conformist ideas provided a pivotal influence on the Turkish social, political, and cultural scene. This new breed of political actors - young, middle class students - grew to be rather popular with the youth. They established a new culture that radically challenged the established political scene and gave more clout to the marginalized left.

During this period, Turkey was shaken by boycotts, strikes, and mass demonstrations that challenged the fundamental basis of the political structure (Belge 1983: 810-811).⁸³ According to Hamit Bozarslan, the strong impact of the left wing politics on the Kurdish intelligentsia created an interesting combination of traditional Kurdish nationalistic point of view with the revolutionary ideas. In protest meetings,

launched by the PKK in 1984, and continuing through the 1990s” (Bozarslan 2003: 21).

⁸³ See Feyizoğlu 1993 and 2002 for further information about the student movements. With a collection of the news, pamphlets, and articles that were published between 1960 to 1968, Feyizoğlu 1993 provides first hand documentation for the issue.

photographs of Sheikh Said - the symbol of the traditional Kurdish resistance - were placed side by side with Atatürk, as the anti-imperialist leader of the independence struggle, and Lenin (Bozarslan 1992: 97), with the intention of raising awareness of the necessity of these three stances for the Kurdish struggle.

The widespread availability of translated works of major revolutionary literature and the news of activism coming from all over the world helped stoke the revolutionary fire in this mostly educated and urban movement. Although this wave consisted of the educated-cum-student membership, it was never an avant-garde culture that was limited to a select few. Instead, the new discourse of this era mobilized large numbers of people and started a major social transformation which soon challenged the established norms of the state and society. The existence of the Kurdish people in Turkey, which had long been taboo, was also recognized. Youths in remote towns started to adopt this style of activism, and a series of books, radical newspapers and symbols, such as long hair and military jackets, was produced to convey anti-establishment feelings. These ideas spread through the local branches of the revolutionary organizations and local art centers, and were published on pamphlets and periodicals, and soon, a new counterculture emerged that shaped the affect of the larger population.⁸⁴

Some international factors also influenced the utilization and the advancement of Newroz in Turkey. For example, the Barzani revolt in Iraq was strongly felt among the Kurdish activists in Turkey. Not only was the news reported in the Turkish media and the radio station of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq, but the tribal ties between the

⁸⁴ Bedri Baykam's interviews with eighteen prominent figures of the 1968 era contain valuable details on the popularity and the ways of expansion of the revolutionary ideas among the youth (Baykam 1998).

Kurdish people on both sides of the border generated significant emotional support for the revolt which, in turn, raised Kurdish consciousness (Bozarslan 1992: 97). Along with other factors, this highlighted the necessity of a symbolic identity framework that could bond the Kurds from all over the region.

The recognition and emergence of Newroz as a significant site for Kurdish identity creation was further boosted by news following the revolution on 14 July 1958 that the then-leader of Iraq, General Kasım, had declared the festival a national holiday (*Kurdistan Times* 1992: 279-280). This announcement was noteworthy, given the fact that the Kurds in Iraq had, up until then, celebrated Newroz under oppressive conditions. Its significance resonated with the Kurds in Turkey, who came to adopt Newroz as a symbol of the Kurdish identity.

It was also around this time, on 14 December 1960, that the General Assembly of the United Nations sanctioned resolution 1514 (XV) and declared the right for self-determination: “All peoples have the right to self-determination, by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” (Karadaghi 1993: 57).⁸⁵ Another resolution was passed after South African’s apartheid regime gunned down peaceful protestors in Sharpeville on 21 March 1960. After this incident the United Nations General Assembly declared that day, 21 March, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (<http://www.hrea.org/feature-events/id-against-racism.html>).⁸⁶ These resolutions clearly recognized the rights of all minorities, and Kurdish activists saw them as an international

⁸⁵ See <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/15/ares15.htm> for the full text of the resolution.

⁸⁶ See for the full text of the resolution.

legitimization of their rights.⁸⁷ Two political activists whom I interviewed and who were active during this period of time specifically mentioned this second resolution as a crucial point that led to the re-appropriation of Newroz festival for the Kurdish cause.

Under these circumstances, the symbols of Newroz started to appear in various political meetings that took place in major urban centers and regional centers of south-east Turkey. Newroz came to be seen and utilized as a “situated activity system” for various sorts of encounters, including pedagogical operations (Goffman 1961: 8). Especially in the 1980s, Newroz celebrations began to play an increasingly important role in shaping Kurds’ collective response toward the Turkish political system.

As was the case with many invented processes of identity formation, it was the Kurdish political elite that selected Newroz to synthesize and systematize the Kurdish ethnic identity. These young activists incorporated elements of the traditional culture with elements from the current political culture, thus using folklore material for political purposes. It was from here on that Newroz began to carry manifestations of the Kurdish identity and was used as a political and pedagogical instrument by Kurdish political leadership. Throughout the 1980s, symbols of Newroz were visible in political demonstrations. It was also during this time that Newroz was officially linked with separatist terrorists and denigrated as troublesome. By the late 1980s, the Newroz tradition had become intimately linked with the Kurdish political agenda in Turkey.

⁸⁷ Abdulhaluk Çay mentions a specific article that was published in a radical left journal published by the Kurdish activists and confirms the significance of this incident for the Kurdish nationalism. See “21 Mart Irkçılıkla Mücadele Günü ve Newroz.” *Özgürlük Yolu*. Sayı 35 (Nisan 1978). Pp. 62-68 cited in Çay 1999: 19-20.

Symbols of Newroz have also marked important historical milestones throughout the history of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that spearheaded the guerilla attacks against the Turkish state. For example, Newroz day, which fell on 21 March 1982, also marked the day that one of the PKK leaders, Mazlum Doğan, committed suicide to protest the prison conditions in Diyarbakır Prison No. 5. On another Newroz day, this time in 1990, Zekiye Alkan, a medical student in Diyarbakır threw herself into a fire after declaring, “from now on, it’s time to stoke the Newroz fire not with twigs but with human flesh” (Zana 1991, p. 325; Polat 1991, pp. 65-66). These occurrences were in no way coincidental. As Gunter notes, the PKK often scheduled its spring offenses on Newroz day between 1978 and 1999 (Gunter 2004, pp. 147-148).

Newroz as a Mode of Manifestation

This chapter discussed the reasons that might affect the selection and the promotion of Newroz as a constitutive myth among the Kurdish minority in Turkey. It elaborated on how Newroz was appropriated and became a major medium in the process of ethnic identity creation of the Kurds in Turkey. The preliminary findings that will lead the argument in the next chapter can be presented like this.

As a cultural reservoir of the Kurdish identity, the choice of Newroz, of course, cannot only be explained by the lack of alternative sources. As a means of performance, the Newroz festival provided resources that cannot be duplicated by other cultural means. Most of all, Newroz provided the much-needed institutionalization for the Kurdish opposition in Turkey. By lending itself as the ultimate cultural institutionalization of

Kurdisness, Newroz, first, routinized a collective action. Through a “common script” that it provided, it became a venue for the conduct of ethnically conscious collective action.

Second, the fixed routines of Newroz set the social and the political stage for inclusion and marginalization. In a political climate that fostered assimilation and the loss of ethnic identity, Newroz set the tone for the ethnic discourse and granted access for exchanges to suit the Kurdish social and political agenda.

Third, it became the main ground for the Kurds for an internal alignment that I would like to define as “cognitive tuning.” On the basis of the experiments conducted by Sherif (1936), Wilke and Meertens describe cognitive tuning as a response to the situation in which group members do not have the same understanding for the same problem. When previously learned representations are in conflict, cognitive tuning occurs through social interaction and activity (Wilke and Meertens 1994: 43-46). Consistent with this framework, as will be argued in detail in the next chapter, Newroz combines and conceptualizes the ideal plan for the Kurdish people in Turkey, thus enabling the Kurds to come to a common understanding of their identity and struggle.

As we are reminded by Laura Olson, performances and cultural symbols do not merely mirror the self-conceptions and ideological goals of the performers. Besides embodying the participants’ goals, they also function as a medium through which the cultural identity can be enacted (Olson 2004: 12). Thus the institutionalization of Newroz has become fruitful in various ways. First, it provided a useful theme for heightening political mobilization among the Kurdish minority of Turkey. The Newroz heightened ethnic consciousness, by distinguishing the boundaries between “us” and “the other,” and “then” and “now.” It also offered an ethnically logical periodization that is crucial to

draw less active members into the Kurdish struggle for identity and self-determination (Kratz 1993: 38-54). These performances, then, may be used to “comprehend residual forms and items, contemporary practice, and emergent structures” (Bauman 1978: 48).

In view of Newroz’s flexibility to new conditions, I also consider Newroz as a representation of the “emergent” aspect of the Kurdish culture. In his groundbreaking book, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, Michael Herzfeld mentions that “the idea of Greece – like any symbol – could carry a wide range of possible meanings” (Herzfeld 1986: 5). The flexibility that I attach to Newroz refers to the possibility of various meanings of imaginary Kurdistan. As I will discuss when highlighting some examples in the next chapter, Newroz carries the idea of Kurdistan and prioritizes one meaning over another according to the current political climate. Newroz’s suitability to create and carry a collective historical memory was another reason why it was used. Besides creating an ethnic theme that is appropriate for social and political struggle, Newroz has made it possible to bring together people of all ages and genders, and expand the spatial boundaries. From large urban celebrations to the little countryside versions, Newroz has given the Kurdish community a sense of continuity and completeness. Besides functioning as a bridge between the politically conscious educated elite and the masses and the urban and the rural, Newroz has also combined the categories of “social memory,” “political memory,” and “cultural memory” and carried the message for the ones who have no firsthand knowledge of the Kurdish history (Assmann 2004: 25).

CHAPTER 3

Recovery of Memory, Construction of Identity and Transformational Politics on an Imaginary Landscape: The Case of Diyarbakır Celebrations.

This chapter summarizes and interprets my field observations of Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır, and is organized into four sections. The first section presents the genesis of the project and sheds light on the evolution of the research as well as the researcher. The second presents the field from the perspective of a fieldworker. After these relatively short sections that situate the researcher in the context of the field as a Turkish doctoral student, a scholarly outsider and a cultural insider who is studying the Kurdish Newroz, the third describes Diyarbakır Newroz celebrations on the basis of my 2001 and 2002 fieldtrips. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the meaning and utility of Newroz in the Kurdish sphere both culturally and politically. It explores the appropriation of Newroz as a partially political expression of Kurdish identity in Turkey, starting in the 1970s and arising in part because of socio-political circumstances.

By writing this chapter presenting the particulars of the Newroz Festival,⁸⁸ on the one hand I will display the findings of my field research that are crucial to support my claims about the outcomes of Newroz/Nevruz competition that will be read in chapters 6 and 7. By focusing on the major Newroz celebration that takes places in Diyarbakır annually, this chapter demonstrates how Newroz portrays and maintains Kurdish claims and operates through the spreading of an “historical truth” that facilitates people with historical, cultural and social capabilities to resist a single-nation-based state structure and demand a better political environment for their rights. On the other hand, I hope to inform the reader of the particular nature of the field that I deal with and prepare her for the different nature and some limitations of the data in advance. The primary methodological difficulty results from not having tape recorded interviews, but largely drawing from field notes that depend on participant observation and conversations.

I believe that I need to provide the details of my fieldwork, in Peter L. Berger’s words, to “allow others to check on or to repeat or to develop” the findings of my research. Even though I suspect that “. . . in science as in love a concentration on technique is quite likely to lead to impotence,” I would like draw a picture of the surroundings that negatively affected the available resources, the conduct of the study and the given research design (Berger 1963: 13).

⁸⁸ Between my two fieldtrips to Turkey, my funding for the preparation for my Ph.D. qualify exams, with the crucial support of Dorothy Noyes, was supported by the Mershon Center’s research assistantship in the winter of 2001. During these months, distinguished Anthropologist Johannes Fabian was visiting OSU and I was lucky to be one of his office neighbors at the Mershon center. In that brief period, Mr. Fabian was kind enough to ask about and discuss some issues about my field experience as well as my dissertation project. In our discussions while he was generously bringing continuous light to my work in a friendly manner, he was often warning me by saying; “stop explaining, show me the stuff!” I wrote this “stuff” chapter keeping his warning in mind.

An Ideal Plan That Failed

All doctoral project plans change in the course of the research. I had my share of this and made many revisions in the original plan of my work. However, the change that I am about to explain was pivotal in affecting the final form of my dissertation. My original plan was to make a Newroz trip with a family in order to represent the celebration from the perspective of a specific experience. According to my ideal plan for the 2001 fieldtrip, I was going to travel with the family from their village to Diyarbakır. After spending the day with them at the festival site, I also intended to go back to their village and witness the internal cooling off process of the family after the festival. Considering the large number of checkpoints that were situated throughout the area before and during Newroz, I was planning to travel to Diyarbakır with the family one or two days before March 21st, in order to reduce the risk of not reaching the festival site. This was also going to reduce the risk for the family of traveling with me, an outsider, on the tension-filled day of Newroz. The plan included using pseudonyms for the family members as well as the village during the writing phase. I was also not going to take their picture at the festival site. Instead, I planned to photograph their hands (from the wrist down) and the outfits that they wore in the festival site to give the reader a human touch.

But who would volunteer for such a demanding and dangerous endeavor with me? My concerns with this were twofold. First, I could not risk the well-being of the family that might assist me. I also would not want to make this “pilgrimage” with an unusually politically active family of the sort that might be willing to take such a risk. Research that depended upon a “poster family” of Kurdish activism would not adequately address the scholarly needs of my research, because it would have provided little basis for sound

generalizations to the less politically active majority of the Kurdish population.

Concerned about the legitimacy and reliability of my work, I sought to find “regular people” who still possessed a degree of ethnic consciousness, and who were participating in the celebration.

To reach this goal, during my field trips I searched for suitable families who were willing to be involved in my research. Through people that I knew previously in the region, and through the new acquaintances I developed during my trips, I came in contact with various families and became their guest in their home environment. Without having to explain my intention regarding the upcoming Newroz, I tested the water for the possibility of our participating in the following Newroz together. Even though I made significant progress in setting up a fieldtrip, I ended up deciding not to further this original plan.

After I personally made the trip to Newroz and experienced the difficulties that the participants face in reaching the festival site, I felt that my decision to drop the original plan was vindicated. The failure of the first research design was not caused by my false reading of the surroundings of the festival such as the security measures, check points, and other potential difficulties. Instead, I simply exaggerated my capabilities for “going native.” In the beginning of the preliminary period, I falsely assumed that if I get on a bus or a tractor trailer with a family, I could blend in and witness the event from their perspective. I simply underestimated the residue of the recent military clash, which contaminated the social climate. During a preliminary visit, I observed the level of polarization with my own eyes. Outsiders like myself were there either as part of the security forces from various state agencies or to display their political support for the

Kurdish cause. This polarization, which erased the middle ground that any scholarly research requires, and the lack of assurance that the informant family could be kept safe, made me drop the plan. Eventually, I observed the celebrations on my own.

The Making of a Fieldworker: An Outsider from Inside

This section is offered to give the reader an idea of my understanding of my field research, and the field conditions that I dealt with. This section, also, offer an approach to what Fernando Coronil refers to as “geopolitics of truth.”⁸⁹ In addition to locating the research and the researcher within a context, it discusses the concrete methodological and ethical questions that surfaced throughout the inquiry. I have also written this for my own benefit, in order to assist me in maintaining an adequately reflective and self-reflexive perspective.

Fieldwork is a difficult endeavor. Besides the anxiety of creating a solid scholarly work, some structural and emotional aspects of the encounter make it more difficult. A plan to learn from real life experiences rather than dealing with processed, written texts, in other words the idea of not only cooking but also farming and collecting the ingredients from the field, gives rise to a process of persistent questioning. Whether I will open the difficult gates of meaning and understanding in the field. Whether the research plan will work. Whether I will successfully carry out the entire process from collecting the data to the writing of the findings. The politically-charged circumstances were compounded with the problems of conducting research on a topic that previously had found only limited attention in the scholarly sphere. My hopes of shedding light on

Kurdish culture, and thereby contributing to a better understanding of the conflict, combined with my intent to remain reflective and adhere to scholarly standards, contributed to a process of self-questioning that continued in the field. I repeatedly asked myself, “Am I doing a good job? Am I missing something that I will end up noticing when my fingers are finally on the keyboard? Is my research design sound? Am I putting anybody in danger?”

Conducting field research is a multi-layered proceeding full of surprises and endless occasions for learning. Knowing that every field is a microcosm of larger dynamics that exceed the given field experience, the fieldworker has to be ready at any time for the surrounding reality to leak into the research, and so must expect unexpected unfoldings. The fieldwork provides a set of tools to uncover the complexity of the studied topic. A fieldworker, who rarely feels ready for the field, tries to be as prepared as possible for the upcoming journey. The doors of multiple learning processes are opened through observation, interviews, and interaction. A planned field strategy based upon critical thinking and supported by a careful methodological design only leads up to the discovery of the field. The findings of this stage, eventually, are processed with the application of key theoretical arguments and interpretation of the data, and, if the researcher is courageous and capable enough, prediction may come after that. The ever-changing structure of ethnographic research and the slippery ground of the field, from introducing a novel question to making decisions on the arrangements of available methodological tools, make the researcher the most crucial part of the research process. By making constant decisions, eliminations and alterations the researcher becomes part of

⁸⁹ Coronil’s concept is borrowed from Pratt 2001: 29.

the design. Thus this ultimate overlapping extends the line of discovery up to the self-discovery of the researcher.

The self-discovery of the researcher starts with a preparatory phase. The field worker-to-be prepares for the field by gathering information from mentors and others who have had similar previous field experiences. Readings and discussions on the entry points to the field, building trust, recording, note taking, etc., however, prove to cover only limited parts of the issues that will be faced. The “fieldization” of the studied topic, with its crucial human ingredient for knowing, brings another set of questions into the picture. When one “attempt[s] to understand another life world using the self as the instrument of knowing,” this decision brings the background of the researcher and the factors that shape her lenses into the equation (Ortner 1995: 173).⁹⁰ This angle also requires the accurate mapping of the surrounding power relations and the position of the researcher within it. Especially when studying a contested, highly politicized and sensitive topic like mine, in which reading between the lines and small details often carry high significance, this becomes even more important. Other factors also underscore the significance of the fieldworker. As a lone decision maker, a researcher has to make quick decisions under mostly unexpected circumstances in the field. The scarcity of second chances and lack of “proofreading,” and ethical aspects of the research raise the significance of the researcher. Studying a controversial and highly contested event by questioning people who are, for the purposes of the study, treated as “nameless faces,” and being in a position in which no one has the power of controlling or stopping you as a

researcher, makes one more aware of the ethical aspects of the social position occupied by the researcher.

In the presented study I, a researcher of Turkish origin, wanted to understand and analyze the Newroz festival and its position within the ethnic Kurdish discourse in Turkey. My background made me worry about different types of competence in the field other than the field research techniques. As a Turk, affiliated with an American university, being in Diyarbakır only for a specific period of time made me a perfect “outsider from inside.” The research was conducted only a couple of years after the end of a bloody clash between the PKK guerrillas and the Turkish state. In an environment in which being a Turk was equated with being a soldier, police officer, civil servant or university student, being a Turkish ethnographer was a somewhat awkward title to adopt. When the people who helped me in Diyarbakır to rent a room and participate in Newroz-related events etc., introduced me to their friends, they were quick to underline that I was there by my choice and to conduct research. In many of the cases I was introduced as a doctoral student who was working on his dissertation. This was sometimes replaced with “a writer working on a book on Newroz,” or “a friend or a friend of a friend” whenever it was convenient. One other “identity” came with the help of a camera that I constantly carry with me. I was often assumed to be a journalist and was asked what newspaper I was affiliated with. When I encountered people who are interested in what I do, I explained to them that I was conducting research on Newroz as part of doctoral research. I even met people who wanted to know my opinions, hear me relate my experiences, and

⁹⁰ Ortner’s quote is taken from Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999: 12.

read what I would ultimately write about their major festival. In those moments, I found myself explaining my work to the “volunteer members” of my doctoral committee.

In the Newroz Site

Before entering the field, I designed my research to depend on interviews, observation, and textual and artifact analysis to gain insight into the festival. It did not take too long to recognize that my idea of conducting and recording formal intensive interviews, photographing people and recording their names was not workable. The security measures, which I will describe in detail in the following section, and the tension in the air made tape recordings impossible.⁹¹ If I had insisted on recording the interviews and collecting names, I was either going to end up recording sanitized versions of testimonies or merely dealing with the active members of the pro-Kurdish party who did not mind sharing their names. In effect, these methods would have necessarily caused me to take part in, what Antonious Robben calls, “ethnographic seduction” (Robben 1995: 83).

In her *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography*, Erika Brady discusses how the use of phonograph by the female ethnographers changed the pre-existing sexist assumptions and provided a venue of competence for the female ethnographers in the field (Brady 1999: 87-88). As one can see from Brady’s example, the use of some techniques and tools might have larger meanings and send different

⁹¹ I do not intend to give an impression that the situation that I faced was something unexpected. Before my fieldtrips I was aware of the ongoing tension and expecting difficulties during my research, but still hopeful for a better research environment. However, it is obvious that I should have done a better job to prepare for this type of limitations.

messages to various audiences. Considering the tape recordings' easy equation with being known (being marked), I gave up conducting recorded interviews. This difficult decision also constituted an important cornerstone in my field experience. Consistent with my goal, I hoped to blend various methodological techniques as part of an effort to see things as the participants of Newroz do. However, in the tension-filled environment of the festival site and the sensitivity surrounding the Kurdish issue of Turkey, these concerns directed me to sometimes unexpected methodological negotiations with my hypothetical reader.

In the festival site, at first, I wandered around taking notes and photographs while trying to locate the focal points of the festival, both geographically and symbolically. At this stage, I literally and figuratively drew a map of the festival site. This helped me to recognize the focal points and the secondary points of the festival site. This overview helped me to make sense of the logic of the event and shaped my plan in the field. After this I slowed down and started to make small talk to create encounters with the participants. Generally, after introducing myself and explaining what I was doing, I asked questions about Newroz in general, a performance in progress on the main stage, or a specific symbol to start a conversation. I was asked counter questions, in some cases: why I was there, what I thought about the event, etc. Generally, I used these casual conversations to reach potential informants. Many of the interviews were very short. Even the longest ones did not last more than ten minutes. The main reason for this is the nature and the conduct of the festival. As I will display in the next section, almost all participants are kept extremely busy with a range of activities during Newroz. Throughout the day participants dance, sing, watch the performance on the main stage,

enjoy the food-court and otherwise remain thoroughly engaged. This was one of the reasons that I did not have any opportunities for longer conversations. The interruption of longer conversations was also a result of common modesty and shyness. After a specific point, some conversations, which I had initiated, were halted with a comment to the effect of, “I’m too young to know all this,” or, “you should ask somebody who knows better than me.”

Knowing that, in the precise sharing environment of the field, the dependable data are born out of reciprocal trust and respect, I try to establish these first. To do this I always start my conversations with an “icebreaker.” Either a starting sentence about a family’s kid, or a question about a traditional outfit started the conversations. In some cases, I met with those who did not mind talking in various parts of the site, such as the food-court, while waiting on the restroom line, etc. When possible, I had multiple conversations with the same person throughout the day. Sometimes while I was speaking with one participant, others would jump in. Sometimes I was able to develop mutual trust with a responsive consultant, who might help me reach other people, who would, in turn, sometimes introduce me to others.

The most successful conversations happened either with the people that I talked to as a whole family or the elder participants. Since, other than the university students, all the female participants were there with their families, gender-based issues did not prevent me from speaking with women. The most difficult group to engage seemed to be university students. Because they often feel, with good reason, that they are vulnerable to political persecution, they were extremely cautious in their interactions. I had very limited contact with these participants. Some people who did not want to be known to the

public did not want to talk with me. The hesitation of some of the participants, the body and bag searches in the entrance of the festival site and the existence of a large number of heavily armed security forces around the festival site made me behave cautiously, as the circumstances demanded. Thus, as I mentioned above, I did not do tape recordings. My fieldnotes, also, do not include one single name of a person other than the political and intellectual figures, in order to ensure confidentiality. The names of places were also disguised accordingly. Considering the typical small size of villages in the region, no village names were noted. Instead of villages, the townships of informants were mentioned. If the short interview was noted with a very specific description of the person or family, either because of their unique outfits or comments that I found important, I altered and coded some of the characteristics instantly in the field. Overall, the reader has to remember that the fieldnotes were taken as if they could have been confiscated at any moment during the day. I do not wish this discussion of ethical issues to come across as self-promotion or evasion. As Robben and Nordstrom stated, “understandings of violence should undergo a process of change and reassessment in the course of fieldwork and writing. . .” I consider these precautions my own, quite minimal way of dealing with the violence and trauma that are necessarily associated with the subject under investigation (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 4 and 14).

I also hope the description of my caution does not appear as a sign of fear, intimidation or concern for my own well-being in the field. I felt that carrying a state-issued ID displaying my Turkish origin through my hometown, and my academic position, etc., was sufficient protection for me. In my case, the worst possible scenario would have been losing my notes, film and camera. In itself, this would have been

tolerable. However, I could not risk causing the arrest or persecution of somebody because of my research. I believe that being “courageous” at the expense of others who already suffer immensely cannot be an acceptable attitude for an ethnographer. I therefore still believe that the sacrifices that I had to make in terms of data collection were right, but certainly not easy. To pay my scholarly due to my doctoral committee members and future readers in various languages, I shifted my interest towards the more silent but visible sources. I finally settled on a format that was influenced by the surrounding politically charged limitations of the field. The impact of this will also be seen in my writing of the ethnography. While I try blending the “thick descriptions with verbatim quotations” of peoples' thoughts and feelings to lead the reader to infer from those, time to time I gather the basic factual data from the “silence” or visual material (Fetterman 1998: 122-24). The serendipitous benefit of these political realities was that they drove me to contrast people's words and actions during the Newroz festival. I consider these shifts in the research plan as part of the reality that I observed and thus my share of ethnographic discovery. I sincerely believe, “while the exotic is in eclipse and there is no more of the literal world to discover, the sense of discovery in ethnographic research is still important and a key to why scholars engage in it” (Marcus 1998: 21).

By communicating these limitations and requesting the acceptance of readers for the field-forced limitations of the data and unintended results of the fieldwork, I recognize that I am sailing in dangerous waters. While I describe this situation that I faced as an unexpected lesson from the field resulting from the surrounding political climate, it might also appear as a shortcoming in the research design. In this event, I would suggest that the limitations of this methodology, which include an increased

possibility of mis-recording and mis-interpretation, must not be contrasted with an idealized notion of tape recording that assumes its neutrality. By way of meaningful comparison, we must also consider the previously-mentioned social distortions which the device itself could create under these highly politicized conditions. I believe that, given the circumstances, my methodological decision introduced the least possible distortion in terms of the statements obtained from interviewees. Still, the recording of some interviews would have certainly proven beneficial.

Aside from the concerns mentioned above, I experienced some other difficulties as well. Some possibilities for tape recordings without taking names did not work out because no suitable venues in which to conduct recorded interviews were available. Passing as a fellow participant or as an interested bystander in the festival site and conducting interviews was not possible because of my accent, body language and general appearance. In the politically charged, tension-filled circumstances it was not imaginable to play amateur learner and ask inarticulate questions. Filling the role of a journalist, the closest things that an ethnographer might do in the field, was not realistic in my case. Due to the arm-chair tradition of journalism in Turkey, it is very rare to see journalists recording the views of the people, especially during sensitive occasions like Newroz.

I generally took notes after the conversations and before the next round of interaction, unless there was something that needed to be written immediately, such as a specific word that I did not know, etc. When this was not necessary, I kept my notes either in my mind or wrote them as very short notes. Not trusting my ability to remember, I tried to note the description of the people, the place in the festival site, the order of events and finally a general characterization of the encounter immediately after it took

place. Sometimes I preferred on-the-spot note taking, especially when I spoke with a whole family or a group of people. Knowing that in spite of their importance the details of the field disappear quickly, I checked my notes at the end of each day and tried to fill in the gaps of my notes.

The other empirical records that I took from the site, photographs and printed material, served a double function. Even though, as Sarah Pink suggests, the plan for use of visual materials must be produced before the fieldwork begins, I was not sure about the appropriate use of the visual material in advance (Pink 2001: 30). My initial understanding of the visual material was limited to their function as evidence of my presence at the Newroz site (Marcus and Cushman 1982: 33, Clifford 1983: 118, Geertz 1988: 66-68).⁹² However, the lack of tape recordings and long interviews expanded the importance of my camera. After returning from the field I noticed that the photographs that I took were much more than visual support for my work. They literally helped me clarify some raw observations that I noted in the field. For instance, while some of the interviews directed me toward the pedagogical function of Newroz, slides including the collective dances of women and men from different generations helped me make sense of and recognize the reduced salience of generational and gender divisions during the festival. Back to back slides of a 10-year-old and a 70-year-old jumping over the fire, as well as hand-to-hand line dances of women and men who do not know each other, helped me to grasp the festival's significance and its capability of suggesting some possibilities of fundamental, not only political but also social, change in this traditionally Muslim setting.

Now, when I write this chapter on the basis of my field notes, I am in constant dissatisfaction. There are notes that are not clear enough to use and parts that I wish were not so brief and dependent on my ability to remember. If the fieldwork is an apprenticeship and an ongoing, multi-faceted learning process, it is obvious to me that I would make a better fieldworker now than before. There are many things that I would do differently. One of the regrets that I have is not using the different trips for different purposes. I would have been more successful if I had used the first trip, for instance, to make sense of the festival in general, and then used the following one to go into details. Besides the shortcomings that I regret, there are also unexpected positive outcomes that I would like to mention. In 2002, in my second year in the field, it was good to see some familiar faces again, and I was more comfortable in Diyarbakır. The comfort that I felt and my familiarity with the city and the festival gave me chance to focus more on the city and the effects of Newroz outside the festival site. This led me to situate the festival in the city, as well as giving me ideas for further studies. I went to Diyarbakır generally one or two days before the event and left one or two days later in order to observe the cooling off process. Although I made other trips to Diyarbakır during the research period, I wish I had lived there for a full year to see the position of the Newroz Festival at the family level and observe the preparation of it from scratch.

I knew before the field stage that I was about to start doing something challenging and that the surrounding political tension was going to affect my work.⁹³ In accordance

⁹² These references were encountered in Jacobson 1991: 116.

⁹³ Among many others, the following works based on original fieldwork help me to make sense out of my own ethnographic experience : Stanfield and Dennis 1993, Nordstrom and Robben (Eds.) 1995, Greenhouse et al (Eds.). 2002, Renzetti and Lee 1993, Lee 1993, Lee 1995, Hoddinot 1993.

with Berger and Luckmann's assertion that knowledge is not only a social product but also a continuous social process, my participation in "the social distribution of knowledge" as an ethnographer clearly deserves scrutiny (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 43). However, the concrete appearance of this fact was not clear to me at that time. The image of me as an outsider in the field, produced unique problems. Especially it affected the level of eagerness of the participants to respond to my questions about their views regarding the event. While some were significantly open in our interaction, some made me feel the differences between me and them. These, thanks to their kindness, generally came as very short responses, or as a questioning of my experience as opposed to a discussion of theirs. Of course this was not unique to me. Folklorist Muhsine Helimoğlu Yavuz, who prepared a master thesis at Dicle University in Diyarbakır that later became a scholarly book on Diyarbakır legends, defines her difficulties during the process into four categories: language differences, gaining trust, poor infrastructure of the villages that reduces the outcome of the fieldwork and self censorship of the people (Helimoğlu Yavuz 1990: 196-207).

My difficulties obviously were different than Helimoğlu Yavuz' problems. Studying a much more narrowly-focused topic, the language and infrastructural difficulties did not affect my work. However, I cannot say that I did not suffer, at least partly, from the self censorship of the festival participants that Helimoğlu Yavuz touches upon. Quoting from Ziya Gökalp, one of the founding figures of sociology in Turkey, she explains that Anatolian villagers do not trust outsider "agzı kara" (black mouth), and often refuse to tell their secrets in order to keep the well being, literally "spirit," of their village. She proceeds to describe the kind of methods she used to change her image from

“ağzı kara” to “aydınlık ağızlı” (lightened mouth) (Gökalp 1975: 28 in Helimoğlu Yavuz 1990: 199). In the modern setting of the Newroz festival, nobody seemed to adopt conservative village norms and treat me as a black mouth that would bring bad luck to their world. What I experienced was much closer to Navaro-Yashin’s experience of being a “not-too-native” fieldworker.

