Activism And Its Moral and Cultural Foundation: Alternative Citizenship and Women's Roles in Kurdistan and the Diaspora (ALCITfem)

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W 22 numerze naszego czasopisma przedstawiamy pracę magisterską Rodiego Hüseyina Keskina zatytułowaną *Cultural Initiatives for Language Revitalisation among Kird/Zaza Women in Turkish Kurdistan* (Kulturowe inicjatywy na rzecz rewitalizacji języka wśród Kurdyjek Zaza w Kurdystanie tureckim) przygotowaną w ramach jego udziału w projekcie *Aktywizm i jego moralne i kulturowe podstawy: alternatywne obywatelstwo i rola kobiet w Kurdystanie i Diasporze* (ALCITfem). Praca została obroniona dnia 26 września 2023 roku.

In the 22nd issue of the bulletin we present the Master Thesis by Hüseyin Rodi Keskin entitled *Cultural Initiatives for Language Revitalisation among Kird/Zaza Women in Turkish Kurdistan* prepared in the scope of the research project entitled *Activism and Its Moral and Cultural Foundations: Alternative Citizenship and Women's Roles in Kurdistan and the Diaspora* (ALCITfem). Mr Keskin was one of project's participants. The thesis was defended on 26th of September 2023 at the Jagiellonian University.

Hejmara 22 ya kovara me teza masterê ya Rodî Hûseyin Keskîn pêşkêş dike ya bi navê Însyatîfên/Destpêşxeriyên Çandî ji bo Zindîkirina Zimanê di Nava Jinên Zaza de li Bakurê Kurdistanê. Tez di çarçoveya projeya lêkolînî de ya bi navê Çalakvanî û Bingehên Wê yên Exlaqî û Çandî: Hemwelatiya Alternatîf û Rolên Jinan li Kurdistan û Diasporayê (ALCITfem) hatiye amadekirin û Rodî Hûseyin Keskîn beşdarê wê bû. Tez roja 26ê îlonê sala 2023 hat pejirandin.

Content (Naverok)

Cultural Initiatives for Language Revitalisation among Kird/Zaza Women in Turkish Kurdistan

Master Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Most European and American scholars working in the field of endangered languages focus primarily on the endangered languages of Europe or the Americas; there are not many academic studies on Muslim indigenous communities in the Middle East and their linguistic and cultural struggles. However, it is valuable to relate the minority communities in the Middle East, such as the Zaza Kurds, to the global language revitalisation struggle, because they can benefit from the experience of other indigenous communities in reviving their language and culture. Therefore, this master thesis seeks to bridge the existing gap and provide some insight into the revitalisation policies of the Kurdish people, women in particular.

The participation of Zaza women in Kurdish political movements since the 1960s has played a significant role in developing Kurdish identity and in building a sense of citizenship that offers alternative narratives to the assimilation policy of the Turkish state. According to Faye Ginsburg, indigenous communities possess their own collective narratives and histories, some of which are marked by traumatic experiences. These narratives have been systematically erased in the dominant culture's national narratives and are at risk of fading even within local communities. The efforts of Zaza women to keep the Zazakî language and culture alive contribute significantly to the continuity of their language and culture and to the transfer of their 'collective narratives and histories' to future generations, despite the state's oppressive policies.

The master thesis departs from discussing the theoretical aspects of language revitalisation. It presents the situation of Zaza people and their language in Turkey, discusses the historical background of Kurdish women activism and finally analyses motivations behind revitalisation as well as various practices and undertakings of Zaza women, such as the collecting of folklore, creating music theatre and literature in Zazakî, organising demonstrations popularising language revitalisation and preparing children's TV programmes in Zazakî. It also draws some comparisons between Zaza women's language revitalisation and that of such movements elsewhere especially in South America. This study is based on interviews with 12 women activists, 11 Zaza and one Kurmanji who learned Zazakî, living in the Çewlîg/Bingöl, Amed/Diyabekir, and Dersim/Tunceli provinces of North Kurdistan, who have become active in the field of Zazakî revitalisation and find it an important task in their lives.

KİLM NUSTE

Akademîsyenê ewropayij û amerîkayijê ke ziwananê binê tehlukeyî ser o xebitîyenê, zafêrî bala xo danê ziwananê Ewropa û di Amerîkayan ser. Xebatê akademîkê ke şaranê Rojhilatê Mîyanên ê cayî û musilmanan û mucadeleyanê înan ê ziwan û kulturî ser o ameyê kerdene, hetê hûmare ra zaf nîyê. Labelê, muhîm o ke komelanê Rojhilatê Mîyanên ê cayîyan ê sey kurdanê zazayan û mucadeleyê reynaganîkerdişê ziwananê dinya de tekildar bikerê, çike beno ke ê zî eşkenê tecrubeyanê komelanê cayîyan ê bînan ra seba ganîkerdişê ziwan û kulturê xo fayde bivînê. Coka, amancê nê tezê masterî o yo ke na kêmanîye telafî bikero û polîtîkayanê reynaganîkerdişî yê şarê kurdan, bi taybetî zî yê cinîyan, ser o melumat bido.

Serra 1969'î ra heta nika, beşdarbiyayîşê cinîyanê zazayan ê hereketanê kurdan ê sîyasîyan, averşîyayîşê nasnameya kurdan û hîsê hemwelatîyîye de rolêdo zaf muhîm girewt. Na zî vera polîtîkaya asîmîlasyonê dewleta tirkan de gamêda alternatîfe hesibîyena. Goreyê Faye Ginsburge, komelê cayî wayîrê xatira û tarîxê xo yê kolektîf ê ke tayê înan tecrubeyê trawmatîk û dejnak ê. Nê xatireyî hetê tarîxnusanê dewletanê serdestan rad yenê pakkerdene û heta mîyanê komelanê cayîyan ê mexduran de zî binê tehlukeyê vîndîbîyayîşî de yê. Vera polîtîkaya dewlet a zordarîye de, reynaganîkerdişê ziwan û kuturê înan, dewamîya ziwanê înan û transferê 'sanik û hîkayeyanê xo yê kolektîfan' de lebatê cinîyanê zazayan cayêdo zaf muhîm genê.

No tezê masterî, teorîyanê ganîkerdişê ziwanî ser o vindeno. Reyna hem wezîyetê şar û ziwanê zazayanê Tirkîya û hem zî munaqeşeyanê aktîvîzmî yê cinîyanê kurdan ê tarîxîyan ser o vindeno. Zafêrî bala xo dano motîvasyonê reynaganîkerdişê ziwan, motîvasyon û xebatanê cinîyanê zazayan ser, zê nimûne; aredayîşê folklorî, kaykerdişê tîyatro û afirnayîşê edebîyatî yê bi ziwanê zazakî, organîzekerdişê aktîvîteyanê ganîkerdişê ziwanî û hazirkedişê bernameyanê televîzyonî yê bi zazakî seba domanan. Destpêka na xebate de ganîkerdişê ziwanê zazakî bi destê cinîyanê zazayan û eynî akvtîvîteyê cinîyanê Amerîkaya Başûrî yenê têverşanayene. Na xebate 12 roportajanê cinîyanê aktîvîstan ra ameya hazirkerdene, înan ra 11 cinîyî zaza û yewe kurmance bîyê. Nê cinîyî şaristananê Çewlîg (Bingöl), Amed (Diyabekir) û Dêrsimî (Tunceli) yê Kurdistanê Bakurî de ciwîyenê. Nê aktîvîstî ziwanê zazakî ser o xebitîyenê û ziwanê xo de mucadelekerdişî muhîm vînenê.

ABSTRAKT

Większość badaczy zajmujących się językami zagrożonymi koncentruje się przede wszystkim na językach Europy lub obu Ameryk. Natomiast niewiele jest studiów na temat społeczności muzułmańskich na Bliskim Wschodzie oraz ich inicjatyw na rzecz rewitalizacji języków rdzennych i wyrażonej poprzez nie kultury. Dlatego też wartością jest włączenie społeczności mniejszościowych na Bliskim Wschodzie, takich jak Kurdowie Zaza, w globalne studia dotyczące rewitalizacji języka. Dzięki temu Kurdowie Zaza mogą skorzystać z doświadczeń innych rdzennych społeczności w zakresie ich polityk rewitalizacjyjnych.. Niniejsza praca ma więc na celu wypełnienie istniejącej luki w badaniach poprzez zapewnienie wglądu w politykę rewitalizacji podejmowaną przez Kurdów Zaza, a w szczególności przez kobiety.

Od lat 60tych XX wieku udział kobiet Zaza w kurdyjskich działaniach politycznych odegrał znaczącą rolę w rozwoju tożsamości kurdyjskiej i budowaniu jej poczucia obywatelstwa tworzonego w oparciu o narracje alternatywne w stosunku do polityki asymilacyjnej państwa tureckiego. Według Faye Ginsburg społeczności rdzenne posiadają własne odrębne zbiorowe narracje i historie, z których część naznaczona jest traumatycznymi doświadczeniami. Narracje te były systematycznie wymazywane z narracji narodowych dominującej kultury i istnieje ryzyko, że zanikną nawet w społecznościach lokalnych. Wysiłki kobiet Zaza na rzecz przetrwania i rewitalizacji języka Zazakî i wyrażonej w nim kultury znacząco przyczyniają się do zachowania ciągłości dziedzictwa oraz do przekazywania „zbiorowych narracji i historii" przyszłym pokoleniom, pomimo opresyjnej polityki państwa.

Niniejsza praca magisterska rozpoczyna się dyskusją na temat tego czym właściwie jest rewitalizacja języka, przedstawia sytuację ludności Zaza w Turcji, nakreśla tło historyczne aktywizmu kurdyjskich kobiet oraz analizuje motywacje stojące za rewitalizacją, a także różne inicjatywy i przedsięwzięcia kobiet Zaza, takie jak zbieranie folkloru, tworzenie muzyki, teatru i współczesnej literatury w języku zazakî, organizowanie demonstracji na rzecz zachowania języka, czy przygotowywanie programów telewizyjnych dla dzieci. Dokonuje również pewnych porównań między rewitalizacją języka kobiet Zaza, a rewitalizacją podejmowaną przez kobiety w innych częściach świata, np. Ameryce Południowej. Praca opiera się na wywiadach z dwunastoma aktywistkami, z których jedenaście to kobiety mówiące w zazaki, a jedna to aktywistka kurmandżi- językowa, która nauczyła się zazaki. Kobiety mieszkają na co dzień w prowincjach Çewlîg/Bingöl, Amed/Diyabekir i Dersim/Tunceli w Północnym Kurdystanie, a rewitalizacja zazaki, to jeden z głównych celów ich działań.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a result of an extensive and collaborative process involving numerous individuals. It is therefore my responsibility to express my gratitude by acknowledging each person's contribution individually. First of all I wish to express my gratitude, to the ten Zaza and one Kurmanji women activists who shared their invaluable experiences for this study. Without their willingness to impart their insights, this thesis would have never been completed. Secondly, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Joanna Bocheńska, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and remarks which have been instrumental from the outset of this writing journey. Furthermore, this thesis received support from the project entitled ***Activism And Its Moral and Cultural Foundation: Alternative Citizenship and Women's Roles in Kurdistan and the Diaspora*** (ALCITfem). I was able to share and discuss the plan of the thesis with my colleagues, members of the project during the project seminars for which I am very grateful too. Last but not least, I whish to express my thanks to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Jagiellonian University and the Department of Iranian Studies in particular for welcoming the MA project about the Zaza women activism.

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Introduction

Zazakî is my native tongue and the language of my childhood. In 2009, it was described as endangered in a UNESCO report. When, between 2010 and 2012, Zazakî became part of the education system in Turkey, like many other Zaza youth I decided to do my undergraduate education in my mother tongue and become a teacher of Zazakî. While studying, I became very interested in Zaza folklore and initially, I recorded my mother's tales, stories, and songs. Later, I collected a lot of Zaza folklore materials from Çewlîg/Bingöl province. Studying in Zazakî and collecting folklore made me aware of the richness and value of my native tongue. This was why I decided to write my BA thesis on Zazakî folklore, for which I visited many villages and towns in Çewlîg/Bingöl province and collected many Zazakî tales, stories, folk songs, customs, and traditions from various regions. Following my graduation from the Zazakî language and literature department, similar to numerous other Zazakî language educators, I encountered the challenge of securing a position as a Zazakî teacher. So, I decided to continue with the MA. Having the opportunity to participate in the research project entitled *Activism and its Moral and Cultural Foundation: Alternative Citizenship and Women's Roles in Kurdistan and the Diaspora (ALCITfem)* at the Jagiellonian University between 2021 – 2024, I have focused particularly on Zaza women and their struggle to keep the Zazakî language alive.

Most European and American scholars working in the field of endangered languages have focused primarily on the endangered languages of Europe or the Americas. A good example may be the book *Revitalizing Endangered Languages, A Practical Guide* by Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank, which presents revitalisation practices in relation to many languages, the experiences of indigenous people, and their global cooperation. Yet it focuses mainly on the indigenous communities of Europe and the Americas, and does not include any indigenous communities from the Middle East (either Muslim or non-Muslim) and their linguistic and cultural struggles. However, it is valuable to relate the revitalisation efforts of minor-

ity communities in the Middle East, such as the Zaza Kurds, to global language revitalisation efforts, because they can benefit from the experience of other indigenous communities in reviving their language and culture. Such a study would also make their efforts more visible and worthy of global attention. Therefore, this dissertation wishes to bridge this gap and provide some insights into the revitalisation policies of the Kurdish people, women in particular.

In this paper, I use the terms 'Zaza' and 'Zazakî', as they are widely used in academic writing, especially in the West, and widely accepted by the Zaza community to refer to their language and identity. The Zazas (also known as Kird, Kirmanc, or Dimilî) are one of the Kurdish communities and indigenous people of North Kurdistan or Eastern Turkey. The Zazakî language is spoken by four to six million people in Turkey, although the exact number is unknown. The Zazakî language, after Kurmanji Kurdish and Turkish, is the third most commonly spoken language in modern Turkey, yet it is not recognised as an official language. In the last 40 to 50 years, for political and economic reasons, a significant number of Zaza Kurds have migrated to Turkey's large cities, such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara, as well as to Europe (especially Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Austria, France, Switzerland, and Sweden). Most of the Zaza population live in the northern part of Kurdistan; their homeland (the Kirmanciye or Kirdane[1]) consists of the provinces of Dersim/Tunceli, Çewlîg/Bingöl, Ezîrgan/Erzincan, Riha/Urfa, Amed/Diyarbakir and parts of Xarput/Elazığ. The origin of the Zaza people has been fiercely discussed by linguists, political scientists, politicians, activists, and the Zaza themselves (Haig and Öpengin, 2014). However, the majority of the Zaza people consider themselves to be Kurds and perceive their language to be one of the Kurdish dialects or a Kurdish language. Additionally, due to the Turkish state's political pressure for assimilation and their anti-Kurdish policies, some Zazas consider themselves an ethnic Iranian group distinct from the Kurds.

Kurdish women became globally known as refugees, victims of violence, victims of war crimes, or, on the other hand, as brave fighters, and heroes. After the eruption of the Syrian domestic war (2011) and the rise of Kurdish political movements in Rojava (the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria)

[1] Kirdane is a term used by Sunni Zazas to define their land and country. And Kirmancîye is used by Qizilbaş/Alevi Zazas to refer to the land and country they live in.

the female guerilla became the Kurdish symbol of emancipation. There appeared many magazine and newspaper articles discussing the struggle of Kurdish women against ISIS, or their political resistance against the countries of which Kurds are a part. At the same time, the efforts of Zaza women, such as in political struggle and cultural activism, including the revitalisation of the Zazakî language and culture, remain unknown. Moreover, most scholars have focused on Kurmanji or Sorani-Kurdish speaking communities. Therefore, I decided to investigate the cultural and linguistic initiatives launched by Zaza women in recent decades in North Kurdistan.

In Turkey, citizenship is defined as membership in the state based on a single language (Turkish), and a single ethnicity (Turk). This understanding of state identity was reflected in Article 66 of the 1982 Turkish Constitution, which states: 'everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk'.[2] This hegemonic statement left no space for ethnic minorities such as Kurds (Zaza, Kurmanji), Abkhaz, Circassians, Laz, and religious minorities such as Qizilbaş/ Alevi Zazas and Ezidî Kurmanjis, which are not even officially recognised as minorities. Instead, they are regarded as groups belonging to the Turkish nation and categorised as Turks even though they are not ethnic Turks (Oran, 2004). Since the 60s, Zaza women activists have been very active in the Kurdish national movement, and their participation in Kurdish politics has played a valuable role in developing the Zaza Kurdish identity and in building a sense of citizenship that would offer an alternative to the Turkish state's policy of assimilation.

