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RÉSUMÉ :

Cet article examine la manifestation du ‘dengbêjî’, tradition narrative orale kurde, sur la scène du Théâtre d’État turc à travers l’exemple de « Vivre la mort » (2009-2010). Plutôt que d’appréhender le dengbêjî comme une influence esthétique ou performative sur la forme théâtrale, l’étude envisage son apparition comme un problème de visibilité façonné par des conditions politiques et institutionnelles. S’appuyant sur l’analyse du discours d’articles de presse, de déclarations publiques et de contextes de production, l’article situe l’émergence du dengbêjî dans le contexte politique plus large de la période d’« ouverture» de la question kurde en Turquie. Il soutient que l’intégration de la langue kurde et d’éléments du dengbêjî dans les productions du Théâtre d’État ne constitue pas une transformation profonde de la pratique théâtrale, mais plutôt une manifestation contrôlée et temporaire, autorisée par l’autorité étatique. En définitive, l’article suggère que la visibilité du dengbêjî demeure contingente et réversible tant qu’elle s’inscrit dans un cadre de favoritisme culturel plutôt que de reconnaissance institutionnelle, soulevant ainsi des questions plus larges concernant la représentation, la légitimité et la décolonisation au théâtre.

MOTS-CLÉS : dengbêjî, théâtre kurde, théâtre d’État.

ABSTRACT :

This article examines the manifestation of dengbêjî, a Kurdish oral narrative tradition, on the stage of the State Theatre in Turkey through the case of “Living the Death” (2009–2010). Rather than approaching dengbêjî as an aesthetic or performative influence on theatrical form, the study frames its appearance as a problem of visibility shaped by political and institutional conditions. Drawing on discourse analysis of newspaper articles, public statements, and production contexts, the article situates the emergence of dengbêjî within the broader political atmosphere of the Kurdish “opening” period in Turkey. It argues that the inclusion of Kurdish language and dengbêjî elements in State Theatre productions does not constitute a transformative impact on theatrical practice but functions instead as a controlled and temporary manifestation enabled by state authority. Ultimately, the article suggests that the visibility of dengbêjî remains contingent and reversible as long as it operates within a framework of cultural favor rather than structural recognition, raising broader questions about representation, legitimacy, and decolonization in theatre.

KEYWORDS: dengbêjî, Kurdish Theatre, State Theatre.

The experience of Kurdish theatre in Turkey is not only the subject of the art of theatre in its not-so-long-ago past to our day. It is possible to say that Kurdish theatre is affected by the political atmosphere in Turkey with the examples such as banning of the plays, taking actors into custody, closing the art centers which will be considered as the “negative” examples in the name of free art. What I listened to during my field work between 2012 and 2017 for my PhD thesis on dengbêjî’s impact on Kurdish theatre in Turkey usually pointed out to this fact of an oral history on what the sovereign does the other. Two examples stood out among these narrations of experience. The plays that were performed in Diyarbakır State Theatre in Turkish: “Ölümü Yaşamak» (Living the Death) in 2009-2010 season and “Taziye” (The Condolence) in 2013-14 season have had made use of dengbêjî tradition. What was the meaning of involving dengbêjî on the theatre stage of the state? Could this be seen as an influence of dengbêjî on Turkish theatre? Or tradition appeared on 2 isolated incidents? In this article, the influence of period’s political atmosphere on Kurdish theatre will be looked into in detail via the newspaper articles on “Living the Death”. Subsequently, the use of dengbêjî which is a tradition of the *other* will be discussed. It should be clarified that this study does not aim to provide a linguistic, musical, or ethnographic analysis of dengbêjî as a performative tradition. Rather than examining vocal techniques, melodic structures, or narrative variations within *kilams*, the article focuses on the conditions under which dengbêjî becomes visible on the stage of the State Theatre. The analytical emphasis is therefore placed on discourse, institutional framing, and dramaturgical positioning, drawing primarily on public statements, media representations, and production contexts. This methodological choice allows the article to address dengbêjî not as an autonomous artistic form, but as a cultural code whose appearance is shaped by power relations between the sovereign and the other.