In her apt anthropological study, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, Navaro-Yashin discusses her position in the field. She discusses that in spite of her close ties with her own city of Istanbul, because of her Jewish minority background in Turkey, she was not perceived as a “proper native” by either her Islamist or secularist informants. In spite of her native fluency in Turkish language, and having family that lives there, she argues that she became an object of othering nativist discourses (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 13-14). Like Navaro-Yashin’s position in Istanbul, I also experienced some difficulties related to my “nativity” for various reasons. In the beginning of his widely quoted article, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” Clifford Geertz tells about the evolution of himself and his wife in the eyes of the local people (Geertz 2000: 412-417). He describes an incident in which police raided the village to find the organizers of the cockfight, from which they, along with the rest of the village, escaped together. Later, when they kept this secret from police, this elevated their position in the eyes of the villagers and created an atmosphere of greater trust. By telling this experience, Geertz underlines both the thin line between being insider and outsider and the fluidity of the field worker's identity. In my case I did not even have to lie about an ongoing cockfight. In the midst of the political and cultural conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish opposition, my being there to study Newroz helped me to pass a test similar to

Geertz's. Even the people who did not know what a doctoral work was often sympathized with me because they considered my presence to be a sign of respect for their culture.

However, my being there challenged every aspect of what Kirin Narayan terms the fixity of a distinction between a “native” and “non-native” field researcher (Narayan 1997: 23). I fit more than one category at once. Although I conducted fieldwork in my own country, and the subject of my study was part of my own culture, my relationship with the proper subject has been very complex. First of all, I was conducting field research within the borders of the republic of Turkey, the country of which I am a citizen. I was mostly communicating in my native language, Turkish. I was surrounded with Turkish national symbols and images wherever I went. This is, at least to some of my fellow Turks, a reason to be considered “native.” However, considering the arguments presented in the first and the second chapters of this work, was I really a “native” in the Newroz festival site? With the bold differences between the official and the factual reality, what kind of native was I? With my clear distance from the official discourse on the Kurdish question, deep interest in Newroz and the Kurdish culture in general, my cautious dealings in the field, I was neither an insider nor an outsider. In a milieu of complex and interwoven identity claims, and with my readiness to disregard differences between myself and the people that I encountered in the festival site, there was no room for a pure insider/outsider, ethnographer/native. I was, therefore, “almost always simultaneous insider[s] and outsider[s]” and this sometimes worked against the quality of

my fieldwork (Zavella 1997: 44).⁹⁴ Being neither a total insider, nor a total outsider, sometimes, clogged the channels of communication.

The discussion of my existence in the field has to be concluded with the ongoing debate regarding the contentious functions of ethnographers. In the various disciplines in which ethnographic methods are used, there has been an ongoing argument on the ideal position of the fieldworker. The fieldworker goes to the subject field after a long preparation process that includes years of studying language, culture and field techniques. Some believe that during this time of deep commitment, the researcher, in gaining understanding, also develops an attachment for the people of the field. Therefore, they assume an automatic social and/or political involvement and advocacy for the people of the field. For various reasons, I did not experience this dynamic in my case, mainly due to the maturity and the capability of the institutions in the field. Their issues and grievances were already explicitly mobilized in the Kurdish movement, which certainly was not waiting for my advocacy.

Another important reason for abstaining from advocacy was my understanding of the power of the scholar and the scholarly work. Having my own reservations about academic stances and writing styles that are shaped by academic conventions and rituals, it would not be possible to present myself and my work as the representative of the happenings in the field. As I discussed above, my identity as the “insider from outside” was challenged by various epistemological issues in the field, and I was perceptive enough to emancipate myself from any type of spokespersonship. Thus, without trying to

⁹⁴ For accounts of fieldworkers conducting their research in their own communities, see Panini (Ed.) 1991. For an example of difficulties that native and near-native ethnographers experience see Loizos 1994: 49

control, or inadvertently being controlled by, the statements of my informants (Atkinson 1990: 106), I preferred to be an invisible ethnographer as much as possible, and let participants describe the event and their position by themselves.

One Day Before Newroz

In the morning of March 20, I stopped by to see the preparations at the city headquarters of the HADEP⁹⁵ party. Later on, I participated in a panel discussion as part of the audience. Following that, I wandered around the city. As I will discuss in the following sections, Newroz celebrations consist of multiple parallel events that spread the main theme of the festival. In a series of extension events occurring before and after Newroz, the theme, as well as specific issues related to the current political agenda, are further established. In this section, first, I would like to introduce a panel meeting that took place at the theater hall of the Diyarbakir municipality building on 20 March 2001. In this process, keeping Habermas' "structural transformation of the public sphere" concept in mind, I will discuss how the discourse of Newroz was introduced and how the audience was prepared for the current theme of Newroz (Habermas 1989).

The panel meeting was titled "Multiculturalism and Human Rights" and was organized by the Diyarbakır branch of the Human Rights Association of Turkey. The panel chaired by Hicri Özgören, a Kurdish poet, included Akin Birdal, Turkey's leading human rights advocate who survived an assassination attempt in 12 May 1998 and was

[taken from Dudwick 2000: 26], Zivkovic 2000 and Barsegian 2000: 122-124.

⁹⁵ Halkın Demokrasi Partisi – People's Democracy Party. See Güney 2002 for political evolution of Kurdish opposition.

later imprisoned because of a speech using the term “the Kurdish people;”⁹⁶ Mıgırdıç Magrosyan, an Armenian writer from Diyarbakır who wrote three books on the city’s Armenian population; and Ragıp Zarakolu, a prominent member of the Publishers Union of Turkey and columnist.

The audience also was not only made up of lay people, but also included well-known human rights figures such as folk singer Ferhat Tunç; a human rights activist and lawyer recently imprisoned for a speech related to the Kurdish issue,⁹⁷ Eşber Yağmurdereli; and the president of the Human Right Association of Turkey, Hüsni Öndül. Knowing their personal suffering of supporting the Kurdish cause, the audience warmly welcomed them all. It is significant to note that even though “multiculturalism” was then a new phenomenon interesting to a rather narrow and sophisticated audience, the 700-seat capacity of the theater hall was overcrowded with people sitting on the floor, standing, and filling the outside hall.

After a very long ovation period, Akın Birdal discussed the importance of Newroz within the Kurdish culture and identity, praising Kurds for keeping the Newroz fire alive for 2600 years. He also criticized the ban on 2001 Newroz celebrations in Gaziantep city.⁹⁸ Ragıp Zarakolu criticized the government’s intention to destroy historical sites through constructing a dam in south-east Turkey. He then compared the Turkish government to the Taliban in Afghanistan, further saying that a secular administration

⁹⁶ See <http://news.amnesty.org>

⁹⁷ See <http://www.amnestyusa.org>

⁹⁸ The rendition of the festival’s name has been very controversial in Turkey. “Nevruz” stands for the Turkish version. “Newroz” represents the Kurdish version. However since the Turkish alphabet does not include the letter “w,” the use of Newroz is prohibited. To protect themselves from “w” related persecution, some writers use “v” instead of “w” and write Newroz as, Nevroz. For an example of a “w” related court case see Alataş 2003, p. 90. In 2001, when the local organization committee used the letter “w” to write the

can easily employ mechanisms of fundamentalist Muslim ones. Magrosyan, touching upon his childhood in Diyarbakır, underlined the necessity of multi-cultural values and tolerance for other stances.

But the panel meeting was more significant than the panel members' words and the messages specifically. The diversity of the panel, consisting of two Turks, one Armenian and one Kurdish intellectual, can be viewed as a symbolic valuing of diversity and a response to the one-nation based Turkish official stance. Moreover, the carefully planned meeting set the main theme of the upcoming Newroz as "human rights and peace." Additionally, it also offered a fresh path for possible transformation of the internal conflict. As I argued in the first chapter, the Kurdish issue of Turkey has been discussed largely within the sphere of politics and terrorism. Making the concept of multiculturalism a main theme of this meeting, the organizers opened a new path and suggest a new tone for the discourse of the Kurdish people. This move would not have any originality or distinction if it would happen in a purely academic-intellectual setting. However, since a series of Newroz-centered activities is a rudiment of "structural transformation" that only succeeds to the extent that it obtains the popular imagination, the operation and the timing of the events, including the panel meeting, occupy a significant position.

The idea of multiculturalism and the power of civil society are rather new concepts in Turkey. Starting from the 1990s, a series of Turkish publications surfaced to address these topics.⁹⁹ Especially after the horrible Izmit earthquake, in which the lack of

word Newroz in their application for the meeting permission, their request was returned for this reason.

⁹⁹ The publication years and the topics of the following titles can give an idea about the increase of these

coordination among the state agencies and corruption caused significant losses, the failure of the state in various venues highlighted the capabilities of civil society. In various parts of society, the concept of civil society, loosely covering various kinds of nonprofit, non-governmental, voluntary organizations, was equated with the idea of integrity and order. Abant Platformu, a series of meetings that was organized by the end of the 1990s and attended by intellectuals from different parts of the political spectrum, also supported this line of thinking. The final declarations of the Abant meetings were based upon the recognition of differences, pluralism, and democracy and influenced the urban based Kurdish intellectual elite (*Çoğulculuk ve Toplumsal Uzlaşma* 2001). The hopeful consideration of these ideas by the Kurdish intellectuals was soon evident.¹⁰⁰ Especially after the publication of *Güneydoğu'da Sivil Hayat*¹⁰¹ a major work on civil society in the city of Diyarbakır, the influence of this discourse started to be seen in the political scene (Diken 2001).¹⁰²

A significant aspect of the panel meeting I attended was its multifaceted role. It reflects trends and unsteady power relations and prepares the audience for the next day's main theme. The theme of the meeting and its timing highlight a unique exchange between the scholarly and political spheres. Besides blending various types of participants at a panel setting and empowering them with a set of socio-political views

ideas within the intellectuals of Turkey: Sarıbay 1994, Çaha 1996, 1999 and 2000, Yıldırım 1996, Yucekok at al. 1998, Yavuz 1999, Davutoğlu et al. 2000, *Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları ve Yasalar-Etik-Deprem* 2000.

¹⁰⁰ A project that was supported by Institut Francais d'Etudes Anatoliennes and Orient Institut on civil society in Turkey organized three meetings between October 1998 and January 2000. These meetings were participated by some prominent intellectuals from the region and being a major human rights issue, the Kurdish issue was covered extensively. For the published presentations and the list of participants see Yerasimos et al. (Eds.) 2001.

¹⁰¹ The title can be translated as "The Civil Society in the Southeast." Southeast is the term generally used to describe the region mostly populated by the Kurds in Turkey.

including multiculturalism, the whole process reveals a road map for the next year's agenda. The meeting, just like the Newroz festival and the various expansions of it, satisfies the needs of the variety of participants whatever their social background and level of education.

To make sense out of the city during the day of Newroz, I spent the rest of the day of March 20th in the streets of Diyarbakır. To make a meaningful comparison before and during the day of Newroz, I wanted to observe the city in general and simply wander through various neighborhoods of Diyarbakır. From the old bazaar in the old city to the elegant cafes of the new section, I circled around the city to search for signs of Newroz. This was also a somewhat personal endeavor. Returning to Diyarbakır after a little less than a decade, I wondered about the changes. Though there is usually a constant, visible existence of security in Diyarbakır, especially around government buildings, it still seemed excessive and unusual to me, but possibly not to the rest of the city. My notebook and my camera in my bag, I encountered various conversations with local people. Many of these conversations did not directly involve the upcoming Newroz yet still connected to the major social and cultural issues that are faced by the people.

Because of the high rate of immigration that Diyarbakır receives, and the high unemployment rate, the streets in the old city were full of peddlers, shoe polishers, and vendors of all kinds. Throughout the day I was approached by them, and in some occasions my disinterest in a business encounter was followed by “are you here for Newroz?” In the old city, a saddler who served villagers in a traditional little shop caught

¹⁰² For Diken's brief but significant point on how the political system expands the responsibility of civil society in the region see Diken 2001: 262-264.

my attention. An artisan in his early fifties, skinny, balding, and with a calm voice, he was located in one of the narrow back streets of the old bazaar. As I passed by he was sewing a beautiful *kilim* – a woven carpet – onto a saddle and I stopped to admire his art and we began to talk. After discussing a then current corruption case that was shaking the country, he talked about the decline of his income during the last decade. He made a marvelous statistical presentation by comparing the price increase of string and leather with the decrease in the price of his products, all in plain, confidential language. After this lengthy conversation he paused and said something to the effect of, “this is no good. No stability, no future. There is nobody left in the villages to whom I can sell my saddles. My being here is not reasonable any more. I am still here and in this business because this is what I do. I am not even worrying about myself anymore, but my children. I do not know what is going to happen to them.”

Even though the dominance of economic difficulties in his talk and his hopelessness displayed a contrast to the more optimistic discourse of Newroz, I felt a connection between the two. That particular day the direction of the conversation did not lead me to ask about his participation in the upcoming Newroz. The sad quietness and apparent poverty in his tiny shop, and the completeness of his talk, did not provide the necessary room to ask; “so, what is your plan for tomorrow?” Also, I hesitated to ask because of the lack of ethnic consciousness in his talk, which one can encounter very often in Diyarbakır. Without knowing why, I felt sure he would not come to Newroz. I left the shop with a deep sadness. Not the sadness of an ethnographer, but the sadness of a fellow human being. I didn’t take one single note of the interaction, but continued my tour of the streets. But I remembered him the next day in the early hours the festival. The

highly tailored design of the festival site, the strict planning of the attractions, the ambulances standing by because of the hot weather, the discipline of the young volunteer workers, their uniform T-shirts and arm bands, even the general tidiness at the festival site, all contrasted to the complaints of the saddler. There were regular announcements asserting an order, to keeping the environment clean, or informing people about security, service, health, events, everything overshadowed the disorder, corruption, and hopelessness by mapping normality, integrity and sociability.¹⁰³

An Emergence of a Spontaneous Quasi-Parade on the Way to the Festival Site

It is generally assumed that festivals normally take place on planned sites in predetermined formats. Even if they exceed the initially planned structure, there is generally a limit to their expansion. Assuming the repetition of this tendency and knowing the previous structure of Newroz, I prepared myself to participate in the festival solely at the Newroz site. However, a traffic jam was caused by road closings and the high frequency of checkpoints between the city center and the festival site. This caused a spontaneous quasi-parade to form. As a result, I started my field observations earlier than expected. The present case does not appear as a permanent part of the Newroz festival. It was not intended “to display power, wealth and prestige,” nor did it raise, in any direct sense, a “voice of protest” (Fraser 2000: 2-6). It instead grew, unexpectedly, out of heavy security measures and became, at least in the years of 2001 and 2002, the opening phase of the Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır.

¹⁰³ Daina Stukuls Eglitis coins the terms of “mapping normality” and “mapping nationhood” as part of forming national self-definition in post-Soviet Latvia (Eglitis 2002: 153).

The Newroz festival takes place in the outskirts of Diyarbakır - twelve kilometers (approximately fifteen miles) away from the city. For the first half of the trip from downtown to the festival site, one passes through the older section of the city. The second half starts with the freeway that connects Diyarbakır with the neighboring city of Elazığ. From very early in the morning, potential participants leave their homes in an effort to reach the festival site. Under ideal conditions, carpools, truckpools and public transportation would have efficiently provided the necessary forms of transportation. However, two factors prevented this ideal scenario from unfolding. The first was the high volume of participants. The estimated number of participants in 2001 was between 300,000 to 500,000,¹⁰⁴ and in 2002 it was 500,000.¹⁰⁵ Even under normal circumstances, the available practices of transportation would not have worked to carry people to the festival site properly. Because of the large number of participants, the city's pro-Kurdish mayorship uses every available vehicle to help the participants reach the festival site. Buses, minibuses, vans, trucks, tractor trailers and ambulances work all day to carry people. Many participants also come from other cities and the countryside. These participants generally come with their cars, tractor trailers, and semi-trucks or rented commercial buses. On their way, these vehicles collect others and carry them to the site as well. In this process, nobody needs to ask permission to jump onto the back of a privately-owned truck or tractor trailer, and payment is never expected.

¹⁰⁴ Oral Çalışlar, "Deprem Bahane Diyarbakır Şahane." *Cumhuriyet*, 22 March 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Celal Başlangıç estimated 500,000 for 2002 Newroz. *Tiroj*, April 2003. pp. 5. In both years the estimates for the numbers of participants varied from 100,00 to 700,000. Even though I have no expertise making this type of estimations, the size of the area and the number of people that I can see in it make me to say that there were at least half a million people on the ground.

In my first fieldtrip in 2001, I was guided by two medical doctors who provided emergency care at the festival. They picked me up in the morning, and I observed the spontaneous “parade” from the comfortable front seat of a car. In 2002, I decided to go to the festival site via public transportation so that I could observe the parade more closely. Knowing that the municipality building was going to be one of the key locations to find a ride, I went to the mayorship. After missing an open truck, I managed to board one of the service minibuses provided by the Diyarbakır mayorship. The capacity of the vehicle was exceeded at least twice. To repeat the service as many times as possible, the driver was driving very fast. In around ten minutes, we encountered a road-block. Immediately after starting on an alternate route, the minibus that I was in, along with the other vehicles on the way, were stopped at a checkpoint. Everybody got out of the vehicle. Men were separated from the women and children. During the body search of men, people were made to leave banners, flags and Newroz-related symbolic artifacts at the checkpoint. At this checkpoint, women were not searched, although they were told to leave Newroz related material at the site. In both lines, the police attempted to locate school children and public servants and send them back, because the governorship had issued a special order requiring them to remain at school or work. Students were stopped and not allowed to pass the point. I noticed several young students trying to pass the checkpoints by getting rid of their ties and jackets, parts of the school uniform at the junior high and high school levels. I also recall several instances of young people trying to convince security forces that they had no school affiliation.

Small children were also prohibited from attending the festival. Supposedly in the interest of the children’s safety, parents were ordered to leave their children at the

checkpoint or return home. In order to fully understand the effects of these orders, one must consider the stressful environment created by the checkpoints. A massive line develops at each checkpoint; this specific checkpoint consisted of around a hundred police officers with hundreds, if not thousands, of people backed up and waiting to pass through. People were not stopped in an orderly or predictable fashion. The entire operation resembled a massive assembly line being run by relatively few workers; back-ups were inevitable. Under these conditions, there were no convenient places to leave children. I remember numerous families explaining that they did not see any danger for their children at the festival site. Some families with children gave up and left the area, either to return home or to seek entry by another route. In other families, the men continued with us while leaving their children and women at the checkpoint. Since I was worrying about keeping a low profile so that I could pass the checkpoint and reach to the festival site, I did not have a chance to talk to these families, and so have only my observations. It would stand to reason that many of the families that gave up and left as a whole were coming from out of Diyarbakır, while those in which the men left children and women behind might have come from Diyarbakır.

I do not know precisely how long it took myself or others to cross these checkpoints.¹⁰⁶ I did not check my watch. I did not talk to anybody around me. Seeing people being turned away, facing the risk of not attending the festival, and seeing the general attitude of the security forces toward the people, I was quite nervous. As my perspective shifted from that of a fieldworker to that of a participant who passionately

¹⁰⁶ The next day the newspapers mentioned that the Diyarbakır-Elazığ highway was closed for two hours. *Sabah*, 22 March 2002. Another news noted that the checkpoints were structured 5 kilometers away from

wanted to reach the site, I believe that I performed at my poorest as a fieldworker. The situation made me very nervous, so I still cannot provide accurate answers to questions regarding how long the process of passing through a checkpoint took, precisely where they were located, etc.

The passengers of the minibus who managed to pass the control would then board their vehicle again. Some new faces appeared on my vehicle at this point. After leaving this checkpoint, only two hundred meters away, we were stopped at the next checkpoint. The driver and some fellow passengers furiously tried to explain that this was a mistake and we were all stopped and checked in the previous checkpoint. Some responses from the officers included, “No you were not” and “I did not see you there.” The same process of body searches, bag searches and ID checks was repeated again. During the search, the minibus that I was in was sent away by the police to prevent it from blocking the flow of the traffic. The driver had to leave us and move forward. After they completed my body, bag, and ID check, I walked for a while and boarded a new truck while the traffic was stopped. Other than a couple of elderly individuals, everybody was standing to save room for more passengers at the back of the truck. The driver was, again, driving like a madman in an effort to re-gain the time that he lost in the checkpoints. The passengers in the middle like myself, clung to the shoulders of the men next to us. We were stopped at a checkpoint again. Everybody got off the vehicle and was body searched. All handwritten Newroz related banners, flags, all green-yellow-red headbands, bows for hair, and shirts were confiscated. In the space of fifteen miles, I was stopped four times. Throughout the day, I would hear similar stories from people coming from different parts of the region.

Another difficulty that I witnessed was the continuous stopping of vehicles for violations of traffic regulations. Since all of the vehicles were either carrying more people than they were allowed to do (I saw sedans carrying more than 10 people, minibuses carrying 30-40), or were illegally carrying people on an open truck, many were ticketed. This also contributed to a huge traffic jam. I remember angry faces, criticizing what they called “another tactic to interrupt Newroz.” I also noticed a number of people who remained optimistic throughout the small ordeal: one middle-aged man in the truck that I took was talking to himself calmly and admiring the view; I heard thousands of people on the road saying “look at this beauty, look at this beauty.” After we had traveled about half of the distance to the site, walking seemed to make more sense than dealing with the congested traffic, and many people, including myself, opted to travel the rest of the way on foot.

The slow motion of the traffic created room for those on and near the road to interact. The interaction was not entirely limited to symbolic exchanges such as singing, flashing victory signs, waving flags, etc. I saw shop owners leave their shops and come to dance with the people waiting on the road. All along the road, people were dancing, waving banners and singing with joy. People standing in front of their houses served water to the slowly moving crowd. Women were allowed to use the bathrooms in nearby houses. Especially after passing the checkpoints and getting closer to the festival site, a general feeling of nervousness was gradually replaced with relaxation and celebration.

What I describe here as a quasi-parade, of course, is not the sort of regular parade that can be considered “public memory on the move” (Gordon 2001: 145-165). Even

though the “parade” was born out of a surrounding confrontational political atmosphere, it became a means of transforming a long and boring trip into a display of unity and passion as well as felicity. The passengers of countless trucks, vans, sedans and the thousands who walked to the festival site were unexpectedly “caught up in the greater whole” and “the spectator is re-impressed, constrained and loyally reconverted” (Fernandez 1986b: 276). This does not only validate the authenticity of the organized festival in a sense; it also provided a sort of warm-up for the upcoming day of celebration.

Because of both the spontaneity of the happening and my then narrow understanding of the field, however, I did not work on these observations at the time. My “awakening” on this matter did not come until the writing stage, and so I did not talk to the participants in order to gauge their understandings of this quasi-parade. Therefore, I should present these as my own interpretations. Still, in light of how successfully the quasi-parade transformed the environment and re-constructed the key symbols of identity in a very narrow time and space, it stands as a clear example of the constancy of the core values of Newroz.

The rest of the chapter will introduce the festival-site and the celebration. After displaying the space and some aspects of this master symbol, “a symbol which seems to enshrine the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society,” the findings will be presented in comparison with the Nevruz celebration (Wolf 2002: 69).

The Preparation for the Festival

Newroz is a well-organized and highly tailored festival. The main organizer of both celebrations I observed was the pro-Kurdish HADEP party and the mayorships that were won by HADEP candidates. However, the organization is not limited to the local chapters. In 2001 and 2002 I visited the central headquarters of HADEP in Ankara before Newroz and met the leaders of the party. During these visits, which occurred a week before Newroz, I observed intensive meetings and preparations for the upcoming festival. In 2002, besides the full organizational efforts at the highest level, a seven-member general Newroz committee headed by one of the general deputy chairmen of the HADEP party led the preparations at the national level. An invitation, sent in Turkish and English to selected guests in 2002, was signed by the deputy chairman of HADEP, Kemal Peköz. Peköz's title in the mentioned document, "deputy chairman and head of the central Newroz committee," informs us about the importance of Newroz for the party and the structure of organization of the celebration. The impression that I gathered of the HADEP headquarters was that, besides overseeing the preparations in general, considering Newroz's somewhat controversial stance, the headquarters also provided a mechanism to underscore the legitimacy of the celebrations. While on the one hand the HADEP headquarters functions to reassure potential participants that they will be safe during the celebrations, it also assures legitimacy of the celebration to the state authorities.

For instance, a letter I reviewed which was sent to all HADEP members on 15 March 2002 informs the members of 47 cities that hold Newroz, and asks them in which celebrations they will participate. While the HADEP headquarters is making a practical issue out of the matter, it is also informing members of the extensive nature of the

upcoming celebrations. In a memorandum sent to the Diyarbakır chapter by the party general secretary, Diyarbakır is asked to send designated party members to the Adana, Hakkari, Muş, and Bingöl chapters, which have vacant positions at the administrative level and need support for Newroz preparations.

Naturally, the most extensive preparations can be observed in the flag-ship celebration of Diyarbakır. The small building of HADEP in Diyarbakır was not only full of committee members, but also of children, men, and women who continuously stopped by to offer any needed help. Of particular interest to me was the largest room in the front, which was designed as a welcoming post. Visitors drank complimentary tea as they shared their own local news about festival preparations all over the region. Behind them the TV set, always on, constantly displayed footage from previous Newroz festivals. Here both the production and the political socialization aspects of Newroz preparations were integrated and mutually strengthened.

On the basis of the interviews that I had at the HADEP Diyarbakır headquarters and the printed material that I was provided, the preparation structure is as follows: Every year thousands of people work within the organization in one of a variety of committees: the general public committee, press and guests committee, technical committee (which deals with the sound system), transportation committee, and a committee for indispensable necessities such as food. There is an organized outreach program designed for Diyarbakır and the surrounding small towns by using neighborhood, labor, tradesmen, youth, and village committees, all reporting to a higher committee. The local chapters, and the youth and women's wings of HADEP are also considered as part of this

organizational schema. Labor committees are expected to be active both at the work site and at the neighborhood level.

The core of Newroz organization appears to be the neighborhood committees. Neighborhood committees consist of four members, a committee chair and one representative each of labor, youth and women representatives. These four are also divided into two committees on the basis of area and function. These committees are responsible for transporting the people in their area. As is stated in their guides, on the morning of Newroz the members must be at the neighborhood transportation centers and must keep a report of the number of vehicles and activities for the inspection unit. The members of the neighborhood committees report to the group chair on a daily basis until the end of the festival. The neighborhood committee meets on a weekend day for appraisal and planning of the following week. The chair then reports to the city level inspection unit on a weekly basis.

After this relatively limited preparation, the intensive meeting program with the people of each neighborhood starts by the beginning of March. The meetings take place at homes, coffee shops, and businesses. The goal is set to contact every single household and business in the neighborhood. The meeting organizers are advised to conduct at least 20 minute-long meetings and to be sensitive about local circumstances. According to guides prepared for the organization committee members, the participants have to encourage people to wear local outfits on the day of Newroz. They also need to make a list of vehicles that will carry people to the festival ground. The neighborhood committee members have to enlist at least 10 members for the pool of needed volunteer posts at the festival site.

The preparations for the festival start months before March. The major preparations are generally handled by the pro-Kurdish political party and various civil societal organizations. A typical February meeting, taking place on 28 February in 2002, includes members of all committees initiates non-stop planning and coordination up to the celebration day. A press conference is then held to publicize the meticulous preparations and scheduling soon to be unfolded, and the press is provided an hour-by-hour schedule of all performances and the speeches. In 2001, the plan of the festival was presented to the press in a breakfast meeting on 14 March. The program also included pre-festival events such as the painting exhibition, discussed below, and a quiz show that took place at the local buildings of HADEP, organized by its youth division. The welcoming of the HADEP general chairman from Ankara and the dinner honoring him were also publicized then.

There is a constant desire to add new attractions and raise the overall programming quality. In my interview with Ali Ürküt about the lengthy preparation process, he informed me about the constant changes towards bettering the event. In the last two days before Newroz he was extremely busy, and our meetings were cut by constant phone calls and questions from his associates. In fact, a significant amount of my knowledge on the preparations came from these “overhearings” as I sipped my tea quietly amid the hectic exchanges. These were the moments where I clearly sensed their passion for the quality of the organization and services. At one point, after a discussion with his assistants, he explained their complex transportation issues, trying to optimize their fleet of vehicles in order to get everyone to the festival. In another occasion, he showed me a file of bids from various sound engineering firms, exemplifying their

sophistication by way of listing the famous recording artists and venues who employed them. He was proud to then count Newroz as an equal.

Mr. Ūrkūt's and his associates' attachment to their goal reminded me Abner Cohen's point regarding the Notting Hill carnival: "The sound system was certainly the most important West Indian institution in the inner cities" (Cohen 1993: 99). Cohen's way of defining a sound system as an institution perfectly fits what I observed in the preparation process of Newroz. Knowing that even without a sound system at the festival site people would still be there, the attention to such details substantiates the institution-building efforts. The organizer's agenda, which includes such practicalities as transportation, the food-court, artists selection, etc, is not only trying to provide a smooth festival experience, but is also trying to impress and validate the audience.

The Festival Site

The Newroz festival occurs at the trade fairground located in the outskirts of Diyarbakır, at Ūčkuyu point. It is a two-football stadium-sized ground - 167 thousand square meters - on the Diyarbakır-Elazığ highway and is known as the Newroz ground among the people. Besides a couple of factories on the same road, the remote spot is surrounded by open land with no close neighborhoods. When it is not in use, an outside passerby may not even recognize it as a fair ground at all.

During the festival, the ground can be described in two different ways. In a geographical sense, the site includes the main stage, a balcony-like platform for the political leaders and important guests called the "protocol tribune," and podiums for the foreign guests and journalists, and the food-court and tents for the display of the artistic

artifacts, plus numerous bonfires. The balcony-like podium for the political leaders stands right behind the stage and is attached to it. Besides this function-based mapping, another description should be made on the basis of the human ingredients of the festival. The festival site is divided, approximately 50/50 into two sections. The half closest to the road and stage is occupied by the participants, usually sitting on the ground or standing facing the stage. The focal point of this section is the political speeches and the artistic performances that take place on the main stage. These are the participants who respond to the speeches and the performances by ovation and cheering. These attractions are usually covered by the media. Consistent with the size of the ground, the stage is big and high, comparable to one seen in a major rock concert.

The other half is filled with people on the move; dancing, jumping over the fires, etc. Instead of interacting with the major attractions, these people create their own temporary focal points. These ways of attending obviously represent two different styles of participation. However, this should not be taken as a clear division within the audience. Even though families with children and elder participants prefer to be in the section where they can sit or stand, throughout the day it is common to see people moving between the two sections. One other reason for the fluidity between the sections is the location of the service booths, prompting participants to explore either half as they make their way to the food court or the restrooms.

The banners appear as another type of focal point on the grounds. Banners present the current agenda of the Kurdish leadership. Ordered by the festival organizers, these successfully illustrate the current theme of the festival. In 2001, such themes could be seen: “Ne İnkâr Ne Ayrılık Demokratik Cumhuriyet - Neither Denial Nor Separation [but

a] Democratic Republic,” “Kürt Sorununa Demokratik Barışçıl Çözüm - Democratic Peaceful Solution for the Kurdish Issue,” “Özgürlük ve Barış İçin Elele - Hand in Hand for Freedom and Peace,” “Barışla Herkes Kazanacak - Everbody Will Win with Peace”. Besides carrying political messages, the banners and slogans also represent an aesthetic taste. For instance, in the banner stating “Ne İnkâr Ne Ayrılık Demokratik Cumhuriyet - Neither Denial Nor Separation [but a] Democratic Republic”, the first half of the slogan was taken from one of Sezen Aksu's songs, one of the most famous pop singers in Turkey. In 2002, a different set of banners was hung: “Barış İçin Elele - Hand in Hand for Peace,” “Aydınlık Gelecek Çağdaş Dünyayla Bütünleşmekle Olur – An Enlightened Future Happens by Integrating with the Modern World,” “Şeffaf Devlet Demokratik Toplum Temiz Siyaset – Transparent State, Democratic Society, Clean Politics,” “Kadınlara Özgürlük, Dünyaya Barış - Freedom to Women, Peace to the World,” “Kadın Özgürlüğün Gizli Bahçesidir - Freedom is the Secret Garden of Freedom,” “Barışla Herkes Kazanacaktır - Everbody Will Win with Peace”.

From these banners, the main theme appears to be peace and freedom. The request for a "peaceful solution," underscoring that the solution should be searched for within the existing Turkish republic. Additional themes surface with demands for bringing corruption to justice and for women's rights. During the 2001 and 2002 celebrations in Diyarbakır, opposition to the death penalty was a main theme, proclaimed widely on the banners and in slogans. At the time, the death penalty was a possibility for imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. The banners traditionally highlight the struggle against the denial of Kurdish identity while also making a demand for political inclusion.

