

The Village Chronotope in the Genre of Iraqi Yezidi Wedding Songs

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Introduction

Among the world's roughly one million Yezidis, adherents of a monotheistic faith that does not accept converts or allow marriage with outsiders, as many as half are living in exile, with the highest concentration of refugees outside the homeland living in Germany. Yezidis, originally from parts of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, have a long history of violent persecution, including the 2014 genocide in Shingal at the hands of ISIS where thousands were killed and thousands more (mostly women and children) were captured and enslaved. The influx of Yezidi refugees to Germany has created conditions that complicate and expand the already rich community and scholarly debates about Yezidi identity and the future of the religious minority (Ackermann 2004; Ali 2019; Allison 2014; Arakelova 2010; Maisel 2014 and 2017; Nicolaus and Yuce 2019; Rodziewicz 2018; Spät 2018). Indeed, Yezidi identity is contested and negotiated by Yezidis responding to complex political and social pressures in Germany and in the homeland. Such pressures include discrimination and racism despite sympathy in international media and the German government, disruptions in employment and asylum hearings in Germany caused by COVID-19, statements from German politicians that refugee status should only enable temporary residency (Vulliamy 2016), and ongoing tensions between Kurdish political parties. In diaspora in Germany, the stresses of forced migration and assimilation create tension in the Iraqi Yezidi refugee community about what it means to be Yezidi and how a good Yezidi should behave. I argue elsewhere (Stuewe 2018) that weddings and marriage practices are salient sites for analyzing these issues in the Yezidi diaspora.

This paper highlights a specific case of identity negotiation through an analysis of a selection of songs sung at Iraqi¹ Yezidi wedding parties in Germany over the past few years. Routine use of what I call here the "village chronotope" in these songs projects the image of a good, moral Yezidi who appropriately maintains traditional practices and views despite living in Germany. The village chronotope is a repeated projection of the "then and there" of Iraqi Yezidi

¹ While the inquiry of this paper focused specifically on songs sung at Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties, similar moralizing discourses are likely present in songs sung at the weddings of Yezidis from other countries as well. Possibly, the spacetime projected by the "village chronotope" is interpreted differently in Iraqi Yezidi contexts than in other Yezidi contexts, however, given the location of the 2014 Shingal genocide. The 2014 genocide, which I suggest is itself a chronotope of sorts produced through references to Shingal, contrasts and clarifies the meanings conveyed in the "village chronotope."

villages prior to the 2014 genocide into the “here and now” of the diaspora in Europe. This chronotope emerges, for example, in references to the routines of village living and in dialect choices that indicate Shingali heritage. The village chronotope works to strengthen relationships between Yezidis who were born in Iraq and remember life there while also signaling proper Yezidi behaviors, attitudes, and values to those who might have “forgotten” or never knew. In this way, the village chronotope is also a spacetime that indexes a particular character: the good and moral Yezidi who lives an honorable life and follows tradition.

Analyzing Weddings and YouTube Wedding Videos

This paper is based on observations made at four weddings I attended in northern Germany in the summers of 2016 and 2017 and on an analysis of song lyrics transcribed² from YouTube videos of Iraqi Yezidi weddings that occurred in 2017 and 2018.³ My observations of weddings and analysis of song lyrics are supported by data from interviews conducted in December of 2018 with three prominent Iraqi Yezidi singers: Tarek Shexani, Xalid Dinay, and Daxil Osman. My analysis of songs as they are performed in videos uploaded to YouTube was a practical choice for lyric transcribing, but it also highlights the “second life” of Yezidi weddings in the viewing of videos long after the wedding has taken place. Many Yezidis opt to have their weddings filmed and uploaded to YouTube where they can be enjoyed by family members and friends of the wedding party and by individuals with no connection to the wedding party who simply want to listen to Yezidi music.

The songs analyzed here include pieces written by several of the most popular Yezidi wedding singers. They were selected because they exemplify the use of the village chronotope and because my Yezidi interlocutors described them as songs they have heard at weddings. Additionally, I have included an example of a song not written by a Yezidi or intended specifically for a Yezidi audience. While some wedding singers sing popular Iraqi songs written by non-Yezidis, they often incorporate these songs into the flow of the wedding party music in a way that the lyrics meld with other songs written by and about Yezidis. This song is an important inclusion in that it exemplifies how the village chronotope is set off against the developing spacetime of the Yezidi diaspora. Moreover, the singer’s decision to perform this song at a Yezidi wedding highlights the unique positioning of the Yezidi community and the important role of the Yezidi wedding singer. Tarek Shexani explained to me that the singers of the Iraqi Yezidi community are the “messengers of the community.” As one responsible for voicing the joys, challenges, and concerns of the community, Shexani explained that at weddings he brings together old Yezidi folk songs with popular music to compose an original set that expresses the diverse influences on Yezidi life. Additionally, the seamless incorporation of popular Iraqi songs

² I am grateful for the assistance provided by Saeed Bakr, Qayssar Hussain, and Linda Hussain in translating the songs included in this article. I could not have written this without their translation assistance, notes on regional dialects, and feedback on my ideas.