Introduction: Dengbêjî, Theatre, and the Question of Manifestation

Dengbêjî refers to a Kurdish oral narrative practice performed solely through the human voice, without the use of musical instruments. Through *kilams*, dengbêjs recount historical events, collective suffering, and shared social experiences, ensuring their transmission across generations. Developing largely outside the frameworks of written culture and state authority, dengbêjî operates not simply as a cultural or artistic expression but as a crucial mechanism to produce collective memory and oral historical knowledge. Its performative modality allows the past to be actively re-enacted through sound, thereby disrupting linear distinctions between past and present.

Because the Kurdish language has historically been associated with oral circulation and forms of knowledge situated beyond state structures, dengbêjî has remained

marginal within official cultural institutions in Turkey. As a result, its inclusion on the stage of the State Theatre cannot be reduced to a purely aesthetic decision. Instead, it invites critical inquiry into how a tradition long positioned as “other” is rendered visible within a dominant cultural institution, and the political and ideological conditions that shape and constrain this process of recognition.

This article approaches the emergence of *dengbêjî* on the stage of the Turkish State Theatre not as a matter of cultural influence or artistic hybridity, but as a problem of power, visibility, and recognition. Rather than asking how *dengbêjî* aesthetically transforms theatrical language, the study shifts the analytical focus to the conditions under which a tradition historically positioned as “other” is rendered visible—however temporarily—within a dominant state cultural institution. In doing so, the article argues that such visibility cannot be understood outside the political and ideological frameworks that authorize, regulate, and delimit it.

Accordingly, the central research question of this article is the following: does the presence of *dengbêjî* on the State Theatre stage constitute a genuinely transformative intervention in theatrical practice, or does it function instead as a controlled, reversible marker of cultural difference enabled by a specific political moment? Focusing on the play *Living Death* (*Ölümü Yaşamak*, 2009–2010) and the public and institutional discourses surrounding its production, the article contends that *dengbêjî* operates less as an autonomous performative practice than as a cultural code mediated, framed, and circulated through state authority.

Methodologically, the study deliberately refrains from linguistic or musical analysis of *dengbêjî*. Instead, it relies on discourse analysis of newspaper articles, public statements, and institutional narratives. This methodological choice is central to the article’s argument: rather than treating *dengbêjî* as an ethnographic or aesthetic object, the study traces how it is articulated, justified, and normalized within state and cultural discourse. By examining the language through which *dengbêjî* is made legible on the State Theatre stage, the article foregrounds the politics of representation that condition its appearance and circumscribe its meaning.

Political Context and Kurdish Theatre in Turkey (2009)

2009 is an important year in which important discussions took place for Kurdish theatre in Turkey. It is possible to summarise the political atmosphere that directly affected the theatre as well in Turkey in 2009 as the following before taking a look at the country in the context of theatre: Democratic Society Party which is chaired by Ahmet Türk and which will have been banned 9 months after the elections won

99 municipalities including Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality in 29th of March 2009 elections. On 23rd of July, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced officially that they started an initiative with the words “call it ‘Kurdish question’, ‘Southeast question’, ‘East question’ or recently named ‘Kurdish opening’, we started to work on this problem”(«Kürt Açılımını Başlattık» 2009). The reflection of the initiative on the theatre started a discussion on performing plays in Kurdish in state theatres. The Minister of Culture and Tourism Ertuğrul Günay’s words on plays in Kurdish language in state theatres in a newspaper article is striking, “If Kurdish songs can be sung, then plays can be performed as well”:

“Günay who talked about his impressions on the Southeast during his Hakkari visit stated that he has visited the region numerous times over the years, but he has seen “such a desire for fusion and hope towards Ankara for the first time”. Günay who stated that in previous years there has been political demands such as “we would like to speak our language, express ourselves” said that “These demands are being overcome, our citizens see that. TRT broadcasts in Kurdish, our State Theatres does not see any harm in performing Kurdish plays. Previously, when artists talked about singing and making records in Kurdish, people attacked them. Now, members of the parliament as well as common people sing and tell jokes in Kurdish”. Günay, who said that “If Kurdish songs can be sung, then plays can be performed as well” on State Theatres’ performing Kurdish plays stated that it would be a foolishness to ignore this demand.” (Anka News Agency 2009a)