I should mention that the slogans on the banners have to pass a check from local governorships. In 2002, a curiously small number of banners were hung. When I probed into this, I was told that many of the banners were not permitted. I assumed that at least some banners might have been banned because of the “w” issue, carrying the word “Newroz” on them. The next day, I searched for the list of silenced slogans-banners to get a sense of the limitations put on Newroz from the official sphere. Fortunately, I found a copy of the notification given to the HADEP Diyarbakır chapter.¹⁰⁷ The office of the local security police, working under the governor of Diyarbakır, stated that the following list of banners were not allowed to on the Newroz grounds: “Newroz Zihinlerde Aydınlanma, Yüreklerde Cesaret, Gözlerde Işıktır – Newroz is Enlightenment in Minds, Courage in Hearts, Light in the Eyes,” “Newroz Barış 2002 - Newroz Peace 2002,” “Ne İnkâr Ne Ayrılık Demokratik Cumhuriyet - Neither Denial Nor Separation, [but a] Democratic Republic,” “Toplumsal Barış İçin Ayrımsız Genel Af – For Social Peace, General Pardon,” “OHAL Kaldırılsın - End to Special Administration Status,” “Newroz’da Buluşma Barışla Buluşmadır – Meeting at Newroz is Meeting with Peace,” “Halkımızın Newroz Bayramı Kutlu Olsun – We Congratulate Our People’s Newroz Festival,” “Gençlik Demokratik Cumhuriyetin Teminatıdır – Youth is the Assurance of a Democratic Republic ,” “İnsan Diliyle Özgürdür – Humankind is Free with its Tongue,” “Yaşasın Demokratik Cumhuriyet - Long Live the Democratic Republic,” “İdama Hayır - No to the Death Penalty,” “Milyonların İradesi Engellenemez – Determination of the

¹⁰⁷ The notification is given by Diyarbakır police security section chief Bülent Yavaşoglu and received by A. Mefair Altındağ, the vice chair of Diyarbakır HADEP in 19 June 2002 at 10:45 am. The same document also includes the negative responses for the Newroz run that was planned for 20 March 2002 between 11:00 am-1:00 pm at Dicle Kent street and fire-works that were planned between 6:00-8:00 pm at Koşuyolu Park.

Millions Cannot be Stopped,” “Öteki Eşitimidir - The Other is My Equal,” “Demokratik Cumhuriyet - Democratic Republic,” “Demokratik Toplum Özgür Birliktelik İçin Kadınlar Elele - Women are Hand in Hand for a Democratic Society and Free Unity,” “Anadilde Öğrenim Hakkı - Right for Education in Native Tongue,” “Silopi Kayıpları Nerede - Where are the Silopi Missing,” “Kürt Sorununa Demokratik Siyasi Çözüm - Democratic Solution for the Kurdish Issue,” “Newroz ve Barış 2002’ye Hoşgeldiniz - Welcome to Newroz and Peace 2002,” “Köye Dönüş Sağlansın, Zararlar Karşılansın - Right to Return to Villages, Compensation for the Loss” “Kültürel Zenginliğimiz Özgür Birlikteliğimizin Temelidir - Our Cultural Richness is the Basis for Our Free Unity,” “Anadolu ve Mezopotamya Kardeşliğinden Demokratik Uygarlığa - From Anatolian and Mesopotamian Brotherhood to Democratic Civilization.”

A newspaper article written by Celal Başlangıç on human rights issues in the region touched upon this issue. Mentioning the recent efforts to abolish the death penalty on the part of the Turkish state, which became a reality very soon after this date, he points out that nonetheless they still censor the banner stating “No to the Death Penalty.”¹⁰⁸ Ali Ürküt, then chairman of the local HADEP chapter, also touched upon this issue in his opening Newroz speech in 2002: “even if 30-40 slogans of ours are not permitted on the festival ground, they are in our hearts.” Since there was no detailed, official explanation other than the declaration of these bans on the basis of national security codes, there is no real base to discuss the official reasoning behind these bans. I can only provide my educated guesses. On the one hand, the list of banned banners represents the current state’s stance on specific issues. As I will discuss in detail in

chapter 5 of this work, following the footsteps of the Kurdish opposition, the state also has utilized Nevruz and anti-Newroz related activities and decisions to mirror this view on specific issues. In a more general sense, the list of restrictions displays continuity within the politically charged cultural policies of the Turkish republic. Throughout the history of Turkey's Kurdish conflict, a parallel “war of words” has been observed. Consistent with the conflicting views of the dichotomy, the opposite parties strictly used different sets of words to define concepts, issues, and even localities. Throughout the years of violence, for instance, a series of memorandums that were sent by security agencies to the media advised them to use a particular set of words instead of another. Instead of “guerrilla,” “terrorist;” instead of “Kurds” or “Kurdish citizens of Turkey,” “the citizens of the eastern Turkey;” instead of “Kurdish,” “local dialects” were advised to be used. In trying to make sense of the ban on such slogans as “Democratic Republic” and “Internal Displacement,” a clear connection surfaces to this overtly manipulated political terminology.

Beside the main stage there is a podium set up for the famous and important guests. In 2001, the Diyarbakır metropolitan mayor Feridun Çelik and the HADEP chairman Murat Bozlak were the hosts on this podium. Also present were HADEP vice chairman Ahmet Türk, ÖDP president Ufuk Uras, SiP president Aydemir Güler, European parliament members of Kurdish origin Feleknaz Uca and Evrim Helin Baba, former members of the parliament Sedat Yurttaş, Ali Öncü and Zülküf Karatekin of the Diyarbakır Democracy Platform, Sevil Erol - general secretary of KESK (a major trade union for public servants), singer Ferhat Tunç, writers Vedat Türkali, Ragıp Zarakolu,

¹⁰⁸ “İdama Hayır Pankartı da Yasak.” Celal Başlangıç. *Radikal*, 24 March 2002.

Mıgırdıç Magrosyan, Varlık Özmenek, well-known human rights activist Eşber Yağmurdereli, Human Rights Association general president Hüsni Öndül, and Alaattin Dinçer - Eğitim-Sen general president (major union of the teachers).

In 2002 Müjde Ar, a famous actress, Ercan Karakaş, a leading center-left politician, Fikri Sağlar, former minister, Levent Tüzel, EMEP party leader, Aydemir Güler, Sami Evren, KESK president, and Feleknaz Uca were also among the guests. These people represent the available support coming from both the political and the artistic sphere. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the Kurdish minority issue is one of the most sensitive issues in Turkey and the listed names generally represent the minority view amid the general population. The mentioned parties, other than the pro-Kurdish parties, generally receive less than 3-4 % of the vote in general elections. The seasoned human rights veterans generally have had their own share of political persecution. Considering the huge negative effects of the long violent clashes in the general population, whatever their background the people on the podium are described as “separatist, marginal, and ultra leftist.” Therefore, their very public attendance, and the warm reception given as they are introduced, is a sign of mutual appreciation between the guests and festival-goers. Furthermore, the existence of the podium, its visibility, centrality, and the attached rituals of support, objectify that recognition.

While as an image of power and stability the balcony frames the representatives of the continuous Kurdish struggle and its supporters, one can easily notice the lack of official representation. Other than the security personal, not a single representative of the

Turkish state can be seen on the festival ground.¹⁰⁹ One explanation can be the parallel Nevruz celebrations that take place in Diyarbakır. As will be discussed in chapter 5, a well-organized Nevruz event takes place in Diyarbakır and high level public servants eagerly participate. However, comparing the state's thorough representation through deputy governors or other public servants in similar occasions, their absence at Newroz has to be taken as a clear message of the state's distancing itself from such activities.

The way in which the stage is utilized also hints at the intentions of the organizers with regard to the direction of the crowd. Besides speeches and performance, other announcements informing the celebration come from the main stage. For instance, the participants were regularly encouraged not to shout illegal slogans but to cooperate with the security forces. On the other hand, sometimes an announcer was riling the crowd, calling upon the Newroz legend and rhetorically demanding in Kurdish "who are we?" to the crowd. The participants were responding in one voice: "we are the Kurds." Yet again in other cases, participants dancing at the other side of the site are asked to be quieter when an important speaker took the stage.

As a public celebration, Newroz highlights and differentiates the crucial components of Kurdish identity. The festival displays and recalls the historical experience that the Kurds had. By transmitting the knowledge and the consciousness of the imaginary collective past, it becomes a medium to teach history and create a common culture. At the site of Newroz in Diyarbakır, carefully presented details such as the giant

¹⁰⁹ The Turkish state is divided into cities which function as provinces (*il*). Every city is considered as the center of the region and contains townships (*ilçe*). The governors of the cities are sent by the central government and represent the central government. Mayors on the other hand, who run the cities, are elected by the people. However, as the representative of the Turkish state, governors are superior to mayors. During the last years, Diyarbakır mayors have been elected from pro-Kurdish political parties; this situation

picture of the legendary Kawa¹¹⁰ and the huge bonfires, bring together both the institutionalization of Kurdish culture and the current political protest. The sophisticated organization of the festival site, the quality of the sound system, the performance of Turkish and Kurdish popular singers as well as other shows, along with the traditional bonfires and dances, all creates a temporary heaven for participants to announce their culture and renew it.

From the pro-Kurdish political slogans to the widespread use of the red-green-yellow colors¹¹¹ on clothes and banners that are snuck through the check points, the dominant Turkish political discourse is momentarily displaced. The carefully chosen and arranged mythicized past becomes real (Geldern, 1993: 43-44). In Barbara A. Babcock's words, Newroz' ground and the attached freedom enable participants to free themselves from the limitations of "thou shalt not's" and enable them to make counter statements about the present social order. In this context of reversal, the "inverted beings" of the Newroz festival question the order in which they live (Babcock 1978: 21-28).

The festival site also becomes a massive stage for social performance, even at the individual level. Although during the recent years Newroz celebrations are legally celebrated, reaching the festival site and being at the celebration site still carry risks.¹¹² I heard many accounts of hardships that were experienced merely on the road to Newroz. People openly tell each other what they did to pass a checkpoint, or how they tried to take

therefore creates tension within the administrative system.

¹¹⁰ According to the Newroz legend, the Kurds were united and sustained under the strong leadership of the blacksmith Kawa to resist against the despot king Dehaq. The murder of the king by Kawa is celebrated by lighting the bonfires, which are passionately considered a symbol of freedom.

¹¹¹ The "national ownership" of this color combination, red-green-yellow, is another controversial and contested issue. See Tural and Kılıç 1996.

¹¹² For specific previous Newroz related human rights violations see *İHD Şube ve Temsilciliklerinin*

a less travelled route. Thus, simply getting there becomes a major part of festival participation. People met their acquaintances, classmates, and distant relatives at the scene and earnestly embraced to be at such an event together.

The Platform for Foreign Guests¹¹³

Besides giving participants a chance to re-produce and promote their ethnic identity and freshen their hope for freedom, the festival also appears as the most visible display of their identity. The presentation of ethnic identity and the issue of the audience can be best argued through the presence of the “foreign guests” of Diyarbakır’s Newroz celebrations. Throughout its history, the existence of foreign guests has occupied a significant position at the site. Especially throughout the 1990s, from the violent examples of 1992 and 1993 celebrations to the current, much more stable festivals, foreign guests played multiple roles at the site. European human rights organizations and activists carried weight in terms of recognizing human rights abuses in the region. They filled a huge gap by witnessing for the international audience various rights-related issues and the Kurdish issue particularly. In 1998, for instance, Italian journalist Dino Frisullo, the general secretary of No Borders and the spokesperson for the Anti-Racist Network, was arrested when he was in Diyarbakır observing the Newroz celebration.¹¹⁴

Another support mechanism was established by the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe which contained various sorts of left-leaning political parties and organizations. In this case, just as in the Palestinian case, foreign activists came to the region and became a

Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Raporu 1992, pp. 9-77.

¹¹³ See chapter 5 of this work for the discussion of the audience and the foreign guests in the Turkish Nevruz celebration.

¹¹⁴ *Ülkede Gündem*, 26 March 1998.

voice for the silenced region. The existence of these foreigners in hot zones and their critical position for the Turkish state's human rights records were considered and presented as expansions and residues of European imperialism by the Turkish state discourse and deemed activities against the Turkish state. By the mid-1990s, the relative normalization of the Newroz celebrations created a suitable and needed venue for these activists and since then there has been a constant existence of "foreign guests" in the festival site.

It has to be clarified that the "foreign guest" category is not my preferred term in describing this group. As can be seen in the discourses of both hosts and guests, this is an established part of Newroz. In the human rights panel that I wrote about above, I sat with two Germans at the theater hall. At one point they were approached by a senior police officer and asked for their IDs, proving that they were journalists and have a right to be there. In return, they responded by saying, in Turkish, "we are foreign guests."

This category includes a variety of people, from the middle aged Kurdish intellectual who left the country years ago and now carries a European passport, to the 20-year-old liberal activist with just a backpack, to the member of the European parliament, to the freelance socialist photographer visiting politically sensitive regions with no mainstream coverage. In 2001 around a hundred participants from Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Russia, and England were also on the grounds. In 2002, there were more than one hundred foreign observers present.¹¹⁵ In my 2002 trip for instance, I met a man who was visiting Newroz for the eighth time. The same year, after the festival, I spent the night chatting with a large group of doctors from Europe and

Canada in the lobby of my hotel. In fact, the hotel in which I stayed during both trips, along with another one nearby in downtown Diyarbakır, were hubs for these guests. Throughout my stays, I observed their familiarity with the environment and the consideration granted to them not only by the political elite but also by lay people. One restaurant, directly connected to the hotel, extended to the foreign guests a wider variety of vegetarian foods, knowing their clientele. The foreign women guests, who drank alcohol freely and dressed in ways that would certainly be admonished in native women, were hardly given a glance by quite conservative Kurdish townfolk.

There was also proof of this at the festival site, where a tower-like podium with a balcony is reserved for foreign guests, located right beside the main stage. With its central position, it has a view of the whole festival. It provides not only a comfortable spot to record and watch, but also provides a safety zone from the persecution of the police. Any footage immediately can be seen on the European-based pro-Kurdish TV channels as well as in some other media around Europe. An even more concrete benefit of this platform can be seen immediately after the celebration. The foreign visitors, generally led by a senior human rights officer or a parliament member, share their observation of the festival. After 1998 Newroz, which was celebrated at the *Batıkent* ground in Diyarbakır, a group of eight observers – including parliament member Heidi Lippmann-Kasten from Saksonia-Germany, organized a press conference in Hamburg to report on the oppression of HADEP and requested the German government be active in the resolution of the conflict.¹¹⁵ After the 2004 celebration, a press conference held in

¹¹⁵ Some of these guests were representing AP, AFP, BBC, and Time Magazine.

¹¹⁶ *Ülkede Gündem*, 26 March 1998.

France detailed a list of Newroz-related human rights abuses observed by foreign guests during their attendance.

This foreign record-keeping also functions to preserve the cultural history of the Kurds. Two European photographers, a man and a woman, told me that they have personal archives consisting of hundreds of photographs taken during the last decade of festivals. When I asked about the possibility of using their photographs, they requested no money or return short of simply asking me to use their names. Besides the record keeping function, one other aspect arises, that of international recognition, legitimacy, and arbitration. This will be touched upon in the appendix, where possible conflict transformation capabilities of Newroz will be central.

The Celebration

In both years of my observation, participants start out very early in order to make the rough journey to the festival site. The ones who manage to pass into the festival are first body-checked by police in a series of lines. In 2001, it was relatively easy to pass through the check line. However, in 2002, the checking at the festival ground was much tighter. For one thing, people under 18 were not allowed in whatsoever. Since the festival took place on a week day and the school children were supposed to be in their school, the Diyarbakır governor banned students' and public servants' participation in Newroz in 2002. Consistent with this decision, official identification of the public servants was collected at the entrance by police. Later in the day, I was told that some people coming from outside of Diyarbakır were also strictly not allowed in. I had my own share of trouble as well in the 2002 festival. At the check line at the entrance of the Newroz

ground, I was told that I cannot enter with my camera unless I have a journalist ID. I had to go back to my hotel and leave my camera along with the films and a large notebook. Upset and angry, I took only a little notebook with me and was not able to take pictures inside of the Newroz ground at all. This unfortunate incident, however, allowed me to see the empty streets of Diyarbakır that morning, and created a thought-provoking contrast to the teeming festival.

Earlier, I mentioned the two major divisions within the festival site. It is fruitful to follow the same route to describe the celebration patterns as well. The first grouping of celebrations takes place around the stage. For the participants who sit on the ground or stand towards the main stage, the activities and the announcements dominate their celebration experience. The participants who take the stage as a focal point are less mobile and more responsive to the announcements and performances. The participants who set their own agenda occupy the eastern and the south-eastern part of the festival ground, though, again, there is no clear distinction between actors and the spectators. It is common to see people shifting positions, dancing and jumping over the fires and coming back and sitting again.

In 2001, even though the festival application requested a longer time frame, the celebrations were held between 10 am and 3 pm. The participants were welcomed by a giant hot-air balloon declaring “Newroz 2001” on it. The celebrations were initiated when Murat Bozlak, the general president of HADEP party, lit a symbolic bonfire with a torch lit by a young man who had won the “Newroz 2001 race.” The same run was banned in 2002.

Next, the opening speech was given by then HADEP Diyarbakır chapter president

Ali Ūrkūt. Ūrkūt explained: “Diyarbakır becomes beautiful with Newroz. We were the ones who suffered a lot during the last 15 years, that is why we know best what peace is. Gaffar Okan’s assassins, two of our party members who are missing from Silopi are not found. Some want to sabotage peace.”¹¹⁷ The Diyarbakır metropolitan mayor Feridun Çelik described the participants of the festival as a light in the dark.

HADEP chairman Murat Bozlak started his brief talk by wishing a Happy New Year to people from the Middle East to Caucasia. After strongly cursing the recent assassination of Gaffar Okkan, the police chief of Diyarbakır of Turkish origin who was known for his humane attitude towards the local Kurdish people, he defined Newroz as “the name of peace and brotherhood and as a celebration in which peoples identity and cultures are not denied. We are suffering here and the ones in Ankara [read: central government] do not hear our voice. Because we have peace here and the clashes have ended, hundreds of thousands can celebrate Newroz here. Turkey needs a social peace and Ankara has to support this.” He continued by saying, “we are for democracy and dialogue. This positioning needs a response. Today Newroz is being celebrated in only 20 locations. I wish all governors would have let people celebrate Newroz just as Diyarbakır’s governor did.”

As it always happens in Newroz celebrations, the leaders' speeches cover major issues and set the tone for the celebration. The speeches of Ūrkūt and Bozlak are full of significant details. The missing party members, the assassination of a most loved police chief of Diyarbakır, and an invitation to the Turkish government to work towards a

¹¹⁷ In 2001 the pictures and flyers of recently missing HADEP members Serdar Tanış and Ebubekir Deniz were everywhere on the ground. Ali Ūrkūt’s point is about these two people.

peaceful conflict resolution, all stand as the backbone of Kurdish political discourse for that period. While the tone is quiet and diplomatic, it also recalls the heavy consequences of the then recently ended military clashes.

The back to back summaries of the talks should not give an impression of a conference meeting. Between the speeches there were various performances diversifying the stage, from a youth gymnastic exhibition to a simple reading of the congratulatory messages coming from in and out of the country.

In 2002, Murat Bozlak, Ahmet Türk, the vice chairman of HADEP, Akın Birdal,¹¹⁸ and former member of the Turkish National Assembly Sırrı Sakık inaugurated the festival by lighting the huge bon fire in the middle of the festival site. During this, pigeons, representing peace, were freed. As the first speaker, Ali Ürküt stated that; “This is the third year that we celebrate Newroz without pain. Diyarbakır is producing a new culture. This is a culture that promotes unity, brotherhood, love, and sharing. Some are scared of us. Susurluk mafia should be scared of us, but we are shoulder to shoulder with the people working for peace.”¹¹⁹ When the righteous requests are not seen, this is a problem. When the names are banned, this is a problem. No applications of human rights should be taken as a threat to the state.”

The Diyarbakır Democracy Platform spokesman Zülküf Karatekin, who represents the civil society of Diyarbakır, demanded the dissolution of the extraordinary administrative status of the region and demanded education in the Kurdish language.

¹¹⁸ See “One Day Before Newroz” section in this chapter.

¹¹⁹ A traffic accident in a little western town, Susurluk, displayed a connection between high level police chiefs and ultra right death squads and became a big scandal at that time. This point is about that case of corruption and illegal activities of the state.

Mayor Feridun Çelik stated that he is proud of the political maturity of the Diyarbakır people and asked for the continuance of the people's support by saying; "you gave us the local power, now it is time for your support for general political power."

In both Ürküt's and Çelik's points Newroz is presented as model for both insiders and outsiders. In Ürküt's talk, Newroz is presented as a model for peace and mutual understanding. Using Diyarbakır's Newroz as proof, he calms the outside audience and distances Newroz from conflict-laden connotations. In Çelik's talk, he presents Newroz as model behavior for the Kurdish people as a whole. He asks festival participants to expand the festival behavior to their real life, especially towards the political decision-making process.

HADEP chairman Bozlak started his talk by thanking the governor and the police chief of Diyarbakır. Bozlak also touched upon the issue that the state still did not catch the killers of key Kurdish figures such as Vedat Aydın and Musa Anter. He continued, "Recently there were two positive changes taking place in Turkey. One of them is the end of war. The other is the progress that Turkey has made towards European Union membership. We want to solve our issues with democracy. There are still people with guns in the mountains. We need to secure the disarmament." The competition between Nevruz and Newroz was also touched upon by Bozlak. Referring to a betting tradition of knocking boiled eggs together to see which one will crack, common to Nevruz, Bozlak joked, "Newroz is not for butting eggs, but for peace and democracy." Murat Bozlak, following the main theme, summarized the many years of Newroz; "Turkey is the homeland of 70 million people. We want to live freely in brotherhood. Nobody wants to divide the country."

Music has been crucial part of the Newroz festival in Diyarbakır. The list of performers sets a message in and of itself. A variety of artists perform, from major pop singers to traditional folk singers. A participant can experience a live performance of a famed pop song as well as a revolutionary one. The manipulations of the stage performances appear as another venue to send symbolic messages. In 2001 for instance, Ferhat Tunç, a folk singer who openly supports the Kurdish cause was not allowed to perform. However, he still appeared on stage, informing the audience that he could not in fact perform. That same year the short talk of Gülten Kaya,¹²⁰ wife of the late singer Ahmet Kaya who died on 16 November 2000, was explosive at the site. Ahmet Kaya was a supporter of the Kurdish issue and has been bashed by the mainstream media because of a talk he gave before he left the country, later dying as an exile in France.¹²¹ The 2001 celebration was started with one of his songs. Throughout the day, Kardeş Türküler, Nilüfer Akbal, Ozan Serhat, Servet Kocakaya, Koma Gülen Xerzan (the group from Mesopotamian Culture Center), and the Sarya Dance Group took the stage.

In 2002 Sezen Aksu, one of the leading famous pop singers of Turkey, was in Diyarbakır. Sezen's decision to come was a major issue. Sezen was never a pro-Kurdish artist. In her own words, she was "somebody from the Aegean coast, who kept the same distance to all political lines for the last 28 years."¹²² She, as a leading singer, performed in concert to support Turkish soldiers who died during the civil war and had a good reputation on both sides. After greeting the audience with "peace and brotherhood," she

¹²⁰ Gülten Kaya along with Eşber Yağmurdereli and Celal Başlangıç received the first Newroz prizes given by Diyarbakır Democracy Platform in 20 March 2001. The prize was delivered at a reception that took place at the South-East Journalist Association building.

¹²¹ <http://www.ahmetkaya.com/>

¹²² Sezen Aksu, "Burası Diyarbakır." *Radikal*, 26 March 2002.

started her concert with the song “Gûlûmse – Smile,” which was written by then exiled leader of the Kurdistan Socialist Party, Kemal Burkay. At 1:05 a strong rain started but nobody left. She continued her concert in the rain. Because of her late arrival the festival ended one hour later than the permitted time. Besides Aksu, Koma Azad, Bilal Ercan and Koma Sîbad performed. Kazım Koyuncu and his group performed in the Lazi language, another minority tongue. This was another symbolic move to support other language-based freedoms besides Kurdish.

As I mentioned, half of the participants were more or less on the move and the attractions of the stage were not central to them. For those who were dancing and jumping over fires, the function of the stage was to provide music for their dances. The two activities garnered the most participation in this section: *Gowend* and fire-jumping.

The *gowend* dance is one of the most widely practiced and colorful aspects of the festival. This chain-based performance takes place all over the ground. It generally starts as a small group and gradually gets longer and more crowded. Its loose rules and its adaptability to be performed to a variety of music make it accessible to all participants. Thus, one temporary and wild chain after another, it continues throughout the day.

It is not solely connected with the festival but can also be seen in other rural and the urban celebrations, from weddings to factory openings. Very similar line dances can be seen from the Balkans to Central Asia. *Gowend* is performed hand to hand with basic steps. The line is led by a *sergowend* – leader of dance. From time to time this person breaks from the line and shows off some fancy figure moves, some of which are made with a handkerchief. It can be performed slowly as well as fast, depending on the traditional differences and the performers’ preferences, ages, etc. Whatever the pace, it

starts as a slow performance. Dance motions are based on standard steps and rhythmic arm motions, swinging together with shoulders touching.

The tremendous size of *gowend* lines and the combination of people from various backgrounds make the performance unique. The spontaneous nature of the dance puts people in bodily touch with others from different regions and backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, people come to the site with their families and friends. However, the spontaneous growth of the dance line does not allow participants to stick with their own clan of people. The circle dance pattern is broken with continuous, spontaneous joinings. One might join to the line wherever s/he wishes, or wherever or whenever the line wishes them. During the dance, men and women are often placed next to each other and from time to time, one of the dancers enters the center to perform. Even though this position is traditionally left for the leading dancer, it is common to see others occasionally taking this position. Even though *gowend* brings opposite sexes together and creates an acceptable environment for new sexually-oriented interactions, it seems that the dynamic of ethnic solidarity overshadows the opportunity for flirtation.

Jumping over the huge bonfires constitutes another aspect of the attractions in this section. During the day people from all ages and sexes make the jump, sometimes over huge fires – at one's own discretion. All jumpings are watched by a group of people, joyously laughing at the sight. The biggest fires can only be jumped by the athletic, and the young people can create quite a collective entertainment for a huge crowd, sometimes coming thrillingly close to the flames. Talent and bravery are cheered. It is impossible to see anybody jumping over a fire without a victory sign in hand. The mood of the jumpings has to be differentiated from other performances, such as dancing for instance.

The calm, understanding mood of *gowend* with the matching steps and the tight body movements is contrasted here with wildly pushing the limits. Whatever the age, gender, or physical capability, the “body in the act of becoming” jumps and jumps higher (Bakhtin 1968: 317).

This sort of spontaneity can permeate the entire scene of the festival and transform group habits. In 2002 for instance, unseasonable and very strong rain strengthened the dances and the slogans. In this very open site, with very limited secure spots, people did not scatter for shelter but rather easily tolerated the heavy storm. In another instance, when Turkish Air Force jets appeared overhead, people instantly started booing and hooting, and this became a festival happening in and of itself.

The Newroz festival day in Diyarbakır marks the beginning of spring, entailing dancing, singing, and eating along with a series of cultural performances and displays. The celebration's cultural configuration represents a balance between the modern and the traditional, the high and low. While developing and promoting an identity, the focus of the celebration shifts to respond to various needs and various layers of the participants. Consistent with its complex genre, it neither appears as a “pure” artistic performance nor a direct representation of political discourse. In Bakhtin's words, “it belongs to the borderline between art and life” (Bakhtin 1968: 7).

Colors, Costumes and Masking

Newroz is associated with the beginning of spring, March 21st, the joy of a new beginning first seen in new and clean clothes. People dress up on the day of Newroz. The outfits that one sees at the festival site represent the diversity within the participants.

From quality suits to designer jeans, from *şalvar* to handmade t-shirts, people's diverse sense of style can be seen. Even if the type of clothes varies according to the differences between origins, tastes, and incomes, the neatness appears as constant. The site can easily be described as a fashion show of ethnic-conscious clothes, dresses, bandannas, and various kinds of headscarves embroidered or woven with red-green-yellow colors. The only uniform piece of clothing was the paper hat worn by almost everybody, white with blue ink – I myself had one, but I chose not to sport it. The forehead states “2001 Newroz,” on the left side states “democracy,” and the right side states “freedom.” In 2002 the hats, made by the festival organizers, stated “*aşiti* – peace,” and were confiscated by the police.

As I mentioned in the spontaneous parade section, because of the security measures, there were limitations in bringing Newroz-related artifacts to the festival site. However, there were still many colorful costumes, masks, and various sorts of outfits and ornaments, which carry symbolic meaning. In this section, a special kind of masking, the utilization of costumes and uniforms, and the widely used colors will be discussed.

I would like to start with a kind of mask that is used by some of the young male participants in the festival site and describe how it takes place. At a moment with no specific importance, a young man starts covering his face with either a *camedan* - a piece of fabric that is widely used all over the Middle East, or a red-green-yellow fabric. While doing this his body language immediately changes and starts moving in somewhat exaggerated joyful manner. While his hands are busy slowly masking his face, the man starts moving in rhythm. The lower part of his body, in a series of moves that can be best described as improvisations, makes solid dance moves. As the observants, including

myself, soon see, this specific way of covering highly resembles the guerrilla face-covering practices when encountering regular people or conducting military actions. At that very moment, this shift is responded to by the surrounding group, who themselves begin to perform. If the group is moving and circling around the festival while dancing, the front leading position is given to the man in mask. If the group is in a fixed position, the group circles him and gives him cries of encouragement. In either case, the man with the mask occupies the leading position during the entirety of the performance. He almost loses himself in the unreal drunkenness and dance. With a victory sign in hand, he leads the crowd around him.

The other members of his immediate group act to highlight his performance accordingly. By clapping and by chanting *zılgıt*,¹²³ they display and praise him. Although the particular details vary, the central position of the masked man can be performed in a variety of ways. Other than leading the dance, the masked men also lead the groups in jumping over the Newroz fire. As he jumps, others stop to watch and praise him. These performances that I encountered took between 20 to 30 minutes. At the end of the performance, the young masked man uncovers his face and everything returns to the normal.

I first encountered this performance just before noon in 2001. While I was observing a giant *Kawa* picture that was located at the east side of the festival site, a group of people passed by me, one masked in the middle. Since the use of masks at the festival is rare, I followed the group and observed the rest of the performance. Only after

¹²³ *Zılgıt* is a type of cheering common among the rural Kurdish women. Recently it is appropriated to the urban and political celebrations.

around ten minutes, the leading man took off the mask and it was the end of the performance. The first half of the encounter did not make a lot of sense. The quick and immediate ending of the performance left me with frustration, disillusion and many questions, and I thought perhaps I missed something that I couldn't observe again. Fortunately, similar performances eventually gave me a better understanding.

I should make it clear that even if I use the concept of mask to define a specific masking practice, the artifact that I describe is not a mask in the classical sense. However, since in the case that I present here the “elements are withdrawn from their usual settings and combined with one another in a totally unique configuration,” I do not mind considering and elaborating on these as masks (Turner 1967: 105).¹²⁴ In his *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin connects masks “with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries. . . . Even in modern life it is enveloped in a peculiar atmosphere and is seen as a particle of some other world” (Bakhtin 1968: 39-40). Adding to this the temporary nature of masking makes the case more complicated and requires an elaboration of these multi-layered performances. In this practice of masking, a piece of fabric is used to cover the lower part of the face including the nose, or it covers the whole head, only leaving openings for the eyes. This mask is only used by a limited number of young male participants at the celebration site. A person who masks himself in this way does not come to the site covered, and is thus never an unknown person. He generally puts the

mask on at the moment that he chooses. This move immediately starts a short performance that is complemented with the help of either friends or family.

As I mentioned in the general description of the festival, people generally come to the festival site as part of a group that consists of family members and/or friends. Spending the day with family or friends appears as a common format for participation. In both field trips, I did not talk to any participant that was alone in the field. Consistent with this, the masking performance takes place within a small group with which the masked participant is affiliated.

There are three aspects of these performances that I would like to highlight and elaborate here: The temporary nature of masking and the meaning of it, the role of the audience and the embedded actions in the process of masking, and the material that is used. The idea of masking always comes with a purpose to disguise personal identity. It is believed that “by donning a mask one becomes what otherwise one could never be. Men into women, old into young, human into animal, mortals into animals, dead into living (and vice versa)” (Crocker 1982: 80). However in the presented specific case the quick shift from being masked to unmasked reduces the concealing character of masking. In this case, the symbolism of masking, which is augmented by the supporting acts of the group, seems to put the practical disguising function of masking into a secondary position. Here, the temporary nature of masking and its communicative functions precede the mask itself. The focal point of the performance lies in the transition rather than the mask. In other words, instead of the mask itself revealing a character, the masking

¹²⁴ Quoted in Crocker 1982: 83.

performance highlights the possibility of a reality shift and embellishes the participants' awareness towards social change.

The reason for this reading comes with the details of the performance. On-site masking and unmasking lessen the iconographic message of the mask itself. As I mentioned, the performer does not separate from the group during the masking process. He prefers to inverse and re-inverse on site within the group. These unique modes of entrance and exit along with the signs of gaining power - the changing body language, the assuming of a central position in the group, and the leading of various performances, as well as the immediate loss of power at the end of the performance, highlight the shift itself. In the described context, instead of the mask and the masked one, the process of masking and its relationship to the group is prioritized. In Žižek's words, the mask does not hide the reality but highlights its contradictions and related possibilities (Žižek 1989: 28-29).¹²⁵ While disguises transform, the performer's power does not rest upon membership in a specific position within society such as his age, education, status, etc. As is clearly shown in the rich details of the performance, the license for temporary power and leadership comes with the capability of detachment from the immediate context. Therefore the source of power that the performance highlights is neither the main performer, nor the masking, but the performance itself, which provides other outlets of struggle for the participants.¹²⁶

Another similar outfit-oriented performance takes place in a very different way. In this case, the unit is not a small group but the whole festival site. One may become aware

¹²⁵ Encountered in Aching 2002: 54.