In recent decades, feminist studies have suggested alternative ways of theorising citizenship. They have endeavoured to make the concept of citizenship more comprehensive by focusing on the lived practice of citizenship (Halsaa et al., 2011). The term 'lived citizenship' was proposed to address the intersectional character of citizenship and its embeddedness in everyday life (Kallio et.al., 2015). In the case of the Kurdish people, both Kurmanji and Zaza, their exclusion from mainstream politics and society has led to a series of initiatives that in our research project we call 'alternative', which I also apply in this thesis. I also draw from Engin Isin's notions of *acts of citizenship* and *activist citizenship* (2008, 2016) to refer to the actions of Zaza women that occurred outside of the legal and institutional order

[2] https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf

of the Republic of Turkey. They call into question this order's very existence and meaning, and demand space for the rights of their indigenous language communities and women's rights at the same time. Furthermore, I use the term 'cultural activism' to highlight the way in which Zaza women activists began to use various cultural and linguistic practices as a means to 'talk back' to structures of power that have erased or distorted their interests and realities. Faye Ginsburg applied the term *cultural activism* 'to underscore the sense of both political agency and cultural intervention that people bring to these efforts, part of a spectrum of practices of self-conscious mediation and mobilisation of culture that took particular shape beginning in the late twentieth century' (Ginsburg, 2002: 8). This concept focuses on specific features of culture-making by minority groups rather than the culture-making of the nation-state. According to Wendelmoet Hamelink, 'nation-states aim to unite people under a single national identity by focusing on the nation's majority culture and language' (Hamelink, 2016: 288). Due to the policies of assimilation and oppression of nation-states, the collective history of minorities is often 'erased in the national narratives of the dominant culture and in danger of being forgotten within local worlds as well' (Ginsburg, 2002: 40).

Since the establishment of the Turkish state, oppression, massacres, and assimilation of the indigenous communities of Turkey and North Kurdistan have been part of its policy. The legal process in Turkey started with the Eastern Reform Plan (Şark İslahat Planı), prepared in 1925, and completed with the adoption of the Dersim/Tunceli Law dated 1935. With the policies implemented afterward, people were shot *en masse* or forced to migrate to the western provinces of Turkey. In order to prevent the Zazakî-speaking population from using their native language, the state did not allow more than a certain percentage of the Zazakî-speaking population to reside in Zaza cities. The 17th article of the Eastern Reform Plan stated: 'Speaking Kurdish by Kurds who have settled in a scattered way in our eastern provinces of Euphrates should be banned immediately, and girls' schools should be given importance to ensure that women speak Turkish' (Bayrak, 2009; Güntaş, 2020: 86). According to Güntaş, the particular emphasis on women indicates that the role of women in the transfer of identity and culture through language was well-known by the Eastern Reform planners, and the primary purpose of regional

boarding schools (YIBO)[3] was to assimilate Kurdish (Zaza and Kurmanji) girls through education. Fifty of the YIBOs opened by the state between 1962 and 1973 were in the Kurdish provinces (Avar, 2004; Güntaş, 2004). The assimilationist policies applied in YIBOs were primarily based on violence and aimed to change the girls' identity (Güntaş, 2004: 86). In traditional Zaza families, mothers spend time with their children from an early age, and it is the mother who enables the child to gain language competence and learn the customs and traditions that exist in the community; thus, mothers and the future generation became the target of the Turkification policies of the Republic.

This study is based on interviews with women activists, 11 Zaza and one Kurmanji, living in the Çewlîg/Bingöl, Amed/Diyabekir, and Dersim/Tunceli provinces of North Kurdistan, who have become active in the field of Zazakî language and culture revitalisation. I contacted some of the Zaza female activists through my networks of friends and acquaintances. Due to the political sensitivity of the Kurdish topic in Turkey, I conducted my interviews anonymously. Therefore, in this thesis, the real names of many of the activists have been changed.

In the first chapter of my thesis, entitled *Why Revive and Save Local Languages? Learning from the Experience of other Indigenous Communities*, following an introduction to the concept of 'endangered languages', I consider why it is essential to save and revive endangered languages, what causes language shift, and in what ways it can be reversed. I introduce a global perspective by providing some concrete examples of indigenous women's activism from Latin American indigenous communities. In the second chapter, entitled *Endangered Languages, Endangered People of Turkey*, I focus on the minority languages in Turkey and the state's policies towards them. I explore the reasons behind the state's negative attitude towards minority languages and how the monolingual policies affect the minority communities in Turkey and Kurdistan. In the third chapter, *Language and Identity: Kirdkî, Kirmanckî, Dimilkî and Zazakî*, I present the history of the Zazakî language as oral and written language from the past to the present along with the debates on whether the Zazakî language in Turkey is a language or a dialect of Kurdish. In the fourth chapter, entitled *Toward Empowerment: Activism of Kurdish Women in Turkey*, I present the historical background of Zaza women's

[3] Yatılı Bölge Ortaokulu or YİBO (Regional Boarding Secondary School)

activism, starting from the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic of Turkey, showing the evolution of the Kurdish movement, which cannot be reduced to only military activities. The fifth chapter, entitled *Why revitalise Zazakî? Zaza women activists, their motivations, forms of action and challenges,* are rooted in my fieldwork which presents the varied motivations and forms of cultural activism of Zaza women. In the sixth chapter, entitled *Zaza Women: From Language Revitalisation to Citizenship Rights,* I link the linguistic and cultural activism of Zaza women with women's and citizenship rights. In the *Appendix* I present the short biographical notes of all the women I interviewed in this study.

Chapter One

Why revive and save local languages? Learning from the experience of other indigenous communities

The *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* introduces six degrees of language endangerment that 'may be distinguished with regard to intergenerational transmission':

1. **Safe**: A language is considered safe if it is spoken by all generations and the intergenerational transmission of the language is uninterrupted.
2. **Vulnerable**: Most children speak the language, but its use may be limited to certain domains (e.g., home).
3. **Definitely endangered**: Children no longer learn the language as their mother tongue in the home.
4. **Severely endangered**: The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; the parental generation may still understand it but will not pass it on to their children or speak it among themselves.
5. **Critically endangered**: The youngest speakers are of the grandparent generation and older, they speak the language partially and infrequently.
6. **Extinct**: There are no speakers left.[4]

The 2009 edition of the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* showed that 15 languages in Turkey are in danger and that three other languages had become entirely extinct. The **extinct languages** include Cappadocian Greek, Mlahso and Ubykh. Four languages in Turkey were categorised as **vulnerable**: Zazakî, Abkhaz, Adyge, and Kabard-Cherkes. To the **definitely endangered languages** belong Abaza, Homshetsma, Laz, Pontic Greek, Romani, Suret, and Western Armenian. **Severely endangered** languages include Gagauz, Judezmo and

[4] Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, edited by Christopher Moseley, p.11 for more information; https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00001-7026

Turoyo, and one language, Hertevin, was categorised as **critically endangered**. Kirdkî, or Kirmanckî Kurdish, is also included as a vulnerable language, listed as 'Zazakî'.[5] It is important to note that Zazakî is not a language recognised by the state, which means it cannot be used in education, media, and many other public contexts. Therefore, it has limited space in the native speaker's everyday life, and its vulnerability is increasing.

At this point, it is important to pose a few basic questions: what causes language decline and extinction? Can the process be reversed? Why should we care about the world's linguistic diversity? Is it not better for all the people of a nation to speak one language? These questions are often asked in response to indigenous people's pressure for language and culture protection. There are many reasons why we should protect the world's linguistic and cultural diversity. According to Fishman (1996), language loss is essentially an aspect of the relationship between language and culture. The loss of languages means 'the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including philosophical systems, folk literatures, and musical traditions, environmental knowledge systems, medical knowledge, and important cultural practices and artistic skills' (Hinton, 2001: 5); thus, losing a language often means losing a culture, which results in a decline in the sum of human knowledge. Reyhner (1996) also linked the decline in linguistic diversity to the decline in human knowledge: 'Our languages contain a significant part of the world's knowledge and wisdom. When a language is lost, much of the knowledge that language represents is also gone' (Reyhner, 1996: 4). There are many reasons for language loss, but the major causes are colonisation, cultural degradation, displacement from the homeland, and the economic and political pressure of states on local communities. Language revitalisation is an important attempt to protect the languages that are at risk, and to 'reverse language shift' (Fishman, 1991). Language revitalisation is part of a broader process of decolonisation, cultural revival, and reclaiming the right to self-determination, by 'creating new speakers of the target language, … building new domains for language use, and … creating a future generation of speakers' (Grenoble, 2021: 9). A language carries essential cultural and linguistic knowledge that is lost if it disappears, and many local communities' culture, nature and spirituality are intertwined with the language. Languages have a significant

[5] http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php

role in social, spiritual, and cultural cues that contribute to the formation of cultural identity. One of the fundamental reasons for reviving a language is 'to claim, or reclaim, identity and knowing the language as the single route to learning to be a member of the culture' (Grenoble, 2021: 12).

Nation-states have always tried to control local communities with policies of oppression and assimilation. The main reason for this is the fear of local communities making demands for self-government, and cultural and linguistic independence, leading to loss of land and power. According to Smith, 'The practices linked to the last centuries are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous people's claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments' (Smith, 1999: 1). Language decline and revitalisation have become a global issue as local communities forge global connections for the continuity and revival of their languages. It is valuable to learn from 'the experiences of other communities "from the horse's mouth" rather than through the filter of a third party, especially since this third party is often associated with an institution of power built upon European colonialism' (Mendizabal and Penman, 2021: 180). Local communities around the globe that are facing similar language hazards are more likely to help each other; therefore, sharing valuable experiences among them is crucial. For example, Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann's contribution to the revival of the Aboriginal Australian languages would be a good example, as he drew lessons from the Hebrew experience, 'the revitalization of Hebrew being perhaps the most successful case of language revitalization in human history, while Australian languages are among the world's most endangered' (Mendizabal and Penman, 2021: 188). The use of the native language at home is essential for intergenerational language transmission and language revitalisation. In Turkey and across the globe, indigenous communities fear further loss of their linguistic and cultural knowledge, due to the lack of government support; many of these minority communities continue to live in political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic diseases, and inadequate educational and social opportunities.

Indigenous communities worldwide have been oppressed, assimilated, and ignored by the states of which they are a part because of their culture, language,

and identity. Due to indigenous communities' successful cultural and linguistic resilience, they have attracted international attention and support for the revitalisation of their language and culture. They have also made connections with other indigenous communities around the globe to share valuable experiences. Indigenous women worldwide have consistently played significant roles as participants or leaders in the process of revitalising language and culture within their communities, despite the effect of gender dynamics and patriarchal norms.

South America was often an essential point of reference for Kurdish people. The best examples are the word 'guerilla' inspired by South American revolutionary movements and borrowed from Spanish to refer to Kurdish militants. The portrait of Che Guevara and Frida Kahlo is seen in many places in Kurdistan. Many young Zaza and Kurmanji Kurdish women have been inspired by Frida Kahlo's art and spirit. Nevertheless, this inspiration is largely ideological, and only rarely have any other cultural parallels been drawn.[6] Endangered languages are new a field of study and are not yet a prominent academic area. For example, the book entitled *Revitalizing Endangered Languages, A Practical Guide*, edited by Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank, is a valuable source on language revitalisation, the experiences of indigenous communities, and their global interactions; however, it discusses only indigenous communities of Europe and the Americas and has no chapters on Muslim or other indigenous communities from the Middle East and their linguistic and cultural struggles. It must be remembered that there are still many other ethnic groups and their languages deserving protection and international support for their linguistic and cultural struggles, but unfortunately, for a number of reasons, they slip the attention of scholars. It is, therefore, essential to shed light on Middle Eastern communities, such as the Zaza Kurds, who can thus benefit from the experience of other indigenous people. Despite religious, linguistic, and cultural differences, it is possible to draw parallels between the efforts of minorities worldwide and thus enable them to learn from one another, because the stories they narrate can be considered 'powerful forms of resistance that are repeated and shared across various indigenous communities' (Smith, 1999: 2).

[6] See for example, the literary output of the Kurdish Kurmanji writer Mehmet Dicle, his sources of inspiration and his balancing of fact and fiction (Bocheńska, 2022).

In Guatemala, the Kaqchikel language is spoken by the Maya people; the first contact between Maya and Spanish people took place when Pedro de Alvarado invaded Guatemala in 1524. But language shift and the linguistic and cultural pressure did not accelerate until the 20th century. According to Bennett, 'In the early 20th century, the Guatemalan state worked toward indigenous language elimination through a programme called castellanizaciton, or Spanish-izing, which was effective in convincing indigenous language speakers that bilingualism would result in a shift to Spanish monolingualism' (Bennett, 2020: 3). Pan-Maya activism emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to a long tradition of the political marginalisation of the large indigenous population of Guatemala, and particularly in response to state violence against indigenous communities during the Guatemalan Civil War (1960 – 1996). Importantly, Pan-Maya activists came together to fight for indigenous rights, especially the right to speak their own language without fear of persecution, and they developed a standard Kaqchikel language to minimise systematic language loss and code-mixing with Spanish (Bennett, 2020). With the peace agreement signed between the government of Guatemala and various leftist rebel groups in 1996, the linguistic and cultural rights of the Mayans were restored, and Maya children were provided with the opportunity to learn their native language in schools.

In some cases in South America, at the end of the 20th century, the states' perspective on local communities began gradually to shift from homogeneity to cultural and linguistic pluralism. According to Rendon, in Ecuador and many other Latin American countries, 'the state has assumed a role of protector of rights and promoter of cultural diversity in a context of ethnic resurgence and along with a new politics of identity' (Rendon, 2013: 118). In Ecuador, indigenous movements began to appear in the mid-1980s. The main objectives of these organisations were to improve the linguistic and cultural rights of indigenous people and to obtain recognition of the right to education in indigenous languages. CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) submitted an education proposal to the Ecuadorian government, which resulted in the establishment of the National Director's Office of Intercultural Bilingual Education (DINEIB) in November 1988 (Rendon, 2013). Since 1988, intercultural bilingual education in Ecuador has been administered by indigenous organisations that are members of

ECUARUNARI (Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality) and CONAIE. Since 1993, all educational centres run by DINEIB have included the Intercultural Bilingual Education System; indigenous representatives appointed by this programme as teachers, along with school principals, designed the school curriculum and wrote the textbooks in indigenous languages. Since 1989, numerous teaching materials in book and digital formats have been produced as part of the teachers' programme. But most of the materials prepared are in the Kichwa and Shuar languages, and the lack of materials and support in other indigenous languages is accelerating their disappearance.

Indigenous women have always been active participants in acts of political resistance across Latin America, fighting for centuries against ethnic discrimination and violence. Especially in Ecuador, women have always held leading positions in political resistance to the government. Two women, Dolores Cacuango (1881 – 1971) and Tránsito Amaguaña (1909 – 2009), were the first and most devoted activists, and they shaped Ecuador's indigenous movement. In 1944, they founded the country's first indigenous organisation, the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI), and 'both women fought for bilingual education, spending much of their long lives advocating for land ownership and cultural dignity across Ecuador and abroad' (Picq, 2013: 78). Dolores Cacuango is seen as the most notable figure in the struggles for indigenous women and community emancipation, and 'actively contributed to the creation of rural unions' (Picq, 2013: 78). When she became active in the political arena, she focused on two core issues: redistribution of land ownership and bilingual education. Additionally, she was instrumental in the opening of bilingual rural native schools in Moyurco, San Pablo Urcu, Pucará, and La Chimba (Cayambe province) (Picq, 2013). Thus, women such as Dolores Cacuango and Tránsito Amaguaña are remembered for paving the way for indigenous cultural and linguistic liberation. As will be shown in a later chapter of my thesis, this corresponds with the engagement of Zaza women, which has largely focused on language and cultural revitalisation.

Colonisation leaves indelible marks on colonised lands and peoples, and the impact of the colonial system can be seen in the everyday life of indigenous communities. Despite their encounters with indigenous peoples, European colonisers viewed the new world as 'terra nullius' or 'no-man's land', which fit the political

and economic agenda and led to exponential growth in wealth and prosperity for coloniser nations; indigenous lands were viewed as '"unused" or "uncivilised" and gendered as a ripe and bountiful female ready for the taking' (Huaman and Naranjo, 2019: 3). Thus, counter-narratives become a powerful part of indigenous responses to these constructs, and 'native women are at the centre of how indigenous and settler nations have been imagined' (Huaman and Naranjo, 2019: 3). The modern understanding of language revitalisation efforts may be rooted in the same colonial discourses and modern ideologies that bear the consequences of colonialism. Creating written materials and curricula for indigenous languages is a Western approach to education; indigenous educational ideologies rely on oral knowledge closely linked to the physical environment, while Western education generally focuses on written learning (Hassan, 2015). Traditionally, indigenous women from the Americas were well respected and held significant cultural knowledge and power, hence 'reconnecting cultural and linguistic revitalization with community healing allows women to be "active in 'on-the-ground' decolonisation efforts"' (Hassan, 2015: 9). For the Mayas, women are powerful representations of society because of 'their roles as bearers of the next generation and socializers of the children in Mayan languages' (Warren, 1998: 108). Zaza women also play a pivotal role in the dynamics of language loss and revitalisation, not only due to their role as transmitters of the language to future generations but also because of their extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge. The community relies on women to pass down the Zazakî language to children. However, political and economic policies influenced by deep historical processes devalue the Zazakî language and associate the use of Turkish with social advancement. Despite these challenges, examples from South America demonstrate that even deeply entrenched colonisation and language assimilation can gradually evolve into a multicultural and multilingual approach. These examples also highlight the importance of engaging indigenous communities, including women, to foster such transformation, even if the bilingual model still favours the language of the majority. Thus, the experiences and solutions from Guatemala and Ecuador can offer valuable inspiration for Zaza women.