In response to these statements, the General Manager of State Theatres of the period Lemi Bilgin argued that the state could only help with the provision of stages for performing Kurdish plays and stated that Kurdish plays in state theatres is an impossibility:

“Let’s perform our plays in French, Kurdish, or in Laz language, it is technically impossible. There will be conservatories, people will study there, the phonetics and diction of that language will be learned, they will graduate, these artists will become teachers there, technically these are impossible. I can sing in Kurdish today as well as anybody who would like to. Performing a play is not as easy as singing songs. In our conservatories, we teach students for five years, with the Turkish language’s phonetics, diction and artistic structure. Those who demand these does not know these issues. The law that State Theatres were founded upon states that their aims are dissemination of art and also correct and fine use of Turkish language, publicity and ensuing the dialect unity. Every country performs plays in its own language.” (Anka News Agency 2009b)

After Lemi Bilgin's statements in June, the discussions continued. A meeting between Kurdish actor Murat Batgi and Abidin Pariltı who presented a poetry programme on TRT 6 during the period and Ertuğrul Günay took place in July (Altuğ 2009). Mustafa Kurt who was appointed to Lemi Bilgin's position in May 2013 in an interim role joined the discussions with the following words:

Why shouldn't there be plays in Kurdish? Yet, we need actors, directors, decorators and custom creators who are very fluent in Kurdish. It wouldn't be right to perform with actors who are not completely fluent in Kurdish. When these deficiencies are corrected, there would not be any obstacles to plays in Kurdish. Our Diyarbakır Directorate can do that. (Çoşkunserçe 2013)

It is possible to see that this statement was made in the light of the political atmosphere of the period: 20 years before 2009, in 1989, it is claimed that the lines "I want to speak my language" in the play "Yunus Emre" which was written by Recep Bilginer and directed by Zafer Kayaokay was changed into "I want to speak my Turkish" after it received too much applause by the audience since the audience thought the line meant Kurdish although it was about Turkish language. When one thinks about the influence of changing political atmosphere on theatre, this is the reason why it is very important that there are discussions taking place on performing Kurdish plays in state theatres in 2009 and 2010.

As a result of the increasing visibility of Kurdish theatre on the part of the state, the Ministry of Culture provided financial support to a group that performed in Kurdish for the first time in 2009 during the 2009-2010 season for the play "**Cerb**" (Experiment) of **Destar Theatre**, a nonverbal performance. (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Güzel Sanatlar Genel Müdürlüğü 2009) "International Ankara Theatre Festival" that incorporated Kurdish plays into its programme since 1997 was held 15th time in 2010 between 26th of November and 6th of December. "**Çîrokek Zivistanê**" (A Winter's Tale), directed by Haldun Dormen and performed by Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality City Theatre with the support of Ministry of Culture and Tourism met with audiences. Same year, 17th International Istanbul Theatre Festival included a Kurdish play for the first time. Henrik Ibsen's Saliho û Nurê (Saliho and Nurê) kilam (dengbêjî narrative) guided the Henrik Ibsen's "Nora: A Dollhouse" in the Kurdish adaptation and the play was performed with the title "Nora/Nurê" (İKSV Festival Arşivi 2010). On the other hand, Diyarbakır Police Department officers performed a play called "Mutluluk Elimizde" (Happiness is in Our Hands). Actors (police officers) who took the stage wearing local clothes performed their play with Turkish and Kurdish music and making accents (Mimesis Sahne Sanatları Portalı

2010). These examples are striking since they reflect the atmosphere of the period.

“Living the Death” and the State Theatre Encounter with Dengbêjî

“Living the Death”¹ directed by Tamer Levent and written by Orhan Asena was performed by Diyarbakır State Theatre actors in 2009-2010 season in such an atmosphere as a “play of peace”².