¹²⁶ See Glassie 1975: 135-137 for a seemingly apolitical revival of mumming practices in highly political

of this performance only on hearing a huge ovation. I first noticed this performance after hearing loud cheering. Approaching in that direction, I saw a man in full guerrilla uniform with covered face at the top of a human tower. The major differences between this and the previous masking performance are the audience, frequency, length, and the artifacts that are used.

Compared to the previous masking, these happen much less frequently. I saw only two such performances. This one is prepared secretly within the festival site. On none of these occasions did I notice the preparation period. I assume, because of its direct political and illegal message, no one witnesses the preparation phase other than the performers. The uniform is kept hidden until the beginning of the performance. The performance in this case did not take more than 10 minutes. The human tower that I saw in both field trips consisted of three levels, prepared by approximately 30 men. At the top of it, as a fourth additional level, a man in full guerrilla uniform stoically stands. Because of the height of the tower, the performance is seen from all over the festival place. Therefore, the audience of this is much larger than the previous one. People who see the tower immediately stop what they are doing and start shouting and cheering. Even though the performance being presented at the main stage continues, it is overshadowed temporarily by the deafening cheering. The performance contains two major elements: greetings of the crowd by the man in guerrilla uniform, and the appearance of the PKK flag.

None of the demeanors that are seen in the previous masking performance appear here. The tower does not move. In a very calm manner, the guerrilla-acting man salutes.

Even though these moments are the noisiest moments of the festival, the man in uniform does not change his manner. His pulling a PKK flag out of his bosom marks the end of the performance. These appear as the peak moments of cheering, the crowd literally goes mad. The performance ends as quick as it starts. The tower quickly turns into a human made tent. Men who created the tower come shoulder to shoulder and make a tight ring. The man in uniform quickly disappears in this ring to change his dress and in maybe two minutes, the ring dissolves. All the young men involved in the performance quickly disappear among the other participants and a calmer mood returns.

The human tower, in the Bakhtinian sense, employs the human body as a building material in this performance (Bakhtin 1968: 313). The central symbol of this brief performance is the existence of a guerrilla at the festival site, illustrating the most political inventions of the event. It should be mentioned that throughout the years of violence, Diyarbakır and other major cities had a reputation as a no-entrance zone for the guerrilla forces by the state security agencies. Therefore, a man acting as guerrilla appears as a complete affront to the power order. His uniform and the flag he carries are the standard symbols of the struggle for power and relate to the recent past of the Kurdish struggle. Utilization of the uniform in this performance therefore allows participants to connect the military aspects of the conflict to the festival. However, one cannot understand the way in which this performance is conducted, unless one recognizes the multiple layers of meaning that are absorbed into the performance. Therefore, it would not be an accurate interpretation to narrow the presentation into a bold bridge between the cultural and military spheres. Considering that a guerrilla is believed only to live for short time after their enrollment to the ranks, the cheering for this performance should not be

taken only as a saluting of a political message, but also should be taken as respect to the sacrifice that they make.

In order to bring another angle and deeper reading of this performance, another series of performances that take place at the main stage should be taken into account. As I mentioned above, in both 2001 and 2002 the main theme of the festivals revolved around peace. Throughout the days, the peace-dominated theme was cheered loudly by the participants. But how can this be reconciled with the equally strong ovations for the man in guerrilla uniform? There are two items that I would like to elaborate with respect to this dichotomy. Since the very beginning of the appropriation of Kurdish Newroz it was attached to the surrounding political conflict and therefore was utilized as a message board to the political other. Consistent with this tradition, the combination of peace-dominated stage performances and the human tower with a guerrilla can be considered as part of a carrot and stick policy. While the stage promotes peace, the tower serves as a reminder of the darker consequences simultaneously at hand.

A second possible rendering comes with an extension of a political reality to the Kurdish opposition in Turkey. As in the case of other political movements, it is difficult to describe Kurdish political opposition as a whole granite block. Throughout history, including recent phases, the Kurdish movements consist of various versions of political tactics and sometimes contradicting plans for their future. Thus, this dichotomy between the stage and the human tower can be taken as a depiction of differences within the political decision making process. While the man in guerrilla uniform challenges the order and transforms it temporarily, he might also send an internal message to the other stances within the Kurdish opposition.

One of the most competitive aspects of the Newroz and Nevruz dichotomy surfaces at the ownership of the red-green-yellow color combination. In any conversation that one might have over Newroz/Nevruz, competition is generally immediately followed by a conversation over this issue. On the basis of this widely known controversy and its easy adaptability to the festival artifacts, an excessive use of the red-green-yellow combination is observed at the site. From handmade costumes to banners, from headbands to baby-clothes, various items are brought to the festival area. Even though the entrance of these artifacts to the site was systematically forbidden, in both 2001 and 2001 one out of every four participant were carrying something bearing these colors.

If an outsider who is not familiar with the theme of Newroz were taken to the scene, the use of these colors would be the first to be recognized. Throughout the days of Newroz, I encountered various conversations over the color issue. All the people that I talked to considered these colors as belonging to the Kurds and as a natural extension of the Newroz celebration. The responses related to the colors issue were all characteristically short. My attempts to dig for the history and the reasoning for these colors were fruitless.

This was not entirely unexpected, nor was it something that went unobserved by other folklorists in different field projects. The issue that I would like to discuss here is the discrepancy between the exalted participation level and the knowledge participants have on various Newroz-related issues. Since the first moments of my fieldwork, I observed this gap and searched for an answer; the needed response came with the excessive use of the red-green-yellow colors.

As I argued throughout this chapter, the symbolic elements of Newroz ascribe it and its values to a presumably immutable legendary past. As a reservoir of symbols, Newroz serves the needs of the Kurdish cause and provides a framework of meaning for the people. However, the politically charged characteristics of its appropriation delivered from the intellectuals to the masses, and the impediments for its text-based learning within the widespread Kurdish population, affect a deeper knowledge of the festival. For the relatively older generation Newroz tradition is not part of their biographical memory. For this group, Newroz either had no part in their early life or is remembered as a non-political, small-scale local celebration. For this generation, Newroz was a learned political activity emanating from the educated-urban-political Kurdish elite. Therefore, the more accessible aspects - such as the colors - precede the more complex aspects - such as mastery of the details of its history for this group. The color combination, which is ultimately accessible, appears as a shortcut between the grand history and the Newroz participant. The colors, in banners, in hair, on balloons, become concrete keys to grasp remote fantasies of their world. For the younger generation on the other hand, perhaps for somebody who was born around the 1980s, Newroz has become part of their biographical memory. Given the available research findings, I am not in a position to make a comprehensive comment on this, but I believe it will be interesting to track the differences between the current celebration and future ones, once the festival site is dominated by the generation with Newroz as part of their biographical memory.

Display of Material Culture at a Portable Museum

When I started to move around the site, I noticed an art tent of sorts set up at the

south-east corner between the two wings of the food-court. Surrounded by other attractions and the food-court, it was a mini-museum of modern and traditional art alike. Before drawing a picture of the place, I need again to highlight the modesty of the setting, both in terms of the quality and the quantity of the works. However, remembering that the concept of museum has had its own share of evolution, relating to other modes of public exhibitions and institutions, I continue to use the framework of museum to interpret this setting (Evans 1999: 6 and 235-239). Entering a big tent, two sections welcomed the visitor: a section where modern art can be viewed, and a section where traditional art is displayed. Although there was no actual border between the two sections, the arrangement made the two parts clear.

In the modern art section, on the walls and poles of the tent, colored and black-white paintings and drawings were hung, some in frames, some bearing the name of the artist. Interestingly, almost all of the work was not Newroz related. Among them were a couple of drawings of Kawa, the legendary Kurdish leader that led the Kurds to freedom, but the majority were natural scenes and portraits, possibly best described as works in progress.

In this section, there were designated “curators,” clean shaved, casual but well dressed young men waiting to respond to any questions regarding the works or artists. However, they seemed to be getting few inquiries and their function was limited to quietly standing. When I asked about the background of the artists, one of the two curators told me that they were mostly students and local artists. The festival schedule folder that I was given to photocopy included labeled this exhibit as “exhibition of paintings.” In the same program, the Diyarbakır youth division of HADEP is mentioned

as the organizer of this event. I assume that this was also related to the “Newroz and Peace Painting Exhibit” that was displayed between 15-20 March at the metropolitan municipality exhibit hall. Unfortunately, I heard about this exhibit too late and could not see it.

The other half of the tent, the traditional art zone, consisted of various handicraft items and some of the tools used in producing them. There were embroidered scarves and various fabrics, lacework, exceptionally beautiful women’s dresses, large embroidery frames, and spinning wheels. Even though some work was hung similarly to the modern section, the displaying style seemed different here. In many parts of Anatolia, in either a rural or urban traditional setting, the trousseau, gifts, and furniture are customarily shown to female guests at some point during a wedding. The setting of this section and the home-like atmosphere reminded me strongly of this. The roles of the designated curators were also much different in this section. They were not only displaying the hand-made work, but also enthusiastically explaining how it was made. While the function of the young well-dressed men curators, at least while I was at the tent, was limited to a short greeting to the visitor, these second group of curators, mostly rural women artists, was much more active. I watched them explain their work in detail, letting people touch and handle the artifacts. They talked not only to outsiders such as educated urban Newroz participants, but also countryside people like themselves. While the younger visitors in fashionable jeans touched the scarves and dresses with the curiosity and hesitancy of an outsider, the rural middle-aged, women visitors and curators were intently discussing their own nuances and patterns.

The described setting, which I view as a portable museum, does not have a long history in the festival. The impression that I had, on the basis of my conversations, was that after the move of Newroz to the current site, more or less similar exhibitions to the one I experienced started to take place.

At the outset, the display seemed like just another overt aspect of Newroz. I was expecting nothing other than a linear expansion of the Newroz theme in artistic forms. My first step inside proved that I was wrong. In spite of the smells coming from the neighboring food-court, and the ongoing, sometimes wild, celebration outside, the art gallery was a significantly calm and quiet place, almost shrine-like. People quietly enjoyed the beautiful collection of textile pieces and pictures without reference to the festival beyond the thin walls.

Bringing the concepts of modern and traditional art together can be read, I believe, in multiple ways. As I mentioned in this chapter, the civil war caused immigration which “urbanized” the region unexpectedly and without necessary preparation. While forced displacement brought “villagization” of the regional cities, it also created lives in the middle. Moving from a small community to a city life in a very short period of time created neither urban, nor rural life styles. Actually, during my city tour a day before Newroz, this theme dominated the majority of the talks in which I was engaged. Whatever the issue we were discussing, the issue of involuntary immigration and its effects would surface. In this complex context, I believe this “portable museum”, with a combination of urban and rural, modern and traditional forms of art, is much less explicit about what it represents than the other attractions of the festival.

To make a meaningful interpretation of the display, one has to consider its attached position in the Newroz festival. This connection, firstly, guarantees a very high attendance for the involved artists. I observed that throughout the day, the tent museum was always full of people. The second meaning comes with the function-oriented attachment. As I mentioned, I went into the tent expecting a bold Newroz theme in the art work. Though I did not ask, I do not think I was the only one caught off guard. I connect this accepted broadness of artwork as an expansion of the Newroz theme consistent to a then current peace-oriented discourse; the display shows artistic aspects of the Kurdish culture and people and is thus relevant. What is seen here represents the artistic notions of the Kurdish culture's "subjunctive mood," in Victor Turner's words, the mood of desire and possibility (Turner 1984: 20-21). While the food-court and other entertainment attractions played less politicized, more leisure roles in the festival, the art arena seems extremely ripe for individual political expression. Here, I believe that the secondary nature of the art tent reveals a more fundamental preoccupation with the political sphere on behalf of the organizers, leaving "art" behind. Regardless, it meekly surfaced by way of the tent, bringing high and popular, modern and traditional cultures together and showing the multi-dimensional Kurdish culture.

When one writes on a public display, of course, there has to be an effort to see the deeper layers. In the case of the portable museum, another layer of function comes from within the traditional artifact section. Here, the artifacts signify ethnic distinction and serve to promote ethnic awareness and identity. The traditional art section is not only part of an effort to define or re-define identity, it also allocates fresh meanings to the objects (Duncan 1999: 306). These fresh meanings are, of course, affected by the background

and needs of the visitor. For example, in one instance, I overheard a group of university students discussing and naming as “Kurdish art” that which is the elder curator’s natural livelihood. This multiplicity and flexibility of objects further emphasizes the unique role of the art tent in expanding and uniting Kurdish culture at Newroz.

The display has twofold functions. On the one hand, this portable museum reveals ethnic identity as a main concern, and displays a usable culture which does not only justify an opposition to the present political design lived outside of the festival site, but also educates the participant with the use of objectified materials of ethnic heritage (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1999: 416). Here, the concerns are more practical and goal-oriented. More importantly, the display does not only inform the visitor about the less known aspects of their culture, but also stands as a gesture of normalization. In an environment where the Kurdish issue has been attached to extraordinary conditions and measures, this modest display highlights the needed normality.

Institution Building through Social Services at the Festival Site: Food-Court, Health Services, and the Volunteers

This section is about the social services that are provided at the festival site. As I stated earlier, I encountered many unexpected actions and occurrences throughout the festival. For example, I was repeatedly surprised by the high quality, articulation and comprehensiveness of the festival's social services. Considering the size and the distant location of the festival, I had expected to find only a few basis services. There were around seven tents erected to support and satisfy a broad range of needs, and throughout the day various other mechanisms were used to provide basic services to the participants.

Internal security volunteers, brief and well worded announcements, health and food services comforted people. In this section, I will discuss these services on the basis of three specific examples.

Discussing this non-artistic and non-ritualistic aspects of the festival, Igor Kopytoff's "internal frontier" concept will loosely inform my argument. In the work of Kopytoff that focused on sub-Saharan Africa, "external frontier" was connected to the colonial expansion. "Internal frontiers," however, rise as a response to the colonial expansion in politically free zones. Internal frontier describes a territory neither colonized by the external power, nor controlled by its indigenous occupants. Under these circumstances, according to Kopytoff, the internal frontier creates an "institutional vacuum" for the creation of a new society (Wendl and Rösler 1999: 3-5; Kopytoff 1999: 31).¹²⁷ Of course the "institutional vacuum" that I suggest here is significantly different than what Kopytoff suggested. In my utilization, it describes a temporary room in which the performance of Kurdish civil society takes place. Civil society is perceived as both a source of legitimacy and strength for the government, and as a source of resistance against a government with an administrative heritage known for its arbitrariness and oppression (Post and Rosenblum 2002: 1). In the performance of Kurdish civil society at the Newroz site which I discuss below, the resistance comes with the display of the

¹²⁷ Kopytoff's work is based on Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis (1893 and 1986). In Turner's understanding, "frontier" is a territory in which incoming settlers form a new society to respond to challenges presented by the earlier occupants of the land; historically, the theory has often been used as an ideological mask for European colonial expansion. This rather vague and Euro-centric concept was challenged and criticized by many scholars. The most significant challenge and addition came from Igor Kopytoff. Kopytoff refined the concept by introducing a distinction between the "external" and the "internal" frontiers.

capacities and unique differences of the Kurdish ethnicity. These stand as part of the systematic effort to gain recognition of their culture and rights.

In contrast to some other festivals, eating and drinking do not have a focal role in Newroz. There is no specific food that I can describe as a traditional Newroz dish. In this dry (non-alcoholic) setting, consumption of food is more functional than ritualistic; people simply eat when they are hungry. If the family does not bring food, they buy food on site. Therefore, the reason for setting up a food-court is simply to provide food to hundreds of thousands of people in this distant setting. The festival possessed a well prepared food-court with two main types of vendor. In the first group, 15-20 buffetlike local vendors sold affordable versions of the commonly consumed dishes in fast food format. These vendors sold a range of common foods: kabobs in sandwiches or pitas, an inexpensive bagel-like food called *simit*, assorted doughy desserts, water, soft drinks and *ayran*, a widely consumed yogurt shake. In the second section of the food-court we see a non-commercial part consisting of large tents that are run by people coming from small towns surrounding Diyarbakır. In 2001 these tents were carrying names of various townships around Diyarbakır, since HADEP chapters of those townships were running those tents. The food offered by these vendors is very clearly home made, in contrast to the commercial vendors. Even if some of their items can be found in the commercial section, the way of preparation differs significantly. These are prepared and cooked on site by people coming from nearby provinces. Instead of using commercial restaurant equipment, they use what they use in their hometown when they cook for big meetings and ceremonies. They also use some traditional equipment such as low wooden tables to fix the bread and a traditional oven that they have built in the tent. In the case of *ayran*,

yogurt shake, they use traditional *yayık*, large mixer to thin the yogurt. When one enters one of these tents, one sees 5-10 people preparing food from scratch.

The high quality of service is also in evidence in the health zone behind the main stage, as is manifest in the internal security and guidance that is provided by the volunteers. Especially in 2001, the weather was very hot and hundreds of people fainted and were treated by four fully equipped ambulances with medical professionals. In both years approximately 5,000 police officers worked to ensure security at Newroz.

Approximately 1,000 volunteers also worked to provide internal security and to help people with their needs. From serving as the curators for the art tent, to acting as guides around the site, from warning people not to wave flags of PKK and ERNK¹²⁸ to cleaning the festival site after the meeting, they were everywhere. I encountered them all on various occasions before and during the festival. For instance, in an article of his observations of the 2001 Newroz, Vedat Türkali, a famous writer who is well respected within the Kurdish community in Turkey, wrote how he was taken care of by a young teacher and a journalist throughout his stay in Diyarbakır.¹²⁹

The heavy emphasis on the provided services and the tender and affectionate behavior of the volunteers goes beyond the functional aspect of the services. As I stated above, Newroz is a celebration with multiple layers, and the provided services encapsulate an imaginary frontier of Kurdish civil society performance. As was argued by Jürgen Habermas, the institutions and practices of the civil society are re-produced through “communicative action” (White 2002: 146). The style of provided services on

¹²⁸ ERNK was the military arm of PKK.

¹²⁹ Vedat Türkali “Sevgi Destegi Gerekiyor.” *Radikal*, 2 April 2001.

the festival ground and their quality appear as another symbolic area where a communicative action takes place and in which the orders of autonomy and agency are manifested. I consider the design and the characteristics of the displayed food-court as another response to this official challenge as well as a venue in which to display solidarity. As a whole, the services provided on the Newroz ground construct a systematic display of Kurdish civil society that could have been, and could yet be.

Conclusion: Who is the Owner of Newroz?

Throughout my study of Newroz, including the writing stage, I wrestled with the question of the "ownership" of the festival. With its months of strict preparations, committee based organizational structure, inspections, notifications, etc., it would be possible to describe it as a pure political celebration. However, some aspects of the festival made this impossible. The level of participation in terms of both quantity and quality, the widespread feelings of joy at the festival site, and the sense of personal investment and effort on the part of the organizers and the volunteers made me re-think what really is going on. Thus, I want to conclude this chapter by discussing the question of ownership of Newroz.

In his seminal work *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*, Roberto DaMatta discusses a commonly asked question: "Who is the owner of the festival?" for Carnival in Brazil. After elaborating the examples of religious processions and military parades with their clear focus, content, and purpose, he answers his own question, "carnival belongs to everybody." He explains the collective ownership of the Carnival space and the attached anonymity as a response to the "fixed forms and formulas" of the social order: Carnival

"without a master is primarily a festival of the dominated and the destitute. In the everyday world they possess nothing but their bodies and their labor power, their mystical power and their thirst for living; hence only they can be at the center of an inverted, paradoxical festival that has no law or master but can be possessed by those who have nothing" (DaMatta 1991: 87-90).

In the light of DaMatta's argument, how can I respond to the same question for Newroz? As stated in chapter 2 of this work, Newroz is a by-product of political history of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Since the beginning of its appropriation, it has been a prominent front for Kurdish political discourse and closely affiliated with the Kurdish political decision-making mechanisms in Turkey. As I stated above, in 2001 and 2002 I observed activities that were carried out by the local chapters of the pro-Kurdish HADEP party and the mayorship of Diyarbakır, as the mayor himself was a member of the same party. I also described some Newroz related warm up processes, such as the panel meeting that I discussed and all other preparations arranged by the same groups. From the beginning, including the years that I observed, Newroz has had a clear theme, well structured design and organizing body, and a political center that is organized around. Even if these aspects of Newroz resemble the events that are defined by DeMatta, some other aspects of Newroz make the equation more complex, forcing one to draw away from a clear-cut political ownership for Newroz.

As discussed throughout this chapter, Newroz is a deeply rooted, highly attended, ever adjusting festival with multiple audiences. Even though there is a theme frame that produces and affirms the Kurdish identity, it is very difficult to talk about a uniform celebration with a clear-cut purpose. Newroz's capability to adjust to manifold

circumstances and the attached shifts in both form and message, and its capacity to accommodate and respond to multiple audiences do not permit a strictly prefixed structure. This fluidity in the festival structure and the diversity of the celebration repertoire can be observed through the shifting character of festival ownership. As in the case of masking performance, the performance can have double and contradictory meanings that can exceed the organizers' intent and challenge their organizational power. In the case of spontaneous parades, for instance, in a moment the authority vacuum is filled by ordinary participants. During these, which are neither planned nor controlled by the festival organizers, the position taken by ordinary participants stands as a powerful sign for the discussion of the ownership of the festival.

Some aspects of the celebration can challenge the ones who might underline the tailored structure of the festival to reduce it to a strictly political celebration commanded by the pro-Kurdish party. First of all the size and the joyful participation of the participant body should be considered. Almost half a million people from all over Turkey and from various backgrounds and political affiliations attended. This contrasts markedly with other events organized by pro-Kurdish parties, which seldom bring so many to the streets. Party organization is certainly no guarantee of high participation, let alone a willingness to bear significant costs associated with attendance. At Newroz, I met Kurdish workers coming from various Western cities of Turkey, which is a big sacrifice considering their level of income. Soldiers were using their vacation time to participate in Newroz. The level of pleasure that can be seen in peoples' eyes tells one that this is not the result of an organization effort by HADEP. Even though traditional culture and a political agenda are intertwined, neither of these frameworks are solely capable of

describing Newroz. In Abner Cohen's words, "it is a multivocal form, an ambiguous unity of political and cultural significance, combining the rational and non-rational, the conscious and the non-conscious." On the Newroz ground, " 'pure culture' and 'pure politics' are melted down into a transcendental aesthetic unity" (Cohen 1993: 120 and 132).

Another similar argument can be posited regarding another observation of mine at the Newroz site. Around noon, I noticed a group of volunteers suddenly move towards another small group of men; an intent discussion ensued in the distance. Later on, I understood that the members of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) were prevented from unveiling a giant banner by the festival organizers. A similar thing would also happen with the Labor Party of Turkey (EMEP). Even though I knew the tradition of not allowing groups to open political slogans and banners with party logos, this news came to me as a surprise, since these parties are both known for their support of the Kurdish cause. When I followed up on this point with a group of people with whom I was interacted at the site, this was explained as a general ban on large political signs by HADEP people. This was a logical argument. In response to the argument, I mentioned the thousands of little HADEP flags that I saw in the hands of the participants on the festival ground. While this topic-based interaction was going on, a young fellow interjected "but this is HADEP that we are talking about," and so split HADEP from the other political parties.

This statement encapsulates and crystallizes a series of other observations that I made of the festival; the young man has, most probably, nothing to do with HADEP and certainly has no power of political representation of it, and the following observations are

certainly not presented as logical deductions based on a single, quickly-uttered statement. However, the point that he made helped me to make sense of the atmosphere in the waiting room of the Diyarbakır chapter of HADEP one day before Newroz . At that moment I noticed that HADEP (and the previous and the following pro-Kurdish parties) was not considered within the same category with the mentioned parties. With its loose ideological structure, and with a leadership coming primarily from the ranks of human rights organizations and civil society, HADEP was more of a functional community organization than a strictly ideological political party. I sensed that they considered Newroz as the celebration of the community itself (Burke 1978: 200), and HADEP as a tool that is in the service of Kurdish ethnic identity, which precedes the ethnic ties rather than constituting a pure political affiliation. I do not have the data to elaborate on this very interesting, apolitical stance of a political party. However, the main characteristics of the pro-Kurdish parties which strongly resemble the civil society organizations are waiting to be understood. Whether this has been a matter of political convenience or an implication of the Kurdish traditional society, I believe further research will bring needed enlightenment to understand the pro-Kurdish political party structure.

As an extension of this and consistent with the argument that I presented in the second chapter of this work, I see Newroz as a loosely defined venue to re-construct the Kurdish identity. Whatever the kind of tools that the Kurdish repository can produce involve with its preparation. Newroz quickly adjusts to the current level of the ethnic struggle. Whether at the peak points of the civil war or the peaceful moments of the ethnic relations, it quickly adapts the current theme. Therefore, the dominance of HADEP in the preparation of the years of 2001 and 2002 should not be taken as a clear sign of a

pure political festival. The unplanned performances that continuously multiply the messages and the continuous expansion of the theme outside of the control of the organizers reduce the role of the organizers. Therefore, the stable part of the Newroz festival seems not to be the organizing committees, etc. but the continuous creation and promotion of the Kurdish ethnic identity; therefore the ownership of the tradition should be described in a much looser way.

The findings of this research mark two major outcomes of the Newroz festival. First, Newroz functions as an imaginary transitional venue towards an ethnic ideal. It serves to articulate and position Kurdish identity. For one day a year it turns the world upside down. It appears as "a time of institutionalized disorder, a set of rituals of reversal" (Burke 1978: 185-190). Reversing the dominant official theme of ethnic monolith, it facilitates a space in which various sorts of "would have beens" can be displayed one day a year. It makes it possible to see a guerrilla in a full uniform in Diyarbakır; it makes Kurdish the dominant tongue; it replaces cautious dealings with a comfortable attitude. But what we see at the Newroz site is not only a temporary reversal of the controlling social and political structure, or the opening of a temporary window for momentary freedom. The festival as a whole represents a transition of position in history. In other words, the changes that were fit into the cyclical time period of the festival also directs historical time for the Kurds.

The Newroz festival which claims itself as "purifying, redefining and revitalizing a social structure" of the Kurds (Turner and Turner 1982: 202), stands as "the subjunctive mood" of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Turner describes subjunctive mood as a mood of "supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility" (Turner 1986: 25) and "feeling,

willing, and desiring. . . fantasizing” (Turner 1987: 76) different conditions. According to him, various performative genres such as ritual, carnival, and festival maintain many of these characteristics (Turner 1984: 20-21). The findings of my fieldwork situate the Newroz site as a milieu in which a constant response for an hypothetical “what if” question is produced. In this milieu, the Newroz festival produces a collective voice towards the Turkish social and political spheres. In addition to presenting Kurdish identity and responding to the official framework, it composes itself as both a bulletin board and a negotiation table, and creates continuities between everyday activities, current social and political needs, and the ethnic cultural repository of the Kurds in Turkey.

CHAPTER 4

Overview of the Evolution of Nevruz Celebrations in Turkey

This chapter is about the history of the Nevruz celebrations in Turkey. I would like to examine the evolution of Nevruz's position within the official celebration repertoire to make better sense of its current revival. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the political uses made of the celebration. I will argue that Nevruz is generally a minor celebration, except during periods when it becomes a center of political identity creation.

One of the most significant indications of the deep cultural roots of Nevruz is its existence in the oldest known Turkish calendar, the *Oniki Hayvanlı Türk Takvimi*, or the Twelve Animal Turkish Calendar.¹³⁰ In this calendar, twelve solar years constitute a historical period, and five periods, 60 years, constitute an age. Each 12 year period is given the name of an animal. Every season constitutes three months, and the time of Nevruz appears as the beginning of the new year (Çay 1999: 57-66).¹³¹ Marking the awakening of nature, Nevruz has a long, rich and varied history in Anatolia. It has been celebrated in various parts of the country under various names, and is sometimes attached

¹³⁰ This calendar is also known as "Tarih-i Türki," "Tarih-i Türkistan," "Tarih-i Khita," "Sal-i Türkan," and "Ahkam-i Sal-i Türkan" (Çay 1999: 56).

¹³¹ Abdulhaluk Çay also mentions Celali Takvimi – Celali Calendar and its developed versions such as, "Tarih-i Celali" or "Tarih-i Meliki" and "Tarih-i İlhan". All of these make reference to Nevruz (Çay 1999: 66-69). For a brief but significant account of the seasonal celebrations and their variations in Turkey see Boratav 1973: 258.

to other celebrations and customs. The long folk heritage and deeply local character of Nevruz celebrations is already apparent in the variety of names assigned to them. It is common to see Nevruz being celebrated as *Navrız*, *Navruz*, and *Sultan Nevruz*. Less common names include *Çiğdem*, *Çiğdem Pilavı*, *Baca Pilavı* and *Mart Dokuzu*¹³² (Kutlu 2000: 112). The celebration can carry various meanings and has been celebrated in various forms. In keeping with the agricultural tradition of Nevruz, the emphasis is generally on material abundance and fertility, although some religious communities, such as the *Alevi* and *Bektaşî* communities of the *Shia* branch of Islam, grant it special religious importance.¹³³

Although there is great variation in local Nevruz traditions, one can identify four main types of ritual characterizing Nevruz celebrations in Turkey. The first group includes beliefs and practices surrounding the health-related power of Nevruz. The rituals of this category deal with staying healthy or curing sickness. In Şebinkarahisar, it is believed that bathing in a river on the morning of Nevruz brings health and strength. Another tradition is known as “Kara Çarşamba – Black Wednesday” in Tunceli. In the closest Wednesday to Nevruz, the middle section of a wild rose branch is cut. The branch is then bent into a circle, and people pass through the circle to be cured of illness or to ensure good health. The second group of Nevruz rituals centers around securing the abundance and richness of the coming year. In Eastern Anatolia, the head of the household collects little rocks for every member of the household and sets them up

¹³² “Mart Dokuzu” means March the Ninth in Turkish. Since the time of Nevruz happens on March 9th in the lunar (*hicri*) calendar, it is also known by this name in central Anatolia. See İvgin 2000.

¹³³ The varieties of the Nevruz concept and their background will be discussed at the beginning of chapter 5 of this work.

around the chimney. On the morning of Nevruz, the bottoms of the rocks are examined. If a red insect is found under one of the rocks, it is believed that that person brings good luck to the family. In Edirne, soil collected from ant mounds is put into a small bag and hung on the back door. This is believed to bring abundance. In Sivas, if there is thunder on the day of Nevruz, it is believed that there will be a good harvest. The third category of Nevruz rituals deals with finding a husband or wife, a theme that has clear connections to the celebration's central concerns of fertility and abundance. In Edirne young girls put a spider into a matchbox and put it underneath their pillows on the night of Nevruz. They believe that this will cause them to dream of lovers or future husbands. In Yozgat, young girls who hope to get married tie knots in grass and vegetable vines. The fourth category deals with reading the future. In Kars, if part of a grain plant is seen in the mouth of a stork, it is believed that the coming year will be abundant. If a piece of fabric is seen in the stork's mouth, however, this is considered a sign of impending strife or warfare. In Edirne, on the night of Nevruz people do not work or sleep. It is believed that sleeping would bring sloth throughout the year, while working on that night guarantees a failure in the year's work (Kaya 2000: 86-88 and Kılıç 2000: 97).

Throughout the history of the Turkish republic, Nevruz has continued to be celebrated within the private sphere, although sometimes at different times of year, and always heavily characterized by local traditions. During my field trips, almost every middle-aged person could remember celebrating or doing something related to this tradition. However, when I searched for a deeper response about the details and the roots of this tradition, the responses always blurred. After a couple of common sentences describing it as the beginning of spring and connecting it with abundance and

the awakening of nature, the responses would continue with personal memories mostly shaped by local traditions. In none of these interviews was Nevruz attached to the political process and remembered as a state-related event.

Nevruz in the Political Sphere

The more recent revival of Nevruz within the political sphere has precedents in the final decade of the Ottoman state. According to Abdulhaluk Çay after II. *Meşrutiyet* - the Constitutional Reform¹³⁴ - Nevruz began to surface in the public sphere as a symbol associated with Turkish nationalism. Çay supports his claim by citing a newspaper article from March 18th, 1914 by Ömer Seyfettin, a prominent literary figure of the late Ottoman and Republican era. In this article, Seyfettin describes Nevruz as a sacred symbol of the Turkish youth and a national celebration (Seyfettin 1914 cited in Çay 1999: 285).¹³⁵ Çay also cites the 1914 and 1915 celebrations of Nevruz in Kastamonu province. The coverage of this Nevruz celebration by the local *Köroğlu* newspaper contains nationalist speeches and poems that were presented at this ceremony, and can easily be considered one of the earliest appearances of the nationalist discourse on Nevruz. These early appearances are discussed in detail by Çay (1999: 286-297). Under the leadership of *Türkocağı*, the local organizational predecessors to modern Turkish nationalism, a local Nevruz celebration was also organized in Konya. In this celebration, the chairman

¹³⁴ In 23 July 1908 Sultan Abdulhamid II restored the constitution that he had suspended thirty years earlier. The Constitutional Reform (II. Meşrutiyet) started a new era in the political and social history of the Ottoman state and raised hope for improvements of civil rights. Feroz Ahmad rightly describes this move as the entrance of the Ottoman state to the 20th century. This era is also considered a crucial period in the development of the Turkish nationalism. See Ahmad 2003: 49-73.