Chapter Two

Endangered languages, endangered people of Turkey

It has been widely acknowledged by linguists that of the approximate 7,000 languages spoken around the globe today, at least half will have disappeared by 2100 (Hassan, 2015; Krauss, 1992: 4-10). There are many reasons why language extinction may occur. Among the leading contributing factors to the predicted deaths of over 3,000 languages are globalisation and colonisation (Smith, 1999; Hassan, 2015). As mentioned in the first chapter, 15 languages spoken in Turkey are in danger of disappearing; some of these are spoken by small groups of people, i.e., Abaza, Homshetsma, Laz, Pontic Greek, Romani, Suret, and Western Armenian. The monolingual policy of the Turkish state affects such small groups more than others, and a language shift is ultimately inevitable for them. The Turkish state does not recognise these languages as official languages, and since they are not used in modern education and media their vulnerability increases; having limited space in the native speaker's everyday life, their extinction is accelerated. Compared to Kurmanji Kurdish, the Zazakî language is not well-known to outsiders and has become increasingly vulnerable; due to the state imposition of the Turkish language, lack of education in the mother tongue and other assimilation policies of the Turkish state, and political unrest in Turkish Kurdistan, both the number of Zazakî speakers and the degree to which they use the language have been in sharp decline. The community that speaks the Zazakî language does not have a deep-rooted written culture; the existence of the language is based largely on oral culture. In contrast to other ethnic groups in Turkey, Alevi/Qizilbaş Zazas worship in their own language, which increases the importance of the survival of Zazakî as a living language (Güntaş, 2020).

The Turkish state was founded on what remained of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish nationalist Kemalist ideology 'emphasized the unity, secularity, and the indivisibility of the Republic and the Turkish nation, aiming for the complete homogenization of the society' (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012: 100). So, the assimilation of

minority communities in Turkey became the primary goal of the Kemalists. They aimed 'to create a western and secular nation-state (a secular nation that shares the same ideals, language, territory, and culture) for the Turks, leaving their "Oriental" Ottoman past behind' (2012: 100). Turkey inherited multilingual and multicultural diversity from the Ottoman Empire, but the Turkish Republic could not sustain the Ottoman policy of linguistic and cultural tolerance and chose to rule through oppression and assimilation of its minority communities. It has had a single official language since its foundation, its monolingual policies are rooted in the İttihat ve Terakki Partisi (Committee of Union and Progress),[7] which led to the Kemalist ideology. In the Lausanne treaty (signed on 24 July 1923) the minority citizens of Turkey were defined by religion. Non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians, Greeks and Jews were recognised as minorities, and their language rights were identified in articles 37-45 (Aydın, 2004). Conversely, the Muslim communities such as Kurds (Zaza, Kurmanji), Abkhaz, Circassians, Laz, and other religious minorities such as Qizilbaş/Alevi Zazas and Kurmanji-speaking Yezidis were not even officially recognised as minorities. This lack of recognition led to the denial of 'the validity of minority communities' claims to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of their languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to their natural resources and systems for living within their environments' (Smith, 1999). Ultimately, this caused the assimilation of many communities and the extinction of their languages and cultures.

Turkey was a newly established Republic with a multi-ethnic and multilingual society, but during the rule of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), also known as the single-party era, the state implemented a series of Turkification policies to ensure linguistic homogeneity (Aslan, 2007). In 1924, 'the Law of Unification of Education brought schools under the control of the state and imposed a standard state curriculum. In the following year, teaching the Turkish language in minority schools was made mandatory' (2007: 251). In 1926, the parliament passed a law mandating the use of Turkish in all correspondence between companies. Vatandaş Türkçe konuş, 'Citizen speak Turkish', a govern-

[7] The İttihat ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress) was a secret revolutionary organisation and political party active between 1889 and 1926 in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey.

ment-sponsored campaign, was launched by law students at Istanbul University on January 14, 1928, and continued throughout the 1930s (Aslan, 2007). The campaign aimed to prevent minorities from speaking their native tongue; it implied that what was necessary was a common language to symbolise national unity rather than multilingualism. The biggest target of this campaign was 'the high numbers of non-Muslim minorities and Muslim immigrants from the Balkans whose mother tongue was not Turkish' (Aslan, 2007: 253). According to the 1927 census, 'Turkish was not the native language of around 28 percent of the city's population. Out of 794,000 people in the city, 92,000 spoke Greek, 45,000 spoke Armenian, 39,000 spoke Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), 6,000 spoke French, and 6,000 spoke Albanian. The remaining 31,300 spoke a profusion of other languages, including Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, Circassian, and Bulgarian, as their mother tongues' (Aslan, 2007: 250). The most significant aim of this campaign was to encourage non-Muslim minorities to speak Turkish in public and to Turkify the non-Muslim population, primarily through assimilation; as Aslan argues, Islam was at the centre of the definition of Turkishness. The attacks against non-Muslims during the *Citizen speak Turkish* campaign demonstrate that such an understanding of Turkish national identity had a solid social base. For most people living in Turkey, 'Turkishness signified a Muslim community' (2007: 258). Thus, initially, Muslim minority communities were not as affected by this campaign as non-Muslim communities; in fact, there was a moderate attitude toward them. In the 1930s, the state's attitude towards local communities, mainly the Kurds, became more radical. In 1931, the state required all Turkish children to receive primary education in Turkish schools rather than in minority schools (Aslan, 2007: 251). The Settlement Law of 1934 aimed to accelerate the assimilation of Kurdish communities by moving them from Turkish Kurdistan (the eastern region of Turkey) to the western part of Turkey. The law also prohibited non-native Turkish speakers from establishing villages or towns (Kirişçi, 2000; Aslan, 2007). During the campaign, various fines and prison sentences were given to people who spoke a language other than Turkish (Ibrahim, 2000; Sofos et al., 2008), and Kurdish names for villages, streets, mountains, and rivers were replaced by their Turkish equivalents; the use of Kurdish names for newborns was forbidden, and Kurdish content was eliminated from history books (Kaya, 2011: 115; Şanli, 2022: 4). However, despite these measures, Kurds man-

aged to preserve their Kurdish names for individuals and localities in non-official contexts. As a result, it is now common for both people and places to have dual names, with one being Kurdish and the other Turkish (Şanli, 2022: 4).

In 1937 and 1938, the Turkish Armed Forces carried out three operations against the Dersim/Tunceli region, which targeted civilians and resulted in the Dersim massacre (known as Tertelê in Kirmanckî). This military action led to the loss of thousands of Kurdish (Kirmanc, Kurmanji) lives and the displacement of numerous others (Deniz, 2020; Strasser and Akçınar, 2017; Törne, 2015; Bruinessen, 1994). The primary victims of the Turkish military campaign were the majority Kirmanckî/Zazakî and minority Kurmanji-speaking Alevi-Kızılbaş Kurdish population of the region, along with the remaining Armenian population (Törne, 2015). The 'brutal Dersim campaign was but the culmination of a series of measures taken in order to forcibly assimilate the Kurds' (Deniz, 2020: 22; Bruinessen, 1994), and was 'also due to the city's central significance for Kurdish Alevis' (Deniz, 2020; 23). Since Kirmanckî/Zazakî was not a written language, memories of the genocide have been primarily transmitted orally by the victims and witnesses to future generations. Consequently, many Zazakî students and scholars are now focusing on these oral accounts to uncover the truth about the horrors that took place in 1937 and 1938. Following the Dersim genocide, the Turkish state orchestrated the forced migration of Alevi Kirmancs to the western provinces of Turkey. The availability of educational opportunities in these western provinces facilitated the involvement of Alevi Kirmanc women in left-wing movements and their adoption of the secular ideology promoted by the state. Additionally, due to historical persecution by Sunni Muslims (Zazas, Kurmajis, Ottoman Turks), Alevi Kirmancs found it easier than Sunni Zazas to integrate into the secular Turkish state, embracing the ideology of secularism.

Following the 1971 military coup in Turkey and the subsequent crackdown on leftist movements, there emerged an ideological group led by Abdullah Öcalan known as the Kurdistan Revolutionaries (Jongerden, 2017), primarily comprising students. Subsequently, in 1978, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) was established with the objective of creating an independent Kurdish state. The PKK included both male and female guerrilla fighters. Initially, it pursued the policy of independence, and most of the Kurdish provinces in Tur-

key were ‘under the political and ideological influence of the PKK since the end of the 1980s’ (Casier et al., 2013: 5). But it shifted in the 1990s, its new focus being autonomy and greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey (Stanton, 2016). It was not until 1990 that a legal and recognised pro-Kurdish party entered the political arena with the establishment of the HEP.[8] Subsequently, the Kurdish movement operated under various names, including the DEP[9] in 1993, HADEP[10] in 1994, and DEHAP[11] in 1997. It ‘gained some EU recognition and support in the context of human rights, as well as establishing itself in local elective bodies and gaining some success nationally’ (Casier et al., 2013: 6).

In the period preceding the 1980 coup in Turkey, the political climate was dominated by an intense conflict between right-wing and left-wing factions. Leftist individuals, driven by aspirations for a communist revolution, engaged in street riots, while nationalist and conservative right-wing groups opposed them and stirred religious enthusiasm. Universities aligned themselves with one side or the other, serving as epicentres for either the left or the right. During that period, Kenan Evren, a Turkish politician and military officer, assumed a prominent role; on the night of September 12, 1980, he orchestrated a military coup, taking control of the government and appointing himself as the head of state.[12] He was then elected as the new president of the country on 7 November 1982; he served as the seventh President of Turkey from 1982 to 1989. After the 1980 coup, the state targeted not only the Kurds living in the cities but also those living in the countryside. In a nine-episode documentary about Kenan Evren’s life entitled *12 September*, directed by Mustafa Ünlü in 1998, Kenan Evren made a statement that, as the military commander of the time, he decided to intervene after his trip to Turkish Kurdistan; he stated: ‘The southeast was as if it were not anymore Turkey. People were speaking Kurdish everywhere. They were out of control. It was as if they had created a separate state’ (Ustundag, 2019: 98). The declaration of a state of emergency in Kurdish cities in the 1980s, the evacuation of the villages, and the

[8] Halkın Emek Partisi (in English; the People’s Labour Party) – MİLLİYET GAZETE ARŞİVİ (archive.org), 21.05.2023, 14:50

[9] Demokrasi Partisi (in English: Democracy Party)

[10] Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (in English: People’s Democracy Party)

[11] Demokratik Halk Partisi (in English: Democratic People’s Party)

[12] Kenan Evren kimdir? – Yeni Akit 06.05.2023, 12:12

forced migration of thousands of Kurds to Turkey's western provinces and Europe accelerated assimilation by separating the Kurdish population from their ancestral lands. By the mid-1990s, more than 3,000 villages had been virtually wiped from the map, and, according to official figures, 378,335 Kurdish villagers had been displaced and left homeless.[13] Since 1984, the Turkish military has embarked on a campaign to eradicate the PKK. As a result, by the year 2000, two million Kurdish people had been driven out of their homes into the overcrowded shantytowns of western Turkish cities (Ibrahim and Gürbey, 2000: 167).

One can conclude that the Republic of Turkey has always perceived minority communities as a threat to the 'indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation', enshrined in the Turkish Constitution. The threat was referred to as the 'Sèvres syndrome', alluding to the Turkish state's fear of Kurdish separatism. This refers to the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, signed between the Allies of World War I and the Ottoman Empire. The treaty ceded most Ottoman lands to France, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Italy, and created large occupation zones within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the treaty foresaw the establishment of an independent Kurdistan and Armenia in today's eastern Turkey; 'contemporary discussions show that the conspiracy theories, and the fear of territorial dismemberment existed not only among social but state and military circles' (Hovsepyan, 2012: 66). One of the founders of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), led the Turkish nationalists to defeat the combined armies of the signatories of the Treaty of Sèvres. The Treaty of Lausanne, which replaced the Treaty of Sèvres in 1923, ended the conflict and was the founding treaty of the Republic of Turkey; but this treaty disregarded Kurds' and other minorities' rights. Thus, the 'Sèvres syndrome' refers to the Republic's ruling elites' fear of 'the idea of dividing Turkey into Armenian, Kurdish and Greek territories' (Hovsepyan, 2012: 59), and reduces Kurdish people's struggles to a mere Western conspiracy, with Western influence that is allegedly hostile to Turkey.

Language endangerment is substantially the result of government suppression through repressive education, laws, and policies. The Turkish government has prohibited minority communities from using their language, and has subjected

[13] Refworld | Unjust, Restrictive, and Inconsistent: The Impact of Turkey's Compensation Law with Respect to Internally Displaced People, 06.05.2023, 12:31

the Turkish population to policies aimed at homogenisation by the elimination of minority languages, cultures, and religions.[14] Research on the status of local languages in Turkey, and documentation thereof, is limited. This may be due to the long-lasting language bans (in the public and private sphere) or 'may be explained by several factors that are beyond the legal limitations: a) the shortage of researchers in the field of minority languages, b) the fear of discrimination for researching a language other than the state language, c) limited career opportunities in the field of local languages' (Uzum and Demir, 2017: 9). However, in Turkey and around the world, indigenous communities have been working hard to reclaim their native languages and cultural freedom. But in the case of Turkey, there is no support for these efforts, because the authorities perceive linguistic and cultural pluralism as a threat to the unitary understanding of the state, and fear that the cultural and linguistic aspirations of local communities (mainly the Kurds) will turn into political separatism.

When, in December 1999, Turkey signed the Copenhagen criteria during the Helsinki Summit, it led to the so-called 'peace process' between the Turkish state and the Kurdish fighters (PKK), which took shape, especially in the period from 2009 – 2015. At the end of 2008, the first public Kurdish TV channel was opened, providing some space for the Zazakî language also. In 2012, in an attempt to reconcile with the local communities and to restore basic language rights, the Ministry of National Education introduced two hours of local language education per week as an elective course in public schools under the name *Living Languages and Dialects*. The languages taught in these classes included Kurmanji and Zazakî Kurdish, Laz, Georgian, Adyghe, and Abkhaz. In 2017, Bosnian and Albanian were added to the curriculum. On 10 December 2009, the Institute of Living Languages and Dialects was established within the Mardin Artuklu University. Teachers' training programmes have been initiated to train relevant teachers, and the local language programmes at this institute focused on Syriac, Kurmanji, Zazakî and Arabic. Zazakî language and literature departments have opened also in Munzur (2012) and Bingöl (2012) universities, and this has accelerated the development of Zazakî language and culture. However, according to Yeni-Palabıyık,

[14] https://minorityrights.org/publications/a-quest-for-equality-minorities-in-turkey-december-2007/

> The main problem shown in the official regulations was the dominance of some languages, in particular Kurdish as Kurmanji and Abkhaz. Thereby, the educational policy for LLD seems to grant privilege for languages such as Kurmanji and Abkhaz against others like Georgian and Lazuri, and even some others whose names have never been pronounced in the official documents (2017: 166).

It is also important to stress that the changes that took place between 2009 and 2015 did not have any legal basis, but were simply an act of goodwill by the Turkish authorities. Therefore, they did not provide any long-lasting solution for indigenous peoples and proved that their treatment depended on the momentary political interest of the ruling elite.

Due to the reasons described above, throughout the 20th century, the Zazakî-speaking people were frequently subjected to forced migration to the western provinces of Turkey and to Europe. While Kurdish was banned in Turkey, the process of Zazakî language and culture revitalisation was initiated in Europe by the Zaza diaspora, in the form of publishing journals and magazines, such as *Kormişkan* (Sweden, 1995), *Tija Sodiri* (Germany, 1995) and *Vate* (Sweden, 1997). There exist four publishing houses that primarily release materials in Zazakî: Vate, Roşna, Tij, and Vir. Additionally, a few Kurmanji-focused publishers such as Peywend, J & J, Nûbihar, Dara, Weqfa Mezopotamya, Med Kurd and Avesta have also ventured into publishing a small number of journals and books in Zazakî (Şanli, 2022: 8). In 2003, Vate established a publishing house in Istanbul, which now plays an essential role in the standardisation and revitalising of the Zazakî language and culture. In a manner similar to the Pan-Mayan activists in Guatemala, the Vate Group took the initiative to standardise the Zazakî language. Their goal was 'to minimize systematic language loss and the amount of code-mixing' (Bennett, 2020) with Turkish, and to reduce the systematic decline of the Zazakî language. With significant support from the diaspora, during the peace process, the Kurdish (Zaza and Kurmanji) communities began to develop alternative initiatives such as cultural associations – Kurdi Der, Zaza Der, and Vate – focusing on the revival of the Kurdish (Zazakî and Kurmanji) dialects and culture. These initiatives developed outside the state institutions and structures and were designed to bring about social and cultural change in Kurdish society. It 'resulted in the increasing success of the Kurdish movement in establishing the cultural activism

that visibly contested the state project, this time not through violence but in public life' (Hamelink, 2016: 290). This can be related to both Ginsburg's cultural activism (2002) and James Scott's notion of micro-politics (1985). Cultural activism focuses on specific features of culture-making by minority groups rather than the culture-making of nation-states. Thus, 'cultural activism became essential for the Kurdish movement to expand its political influence' (Hamelink, 2016: 289) within the peace process. As Scott (1985, 1990) emphasises, seemingly private everyday life practices that counter the dominant culture can lead to macro-scale cultural change. For example, even drinking *kaçak çay* (smugglers' tea) or making jokes in Kurdish can be associated with the micro-scale activities that foster ethnic identity (Kaczorowski, 2018: 178).