³ The inclusion of these particular excerpts should not be interpreted as a statement that these songs are commonly performed at weddings. My interviews suggest that these are songs that one might hear at an Iraqi Yezidi wedding, but I do not have data to suggest anything about the frequency with which these specific songs occur.

into the music sets at Yezidi wedding parties exemplifies the coherence of the Yezidi wedding party song genre, which, as is necessarily characteristic of any genre, includes similar “thematic, stylistic, and compositional elements” (Hanks 1987:670).

In addition to the linguistic features that make up the allusions to pre-2014 Shingal that I call here the “village chronotope,” non-linguistic aspects of Iraqi Yezidi wedding party music, like the melodies and the corresponding dances, also contribute to the moralizing work accomplished by the village chronotope. The melodies are appropriate for certain kinds of group dances and are generally played in a similar order at each wedding to facilitate the mood appropriate for that time in the wedding party’s events. For example, songs that are made for some of the more complicated dances are not generally played at the beginning of the wedding party. Knowing how to dance contributes to a sense of Yezidi community building. The ability to perform the popular dances well is a socially valuable skill that is strongly associated with Iraqi Yezidi culture.

The instruments and performance of the songs are also important aspects of the performance of “good” Yezidi cultural identity, which is the central message of the “village chronotope.” The songs themselves usually feature, in addition to the main singer, a keyboard and a *tanbur*, an instrument similar to a lute from the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Iran. Today and in recent generations of Iraqi Yezidis, it is not uncommon for Yezidis to know how to play the *tanbur*. Xalid Dinay explained the cultural significance of the *tanbur* in the production of Iraqi Yezidi cultural identity. When I asked about his concerns about his children growing up in Germany without complete immersion in Yezidi culture, he showed me a video of his young son playing the *tanbur* and singing a song written by his father. The sharing of this video in response to my question about Yezidi identity loss highlights the importance of the *tanbur* and Yezidi music in Yezidi cultural identity formation.

The Village Chronotope

In this article, I analyze the way village life is referenced in songs performed at Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties. These references frame pre-2014 Shingal as an example of “narrative spatio-temporal frames” (Glick 2007:291), or chronotopes. Originally analyzed by Bakhtin (1981) in a 1937-38 article, chronotopes can be understood as “historically configured tropes” that project “how-it-was” into present contexts to “affect what can and does happen in discursive events” (Blommaert 2015:111). Without the violent and cruel rupture of the 2014 genocide, references to the past may simply have been heard as mere allusions to the way Iraqis lived historically, but given the brutality of the genocide and the mass migration it necessitated, these references are, I argue, now heard as value-laden “invokable histories” (Blommaert 2015) that are set off against the dangerous spacetime of current Yezidi diaspora life in Europe.

In “*Ezê vegerim welatê xwe*”⁴ (“I Will Return to My Homeland”) by Xalid Dinay, salient aspects of Iraqi Yezidi life are described. An Iraqi Yezidi friend who helped me transcribe this

⁴ The Kurdish texts in this article were transcribed according to the *Hawar* system by the editors. I am grateful to Khanna Omarkhali for her review of my transcriptions.

song said that every time she hears this song, it “takes” her back to Iraq. The village chronotope, which works to “transpos[e] selves across discrete zones of cultural spacetime” (Agha 2007:324), is effectively invoked by Dinay in this song. The emotionally loaded examples of village life in Iraq referenced do more, however, than simply remind my friend of her nostalgia for pre-2014 Shingal. Chronotopes also have “consequences for how social actors in the public sphere are mobilized to think, feel and act” (Agha 2007:324) in the current moment and place. One such consequence is the moralizing work of the village chronotope that calls on Yezidis in the diaspora to be “good” Yezidis by not forgetting traditional Yezidi values and practices. In Dinay’s song, he references spending time with family and the simple pleasures of summer breeze and hot bread. These are calls not only to remember what life was like in Iraq for many Yezidi refugees, but also to reject the isolation, alienation from family, and consumptive excesses of diaspora life.