¹³⁵ In an interview, Sadık Tural, the organizer of a series of international conferences on Nevruz and a prominent scholar, cites Omer Seyfettin's poem on Nevruz published in March 1914 at *Halka Doğru*

of the local *Türkocağı* branch organized a ceremony that was held on *Alaaddin* Hill. A group wearing traditional clothing sang traditional Turkish nationalist songs. Students read poems and made speeches, many of which articulated nationalist themes (Çay 1999: 286-297).

M. Akif Tural's article on the position of Nevruz during the war for independence and in the early years of the Turkish republic provides significant information on this issue. For instance, in 1921, the prime minister of Soviet Azerbaijan sent a telegraph to celebrate Nevruz. On March 21st of the same year, the newspaper mentions people and students celebrating Nevruz in public places, sometimes by having picnics. In 1922, Nevruz was officially celebrated with the full participation of the leaders of the new regime in Ankara. The newspapers of *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, *Yeni Gün* and *İkdam* point out that on March 22nd, 1922, people met in front of the Parliament building and *Taşhan* square. On the same day, these papers describe a military review which was observed by the political leaders of the new regime. A widely circulated picture of Atatürk and other leaders observing the Nevruz celebration in 1922 signifies a full official presence at the Nevruz site (*Fotoğraflarla Halk Kültürü ve Nevruz* 2001: 1).

The surrounding war conditions make these celebrations unique. The newspaper articles covering the 1921 Nevruz celebrations stated that because of another wave of attacks by the Greek army, the leaders of the Turkish parliament could not participate in the 1921 Nevruz celebration, which needed to be cut short (Tural 1999: 345). Moreover, the above mentioned picture of Atatürk at the 1922 Nevruz site was taken during the war for independence, while Kemal Atatürk and his allies were struggling against the newly

journal that he encountered during his doctoral work (Kılıç 1998: 35).

formed and powerful opposition within the Turkish Parliament called the *İkinci Grup* – Second Group.¹³⁶ The fact that Nevruz was officially celebrated even during a time of war and internal political turmoil highlights its significant stance on the official celebration list. Indeed, the celebration may have provided a cultural rallying point for Turkish national sentiment, perhaps becoming even more important during a period of conflict and opposition to Atatürk's version of the nationalist project.

It is important not to overstate this politicization. Even as Nevruz was put to official use, accounts can also be found of early celebrations that display a high level of spontaneous participation connected to the traditional, nature-centered aspects of the holiday. For instance, an article published in *Yeni Gün* newspaper at 23 March 1923 reads: “Yesterday was the day of Nevruz. Even though the weather was cool, it was sunny. The residents of Ankara who spend the snowy and muddy winter days in their cramped and stuffy homes, spent the beautiful Nevruz day with happiness, enjoying the sun and the fresh air. A crowded stream of women and men went out into the fields and saw each other. . . Yesterday *Samanpazarı*, up to *Cebeci* along with the roads that connect *Bendderesi* and the railway station to downtown were full of people and school children who went out to celebrate Nevruz” (Tural 1999: 344-348). To say that Nevruz was politicized is not to suggest that it was reduced to a merely political form, but that, for a time, a version on the celebration was used to crystallize nationalist sentiment

After 1926, however, Nevruz was no longer held as an official celebration. After clearly stating that Nevruz stopped being officially celebrated after 1925, Tural explains

¹³⁶ The Second group was formed in the beginning of 1922 and the independence war ended in September 1922 (Zürcher 1998: 166).

that this was a result of the incompatibility between Nevruz's necessary open-air elements and the demands of an official holiday. According to him, the high attendance, spontaneity and joy attached to Nevruz made it less suitable for an official in-door celebration, and therefore it did not earn the status of an official celebration within the official celebration repertoire (Tural 1999: 344-347). Another plausible explanation is that the change of calendars made in 1926 marginalized Nevruz by undermining its status as a "New Year's" celebration. In 1926, the previous calendars based upon Islamic, Orthodox and Gregorian calendars were abolished and replaced with a calendar based upon Western theories regarding the birth of Jesus Christ. With this change, the beginning of the new year was shifted from March to January.¹³⁷ During this time, the dominant paradigm of the governmental leaders demanded that the new republic transform Turkish society along Western lines; this theory was being radically applied. It is unsurprising, then, that a New Year's celebration which had suddenly been rendered out-of-place by the change should be quickly downgraded in importance. After the brief period of celebrating Nevruz, it was primarily celebrated in the private sphere until its popular rebirth and wide acceptance among the Kurdish minority in the 1980s and 1990s.

In a review of major Turkish newspapers between 1990s to 1980s, the limited news coverage that I encountered always dealt with the celebratory, nature-related aspects of the tradition, and bore no references to Nevruz within the official sphere. A review of more specific sources on official celebrations in Turkey yield the same result. For instance, a comprehensive list of the official and unofficial celebrations of Turkey in the year 1974 does not even list Nevruz (Akbayar 1975). Similarly, the Turkish

¹³⁷ The fiscal year, however, continued to start by 1 March until 1983.

Education Ministry's list of recommended school holidays in 1983, the only available version of such a list from that decade, did not list Nevruz (*İlkokul, Ortaokul, Lise ve Dengi Okullar Eğitici Çalışmalar Yönetmeliği*, 1983).¹³⁸

However, since the successful revival of Newroz as a political celebration among Kurds during the 1990's, there has been a re-appearance of Nevruz in the official Turkish sphere and in official texts. Especially after 1995, any major newspaper's 22 March issue can be expected to contain quite a bit of local and general news on Nevruz celebrations. Some articles show local governors jumping over bonfires. Others cite speeches given by the prime minister or other major public figures at Nevruz celebrations. At another level, more recent compilations of social and cultural activities by the Prime Minister's Social and Cultural Affairs office (*Sosyal ve Kültürel Etkinlikler*, 1996) and the Ministry of Culture's "Special Days Album of 1997" (*Özel Günler Albümü*, 1997) included the Nevruz celebration. Even if not directly parallel to the Education Ministry's list of recommended school holidays, these documents perform the same social function of officially validating cultural activities. In both the newspapers and in official documents, there has been a marked shift toward official acknowledgement and celebration of Nevruz.

In the next chapter, the official revival of Nevruz will be examined on the basis of my review of the available published sources and the archive of the Ministry of Culture. Through the main characteristics and day to day organization of the re-appropriation of Nevruz, I will explore Nevruz traditions as a major site of identity re-creation and

¹³⁸ I do not want to give an impression that I am cherry-picking a list that suits my claim. These lists are the only lists that I found in the main research libraries in Turkey that shows the evolution of national

response to the claims of an ethnically charged political opposition. The chapter will pay particular attention to the construction of the revived Nevruz discourse and its use in neutralizing alternative claims.

CHAPTER 5

The Re-Birth of Nevruz: A Cultural Gerrymandering

This chapter is about the Turkish state's "tradition reclamation" operation through Nevruz. The second chapter of this dissertation demonstrated the central role that Newroz celebrations have come to play in shaping and reproducing the Kurdish identity in Turkey. In the Turkish republic, there have been restrictions on using and disseminating Kurdish language and literature for fear that they would strengthen Kurds' sense of nationalism. The Newroz festivities, therefore, became a convenient way for Kurdish political leadership to circumvent those restrictions and craft a collective response toward the Turkish political system. In the context of the Kurdish narration of ethnic identity, Newroz celebrations have played a major role in shaping Kurds' collective response toward the Turkish political system. Although it has been a part of the cultural repertoire of many peoples in the Middle East, including the Turks and the Kurds, it was only after the 1980s that the festival became a significant collective venue for the assertion of a distinct Kurdish identity.

For the reason that the Kurdish national movement has successfully utilized this festival to differentiate and underline its identity and promote its political agenda, the Turkish state began in the 1990s to promote officially the Turkish version of the same celebration in an effort to respond to the Kurdish identity claim. As was presented in

chapter 4, although the Turkish Nevruz has historically been part of the traditional celebrations of Turkish culture and was celebrated officially in the beginning of the republic, it was not marked as a major event on the Turkish national celebration calendar until the beginning of the 1990s. It was only in the 1990s, after observing the popularity of Newroz within its Kurdish population, that the Turkish state recycled its own version to override the Kurdish version and maintain the Turkish national identity-oriented political order.¹³⁹

This chapter seeks to investigate the process by which the Nevruz celebration is structured and utilized. Since the two compared observances of the solar New Year festival - marked by the spring, or vernal, equinox - are celebrated on the same day of March 21, I had to make some critical decisions in terms of the methods that I needed to use in my fieldwork. With no chance of being at two different festival site at the same time, I preferred to employ an ethnographic approach to the Newroz celebration in Diyarbakır, and therefore conducted archival research to study the much more text-oriented Nevruz. In various occasions in the years of 2001 and 2002, I visited the archive of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the Library of the Turkish National Assembly to gather data for the Nevruz celebration. I also interviewed the people who were in charge of organizing Nevruz-related events at HAGEM, a branch of the Turkish ministry of culture. This methodological approach was not only shaped as a matter of necessity. As I

¹³⁹ The "true origin" and ownership of celebrations are highly politicized and debated issues in Turkey. The politically charged opposite claims ownership and blames the other side for hijacking the tradition and contaminating it for political purposes. The attached non-scholarly tradition of debating the issue, as I stated in the introduction, made me wish to refrain from discussion of the origin of the celebration. What I state in this paragraph is the earlier absence of Nevruz within the official repertoire. This statement neither challenges the deep popular roots of Nevruz within the Turkish population and Turkic people of various central Asian countries, nor denies its celebration in early periods of the Turkish republic.

stated in the earlier chapters, since Newroz has occupied a controversial position within the social and political spheres in Turkey, the written material regarding it was scarce. In the case Nevruz, the Ministry of Culture and the regional governorships were in charge, and consistent with official traditions there were significant amounts of documents available. I therefore focused on official documents, conferences, and various school children-oriented activities to piece together the history and the day-to-day conduct of Nevruz.

Nevruz celebrations stand as an extension of the state-centered folklore management and display one of the most visible and creative involvements of state structure in the cultural sphere. To consider the conscious and organized use of folk cultural items/events/activities such as Newroz by the state, the first layer of the argument will utilize the concept of folklorism. I understand folklorism as the purposeful and prearranged use of folklore. In a case of folklorism, a power structure leads a conscious, agenda-driven, and selective process in the scripting and institutionalizing of folklore.¹⁴⁰ The findings of this research show that, in Michael Herzfeld's words, "folklorists of nationalist persuasion draw a hard-and-fast line between history and folklore" with Nevruz as with other public performance events (Herzfeld 1992: 79). While illustrating "hard-and-fast line" in the specific case of Nevruz, I will mainly use Michael Hezfeld's writings on disputed ownership of tradition and history (1986, 1991 and 1992). I also coin a term to describe the re-appropriation of Nevruz as "cultural gerrymandering." Within this framework, I would argue that Nevruz festivals were

¹⁴⁰ See Lord 1976 and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992 for two comprehensive arguments of the concept.

organized by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and affiliated organizations to challenge the popular success of the alternative Newroz and re-design the cultural map of political power. I would also argue that this operation was not a total invention but rather a re-organization of the deeply rooted tradition to respond to a current challenge such as the Newroz operation.

In the rest of the chapter, I will present the Nevruz celebrations as a series of activities. Given the importance of the political and historical context in the re-appropriation of the Turkish state-centered Nevruz, first, I would like to start by introducing the evolution of the current state discourse on this version of the festival. After discussing various understandings of it, I will introduce two short definitions of Nevruz that represent the state discourse. Before analyzing the practices and contexts in which Nevruz was re-produced and disseminated, I would like to present how Nevruz is situated within the official discourse.

Variations of the Nevruz Festival and the Official Presentation¹⁴¹

The Nevruz and Newroz dichotomy is not a simple “clash of calendars,” in Jack Santino’s words (Santino 1996: 15). It represents a deep-seated conflict that has long historical roots. The public re-appearance of Nevruz starting from the 1990s, as it was discussed in the previous chapters, was a response to the success of the Kurdish version

¹⁴¹ The celebration of the spring equinox has deep roots in Iranian culture. The various spellings of the word come from the Persian words new day – *norooz*. The tradition’s uniquely Iranian characteristics, which go back to the Zoroastrian religion, can be seen not only in post-Islam Iran but also in some of the neighboring countries. Even in the most nationalist versions of the traditional new year festivals, there is still an acceptance of the Iranian origination. Due to the focus of the section, this connection will not be covered.

of the same tradition. Therefore, starting from the very beginning of the resurgence of and parallel with the competing Newroz, the Nevruz discourse was highly politicized. The traditional Nevruz festival was mainly situated within the private sphere and was re-shaped to fit the current needs of the official agenda. The festival's focus was shifted from a private celebration to a public staging of national unity. Consistent with this shift, some aspects of the tradition, such as the commonality of the tradition among the Turkic nations and central Asia-oriented rituals such as rice cooking and egg butting, were highlighted. The rearrangement of the festival significantly altered the forms of celebration and structure of the audience.

The recent official adaptation process, however, did not progress as steadily as it might sound. The re-appropriation of Nevruz did not only take place after a successful claim by the Kurdish minority, but also was re-shaped during peak moments of extremely destructive, armed clashes in Turkey. Under these types of conditions, the ultra-nationalist views on Nevruz found suitable climate to dominate the discourse. In another vein, the religious character of Nevruz has been focused on by a group of scholars. To give a sense about the evolution of Nevruz and major interpretations of it within the Turkish population, I would like to present some major arguments which shaped the official discourse of Nevruz to my discussion.

As pioneer Nevruz scholar, Abdulhaluk M. Çay deserves special attention within the Nevruz scholarship in Turkey.¹⁴² In his highly popular and widely quoted book

¹⁴² Professor Çay was the minister of state responsible for the central Asian Turkic republics in the 57th government of the Turkish republic between 28.05.1999 - 24.12.2001.

Nevruz Türk Ergenekon Bayramı – Turkish Ergenekon Celebration,¹⁴³ he highlights the commonalities between different Nevruz festivals using *Ergenekon*, Azerbaijan *Oğuz-oğlu*, Turkish birth (nativity), and Uigur *Noruz Bulak* legends (Çay 1999: 35-53). After providing the brief themes of these legends, he situates Nevruz into the traditional cultural framework of the Turks. In his argument, the Ergenekon legend summarized below occupies a crucial place. He views Nevruz as the day that *Göktürks*, the ancestor of the Turkish nation, left Ergenekon and gained their freedom again. According to him, Nevruz represents the re-birth of the Turkish nation (Çay 1999: 53).

According to the legend, the Turks were at one point long ago quickly expanding their country by the conquest of other nations. They in turn decided to get together and exact revenge. In the first stage of this fight, which took ten days, the Turks were the winners. Seeing the success of the Turks, the leaders of the opposing side decided to deceive the Turks. The next morning they left the battle field, giving an impression that they were withdrawing. When the Turks rushed to follow them, not noticing a trap, they were massacred by the enemy. All the adults were slaughtered, and the children became slaves. Only one of the sons of the Turkish king *İlhan*, *Kıyan/Kayan* and the nephews - *Negüş/Tukuz*, and their wives survived. Even though they were first imprisoned, ten days later they managed to escape. On their way, they found some camels, horses, bullocks and sheep. Knowing they were surrounded by enemy nations, they decided to settle in the mountains where they could be secure. They ended up in a very secluded valley found off an extremely narrow and dangerous path. They named this very beautiful and fertile land

¹⁴³ The first edition of this book came out in 1985. The 1999 copy that I use is the eighth edition, a large publication number for this kind of book, thus indicating its great popularity.

Ergenekon.¹⁴⁴ They and their ancestors stayed in this land for four hundred years. When it became too small for their growing population, they could not find the only path out. A blacksmith told them about an iron mine and suggested they open a passage through it by setting a huge fire on the iron mountain. After piling up layers of wood with layers of coal and melting the iron, they opened up a hole big enough for a loaded camel and eventually returned to their homeland (Çay 1999: 35-38).

Abdulhaluk M. Çay described this day as the day of the Nevruz celebration and called it the Nevruz Ergenekon celebration. The importance of Çay's work, besides being one of the major scholarly works of this nature, is its timing to find a suitable environment for responding to the popular Kurdish re-vitalization of the tradition. Even though his position was criticized by some scholars, his work continued to dominate the Nevruz scene.

A pamphlet twenty-seven pages long published anonymously by the Kemalist Onset Union - *Kemalist Atılım Birliği*, takes Çay's argument one step further and suggests a more direct relation between various Turkish legends and Nevruz (*Ergenekon Destanı ve Demirci Kava* 1992). The main claim of the pamphlet is that the Kurdish Newroz legend is the adaptation and combination of the Turkish Ergenekon, Oğuz Kağan and Dede Korkut legends. After providing a somewhat accurate version of the Kurdish Newroz under the name of the "Dahhak legend," the text continues by listing its

¹⁴⁴ According to Bahaeddin Ögel, *Ergenekon* is the combination of the words "ergene," meaning steep, and "kon," meaning crossing (Ögel 197: 62 cited in Çay 1999: 37). Sadik Tural relates the word to the verb of "ergen" or "ergenmek," meaning continuance of posterity by insemination, and "gün" or "kün," meaning the day. According to Tural Nevruz, that is the day when god awakens nature. The celebration of Nevruz becomes an occasion to show affection to ancestors and members of the nation. In a way, it is to display consciousness of national identity and national resurrection and to share this happiness with others (Tural 1998: 2).

similarities with the three legends. According to the booklet's description of Kurds as the Kurdish Turks, the power of the Turkish nation can be seen in their legend's endurance and flexibility. Even during the declining moments, these legends keep the main core of the Turkish identity. Thus, the main body of the Turkish legends can be seen in various branches of the nation. This explanation applies to the Newroz theme as well. According to this way of thinking, Newroz, which is mentioned as the Dehhak legend of the Kurdish Turks, is a version of the Ergenekon legend. The explanation also includes concrete details such as how Feridun was modeled after Börteçine, and how the blacksmith Kawa was modeled after Tömürdü Kağul.

The critiques of these nationalist views come from sociologist Mustafa Aksoy (1996 and 1997). In his book on the sociology of the culture of eastern Turkey, *Kültür Sosyolojisi Açısından Doğu Anadolu* (1996), Aksoy discusses the current approaches the Nevruz tradition in Turkey. His book, which depends upon fieldwork conducted within various ethnic groups between 1991 to 1995, stands as one of the very limited scholarly works dealing with the political appropriations of the Nevruz tradition. Aksoy points out three general approaches towards Nevruz in Turkey: a) ideological approaches, b) religious approaches, and c) approaches focusing on the spring aspect of the celebration (Aksoy 1996: 163).

Aksoy criticizes the Kurdish Newroz and the Ergenekon legend-based Nevruz efforts as politically charged and baseless. He makes his argument on the basis of both historical documents as well as his findings in the field. The presentations of the tradition as of pure Turkish or Kurdish origin, Aksoy continues, are produced by approaches which try to shape cultural heritage according only to their wishes (Aksoy 1996: 163).

According to Aksoy, Nevruz is part of cultures from the Middle East to Asia and has been celebrated sometimes as the beginning of Spring, or sometimes as Ali's (or Hüseyin's) birthday, and has been adapted as a national symbol of various nations in these regions (Aksoy 1996: 186).

Orhan Söylemez's brief article, even though it does not address the discussed issue directly, stands as another response to the strictly nationalistic arguments on the ownership of the tradition. He starts his argument by using "Groundhog day" and its English version "Candlemas day" as an example. According to Söylemez, this tradition belongs to the sphere of belief and it does not have to be proved. According to the author, the decision of the groundhog to return to its hole and the consequent results do not require statistical and scientific proof. He continues to suggest the same of the Nevruz tradition, differentiating it from the arena of proof. He subsequently mentions the sources of the new year festivals coming from Iranian along with Turkish sources and highlights the peace and joy of that tradition (Söylemez 1999: 40 and 45).

Another reasonable comment comes from İlker E. Binbaş. After stating that Nevruz is being celebrated across a wide geography of many people, he clearly mentions the variety of understandings attached to this day by people of the Middle East and Central Asia. According to Binbaş, it is impossible to frame and understand these current variations on the basis of the current nation state-dominated mentality. According to him, for sound research results scholars should start considering Turko-Iranian or Turko-Persian as well as Turko-Mongolian concepts of cultural history research. By doing this, scholars will elevate the cultural debates from their current state to the scholarly level (Binbaş 1999: 61-62).

Nevruz within the Islamic Religious Sphere

One other strong appearance of Nevruz takes place within the Islamic belief system. The following list of Nevruz-related Islamic beliefs highlights the deep connection between Islam and Nevruz for the Turks: Nevruz as the day which *Allah* created the universe, the day in which the first human being was created - in other words *Adem*'s mud was created in this day, the day in which *Adem* and *Havva* met at *Arafat*, the day that prophet *İbrahim* broke the idols, the day in which prophet *Nuh* first took his first step on land after the great flood, the day in which prophet *Yusuf* was to be freed from the well in which he was thrown, the day prophet *Musa* walked through the Red Sea, and the day in which prophet *Yunus* was returned to land after being swallowed by a fish (Noyan 1983a: 105 cited in Çay 1999: 21-22 and Kutlu 1990 cited in Görkem 2000: 50).

Zeynelabidin Makas provides detailed accounts of how Nevruz has been celebrated within the *Mevlevi* and *Bektaşî* religious orders - *tariqas* (Makas 1987: 53-56). According to Makas, the *Mevlevi* order celebrates Nevruz with a milk drinking ritual. On a piece of paper the seven *ayah* which start with the word of *selam* are written.¹⁴⁵ In writing these, black ink that is either produced from chimney soot by mixing it with arabic gum, or *Kerbela gem* is used. This piece of paper is placed in water in a bowl so that the writing dissolves into the water. Sometimes childbed sherbet is added to make the color pink. After a chant, the ritual ends with drinking the product (Makas 1987: 53-56).

In the *Alevi* and *Bektaşî* orders, Nevruz is celebrated as the birthday of *Ali* (Erman 1992: 42 cited in Aksoy 1996: 171). According to Bedri Noyan, a Bektaşî *dedebaba*¹⁴⁶ himself, Nevruz was the day on which Muhammad became the prophet, the day that Ali was born, and the day that Ali and Fatima were married. On the morning of Nevruz, Bektaşîs prefer to eat food that is white in color, such as milk, eggs, and almonds. He lists the revitalizing and purifying specialties of these items. Noyan also adds pomegranate to this list and mentions its representation of reproduction (Noyan 1983a and 1983b cited in Grkem 2000: 53).¹⁴⁷ Citing an observation that was made in 1958 in the village of *Ocak* of Erzincan-Kemaliye, Grkem confirms the milk ritual and also explains it with the idea of spiritual purification and rejuvenation (Yaman 1994 cited in Grkem 2000: 51). On the day of Nevruz, whether the Alevi-Bektaşî community is settled or living nomadically, large *ayin-i cem* – cem ceremonies are celebrated. The ceremony starts with “Ali’s mevlid.” After this, a *sema* dance and chants are performed.¹⁴⁸ The ceremonies which start during the day continue until the next morning (Çay 1999: 310-312).¹⁴⁹ It is believed that during the night of Nevruz, households are filled with *nur* - divine light, and Nevruz brings luck. Referring to the *glbang* - a loud cry or uproar during the Nevruz ceremony, Grkem underlines the combination of old Turkic cultural motifs with the Bektaşî tradition. According to him, the fact that the *glbang* ceremony mentions Nevruz as a person - *Nevruz Sultan*, and places him in the second position after Allah stands as a

¹⁴⁵ These *ayahs* are; 13:26, 36:28, 37:79, 37:109, 37:120, 37:130 and 97:5.

¹⁴⁶ *Dedebaba* means a prominent member or a leader of a Bektaşî order.

¹⁴⁷ HAGEM researcher Glsen Balıkçi also adds the day that Ali became caliph and the day that prophet Muhammad went to Hejaz (Balıkçi 2002: 56).

¹⁴⁸ For a comprehensive account of Alevi semahs see Dinçer 2000.

¹⁴⁹ Çay cites Oytan 1960: 60-62 (or 1962. In Çay's book there are two different publication years provided for this book) and Oğuz 1980: 220 for this account.

strong mark of the deep roots of Nevruz among Bektaşis and establishes a connection between the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition and the Central Asian Turkic heritage (Görkem 2000: 53).

Eröz also notes that among the Silifke area *Tahtacı*s – another Alevi community of Anatolia, the day is known as the birthday of *Hüseyin* (Eröz 1977: 361 cited in Aksoy 1996: 171).¹⁵⁰ Balıkçı notes that among the Tahtacıs of Naldöken this day is known as the day to feed and entertain dead people (Balıkçı 2002: 54). On the basis of his fieldwork among Tahtacı communities in the 1930s, Yusuf Ziya Yörükan challenges this idea. According to him, Tahtacıs' Nevruz knowledge mostly depends upon written sources and compared with the Alevis and Bektaşis, the position of Nevruz is less significant among them (Yörükan 1998 cited in Görkem 2000: 52).

Nevruz within the Official Cultural Discourse

As presented, Nevruz has had multiple and rich meanings among the Turks of Anatolia. Even though a variety of descriptions of Nevruz were available, the politically charged current needs of the state, which was dealing with a huge internal dispute, required more extensive and consolidation-prone descriptions that suited a larger audience. This necessity brought more general views which systematically underlined the peace and brotherhood capacities of Nevruz to the scene. Starting from the 1990s,

¹⁵⁰ See Engin 1998 and Sümer 1993 for the history of tahtacı community and their belief system.

from published material for general audiences to academic conferences, an official framework for Nevruz started to be promoted.

The official understanding, however, was not pushed against other available understandings within the Turkish population, excepting the Kurdish one. Instead, it was organized in a way to represent the versions and the multiple meanings as proof of its richness and embeddedness within Turkish society. This diversity and the somewhat loose available definitions created a pool of multiple meanings for Nevruz. Within the limits of believing in the Turkishness of the tradition, various factions of the social and political population focused on the aspect that suited their needs most. Today, the official definition stands as a kind of confederation of meanings embedded in the tradition. Even though there are differences in this confederation, they are all presented as living proof of the comprehensiveness of the Turkish identity.

Considering the differences within the Nevruz discourse and the function-oriented differences in its various descriptions, before I start to present the Nevruz celebration and the attached sponsored activities, I would like to introduce two descriptions of the new year celebration, both published anonymously, exemplifying the official Turkish conceptualization of Nevruz. In contrast to their shortness, these descriptions, published in a journal for the international audience in English, do not only explain what Nevruz is, but also put it into a historical context.

The first paragraph is taken from *Newspot* Magazine, which is published on behalf of the Directorate General of Press and Information and distributed worldwide. As part of state run public relations effort, *Newspot* covers a wide range of topics, from foreign affairs to cultural issues, and echoes the official stance:

Nevruz is a feast celebrated in the Turkish world with great enthusiasm. It marks the rebirth of nature and renewal. Nevruz is a Persian word which means “New Day.” The holiday occurs on March 21 . . . The beginning of spring was usually celebrated as a feast in the history of the Turks. Nevruz means the beginning of a new year, spring, mirth, love and friendship. It is the feast of peace, tolerance and friendship, symbolizing unity and togetherness. Nevruz originated in the Yenisey-Orhon area and spread by the Altaic Tribes. Then the Hun Turks brought this feast to Hungary and to the Balkans. . . Nowadays, it is celebrated by people who inhabit a vast area stretching from the Balkans to the Wall of China and to Siberia. . . In addition to the Huns, K k Turks, Uigurs, Seljuks, and Ottomans, Nevruz has also been celebrated during the Republican period. Following the proclamation of the Republic, under Mustafa Kemal Atat rk, the holiday was celebrated as the Ergenekon Feast in 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1926 and later celebrations were held regionally. (*Newspot Magazine*, 2002)

Newspot’s definition, written for the foreign general reader, situates Nevruz as a celebration with ancient Turkish roots that go back many centuries. The paragraph is triple coded with the deeply-rooted connotations of official language. Firstly, it prioritizes Turkic origins, and relegates Islam to a secondary role. Secondly, by presenting the Turks as the carriers of Nevruz tradition, the *Newspot* article provides a selective, ideologically refined map of the celebration. And finally, even though the article mentions the Persian roots of the word “Nevruz,” it focuses mainly on Central Asian roots.

Employing a similar tone, the second passage, from a pamphlet produced by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, co-opts the tradition from a different angle. It stresses the traditional values of the Turks such as love for freedom, tolerance, friendship, and, most importantly, unity and togetherness. Underlining the solidarity among the Turkic nations and serving as a reminder of the historical difficulties that Turks faced, the quote suggests a specific set of meaning for the Nevruz tradition.

Nawruz [occasionally used to refer to the official Nevruz], which is celebrated as the festival of liberation among Turks, is the Legend of

Ergenekon related by Ebulghazi Bahadır in his work, *Geneological Tree of Turks*, an echo of the historical events quoted by old Chinese resources. It is the struggle for existence of Turks living for 400 years in a valley surrounded by high mountains. Returning to the fatherland from Ergenekon on a spring day, Turks won their liberty and independence and declared once more to friends and foes alike that they are still on their feet. (*Nawruz-New Day - March 21 n.d.*)

These texts represent the Turkish Ministry of Culture's response towards the tension-filled background of the tradition in Turkey. In short, they counteract the Kurdish claim by revitalizing and developing their own version, Nevruz. Equally important is the Turkish state's recognition that the multiple dimensions of this tradition could serve as a means of mitigating the current social and political situation. In other words, Nevruz not only gives the Turkish state an ideological outlet that could be used to reclaim a specific part of the cultural territory, but also creates a space for debating the key values of historical Turkish identity. During this reclamation process, the Turkish Ministry of Culture recycles its own version of the celebration from the traditional version, emphasizing togetherness and the importance of unity. This official version is presented as a pure Turkic tradition, with its unique context and connotations linking the early Asiatic Turkic origin with the Ottomans. This, in turn, sets the pace for a gravely needed national unity. Consistent with this theme, a press release from the Minister of Culture M. İstemihan Talay on 21 March 2002 specifically highlighted the power of Nevruz, providing for its amalgamation.

The Organization of the Festival

Halk Kùltùrlerini Arařtırma ve Geliřtirme Genel Mùdùrlùğù – General Directorate of Folk Culture Research and Development (HAGEM), is the governmental

agency that is in charge of organizing the annual Nevruz celebrations as well as the year long-related activities, augmented by some other inter-governmental agencies such as Türk K lt r ve Sanatları Ortak Y netimi - Joint Administration Of Turkic Culture And Art General Directorate (T RKSOY).¹⁵¹ The root of HAGEM is the National Folklore Institute which was founded in 1966. This time is known for the foundation of specialized folklore libraries and the conduct of a wide range of folklore research by village teachers. One of the major developments that was carried out by the National Folklore Institute was the organization of the “First International Turkish Folklore Seminar” in 1973 in Ankara and the “International Turkish Folklore Congress” in 1975 in İstanbul. The politically-motivated exclusion of permanent folklorists Pertev Naili Boratav and İlhan Başg z from the list of participants in the İstanbul congress is still remembered. After a series of name changes and structural reorganizations, HAGEM has since been stably functioning as one of the main service units of the Ministry of Culture. With its expert folklorists and musicologists and its one of a kind collection of thousands of slides, original artifacts, clothes, recordings, and books, it stands as the foremost folklore agency in Turkey.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ The Turkish website of T RKSOY reads “cultural roof of the Turkish world.” It was established in 12 July 1993 in Almati-Kazakhstan. The goals of T RKSOY, located in Ankara, are defined as: “to establish friendly relations among the Turkish speaking peoples and nations and to explore, disclose, develop and protect the common Turkic culture, language, history, art, customs and traditions as well as pass them down to future generations and let them live forever.” The organization’s general director Polad B lb loğlu is also the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan. The member countries and territories are Altai, Azerbaijan, Bashkiria, Kazakhstan, Khakasia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova-Gagauz Land, Saxa-Yakut, Tuva, Tataristan, Turkey, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. See [<http://www.turksoy.org.tr/eng/anasayfa.html>] for more information on the membership structure and activities of the organization.

¹⁵² See  rnek 1995: 111-114, *HAGEM* 2000, a brochure that was published for the 34th anniversary of the organization and [http://www.kulturturizm.gov.tr/portal/turizm_bakanlik_tr.asp?belgeno=2678] for the history and the responsibilities of HAGEM. For an English version see [<http://www.discoverturkey.com/english/bakanlik/b-h-gorev.html>].