“‘Living the Death’ which will also include Kurdish narration for the first time in a State Theatre play will premiere on the 1st of October. Diyarbakır State Theatre (DDT) will open its curtains on October 1, with the play ‘Living the Death’ written by Orhan Asena and directed by Tamer Levent, a play on a vendetta. Levent told that the play with a small Kurdish narration for the first time will be performed as part of the project, 60 new plays on the 60th anniversary of the State theatres. Levent who stated that the playwright who is of Kurdish origin and from Diyarbakır has a style of ancient tragedy and is one of the best playwrights of the country, told that the playwright placed the regional accent inside the tragedy style smoothly.» («Diyarbakır Devlet Tiyatrosu Kürtçe Oyunla Perde Açacak» 2009)

The fact that Kurdish is now in a play by the State Theatres created huge reactions. In a statement during the rehearsal period, Tamer Levent told that he accepted the role of directorship for this play on a vendetta after the village of Bilge massacre (Butler 2009) and stated the following on the dengbêjî execution in the play:

“I am very impressed by the way dengbêj tell an event. Dengbêjs tell events such as history, love, vendettas. There is a tradition of troubadours here and it is alive. It won’t be as nice if we translate this to Turkish, to begin with, the guttural voices won’t fit. That is why we use this troubadour culture in its own language.” («Devlet Tiyatroları’nda Kürtçe Anlatım» 2009).

By stating that he previously acted in a musical called “**My Fair Lady**” (1977) for Ankara State Theatre and the play had some English lines, he created par-

¹ The first 5-minute broadcast of the play can be found on the State Theatres website. Before the stage lights turns on, Kurdish narration starts. see (Devlet Tiyatroları Dijital Oyun Bilgi Sistemi 2009).

² Diyarbakır State Theatre Manager Orkun Gülşen defines the play as a “play of peace” in the presentation piece in the play brochure. For the brochure see (Devlet Tiyatroları Dijital Oyun Bilgi Sistemi 2009).

allels between that play and the example of dengbêjî in “Living the Death”. According to this line of thought, having an example from the dengbêjî tradition in a play which takes place in the region is as normal as singing English songs in the musical “**My Fair Lady**”. However, one should point out that this comparison misses an important dynamic: having a Kurdish narration on the State Theatre stage is not the result of an aesthetic concern, even if that was the case, it was enabled by the political atmosphere of the day. The news titles that were published on the play summarised how the public reacted to the news of Kurdish incorporated into the play: “The Kurdish Opening by State Theatres” («Devlet Tiyatroları’ndan Kürtçe Açılımı» 2009), “We Make Art, Not Politics” («Biz Sanat Yapıyoruz Siyaset Değil» 2009), “The Curtains of the State Opens with the ‘Opening’” (NTV 2009), “If there is an opening, it is the creation of this theatre 21 years ago» (Özkartal 2009) Nedim Saban states the following on the news that is broadcast on the media on “Living the Death”:

“The most striking aspect of Tamer Levent’s direction was not the Kurdish components that drew media’s attention to the play in my opinion. Dengbêj meant the epic narration without instruments in the regional culture, it can be correct that vendettas is told this way dramaturgically in the Kurdish culture’s oral tradition, yet it personally repulsed me that it is associated with violence from time to time...» (Saban 2011)

In a subsequent article, Saban defined “Living with the Death” as a play “performed by Diyarbakır State Theatre half-Turkish, half-Kurdish with an curiosity of opening and embellished with the music of Şivan Perver» (Saban 2010, 31 March) On the other hand, it is striking that the personnel including the director who worked on this play claimed that the use of Kurdish and dengbêjî tradition has only an aesthetic aim. The assistant director Yurdaer Okur says the following on Kurdish being include in the play:

“Because this language is being spoken in the region. In this play, we would have wanted a Laz aunt singing an elegy in Laz. This is a situation required by art. Art reflects the society and it is always one step ahead of it.” («Biz Sanat Yapıyoruz Siyaset Değil» 2009)