“Ezê vegerim welatê xwe” (“I Will Return to My Homeland”) sung by Xalid Dinay⁵

1	<i>Dê vegerim welatê xwe</i>	I will return to my homeland
2	<i>Nav dost û hevalê xwe</i>	To my dear ones and friends
3	<i>Li warê xwe yê kevnar</i>	To my ancient home
4	<i>Ba deyk û babê xwe</i>	To my mother and father
5	<i>Şev xweş kem nav male</i>	Hang out at home
6	<i>Cîran û met û xale</i>	Neighbors and aunts and uncles
7	<i>Tucar ij bîrê me narê</i>	We will never forget (this)
8	<i>Bê welat jiyan betal e</i>	Without the homeland, life is worthless
9	<i>Ku ew xewê havînê</i>	Where is summer sleep
10	<i>Li ser banê xanî</i>	On the house roof
11	<i>Lê wî bayî xerbî</i>	That western breeze
12	<i>Muhla Şingalê il min da</i>	Yearning for Shingal hit me
13	<i>Taşte il ber seha sibehî</i>	Breakfast in morning shade
14	<i>Û mast mehî û bizîne</i>	And yogurt of sheep and goat
15	<i>Nanê germê tanûr</i>	Hot bread from the <i>tanur</i>
16	<i>Ez xulam destê daykê.</i>	I appreciate mother’s hands.

As others have noted (Glick 2007; Stasch 2011), verb tense can be an important aspect of chronotope use. In this example, the author oscillates between the here-and-now and the imagined past, which is emphasized through verb tense. Line 1 begins with a future tense verb, but the imagined journey is to a place which the author, and audience present at a wedding in Germany, now associate with the past. This connection between future and past highlights the chronotopic dislocation created by references to village life. Lines 2 through 6 contain no verb; nothing is, was, will be, but rather we hear a list of semantically loaded descriptors. Given the

⁵ A note on song authorship: according to my Yezidi interlocutors, some of these songs were not actually written by the singer referenced here, but I could not determine the original authors. Additionally, many singers make slight changes to an older song when they sing their version. The singers referenced here are then to be understood not as the original authors, but as the author of the particular iteration of the song I viewed.

violence of the 2014 genocide and the destruction it caused to Shingali villages, the romantic tone here implies the author is speaking here about a time in the past. The listener has been transported to the spacetime of Iraqi Yezidi village life prior to the genocide of 2014 and the diaspora. The use of “ancient” (*kevn*) and references to mother and father (*dey* and *bab*) also exemplify a key feature of the village chronotope: the connection to ancient traditions and values. Indeed, the lyrics evoke a spacetime of the Iraqi Yezidi village prior to the 2014 genocide, but one that does not start at any time. Rather, the spacetime of the village chronotope extends back in time to ancient history. The moral associations of the village chronotope then imply that “good” Yezidis live the way Yezidis always have lived and always should.

Lines 7 and 8 are situated back in the here-and-now and serve as a contrast to the village chronotope. The author’s command to the audience to “never forget this” (*tucar ij bîrê me narê*) and his following statement that “without the homeland, life is worthless” (*bê welat jîyan betal e*) further emphasize the moral significance of village life; the value of life is inextricably linked to a way of being in an older time and place. Notably, the first statement also features a marker of a dialect spoken by speakers of the Dinayi tribe living in Shingal. According to some of my Yezidi interlocutors in the United States, Shingalis from other tribes would say “*tucar ij bîrê me naçê*” instead of “*tucar ij bîrê me narê*.” This statement, like line 12, narrows the spacetime considered to the region of Shingal and, because of the salience of Shingal in recent history, to the time prior to the genocide. Indeed, “Shingal” itself functions as a kind of chronotope given its connection to the genocide carried out by ISIS in August of 2014. This is further evidenced by the way the word “Shingal” appears in social media profile pictures as a reference to the horrors faced by the Yezidi community.