Its duty and function are defined in their website as follows:

- 1- To undertake or obtain research, collection, study and other scientific initiatives related to areas such as folk literature and drama, traditions, customs and beliefs, folk music and dances, folk cuisine, costumes and decorations and others belonging to folk cultures, and to publish and promote the findings;
- 2- To establish archives of folk cultures;
- 3- To research, study and collect and to undertake other scientific studies related to the cultural heritage of Turks living in and outside Turkey within the context of cultural exchange programmes, to have the results published and promoted and to secure them for open air museums and folk culture archives;
- 4- To teach the different Turkish dialects and accents currently used in other countries and to work towards establishment of institutes within the frame work of effective legislation in order to carry out research and studies in this area;
- 5- To undertake similar tasks to be assigned by the Ministry.¹⁵³

The Yearly Nevruz Cycle: The Planning

The format of the celebrations starts taking shape months in advance. By January of the given year the first meeting for organizing Nevruz takes place within HAGEM. In my interviews at HAGEM in March 2002 for example, I was told that for the 2002 Nevruz celebration the meeting was held on 10 January 2002. In this meeting, the general outline of that year's event is discussed and an agenda is produced for the upcoming celebrations.

After this first step, HAGEM sends letters which carry signatures of the Ministry of Culture to the governors asking them to prepare a tentative program for the Nevruz celebrations in their cities.¹⁵⁴ Whatever the size of the city, the same format letter is used

¹⁵³ [<http://www.discoverturkey.com/english/bakanlik/b-h-gorev.html>].

¹⁵⁴ As I mentioned in chapter 3, the Turkish state is divided into cities which function as provinces (*il*).

for this purpose. The following circular letter, which was sent to the governorship of Kırşehir along with other governorships on 26 February 1996, is one of the many examples that I encountered in my archival research:

Republic of Turkey¹⁵⁵
General Directorate of Folk Culture Research and Development

Number: B.16.0.HKAG.0.10.00.03.110-641

Subject: Nevruz Celebrations

To the Governorship of Kırşehir
(Province Directorate of Culture)

As the day of parting with Winter and ushering in Spring and the beginning of a new season, Nevruz has been celebrated with joy and happiness throughout the Turkish world, and since 1991 it has been celebrated in our country.

This year too, for the purpose of giving life to our traditional cultural values, to improve them and make them part of our lives, on the 21st of March, 1996, Nevruz celebrations will be held all over the country. As part of this, I would like you to organize in your province festivities and conferences, arrange for local press, radio and television channels to cover them, and take the necessary measures to engage people's participation in the traditional ceremonies and activities and develop such activities consistent with these purposes.

D. Fikri Sağlar
Minister

Appendixes: 1- Nevruz booklet.
2- Poster.

Every city is considered the center of the region and contains townships (*ilçe*). The governors of the cities are sent by the central government and represent the central government. Governors stand as the main executors of orders coming from the central government. Whatever the issue, the related ministry communicates with the governors and they in turn oversee the execution of the order and then respond to the central agency – in this case HAGEM.

¹⁵⁵ HAGEM Archives. Date and number: 16.10.1996/1128. Record Number: 4054. Archive Location Number: Y.B.96.0063.

The following circular letter, sent to Van governorship along with all the governorships on 4 February 2002 for the same purpose, seems more detailed and comprehensive and displays the development of the Nevruz preparations within the Ministry of Culture structure.

Republic of Turkey
General Directorate of Folk Culture Research and Development

Number: B.16.HKAG.0.10.00.03.110-394
Subject: 2002 Nevruz

To the Governorship of Van
(Province Directorate of Culture)

Nevruz, holding a significant position in Turkish culture, will be celebrated on the 21st March, 2002, all over the country, consistent to the tradition and in its natural course. The principles that need to be followed and activities to be organized are as follows:

- 1- Nevruz (Newday), consistent with its hundreds of years of long tradition, will be celebrated within its natural cultural environment.
- 2- In the Nevruz activities, consistent with the core of the tradition, unity, love for humanity and nature, toleration, and the consciousness of helping one another will all be highlighted.
- 3- The posters, pamphlets, and cartoon books that will be produced and delivered to cities will be distributed to the related official agencies by the province directorate of cultures, and the national and local press will be informed.
- 4- By collaborating with universities and the National Ministry of Education's dependent organizations, conferences, panel meetings and discussion programs will be organized for the people, youth, and children.
- 5- In cooperation with local TV stations, a cartoon film and spot films, produced and already distributed to the provinces by our ministry, will be shown widely.
- 6- Folk singers and local performers will be solicited in Nevruz-related activities. According to a plan, Nevruz concerts will be given by the performers from our Ministry (in provinces that are chosen by the Ministry).
- 7- In schools, poetry, composition and drawing contests will be organized by our Ministry's education section.
- 8- All units in our Ministry's directorates of culture will be actively charged.
- 9- To create Nevruz forests on public lands chosen by governorships within the coordination province directorate of cultures and in collaboration with directorate of forest and agriculture, bank accounts will be opened under the names of governorships

and the amount accumulated in these will be used for forest plantation.

10- A group of 50, consisting of 4 students from 10 cities along with a teacher from each, will be invited to observe Nevruz activities in Ankara.

The celebration programs prepared for each city should be sent to HAGEM by the 28th of February, 2002.

Within the framework of the stated principles and assorted activities, I would like you to take the necessary action for the preparation of this province-based celebration program.

M. İstemihan Talay
Minister

After receiving such letters, local governorships create a local Nevruz Celebration Committee under either one of the deputy governors of the region or the local directorate of culture. There is no uniform structure for these committees. The membership structure varies from city to city and is shaped by local conditions and resources. The 2000 Nevruz celebrations in İzmir, the third largest city in Turkey, stand as a good example of the correlation between available resources and the extensiveness of the celebrations. In 2000, İzmir celebrations were led by deputy governor Ramazan Urgancıoğlu and took up four consecutive days. Starting with a panel meeting in the meeting hall of the İzmir governorship at 5:00 on 20 March and continuing until 23 March afternoon, numerous panel discussions, folk and pop dance and music performances, art exhibitions, and sports performances such as tae kwondo took place. With the participation of the city's three public universities, a local branch of public television, and the whole culture and education-related state structure, foreign guests were hosted, and with local students, were taken to theater plays and classical music concerts.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ HAGEM Archives. (This document carries two dates and record numbers). The first date and number: 31.3.2000/306. The second one is 31.3.2000/514.

The local Nevruz committee consists of managers and representatives from the local governmental agencies including the university if there is one in that city. For instance, the celebration committee of Hatay, a border city on the south of Turkey, for the 1995 Nevruz celebration was headed by a deputy governor and included a province gendarme commander, a deputy mayor, the director of the directorate of education, the director of the directorate of culture, the interim director of the directorate of health, the director of the directorate of sports, the director of the directorate of tourism, the director of the directorate of environment, the chair of the local journalist association, and the chair of the guild of local tradesmen and artisans.¹⁵⁷ In the larger city of Kocaeli, about an hour's drive from İstanbul, the 2000 celebration committee seemed more specialized and art oriented. In 2000, the Kocaeli Nevruz committee was headed by the director of the directorate of culture and included a representative of city congress, a representative of the regional public theatre, a representative of the theatre of the mayorship, a representative of the fine arts gallery, and representatives of the local media.¹⁵⁸

The Committee's first task is to prepare a tentative schedule which is then sent back to the Ministry of Culture for approval. These local programs are generally prepared according to local resources and priorities. In large cities, the format generally includes large scale activities such as scholarly conferences, free concerts given by popular singers or bands, and public gatherings attended by statesmen – covered in detail below. In smaller provinces, the structure of the celebration is consistent with the size of the city. It is common to see regional universities considered as crucial resources and taking on

¹⁵⁷ HAGEM Archives. Date and number: 17.7.1995/685. Record Number: 3937. Archive Location Number: Y.B.95.0095.

significant roles in the events. The invitation I acquired for the 2002 Nevruz celebration, sent by Osman Tekinel – the president of S  t   İmam   niversity to residents of the city, shows the significant role that local universities play. A schedule of celebrations attached to this invitation included activities ranging from step dance to judo and to gymnastic performances, scholarly panels, and an invitation for a picnic on the day of Nevruz.

HAGEM also provides whatever is needed by the local governorship for the betterment of Nevruz celebrations. Materials such as posters, booklets, and ready texts on the Nevruz tradition for local organizers are systematically provided to all the cities of Turkey. For instance, a letter sent to all governors by HAGEM general director Seyhan Livanelio  lu in 2002 solicited their efforts towards effectively distributing all enclosed posters, booklets, and cartoon books in their province.¹⁵⁹ During my fieldtrips to Turkey in 2001 and 2002, I saw the Nevruz posters when I arrived in the İstanbul international airport and in downtown Ankara and Diyarbakır.

The following sketch program, prepared and sent to HAGEM by the Province Celebration Committee of the Ni  de province in 2001 for approval, is one of the many examples I encountered in the HAGEM archives during my research trips.

Province Celebration Committee Chairmanship¹⁶⁰

The Nevruz Spring Festival, which is celebrated by the Turkish world and the neighboring nations on the 21st of March, will be celebrated in our province. The Province Celebration Committee which was ratified by the Governor’s office met on the 12th of February, 2001, at 2:00 pm, and decided the following:

¹⁵⁸ Number of the letter: B.O.16.PER.4.41.0.00-272/452 Subject: Appointment.

¹⁵⁹ Number of the letter: B.16.HKAG.0.10.00.03-110 Subject: Nevruz activities.

¹⁶⁰ HAGEM Archives. Date and number: 2.4.2001/789.

- 1- To celebrate Nevruz in our province on Wednesday, 21 March 2001,
- 2- To choose the grounds of Niğde University, Department of Education, as the locale for the celebration,
- 3- To have participants reach the site by their own transportation,
- 4- To have Niğde University provide and assemble the sound system,
- 5- To have the Niğde University folk dance group perform during the celebrations,
- 6- To have the Niğde mayorship announce the celebrations on a regular basis,
- 7- To have the Directorate of Public Security take the necessary security measures,
- 8- To have the Directorate of Health take the health-related measures,
- 9- To have the province Directorate of Culture prepare Nevruz-related texts to inform the people via local media,
- 10- To start the Nevruz celebrations on the 21st of March, 2001, at 1:30 pm, and to have a Nevruz fire be lit,
- 11- To hold, on Wednesday the 21st of March 2001, a panel meeting on Nevruz at the Niğde University Derbent Conference Hall,
- 12- To have the Directorate of Education organize poetry, drawing, and composition contests about Nevruz.

This was decided unanimously.

Chair: Hilmi Atabey (Interim Director of the Directorate of Culture)

Member: Mehmet Sayın (Representative of the Directorate of Education)

Member: Başaran Öztürk (Niğde University, Director of Public Relations)

Member: Gökhan Demircioğlu (Niğde Mayorship, Director of Press and Publications)

Member: Timur Yılmaz (Representative of the Directorate of Culture, Folklorist)

From the impression I got in my interviews, HAGEM generally approves these sketch programs and the approval process is more about providing support especially to the small provinces.

In the week following the celebrations, the provinces report back to HAGEM and list the activities that took place in their province. The following report was sent by the governorship of Manisa in 2000, after that year's Nevruz celebration.

Republic of Turkey
Governorship of Manisa
Province Directorate of Culture

Number: B.16.PER.4.45.00.00-110-640
Subject: Nevruz Celebrations

23/03/2000

To the Ministry of Culture
(General Directorate of Folk Culture Research and Development)

A report about the Nevruz celebration that was held on the 21st of March, 2000, in our province, is enclosed.

I submit it for your information.

Muslu K se
Deputy Governor, on behalf of the Governor

Appendix: File (1 set).

Governorship of Manisa
Nevruz 2000 Activity Program

- 1- Pamphlet delivery (The position of Nevruz in Turkish culture), press release, documentary film. Date and Time: Monday, the 20th of March, E.T.V.[this might be the local TV channel YD] at 7:00. Coordinating agencies: E.T.V., Province Directorate of Culture. Supporting agencies: E.T.V., Press Office of the Governorship.
- 2- Traditional Mesir Paste Preparation Ceremony.¹⁶¹ Mixing Ceremony. Date and Time: Tuesday, the 21st of March, at 11:00 at Bimarhane. Coordinating agency: The Manisa and Mesir Promotion and Tourism Association. Supporting agency: Province Directorate of Culture.
- 3- Lighting the Nevruz fire./ Province Directorate of Culture. Coordinating agency: Province Directorate of Culture. Supporting agency: Province Directorate of Education.
- 4- Delivery of prizes to students who were successful in composition, poetry, and drawing contests. a) Folk music concert; b) Folk dance performances; c) making fritters; d) various concerts. / Turkish traditional music concert. Date and Time: Tuesday, the 21st of March, at 2:00 at the Governor's Park and Tuesday, the 21st of March, at 8:30 at Celal Bayar University, S leyman Demirel Cultural Center. Coordinating agency: Province

¹⁶¹ Mesir Paste is believed to have cured Suleyman the Magnificent's mother and the wife of Sultan Selim, Hafsa Sultan. See [<http://www.manisamesirmacunu.com/manisamesir.html>].

Directorate of Culture. Supporting agencies: Province Directorate of Forest, Province Directorate of Education, Province Directorate of Health, Province Directorate of Social Work, Local Gendarme, Province Directorate of Security, Celal Bayar University.

5- Nevruz Forest tree-planting ceremony./ At a location which was found suitable by the Province Directorate of Forest. Coordinating agency: Province Directorate of Forest.

6- Cooking Contest./ Date and Time: Wednesday, the 22nd of March, at 2:00 at Municipality Wedding Hall. Coordinating agencies: Province Directorate of Culture and Manisa Mesir and Solidarity Association.

7- Friday *Khutbah*.¹⁶² / All mosques./ Coordinating agency: The office of the *Mufti*. Supporting agency: Province Directorate of Culture.

8- Cartoon film./ Association for E.T.V., Province Directorate of Culture, the Directorate of Public Library.

[A photocopy of a news article titled “Nevruz Ateşini Vali Ecemiş Yaktı” on the lighting of the Nevruz fire by the governor of Manisa, published in the local *Hür Işık* on the 22nd of March, 2000, was enclosed.]

The Local Celebrations and the Media

Consistent with the directive for media attention, Nevruz celebrations are covered extensively by the media. Throughout the Nevruz week, not only public TV channels but also privately owned ones aired programs on Nevruz. In both of my 2001 and 2002 fieldtrips to Diyarbakır, I watched and took notes on some of these program in my hotel room.

In 2002, also, all the national newspapers thoroughly covered Nevruz celebrations. Besides regular news coverage, many related articles were published before and after Nevruz.¹⁶³ According to the political leaning and preferences of the newspapers, Nevruz coverages differed. Some newspapers preferred to cover Nevruz as a “state

¹⁶² Khutbah is the advising sermon made on Fridays before the special Friday *Jum'ah* prayer.

¹⁶³ For instance; Emin Çölaşan, “Nevruz Olayı,” *Hürriyet* 21 March 2002; Mehmet Yılmaz, “Nevruz’da Zafer İşareti,” *Milliyet* 22 March 2002; Prof. Ramazan Mirzaoglu (then the minister of state), “Nevruz Türkün Bayramı,” *Ortadoğu* 22 March 2002.

celebration” and highlighted its tailored character.¹⁶⁴ The daily *Radikal*, for instance, wrote about the İstanbul Nevruz celebration as the “celebration of the governorship.”¹⁶⁵ Another newspaper, *Vakit*, discussed the unsuccessfulness of the state in its attempt to possess the tradition.¹⁶⁶ Some others, however, presented the Nevruz celebration as a main and legitimate celebration and reported on other non-government versions by highlighting their disturbances, such as in the case of Mersin and İstanbul.¹⁶⁷ But a significant amount of the press covered both versions back to back in their pages.

In 2002 the students coming from the Central Asian Turkic republics got together at the Turkish Ministry of Culture at 10:00 am. Two students from Azerbaijan presented a “Honca tray,” which includes germinated wheat, dried fruits, colored boiled eggs, and candies. The Nevruz celebration then started at 11:30 when the Turkish ministers of culture and education, along with the Azerbaijan minister of culture and the general director of TÜRKSÖY, started the Nevruz fire. During the celebration students from Azerbaijan, Tataristan, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Gagauz land, Turkmenistan, Bashkiria and Khakasia performed folk dances.¹⁶⁸ In İstanbul, the largest city of Turkey, the celebration was coordinated by the governorship’s “Coordination of the Turkic World and Related (Relative) Communities” directorate in Sultanahmet square. After a moment of silence for the losses of the Turkish world, governor Erol Çakır along with the prominent officials of the city jumped over the Nevruz fire, hammered iron, and knocked eggs. In his speech, governor Çakır said that Nevruz has

¹⁶⁴ *Cumhuriyet*, 22 March 2002.

¹⁶⁵ *Radikal*, 22 March 2002.

¹⁶⁶ *Vakit*, 22 March 2002.

¹⁶⁷ *Gözcü* 22 March 2002, *Takvim* 22 March 2002, *Ortadoğu* 22 March 2002 and *Türkiye* 22 March 2002.

¹⁶⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, 22 March 2002.

been celebrated in the Turkish world for five thousand years. He also added that Nevruz “is a day which is supposed to be celebrated within unity, without exploitation. It is not anybody’s or any specific community’s day.” A picture of the governor jumping over the fire was included in the news.¹⁶⁹

The detailed coverage of these events, the language of the news, and its consistency with the guidelines provided by HAGEM reveal the state-centered efforts to publicize Nevruz.

The Center Based Activities

The dynamism that is seen in the periphery of celebrating Nevruz is also seen in the center. From the press releases to the high level receptions, the whole state structure is displayed during the celebrations. For instance, in 2001, just like every other year, the president’s and prime minister’s Nevruz messages were delivered. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer described Nevruz as the day of peace, brotherhood, and friendship, and told the public that “to identify one’s own identity with the identity of her/his nation is her/his responsibility towards the society that s/he lives in.”

Prime minister Bülent Ecevit highlighted Turkish people’s comprehension of diversity as richness. In the same year, a photography exhibit was opened at the Turkish National Assembly. In the Hilton Hotel in Ankara a reception was given for the higher officials of the state and the foreign mission representatives. That same year, on 29

¹⁶⁹ *Türkiye*, 22 March 2002 and *Yeni Şafak*, 22 March 2002..

March, 2001, the Directorate of the National Lottery organized the “Special Nevruz Lottery” in Ahlat-Bitlis to mark the importance of the event.¹⁷⁰

Nevruz also functioned as a show place and a bulletin board for internal politics. For instance, Abbas Bozyel, a member of Parliament from the Nationalist Action Party, and his friends made a proposal for a law to make Nevruz a national holiday.¹⁷¹ This was not only a move to respond to Kurdish claims of the tradition but also was a timely performance made for the conservative Turkish constituency.

The secular state center did not only use its cultural and educational agencies in a well organized manner, but also employed some extra venues to override the contested version. In 2001, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Directorate of Religious Affairs – the official body administering religious affairs in Turkey, prepared a Nevruz sermon – *khutbah*. The *khutbah*, given on Friday, 23 March, 2001, in all mosques in the country, declared that Nevruz was not a religious tradition. It encouraged citizens towards unity and warned them against positions of treachery. The *khutbah* also touched upon the importance of Nevruz for solidarity and peace, including Nevruz’s role in the formation of a nation and in the accomplishment of unity along with language, religion, and history. The people were reminded that facing the internal and external enemies who abuse this tradition for their own purposes is the people’s own religious and national responsibility.¹⁷² In 2002, the general director of Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, and his agency were active in the promotion of Nevruz. This time, after criticizing efforts which

¹⁷⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, 21 March 2001.

¹⁷¹ *Akit*, 22 March 2001.

alter the real venue of Nevruz and utilize it for dangerous political purposes, they stated that Nevruz meant “abundance, love and hope.”¹⁷³

As described above, the entire state structure along with its agencies at the periphery create numerous venues and activities for promoting Nevruz. After introducing the main actors and outlining how Nevruz preparations have worked, in the following section I would like to focus on the state-supported scholarly activities and the children-oriented campaigns to provide a more detailed discussion of the promotion of Nevruz by the state. The following sections will include Nevruz close-ups and to give a better sense of how official mechanisms work in the promotional process of the Nevruz tradition.

The Scholarly Meetings¹⁷⁴

The Nevruz-related scholarly meetings, organized either by central or local agencies, have a significant position in developing the Nevruz consciousness in Turkey. First, they function in a variety of ways in the preparation and promotion process of the official Nevruz discourse. By bringing scholars of Nevruz together, these created forums re-shaped the position of the state. Second, they functioned as a Nevruz showroom; with the constant participation of high level officials, these events became the first crucial effort in the promotion of Nevruz to the general population. Third, these meetings

¹⁷² *Diyarbakır Soz*, 22 March 2002.

¹⁷³ *Yeni Şafak*, 21 March 2002.

¹⁷⁴ In the beginning of my doctoral work, I was planning to employ these conferences more extensively and analyze the presentations to view the development of Nevruz within the scholarly zone. However, the more I got into these meetings, the more I saw their complexity. I noticed that, beyond the presentations, the logistical details – such as locations of meetings, organizing bodies, participants and their national background, were all full of codes that needed to be explored. The scope of an adequate plan to address this would require comparative analysis of the papers and the presenters’ previous work, and this simply was not within the framework of this dissertation. Therefore, I preferred to make a more general descriptive analysis and focus more on their political and symbolic meaning.

became the testing and performance ground for Nevruz as the celebration of all Turkic people around the globe.

As I mentioned above, in my archival research I encountered hundreds of examples of university professor employment in the Nevruz celebrations. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, university professors, mostly affiliated with the Turkish literature and history departments, made public speeches and participated in panel discussions at the local level. These were mostly recruited from the local universities. If there was no university in the province, visiting speakers would be invited from the surrounding cities' universities.¹⁷⁵ In larger cities such as İstanbul and İzmir which have more than one university, as well as numerous established cultural research institutions, I encountered organizations of mini conferences. In these meetings, single presentations and panel meetings are generally embedded in the general celebration program and talks are designed for the general audience. These were mostly about promotion and celebration of Nevruz rather than scholarly exchanges.

Besides the locally organized meetings, there have been international conferences organized by central cultural agencies, playing a much more significant role in the re-appropriation of Nevruz. HAGEM's International Nevruz Symposium in 2000 especially needs mentioning, with its expansiveness and high quality of papers (*Uluslararası Nevruz Sempozyumu Bildirileri* 2000).

The series of conferences that shaped the official stance and the attached promotion efforts of Nevruz have been organized primarily by Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve

¹⁷⁵ Among many other examples see *1999 Yılı Kahramanmaraş İli ve İlçelerinde Yapılan Nevruz Paneli ve Konferansları* for the Nevruz related scholarly meetings in the province of Kahramanmaraş.

Tarih Yüksek Kurumu (AKDITYK) – Atatürk Culture, Language and History Institution. AKDITYK is a research institution dealing with issues relevant to Turkish language, history, and folklore and its roots go back to the beginning era of the Turkish republic.¹⁷⁶ Besides leading organized series of international Nevruz conferences and publishing their outcomes, it hosts and supports a number of Nevruz researchers. AKDITYK most recently supported the publication of a major encyclopedia of Nevruz; *Türk Dünyası Nevruz Ansiklopedisi* – Encyclopedia of Nevruz in the Turkish World (Oğuz 2004).

The first international symposium, entitled International Symposium on Nevruz in the Turkish Culture, organized by AKDITYK, met in Ankara between the 20th –22nd of March, 1995, overlapping the beginning stage of the Nevruz re-appropriation by the state. The collection of presentations along with the additional articles and translations published from this conference successfully display the intellectual background and organizational development of Nevruz in Turkey (Tural 1995). The collection begins with a crucial text that situates the Nevruz celebration in a political context. A press release signed by the Culture Ministers of all TÜRKSOY member countries was located in the beginning of the collection. This brief but very significant text touches upon the United Nations General Assembly’s decision to declare the 21st of March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and acknowledges the deep roots of Nevruz within Turkish culture. The following text declares the ministers’ decision to assign Nevruz as the day of common celebration of the Turkish world. Furthermore, the member countries decided to hold their periodic spring meetings during the Nevruz celebrations every year (Tural 1995: 13).

¹⁷⁶ For more information on this institution see [<http://www.akmb.gov.tr>].

Meetings were attended by scholars of the Turkish-speaking world and commenced by then prime minister, Tansu Çiller. In her speech, Çiller highlighted the common character of this tradition among the Turkish people of different countries. She also highlighted the unity and togetherness that is attached to Nevruz (Tural 1995: 3-4). The presented papers, 16 from Turkey and 16 from the rest of the Turkish-speaking world, covered various dimensions of Nevruz. While some covered the history of the tradition, its embeddedness in Turkish culture, and the artistic forms that have been attached to Nevruz, some other foreign scholars covered the current celebrations in their native central Asian countries. Other than the two articles on Nevruz in Iran (Heyet 1995 and İdrisi 1995), all papers focused on the Turkish roots of the tradition and its position in the contemporary Turkic world.

In the editor's preface, Professor Sadık Tural (also the main organizer) sheds light not only on the current position of Nevruz but also its evolution within the official discourse. Consistent with the title of his preface, "Nevruz: A Concept Pushed into Darkness," he points out the blurred position of the majority of the cultural concepts in the Turkic world and underlines the critical position of people of intellect and critical thinking to deal with this blurredness. Continuing, he brings his discussion to Nevruz and describes it as a concept that had been abused by internal and external trouble makers. After arguing for the richness and flexibility of the Turkish culture in order to argue that it is perfectly reasonable to see different versions of Nevruz – namely; Nooruz, Novruz, Navruz, Nevriz, and Nevris, he then concludes: "the unclarity of concepts in Turkish political life and culture, and the attempts to use Nevruz for the contamination of mentalities, made us organize a scholarly meeting on this topic" (Tural 1995: vi).

Some of the points that were brought up in these meetings were later carried on by various state agencies throughout the late 1990s and 2000s. This also illustrates the importance and effectiveness of the Nevruz conferences. For instance, Tural's comments on the need to create additional research institutions to study Turkish traditions and reveal common values in the Turkic world, or on the need for wider participation of all public TV channels in culture-related issues, or on the need for publications and academic meetings that would create an academic base to better know other parts of the Turkic world, became road maps for the subsequent activities on Nevruz (Tural 1995: vii-viii).

In the 1996 symposium, which was opened by a speech by then president Süleyman Demirel, there were 34 presentations, 15 from Turkey and 19 from outside. Besides the participant scholars, diplomats from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan also made speeches. Even though the format and the participant body were familiar and a variety of papers were presented on Nevruz, the focus of the meeting shifted to the then controversial color issue of 1996. Throughout the competition between the Nevruz and Newroz versions, the ownership of the yellow-red-green colors became highly contested. Historically, the Kurdish opposition presented this color combination as a national symbol. As I discussed in chapter 3, these colors constituted one of the most important and controversial visual aspects of the Newroz celebrations. This situation expectedly became one of the most controversial and most argued aspects of the Nevruz/Newroz related contestation. A group of papers that were read in this conference, thus, became the most organized response towards the Kurdish claims. Even though the number of papers on the color

combination's history and their position in Turkish culture were very much in the minority, the collection of overall papers that was published out of this symposium was titled as *Nevruz ve Renkler* – Nevruz and Colors (Tural and Kılıç 1996).

State minister Ayvaz Gökdemir's opening speech in the 1996 meeting contained many important points regarding the preparation logic of the conference, the main theme, and the position of the state on these matters. Gökdemir, after briefly touching upon the position of Nevruz in history, stated that even though there was no official Nevruz celebration during the first generation of the Turkish republic, people were celebrating Nevruz between March to May in a variety of ways. He continued;

“we reached a point where some appeared and claimed ‘Nevruz is our own celebration,’ and they wanted to celebrate it as a base for their negative activities, for separatist movements, for activities to trouble the Turkish nation and the state. It was called a celebration, but it did not look like one. Then they brought up the yellow, green, red colors. Nature is full of these colors. All over Turkey we have seen these colors on our people and loved it. These, reds, greens, were in our songs. . . However, they wanted to monopolize these colors. They attempted to erect a flag that they made out of these colors against our flag with the crescent and star. Leaving the political and security dimensions of this matter, which concern our security forces, aside, we, along with our valuable friends, told ourselves ‘we need to look into this. First of all, What is Nevruz? Is this a celebration of a specific nation, race, people, living on a specific land? What is the position of this celebration in the Turkish nation, Turkish culture? Are these colors the special flag of a race, nation, or a state? We need to look into this, and shed the light of science onto this” (Tural and Kılıç 1996: 3-4).

In the same speech, Gökdemir clarifies his understanding of state involvement in this process; “this is a kind of celebration that has not been imposed or invented by the state. This is a celebration which has been embraced and celebrated in sincerity. This deep-rooted celebration's history goes back hundreds of years. The state accepted its

existence and registered it. Nevruz is this kind of celebration. In other words, whether the state celebrates it or not, the people will celebrate Nevruz, we saw this, too” (Tural and Kılıç 1996: 4). Another point that he makes continues to set the tone for the official stance over the other versions: “Now, whoever says ‘I love Nevruz. Nevruz is my celebration,’ s/he means, ‘I am a good Turk, a Turk who did not break away from the Turkish tradition. I am a Turk who lives in and keeps alive the Turkish traditions in her household, village, and the surroundings.’ The one who wants to leave the Turk, who searches for a cultural environment, for a celebration of her own to say ‘I am not a Turk,’ has to find another celebration other than Nevruz” (Tural and Kılıç 1996: 6).

In the third celebration, during the 18th-20th of March, 1999, in Elazığ, and in the fourth during the 21st-23rd of March, 2001, in Sivas, the conference formats and participant structure were kept similar to the previous ones. The fifth conference, however, meeting in Diyarbakır between the 15th-16th of March, 2002, holds a highly significant position because of its location. As I presented earlier, the Diyarbakır Newroz celebration has been considered as the center of Newroz celebrations in Turkey. Organizing this conference in Diyarbakır also stands as a clear performative message highlighting the official position of the state for this contestation.

Nevruz for Children

The publication of children’ books and the organizing of various sorts of contests within the primary school system appear as constant venues to promote Nevruz among children. With their lucid texts and quality drawings, the cartoon story books deserve special attention. In this section, I would like to introduce and discuss two cartoon books

on Nevruz.¹⁷⁷ The first one, which also functions as a coloring book, is prepared for children by HAGEM (*Nevruz* 2003). The book was first published in 1999 and republished in 2002 and 2003. The cover is a drawing depicting a group of people dancing. Inside the book, the left pages includes the text of the story and colored pictures relating to the text's theme. The facing pages were designed for coloring, repeating the same picture but without color. Telling a story via a coloring book seems to extend the audience from the kindergarten level to the elementary school level. The language of the text is consistent with the audience. In the first story the setting is a little village under snow and the main characters are a brother and a sister. This story, which was prepared by a group of experts from HAGEM, is set in a typical countryside in Turkey. The peaceful and comforting effects of provincial life in a small village set the main stage.

Nevruz and Şenol live with their parents and grandparents in one of the houses of the village. In the cold winter days, while grandmother cooks, grandfather spends his days making a *saz*, a traditional musical instrument. While the parents were good at taking care of the chickens and feeding them with their own hands, 12-year-old Şenol took care of the other animals in the barn. He especially deals with the Yellow Cow which will give birth soon. While everybody is busy with their work, little Nevruz gets bored and looks out the window at the snowy mountains.

One day, when she's feeling bored in front of the window, grandfather approaches and does the same along with her. Suddenly Nevruz asks her grandfather, "when will I be able to play outside?" The grandfather responds, "Nevruz is close my daughter, Spring is coming." Confused by the resemblance with her name, Nevruz says, "I'm not coming, I am already here" The grandfather laughs and starts telling her about Nevruz: "Nevruz means spring, the end of winter. By spring every place is filled with nevruz flowers and the beautiful days begin."

Not so long later, the days that little Nevruz dreamed about begin. The sun melts the snow on the roofs. The trees bloom with flowers. Cows and sheep start going out to pasture. While this is happening, there is a sweet excitement in the

¹⁷⁷ For similar books see Turan 2002 and Ural 2002.

household. Nevruz checks out the clothes that her grandmother took from the coffer. Knowing that the clothes are for her, Nevruz asks, “is this mine?” Her grandmother responds, “yes, tomorrow is the Nevruz celebration.” Remembering what grandfather told her about Nevruz, she continued to listen to her grandmother; “Every year the 21st of March is celebrated as Nevruz. You were born on March 21st, and that is why we named you Nevruz. Tomorrow there will be festivities in the village. You will wear this beautiful dress. Not only you; all of us will dress well. For young or old, tomorrow will be an entertaining day.”

Later on, they went over to the kitchen hearth. Little Nevruz noticed a difference here, too. Her grandmother prepared more pastry and *kete*¹⁷⁸ then the usual amount she generally makes. She could not suppress her curiosity and asked, “are these also for Nevruz?” Grandmother responded, “yes, we will share these with our neighbors at the picnic during the celebration.”

The abundance and richness of Nevruz came before the celebration itself. While the people of the household prepared for the celebration, the Yellow-Cow gave birth to a female calf. On the white skin of the calf, there were brown spots. They seemed like flowers. Because of this, they named her *Çiçekli*.¹⁷⁹ The next day, all the people of the village got together by the river. While the sun was rising to warm the mountains and the meadows, the meal was prepared.

