

# Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies



Edited by  
**Christine Allison and Philip G. Kreyenbroek**

Acknowledgments ..... 7

Christine Allison  
Philip G. Kreyenbroek

Storytelling, History and Communal Memory in pre-Islamic Iran ..... 11

Exeter Spelt  
Religion and Oral History: The Origin Myth of the Yazidis ..... 23

Ligman Torgat  
Memory and Social Structures in Kurdish Society ..... 47

Karin Filmer  
The pre-Islamic past as part of Iranian national memory ..... 59

Yavuz Aykci  
Unacknowledged Memory: The nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the  
Archaeology of National Memory in the Turkish Republic ..... 77

Serag Mammadov  
The Ruins of Shiraz ..... 101

Yianis Kavakis  
Dancing the Figure of Halkedon ..... 117

Melissa Biles  
The oral and the text: Achaemenid and Sassanid Iran ..... 131

Thomas Loy  
The big fraud – the legend of the Yaghnob valley ..... 147

Margaret A. Mills  
The Writing of the Past ..... 161

Phan Kizilhan  
Oral History of the Yazidis ..... 177

Christine Allison  
Philip G. Kreyenbroek

2013

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	7
Christine Allison Introduction: Remembering the Past in the Iranian Cultural space .....	9
Philip G. Kreyenbroek Storytelling, History and Communal Memory in pre-Islamic Iran.....	21
Eszter Spät Religion and Oral History: The Origin Myth of the Yezidis .....	33
Luqman Turgut Memory and Social Structures in Kurdish Society .....	47
Katja Föllmer The pre-Islamic past as part of Iranian national memory .....	59
Yavuz Aykan Unacknowledged Memory: The nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the Ambivalence of National Memory in the Turkish Republic.....	78
Sertag Manoukian The Ruins of Shiraz: history, memory and forgetting in the Islamic Republic ....	95
Yiannis Kanakis Dancing the future of Hakkari's past, according to 9-year-old Ayfer .....	113
Melissa Bilal and Estelle Amy de la Bretèque The oror and the lorî: Armenian and Kurdish lullabies in present-day Istanbul....	125
Thomas Loy The big fraud – Recollecting the resettlement of the population of the Yaghnob valley .....	141
Margaret A. Mills 'Are You Writing Our Book Yet?' War, Culture, Structural Violence, and Oral Historical Representation .....	165
Ilhan Kizilhan Oral History of the Yezidis – Recollecting and Forgetting .....	177
Christine Allison Memory and the Kurmanji Novel: Contemporary Turkey and Soviet Armenia ...	189
Biographies .....	219

## The oror and the lorî: Armenian and Kurdish lullabies in present-day Istanbul

Melissa Bilal and Estelle Amy de la Bretèque

In 2004, we had the opportunity of working together in Istanbul, and becoming better acquainted with each other's research. We soon discovered that Armenian and Kurdish lullabies shared some important characteristics in terms of their textual, musical and emotional content. Textual and musical, in that they use similar ways to melodise a vocabulary of pain in recitative melodic patterns. Emotional, in that they constantly express a feeling of sorrow, which is experienced both as an intrinsic characteristic of being a woman, and as a constant trait of Armenianness and Kurdishness. Beyond similarities, we also came across important differences.

Our research projects were not conducted jointly, or intended to be comparative. We therefore prefer to present two separate papers, rather than a single, joint one. We believe, however, that when read together, these two accounts raise critical questions with regard to the gendered expressions of Armenian and Kurdish experiences in Turkey and the ways in which they were historically shaped in relation to each other.

### *Oror Mayr Hayasdanin [Lullaby for Mother Armenia]*<sup>1</sup>: On Home, Displacement and Armenian Lullabies

In her memoir, pianist Valantin Mazlum (1913–2000) gives an account of her mother singing her a lullaby:

Oror anush knign achern arer, Anush hoverč daruper, Im dadragis kunn yen perer, Bzdig tsenov eşem oror.	<i>Oror</i> sweet sleep is in your eyes, Sweet winds rocking, Brought sleep to my dove, I shall sing a lullaby softly. <sup>2</sup>
--	--

Mazlum recalls that the following morning, their next door neighbour pays them a visit and asks her mother “how come she knew the lullaby of her village”, expressing her surprise at hearing this lullaby from an Istanbulite Armenian woman. Manna, a new migrant from Anatolia, was most probably a genocide survivor, who

1 For an English translation of the poem, see: Blackwell, Alice Stone. *Armenian Poems*, Rendered into English verse. Boston, MA: Atlantic Printing Company, 1917.