The peace process collapsed in 2015,[15] cultural initiatives were brought to a standstill, and many activists (mainly Kurdish) were imprisoned. Due to the curfews that lasted from August 15, 2015, to April 20, 2016, and the devastating consequences of the clashes between the PKK and Turkish military forces in Kurdish provinces, 338 civilians, including 30 elderly, 69 women and 78 children, lost their lives. In addition, 5,000 houses were demolished; the Turkish Ministry of Health calculated that 355,000 people were forcibly internally displaced by March 2016 (Kaczorowski, 2018: 159).

As soon as the state retreated to its former policy of repression, many minority communities' linguistic and cultural activities weakened or came to a complete standstill. The languages spoken by small groups, such as the Zaza Kurds, are more fragile and sensitive to extinction, and such communities are especially in need of support for their linguistic and cultural continuity; these languages and cultures were left in danger of extinction. Minority languages continue to be taught in universities and secondary schools in Turkey, but recurring problems in appointing teachers trained at the universities by creating jobs for them, as well as a lack of jobs for graduates of the indigenous language departments, seriously limits the demand for this type of course and interest in indigenous communities.

[15] The 2013 ceasefire was working until September 2014. However, when relations became strained due to the Syrian Civil War, the ceasefire entirely collapsed in July 2015, following the killing of two police officers in Ceylanpınar, used as a *casus belli* by the Turkish government to renew full-scale warfare in South-Eastern Turkey (Özpek, Burak, 2018).

Chapter Three

Language and identity of Zaza people: Kirdkî, Kirmanckî, Dimilkî and Zazakî

Distinguishing between 'language' and 'dialect' can be a complex task, as linguistic factors often intersect with the sociological, political, and ethnic. The most widely used criterion for differentiation has been mutual intelligibility, whereby mutually understandable languages are classified as dialects of the same language. Conversely, varieties that are not mutually intelligible are categorised as distinct languages (Chambers, 1998: 3-4). However, this definition is far from reliable in many respects. For example, 'Swedish and Norwegian are mostly mutually intelligible, both in spoken and written forms, but they are standardly considered to be separate languages. On the other side, mutually unintelligible varieties of Mandarin (Standard Chinese) and Cantonese (the variety of Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangdong province), together with five other major varieties, are considered to be dialects of Chinese' (Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 101). Today, it is often social and political structures that determine whether it is a language or a dialect. In the Kurdish case, there seems to be a consensus among Sorani/Central Kurdish and Kurmanji/Northern Kurdish speakers that their dialects can be defined under the umbrella of Kurdish/Kurdi. In the case of Zazakî, 'the discussion has become regrettably politically charged, and the linguistic arguments are regularly instrumentalized by different political factions, rendering rational debate increasingly difficult' (Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 103); Haig and Öpegin decided to classify Zazakî and Gorani languages as a sub-group of Kurdish, which is defined by them as consisting of five groups:

1. Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji)
2. Central Kurdish (Sorani)
3. Southern Kurdish, including varieties such as Kelhuri, Feyli, Kirmashani, Laki
4. Gorani, covering what is known as Hawrami or Hawramani

5. Zazakî: Its three main dialects are Northern Zazakî (Tunceli-Erzincan provinces), Central Zazakî (Bingöl-Diyarbakir provinces) and Southern Zazakî (Diyarbakir province and Siverek town) (Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 110).

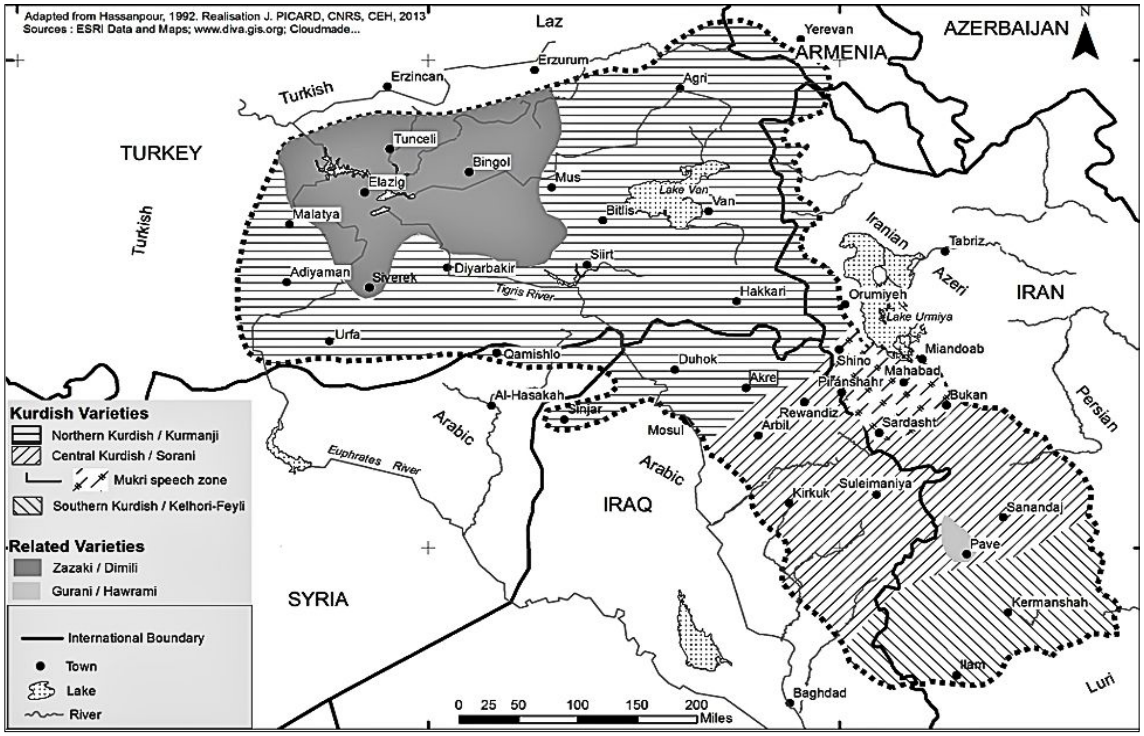

Figure 1: Map of language varieties spoken by the Kurds (from Öpengin, 2013)

However, Haig and Öpengin argue that 'it is perfectly possible to accept both the conclusions of the historical linguists' (that Zazakî is historically not closely related to Kurmanji), and the conclusions of many native speakers (that Zazakî speakers are Kurds, and their language belongs to a larger-order entity 'Kurdish') (Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 111).

It is also important to note how the Zaza people were described in historical sources. Şerefhan Bidlisi wrote the history of Kurdish principalities in the Ottoman period in his book entitled *Şerefname* (1597), and referred to the Zazas living in the Çapakçur (Çewlîg), Eğil, Genç, Çermişgezek, Palu, Pertek, Siverek and Çermig regions as Dumbeli/Dombeli Kurdish.[16] Hoca Sadeddin is the author of *Tâc üt-Tevârîh* (Crown of Histories, 1584), a history of the Ottoman Empire. He noted

[16] Şerafeddin Han, Şerefname c. 1-5 (translation Riza Kati-Veli ilmen) Yaba publications, Istanbul, 2009 – 2010.

that the Zaza Kurds from Çapakçur and Kiğı helped the Ottomans against the Safavids in the 1514 Battle of Çaldıran.[17] Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname, 1611 – 1682* is an essential reference regarding the daily life of the Zazas during the Ottoman period. While travelling around Kurdistan in the 17th century, he described the Zazas living in the Malatya, Harput, Palu, Urfa, Diyarbekir, Genç, Çapakçur, and Bidlis regions as Ekradi Zaza/Kurdish Zazas (Çağlayan, 2017). An early Kemalist Turkish sociologist, Ziya Gökalp (1876 – 1924), in his book *Sociological Studies on Kurdish Tribes,* includes the following about Zazas:

> The Zazas in Turkey perceive themselves as the original Kurds and refer to themselves as 'Kird'. They hold a somewhat derogatory view of the Kurds outside of their community, specifically the Kurmanjis, whom they label as 'Kirdasi' meaning 'Less Kurdish' or 'insufficiently Kurdish' (Gökalp, 1975; Badili, 1996; Malmisanij, 2011).[18]

The Zazas were named 'Zaza, Kurd, or Zaza Kurds' in the historical sources and academic articles, whereas, among themselves, they are known by various ethnoreligious terms (e.g., Kird, Kirmanc, Dimilî, Zaza). As will be explained later in this section, every term referred to a distinct religious group. Although it is disputable which of these names are of ethnic and which ones are of tribal origin, recently the use of ethnic names (e.g., Kirmanc, Kird, Zaza) became preferable. The debates on whether the Zazakî language is a dialect of Kurdish or not started in Europe, and such discussions gained momentum with the so-called peace process. It has caused identity issues among the Zazas and affected their sense of belonging to Kurdish society. The Zazas 'who had always been considered, and had considered themselves, as Kurds, have started speaking of themselves as a separate people whose distinct identity has been denied not only by the Turkish state but by the Kurdish movement as well' (Bruinessen, 1994: 2). On the other hand, some Zaza scholars and writers vehemently deny that Zazas are a Kurdish community, and claim that Zazakî is a language independent from Kurdish. Mesut Keskin, a Zazakî writer, translator, and teacher of the Zazakî language at Frankfurt University in Germany, wrote in his article:

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[17] Hoca Sadeddin, Tacu't Tevarih, (Ismet Parmaksizoglu) kültür yayinlari bakanligi (ministry of culture publications), c. IV, Ankara 1992.

[18] Translated by the author.

> In 1906, Oskar Mann commissioned the documentation and linguistic analysis of western Iranian languages and made the most extensive collection of the Zazakî language, especially from the Siverek and Kor (Bingöl) regions (with German translations, 91 pages, five dialects). After the death of O. Mann, it was published as a book in Leipzig in 1932, together with the grammatical analysis of dialects written by Iranologist Karl Hadank. Oskar Mann claimed that the Zazakî and Gorani languages had been mistakenly seen as dialects of Kurdish until then, but proved by comparisons that they were Iranian languages (Keskin, 2010).

Moreover, according to Zilfi Selcan,

> Sorani and Kurmanji politicians formed a political alliance at the end of the Ottoman Empire. They claimed the area between the Persian Gulf and Mount Ararat and drew this area on the map. The Zaza, Goran, and Lur peoples living in this region were declared 'Kurds', their language a dialect of so-called 'Kurdish', and their homeland 'Kurdistan' (Selcan, 2011: 128).[19]

The Zaza community in Turkey has faced marginalisation by both the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement. Additionally, there have been attempts by the Kurdish nationalist movement to portray Zazakî as a dialect of Kurdish. Consequently, many Zazas are worried that their language will be categorised as a variant of Kurmanji Kurdish instead of being acknowledged as a separate Kurdish language. These concerns have led to the emergence of Zaza nationalism, although this has not garnered substantial support within the Zaza community; in fact, numerous Zazakî writers have vehemently opposed it. One prominent example is Rosan Lezgin, a well-known Zazakî writer, who criticises Zaza nationalists (Zazaists) for propagating falsehoods and deceptive claims that the Zaza people are not Kurds. Lezgin argues that such discourse is not based on scientific grounds but is driven by political motives (Lezgin, 2016). In fact, many Zazas are sceptical about the new wave of Zaza nationalism, perceiving it to be a state-sponsored plan to divide the Kurds.

There have been many discussions about the origins of the name 'Kurd', but according to Malmisanij (1996), many people who have engaged in such discussions are unaware of the Zazakî words 'Kird' and 'Kirmanc' and how they have been

[19] Translated by the author.

used by the Zaza Kurds themselves. Historical sources may reveal a surprising closeness between the ancient descriptions of Mesopotamian inhabitants and the words used by the Zazas today. For example, a Greek author, Polybius (200–118 BC), used the word Cyrtii in his writings. Another, Strabo (64 BC–21 AD), mentioned Kirtii, and the Roman historian Titus Livius (59 BC–AD 17) wrote about Cirtei or Cirti. All these words are very similar to the ethnonyms used by the Dimilî Kurds (Zaza Kurds-HRK) today (1996:3).

In the local context, Alevi Zazas call themselves Kirmanc, their language Kirmanckî, and their homeland Kirmanciye. According to Malmisanij (1996: 3), the Kurdish people from Dersim, who speak the Dimilî dialect of Kurdish in the Dersim region, describe themselves as 'Kirmanc' and the Kurmanji Kurds as 'Kirdas'; and their dialect as 'Kirdaski' or 'Kirdasi'. There is no difference between the words 'Kirmanciye' and 'Kurdistan' in Dersim; they are used to indicate Dersim and the other parts of North Kurdistan (Bakur). The Alevi Kirmancs of Dersim have never used the word Zaza, because it has negative connotations stemming from its historical connection to the Sunni Zaza tribes who resided in the Palu areas, near the borders of the Dersim region; the Dersim people faced oppression and persecution from the Ottomans and their Sunni Zaza allies. Interestingly, from the information provided by August Kościesza-Żaba as a commentary to the Kurdish stories collected by Mela Mahmud Bayazîdî (1860),[20] we learn that the Kurdish Alevi tribes living in Dersim were described as 'Kurds' by the Ottoman Turks, but as 'Qizilbaş' by the Sunni Kurds (Bocheńska, 2018c: XVI). Contrary to common belief, the Kirmancs from Dersim refer to their religion as 'Rae Haqi' or 'Reya Haqi' (followers of the path) rather than Alevi or Qizilbaş, which was used by outsiders (Deniz, 2019: 48). According to Bruinessen, while 'the Alevis also venerate Ali and the other eleven Imams of the Shi`is, they do not, in general, accept the canonical obligations of orthodox Islam and they have their own religious rituals, different from those of the Shi`is as well as the Sunnis. Alevi Kurds (Kirmanc,

[20] The well-known work published by the the Russian Academy of Science in Saint Petersburg in 1860, entitled in French translation: *Recueil de notices et récits kourdes servant à la connaissance de la langue, de la literature et des tribus du Kourdistan, réunis et traduits en français par M. Alexandre Jaba consul de Russie à Erzeroum* (A collection of remarks and Kurdish stories by which one may acquaint oneself with the language, literature and the tribes of Kurdistan, collected and translated into French by Alexandre Jaba, a consul of Russia in Erzurum).

Kurmanc) are only a minority among the Alevis of Turkey, and they often feel closer to their Turkish-speaking co-religionists than to the Sunni Kurds' (Bruinessen, 1994:7). Inspiration with Islam is limited to Ali, Fatima and their sons Hasan and Hussein. Alevism perceives landscape and nature as part of the religious cult, and religious needs are fulfilled through the worship of nature (Deniz, 2019). It has closer links with Ahl-e Haq and Ezidism than with Islam (Malmisanij, 1996).

Shāfi'ī Zazas are followers of Imam Shāfi'ī. Often referred to as 'Shaykh al-Islām', al-Shāfi'ī was one of the four Sunni Imams whose legacy on juridical matters and teaching eventually led to the formation of the Shāfi'ī school of *fiqh* (Hallaq, 2008: 31). Shāfi'ī Zazas from Çewlîg (in Turkish Bingöl) Diyarbekir call themselves 'Kird', their language 'Kirdkî', and their country 'Kirdane'. The name 'Kird' is also mentioned in the texts compiled by the Russian linguist Peter Lerch. The stories were gathered from the Zazas captured during the Ottoman and Russian Crimean War in 1855, and the publication is seen as one of the first texts written in Zazakî. In one of these inscriptions, the head of Nerib village, Xelef Beg, addresses his Neribian supporters as follows:

> 'Look Gentleman, we are going to fight, do not be afraid, Daqma Lord's soldiers are many, and they are all Turks, they cannot conquer us, we are all "Kird" and brave' (Lerch, 1855, cited in Malmisanij, 1996: 2).[21]

The name 'Kird' was also preferred to 'Zaza' in the *Mewlîdê Kirdî*, written in 1899[22] by Hezanian poet Ehmede Khasi in the Zazakî language. Moreover, according to Badili, the Zazas in Turkey consider themselves the true Kurds and therefore call themselves 'Kird'. The other Kurmanji Kurds are called, with some disdain, 'Kirdas' or 'Kirdash' (1975: 6). The name 'Kirdas' suggests being a lesser or insufficient Kurd. Ziya Gökalp, who also conducted a sociological study on Kurdish tribes in Turkish Kurdistan, implied that the Zazas call themselves 'Kird/Kirt', and refer to the Kurmanjis as 'Kirdas'. The Turks, on the other hand, assigned the name 'Kurd' to the Kurmanjis (1992: 27). Thus, it is justified to think that the Zazas saw themselves as true representatives of the Kurds. However, due

[21] Translated by the author

[22] The book contains texts that are recited or sung during the celebrations to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

to the Turkish state's prolonged assimilation and oppression as well as the impact of Kurdish nationalism, nowadays some Zazas deny their Kurdishness.