That day was the day of children. All the children of the village ran around and played. Swings that were hung from the branches of the trees increased the joy of the children. All the celebrations’ regulars - the *davul*¹⁸⁰ player, uncle Mahmut, along with the *zurna*¹⁸¹ player - uncle Ekrem, came. The whole village started to dance. The roar of *davul* mixed with the melody of the *zurna*, and these reached the other festivities over the mountains.

From the lovable main characters to the musicians, from the food to the work distribution within the family, the story constitutes bold cheerful generalizations. The way that these generalizations are presented permits us to situate Nevruz within these commonalities comfortably.

¹⁷⁸ Rice-flour cake.

¹⁷⁹ Means ornamented or decorated with flowers.

¹⁸⁰ A kind of drum.

¹⁸¹ A kind of traditional horn.

The song of the dance was talking about Nevruz; Nevruz is abundant and rich.

In another place people were shouting with joy, “Nevruz is love.”

In a distant province people were dancing, “Nevruz is hope.”

Everybody knew that Nevruz was peace, brotherhood, joy, festivity.

The tunes coming from uncle Mahmut’s davul and uncle Ekrem’s zurna mixed with the tunes of the saz, accordion, kemençe, and other songs. In this day of the beginning of spring, people were hand in hand and the fields were covered with enthusiasm, the voice of “Nevruz is unity” spread to all of nature. And the colors of the dance turned to a huge, marvelously smelling Nevruz flower.

In a country where almost all unknown cows are called “Yellow Cow” and celebrations are considered incomplete without the davul and zurna performances, the attachment of these details to Nevruz helps to mainstream it for a younger audience. In this story, promoting Nevruz precedes the efforts to respond to competition over the ownership of Nevruz. In a soft-spoken tone, Nevruz is combined with the well established traditions of the centuries.

The undated second cartoon story book on Nevruz was prepared by the General Directorate of the Security of Turkey.¹⁸² The cover of this colored book is titled “Nevruz Celebration” and shows people folk dancing and jumping over a fire. The story reads like this:

Mete lived in Ankara with his family. His mother and father were born in Mersin. After studying in Ankara, they started to work there. Mete and his older brother, who was a medical doctor, were born in Ankara.

¹⁸² I first encountered this one during my 2002 fieldtrip. It is the only text I encountered in my research prepared by this agency. Since there is no date, name of an author, or publication information available on the book, I could not provide a satisfactory answer for the source of the story. In my interviews at HAGEM, I could not make any progress on the source of this text.

Mete was a sixth grade student. Since his brother was working at a health center in Diyarbakır, Mete could see him only once a year. Mete missed him all the time and wanted to visit him all the time. However, it was not a possibility all the time.

Due to a little accident, Mete's finger was dislocated and he needed to stay home from school for ten days. He wanted to visit his brother during this period. However, his mother and father were busy with their work and had no time to go with them. It was impossible for Mete to go on such a long trip himself.

In the building where Mete and his family lived, there was a neighbor who was originally from Diyarbakır. This neighbor who Mete called uncle Ahmet had a son named Nuri who was one year older than Mete.

While Nuri and his family were visiting Mete's, Mete's desire to go and visit his brother became apparent. Uncle Ahmet told them that he was going to Diyarbakır with his son Nuri the next day and if he wanted, Mete could join them. Mete received this offer with happiness. His parents accepted this with the condition that he behave well.

From the start the story employs a different tone than the previous one. Here, not only the story-line but also the language itself prepares the reader for the main message of the story. Throughout the flow of the story the reader sees in detail how people from different backgrounds get along well and socialize together.

After a long tiresome day in the back seat of the car, they reached Diyarbakır. In Diyarbakır, Mete's brother welcomed them. Mete hugged his brother longingly.

That night they stayed at Mete's brother's home. They ate a meal that was cooked by Mete's sister-in-law, Gül, with much appetite. The next day, while uncle Ahmet was leaving to go to his village, he asked Mete if he wanted to go with them.

Mete decided to go with uncle Ahmet and Nuri to their village. He was curious about the village and the village life. When they arrived at the village, they went to uncle Ahmet's old father's house. After the arrival, Mete and Nuri went out to see the village.

That day, the people that they met at the village were preparing for a celebration called "Nevruz." As the celebration started, people were dancing, people were having fun altogether. During the evening hours different meals, kabobs, and desserts were eaten.

The main celebration started after sundown. In the center of the village a bonfire was started. Young, old, women, men; everybody was dancing around the fire, singing with happiness. Being witness to this festivity for the first time, Mete was watching it with curiosity.

Through the curious eyes of Mete the reader is introduced to Nevruz and provided with rich details about the celebration.

He was observing the people jumping over the fires with excitement. Even though the melodies and the rhythm of the songs being sung sounded familiar, he could not understand their lyrics fully. When he asked uncle Ahmet why he did not fully understand the lyrics, he told him, “their accent is different.” When he heard this response Mete thought, “the songs that we listen to in Ankara are sung in a different accent here, but they are all the same songs.”

Here the story does not only limit itself to informing or promoting Nevruz to its reader. The competition over this tradition and the complex reasoning behind the existence of the competing versions are also explained according to the official stance.

A little bit later, Mete joined them. He sang as well as he could. He jumped over the fire with them, and danced with the other children. He also participated in other activities.

In the late hours of the night, Nuri and Mete slept on a bed spread out on the floor. That night Mete dreamed of Nevruz celebrations.

The next day Mete and Nuri continued to walk around the village. After this two day village visit, Mete spent four days with his brother and went back to Ankara with uncle Ahmet and Nuri.

Mete told his parents what he saw in Diyarbakır with excitement. He especially told them that he could not forget what he experienced in the Nevruz celebrations.

The explanation of the difference of the songs in uncle Ahmet’s village is followed by an occasion that provides a chance for comparison and highlighting of the similarities between the presented versions.

A couple of weeks later the two families got together. Mete's father teased him by saying, "Nuri took you to his village and took care of you. Tell us, where do you plan to take him?" Mete responded instantly: "Uncle Ahmet took us to Diyarbakır. If you can take us to your village we can be even! I think we can have good time there, too."

Everybody liked Mete's idea. After thinking a moment his father said, "why not, the semester break is starting in two weeks and your mother and I are taking our vacations. We have been planning to visit our village in Mersin anyway."

After hearing this Mete and Nuri started to jump with pleasure. They were anxious to go there.

Travel to Mersin was long and tiresome. The village of Mete's parents was in the Taurus mountains. While on their way, they got hot in the car. However, when they started to climb, the hot weather was replaced with cool and comforting mountain weather.

The village was surrounded with greenery. People were warm and friendly. They embraced Mete and Nuri. Mete and Nuri felt close with them, too.

In a way, the story prepares the young reader for the spelling differences that s/he is about to encounter in the streets of Turkey. Although it does not touch upon the version with the "w" in it, it certainly prepares her for other versions s/he will surely encounter one time or another.

Knowing that Mete liked the Nevruz celebrations in Diyarbakır, his father had a surprise for him. By the time that Nevruz was celebrated in Diyarbakır, Navruz was being celebrated in their village. A flower was even named Navruz, since it had flourished at Navruz time.

Upon request from their relatives, Mete's father repeated a sample Navruz celebration song for Mete and Nuri. Here too, meals were eaten, songs were sung, and various games were played. Mete and Nuri witnessed what they saw in the Diyarbakır Nevruz, but this time as Navruz in Mersin. This time the touching songs that they listened to in Diyarbakır were replaced with lively ones. The taste of the kabobs was different, but the enthusiasm and excitement were the same.

The story attempts to normalize the existence of other versions by providing information on the richness of the tradition. Full of historical details which bend the story-writing technique towards a history lesson, the story confronts almost all aspects of the Newroz/Nevruz contestation.

A week-long vacation passed quickly. When they get in the car to go back to Ankara, Mete's father started to tell them about the history of Nevruz. "Nevruz is not only celebrated in our Anatolia, but also among the Turks in the independent Turkic republics like Kazakhstan, Kirgызistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Balkans, Caucasia, and many other parts of the world. Even though the name of the celebration differs as Nevruz, Noruz, Navrız, Ergenekon, Bozkurt, Çağan, Yeni Gün, Ulusun Ulu Günü, they are all celebrated with same enthusiasm and joy.

With the old Turks, the awakening of nature was celebrated with various festivals. In those, minstrels read poems while playing the *kopuz* – an old lute or guitar-like musical instrument. During the Ottoman era, both within the governing elite and within the masses, Nevruz continued to be used as the beginning of calendar.

The great founder of our republic, Atatürk, led and participated in the organization of the Nevruz celebration in Keçiören-Ankara on the 22nd of March, 1922. Since 1995, Nevruz has been celebrated as an official festival in our country.

Nevruz is a celebration for all of us. Other than ourselves, Arabs and Iranians have similar celebrations to Nevruz. However, none of those have deep roots or energy like ours."

Mete and Nuri were surprised about what they heard. From then on, they decided to participate in all the Nevruz celebrations.

As has been argued, the Nevruz festival became a state organized response to the political utilization of Newroz by the Kurdish minority in Turkey and required significant shifts from its traditional form of celebration among the Turkish population of the country. During the recent resurgence, this once family-oriented and small scale celebration became a highly tailored public event and the details of the celebration were

significantly re-organized. The indications of this operation can be seen in the two presented stories. While the first story serves the highly needed normalization process by adding Nevruz to the traditional children's story repertoire without touching upon the contest over it, the second one handles the concrete, politically-charged issues for a maybe slightly older audience who is already aware of the competition.

The storyteller knows that storytelling is, in a way, "repair work on the wreck" (Frank 1995: 54). The somewhat abstract story world of the first story is replaced with a real one in the second story. Here people do not live in unknown villages in an unknown time period. They eat, drink, drive cars, have jobs, take vacations, and discuss history. Moreover, either through their origin or accent, they have differences. These differences, however, are handled in a way which is consistent with the official Nevruz line. Knowing that the questions of the real world are more complex than Mete's questions, the storyteller intensifies the telling and responds even to the unasked questions by repeating the official plot.

The closing of the story not only promotes Nevruz and confronts the other version, but also emphasizes the pre-emptive approach adopted since the 1990s by the state. Instead of denying the tradition, which was the case until the 1990s, it claims it through the decision of Mete and Nuri to participate in the future Nevruz celebrations.

The composition, drawing, and poetry contests serve as another venue promoting Nevruz consciousness. Organized by HAGEM and the Ministry of Education, these occurrences involved a large number of students. In February of 1998, a composition contest titled "Çocuk Gözüyle Türk Kültüründe Nevruz – Nevruz in Turkish Culture Through the Eye of Children" was organized by the Ministry of Culture, Education

division.¹⁸³ It was open to high school and equivalent school students and involved a two-level selection process. The governorships and the directorates of culture in the provinces organized the first level selections. After collecting the compositions that were written by the students in their province, these agencies chose the best three compositions and sent them to the Ministry of Culture. The second level consisted of a special appraisal panel that was organized within the ministry and chose the national winners.

In his preface to the published collection of compositions, Minister of Culture İstemihan Talay explained the purpose of organizing this contest by claiming the necessity to stress the importance of Nevruz for the unity of the people of the country as well as for international solidarity. He also presented the contest as a chance to develop research consciousness among youth and to promote Nevruz with its traditional, cultural, and artistic aspects (*Çocuk Gözüyle Türk Kültüründe Nevruz Konulu Kompoziston Yarışması* 1998: vi).

Almost all the published compositions, one for each province, generally focused on the themes of peace, brotherhood, and unity. Consistent with the level and style of writing that is common to the high schools in Turkey, the participants connected Nevruz with these themes in a variety of ways. Interestingly, the compositions coming from the provinces which have mixed populations and which suffered the most during peak moments of ethnic clashes contained details of violence and lightly touched upon the political aspects of Nevruz.¹⁸⁴ For instance, in Gözde Sarıca's composition from Adana,

¹⁸³ The date and the number of the official permission: 16.2.1998/ 233.

¹⁸⁴ With this point I do not imply a political writing different from the framework of the official discourse. With the limited available material, which only included the text of the composition, the names of the participants, and the school, I am not in a position to make such an argument.

two young men, Savaş - war in Turkish – and Umut – hope in Turkish, befriend one another at a Nevruz site. As they enjoy the celebration, Savaş is killed by a bullet which was shot in the air for fun (Sarica 1998: 8-9). Hasan Bilen of Adıyaman, touching upon how the kings of Iran used the Nevruz period to declare amnesty, suggests the same thing for all countries. He also shares his dislike for the abuse of Nevruz by the separatists (Bilen 1998: 10-11). Can Başpınar of Elazığ writes one of the most political pieces. His composition is titled “Not Nevroz.” Touching upon the coincidence that the words of “neurosis” and “nevruz” are explained back to back in the Turkish Ana Britannica and Larousse encyclopedias, he connects the alternative comprehensions of the new year festival with psychoneurosis, which according to him comes with violence and chaos (Başpınar 1998: 45-46).

In 2001, the contest was repeated with some additions. That year, drawing and poetry-writing became part of the contest along with composition writing. One other development came through the inclusion of Turkish students living in Europe and Turkic central Asian countries. While the poetry and drawing contests were designed for primary school students, the compositions were written by high school students. The drawings that were chosen were displayed between the 4th-8th of June, 2001, in Ankara at the National Library. The best three pieces, along with the works of contestants coming from abroad, were published in a 515 page book (*Çocuk Gözüyle Türk Kültüründe Nevruz Resim, Şiir ve Kompoziston Yarışmaları* 2001).

These illustrations all show people celebrating in a festival environment. The poem which received first prize represented Nevruz as a peace envoy. It highlighted the commonality of the tradition by paying tribute to the rain of the Altai mountains, the

winds of Anatolia, a flourishing flower of Uzbekistan, and the folk dance in Mardin (Akça 2001: 1). The first composition prize went to the work titled “Let’s Share the Warmth of Our Hands” (Ateş 2001: 5). The honorable mention went to a high school student from Baku, Azerbaijan. Through describing a group of playing children, she wrote on the abundance that comes with Nevruz (Hasanlı 2001: 8).¹⁸⁵

I observed that in both of the collections, the official discourse was highly utilized. The majority of students used very similar language in describing Nevruz and explaining its Turkish roots. Considering the geographical distance between the contestants, this situation certainly displays the success of Nevruz promotion practices, at least within the school systems.

Gerrymandering: The Cultural Variety

The present state-supported operation, I believe, can best be described using the concept of folklorism. In such cases, the state uses a specific set of folklore materials to confront a political situation and promote its own position. However, to particularly elucidate the detailed, technical aspects of the operation, I want to offer the term “cultural gerrymandering,” and further my discussion through it.

Gerrymandering describes a re-designing of electoral district boundaries to gain political advantage for the ruling party. The term was obtained from the name of Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814), the governor of Massachusetts in 1812, who was instrumental in a

¹⁸⁵ It was interesting to see that while the authors who preferred to write Newroz with a “w” were systematically charged because the Turkish alphabet does not contain the letter “w,” some pieces coming from central Asian students were written using the letters “q” and “x,” which are also part of the Turkish alphabet, but they were not penalized. See for instance (*Çocuk Gözüyle Türk Kültüründe Nevruz Resim, Şiir ve Kompoziston Yarışmaları* 2001: 248-249).

redistricting bill to create an electoral district shaped like a mythological salamander. This bill divided Essex County into two separate voting districts favoring the candidates of the Jeffersonian Republican Party over the Federalist Party. When cartoonist Elkanah Tisdale attached the head and tail of a salamander to a map displaying the newly created long, thin districts, the concept stuck to governor Gerry's name. I believe one of the most accurate and meaningful definitions of the concept came not from a scholar, but a practitioner – the former GOP state party chairman of North Carolina, Jack Hawke. At one point during the highly debated re-districting practices in 1990s North Carolina, forty-two people filed a suit in the federal district court in Charlotte, North Carolina. While announcing the suit, Jack Hawke, one of the plaintiffs, blaming the Democratic-controlled General Assembly, claimed that “instead of voters choosing their representatives, the representatives are choosing their voters” (quoted in Yarbrough 2002: 22). My notion of “cultural gerrymandering” involves a direct cultural parallel: rather than accurately representing the culture and folkways of a people as they exist, cultural gerrymandering represents its preferred image of that culture to a people and demands that they accept it.

The recent work on gerrymandering focuses on race (Grofman 1998, Kousser 1999, Yarbrough 2002) and gender (Scutt 1994) related re-districting practices and expands gerrymandering-based arguments from political process and legislation-oriented discussions to the sociological realities of the political sphere. In a creative article, Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi carries the concept of gerrymandering into her anthropological work (2001). Discussing David Schneider's idea of kinship, which challenges Western

biological kinship, she uses the term "ancestral gerrymandering" and successfully discusses the high degree of flexibility in kinship among the Papua New Guinea highlanders.

As Mark Monmonier explains, the concept has two common meanings, and before furthering my argument, I need to clarify my personal understanding and use of it. For some political scientists, gerrymandering is simply one of the available tools for increasing electoral success and maintaining power. They see this as a normal outcome of the political process. However, for the public and the media, the term has a more sinister meaning. To them the concept implies an unfair manipulation of the voting system (Monmonier 2001: x). My appropriation of gerrymandering to the cultural process depends upon the very foundations of the concept and is much closer to the political scientists. My use of "cultural gerrymandering" connects the power structure with the sphere of culture, which is crucial in the legitimization process of the state. In the process of what I call cultural gerrymandering, I see: a) a power structure that dominates the decision-making process; b) a modification of cultural lines in order to deny and challenge the counter claim; and c) an attached search and effort to heighten the dominant and ruling group's power in the future. Within the framework that I suggest, cultural gerrymandering performs functions similar to political gerrymandering, but in the cultural sphere. While this cultural practice may develop historically from electoral gerrymandering practices, the similarities between political and cultural gerrymandering may simply be a convergence of similar effects; in either case, I believe the similarities between the strategies is tight enough to allow for a fairly extensive adaptation of the idea of electoral gerrymandering to cultural areas.

Strategies for gerrymandering have been distinguished as “stacking” – redrawing boundaries around group opponents in electoral districts where they are the minority; “packing” – concentrating opponents in a small number of electoral districts; and “cracking” – dividing and spreading opponents over a large number of constituencies (Raymond 1992: 191-192, Comfort 1993: 232, McLean and McMillan 2003: 221).

I would like to borrow and transform this terminology so that it can be applied to cultural gerrymandering as I understand it. Analogues can be found for each of these terms, although in the cultural case these do not amount to entirely distinct practices, but instead are phases or moments involved in the process of cultural gerrymandering.

“Stacking” in cultural gerrymandering is the process by which another version of the tradition is deemed inferior or derivative, as when Iranian and implicitly Kurdish celebrations are considered historically derivative and less vital than the Turkish version.

As in electoral gerrymandering, the “deck is stacked” in favor of the culture that is deemed dominant within the discourse. “Packing” in cultural gerrymandering can be understood as a side effect of the process of over generalization that is presumed in stacking: alternative versions are lumped or packed together into an undifferentiated mass of inferior variations, all of which together do not add up to the “true” version.

“Cracking” in electoral gerrymandering spreads a district out over too many constituencies to form an effective coalition, and in practice is simply the opposite of packing. In cultural gerrymandering, cracking is the dialectical counterpart to packing: the same movement that identifies all alterior versions of the tradition as identical in their inferiority (packing) also divides and differentiates them from one another, so that they do not collectively amount to the hegemonic culture. This simultaneous moment of

division between the alterior traditions is what I term “cracking.” In the cultural gerrymandering process attached to the state’s Nevruz operation, all of these moments can be identified.

First of all, Abdulhaluk Çay’s and others’ effective presentation of the Ergenekon-Nevruz tradition as a generous mother/cultural source needs to be mentioned. According to this scenario, Turkish culture stands as the main cultural source lending to its neighboring cultures throughout history. By this move, if this were an “ideal” version of cultural gerrymandering, all other variations on Nevruz would successfully be rendered derivative (the discourse becomes stacked in favor of the official version), would be lumped into an undifferentiated mass, in that they are all deemed mere subtypes (packed), and simultaneously divided into a number of “compartments” so that they do not collectively challenge the integrity of the hegemonic discourse (cracked).

In fact, this ideal process is not carried off perfectly, and the process is driven with internal contradictions. This result from the opposing tendencies involved in cracking and packing, and from the mismatch between official ideology and facts on the ground. This becomes most apparent in the second children’s book discussed above, when the story identifies the neighboring versions of the festival as variations on the Nevruz theme. This process of cracking, intended to divide and rhetorically “conquer” the other festivals, must nonetheless recognize differences. This becomes uncomfortable for the official ideology, because these variations are associated with their own independent states and cultures. The cracking cannot successfully marginalize these alternative traditions simply by noting their alterity. The text seems to catch the dangers of this cracking strategy, and so resorts to a highly questionable moment of packing,

declaring that these traditions are really alike in that they lack the vitality and deep roots of the Turkish version. This moment of packing is necessary, because the neighboring versions must act as stand-ins for the Kurdish Newroz festival, but it cannot reverse the cracking that preceded it.

Confronting the Kurdish Newroz with the Nevruz of the entire Turkic world by adding the newborn central Asian countries onto the Turkish version functions as another effective step in obscuring Newroz as a minority, anti-social position. Driven by political considerations for the need to overshadow Newroz, state-supported cultural agencies consistently sanitized the past. During this process, the Nevruz narrative and the relevant fictional stories or legends were presented as standard and stable history. These reinterpretations were not simply reorganized to produce counter-versions against the unwanted version. Instead, they were effectively tailored to rearrange the “historical cultural district” to gain political advantage.

Contrary to expectations, the first famous gerrymandering practice backfired and the Federalists won the following election (Rush 1993: 2). Although this was a historical coincidence, and not a result of the internal contradictions that I identify in cultural gerrymandering, I would suggest that cultural gerrymandering is characterized by contradictory impulses that may prove to be its downfall. The state-supported Nevruz operation produced a series of outcomes that uncovered the commonalties between the celebrators of Nevruz and Newroz. The systematic efforts to override the other versions unexpectedly highlighted similar dances, customs, color combinations, and most importantly, the common themes of peace and brotherhood. In the appendix of this work, this unexpected outcome of the Nevruz operation and the potential for Nevruz/Newroz to

play a role in conflict transformation will be tentatively discussed, and future research topics identified.

CHAPTER 6

Pedagogical Utilization of the New Year Festivals

This chapter examines the pedagogical utilizations of the contested traditional new year festivals in Turkey. It explores the development and function of contrasting, pedagogical activities through Nevruz and Newroz and draws out their comparative implications for the study of the Kurdish question and for social change in Turkey. I begin by presenting the conceptual framework underpinning this chapter. Subsequently, I outline the opposing pedagogical utilizations of these festivals and their impact on the current state of affairs.

My approach to this topic assumes that a sense of identity is a “conscious awareness” (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995: 367). It is created through complex multi-layered processes and negotiations at various levels and provides mechanisms of understanding of self and the rest of the universe. This “conscious awareness” is shaped by highly tailored efforts of systematic socialization practices that closely reflect the state’s pedagogical aims. This chapter, thus, examines these celebrations as a form of pedagogy and seeks to elaborate on these adapted mechanisms and their capability in identity creation and popular mobilization.

The notion of education occupies a significant position in both cases. In particular, education is seen as having immense influence on the design of internal

identity creation and promotion, and external social and political relations. In the organized efforts of teaching and learning the practices of the two opposing festivals, Nevruz and Newroz, different sets of pedagogical tools are used, although related restorative agendas can be observed. In the case of Newroz, the introduction of an alternative civic culture consistent with the political agenda sets the tone, whereas in Nevruz (the officially commissioned festival by the Turkish authorities), the focus, in addition to promoting a transnational Turkic identity in the Turkish-speaking world, appears to be a response to the challenge of Newroz.

The following section focuses on what I shall call the Kurdish “alternative civic education.” It looks at how Kurdish political elites facilitate Newroz as a framework that permits a re-definition of ethnic identity, creating and promoting an alternative civic culture. Subsequently, I discuss how Nevruz fits into the Turkish state’s civic education scheme. In particular, I argue that the promotion of the official Nevruz version effectively elevated the festival to a symbol of Turkish civic culture.

It was while conducting a detailed study of Newroz-related learning practices¹⁸⁶ that I encountered David Tyack’s argument on the private shaping of civic educations (2001: 333), Lawrence Blum’s conceptualization of “antiracist civic education” (1996: 23), and James Leith’s eloquent presentation on the role of the printed images in civic education during the French Revolution (1996). These studies shed light on the unstructured, informal “no-classroom” aspect of the collective education process and helped me refine my thoughts on non-state and non-traditional actors of the pedagogical processes.

The Pedagogy of Empowerment through Newroz

The pedagogical aspect of Newroz first came to my attention in my 2001 field trip to the Diyarbakır Newroz festival. During my preliminary preparation, I managed to identify only very limited sources on the development of Kurds' popular understanding of Newroz. The written sources I came upon were either very brief or circulated only within the educated elite, and I soon became curious as to whether I would be able to find a common text that had shaped Newroz consciousness within the Kurdish population. The description of the Newroz tradition and the source of that festival, thus, became the opening questions I used when initiating conversation with participants at the festival site.

For the questions “what is Newroz?”, “why is it important to you?”, and “when did it start?”, I received general answers. The frequent response I obtained was that Newroz was the day of Kurds, the most important day of the year, and that it has been with the Kurdish people forever. However, when I asked specific questions such as “when did you first hear of it?” or “when was the first time Newroz was celebrated in your village/neighborhood?”, the responses began to blur among the elderly participants. For the participants who were born during the last two or three decades, however, the responses were much clearer. These relatively young people had more concrete memories of Newroz participation or memories from their relatives and neighbors.

In the cases of elderly participants, however, there were obvious gaps between the “Newroz forever” claims and the level of remembrance. After noticing this gap in my interactions with the elderly participants, I specifically started to mention common

¹⁸⁶ Newroz-related learning practices were first elaborated upon by Yılmaz Varol (1994),

traditional learning channels. I added the questions “what do you remember about Newroz from your childhood?”, “was it celebrated in your village?”, and “do you remember anything that was told to you by your father/grandfather?” These questions did not bring a significant change in the responses, until I met a 72-year-old man at the 2001 Diyarbakır Newroz celebration. His responses were the main reason for writing this chapter. When asked these questions, the man replied: “We have always had Newroz, but it was not like this [gesturing toward the festival ground]. Lately, youngsters tell us the whole story. They tell us the struggle of our people against the merciless Dehak led by the blacksmith Kawa and so on.”

I noted similar responses throughout my 2001 and 2002 fieldtrips and I expanded the research towards pedagogical aspects of the Newroz festival. With regard to this, I would like to discuss my findings on a) the preparation stage of Newroz, b) the celebration at the festival site, and c) the thorough the speeches given before or during the celebration.

As described in Chapter 3, the Newroz festival is surrounded with parallel events that spread the main theme of the festival. At the time, all of these activities were organized by the local chapter of the pro-Kurdish party (which was HADEP), as well as the local mayorship, led by a member of HADEP. For instance, in the year 2002, there were 56 committees and 2,160 subcommittees created in Diyarbakır. These committees met in a total of 5,487 meetings. Throughout the preparation process, 172,458 house visits, 17,587 work place visits, and 549 village visits were made. In these meetings, HADEP representatives met with 924,663 people for the upcoming 2002 Newroz festival (*Tarihin Tanıklık Ettiği Büyük Buluşma* 2002: 152).

In my interviews with Ali Ūrkūt and other HADEP people, I focused on logistical issues, such as the details and day-to-day conduct of the festival organization. During the interview, Mr. Ūrkūt showed some randomly selected agendas of meetings that took place on various levels, along with guidelines given to party volunteers who were responsible for representing the party and communicating with the lay people. Both the guidelines and the sample agendas contained items regarding the history and meaning of Newroz. According to these written materials, every representative were required to educate people on the meaning and importance of Newroz at the beginning of the meeting. Mr. Ūrkūt also emphasized that the HADEP did not consider the gatherings as limited meetings primarily focusing on the technical and preparatory aspects but, rather, as opportunities for learning. Reminding me of the reasons behind the promotion of the official Nevruz and highlighting the competition over the tradition, Mr. Ūrkūt added that even he and his friends at the party needed to learn more and deepen their knowledge about Newroz.

I had my own observation of a similar learning process at the provincial headquarters of HADEP in Diyarbakır. During the preparation process, the building in which the local chapter of HADEP was housed became the center for all Newroz-related operations. During my first fieldtrip in 2001, I interviewed the provincial chair of HADEP, the above-mentioned Ali Ūrkūt, at the party headquarters. When I arrived, I was told that he was still in a meeting, and was taken to the waiting area, the largest room in the building.

In the waiting area, the walls were lined with chairs and at one end there was a television set showing a pro-Kurdish program in Kurdish. Although I describe it as a

waiting area, it clearly also functioned as a kind of relaxing tea room for people stopping by or taking a break from their administrative Newroz work. Other than the middle-aged volunteer who seemed to be tending to the room, the faces were constantly changing.

Hardly ten minutes had passed when I realized I was in an ethnographer's gold mine, and I tried to stop by whenever I could during the times I was there for field research in 2001 and 2002. In this room, I encountered a diversity of individuals who did not belong to the community such as peasants from neighboring villages, urbanites, travelers from other regions, a lady from Europe who came to Diyarbakır specifically for Newroz, students stopping by after school, and many more who had some reason or other to stop in. Other individuals who also used the room were the more active members of the community who were taking a break from back room meetings and responsibilities to chat with a visitor from their village, neighborhood, or family. The continuous activity brought all of these people together in that one room.

In my experience, though one generally enters the room quietly and takes a seat to wait for their party or business, eventually he or she becomes drawn into some conversation going on in the room. In some cases, the newcomer (such as myself) is introduced by someone known to the rest of the people. With people coming and going so frequently, introductions did not make sense to me at first. However, after observing similar introductions during my visits there, I began to understand this formality in a different way. Somebody coming from Istanbul, Europe, or a not-too-distant town would usually begin by discussing how it was that they came to be in the building. They would soon be sharing how the Newroz preparations were progressing in their hometown, the number of people expected to participate that year, and would ask for similar information

from the listeners. Each person introduced became another trigger for conversation about another aspect or region of the tradition.

What I observed in those exchanges can be best described as “no-classroom” educational processes. In the informal setting of the room, I found myself observing an astonishing breadth of exchanges, from brief discussions of current logistical issues, to the history of Newroz, to the contested promotion of Nevruz in their region, to popular guest singers invited to one Newroz or another. Spending a mere half an hour in this informal waiting room, one would certainly learn of a rich cross-section of Kurdish culture cultivating the Newroz tradition.

In contrast to the relaxed setting, however, I want to point out that discussions were substantially agenda-oriented. People were sharing the details that might better the preparation process. Personal experiences were brought up as examples. As the accumulation in the room grew, so did the discussion, and even when central participants were stepping in and out for phone calls or prior engagements, the focus was not lost or dropped for more casual conversation; rather, the exchange of knowledge was relevant and immediate.

The position of volunteers at Newroz is another good example of Newroz-related learning practices at the festival site. In both 2001 and 2002, hundreds of thousands of people got together in Diyarbakır. According to the daily *Hürriyet* newspaper, reporting on the success of the 2002 celebration, an article cited the long and detailed preparation and praised the local governor, security director, the mayor, and the HADEP chair. I believe this success was the result of the organized efforts of the young volunteers. In 2002, there were 2,187 volunteers at the festival site working in various capacities

(*Tarihin Tanıklık Ettiği Büyük Buluşma* 2002: 152). They were absolutely everywhere throughout the day, wearing the same recognizable colored t-shirts. They welcomed and directed people, conducted body and bag searches at the entrance of the festival, provided information to the participants on the lighting of the bonfires, controlled the crowds when necessary, and cleaned the entire festival site after the celebration — all of which were performed in a relatively professional and courteous fashion.

These young volunteers performed a crucial function: they were the human face of political and social order in a long, tension-filled day, when a myriad of activities were taking place in an area the size of three football fields. They not only served as liaison between the main organizing body and the participants, but also as the intermediary body between the state security forces and the participants. I saw volunteers warn people against shouting illegal slogans or waving illegal flags, and controlling raging crowds when political leaders took the stage.

In all instances, the participants obeyed these volunteers, despite their youth. This willingness to cooperate with the authority of the young volunteers stands as another example of the festival's capability to challenge the various types of power structures, especially in a country where traditional power patterns dominate the scene. This popularly bestowed power and respect was a point of discussion in the intellectual circles. In the tent that I called the "portable museum," I witnessed lengthy interactions between participants and the volunteer workers who were in charge of the art displays. Through the combination of urban and rural, modern and traditional forms of art, the volunteers not only explained what the artifacts were and who produced them, but also translated their history and significance for the Kurds.