2 A longer version of this lullaby, the poem attributed to P.S. Sahagyan, was printed in *Zhoghovrtayin Yerkaran* (Popular Song Book), Boston, 1925, p. 539–540.

had found refuge in Istanbul. Hearing the lullaby in the middle of the night, she was moved greatly, remembering the beauties of her hometown. Mazlum's mother's response to her clearly situates the lullaby as a means of remembering home and a context of sharing the feeling of displacement: 'You are homesick, Manna...'<sup>3</sup>

A textual analysis of the lullabies recorded from Armenian women at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proves that Armenian women expressed their love and good wishes for their babies in their lullabies, through which at the same time they expressed their desires, hopes along with sorrows and protests, experiences and emotions that most of the time remained unspoken in public.

Longing for the beloved who is in *bantkhdutyun* [exile] is a dominant theme in many lullabies from rural Anatolia, where women often waited for their husbands' return from big cities that they temporarily moved to seek employment. Hagop Mntzuri (Hagop Demirciyan) writes: 'All our songs had the theme of longing. Very few of our lullabies were real lullabies. Many of them were addressed to the one who was far away. Our mothers used to put us to sleep singing songs of longing. We were just excuses for them to cry out their yearning and suffering.'<sup>4</sup>

However, similar to many lullabies around the world, Armenian lullabies too express women's complaints about marriages without love, men's disloyalty, in-laws' attitudes, or the hardships of being a young bride and mother within the patriarchal social and economic organization of life in an Armenian household.

Lullabies from both urban and rural contexts that reached us in ethnographic and historical accounts, along with the ones that have been orally transmitted among Armenians in Istanbul, retain a memory of the way Armenian women perceived their social environment. Women do not only transmit societal norms, as often argued, but take active role in the process of producing, reproducing, and transforming social relations. A lullaby song transmits the unarchivable: secrets, senses, emotions, etc. Singing lullabies and the bodily interaction accompanying it, creates a memory stored on the senses that are evoked by sharing of body, voice and story. Lullabies create affective bridges between the singer and the listener, the caregiver and the child, or me and the Armenian grandmother singing me a lullaby.

The ethnographic research I have been conducting in Istanbul since 2001 suggests that an Armenian lullaby is a piece of heritage that one inherits from her/his grandmother, a memory that the grandmother shares with younger generations from her or her parents' lives. The following words by Sarkis Seropyan express this very well: "I was not told any fairy tales. The tale I was told was a story of exile that started in the Black Sea shores, passed in Eğin and ended in an orphanage in Malatya. I am talking about the road that my mother, grandmother, aunt and uncle passed. (...) At nights while putting me to sleep, my mother and my grandmother used to tell this story to me instead of lullabies."<sup>5</sup>

3 Mazlum 1993.

4 Mntzuri 1974.

5 Sarkis Seropyan, interview with Celal Başlangıç, *Radikal*, May 17, 2004, p. 7.



The generation who were born in the 1930s, i.e. grandmothers and grandfathers of my generation, are the children of genocide survivors. I believe that their narratives stand in a critical position with regard to the Armenian history and collective memory in Turkey. Scholarly literature, with a few exceptions, still lacks a thorough study of the way genocide survivors, who remained in Turkey, narrated their stories of home, displacement, loss and survival. It is mostly through their children's narratives and their ways of being that we develop a sense of it. In many accounts I have listened to, I was told that, under the ban over publicly mourning over the losses, songs, especially lullabies sung by grandmothers that encoded sorrow in metaphors, had become the means for transmitting the memories of home, displacement, and the massacres. Studying lullabies in this specific context raises significant questions about the dynamics of family as a space of intergenerational transmission and the way gender defines the idiom of remembrance.

Our grandmothers, as the generation of "postmemory,"<sup>6</sup> have been singing the lullabies they themselves were lulled with by their mothers or grandmothers as a means of remembrance and mourning. Some of those lullabies are from homes that were destroyed and everything that will give meaning to their belonging to those homes was erased. Thus, grandmothers' singing of these lullabies powerfully locates stories of presence of a people at a place at a time in relation to their absence today. In such a context, these songs become the symptoms of loss.

Grandmothers also sing lullabies that transmit painful stories. The affect that is transmitted through those is not only of loss but also of the impossibility of its articulation in public (which is itself constitutive to the sense of loss). Those lullabies today stand not only on the margins of the Turkish official history but also of Armenian modernity in Turkey, as expressed by a grandmother: "[My grandchildren] don't let me sing anymore. They get angry with me. They call it "old stuff." They say: "what's that, it sounds like you are lamenting.""

Yet singing lullabies to put children to sleep is still a living practice in Istanbul today and it is generally the grandmothers who sing them. Grandmothers also sing songs to create intimate contexts to transmit their parents' stories to the next generations. Through this relationality they offer their own commentary on events, be it historical or contemporary, involving personal, familial or communal matters. However, there are moments when they refuse to give their testimony for various reasons. The joyful lullaby that they sing instead, I argue, in that very context, points at the unrepresented, displaced excesses of the Armenian experience in Turkey.