Similarly, assistant director of the play, Şamil Kafkas stated that Orhan Asena did not define the characters as Kurdish; but since the play tells the story of a vendetta in Southeast region and people in this region speaks Kurdish, the play consisted of both Turkish and Kurdish languages (Özkartal 2009). Diyarbakır State Theatre Manager of the period, Orkun Gülşen explains the choice of presenting an example from dengbêj tradition in terms of its contribution to the

theme of play artistically. («Devlet Tiyatroları'nda Kürtçe Anlatım» 2009) Gülşen states that “the opening was not started”³ when the decision for the play was decided in April that year as answer to those who saw the decision to perform the play is an a “show off” to the general public when the opening is agenda (Özkartal 2009). Gülşen who sees that the opening and the state theatre's decision to perform a play with Kurdish lines for the first time is coincidental, stated that they told the director Tamer Levent how the an example of dengbêjî tradition would create sympathy in the region and serve the artistic values of the play (Özkartal 2009). Şamil Kafkas told that they have performed that is set in the region before, but the dengbêjî tradition were not employed in these production since the structure of the plays were not suitable (Özkartal 2009). Kafkas answered the question whether they would use Kurdish in these plays if the play structure would have been suitable with the following answer:

“The reason for our existence as the state theatre is the correct use of Turkish language. But you can use French of German as the artistic necessity while performing a play... There is no inconvenience to using Kurdish as well in Diyarbakır.” (Özkartal 2009)

As one can understand from Şamil Kafkas' words, the approach is similar to that of Tamer Levent when he explains the use of songs in English language in “**My Fair Lady**” musical. Kafkas also claims that involving dengbêjî tradition is because of an aesthetic motivation and he normalizes it as if it is independent of the period's political atmosphere. Aesthetic necessity is explained through pointing out voice/guttural/resonance that can be defined as Kurdish. Stating that Orhan Asena is from Diyarbakır, Gülşen told that how Asena's fluency in Kurdish was reflected in the play:

“He is so in command of the language, there is a music in the play because of the voice and this music led us into using the region's language. We have a funeral scene in the play. In this scene, our women sin elegies. These elegies are both in Kurdish and Turkish. We also have a farewell scene in the play. Our artists sang a song from the region in Kurdish. We displayed our stance against vendattas in both Kurdish and Turkish.” (Haber Diyarbakır 2009)

³ However, on 12th August 2005, the Prime Minister of the period Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Kurdish question is his own question and gave the sign of the opening for the following period. There had been important steps taken since the first months of 2009. For example, TRT 6 started broadcasting in Kurdish on the 1st of January, 2009. Erdoğan, in his inauguration speech, told that broadcasting in Kurdish is an important opening and at the end of his speech, he said “Congratulations” first in Turkish, then in Kurdish. See (Bianet 2009)

Like Orkun Gülşen, Tamer Levent also states that the voice of the play reminds one of using dengbêj. Levent argues that the Turkish language that are used in the region has a resonance similar to dengbêj -which he calls guttural- and Asena reflected this in his play. Therefore, the guttural of the play is the guttural of Turkish that people speak in the region. It is claimed that dengbêjî is employed in the play since it has the same guttural:

“Just like in other plays, we wanted to make use of dengbêj culture of the region since it fits into the original structure of the play. It affected us great deal that telling stories without instruments and the guttural that the region uses is also in dengbêj culture. We see the same guttural in the Turkish language that is spoken in the region. Besides, Mr. Orhan reflected the same guttural in his play.” («Biz Sanat Yapıyoruz Siyaset Değil» 2009)

In his critique of the play, Üstün Akmen found this vocal intersection aesthetically positive and stated that women sang elegies in both Kurdish and Turkish and there is a Kurdish song from the region in the Mustafa’s farewell scene in which women does “helhele”⁴. Akmen also claimed that the shaman dance that is displayed with high tempo and dynamically in the same scene with the accompaniment of bandirs also enlivened the play (Akmen 2009). He explained the influence of dengbêj in the play with following words:

“In his work “Living the Death”, Tamer Levent made use of dengbêj culture which is one of the most important rituals that Kurds who are base in Mesopotamia for centuries. He worked on “dengbêj” that literally means “passing a word through word”. Since all important events that Kurdish society lived through is expressed through kilams (songs), he added non-instrumental musical stories that require a regional guttural voice. This addition fit perfectly to the play’s original structure.” (Akmen 2009)

Within Living the Death, the dengbêj does not function as a fully developed character but rather as an episodic dramaturgical figure. Dengbêjî is integrated as an additive element rather than a constitutive one, reinforcing the argument that its presence represents a manifestation of cultural visibility rather than an impact that reconfigures the play’s dramaturgy.