Lines 9 through 16 take us from the spacetime of diaspora back to the spacetime of the pre-2014 Iraqi Yezidi village. Dinay highlights salient aspects of village life, which project a kind of person associated with these village realities. The final line, “I appreciate mother’s hands” (*ez xulam destê daykê*), does more work to “produce specific kinds of person” (Blommaert 2015:109) by concluding that the person who remembers all of these important aspects of Iraqi Yezidi village life also respects the mother and the work she does. In the context of Iraqi Yezidi village life, the work of the mother is particularly significant for the management of daily life as fathers are often away from home because they are earning money through some of the jobs most accessible to Yezidi men: itinerant labor in other countries and military service. Women are then responsible for tending to animals, gardening, maintaining the home, cooking, and rearing children. The reference to the hands of the mother also sets the spacetime of pre-2014 Iraqi Yezidi village life off from the spacetime of the European diaspora, where the mother’s hands do different tasks and where children may be less respectful. Iraqi Yezidi refugee mothers in Germany likely are still responsible for childrearing and food preparation, but they are less likely to have animals or gardens to tend. Moreover, the differences in daily life for children and adults, like in the number of hours spent in school, can result in children with greater access to and understanding of German public life. A feared consequence of this is that Iraqi Yezidi refugee children will not appreciate their parent’s authority in the same way as they did prior to relocation.

Another feature of the village chronotope is the use of semantically loaded vocabulary. Line 5, for example, includes the noun phrase “*şev xweş kem*.” This locally meaningful

expression describes the late-night socializing of close friends and family in their homes. Similarly, lines 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 use nostalgia-laden phrases that describe practices that are not possible for most Yezidis now in the diaspora. Most Yezidis do not live in housing that would allow for summer sleep (line 9) on the house roof (line 10), the keeping of sheep and goats (line 14), or the storage of a *tanûr* (line 15), a large clay or metal oven for baking bread. *Mast* (yogurt) and *nan* (Iraqi flatbread), referenced in lines 14 and 15 respectively, are extremely culturally significant among Iraqi Yezidis. The reference to *mast* and *nan* also lends a multivocalic feel to the song, as “*nan û mast*” (“bread and yogurt”) are mentioned in other familiar contexts, like the Kurdish proverb: “*nan û mast xwarina rast*” (“bread and yogurt is the true food”).

While Dinay’s song “*Ezê vegerim welatê xwe*” (“I Will Return to My Homeland”) evokes the simple beauty and uprightness of a time in Shingal prior to the genocide, other instances of the village chronotope evoke the long history of oppression chronicled in the Yezidi oral tradition. My Iraqi Yezidi refugee contacts in Germany often describe the Yezidi community as an ancient peaceful community that only wants to be left alone but has been continually persecuted for their different beliefs and practices. While the history of victimhood is certainly a part of the village chronotope, the references to violence highlighted in the song by Daxil Osman and Xemgîn below also function as a chronotopic allusion to the spacetime of the 2014 genocide itself. While we might think of this as a distinct chronotope requiring further elaboration separate from the village chronotope, this article interprets allusions to violence as a part of the village chronotope’s projection of ancient suffering.

“*Ey hawar*” (“Help”) sung by Daxil Osman and Xemgîn

1	<i>Ey Xudan</i>	Oh Lord
2	<i>Kesek nema ji me pê va</i>	There is no one left with us
3	<i>Di vê cîhanê</i>	In this world
4	<i>Ma behra me?</i>	Is it our share?
5	<i>Me ya kuştin û ferman</i>	Ours is [to be] murdered and exterminated
6	<i>Ezîdî me</i>	I am Yezidi
7	<i>Ji ser dînê xwe nayême xwar</i>	I will not leave my religion
8	<i>Ey hawar, ey hawar</i>	Oh help, oh help
9	<i>Êriş me diken</i>	They attack us
10	<i>Weka gurê birçî û har</i>	Like hungry, ravenous wolves
11	<i>Napirsin ne li mezin û zarokan</i>	[They] ask neither old people nor children
12	<i>Ku vexwîn weke av xwîna me</i>	When [they] drink our blood like water.
13	<i>Wa ez im neviyê</i>	I am the one who is the grandchild
14	<i>Warê Şingalê</i>	From the place of Shingal
15	<i>Va li me rabû eve heftî û çar ferman</i>	To us the seventy-fourth genocide stood up here
16	<i>Sozê didem Tawûs, ola êzdiya,</i>	I swear by Tawus, by the Yezidi religion
17	<i>Bi şehidan, bi egîdan xwîne xwe dan</i>	By the martyrs, by the heroes [who] gave their blood
18	<i>Biparêzin Laliş û ol û îman.</i>	Protect Lalish and religion and faith.