In the musical memories of Armenian grandmothers, lullabies are categorized into two distinct repertoires depending on the context within which they were learnt, i.e. family or school. These repertoires however are no way mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they share a long history of interaction.

6 Marianne Hirsch defines "postmemory" as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (2008:103).

Lullabies created in Istanbul or in various other localities of Armenian Anatolia are still sung in Istanbul today. Versions of the following lullaby that was sung to me by my own grandmother, born in Istanbul in the 1930s, can be found in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century collections of Armenian 'folk songs,' classified under Istanbul or Bardizag [now Bahçeçik, Kocaeli]:

Kun uni tzakugēs kun uni, Yenikapun dun uni, Vosgiye chakhchakhner uni.	My little one needs some sleep, She has a house in Yenikapu, <sup>7</sup> which has Golden door knockers.
Nazerov nazerov, Varbed gerta vazelov, Sagarē letsun tuzerov.	Coyly coyly, Master goes running, His bucket is full of figs.

Similarly, sung by a grandmother born in Sivas and migrated to Istanbul in the 1970s, where she lulled her grandchildren with it, the lullaby below shares lyrics with a number of lullabies from Gesaria [Kayseri] printed in Mihran Tumajan's *Hayreni Yerk U Pan* [Songs and Sayings of the Homeland]:

Bar bar bareru, Asdvadz Babugu da oreru, Bar bar enem bar enem, Gabad gyem shor enem, Zadig kane nor enem.	<i>Bar bar bareru</i> (playful words), May God give you many days, <i>Bar bar enem bar enem</i> , (I shall do <i>bar bar</i> ) I will cut the fabric and make you clothes, I will prepare new ones for Easter.
--	---

The following lullaby, on the other hand, was most probably created in the present-day Republic of Armenia and sung to me by a young Armenian woman born in Kastamonu in the 1980s, who attended Armenian community schools in Istanbul, where she learnt it from her kindergarten teacher:

Oror oror im balas, Yes yerkem tu knanas, Kusanneri meghetin, Kez kun peri im balas. Yeraznerit mech desnes, Tu Masisi sarn yelles, Payts yerp zartnes yerazet, Araradē srdit mod kdnes.	Rock my little one, I shall sing you a lullaby and you shall sleep, Minstrel songs shall bring you sleep, In your dreams see yourself Climbing up the Masis hill, But when you wake up, Find Ararad close to your heart.
---	--

7 Now Yenikapı, a district in Istanbul.



Tun al kun yeghir, Indzi al kun dur, Surp Asdvadzamayr, Anushis kun dur.	You sleep and give me sleep too, Mother Mary, Give sleep to my sweetie
---	--

Starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, lullabies were collected, classified and arranged by Armenian folklorists, musicologists and composers. Aside from renditions of “folk lullabies,” Armenian composers of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also set lullaby poems into music, creating a repertory that has become very popular.

Among the lullaby songs composed and performed as art songs that are still widely transmitted orally among Armenians in Istanbul is Hagop Edilyan’s *Oror*:

Oror im mangig, Knatsir mēshig mēshig, Aghvor cermag lusēngan, Tsatets orranit vēran, Oror im mangig, Knatsir mēshig mēshig. Oror im tērchnig, Knatsir mshig mshig, Aghvor cermag lusēngan, Tsatets gagugh puynit vēran. Oror im tērchnig, Knatsir mshig mshig, Oror im dzaghig, Knatsir mēshig mēshig, Aghvor cermag lusēngan, Tsatets tsoghunit vēran, Oror im dzaghig, Knatsir mēshig mēshig.	<i>Oror</i> my child, Sleep peacefully, Beautiful white moon-light, Shone on your cradle, <i>Oror</i> my child, Sleep peacefully. <i>Oror</i> my little bird, Sleep peacefully. Beautiful white moon-light Shone on your soft nest, <i>Oror</i> my little bird, Sleep peacefully. <i>Oror</i> my flower, Sleep peacefully Beautiful white moon-light shone On your body. <i>Oror</i> my flower, Sleep peacefully.
---	--

Armenia as a mother weeping over her dead children is a powerful image in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Armenian revolutionary poetry. Many lullaby poems were written and set to music by men as revolutionary songs, where women were imagined as mothers raising their sons as freedom fighters or crying over their martyred sons. Lullabies that were attributed the capacity of expressing the most ‘genuine feelings of belonging to and longing for a homeland were mobilized within the context of the struggle for an independent homeland. Especially after the genocide on the other hand, the lullaby became the genre that articulated the grief over the lost homeland and its Armenian population. Avedis Aharonyan’s *Nazeyi Ororē* [Lullaby for Naze], written before the genocide, was reappropriated as the lullaby that powerfully expressed the experience of Armenians in 1915. It is still sung among Armenians in Istanbul today:



<p>Knir im balig, oror el ara.          Tu lats mi linir yes shad yem          latsel. Guyr grungnerë shuk u          shivanov, Mer sev yergënkits          Yegan antsgatsan,          Akh mer lernerum anonk          guratsan. Tu las mi linir yes          shad yem latsel.</p>	<p>Oh, sleep, my little one;          Oh, sleep once more!          Thou need'st not weep,          For I have wept full sore.          The blind wild geese flew,          Screaming mournfully,          Across our heavens black,          o'er vale and hill.          Blinded they were among our mountains          high!          Thou need'st not weep,          for I have wept my fill.<sup>9</sup></p>
--	---

This canon of Armenian lullabies, formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was broken and reconstituted within the context of repressive politics of remembrance in Turkey. The lullabies that made clear references to historical events were severely censored. However as I tried to demonstrate in this paper, grandmothers' lullabies retained and transmitted a memory and a mode of knowing: knowing the violence, knowing the silence, i.e. knowing otherwise that is constitutive to the Armenian "minority" subjectivity in Turkey.

Melissa Bilal

The 'sacrifice' of the 'stranger':

Kurdish displaced women lulling their sorrows away

The lullabies presented in this paper come from recordings I made in Istanbul's suburbs (*geceköndü*) in the course of 2003 and 2004. The women recorded are refugees in Istanbul from many parts of Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

In the recent past, especially in the past three decades, many Kurds have had to leave their villages and move to big cities of Turkey, or as they put it, 'to live in exile (*gurbet*).'<sup>11</sup> In this new environment, women's role in the transmission and transformation of 'Kurdishness' is of primary importance. In the home's intimacy, with babies and children as a main audience, women can speak and, especially, sing about what is forbidden or 'unwise' when they are out of the house. Over the cradle or the oven, women narrate, in melodised words, their exile from the village and their difficulties in a 'foreign land.'

9 The first stanza of Aharonyan's poem. English translation by Alice Stone Blackwell; see Blackwell 1917:251–252.

10 For detailed information on displaced Kurdish women's laments and lullabies in nowadays Turkey see Amy de la Bretèque 2004.

11 *Gurbet*, a word of Arabic origin, is used in different languages in the Middle East.

As a genre, lullabies are intrinsically linked with very pragmatic features of their performance context: they are sung to put a child to sleep. Kurdish lullabies, or *lorî*, very often speak of love, beauty, etc., and may also include wishes for the child to be happy. However, it is also a unique chance for individual expression, in which women speak of their sorrows, their problems, their feeling of nostalgia. Furthermore, lullabies also speak of the loss of people who used to be close to the mother, such as brothers, fathers, mothers, husbands etc. For these reasons, lullabies share many characteristics with laments.<sup>12</sup>

In the following lullaby, sung by a woman from Batman province, the singer includes narratives about the child's father's absence. She gradually opens her heart, and tells her sorrows.

Lorî de lorî, lorî, berxa bavê min lorî, Ezê berxa bavê xwe ra dilorînim, Ezê bi şîran û şekiran dimijînim, Wele ez deşt û zozanan digerînim, Ezê bi ser mala xalê wî da diçînim, Gidî xalê Eliyê min ne li mal e, Xerîbim, ne xemînim, Gidî lorî lorî berxê min lorî, Dayê qurban hoy biborî,	Sleep, sleep, my lamb <sup>13</sup> of my father, sleep I'll make the lamb of his father sleep I'll feed him with milk and sugar, I take him to the pastures, to the forests I'll take him to his uncle's house My Ali's uncle is not at home Oh, my sad stranger Sleep, my lamb, sleep Please forgive your mother, who 'll do everything for you.
Gidî ezê ji Eliyê xwe ra dilorînim, Gidî ezê berxê have xwe ra dilorînim,	I say, I am lulling my Ali to sleep I say, I'm making the lamb of his father sleep
Wele ezê dikim nakim lorî nayê, Gidî bi qurbana çavên reş û belek jî bela dikim nakim xew nayê,  Gidî lorî berxê min lorî. Min digot, Emîn qurban, min ji te ra got wisa nîne,	I did what I could, but he won't go to sleep However much I sacrifice myself for the sake of these speckled black eyes, sleep won't come Sleep, my lamb, sleep I said: Emin, <sup>14</sup> my sacrifice, this isn't right.
lo wisa meke, Wele qelûra te giran e,	Don't do that Sure, your suffering is great

12 The reverse can happen too: laments often include narratives deriving from the theme of lullabies. This is not only true in Kurdish laments. See, for example, Amy de la Bretèque 2005.