Manifestation: Dengbêjî and the Mechanism of Cultural Favor

While the political atmosphere of the era enabled the use of Kurdish on the

⁴ It means voice that is made in unison in folk dances. “Helhele”, (Erten 1994).

state's stage, one can see that dengbêjî being performed on the stage as a cultural code has a meaning beyond a mere aesthetic need. State had Kurdish language and dengbêjî on its own stage for the first time since the theatre's foundation in Diyarbakır (29th of October, 1988). At this point, it would not be wrong to say that dengbêjî was used as a tool for the relationship with the Kurdish spectator. We think that having a well-known tradition performed on the stage and the prime minister of the period finishing his speech with Kurdish words on the auguration of the Kurdish TV station has the same motivation. While both cases is based on a temporary communication with the receiver on something that belong to her, it transforms the language, culture and tradition of the receiver an ideological tool. In both cases, the sympathy that would like to be created is touristic and therefore, temporary.

One should state that the only familiar culture code in the play is not dengbêjî. One of the folk dances of the region “**Keşeo**” is also performed and the bandirs are played in the play. The difference of dengbêjî from these cultural codes is the fact that it uses language and makes Kurdish language heard. It wasn't this easy to have dengbêjî on theatre stage in other instances.

Beyond Recognition and Favor

The following lines on the page of culture and art of Milliyet Newspaper on the 15th of April, 1998 about Murathan Mungan is striking:

...at the end of this month, Mungan goes to Diyarbakır as the guest of Urartu Bookstore. For this trip, he is accompanied by Gazete Pazar's music critic Naim Dilmener who is the oldest friend of his life and he grew up together. In Diyarbakır, a petition is being prepared with 10000 signatures for Diyarbakır State Theatre who would not include Mungan's Mesopotomia Trilogy, «Mahmud ile Yezida», «Taziye» and «Geyikler Lanetler» to its repertoire. (Atakoğlu 1998)

There is no information regarding the outcome of this petition, yet it can be seen that its call has been received by its recipient. Diyarbakır ST added a Murathan Mungan play (Taziye) 15 years after this call, in 2013-2014 season⁵. Meanwhile,

⁵ After this call, Diyarbakır ST performed the “Şahmeran” play that is adopted from oral culture by Erhan Bener in 1999-2000 season. In the play brochure, Nurhan Karadağ tells the following: “Erhan BENER wrote the Şahmeran story by reinterpreting it. Firstly, we would like to impress our audience in its own cultural identity as Diyarbakır State Theatre and share the feeling of “pleasure” caused by theatre with the world audience.”, “Şahmeran”, Diyarbakır State Theatre Play Brochure, 1999-2000.

at an earlier period, Diyarbakır City Theatre started the 2000-2001 season with the first play of Mesopotomia Trilogy “Mahmud and Yezida” written in 1980. The play was banned twice by State of Emergency Regional Governorship because there is a Kurdish kilam called “**Kirîve**”⁶ sung by Şivan Perver at the finale of the play and use of Kurdish words. Later, the play was performed after being censored partially. The play that was banned after the premiere on 12th January, 2001 was allowed to be performed after the mayors of Diyarbakır had a meeting with the governor of the period Cemil Serhadlı. Mayor of the period Feridun Çelik and People’s Democracy Party city chairmen watched the first performance after the ban. After this performance, the play was banned once again. According to the news item of Cumhuriyet newspaper on the 31st of January 2001, the second ban was lifted (Karaaslan 2001). Metin Boran, the art director of Diyarbakır City Theatre and the director of “Mahmud and Yezida” got a one-month prison sentence because he featured Şivan Perver’s kilam “**Kirîvê**”, later the imprisonment was turned into a fine (Mazlumder 2003). The second play in the Mesopotomia Trilogy, Taziye (1982) was translated into Kurdish by Dilawer Zeraq and Muharrem Cebe and became the first play in Kurdish language performed by Diyarbakır City Theatre (DCT) in 2003 under the directorship of Metin Boran. The City Theatre that faced bans during the performance of the first play of the trilogy performed the second play in Kurdish. Exactly ten years later, in 2013, Diyarbakır State Theatre opened the 2013-2014 seasons with the play “Taziye”. The play was directed by Yurdaer Okur who was the assistant director of the play “Living the Death”. The elegy in the play was performed in Kurdish while for the dengbêj voice, play-back was used («Diyarbakırlılar Taziye’de Buluşacak» 2013). These three examples given for the events surrounding the Diyarbakır performances of Mesopotamia trilogy and the play “Living the Death” that was previously discussed shows us the following chronology:

- 1 “Mahmud and Yezida” which featured Kurdish words and a traditional kilam with the storyline of the play and performed by DCT in 2001 was banned numerous times and censored.
- 2 DCT’s first Kurdish play was “Taziye” performed in 2003.
- 3 In 2009, Diyarbakır ST performed in Kurdish for the first time with the play “Living the Death” and an example from dengbêj tradition was presented on the stage.
- 4 Dengbêj voice was used by Diyarbakır ST in the play “Taziye”.

The discussions surrounding “Living the Death” and the short chronology above that summarized the period displays the manifestation of dengbêj tradition in

⁶ In this kilam, there is a dialogue between an Ezidi woman and a Muslim man. For the lyrics of the kilam, see (Bayrak 2002)

Turkish theatre. This is a manifestation, not an impact. While impact changes the chemistry of the impacted, manifestation likes to display itself and manifestation would like to shine and be seen where it is a tourist. For the influenced, nothing remains the same while the manifested is the choice of the sovereign. What we see is solely what we choose to see. On the other hand, it doesn't mean that what we don't see does not exist. Impact does not take place in the duality of sovereign/*other* because the *other* cannot impact the sovereign. The manifestation of dengbêjî tradition in these examples is a ideological favor shown by the sovereign to the *other*. One can see that dengbêjî contributed to the dramaturgically and aesthetically to these plays, yet the ground which this contribution moves is political. As a result, a one-person tradition of this geography, dengbêjî could only manifest itself in a play which takes its subject matter from the region/set in the region since it is coded as a Kurdish tradition. Therefore, the use of dengbêjî as a tradition of the *other* by the sovereign is not only the subject of theatre. Then, should every meeting of sovereign with the *other* should be seen as a favor?

Conclusion : After Manifestation? The Question of Continuity

In the play «Siyabend ile Xecê» performed by Van State Theatre in 2021-2022 season, written by Cem Düzova and directed by Gül Urgan Yıldız also used dengbêjî tradition and the “dengbêj” role was performed by Engin Begce («Siyabend ile Xecê»). Van State Theatre included the dramatic text which was inspired by the narration originally in Kurdish in 2021. In the case of this example, one should state that «Siyabend û Xecê» is a dengbêj narration. The source of the play for the playwright is this narration. In this context, the fact that there is a dengbêj in the play is not surprising. This move of normalisation of ours can be defeated with the following argument: It is also not surprising there wasn't any dengbêj used in the state theatre productions after this case. The main problematic here is whether the mechanism of favors does work in the case of this play. My claim is that the use of any cultural code of the *other* by the sovereign should be seen as a favor whether it is a small or big one, because favor is hierarchical. In the context of this work, my main proposition in the case of the first manifestation of the dengbêjî tradition on the Turkish stage is that the decolonisation of theatre in Turkey requires the disintegration of the mechanisms of favors and rejection. This should not have the subjectivity of a one-sided intention questioning. On the contrary, the dynamics of the *other* which enables the mechanism should also disintegrate. “Recognition” instead of rejection and meeting instead of favors should be offered. Only then, one could talk about impact rather than manifestation.

Rather than marking a linear progression toward inclusion, the appearance of dengbêjî on the stage of the State Theatre reveals a fragile and conditional form of visibility. As long as dengbêjî emerges only within regionally coded narratives, exceptional political moments, or dramaturgical frames that leave the dominant theatrical structure intact, its presence remains a manifestation rather than an impact. This distinction matters not only for the analysis of Kurdish theatre, but also for broader discussions on cultural recognition within sovereign institutions. To move beyond manifestation, the encounter between the sovereign and the other must shift from a logic of favor to one of structural transformation, in which cultural forms are not merely displayed but allowed to reshape the conditions of representation themselves.

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