Traditionally, the Kurmanji majority referred to the language spoken by all the ethnoreligious groups as 'Dimilî' or 'Dimilkî' (Badili, 1965; Malmisanij, 1992). Nowadays, Hanafi Sunni Zazas from Sewreg (Siverek) call themselves 'Dimilî' and their language 'Dimilî' or 'Dimilkî'. According to one of the approaches, the word 'Dimli' or 'Dimilî' may be derived from the word 'Deylam', which is the name of the Southwest Caspian Sea region. The people who lived there were also of Iranian origin, but nothing certain is known about their possible migration from that area toward Anatolia. The word 'Deylem' allegedly turned into 'Dimli' as a result of the displacement (metathesis) of the sounds (Hadank, 1932: 2, 11-12; Christensen, 1921: 8).

In some districts and villages of the Çewlîg/Bingöl and Xarpet/Elaziğ provinces, especially in Palu, local people call themselves 'Zaza' and their language 'Zazakî'. According to Ziya Gökalp, the name 'Zaza' was given to the people of Dunbul by the Turks, because neither Zazas nor Kurmanjis used the word 'Zaza' (1992: 33), the term being primarily associated with Sunni Zazas in historical sources, rather than being solely a linguistic or ethnic designation.

Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that many Zazas identify themselves and their language through an ethnoreligious lens. The religious and sectarian diversity within the Zaza community, along with the variation in naming, have made them a target for various ideologies, particularly since the 1980s. This targeting has been exacerbated by the negative portrayal of Kurds in the Turkish media, which associates them with terrorism.

Chapter Four

Toward Empowerment: Activism of Kurdish Women in Turkey

This chapter focuses on how Zaza women began to use different 'cultural and linguistic practices as a means to confront and challenge the structures of power of the state that have denied their rights, subjectivity, and citizenship' (Ginsburg, 2002: 51). Zaza women activists' participation in the Kurdish political movements since the 60s has played a significant role in developing Kurdish identity and in building a sense of citizenship that offers alternative narratives to the assimilation policy of the Turkish state. According to Ginsburg, indigenous people have their own 'collective stories and histories—some of them traumatic—that have been erased in the national narratives of the dominant culture and are in danger of being forgotten within local worlds as well' (Ginsburg, 2002: 40). The efforts of Zaza women to keep the Zazakî language and culture alive contribute significantly to its continuity, and to the transfer of their 'collective stories and histories' to future generations, despite the state's oppressive policies.

Moreover, some feminist studies have proposed enhancing the inclusivity of the citizenship concept by emphasising the lived experiences and practices of citizenship (Halsaa et al., 2011). The term 'lived citizenship' was introduced to address everyday practices, acts, experiences, and personal understanding, rather than legal status or a formal approach (Kallio and Häkli, 2014). In the case of Kurdish women, the exclusion of both Kurmanji and Zaza Kurdish women from mainstream politics and society has paved the way for many initiatives that can be described as 'alternative' to state institutions. Kurdish women have lived in a politically restrictive environment and faced multiple obstacles because of the highly patriarchally organised society (Weiss, 2010; Nadje and Pratt, 2009). They had little access to leading positions and were quite often locked at home. Surprisingly, however, we can see women as societal leaders and warriors in the history of Dersim. Upon the death of Ferhadan tribal chief, Keko Aga, in 1327 in Dersim, his wife Daye Xanim served as a tribal chief for 30 years (Dersimi, 1952: 19). The

wife of Seyid Riza, Besi Xanim, was politically active, and during the Dersim massacres, she fought against the Turkish government along with her husband.[23] The wife of the Koçgiri clan leader Alisher, Zarife Xanim, was active in politics and the military; because of her active participation in the fight against the Turkish Army in Koçgiri in 1921 and Dersim in 1937,[24] the female PKK guerrillas associate themselves with her brave and rebellious image (Dağlum, 2013). However, these women were part of a patriarchal society and did not challenge the patriarchy. According to Joanna Bocheńska, traditional honour (*şeref namûs* in Kurdish) was gendered, and rooted in physical strength and courage, which is mainly associated with masculinity (Bocheńska, 2018a). Being brave was a foundation for forming alliances and therefore had social and political meaning; courage was essential in Kurdish society. On the other hand, women's honour was linked to chastity, which impacted the good name and reputation of families and formed traditional relationships. In the 20th century, in national Kurdish ideology, the image of 'woman' became associated with homeland, its beauty, and purity (Galip, 2015: 174–179; Alinia, 2013: 58; Bocheńska, 2018). However, if a woman was brave she could become more important because it was men's honour that was based on courage. Thus, the representation of a brave woman who could challenge her own weakness and gain more respect in society through her courage was common in many Kurdish folkloric narratives (2018). Therefore, one must beware of associating traditional Kurdish women leaders with the modern notion of women's emancipation. Rather, society respected them and appointed them as leaders because they followed the traditional principle of bravery.

The Zaza people were a part of Ottoman society like other minority communities in present-day Turkey. In contrast to today's nation-state system, the Ottoman Empire had a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-religious structure. Tanzimat Fermanı (the Decree of Reorganisations) in 1839 and the 2nd Meşrutiyet (Constitutional Monarchy) in 1908 are very important in terms of improving the rights of minority communities and the struggle of Ottoman women to take an active role

[23] Tarihte Kürt Kadını – I. https://www.bing.com/search?q=Tarihte+Kürt+Kadını+-+I+(ufkumuzhaber.com)&cvid=2c65a5c89f4249–6890c35ab04346c30&aqs=edge.0.69i59l2.1508j0j4&FORM=ANAB01&PC=ASTS 13:00, 20/01/2023

[24] Koçgiri İsyanı ve Alişer İle Zarife – Kürt Tarihi (bitlisname.com) 10:00, 19/01/2023

in the social and political arena. Ottoman women published various magazines, established many associations and organisations, and questioned their position in the family and society (Çakır, 1996; Tekeli, 1990). The first women's associations were often charity associations concerned with philanthropic purposes, such as Osmanlı Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (Ottoman Women's Employment Association) founded in 1916. The association's primary purpose was to improve the economic and social status of widowed Muslim Ottoman women (Karakışla, 2016). Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Women) was founded in 1908; its basic principle was to increase the knowledge and culture of women and to bring women and men together for the first time (Dural and Eyidiker, 2020). Some associations directly focused on women's rights rather than on any charity purposes. An Armenian association, Azkaniver Hayuhyaç İngerutyan, founded in 1879 in Istanbul by Zabel Hancıyan and her friends, focused on the education of illiterate Armenian women in Anatolia and opened 23 schools there (Çakır, 1996; Yuksel, 2006). Kürt Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti (Association for the Advancement of Kurdish Women) was established by Kurdish women in 1919 in Istanbul. It aimed to ensure the development and advancement of Kurdish women with a more contemporary understanding and sought to improve their educational level and help them improve their financial and social conditions (Alakom, 1998: 40).

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalist Revolution in 1923, many changes occurred in Turkey's political and social domains. The project of Westernisation and modernisation of Turkey by the Kemalists gained momentum, and Turkish women benefited from Turkey's social and political changes. But the state's alienation and marginalisation of Kurdish women resulted from Kemalist discriminatory policies toward minorities. According to Yuksel, Kurdish women were doubly marginalised, because their ethnic identity was severely crushed. Thus, they were disadvantaged compared to their Turkish counterparts who could benefit from the secularising and modernising republican reforms (2006: 777). At the time that Turkey's monolingual policy prevented education in Kurdish (Zaza, Kurmanji), Kurdish women did not speak any Turkish, so, they were excluded from education and the state's secular policies (2006: 780).

Zaza women's activism and their involvement in politics began during the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, the Kurdish left-wing activists began to dissociate

themselves from Turkish left-wing politics and organised the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkish Kurdistan. The primary catalyst for this separation was the perceived silence of the Turkish left wing in the face of state repression and prohibitions imposed on Kurdish identity, Kurdish dialects, and Kurdish culture. This led Kurdish activists, including Zaza women, to take a more autonomous and assertive stance in advocating for Kurdish rights.

During the multi-party era in the 1970s and 1980s, the Kurds made efforts to establish political and cultural institutions. As the Kurds became increasingly politically active, their engagement also had an impact on Kurdish women. In the 1970s, independent women's organisations emerged among the Kurds, operating within various non-governmental organisations. These organisations focused on promoting the Kurdish language and advocating for the rights of Kurdish women. The first Kurdish women's association, known as the Kurdish Women's Teali Association (Kürd Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti), was established in Istanbul in 1919, and several years later another came into existence, called the Revolutionary Democratic Women's Association (DDKAD, Devrimci Demokrat Kadınlar Derneği), established in Amed/Diyarbakir in 1977. Female activists such as the President of the DDKAD Association, Sevinç İşcanlı, and other association executives, Sabiha Otlu and Rahime Keslu, were from Riha (Urfa), which is known as the historic centre of the Zazas. Later, they opened a branch in Siverek and focused on education and theatre in their mother tongue (Kurmanji and Zazakî), as well as on women's issues. Following the military coup in the 1980s, the association faced closure and its directors and members were subsequently imprisoned. However, some of the association's members, upon fleeing to Europe, persisted in their efforts to address Kurdish women's issues. This serves as an example of an institution where cultural and gender initiatives intertwined, leading to the politicisation of Kurdish culture. It was perceived both as a means to advocate for Kurdish rights and as a building block in the creation of an alternative civil society.

The rise of leftist ideology and nationalism among the Kurdish people in Turkey, and the separation of Kurdish leftist activists from the Turkish left, led to the emergence of various Kurdish leftist organisations in North Kurdistan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the best known of them, the PKK, was founded in 1978 and included two important Zaza women. One of them was Kesire Yildirim (born

in Dersim province in 1940), the wife of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan. The second was Sakine Cansiz (born in Dersim province in 1958). Cansiz and Yildirim were among the founders of the party. Sakine Cansiz was widely recognised for her resistance while she was in Diyarbekir prison; she joined the PKK only after her release from prison to pioneer women's solidarity and women's representation within the PKK (Letsch, 2013). Cansiz and Yildirim can be easily linked to the traditional image of a brave woman who challenges her own physical weakness and, through bravery, is able to gain more respect in society (Bocheńska, 2018a); thus, the military engagement of Kurdish women cannot be considered entirely 'modern'. Female guerrillas began to challenge the PKK's patriarchal structures, and 'in 1993 women formed an independent army and institutions to disrupt channels of secrecy, transform relations with local people, monitor and limit abuses of power' (Ustundag, 2016:134). However, as stressed by Yuksel, Kurdish women were initially subordinated to men, deprecated and treated instrumentally. As stressed by him, 'on the one hand, Kurdish nationalism politicised and mobilised Kurdish women. Conversely, unintentionally, it led Kurdish women to develop a womanhood and/or feminist consciousness by their questioning the prevalent sexism of Kurdish nationalist men' (Yuksel, 2006: 780). The marginalisation of Kurdish women by Kurdish and Turkish men as well as by Turkish women has paved the way for Kurdish women to establish journals and associations independent of Kurdish men and Turkish women since the mid-1990s. Moreover, the presence of Kurdish women in the national movement has gradually challenged the patriarchal system by offering new perspectives on how to liberate women and their homeland. The women guerillas influenced society by informing many village women of their rights and often by supporting their disobedience toward men and their families (Ferreira and Santiago, 2018). What is more, the PKK mountain camp became a shelter for women who were escaping from the state and family violence, as shown in the documentary by Ervian Briand entitled *The Women of Mount Ararat* (2004). Ultimately, the guerillas were successful in showing other women that they can also become brave warriors by speaking up and protecting themselves from domestic and state violence.

In addition to their participation in political movements, Zaza women activists have also engaged in alternative activities that aim to safeguard and promote their

cultural heritage. These activities go beyond military action and encompass a wide range of artistic expression. For instance, Zaza women engage in theatre performances, where they perform and sing in the Zazakî language, at both local and international levels. These events provide a platform for them to expose their linguistic and cultural heritage, promoting the use of Zazakî and expanding its reach beyond their immediate community via the Internet or YouTube. Through these artistic performances, they aim to reclaim their cultural identity and challenge the dominant narratives imposed by the state. By performing their native language on stage, they promote their right to linguistic and cultural diversity, ensuring that future generations can continue to embrace and value the richness of Zaza language and culture. Furthermore, Zaza women have made significant contributions to the realm of literature by producing written works in their mother tongue. Authors such as Nadire Güntaş Aldatmaz and Bedriye Topas have emerged as influential voices within their community, addressing social and political issues through their literary works. These educated Kurdish women have employed their writing to shed light on the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of Zaza women, presenting alternative viewpoints that challenge existing power structures. Alongside their literary efforts, Zaza women have actively participated in associations, advocating for the rights and well-being of their community. These forms of activism, often less prominent, highlight the multifaceted nature of Zaza women's engagement and their commitment to safeguarding their language, culture, and rights through various channels.

Chapter Five

Why revitalise Zazakî? Zaza women activists, their motivations, forms of action and challenges

In this chapter, I explore the diverse motivations that drive language and cultural revitalisation efforts and the various forms of activism demonstrated by Zaza/Kird women, based on my fieldwork conducted in Turkey and North Kurdistan in 2021. The appendix of this thesis contains brief biographies of all the women who participated in this study. Their motivations shed light on the numerous reasons and sources of inspiration for Zaza women's activism. They hold significant importance for the Zazakî language revitalisation movement, as they may provide valuable insights for shaping future alternative language policies. Additionally, the examination of different forms of activism provides a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cultural landscape of the Zaza people, with a particular focus on women. This exploration helps to identify their priorities and appreciate their creative contributions.

It is important to note that my fieldwork took place amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which hindered travel and face-to-face meetings with the activists. Despite these difficulties, I was able to interview 11 Zaza women activists residing in the Çewlîg/Bingöl, Amed/Diyarbakir, and Dersim/Tunceli provinces of North Kurdistan. Interestingly, the interviews highlight the discovery of the Internet as a powerful tool for Zaza people. As in many other social contexts all around the world, the pandemic proved conducive to the use of online channels of communication also for promoting the revitalisation of Zazakî language. Additionally, I interviewed one Kurmanji woman who had learned Zazakî and actively contributed to its revitalisation. To establish contact with the Zaza female activists, I used my networks of friends and acquaintances, employing the so-called snowball method. Due to the political sensitivity surrounding the Kurdish topic in Turkey, all interviews were conducted anonymously. While some women were not directly involved in politics, they expressed a desire for their names and person-

al information to remain confidential. Therefore, in this thesis, the real names of many women activists have been changed to protect their identities. The interview consisted of a total of 33 questions that encompassed four main topics, namely:

- Identity
- Speaking the Zazakî language (at home and elsewhere, as well as changes that are taking place among Zazakî native speakers)
- Activism focused on Zazakî language and culture
- The sense of citizenship and belonging.

The women activists I interviewed were engaged in various fields, including Zazakî language education, folklore collection, theatre performance, TV broadcasting, translation, and music. Their common motivation was their deep concern for the preservation and promotion of the Zazakî language. Among my interviewees, there were undergraduate and graduate students, as well as professionals working as teachers, dubbing artists, journalists, translators, and writers. The interviews were conducted in various settings, primarily in cafes or through online platforms due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic. The duration of the interviews ranged from one to two hours. Following the interviews, I personally transcribed and translated the recorded conversations.

At the end of this chapter, I also draw attention to the problems and obstacles that the Zaza women are facing. This helps to better appreciate the environment in which they are acting and the very intricate pattern of problems originating in both Turkish and Kurdish politics, as well as due to Kurdish society's uneasy attitudes to their own language and culture.

5.1. THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE ZAZAKÎ REVITALISATION

As emphasised in Chapter One, there are multiple factors contributing to language loss and the consequent need for revitalisation. The loss of a language is deeply intertwined with the loss of cultural knowledge, folklore, and traditional practices;

when a community loses its language, it experiences a profound 'erosion of its entire culture'. Language revitalisation is therefore closely tied to the revival also of the cultural aspects of a community. One crucial aspect of language revitalisation is the creation of new domains in which the language can be actively used. Zaza activists are working to establish such domains and encourage native speakers to engage in conversation and communication in their mother tongue, fostering language use in settings such as educational institutions, media platforms, cultural events, and community gatherings. Language is intricately connected to culture, nature, and spirituality. Being proficient in the language of a community is essential to fully participate as a member of that society and understand its cultural nuances. Reviving the Zazakî language requires not only linguistic efforts but also a broad engagement with the cultural heritage and values embedded within it. By encouraging the use of Zazakî and promoting its importance among the younger generation, Zaza activists are taking significant steps towards revitalising the language and preserving the cultural identity of the Zaza community. Havin, one of the Zaza activists, expressed her feelings and motivation to participate in language activities in these words:

> 'The disappearance of the Zazakî language affected me, so I wanted to contribute to my own language. On the day of the Bingölians, the Sehri Bingöl Theatre group was performing, and for the first time I saw that there was a theatre with Zazakî language, and it impressed me a lot. I was impressed that people were striving for a language that was on the verge of extinction. I can even say that I was ashamed, "How did I become such a stranger to my own language and culture?" After that, I started to take part in Zazakî theatre.'[25]

We can clearly understand from the above quotation that for indigenous activists, the mother tongue can be the motivation for mobilisation, social change, and resistance. Zazakî language and culture have been seen as a symbol of backwardness by the Turkish state and Turkish media for many years, but the use of the Zazakî language in the field of art positively affects local people's perspective on their language. In Havin's case, like many other Kurds, she probably neglected her native tongue because of seeing it only as the language of home and family

[25] Havin, 9 July 2021, Çewlîg.

conversations. However, encountering actors speaking her mother tongue made her realise that it can also be a language of art, literature, and of modern culture, and when she saw other activists performing theatre in Zazakî, she realised that she was alienated from her own language and culture. Therefore, we can see that 'language loss is essentially an issue related to the relationship between language and culture' (Fishman, 1996b). Thus, not speaking her mother tongue caused her to feel ashamed, but it later impacted her positively.