13 *Berx* literally means 'lamb.' In Kurdish, it is commonly used to address babies, especially sons.

14 Emin is the singer's husband and the baby's father. He left them to go to the country of *xerîb* (lit. 'exile(s),' in this case Europe, cf. below, n. 20). The singer does not say why he left in the lullaby.

Xwedê derd û kulê wan gelek e, Gidî te poştê me, goştê canê me helandiye,	God, their suffering is great You made our soul and heart suffer <sup>15</sup>
Xortê min, wer neke, Gidî dayê qurban bavê Eliyêm berê xwe daye welatê xerîbî gurbetê, Çiyayê Qerejdaxê bila biçewite, berf û baranê lê ke, Wele min dît wan xopanê ter û telûra Ji kula dilê hemu te ra helîn çêkir,  Te berê xwe dayê welatê xerîbî, te mîna bihur kir, Gidî lorî lorî Eliyêm lorî, dayê qurbana xwe biborî.	My little lad, don't do that Oh mother, my Ali's father <sup>16</sup> has turned his face toward the country of strangers Let Mt Karadag burn and put snow and rain in his way! By God, I've seen the fresh wonders of exile I saw how they have built a nest of sor-rows in your heart <sup>17</sup> You have gone to the country of exile, it is like you've passed away Sleep, my Ali, sleep, please forgive your mother, who'll do everything for you

A lullaby may also speak of displacement, war and loss. This is the case in the next example, sung by a woman from Siirt region. The singer includes some 'patriotic references' at the end of the lullaby.

De hayê, hayê, Ezê dikim nakim xewa delala dilê min nayê, Ezê berî bendikan ser singa delala dilê xwe bisedînim, Oy de hayê hayê Were şeve, çiriya kanî nalî, li min dibêje, Oy de hayê hayê. Oy ezê dikim nakim nava sibê da xewa delala dilê min nayê.	<i>De hayê, hayê,</i> Whatever I do, the beauty of my heart doesn't sleep. I give sweets and candies to the beauty of my heart, <i>Oy de hayê hayê</i> Come, it is night, the murmur of the well began to lament, it says to me: <i>Oy de hayê hayê</i> <i>Oy, whatever I do, even near morning the beauty of my heart doesn't sleep,</i>
Oy de hayê hayê. Min digot bûhar e, ne havîn e ne payîz e, Oy lê de hayê, Oy li min hatî, oy lê zivistan e çûne li kanî, Min dît berfek barî	<i>Oy de hayê hayê.</i> I felt like it was spring, not summer, not autumn, <i>Oy lê de hayê,</i> <i>Oy, it came to me: it is winter now,</i> Where have they gone? I saw it was snowing in the mountains of

15 The singer blames her husband for having left his house to find work far away.

16 The singer refers to her husband as her child's father. On the role of references to children in the communication between husbands and wives, see Hansen 1961.

17 The singer refers to her husband's departure.

li çiyayê Kurdistanê,	Kurdistan,
Oy lê de hayê hayê,	<i>Oy lê de hayê hayê</i>
Ezê diçim li çiyayê Kurdistanê,	I'll go to the mountains of Kurdistan
Dinêrim tev mêrg û kanî,	I'll look among meadows and springs,
Ezê dinêrim egîd û hevalan	I'll look, I'll search for the heroes, the
hogir hoy digêrim,	comrades, the intimate friend
Oy lê lê nava sosinan,	<i>Oy lê lê</i> , among the lilies, snowdrops and
berfîn û nergîzan.	narcissus.
Ezê deng kim ba kim wan heval û	I will shout and call those comrades and
hogiran,	friends,
Hunê bêne emê deng kin	Come, we'll shout and sing about our
ser Kurdistana şêrîn û delal bibêjin,	sweet and dear Kurdistan,
Were hayê hayê, de hayê oy,	Come, <i>hayê hayê, de hayê oy</i>
Were ezê diçim li Botana rengîn,	Come, I'll go to colourful Botan,
Cizîra Botan ber çavê min, Lê lê	I'll dream of Jezire Botan
dayê ezê lê dinêrim	<i>Lê lê</i> mother, I'll look at the enemy tanks
top û tanqên dijmin tê da qereqol	and bullets which the police put there
danî,	I will say, let the people of Kurdistan rise
Ezê bêjim gelê Kurdistanê tev rabin,	up together
	We'll go and expel the enemy
Emê biçin wî dijminê derînin,	<i>Ay</i> our homeland Kurdistan
Ay ji welatê Kurdistanê,	We will free our country with our hearts
Emê bi dil û can welatê xwe azad kin	and souls
Oy dê hayê, oy de hayê	let me talk about my grief
ezê bêjim ji kulan,	<i>Ay</i> , your mother's heart is full of sor-
Ay dîlkê dayîkê dil çewat ra.	rows.