The third dimension of the Kurdish alternative pedagogical claim comes from the constant existence of a teacher discourse within the speeches before and during the festival. A panel meeting that took place at the theater hall of the Diyarbakır municipality building on 20 March 2001 stands as a good example for this aspect. The three-member panel meeting was titled “Multiculturalism and Human Rights” and was chaired by a poet. Although it was organized around a specific topic and the three members were not Kurdish, this well-attended meeting became a seminar on the history of Newroz. The panel chair, Hicri Özgören, Akın Birdal, a leading human rights advocate, and Ragıp Zarakolu, a prominent member of Publishers Union of Turkey and columnist, all provided detailed accounts of the history and importance of Newroz within Kurdish culture. During the question-and-answer period, a significant portion of the questions was on the history of Newroz.

I observed the same tendency in the speeches given in both 2001 and 2002 from the main stage at the festival site in Diyarbakır. From the general chair of HADEP, Murat Bozlak, to the representatives of civil organizations, the history and the importance of Newroz was told over and over again. The structure of these speeches was almost identical and I do not remember one speech that did not contain a very lengthy introduction on the history of Newroz.

I am not suggesting that a full-scale civic education and formalized pedagogy was coming from Newroz and the attached activities, based solely on my series of observation. However, because the state had greater pedagogical decision-making power in the Turkish republic, the settings in which teaching and learning took place were inevitably microcosms of the socio-political situation. Moreover, consistent with the

state discourse, Kurdish identity does not find much of a place in pedagogical texts. In response to this situation, the Kurdish political leadership has, over the last decade, created alternative institutions such as the Kurdish Institute in Istanbul. However, because of their limited ability to reach the general public, these institutions need to be supported by Newroz and related activities.

As the most important cultural venue of the Kurdish minority in Turkey, Newroz was utilized for a kind of “civic education.” This practice should be distinguished from civic education as political intervention which, essentially, shapes citizens’ understanding of their level of participation in governance by providing some ideals, standards and practices (Torney-Purta et al. 1999). Here, I use the concept in a much narrower sense. By using the term, “Kurdish alternative civic education,” I am describing a much more limited effort to filling the gaps between their understanding of social reality and the texts that were used in their official education. Instead of some professed, abstract ideals and practices, Kurdish political leaders used Newroz as a major medium for Kurdish civic education and for shaping their collective response to the dominant political power and Kurdish empowerment.

For reasons discussed in Chapter 2, the Kurdish leadership employed an unconventional source for creating a civic culture. A lack of suitable conventional sources for this purpose led them to create an “experience-near” concept from an “experience-distant” frame of historical Newroz (Geertz 1984: 124). To respond to the current challenges, they utilized the Newroz text and the festival framework to furnish a historical base for identity creation. This became the main frame for conveying values to the rest of the population.

An interesting and significant aspect of this operation is seen in the directional flow of knowledge. The conventional direction of the learning process, from elder to younger, is radically changed. In the socio-political rebirth of the Kurdish Newroz, an unusual way of learning - what Margaret Mead called “prefigurative learning” - had arisen in its stead, and the direction of learning was reversed (Mead 1978). Prefigurative learning occurs in dynamic societies where rapid changes take place and the elder generation is caught unprepared. Elders (or traditional teachers, in the case of the Kurdish community) find themselves being educated by the young generations on experiences that they themselves have not had. In this context, the elders cannot provide the necessary knowledge to deal with the present situation (Mead 1978: 73).

Although Mead offers these concepts to determine the models of cultural transformations on a global scale and mainly underlines the importance of related technological developments, her concept of prefigurative learning helps to make sense of the way of learning through Newroz. It helps us understand how various generations jointly take part in the construction of a collective identity. This cooperation is developed through the fusion of story and history boundaries, all of which are permitted a role in the development of a theme.

This was first noted by Yılmaz Varol (1994). In his search for the origins of Newroz, Varol argued that while elders usually recounted myths and legends to the young, it is the younger generation who were the bearers and teachers of such knowledge to the rest of the Kurdish society when it came to the Newroz. By stretching and enriching the limits of the Kurds’ identity struggle, the Newroz festival not only changed the social and political scene, but also brought new pedagogical actors and methods to the

scene. In a way, the festival program substituted the formal collective education setting one day a year. By being both a bulletin board and an informal classroom, the physical grounds on which Newroz were celebrated became a space for internal learning practices and the reproduction of the Kurdish cultural identity.

The Turkish State's Response: The Pedagogy of Domestication

Nevruz, the official Turkish state-backed version of the festival, is seen as growing out of and in response to the successful appropriation of Newroz by the Kurdish opposition. Nevruz first surfaced in the 1990s, and has since become a fixture in schools and in the pedagogical sphere. While researching Nevruz in the archives and published sources of the Ministry of Culture, I encountered expansive efforts on the educational aspect of Nevruz.

My research showed that the Turkish Ministry of National Education is the second focal point in the planning and preparation of the Nevruz, after the agencies of the Ministry of Culture. Consistent with this observation, the local directorates of education occupied a crucial position in the day-to-day running of local Nevruz events. Every provincial agenda for Nevruz that I encountered included one or more events aimed at educating both the local student body and the public. Many circular letters and other types of internal communications featured concrete guidelines for soliciting student participation. According to the newspaper accounts from various years, a significant proportion of festival participants were made up of students or public servants.

Besides guidelines to boost student participation, various school-based activities, such as composition writing, poetry, and painting contests, were organized in conjunction

with the festival. Successful students were brought to Ankara and given the opportunity to meet with high-ranking officials. These activities were widely broadcasted via national television and local media. The outcome of these contests was published and distributed widely, along with a variety of other publications such as cartoon books and Nevruz conference texts.

Nevruz-related scholarly meetings organized at various levels have occupied a crucial position in developing Nevruz consciousness. The texts produced for them were closely consulted in the preparation of many local Nevruz speeches. The majority of available texts of speeches I encountered in the archives consisted of freely borrowed ideas from scholarly writings intending to educate the audience on Nevruz.

Children's books were another venue for promoting Nevruz. The deliberately constructed texts and colorful drawings in the cartoon storybooks were used as a pedagogical tool for spreading the official version of Nevruz and discussing all fronts of the Newroz/Nevruz contestation. As discussed in Chapter 5, by successfully combining traditional aspects of the Turkish society with Nevruz themes, these books were easily incorporated into the Republic's selection of well-established traditions of the centuries.

The Nevruz operation, in effect, has become a pedagogical undertaking to re-invent and eventually popularize the foundation of the Turkish national identity. To some extent, this is a manifestation of a pedagogical project to construct the Turkish identity as a unifying framework for citizens of different ethnic origins in Turkey. Specifically, the Turkish state agencies and the related organizations are re-defining the symbols of Nevruz to provide a counter venue that link the concept of Nevruz to Turkish identity.

Moreover, the accepted official descriptions of Nevruz also appear to be using the tradition to provide a common frame for the Turkish-speaking world.

Even though emphasizing and promoting the Turkish identity is predominant in Nevruz celebrations and associated activities, it is not its only agenda. It is crucial to differentiate between the two major functions of the Nevruz-centered pedagogy. The first is the staging of the Turkish identity as the only ethnic framework for the multiethnic society of Turkey. Although this comes into view as a main theme, the orchestrated response to Newroz is also a key component of this process. Since the official stance is to consider Newroz as an outcome of divisive activities and as being promoted by the terrorist organizations that challenges the ideal society of the republic, the task of the Nevruz is to fix the “false consciousness” propagated by Newroz.

The high level of politicization of the new year celebrations in Turkey makes the event a significant one. By drawing on shared symbols and pieces of history, both Newroz and Nevruz “establish continuity with a suitable historical past.” As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger observed, traditions do not pass completely unchanged through the generations, but are often interpreted to satisfy the needs of the current generation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1). In instances like Nevruz, the state remakes and attempts to reclaim a tradition, especially following its success on the popular level. The pedagogy that emerges out of this operation is what Freire would call “the pedagogy of domestication” (Freire 1970). It is a pedagogy that continuously repeats itself in the unlearning of the Kurdish Newroz.

When both material and social symbols of Nevruz are institutionalized and reiterated through the “state ideological apparati” (Althusser 1971) such as educational

systems and religious institutions, the officially endorsed symbols and meanings become incorporated as part of everyday lived experience. This goes a long way in “maintaining the ‘official’ universe against the heretical challenge” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 99) and in the socialization of the population of Turkey to accept the official Nevruz version as the only “true” one. Nevruz and its associated activities, then, are “learned as objective truth in the course of socialization and thus internalized as subjective reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 62). Nevruz as a text of action provides the Turkish state with the opportunity and flexibility to popularize and circulate its own message. On this basic level, the Nevruz pedagogy is not only designed to shape the consciousness of the audience, but also to establish itself as the “good,” domesticating message.

Conclusion

This chapter asserts two distinct pedagogical processes in the Nevruz and Newroz traditions in Turkey. The historical background, which fostered both the alternative Kurdish civic education and the official Turkish pedagogy, holds a crucial position in understanding these pedagogical practices. The promotion of unlearning the opposing projects became their common characteristic.

This chapter suggests that the Kurdish leadership in Turkey employed a traditional narrative to define and justify the Kurds’ historical rights. By making the Newroz tradition one of its crucial pedagogical bases, the Kurdish leaders essentially created socialization channels to aid the dissemination of the Kurdish identity. Besides functioning as a major venue to raise ethnic consciousness and respond to the Turkish

state framework, it also proved a significant venue for collective education in which the youth occupied a leading role, and challenged the traditional learning/teaching processes.

Similarly, there was also a strong element of education in the state-sponsored rebirth of Nevruz. A new venue came into being to compete with the success of the Kurdish Newroz and to secure the current stance of the Turkish state. Besides making its presence felt on the cultural front, the Nevruz framework was also intended to connect the Asiatic Turkic people of the former Soviet republics with the Turkish republic for international, political purposes.

These festivals provide an insight into opportunities inherent in the nexus between politics and pedagogy. They suggest the adaptable nature of traditional boundaries and their multiple pedagogical utilizations. The following chapter will shed light on the possible capabilities of these festivals for resolving conflict, thus going beyond the conflict-burdened reputation of the presented festivals.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with an observation of how the Kurdish issue in Turkey has been mirrored in a narrowly defined political discourse that is dominated concerns regarding internal and international security. In order to expand the limited framework used to examine it, this dissertation has suggested the examination of the contested traditional new year celebrations in Turkey.

The dissertation started by sketching out the history of the Turkish republic and its historical inclination towards utilizing cultural sources for political purposes. It argued that this tendency left a mark in Turkish governance and continued throughout its history. A brief history of the Kurdish issue and the evolution of the Turkish state's minority policy followed. It is argued that in responding to what it believed to be causes of atrophy in the Ottoman state, the new leadership followed western models and imagined a nation state. Within this format, the national identity was solely inscribed within the framework of Turkishness, and this assertion was followed by a series of uprisings from the Kurdish minority throughout the history of the republic.

The study then situated Newroz as the most significant cultural aspect of the Kurdish opposition. After briefly touching upon the development of the Kurdish opposition, and introducing the context in which Newroz was appropriated for promotion

of the Kurdish political opposition as well as the creation and articulation of a Kurdish ethnic identity, the current roles of Newroz were examined. It is argued that the Kurdish political leadership of the period re-appropriated and promoted Newroz as a venue for the promotion of its own national narrative, which was needed to effectively articulate a national identity.

Next, the organization of the Newroz festival was discussed, to distinguish the Kurdish minority from the Turkish state discourse in establishing a distinct culture and politics. On the basis of the Diyarbakır Newroz celebrations, this dissertation described how Newroz portrays and maintains Kurdish claims and operates flexibly in both social and political environments, thereby fostering Kurdish agency on various levels. It argued that the tradition is used to create a common sense of the past and respond to current political changes, and that the festival serves as a “bulletin board” for relevant community messages. It also discussed the multiple layers of the festival performances in detail, showing how sometimes conflicting performances on the stage and on the ground ultimately worked to include the various elements of a divergent population.

It also indicated the creative and highly tailored stance of the festival site as a site for collective projection. In contrast to the limited and conflict-prone vocabulary of the political sphere, the representations at Newroz displayed organic, multi-layered approaches for expressing a collective position on current issues. Besides the rich parade of symbols, it showed how the festival site was utilized to display the past and made for multiple predictions of future themes and approaches to them. Within this temporary collective stage, experiments with new social forms, such as gender equality and generational equality, were conducted. Of course, Newroz is not the only medium for

defining Kurdish society and politics. Yet by blending the traditional form with modern needs and thus achieving a degree of necessary socio-political endurance, this display has become concurrently descriptive and prescriptive, providing projections for the public sphere - which has many more dimensions than political representations.

The study next situated the state-presented Nevruz tradition as an official effort to override the popularity of Newroz and re-conceptualize Turkishness for a greater population. While responding to the “heretical challenge,” it also introduced a new set of tenets and objectives associated with international Turkish solidarity. The Turkish state’s general handling of this operation, its prioritization of children as an audience, and its utilization of the state apparatus for a cultural contestation indicate resemblances to the beginning era of the republic. This bears testament to a marked continuity of nationalistic methods of governance and the tradition of using culture to pursue political ends. Through studying the evolution of the Nevruz concept within official discourse, this work also displayed an internal negotiation process between the nationalist and religious political lines that shaped the official version of Nevruz.

In both versions, pedagogical tools were used as a means of disseminating contested themes and establishing a scholarship behind contested history. Various politicized teaching and learning practices stand as dynamic processes involving reflection and action. In the Newroz case, this consisted of various informal venues for dialogue at festival-related sites which prompted a critical pedagogical attitude largely fueled by the individuals’ desire to find communal ground for understanding the widest scope of their identity, in addition to speeches and literature more traditionally informing this process. In the Nevruz version, there was a much more pronounced traditional and

formal set of teaching tools and interactive, festival-related activities which sought to instruct youth and the general public about the grand history of the festival in Turkish development and to warn of its rogue manipulation in the present. It also was intended to impress upon the youth a sense of ownership of the Turkish language and inculcate the values of Turkish nationalism which were being contested.

In both festivals, the conceptualization of the other led to the objectification of the national/ethnic self. The appropriated versions of the new year festival were used to differentiate identities and construct otherness. Still, however, the commonality of the two festivals qualifies them as venues in which this deep-seated cultural and ethnic conflict can be transformed. In the section detailing this conflict, the preliminary findings and the possible trajectories for future research were presented.

In many respects, the study produced more questions than answers. The augmentation of once lacking fieldwork data on Nevruz in the coming years, and the examination of the year-long social and political effects of these celebrations, will certainly enrich the investigation. What has emerged from this work is that, as chief examples of both distinctions and commonalities, the new year festivals as socio-historically constructed performances serve as complex and compelling models for counter claims about a shared but conflicted past.

APPENDIX

Prospectus for Future Research on the Potential Role of Traditional New Year Celebrations in Conflict Transformation

This section concerns an unanticipated outcome of my research as it relates to the areas of conflict transformation and resolution. This unexpected development in my work arises from some early field observations. From the very beginning, the presence of common themes of peace, unity and brotherhood in these festivals caught my attention. However, considering the deep-seated nature of the conflict and the highly tailored character of the alternative constructions, I was originally resistant to further research in this direction. Gradually, my continued observation of the peace-oriented discourse, not only in the slogans and on the banners, but also among the ordinary participants of the two separate festivals, lowered such hesitations. Eventually, I formulated the question that animates this chapter: “What role might the Nevruz and Newroz celebrations play in positively affecting the ethnic based conflict in Turkey?”

The rest of this appendix will consist of two brief sections: 1) a discussion of the conflict transformation framework, which I believe is the most appropriate scholarly framework to deal with my research question, and 2) a tentative empirical exploration of the subject matter, identifying a series of research questions that proceed within the conflict transformation framework. My intent in the first section is to identify and

introduce a comfortable theoretical home for these investigations; further work along this line would present a thorough review of conflict transformation literature, its historical antecedents and deep assumptions, and its location in the contemporary social sciences. In the second section, I intend to present a few informal observations and impressions in order to raise a number of research questions and indicate future directions for research within a conflict transformation framework.

The Development of Conflict Transformation Research

In investigating the potential role of the Nevruz and Newroz celebrations in the present conflict, I believe that the most relevant body of scholarly work is the conflict transformation literature. This research possesses several characteristics that make it particularly amenable to the study of cultural phenomena in the Turkish/Kurdish context: 1) it understands conflicts as potentially productive, and conceives of the range of possible positive alterations in a conflict quite broadly; 2) it does not focus exclusively on institutional processes, and so allows for the investigation of cultural phenomena; and 3) it encourages broader psychological, structural and cultural analyses of the deep roots of conflict. This approach is especially relevant to my own research domain, because its rich concept of conflict allows for a consideration of non-traditional venues, such as the Newroz and Nevruz festivals.

The conflict transformation literature is situated in the broader field of conflict studies, an area of practice-oriented research that grew significantly during the 1990's. Since that time, conflict resolution has occupied a significant place in the broader field of peace studies as a topic of study and as a concrete social practice (Wallensteen 2002: 5-

7). Aggestam identifies three distinct perspectives on the study of conflict: a) conflict management; b) conflict resolution; and c) conflict transformation. These perspectives supply different analytical frameworks and theories of conflict, and suggest different sets of practices that may be adopted with respect to conflicts. Of course, scholars and practitioners mix elements of these ideal types in varying degrees (1999: 17).

In the standard conflict management model, states appear as key actors, existing to maximize power according to national goals. This model is based on the paradigm of realism. From a realist perspective, international politics should be analyzed “as they were, rather than as they might be” (Hollis and Smith 1990: 21 cited in Aggestam 1999: 18). For a realist, the dealings of states are characterized by power struggles, and therefore the actions of states necessarily create a security concern for other states. Conflict management practice within this paradigm is marked by aggressive negotiations and cold wars.

Within this framework, adversaries are strictly understood as striving to influence each other by various strategies, including intimidation. There are several flaws to the realist approach, both as a descriptive method and as a paradigm for conflict resolution. In this framework, the settlement of conflicts does not tackle its deep causes, which are very often outside of the scope of narrowly strategic state action. The perspective limits itself to an immediate resolution of pre-defined conflicts of interest, and allows for no transformation of issue perceptions and frames. Focusing on the final outcome but not understanding the roots of the conflict can result from an outside actor, often a super power, imposing its will on its rivals, which often causes further acceleration of conflict in the future. Other flaws of conflict management, especially in my area of interest, are

concentration on interstate conflicts, and blindness to the effects and moral implications of unbalanced power between adversaries. (Aggestam 1999: 20).

During the 1970s, the approach of conflict resolution materialized as a reaction to the previous power-dominated understanding of conflicts. Conflict resolution perspectives underscore the existence of conflicts on all levels – interpersonal, societal, international. This allows non-state actors in the conflict resolution process to be drawn into consideration. Another virtue of this approach is that it underlines the significance of the reassessment of a conflict in enabling better resolutions. Conflict resolution perspectives view conflict as dysfunctional behavior between opponents stemming from unmet needs such as identity, security, autonomy, dignity, and bonding. When these universal human needs are not fulfilled, they can create disappointment and eventually violence and conflict. This approach seeks to end conflict by addressing its deep-rooted causes through a systematic approach that is conducted by trained third party practitioners, such as official mediators (Sandole 1993: 14-15; Tidwell 1998: 77-81 cited in Aggestam 1999: 18-21).

However, one of the weaknesses of the conflict resolution-based approaches is born out of the difference between the core and the periphery. Domestic factors such as the culture of the people, their priorities, and their living conditions might not be comprehended well by formally educated practitioners who are not familiar with a region or its people. Their training may not be attuned to local political, economic and cultural environments, and this limits their conflict resolution capabilities. Another weakness appears during the processes of conflict simplification and modification, which are needed if the conflict is to be resolved within a prescribed conflict resolution framework.

Whether they apply resolution-oriented meetings and workshops, or third-party mediations, these approaches presume an unsubstantiated similarity among conflicts. They expect adversaries to behave in accordance with their framework. These efforts downplay unique aspects of the given conflict that could be crucial in the resolution process (Vayrynen 1999: 138-145). According to Rapoport, these types of “technological fixes” that exercise power from the outside produce “pseudo-solutions” and block the channels of genuine conflict resolution, which rely on the “search for self-knowledge” (Rapoport 1989: 545-46 in Vayrynen 1999: 142).

Perhaps the most thorough and fruitful wave of current studies regarding conflict-settling processes comes from conflict transformation perspectives, which seek change through a dialectical process of mutual transformation and a focus on structural inequalities. Although this third category shares some assumptions with conflict resolution perspectives, it differs by highlighting social structures as the roots of conflict, and by critiquing the extreme generalization of the cases of formal conflict resolution. These approaches relate the formation of conflict to deep-rooted structures such as those of economy and religion. These structures generate disagreements characterized by “a real clash of interests rather than a perceived clash of interests” (Groom 1988: 112 in Aggestam 1999: 18-19). As in the definition of John Paul Lederach, “conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (Lederach 2003: 14).

This school of thought starts with the questions, “are conflicts ever resolved or are they only transformed? ... Obviously, a conflict can be ended by one side winning over the other, but is that what we mean by ‘solution’?” (Wallenstein 1991: 129). Conflict transformation approaches accept that conflicts change over time, and are intended to transform the reality of conflict and establish a constructive and peaceful foundation for future change. Within these approaches, the “creation of new institutions . . . establishing the social, political and economic foundations for a sustainable ‘culture of negotiations’” (Rupesinghe 1995: x) occupies a central place. These approaches also scrutinize the multiple levels and factors of conflict, emphasizing holism and structural inequalities, and present a dialectical process for ending conflict in which empowerment plays a significant role by creating the conditions for genuine mutual recognition (Northrup 1989: 58-59).

The central area of explicit disagreement between the conflict resolution and conflict transformation approaches concerns the methods and outcomes of the peace process. These differences are related to their different definitions of rationality, and their hypotheses regarding the main causes and backgrounds of conflicts. According to Vayrynen, “in a complex conflict, transformation rather than resolution is often a more feasible option. One reason for this is that the conflict transformation approach can be more easily linked with social and political theories, and thus new insights are gained. Technical conflict resolution is more likely to be stimulated by limited psychological and organizational theories. It may even be that the application of these theories to conflict resolution has come to a point of diminishing returns due to major changes in the conflict environment” (Vayrynen 1999: 150).

Although all of these forms of conflict analysis and resolution contribute to an understanding of conflict, I am ultimately most sympathetic to the conflict transformation approach. With its greater attention to non-institutional factors, such as cultural interactions, and a richer concept of the ways in which conflicts can change, it provides the most fertile theoretical ground for my own analysis. In the following section, I will present some basic observations from my fieldwork and discuss some of the research questions that they raise with respect to conflict transformation. The following section will connect specific aspects of the festivals with issues of conflict, and argue for the potential of cultural performances to play a role in a process of conflict transformation. Because of the dearth of methods in the study of conflict transformation through performance, the following part highlights a need for an attempt to fill the gap by gathering from diverse studies and utilizing diverse works.

Seeds of Conflict Transformation: Empirical Observations and Directions for Research

In the observations that follow, I will point out small cracks that show through the official veneer during the festivals, and address the contradictory impulses and potentials involved in the opposing re-appropriations of the traditional new year festivals. These observations suggest that the Newroz and Nevruz celebrations may become a channel in which unheard voices can be heard, expanding the room for dialogue between individuals and groups on either side of the split. The following areas of conflict-transforming potential, in particular, deserve further attention: a) the Nevruz and Newroz celebrations' capacities for re-shaping the image of the adversary party, b) the development of a new

sense of equality that may surface, or be surfacing, in the process of competition between the festivals, and c) the potential that a new conceptualization of popular legitimacy may grow out of the festivals.

Re-shaping the Image of the Adversary

At first sight, the overall picture that emerges from the contradictory positioning of Newroz and Nevruz is that of a cultural clash. A sense of mutual distrust is expressed in terms of stereotypical views and assumptions regarding the other side. Newroz is seen by Turkish nationalists as a venue of separatist Kurdish tendencies, while Nevruz appears to Kurdish nationalists as a new front in the campaign to cleanse the Kurdish culture from the cultural scene. Of course, there is a more complex picture beneath; these performances carry unintended messages, uncovering distinct traditions that still share much in common, and revealing shared sets of values that are, nonetheless, realized in distinct ways in their own unique contexts.

These unintended messages challenge the given framework for the conflict, such as that present in newspapers and magazines. Since the 1990s, all major newspapers have provided extensive coverage of the festivals. Especially newspapers printed on March 22nd, the day after the festival, which are always full of details regarding both the “friendly” and “adversarial” celebrations. Mainstream newspapers tend to treat Newroz as the extension of terrorist agendas, while left-leaning newspapers describe Nevruz as an artificial official celebration.

Still, the same newspapers unintentionally highlight commonalities between the two festivals. The bonfires, the colorful dresses, the traditional line dances, and the

peace-oriented banners and speeches reported on in both festivals display commonalities and ties between the conflicting parties; this potentially undermines efforts at completely identifying either party as an out-group. At the same time, an awareness of difference is necessarily present in this adversarial reporting, which undermines the efforts of one festival to completely subsume the other.

Further research could address the psychological impacts of this reporting, investigating the degree to which perceptions of these contradictory impulses penetrate various populations. Alternatively, further textual research could provide fine-grained analyses that assess the degree to which the papers adopt adversarial stances over time, and identify points at which those adversarial stances may give way to mutual recognition. As a matter of conflict transformation practice, one could experiment with influencing the media frames, attempting to develop sympathetic portrayals of the opposing party's festivals on the basis of these similarities. For example, under what conditions might a human interest story about a Newroz celebrant, drawing on the similarities between the festivals, be published in a mainstream Turkish paper?

Some seeds of mutual recognition, buried beneath an adversarial framework, can also be found in officially-sanctioned academic work. Take, for example, the main theme of the second national Nevruz conference in 1996, the theme of which being "Nevruz and Colors" (Tural and Kılıç 1996). Some of the paper titles, consistent with the surrounding tension over the ownership of the color combination of yellow-red-green, were; "Colors in Turkish Thought, Behavior, and Life and Yellow, Red, and Green," "Colors in the Turkish Culture," and "The Position of Colors in Turkish History." Even though the presentations were made to confirm the Turkishness of this color combination, the highly

publicized findings of these papers unintentionally bared the commonality of the two cultures by confirming a mutual reverence for the colors. Thus, the government's strategies of co-optation simultaneously undermine the efforts at de-humanization which legitimizes the status quo.

Future research could investigate such efforts at co-optation in depth, examining the arguments in terms of their intended effect (co-optation), and alternative potential effects. Such research could transform the effect into one of recognition by extending the discussion to include an explicit analysis of the Kurdish versions of these traditions, in both their differences and similarities.

As I displayed in chapter 3, the most used word in speeches and banners at the Newroz site is consistently “peace.” A similar peace-oriented discourse also dominates the Nevruz texts. Even at the most nationalistic end of the Nevruz spectrum, a constant repetition of “brotherhood” and “solidarity” is observed. Might this shared theme of peace form the basis of a highly productive conflict transformation frame?

This hope might be easily dashed by pointing out that even if the wording matches, the slogans merely overlay radically different goals. This certainly has some merit. As I argued throughout this work, the Nevruz discourse promotes unity and solidarity under the umbrella of Turkishness and serves to strengthen the Turkish nationalist ideal. Newroz, on the other hand, suggests a unity that requires the recognition and assurance of the Kurdish minority’s rights. In objective terms, the peace slogan that is heard in Diyarbakır calls for something very different than the one encountered in the Turkish Minister of Culture’s speech.

Nonetheless, the softer subjective and cultural effects may be remarkably similar. Individuals from each party, for example, show a remarkable interest in the other celebration. For instance, in an interview with one of the main Newroz organizers in 2002, I asked whether he had heard about the recently held International Symposium on Nevruz in the Turkish Culture Meeting in Diyarbakır between the 15th-16th of March, 2002. He not only eloquently put the symposium into perspective, but also furnished a copy of an official invitation that he had acquired.

I made parallel observations throughout my study of Nevruz. In one example, the editorial page of *Türk Yurdu* journal's 1994 Nevruz issue, I believe, contains a clear mark of the extent to which the dominant side of the conflict understood the minority's celebration: "As it is clearly known, the bandits did not remind the Turkish nationalists of Nevruz. However, it needs to be accepted that Nevruz was introduced to the whole of Turkey by the bandits. We should confess that we, the Turkish nationalists, by drawing a benefit from a subject brought up by the enemy, had the chance to reintroduce this very significant celebration, which we had been trying to revive since the 1970's, to the Turks of Turkey" (*Türk Yurdu* 1994: 3).

These mutual and close observations, even if sometimes made in a hostile way, highlight a common frame of reference between the two parties. There is at least a connection, however problematic, between the passionate observation of the other side's festival and the potential peaceful transformation of the conflict. But what, precisely, is this connection? And what role might this particular set of shared assumptions play in the transformation of the conflict?

As Marc Ross points out, culture shapes conflict behavior. Culture shapes what people consider valuable. It suggests proper ways to engage in disputes, and delimits appropriate frameworks for conflict. It supports the social body when disputes arise, and by providing images and associations, it distinguishes allies and enemies (Ross 1998: 161). However, the very same dynamic might trigger another set of interactions, and different elements of a cultural framework start to work, highlighting a “culturally shared frame of reference” (Ross 1998: 162). This pattern of shared understanding, presumed in the conflict, challenges the purely antagonistic notion of conflict. The second wave passes along information about the participants that is not available in the political-technical discourses; information full of recognizable cultural features such as dances, food, songs, and most importantly, human faces.

Future research could investigate the quality and nature of information being carried in this “second wave.” This could include direct textual analysis, as well as analysis of the impacts that such information has on individuals. Within the context of conflict transformation studies, the impact of public attitudes on the conflict may be investigated historically and compared to other conflicts; an end goal of such research may be to identify conditions under which changed public attitudes may more effectively generate meaningful policy change “on the ground.”

Finally, both the Nevruz and Newroz festivals are constantly in flux, which suggests that the festivals may adapt to become more conciliatory under certain conditions. Nevruz festivals, on the one hand, have included more and more outdoor activities over the last ten years as part of the government’s campaign to popularize them. Even as an official government affair, it is certainly not static. Adaptability is perhaps

even more evident in Newroz. During the peak years of the clashes, the main theme of Newroz was more struggle-oriented, though after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan the tone became more conciliatory. A fascinating step I observed took place when the Turkish state's Nevruz appropriation became common knowledge. Responding to claims of the pure Turkishness of the tradition, the organizers of Newroz started to highlight the commonness of the tradition for the all people of the region in order to undermine the nationalist tone of the Nevruz discourse. In the Newroz arena, from formal speeches to informal talks with the participants, I heard comments on how the tradition cannot be limited to one national identity.

Of course, these informal observations of the development of the festivals, which I have made as a close, though not scholarly, observer, should be verified or challenged through archival research and through interviews with long-time participants. In terms of conflict transformation, the issue of flexibility raises a number of interesting questions: to what degree can the Nevruz and Newroz celebrations accommodate other discourses? Under what conditions might they be able to accommodate one another? When might this accommodation amount to co-optation, when might it constitute genuine recognition, and how would we know the difference?

I believe the circle of reflexivity that I see in the interaction through these performances might be one of the sources available to reshape mutual understandings and transform misconceptions about the opposing party. The reflexivity that I suggest is “the mutually forming, dialectical process in which self and other significantly influence each other as mediated by some profound common experience” (Rothman 1997: 38-39). The Nevruz and Newroz celebrations' roles in changing the perceptions of the opposite side

can lead to the re-consideration of the definition of “us,” and reflexively start to transform conflicting theses. The changes in the recognition of the “other” could potentially freshen the negotiation framework and bring “analytic empathy” to the environment. As “a vehicle to enable disputants to view each other’s aggression as at least partially similar to their own” (Rothman 1997: 44), this analytic empathy might provide new hope for better understanding.

In Lieu of Conclusion

At the beginning of this appendix, I asked what role might Nevruz and Newroz celebrations play in positively affecting the Kurdish/Turkish conflict. As it turns out, this question implies many others.

If the pursuant questions are to be taken seriously, the observations of my field findings show that the presented cultural performances do not merely articulate political agendas and foster intolerance, but also might contain the basis of a broad mutual understanding and conflict transformation. This novel performance-oriented conflict transformation analysis underlines the participatory aspect of resolution, and suggests that marginalized actors may gain recognition through cultural performance. As a kind of direct democratic forum, these festivals might allow silenced public opinion to be voiced. The incorporation of a performance perspective in conflict analysis and resolution enriches our understanding of dynamic decision-making processes by suggesting the potential importance of cultural performance. One of the major outcomes of performance-oriented conflict resolution is reflected in its capability to extend the limits

of actorship, demonstrating a concrete scenario in which non-traditional political actors may become active in a process of conflict transformation.

Second, the performance-oriented approach can make it easier to foster mutual understanding by helping people to know more about the conflicted issues and the other side of the conflict. It underlines the commonality between the theses of the two sides and therefore raises hopes for coexistence.

Third, by underscoring the multidimensional nature of the dispute, it can deepen the context of negotiation and make it more inclusive. Although this chapter does not suggest an automatic link between settling the dispute and the presented festivals, it contains enough raw observations to further the discussion of the potential capabilities of these festivals.

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