Bedriye, another Zaza female activist, became interested in the Zazakî language when she learned that her mother tongue was in danger of extinction. While studying in Ankara in 2010, she decided to participate in one of the Zazakî courses organised in the period of the peace process. It was her first experience of learning her mother tongue, and she described it in the following way:

> 'I started participating in a Zazakî language course in Ankara in 2010. In that course, I became aware of my language and culture, and I realised that I could only have my Kurdish identity with my own language. In the course, our teacher told us that according to the UNESCO report, our language would disappear, which made me very uncomfortable. I realised that I used to introduce myself as a Kurd, but I was not a Kurd. If I do not speak my own language, I am not Kurdish; how can I leave my own language, go another path, and still say I am Kurdish?'[26]

Language is an essential indicator of identity, and for Bedriye, not being able to speak Kurdish (Kirmanckî) meant not being part of the Kurdish community. As stressed by Grenoble, indigenous languages are the keys connecting us with our own ancestors, nature, and homeland (Grenoble, 2021). We cannot truly understand or become close to a community's spiritual values without knowing the language of the community (2021). The fact that the new generation does not know the Zazakî language makes them an easy target for the Turkish state's assimilation policies. On the other hand, young Zaza activists like Bedriye are breaking the circle of assimilation. They aim to reverse it by challenging ignorance of their language. Bedriye learned it and decided to speak it, and this way she 'talked back' to the Turkish structures of power, who did their best to annihilate her native lan-

[26] Bedriye, 15 July 2021, Dersim.

guage. Obviously, the Kurdish language courses, even if limited and with many shortcomings, encouraged her to speak Zazakî and use it within the community.

Another example is Zaza folklore and the childhood experience of listening to songs and fairy tales. Evidently, this can also be a source of inspiration and a mobilising factor for women activists. Zelal pointed to the songs of Kirmanckî dengbejs[27] that inspired her to study the Zazakî language and to make use of it:

> 'I graduated from Zazakî Language and Literature department at Munzur University. For my BA essay, I worked on Zazakî folk songs by Silo Qiz.[28] Currently, I am collecting folklore stories, tales, and poems. My inspiration from my early childhood is our kilams[29]/folk songs, and I was always under the influence of Silo Qiz. He has many kilams related to the Dersim genocide in 1938, and we, children of Dersim, grew up with stories and kilams about the genocide.'[30]

Many young people like Zelal grew up in the shadow of horrendous genocide stories. Obviously, Zelal focuses not only on folklore and language but strives to pass on to future generations the collective memories related to the Dersim genocide. For many years, information about the 1938 genocide was 'erased' from the Turkish national narratives and 'in danger of being forgotten' by Zaza people also (Ginsburg, 2002: 40). Zelal wants to record and transcribe the songs and poems of the Zazakî folk singer Silo Qiz' who witnessed the genocide. She aims to pass on the stories of the genocide to future generations so that the memory about it is kept alive and better known. For her, folklore is an important repository and the Zazakî language is perceived as a tool enabling access to the repository in order to resist the official Turkish historiography. Many similar initiatives focused on oral history, and tragic events from the past are found among other Kurdish folklore collectors

[27] Dengbêj is a Kurdish music genre and/or a singer of Dengbêj music genre. Dengbêjs are storytellers who sings traditional Kurdish (Zaza, Kurmanji) folk songs. There have been many terms to describe Dengbêjs throughout history, but Dengbêj is the most well-known today, and many storytellers who sing also use Dengbêj as part of their (artistic) name.

[28] Silo Qiz (1914 – 2019) is one of the witnesses of the 1938 Dersim Massacre, according to his own account; he learned to play the violin from his father when he was five years old. Silo Qiz, who transferred the pain and joy of the people into improvised music, often performed his dengbej music at village weddings and funerals.

[29] Zazakî folk/dengbej songs

[30] Zelal, 15 July 2021, Dersim.

(Schaffers, 2019; Bocheńska and Ghaderi, 2023). Oral history was also made use of in the case of the Armenian genocide (Çelik and Dinç, 2015). Despite being an unemployed Zazakî teacher, Zelal continues to work on Zazakî folklore and engages in cultural and linguistic activities in her town with unwavering determination.

However, folklore may not only be a source of historical knowledge. The richness of Zaza folk tales seemed a main motivation for Helin:

> 'While I was a bachelor's student, I became interested in learning to read and write in my native language. At that time, there was no one to teach us how to read and write in Zazakî, so I studied reading and writing in Zazakî on my own. My main inspiration for working on Zazakî was the richness of our folklore, culture, and language. In particular, our folk tales have been my most significant source of inspiration.'[31]

Before Zazakî language courses became more popular during the peace process, 2009 – 2015, many activists like Helin struggled on their own to learn to read in their mother tongue. For many decades, there were almost no written materials in Zazakî, and folklore, with its abundance of motifs and variety of vocabulary, became significant for the next generation of Zazakî learners. It often enabled them to enrich and personalise their way of expressing themselves (Bocheńska and Ghaderi, 2023). Like many other Zaza activists, Helin grew up with her mother's and grandmother's folk tales, which later inspired her to teach her native tongue to younger learners.

However, activists working for the continuity of Zaza language and culture are facing many problems. According to many of them, the most painful is the lack of moral support from their communities. While Bedriye was interested in writing in her mother tongue, she encountered a negative attitude from her community:

> 'When I started to write in my mother tongue, the people around me would say to me, "This language is useless, you cannot improve yourself with this language". And at first, such negative comments affected me a lot. Afterwards, I improved myself in writing and realised how important my native language is, and it helped me improve myself no matter what other people say. I keep saying that my native tongue has been my teacher and my guide.'[32]

[31] Helin, 10 July 2021, Çewlîg.

[32] Bedriye, 15 July 2021, Dersim.

Evidently, Bedriye has improved her knowledge of Zazakî despite the many negative comments she encountered. Reading and writing in the Zazakî language is a new phenomenon, and many Zaza people are not aware that one can write in their native tongue or that there are people who write in Zazakî and teach how to do so. Those who learned to read and write in their native tongue became much more attached to their culture and Kurdish identity. Developing almost a secret bond with their culture and identity, through learning, writing, and teaching the indigenous language, made them at the same time both much more sensitive and more devoted to the Zazakî culture. Their language was always seen as useless and an epitome of backwardness, and never as a language of instruction. By learning Zazakî through their own efforts, they proved to themselves and their community that their mother tongue deserved to be called a language of literature and education. Bedriye continues her engagement with Zazakî regardless of 'what other people say'. She ignored the negative comments and focused only on her mother tongue, hence the language itself became her shelter from the many negative attitudes to Zazakî with which the native speakers are still imbued due to the decades of state assimilation.

These examples reveal many reasons for Zaza women's engagement in language revitalisation. The endangerment of Zazakî, seeing a theatrical performance in Zazakî, childhood experience of listening to songs and fairy tales, and finally, the richness of the language, which may be perceived as a shelter in a discouraging environment, all prove that the motivations of Zaza women are very diverse. They are rooted in both negative and positive experiences.

Zaza women activists have carried out many activities in various fields. Whatever field they are engaged in, their main aim is to support and save their mother tongue and culture from extinction. They focus on promoting the speaking of Zazakî in public through demonstrations and street performances, engaging in producing Zazakî broadcasts on TV and the Internet, collecting and studying Kurdish folklore, and teaching the Zazakî language.

5.2. FORMS OF ACTION OF THE ZAZA WOMEN ACTIVISTS

5.2.1. Literature and research

Developing the Zazakî language takes place by encouraging the development of the modern literary language and scientific terminology useful for modern education and intellectual activity. Bedriye is a remarkable example of a Zaza woman who took it upon herself to learn how to read and write her native language, ultimately becoming one of the most prominent Zaza woman writers. Growing up in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, like numerous others of the Kirmanc diaspora she did not learn the Zazakî language from her parents but undertook the task of self-education. With a predominant focus on women's issues, Bedriye seeks to reveal the untold stories of Zaza women from both the past and the present, using her writing as a means of representation and empowerment; she primarily writes stories and poems. Further, she actively contributes to various Zazakî magazines, including *Newepelî*, *Kovara Şewçila*, and *Keyepelê Zazakî.net*; through her literary contributions, Bedriye enriches the Zazakî literary landscape and strengthens the voice of her community in these publications. Creating literature gives her the opportunity to deepen the psychological characteristics of her characters, and to seek new forms of expression in Zazakî that can be useful for a modern audience (Bocheńska, 2022; Bocheńska and Ghaderi, 2023).

Nadire Güntaş Aldatmaz focuses on researching the Alevi Kirmanc community. She obtained her master's degree from the Department of Kurdish Language at Mardin Artuklu University Living Languages Institute in 2010. Her master's thesis, entitled *Folklorê Kirmancan Ser o/ On Kirmanci Folklore*, holds significant importance as the comprehensive thesis written in the Zazakî language on Alevi Zaza folklore. Furthermore, she has edited and published four collections of Kirmanckî folklore[33] in the Zazakî language, and is an active member of the Vate Group, committed to the standardisation of the Zazakî language and to developing new academic vocabulary and terminology in Zazakî.

[33] Her books: *Pîyê mi Kemane Cinitêne*/My father was playing the violin, 2013; *Folklorê Kirmancan Ser o* / On Kirmanc Folklore, 2014; *Sanikanê Mamekîye Ra* / From the tales of Mamkiye (Dersim province center), 2013; *Pîltane, 2016.*

Zaza woman activists are careful that the form of their action promotes 'sensitivity toward others', and not any form of stigmatisation for not speaking their mother tongue. Their action does not receive any support from the local authorities or other associations, yet they make use of modern tools such as the Internet and social networks.

5.2.2. Street performance

Keje is an excellent example of an activist who participated in a local event to support her native tongue and encourage other Zazas, especially the younger generation, to use and speak their mother tongue in their daily life without fear and shame.

> 'We organised an event in the Dara Heni/Genç district of Çewlîg/Bingöl province. We printed the slogan Ziwane xo bimus, qiseybik, binus/Learn, write, and speak your mother tongue in Zazakî on t-shirts, which we wore during the event, and did not take them off until the end. With this event, we were trying to raise awareness among the younger generation to speak their native tongue. During it, we did not speak Turkish with the local people, and among ourselves we only communicated in Zazakî. The new generation is ashamed to speak in the Zazakî language. Our main goal with this event was to enable the younger generation to speak their mother tongue in public without shame. Why should they be ashamed to speak their native language? Do they feel embarrassed while speaking in English?'[34]

In Turkish media and Turkish politics, the Kurdish language was always associated with PKK activities, terror, and backwardness. Even when the state relaxed the prohibition in the 2000s, many Zazakî speakers were still afraid to speak their language in public, so such activities encourage native speakers to use Zazakî in public places. Since the younger generation is not accustomed to hearing Zazakî in their daily life, on TV, or at school, such activities may increase their interest in their mother tongue and enable them to speak it without shame. The younger generation has a negative attitude towards their native language because of the pressures imposed by the Turkish state via modern media. The Kurds are often portrayed as wild and ignorant peasants and mountain people in Turkish films, which

[34] Keje, 10 July 2021, Çewlîg.

increases their dehumanisation (Marilungo, 2016; Bocheńska, 2018b). Educated Zaza activists like Keje are aware of this negative view of their mother tongue, and they aim to reverse it and make Zaza youth willing to 'speak their native language without fear of persecution' (Bennett, 2020).

5.2.3. Modern media

Today, the Internet, television, and easy access to information are very important for the languages of minority communities. Since minority languages have always been excluded from mainstream national media, nowadays, the Internet offers an alternative space for local community activists to teach and run other activities in their native languages. Berivan, who dubs Zazakî cartoons on the Kurdish cartoon channel Zarok TV,[35] described her work in the following words:

> 'Nowadays, everyone is very busy with the Internet and television. Children watch television daily; the Internet and television have a significant impact on them. In the past, there has never been a Zazakî television programme for children, so what I do now is very important. Currently, there are many cartoons in the Kurmanji language, and we would like to have cartoons in our language too so that our children can find something to watch in their mother tongue. Our job is tough, but our aim significant; we do not want our mother tongue to disappear, and we are fighting for our own language so that our children can learn their mother tongue.'[36]

Before Zarok TV started broadcasting in 2015, there was no children's channel in Zazakî or Kurmanji Kurdish; Zarok TV is Turkey's first private Kurdish children's channel. It broadcasts in Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza, although Kurmanji is the dominant language. After being established in 2015, it faced many problems including a temporary closure in 2016, but managed to continue with its work. Berivan stressed that the Zazakî language has less airtime than the Kurmanji language, and that the Zazakî language needs to be supported more because of the domination of Kurmanji and the scarcity of Zazakî programmes. The widespread use of the Internet and TV, along with the increase in programmes for children,

[35] Zarok means 'child' in Kurmanji Kurdish

[36] Berivan, 12 July 2021, Amed

including in their mother tongue and in the topics they are interested in, offers many new possibilities for language revitalisation. Activists such as Berivan are aware of this, and they see the media as an essential tool to teach the next generation their native language and to popularise programmes in Zazakî. In many contexts, the Internet and TV are perceived as dangerous for children; for example, a recent case in Seattle[37] resulted in parents preparing a lawsuit due to the negative effects of social media networks on children (Suciu, 2023). But establishing broadcast opportunities is a significant step for minorities (Suciu, 2023). It must be remembered that in the case of Berivan, the Zazas and many other minorities, the Internet and television constitute an alternative space for indigenous language policy. Havin sees the Internet as one of the easiest ways to expand her activities and to reach Zazakî native speakers:

> 'Currently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we cannot perform in the theatre face-to-face, and we are trying to reach our people via social media. We are presently making short films on YouTube. Today, one of the easiest ways to reach the public is social media, and we try to reach our people through social media and raise awareness of our language and culture. Our short films (presenting theatrical performances – HRK) focus on cultural issues and interpersonal conflicts in a humorous way. My goal is to approach our people sensitively about their language and culture, encourage them to speak their own language, mobilise them, and fight for a language that is on the verge of extinction.'[38]

When the pandemic started, Zazakî language activities, which were already scarce, came to a standstill. Local activists like Havin sought an alternative method to reach the audience through programmes in their native language during those difficult times. Due to the pandemic, they could not continue theatre performances on the stage, so they started to make short films and share them on the Internet. After receiving positive feedback from their community, they decided to expand their

[37] The Seattle Public Schools (SPS) filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court against multiple social media companies, arguing that the platforms are causing harm to students' social, emotional, and mental health. For more information: Seattle Public Schools Launch Legal Fight Against Social Media Companies (forbes.com), 15.03.2023, 11:19.

[38] Havin, 9 July 2021, Çewlîg.

activities on the Internet.[39] It provided access to these events not only for Zazas living in various cities in Turkey but also for Zazas living in Europe. The presence of indigenous languages on the Internet, reaching larger audiences, also increases their visibility. On the other hand, the Internet offers an alternative space for indigenous activists to express themselves and carry out their activities without state and local authority interference.[40] It is also essential to pay attention to the form of language activism she is promoting. What she considers important is 'humorous' material which is 'sensitive toward people'. In many cases, Kurdish – often men – activists embarrass those who do not speak Kurdish by stigmatising them, for example on social media and on many other occasions. In contrast, Havin suggests approaching people sensitively and encouraging them to speak their own language. Although from previous interlocutors we have learned that feeling ashamed can also be positive, it was rather their conclusion and not the sense of shame imposed by others and the fact of being stigmatised. The female activists share information about their feelings of shame and do not directly impose them on others.

5.2.4. Collecting of Zaza folklore

Another form of Zazakî language activism is the collecting of folklore. Helin, who teaches Zazakî language at Bingöl University, continues her Zazakî studies as a folklore collector. Being an activist who grew up with her grandmother's fairytales, she strives to preserve Zaza folklore and pass it on to future generations.