#### A melodised space of pain

As J. Bowers<sup>18</sup> has pointed out, in many cultures, lullabies are a powerful means of transmitting notions relating to the roles of men and women, family obligations, family heritage, social habits, etc., to the child.<sup>19</sup>

One of the constant elements of Kurdish lullabies is the notion of exile (*xerîb*)<sup>20</sup> experienced by women when they leave their parents' household (*mal*) to get married.<sup>21</sup> Further, as is clear in the examples given above, there is very often a descrip-

18 Bowers 1993.

19 See also Ivanov 1994.

20 *Xerîb*, originally an Arabic word, is used in several languages of the Middle East. In Kurdish the word has a range of meanings; for instance it can be used for someone who is a 'stranger' in a certain place, or for one who has a sense of alienation. It generally takes on poetic and emotional contours.

21 On the complexity and richness of the notion of exile (*xerîb*) as opposed to the household in Middle Eastern societies, see Amy de la Bretèque 2008, C. Delaney 1991, B. Fliche 2004, 2006



tion of the relationship (and its problems) between married women and their husband or their mother-in-law, or there can be a reference to economic problems etc. In Istanbul, new subjects have been added, such as the exile from the village, the war with the Turkish forces, the difficulties of urban life. Many of the women with whom I discussed this insisted on the fact that these 'burning' subjects are difficult to express through words. They cannot be easily discussed with other people. Narratives of loss and pain are, however, often melodised, becoming performances including a wider sensitive range than normal speech. This specific mode of enunciation seems to be more appropriate to express one's suffering.

Kurdish women always insist that the feminine space is a domain of pain, suffering and sacrifice (*qurban*). Therefore women feel the need to sing laments, during which they sigh and say that they sacrifice themselves for their loved ones. Marriage, often at a very early age, is described as the first painful wound, caused by the move to another house. Young married girls say (and are said) to have deeply nostalgic feelings for their parents' house, and this makes them suffer. Additional wounds are caused by the fact that they are often mistreated in the house of their husband's family. This usually happens until they become mothers themselves, preferably of a son, which reinforces their status in the new home.

Every new birth further improves their status, and is of course a joyful event. However, women say that babies are also a source of pain. This is partly due to the relatively high infant mortality. Most women have had stillborn children, or children who died very soon. (When asked how many children they have, they always mention how many times they were pregnant and how many children they now have). What is more, mourning for the dead and taking care of the ill are female tasks. This brings women additional sorrows, especially if we consider that forcibly displaced women have often experienced the loss of young family members, and taken care of wounded persons.

As women insist on their suffering, it becomes their right and their duty to communicate this feeling to others. By expressing their inner pain, women give this pain a specific place in the community, and acquire a role in dealing with suffering. The best way to fulfil this role, they say, is by singing their pain. They add that singing helps them cope with pain and feel better. More generally, the state of constantly experiencing pain is socially considered to be a normal attribute of women's lives. This is a widespread 'posture' in the area, in particular for elder women. I witnessed similar attitudes in Azerbaijan (2005), as well as among the Yezidis of Armenia (2010a), where suffering women define themselves as 'burning hearts' (*dilşewat*).

Suffering and pain has its own vocabulary among Kurdish displaced women too. In lullabies and laments, women use the terms 'servant' and 'slave' to describe themselves. They confirm their willingness to suffer, to sacrifice themselves, and to die. A mother very often tells her child, 'I will sacrifice myself for you (*ez qûrbana te bim*).'<sup>1</sup> Their very existence acquires meaning through sacrifice.

---

and A. Vega 1989.

As with their spoken discourses, women rarely fail to reproduce painful events in their lullabies. This ‘musical’ commemoration of pain plays a necessary role in the construction of the collective characteristics of suffering. Displacement to Istanbul, moreover, produces the need to redefine these collective characteristics to fit the new circumstances.

#### Performing melodised narratives

Lullabies can take on various emotional levels, depending on the feelings of the performer. They sometimes include sighs and crying. The gestures accompanying the song are informed by the lulling character of the song. Women may move back and forth slightly – they do this even if they sing a lullaby when there is no child to lull. Another movement is to rock their legs slightly right and left, with the feet remaining on the floor. These gestures, as well as the context of performance, are to be regarded as intrinsic parts of the lullaby.

According to performers, lullabies differ from other kinds of “songs” not only in their performative features but also in the importance accorded to words. Women say that the lyrics are more important than the music, that lullabies are narratives put to music. They often describe music as a key to help them remember the words. It is the words that constitute the improvisation – which is always, in fact, a ‘free’ reproduction of well-known musical and textual models.