> 'I focus on academic studies, and I teach Zazakî at Bingöl University. We, the teachers of the Zazakî language department of Bingöl University, are preparing Zazakî textbooks for the 4th, 5th, and 6th-grade students. We have published four Zaza folklore books on behalf of the Zazakî language department, and the materials in these books were collected by our own students from Zaza villages. Mainly, I am working on Zaza folklore. I aim to protect my language, culture, and especially my folklore.'[41]

[39] Şehr-i Bingöl Tiyatrosu – YouTube

[40] Even though the Turkish state has frequently banned some Kurdish websites, during times of trouble they can be accessed through tools such as a VPN.

[41] Helin, 10 July 2021, Çewlîg.

After Mardin Artuklu University (2009) and Munzur University (2013), Bingöl University (2013) became the third university in Turkey to have a Zazakî language and literature undergraduate programme. All university academics are of Zaza origin and speak the Zazakî language at native level. There are obvious differences between the political context of Turkey and that of Ecuador, where indigenous languages are already recognised as official, and the Model of the Intercultural Bilingual Education System was introduced by the National Director's Office of Intercultural Bilingual Education (DINEIB), but Helin and her colleagues are focusing on designing the school curriculum within the limited opportunities they have. One of their aims is to prepare annual Zazakî teaching materials in book and digital formats for the first and middle-grade students. This is carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Education of Turkey, even though neither Kurmanji nor Zazakî holds official status and such goodwill from the state may end at any moment. In addition, Helin, who lectures about folklore at the university, encourages and organises her students to do fieldwork. Their task is to record Zazakî tales, stories, folk songs, traditions, and customs from the rural areas where the Zaza people live. Bringing the collected folklore materials together into a book reduces, to some extent, the danger of extinction of Zaza folklore, and many Zaza tales, stories, folk songs, traditions, and customs are introduced in modern teaching materials, which makes them accessible for future generations (Bocheńska and Ghaderi, 2023; Bocheńska et al., 2023).

5.2.5. Language Revitalisation through Music and Theatre

Gule is a prominent artist belonging to the Jin Ma music group in Amed province. The group comprises exclusively female musicians and specialises in the rendition of traditional songs in various Kurdish dialects, such as Kurmanci, Zazakî, Sorani, Lori, Kelhori, and Hewrami. They frequently perform in both Kurdish cities and major urban centres throughout Turkey.

Source of the photo: Orkestraya Jinma/Ma Kadın Orkestrası – ma music centre (mamusicenter.com)

Gule's primary focus within the group is singing traditional Zazakî kilams, i.e., dengebej songs. However, her dedication extends beyond her role as a performer. Gule actively engages in the collection and safeguarding of lesser-known Zazakî kilams, thereby preserving this valuable musical heritage for future generations. Furthermore, she is driven by the desire to ensure that 'her father's songs' (the kilams she grew up with) will endure for generations to come. Through her dedication, Gule not only ensures the continuity of Zazakî kilams but also plays a vital role in safeguarding their enduring heritage and cultural importance.

Although I was unable to conduct a personal interview with Sakina Teyna due to the pandemic, I have included her in my research as a noteworthy example of a female Zaza activist. Sakina is from Gimgim/Varto town in Muş province and is a well-known Alevi Kirmanc singer. During her university years, she became familiar with Kurdish music traditions and began singing in her native language as a form of resistance against the assimilation policies of the state. In 1991, she worked as a vocalist at the Istanbul Mesopotamia Cultural Centre, where she actively participated in promoting cultural expression. However, due to the political pressures of the 1990s, Sakina opted for political activism, which had significant consequences for her life.

Source of the photo: http://sakinateyna.com/trio-mara/

Sakina relocated to Austria in 2006 as a political refugee. It was there that she fully immersed herself in her passion for singing. Drawing inspiration from traditional Kurdish songs, she embarked on a new musical endeavour by forming the female group TRIO MARA with pianist Nazê Îşxan and violinist Nurê Dilovanî. The group's repertoire is primarily performed and transmitted among women, highlighting their rich cultural heritage. TRIO MARA skilfully combines elements of Western classical and contemporary styles, infusing their music with diverse influences. Sakina's artistic journey, accompanied by TRIO MARA, is of significant importance in ensuring the continuity of their language. Their collective efforts not only contribute to the safeguarding of linguistic and cultural heritage, but also serve as a potent means of expressing resilience and resistance.[42]

Two female activists from Çewlîg/Bingöl actively participated in theatrical performances with the Şehri Bingöl theatre group. Havin and Hazal were involved in various plays and performed in many Kurdish cities, major Turkish cities, and even in Germany for the Zaza diaspora. They performed in comedies portraying

[42] http://sakinateyna.com/trio-mara/, 31.03.2023, 12:29

the traditional lives of the Zaza community. Following in the footsteps of other members of the theatre group, Havin and Hazal developed an interest in Zazakî plays and began performing in the Zazakî language when they realised its vulnerability. Through their performances, and by using online platforms, they successfully reach not only Zaza people residing in their homeland but also those in the diaspora. Furthermore, the theatre group has taken responsibility for promoting the artistic language of Zazakî and its presence in the realm of art. The recognition of Zazakî as a language of art, showcased in cultural centres and universities, plays a crucial role in the efforts of numerous young Zazas, including Havin and Hazal, to preserve their native language and culture, contributing to ensuring the continuity and revitalisation of Zazakî language and culture.

5.3. The main challenges for Zaza activists

Local activists in Turkey and Kurdistan need more support from NGOs, local municipalities, political parties, and the state. In particular, the lack of support from the local authorities makes it very difficult for activists to carry out their activities and reach out to their community. Hazal is usually active in the city of Çewlîg/Bingöl, which is governed by the pro-Islamic *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/Justice and Development Party/AKP, a ruling party in Turkey. She and her colleagues encountered many difficulties due to local bureaucracy; one of the problems was that the municipality had authority over their plays and the allocation of space:

> 'As Şehr-i Bingöl Tiyatro Grubu/Şehr-i Bingöl Theatre Group, we cooperated with the local municipality. Before any of our plays were performed, we had to send them our script, and they approached it with serious concern and doubts, especially the plays in Zazakî and Kurmanji. The script would first be translated and then reviewed and approved by the municipality. Sometimes our scripts were refused, which would affect our morale, as we were addressing social issues in our plays. At the beginning, they were very distant with us. They kept telling us 'You are political sympathisers', but once they realised that our work is not about politics but about language and culture, they no longer imposed so many obstacles.'[43]

[43] Hazal, 8 July 2021, Çewlîg.

It is challenging to carry out activities in indigenous languages in Turkey because the state and local administrations are sceptical of anything done in non-Turkish languages. This affects activities and the activists' creativity and their willingness to participate in future projects. On the other hand, it also shows that even the attitude of political opponents (i.e., the AKP) can change, and pose fewer obstacles than before. Finally, as is evident from the interviews, the pro-Kurdish *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*/People's Democratic Party/HDP[44] also has a narrow perception of Kurdish artistic engagement, not seeing it as part of 'real politics' and therefore not worthy of their interest and support. Many of them do not know and do not use Kurdish themselves[45] and therefore they are less willing to see language revitalisation as an important part of Kurdish politics.

What is more, Kurdish politicians focus mainly on the Kurmanji language. Diyarbekir, after Çewlîg and Dersim, is one of the cities where the majority of Zaza people live and where the Kurdish leftist movement is most potent. Despite that, its campaigns are generally carried out only in the Kurmanji language. Moreover, the lack of support from HDP(BDP) for the Zazakî language causes Zaza activists to distance themselves from the Kurdish movement. Gulçin, who criticises the language discrimination of the Amed/Diyarbekir municipality, said:

> 'In the municipality of Amed, they carry out their academic and cultural activities in Kurmanji, and their activities in Zazakî are negligible. We always say that the Zazakî language is in danger of extinction and should be supported more. There was much positive discrimination about language in the past, but now they are not doing much because of the backlash from Zaza activists.'[46]

Another Zaza activist, Bedriye, complains about the Dersim municipality:

> 'The Kurdish community and the municipality of Dersim still do not understand the struggle we are involved in for our own language. The politicians do not understand language issues, the politicians want people to gather around them, but they do not care

[44] Also known as Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi/Peace and Democracy Party/BDP

[45] See for example: 'Siyaseta Kurd ziman û tiştên hatine holê', Amîda Kurd after Azadiya Welat, 2014 https://www.amidakurd.net/ku/tekst/siyaseta_kurd_ziman_%C3%BB_ti%C5%9Ft%C3%AAn_hatine_hol%C3%AA

[46] Gulçin, 13 July 2021, Amed.

> what language these people speak. Several times, I asked the municipality of Dersim for help to publish a local newspaper in Zazakî or support for the Zazakî language, but their answers were always negative. They are unaware of Zazakî's situation, or do not want to understand it.'[47]

Dersim City is governed by Turkey's first and only communist mayor and party.[48] Despite the party's success, during its administration, Dersim municipality did not sufficiently support Zazakî, and this caused reactions from local activists. On the other hand, the priority of Diyarbekir municipality and its financial support for the Kurmanji language leaves many Zaza activists to carry out their activities on their own without any financial support. The fact that local authorities and Kurdish politicians focus on their own political agendas rather than language and culture in Kurdish cities negatively affects the Zazakî revival campaigns.

Also, Zaza women activists face a lack of solidarity with other Zaza women. What they stress is that some Zaza women activists are unaware of the work of other women, and focus only on their activities. Gulçin even highlighted the approach of other women activists in Turkey, who come together to make their voices heard, in contrast to the Zaza women who are unaware of each other:

> 'Women's activism is powerful among Turks and Kurmanjis. They come together from time to time and make their voices heard, but Zaza women activists do not engage in this way. A few women activists work on the Zazakî language, but they do not know each other, do not come together, and do not work together.'[49]

The lack of cooperation among Zaza women activists hinders the continuity of their activities and the reach they can have. Curiously, however, as well as the Zaza activists, there are also Kurmanjis who have taken on the struggle for Zazakî revitalisation. Hazal joined the Şehiri Bingöl Tiyatro Topluluğu/Bingöl City Theatre Group in 2009. It was the first Zazakî theatre group in the Çewlîg/Bingöl province.

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[47] Bedriye, 15 July 2021, Dersim.

[48] Fatih Mehmet Maçoğlu (Also known as 'The Communist Mayor') is a Kirmanc communist politician and founder of Socialist Councils Federation (SMF). In the local elections in 2019, he was elected mayor of Dersim/Tunceli representing the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP).

[49] Gulçin, 13 July 2021, Amed.

She acted in various Zazakî plays for six years because she perceives Zazakî as more vulnerable than Kurmanji:

> 'In general, I can say that I live by feeling and absorbing the Kurdish identity, yet I do not identify as either a Zaza or Kurmanji; I am Kurdish, so I can say that I am both Zaza and Kurmanji. Therefore, I embrace it like this, so everything in Kurdish language and culture is part of my essence. Currently, all our theatre plays are played in Zazakî, and we consciously make our plays in Zazakî; it may be in Kurmanji too, but Kurmanji is a language that is already supported, and people actively speak it, so with our art, we are trying to keep alive a language that is on the verge of extinction.'[50]

Hazal is an intriguing example; her mother tongue, Kurmanji, is also in a very disadvantaged position in Turkey and, as shown above, it is the main dialect supported by the Kurdish movement. However, she chose to support a language that is even more vulnerable than her mother tongue. We can clearly understand from her words that she does not consider herself Zaza or Kurmanji, but rather a Kurd, who acknowledges both dialects as her native tongues. Moreover, she is an Alevi Kurd living in a city where most of the population are Sunni Zazas. Despite the religious, linguistic, and cultural differences in her town, she became interested in the Zazakî dialect and perceives her work for Zazakî as purposeful and necessary. She grew up cultivating differences in her community and it motivated her to embrace, support and learn more about them. This challenges the conviction, imposed by the Turkish education system and repeated by many of Turkey's citizens, that only a single language, Turkish, can enable people to develop and enjoy modern lives.

Finally, it is important to stress that female activists are careful about the form of their actions, promoting 'sensitivity toward others' rather than any form of stigmatisation for not speaking the mother tongue. Even though they do not receive any support from the local authorities and still face many obstacles, they are very resilient and creative in finding solutions. They make use of literature, research, music, theatre, and even street performance. They employ modern tools such as the Internet and social networks, and continue with their struggles for their native tongue.

[50] Hazal, 8 July 2021, Çewlîg.

Chapter Six

Zaza Women: From Language Revitalisation to Citizenship Rights

For Engin Isin, the proposer of the well-known concept *acts of citizenship*, which opened new ways to conceive of citizenship in our contemporary world, citizenship is not only a legal status, or civic practices that this legal status enables. In the global world of ever more complicated economic interests, international networks, multi-layered identities, and often conflicting loyalties that transcend the borders of a single state, it emerges as a phenomenon in the making. While occurring outside of a given legal and institutional order, the new citizenship calls into question that order's very existence and content (2008, 2016). The aforementioned activities of Zaza women can be perceived as acts of citizenship by which they seek to undermine the Turkish structure of power in order to claim their linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson, 2022). Also, by engaging in language revitalisation they increase their visibility as women and thus do not just seek to save the language but also make claims with regard to women's rights (Bocheńska et al., 2023). As is evident from the interviews, women play a very important role in keeping a language alive and transmitting it to future generations. Women are the first teachers, because children learn their native tongue from their mothers. Hence, mothers are the ones who 'create new speakers, new domains for the language use, and a new generation' (Grenoble, 2021). However, what we are also witnessing is Kurdish women's activism based on knowledge and skills, which challenges the traditional image of a woman remaining at home with her children (Bocheńska et al., 2023).

According to Gulçin, the survival of Zazakî is more than just the survival of a language, the prevention of language loss is described as destroying important cultural practices and artistic skills (Fishman, 1996b; Hinton, 2001). Gulçin believes it has also much to do with being a woman:

> 'Language and woman are indistinguishable; the mother first teaches her children their native tongue and has a powerful influence on them. If I cannot speak my mother

> tongue, I will be estranged from my mother and my roots. The most crucial feature of the language is that it is the root of the human being; everything is intertwined with the language, our beliefs, our culture, and the woman's context. If women take possession of the language, the field of language will expand, interest in the language will increase, and the condition of our native language will improve.'[51]

She directly links language revitalisation with women's role in society, and suggests that women may be the most successful in this aim, because thanks to them the use of language will expand and interest in it will increase, positively impacting the condition of the Zazakî language.

Gule also associates speaking her native language with womanhood and women's freedom:

> 'Everyone learns their mother tongue at home, and children learn their native language from their mothers. In my opinion, language, womanhood, and women's freedom are inseparable.'[52]

As they have stated, the mother tongue plays a significant role in our daily life, in how we see the world. Many Zaza women activists are aware of the role of women in preserving language and culture. They focus on women in order to prevent language shift and expand their Zazakî activities. Moreover, language revitalisation can also promote women's visibility by encouraging their social engagement which not only benefits women but also other members of society. Therefore, these two – women's rights and language revitalisation – can be described, after Martha Nussbaum, as 'combined increased capabilities' (Bocheńska et al., 2023). Hence, by playing a crucial role in the revival of their native language and culture, Zaza women can also advance their rights as women. What is more, thanks to the knowledge of their mother tongues, women possess significant indigenous knowledge and skills which are today perceived as one of the important sources of decolonisation (Smith, 1999; Bocheńska and Ghaderi, 2023). As stressed by Hassan, 'reconnecting cultural and linguistic revitalization with community healing allows women to be "active in 'on-the-ground' decolonization efforts"' (2015: 9).

[51] Gulçin, 13 July 2021, Amed.

[52] Gule, 12 July 2021, Amed.

Therefore, many female Zaza activists see women as the key to the revival of the Zazakî language and culture, at the same time as part of their own liberation efforts.

Furthermore, the mother tongue can also offer an alternative space for women to better express their feelings and reconsider their life as a woman:

> 'Language opened a way for me to exist. In my literature, I shout about the things I endure in my daily life or about how I see people. Every day I am becoming better in it, and I can see it in my books and poems. The more I read and write in my native language, the more I improve myself. The language is the teacher, and it opens my way to exist. It happens that I forget that I am a woman, but every time I undertake writing, I recall my womanhood and I feel that I am a woman again.'[53]

Her mother tongue, for her, is not just a spoken language but a medium to communicate with others or to express frustration. Additionally, it offers an aesthetic and ethical potential, a safe space, that enables Bedriye to enjoy being in the world as a woman. Moreover, 'by using the mother tongue to write literature, women felt that they developed and enhanced their sense of self, identity as well as citizenship. By creating books published by and about Kurdish women, women acted as transformative agents that countered the erasure of women's and Kurdish voices and histories' (Bocheńska et al., 2023).

There are many reasons why Kurdish people reject Turkish identity and do not perceive themselves as fully-fledged citizens of Turkey. One of the main reasons is that the state does not recognise their languages, culture, and identity rights. According to Hazal, she does not feel like a Turkish citizen; she has been forced to be so, whereas she wants to be able to feel 'Kurdish':

> 'I do not feel like a Turkish citizen, but I am forced to feel [such -HRK]; it is Kurdishness that I have adopted and live by, and naturally, I would like to be a Kurdish citizen. I have been working on Kurdish languages (Zazakî, Kurmanji) and culture for years; a woman who struggles for her native language and culture does not feel like a Turkish citizen.'[54]

[53] Bedriye, 15 July 2021, Dersim.