An important characteristic of lullabies – and also of laments – is the fact that their melodies follow a recitative pattern. The usual pitch variations of intonation are replaced by a melodic line which varies according to several factors but which always follow more or less the same path. Long phrases are often sung on one or two pitches. Words are stretched (the same sentence lasts more when it is melodised than when it is spoken normally). The lines are not composed of equal number of syllables, and their musical duration varies. As both lullabies and laments share these characteristics, it is very easy to pass from a lullaby narrative to a lament narrative.

Although few have been studied, melodised narratives using similar musical and semantic features can be witnessed on a larger scale including the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Performed by the cradle, in daily conversation, or in rituals such as funerals or graveyard feasts, these enunciations may be described alternatively as ‘lullabies,’ ‘laments’ or even ‘epic songs.’ Though taking on various forms according to the performance context, all these enunciations follow a recitative pattern and are linked to feelings of sadness, pain and loss.<sup>22</sup>

22 The similarity between laments, lullabies and epic narratives became obvious to me during fieldwork among the Yezidis in Armenia. This community presents some similarities with the Kurds exiled in Turkey’s big cities: they speak *Kurmanji* Kurdish and they are exiled from Anatolia. The use of melodised speech in expressing pain and loss is central among the Yezidis in Armenia. It is performed by men and women and can occur in daily conversations as well as in ritual contexts. For more information see Amy de la Bretèque 2010a, 2010b.

## An 'idyllic' past

As has been pointed out, lullabies nowadays often evoke the painful rupture with an 'idyllic' past, the present being reduced to the hardships of exile to a foreign land. This recent notion of exile can in fact be viewed as an extension of the notion of leaving one's father's house or, indeed, of the mere fact of being a woman. Here is a characteristic example of the contrast between a 'happy past' and a 'sad present':

De lawo xerîbim lawo ne livirim, Sal ji sal e xerabtirim. Warê min ê berê te da bu welatê xerîbî û xerîbistanê, Ma anka bira çima ne got, Ezê tenê lom, hazirim ax lê. De lawo lawo, ezê tu lo lo tenê mao. Lorî, de lorî, lorî,	I'm a stranger, son, I am not here As the years go by, my situation gets worse We have settled on the enemy's land, in exile Why didn't you warn us, brother, <sup>23</sup> I am alone, and I am ready to go back home My son, we have been left all alone, you and I, Sleep, my son, sleep.
---	--

The fact that going back to the village is impossible is very often mentioned in displaced women's lullabies. There is also a strong feeling that Kurdishness is associated with suffering. I have often heard women say, 'We are Kurds because we suffer.' And this idea is also present in lullabies.

Through lullabies, babies enter the intimacy of their mother's sorrows. The babies are theirs, they are not strangers (*xerîb*). In the husband's home, little children are the persons to whom mothers can confide their secrets, and they are seen as better able to understand the women than other members of the family. The intimate relationship between mothers and children is reinforced by the confessional characteristics of lullabies. The cultural elements transmitted through these may thus have a very strong (though implicit) influence on the child's personality.

Moreover, displaced Kurdish women invariably lull their children in Kurdish (they are usually not very comfortable with Turkish). Thus, lullabies may give children their first linguistic 'awareness.' Lullabies construct various levels of memory: individual memory, family memory, village memory, kin memory, and also the memory of the Kurds. Through these, women play an important role in the shaping and preservation of group memory.

Lullabies are oral sources of memory. They often preserve stories and memories which are otherwise hidden or altered by dominant history. Thus, lullabies can also be seen as elements of resistance to official discourses of history. The fact that these

23 'Brother' refers to the male authority figure in the family. He did not warn them about what was going to happen, nor tell them that they would have to live in exile.

songs are addressed to babies and little children reinforces the sense of resistance that women say they experience when singing them. The intimate relationship with the mother makes children extremely perceptive of all aspects (sound, pitch, melody, rhythm, stories, gestures), which helps them to construct a profound sense of identity.

In 'foreign lands,' 'far from their own land,' displaced Kurdish women of Istanbul often try as much as possible to keep their traditions alive. However, the changes in their ways of living, and the fact that they have to mingle with Kurds from other areas (as well as Turks), may contribute to a transformation of local cultures to a more standardized, general Kurdish culture.

In their new urban environment, women feel Kurdish and strongly claim their Kurdishness. Such a thing seems to be less necessary or urgent in the village. Thus women and their families develop a strong national feeling. Many young Kurds born or grown up in cities have joined the PKK guerillas. We might suppose that lullabies sung to them when they were little may have played a role in their sense of Kurdishness. While commemorating their sorrow, mothers may also be shaping a part of the future.