[54] Hazal, 8 July 2021, Çewlîg.

She states that she does not feel like a Turkish citizen because she is engaged in the struggle to speak her mother tongue and to participate in Zaza culture; she has done her best to adopt her self-chosen cultural identity. In addition, the fact that Kurdish identity is not recognised and ignored in Turkey forces many Kurdish people to be only Turkish citizens, which does not satisfy them.

In contrast, Aysel confessed that she has not been subjected to any oppression regarding her language and culture:

> 'I feel like a Turkish citizen because I live in this region, in Turkey. Yes, I am a Kurd, but when I live in this region, I have no trouble expressing myself, speaking my native language, doing activities in my mother tongue, there is no pressure on us.'[55]

Aysel does not pay much attention to the Turkish policy of assimilation and to the oppression it entails; she states that she uses her native language in daily life or education without any problems. Furthermore, it happens also that Kurds who call themselves fully-fledged Turkish citizens either hide their Kurdish identity or see it as something secondary and peripheral. The biggest reason for this attitude is the negative perception of the Kurdish language, identity, and culture that has been created by the state and media in Turkey for many decades. Being a good citizen in Turkey is associated with happy Turkishness, as emphasised in the slogan inscribed even on the slopes of Kurdish mountains *Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*/'How happy it is to say I am Turkish'. Thus, Kurdish identity is hidden, as it is far from the imposed representation of a good 'Turkish' citizen.

Nevertheless, the state's oppressive policies toward the Kurdish people have also caused many Kurds to disregard Turkish citizenship. Gulçin admits:

> 'You need to have equal rights to feel like a citizen of a country. Turkish education is free for Turks; there is no language pressure in their lives, but I am Zaza Kurdish and cannot receive education in my native language. How can I feel a Turkish citizen when our villages were burned down, and when we were forced to migrate from our motherland?'[56]

[55] Aysel, 8 July 2021, Çewlîg.

[56] Gulçin, 13 July 2021, Amed.

Zaza activists, including Gulçin, strongly reject Turkish citizenship due to the ongoing inequality in fundamental human rights, such as the lack of education in their mother tongue and restrictions on its public use. They highlight the Turkish state's aggressive policies towards its Kurdish citizens, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted in the forced displacement of many Kurds from their ancestral lands. The forced migration and state violence inflicted on the Kurdish people have left lasting trauma and resentment in the Kurdish community; the historical and ongoing political, linguistic, and cultural oppression by the Turkish state has deeply affected its Kurdish citizens. Many Kurds do not perceive themselves as fully integrated into the current state system due to the state's past and present policies that have suppressed their rights and undermined their cultural identity. The wounds caused by this oppression continue to shape the experience of Kurdish citizens, influencing their views regarding their place within the state system.

Moreover, Zaza women activists face citizenship issues in Turkey. According to Hazal, citizenship that corresponds to one's identity, language, and culture is better than oppression and imposed identity:

> 'I want to be a Kurdish citizen, I feel my Kurdish essence, but I do not define it under the name of Turkish identity. I was born a Kurd, but I am forced to live as a Turk, and I would love to be born and live as a Kurd.'[57]

Interestingly, Havin states that being a Zaza citizen has a different meaning for her than being a Kurdish citizen:

> 'I would like to be a Zaza citizen, not a Kurdish one. I have always verbally said that I am Zaza, but it would mean something different to me if it was written on my ID. I cannot say I am Turkish or Kurdish, I am Zaza, and I would have a chance to prove it with such an official document.'[58]

In Turkey, the term 'Kurdish' is primarily associated with the Kurmanji dialect, culture, and identity. As a result, a significant number of Zazas do not identify themselves as Kurdish. The Kurdish political movement, which predominantly focuses on Kurmanji Kurdish, often prioritises and supports Kurmanji Kurdish in

[57] Hazal, 8 July 2021, Çewlîg.

[58] Havin, 9 July 2021, Çewlîg.

its election campaigns, local activities, and rallies. This lack of attention and support for Zazakî language and culture within the Kurdish political movement can lead many Zazas to feel excluded from the Kurdish mainstream. This sense of distinctiveness strengthens the belief among Zazas that they should be recognised as a distinct ethnic group, part of a broader Kurdish identity. They seek recognition, not as an entity separate from Kurdish identity but rather as an essential component and distinct ethnic group within the broader Kurdish community.

Gule, conversely, does not favour Kurdish citizenship, due to the oppression and discrimination of Kurdish people in Turkey:

> 'Under the current conditions, I do not want my Kurdish identity to be marked on my identification card, because there is assimilation, oppression, and discrimination against the Kurds in Turkey. If Kurdish is written on my ID, I would be more exposed to this pressure and discrimination. I can say that they could easily target us, like the Jews in Nazi Germany. If the oppression and discrimination ceased to exist, I would love to be a Kurdish citizen.'[59]

In Turkey, as well as in many other countries, the prevailing monist and hegemonic understanding of citizenship often results in the infringement of the citizenship rights of minority communities. This situation is particularly evident for indigenous communities who reject the state's concept of citizenship; the official citizenship framework can become a source of oppression and assimilation, undermining the rights and identities of these communities. Even in present-day Turkey, many Kurds feel compelled to conceal their Kurdish identity due to political and social pressures; they often hide their identity from other members of Turkish society. Gule's observations highlight the fact that for most Kurds in Turkey, their Kurdish identity is seen as the main reason for their direct exposure to state oppression and discrimination. The denial of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights, as well as the history of discriminatory policies, have fostered an environment where expressing Kurdish identity openly can lead to adverse consequences. This reality perpetuates a climate of fear and necessitates the concealment of Kurdish identity by many Kurds in Turkey.

[59] Gule, 9 July 2021, Çewlîg.

The language revitalisation efforts of Zaza women can be seen as acts of citizenship that challenge the legal status quo in the Republic of Turkey. These efforts represent a form of resistance against the marginalisation and assimilation of the Zazakî language and culture by the Turkish state. The interviews conducted reveal that there is no consensus among Zaza women regarding their Kurdish or Zaza identity. Some feel the pressure from both the Turkish state and the dominant Kurmanji majority and prefer to emphasise their Zaza identity. However, similar to Kurmanji women, Zaza women also perceive their language revitalisation struggle as interconnected with women's rights. They view the revitalisation of Zazakî as a means of empowering their womanhood and nurturing a sense of freedom. By reclaiming and promoting their native tongue, Zaza women assert their agency and challenge the oppressive state structures that limit their participation in society. The revitalisation of the Zazakî language serves as a tool to assert their rights, challenge gender norms, and enhance their sense of empowerment.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the linguistic and cultural revitalisation efforts of Zaza women activists in Kirdane or Kirmanciye (North Kurdistan), Turkey, focusing on their efforts to keep the Zazakî language and culture alive and pass it on to future generations. Through their efforts, these women are challenging the Turkish state's assimilation policies and oppressive practices that try to eradicate their native language and culture. By examining the challenges faced by the Zaza community, specifically women, in the Turkish Republic, within the Turkish Republic's framework of citizenship based on a single language and ethnicity, this study has emphasised the significance of reclaiming linguistic and cultural heritage. Through acts of citizenship and cultural activism, Zaza women claim their identity and demand recognition and rights within the wider Kurdish movement. These initiatives not only contribute to the preservation of the Zazakî language but also represent the resilience and determination of marginalised indigenous communities. Through my interviews and fieldwork, this research has examined the motivations, the forms of action, and the obstacles encountered by Zaza women activists, highlighting their role in cultural activism and the pursuit of women's and civic rights. This research fills the gap in existing academic studies on indigenous communities by shedding light on the revitalising of the language and culture of the Kurdish people, particularly the Zaza community. It emphasises the importance of including non-Western indigenous communities in global debates on language revitalisation. Also, this thesis aimed to increase the visibility of Zaza women in academic studies by making their struggles and efforts a subject of research and academic writing. Ultimately, the findings of this study underline the resilience and determination of Zaza women to maintain their language and culture, while advocating for broader acceptance and support in their pursuit of cultural revitalisation.

Turkey's endangered languages and marginalised communities face numerous challenges that threaten their linguistic and cultural identity. The monolingual policies enforced by the Turkish state, rooted in Kemalist ideology, contributed to the

suppression and assimilation of minority languages and cultures. The non-recognition of indigenous communities and the forced migration of the Kurdish population has increased the danger of extinction of languages such as Zazakî and Kurmanji Kurdish. The state-sponsored campaign, *Vatandaş Türkçe konuş*/'Citizen speak Turkish', aimed to homogenise society by annihilating local languages and cultures. In addition, the armed conflict with the PKK and the subsequent displacement of Kurdish communities, the removal of the Kurds from their ancestral lands, interrupted language transmission. It is essential for the continuity of local languages that the Turkish state recognises and preserves linguistic diversity, supports bilingual education, and promotes an inclusive environment that respects endangered languages and the rights of their speakers. By doing so, Turkey can embrace its multicultural heritage and contribute to the preservation of global linguistic and cultural diversity.

The language and identity of the Zaza people, which includes Kirdkî, Kirmanckî, Dimilkî, and Zazakî, reveal the richness of linguistic and cultural diversity. The distinction between language and dialect in the context of the Zazakî language and its relationship with Kurdish dialects and other Iranian languages is a complex and multifaceted issue, affected by sociopolitical, historical, and ethnic factors. While the language and dialect debates continue within the Zaza and Kurdish communities, it is evident that the Zazas have a unique linguistic heritage that contributes to their cultural identity. Various terms used by Zaza people to define their communities, such as Kird, Kirmanc, Dimilî, and Zaza, reflect a wide variety of perspectives within the community as a result of the complex interplay of history, religion, and sociopolitical dynamics. The Zaza community has been marginalised by both the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement, leading to crises of identity. In addition, there are conflicting views within the Zaza community, with some vehemently rejecting the Kurdish identity and claiming linguistic independence, while others espouse their Kurdish heritage.

The activism of Kurdish women in Turkey, primarily Zaza women, has been instrumental in safeguarding their rights and challenging the Turkish state's oppressive policies. With their participation in Kurdish political movements, Zaza women have contributed to the development of Kurdish identity and preserving their native language and culture. They questioned the assimilation policies im-

posed by the state, using cultural and linguistic practices as a means to reclaim their rights and maintain their Kurdish citizenship. The endeavours of Zaza women to preserve the Zazakî language and pass on their collective native stories and history to future generations have played a vital role in resisting the erasure of their culture in both national narratives and local contexts. By engaging in activities such as theatre performances and literature in their native tongue, Zaza women also showcased their cultural heritage, promoted linguistic variety, and challenged the dominant narratives imposed by the state. Moreover, their activism reshaped the notion of citizenship by highlighting lived practice and challenging patriarchal norms. Kurdish women's activism serves as an inspiration, emphasising their determination to resist marginalisation, reclaim their rights, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equal society.

For Zaza women, reviving the Zaza language and keeping the Zaza culture alive is the most important source of motivation. Their motivations range from deep concern over the decline of their cultural heritage to a desire to regain their linguistic and cultural identity. Zaza women activists engage in various forms of activism, including writing in Zazakî and teaching it, folklore collection, theatrical performance, and music. They are attempting to create new spaces where the Zazakî language can be used actively, and encourage native speakers, primarily the younger generation, to safeguard and speak their mother tongue. The obstacles that Zaza women activists face, such as lack of support from their communities and negative attitudes towards their native language, emphasise the complex atmosphere in which they operate. Despite these obstacles, Zaza women activists continue in their efforts to revive the Zazakî language and increase the significance of language and cultural preservation. Overall, the fieldwork conducted in Kirdane and Kirmanciye sheds light on the motivations, course of actions and challenges encountered by Zaza women activists; their contributions have a significant place in shaping the future of the Zaza language revival movement and developing alternative language policies.

In addition, Zaza women's endeavours to revitalise their native tongue and to safeguard their rights as citizens in Turkey demonstrates the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity. By preserving and promoting their native tongue, Zaza women challenge the policies of marginalisation and assimilation

imposed by the Turkish state, while at the same time questioning gender norms and empowering themselves as women. Through their activism and commitment, Zaza women have demonstrated the resilience, creativity, and dedication required to preserve their language and culture. By actively participating in language revival and cultural preservation, Zaza women claim their identity and seek recognition within the wider Kurdish community.

This thesis has highlighted the role of Zaza women in cultural activism and their pursuit of women's and civil rights. Ultimately, women's determination and resilience underline the importance of promoting linguistic and cultural rights for a more inclusive and diverse society, both in Turkey and beyond. The efforts of Zaza women are a powerful example of how grassroots movements can demonstrate resilience in challenging oppressive systems, calling for change for marginalised communities.

Appendix

Hazal is 29 years old and lives in Kars Province. She is a Kurmanji Kurd from the Çewlîg/Bingöl province. She graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Bingöl University and is currently a student at the state conservatory of Kafkas University (Kars). While studying at Bingöl University in 2009, she joined the local Zazakî theatre group and acted in the Zazakî language for six years. The interview took place in July 2021, in Çewlîg province.

Bedriye is a 44-year-old Kirmanc living in the Dersim/Tunceli province. She grew up in Ankara, where her family was forced to migrate due to military conflict in the 90s. There she completed her education, and in 2010 attended her Zazakî language course where she learned to speak, read, and write in her native tongue. After the course, she decided to write poems and stories in Zazakî. Today, she is one of the most well-known Zazakî women writers, author of several Zazakî books, for example (titles and dates). The interview took place in July 2021, in Dersim province.

Zelal is a 24-year-old Zaza living in Çewlîg/Bingöl Province. She graduated from the Department of Sociology at Bingöl University. She grew up in Diyarbekir/Amed and has been living in Çewlîg/Bingöl province since 2015. She has taken part in the distribution of a Zazakî journal based in Çewlîg/Bingöl city and in various Zazakî language revitalisation activities in her city. The interview took place in July 2021, in Dersim province.

Helin is a 33-year-old woman from Çewlîg/Bingöl. Currently, she is a doctoral student and teacher of Zazakî at one of the Universities in North Kurdistan. She studies Zaza folklore and encourages her students to collect local Zazakî fairy tales, stories, folk songs, information about customs, and traditions that are still cultivated in the rural areas of Zazakî-speaking regions. The interview took place in July 2021, in Çewlîg province.

Gule is a 26-year-old single woman living in Çewlîg/Bingöl province. She graduated from the Department of Zazakî Language and Literature at Bingöl Univer-

sity and is currently a Zazakî master's student at Bingöl University and a Zazakî teacher at the public education centre. After being unemployed for two years due to the lack of jobs for Kurdish language department graduates, she started teaching Zazakî to make her living. The interview took place in July 2021, in Amed province.

Gulçin is a 34-year-old woman living in Amed/Diyarbekir province. She graduated from the Department of Arts/Painting at Dicle University. She is a news editor and translator working for the Zazakî news channels and newspapers. In 2015, she started dubbing Zazakî cartoons for Zarok TV, and later initiated a Zazakî language painting programme for Jiyan TV. The interview took place in July 2021, in Amed province.

Gule is a 17-year-old young woman living in Amed/Diyarbekir province. She is a musician who compiles and sings Zazakî folk songs. In addition to singing, she also dubs Zazakî cartoons for Zarok TV. The interview took place in July 2021, in Amed province.

Berivan is currently a student at the Akdeniz University, Department of Journalism. She is a 26-year-old woman living in Amed/Diyarbekir province. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, she was living and studying in Antalya. There, she began to learn how to read and write in her native language. Later, she moved to Amed/Diyarbekir to work at Zarok TV and thus she contributed to Zazakî language revitalisation activities. The interview took place in July 2021, in Amed province.

Keje is a 35-year-old woman living in Dersim/Tunceli province. She graduated from the Zazakî Language and Literature Department at Munzur University. Subsequently, she started teaching Zazakî at the public education centre in Dersim province. She wrote her undergraduate thesis on Silo Qiz, a Zaza folk singer well-known among the Alevi Kirmancs and other Zazas. Currently, she is collecting Kirmanckî fairy tales and stories, and she writes poems. The interview took place in July 2021, in Çewlîg province.

Havin is a 22-year-old woman living in Çewlîg/Bingöl province. She graduated from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Bingöl University. In 2018, she joined the Şehri Bingöl Tiyatrosu/ Bingöl City Theatre Group and took part in many Zazakî plays. When the theatre group had to be closed due to Covid-19, the actors started parody performances on YouTube. Havin herself took an

active part in these performances to support her native tongue. The interview took place in July 2021, in Çewlîg province.

Aysel is 27 years old, living in Çewlîg/Bingöl province. She graduated from the Zazakî Language and Literature Department at Bingöl University. For her BA thesis, she collected fairy tales, stories, and folk songs from the Zazakî-speaking regions of the Çewlîg/Bingöl province. While she was studying at the Zazakî language department, she participated in many Zazakî language revival activities. After graduation, due to the lack of job opportunities in the field of Zazakî language, she decided to study child development and is currently teaching preschool children. The interview took place in July 2021, in Çewlîg province.

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