Estelle Amy de la Bretèque

### Bibliography

- Amy de la Bretèque, E. (2004): *Lamentations de femmes kurdes déplacées: les chemins de l'identité kurde en Turquie aujourd'hui*, MA thesis, Department of Ethnomusicology, University Paris VIII.
- (2005): 'Femmes mollah et cérémonies de deuil en Azerbaïdjan,' *Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles* 18:51:66, Geneva.
- (2008): 'Chants pour la maisonnée au chevet du défunt: la communauté et l'exil dans les funérailles des Yézidis d'Arménie,' *Frontières*, vol.20–2:60–66 (with a CD), Montréal.
- (2010a): *La Passion du Tragique: Paroles mélodisées chez les Yézidis d'Arménie*, Doctorate thesis, Departement of Anthropology, University Paris Ouest- La Défense.
- (2010b): Des affects entre guillemets: Mélodisation de la parole chez les Yézidis d'Arménie, *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* 23:133–147, Geneva.
- Blackwell, A.S. (1917): *Armenian Poems rendered into English verse by Alice Stone Blackwell*, Boston.
- Bowers, J. (1993): 'Women's Music and the Life Cycle,' *ILWC Journal*, 14–20.
- Delaney C. (1991): *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology and Turkish Village Society*, Berkeley.
- Fliche, B. (2004): "Ghurba/gurbet: variations autour de l'exil", EHESS-IISMM, *Labyrinthe* 17:127–129.
- (2006): "Le nomade, le saisonnier et le migrant. Une culture de la mobilité en Anatolie centrale?", *Etudes Rurales* 177: 109–119.
- Hansen, H. (1961): *The Kurdish Woman's life*, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen.
- Hirsch, Marianne (2008): 'The Generation of Postmemory,' *Poetics Today*, 9/1:103–128.
- Ivanov, A. I. (1994): 'Pričitanja nad kolybe'lju zapisannye v Juzhnoi Rossii' (Lamentions by the cradle in Southern Russia), *Zhivaja Starina* 4, Moscow.
- Mazlum, V. (1993): 'Kiughi Kisherner (Village Nights),' in *Yerazi Nman (Like a Dream)*, Istanbul, p. 9. Originally published 1969 in *Kulis (Backstage)*, no. 531.



Mntzuri, H. (1974): 'Mer Mayrerè (Our Mothers),' in *Grung Usdi Gu kas* (Crane, Where do you Come From), Istanbul, p.89.

Vega, A. (1989): *Mariage et accouchement chez les Kurdes de Turquie, représentations de l'alliance et de l'enfantement des femmes kurdes immigrées de la région parisienne*, MA thesis, University Paris X.

## Population of the Yaghnob valley

Thomas Lay

### Introduction

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, one of the main political goals of the Tadjik SSR was to rationalize the republic's economy and raise its efficiency, which first of all meant to 'cultivate the fallow lands' and increase the production of cotton. With this aim in mind the government in Dushanbe tried to encourage the population to move to the territory with the most fertile and productive soils. *Harakat be qonitda-i nasronat* – 'I came to the new cultivation lands' – was only one of many housing schemes of that time.

By 1971, when this proclamation was published in *Yaghnob-i azad*, the migration of the Yaghnobs<sup>1</sup> was almost completed. The resettlement started with a project. A landslide was predicted that would devastate three villages in the middle part of the valley. Between March 1970 and September 1971 the Yaghnob valley was emptied completely. More than 3100 persons were removed from their houses. The relocations were brought to Zhetysay and then incorporated into the then underdeveloped new settlements of the 'Hungry Steppe'. They were forced to abandon their life, amidst severe physical and psychological hardships, as workers in the district's cotton production. According to official sources the people of Yaghnob were not only satisfied with the move, but had in fact decided to abandon the homeland of their ancestors of their own free will.<sup>2</sup> This, however, was not the case. Most of the Yaghnobs who refused to be relocated were finally forced to enter the helicopters which flew them out of the valley. A couple of years later some of them clandestinely made their way back to Yaghnob. In 1978 most of these illegal returns were removed again. Even after being forcefully resettled a second time, some families

1. Malimova 1971.

2. In this paper Yaghnobs speak for all the inhabitants of the Yaghnob valley. It is to be noted that of 10 villages of the valley (over Tajik and ex-Yaghnob), but an ethnographic and linguistic description of the Yaghnob Valley and its inhabitants, see Anderson, 1971; Jones, 1940; Klonovsk 1964 and 1972.

3. See, for example Central State Archive of the Republic of Tajikistan (formerly Gosstatizhkom Tajik SSR) Dushanbe, files 1565 and 1566, 83, 104, 109; gazetteer TSA 1964, 3, 83, 191. The official Soviet view on resettlement is summarized in Aydar 1970.