Daxil Osman's and Xemgîn's song "*Ey hawar*" may seem a surprising choice for a wedding party, but Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties might include a few sad songs that reference times of violence against the Yezidi community. My Iraqi Yezidi interlocutors report that this is especially true at Yezidi parties since August, 2014, because, as they say, a Yezidi cannot possibly observe a large gathering of Yezidis now without thinking about the genocide and all of those who are not present. The title of the song also speaks to this feeling of group loss. *Ey hawar* does not easily translate to any single word (lit. "call" or "cry for help") in English but is a culturally significant plea for help often addressed to God. It is generally used when a family or friend dies and is often cried aloud by women when they cry and beat themselves in a funeral procession. In a large group of Yezidis, when the singer repeats the refrain "*ey hawar*," this serves to transpose all of the funerals of the past onto the present moment. According to Yezidi oral tradition, the August, 2014, genocide was the seventy-fourth genocide to have marked the Yezidi community.⁶ Given this shared knowledge of a history of persecution, the phrase "*ey hawar*" calls into Yezidi consciousness not just the moment of the 2014 genocide, but the moments of all previous genocides, and projects the persona of a village person who has known extreme violence and suffering.

Like the Xalid Dinay song, *Ey hawar* makes use of verb tense in a way that reconstructs the unspecified village past into the present Yezidi diaspora. Rupert Stasch's (2011) article on travel writing about the Korowai of West Papua outlines the use of the historical present as a strategy for making the experience of reading seem to iconically resemble the author's actual past experience of being in West Papua. Similarly, the use of the historical present in lines 9 ("they attack us"), 11 ("[they] ask neither old people nor children" [which here means that the inflictors of violence do not discriminate in who they target]), and 12 ("when [they] drink our blood like water"), makes the experience of listening to the song iconically resemble the multiple historical moments in which the Yezidi community was attacked. This effect is furthered by lines 4 and 5 ("is it our share? / ours is [to be] murdered and exterminated"), which project past instances of violence into the present and beyond as if violence against Yezidis is constant.

The use of vocabulary in this instance of the village chronotope, which references violence under the Ottoman Empire, illustrates the way a history of violence against the Yezidi community is projected into the present. In line 5 the author uses the word *ferman* (translated here as "extermination"), which simultaneously invokes the recent genocide and a specific history of violence against Yezidis at the hands of the Ottoman empire. The word *ferman* is a Turkish (originally Persian) word meaning "edict" or "decree," but, given the history of violence against Yezidis "by edict" under the Ottoman Empire, the word is used by Yezidis to mean genocide or an act of extreme violence against Yezidis. The implication is that any decision made by a non-Yezidi occupier always means death for Yezidis. Through the use of this word, the aggressor in the most recent *ferman*, ISIS, is conflated with the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the multivocality of the word *ferman* works as a part of the village chronotope to project the character of an Iraqi Yezidi who knows suffering and is ever wary of non-Yezidi leadership. Additionally, this highlights the political nuances of the village chronotope. I have suggested that the village chronotope should be understood as a call for Yezidis who have found safety in the

⁶ There is some debate about this number depending on how one defines a genocide.

diaspora not to lose what are understood to be traditional values. That said, the emphasis on historic suffering in the village chronotope might also be interpreted in light of the demands of recent Yezidi Nobel Prize winner Nadia Murad for international protection for the Yezidi homeland, which would allow Yezidis in the diaspora to one day return.

This example of the village chronotope from Daxil Osman and Xemgîn contributes to the sense of a shared experience of and responsibility for Shingal and the Yezidi faith. The song specifies the spacetime of the village chronotope through references to a shared Shingal (“from the place of Shingal”) (line 14). Moreover, the projection of a prior shared Shingal into the present, where the audience and the singers have been relocated as refugees in Germany, allows us to imagine Shingal as less a physical place and more an expression of cultural values, which “good” Yezidis in diaspora guard closely. This interpretation is supported by line 16’s reference to Tawûs and *Ola Êzdiya* and the final line’s reference to Lalish, the holiest Yezidi site, which is located in northern Iraq. Tawûs literally means “peacock,” but here it means Tawusî Melek, the Peacock Angel. I have translated *Ola Êzdiya* as “Yezidi religion,” but here it means something larger, like the Yezidi way of life and traditions. In my interviews with Yezidis in Germany, I have heard differing opinions about the importance of Lalish as a physical space. Some Yezidis report that longterm separation from this place will be problematic for Yezidis, but others suggest that Lalish is just a physical manifestation of Yezidi beliefs, traditions, and values, which can be replicated elsewhere in diaspora. Families also often display in their home in diaspora either a physical replica of Lalish or a picture. This suggests that the Lalish which the ideal Yezidi is to protect is not a physical place but something more abstract. The reverence for these religious and cultural concepts in this song represents more than merely loyalty to the community; I argue that the commitment to and projection of these religio-cultural ideas from the context of pre-2014 Shingal into the spacetime of the contemporary diaspora emerges in the form of the village chronotope as a call for Yezidis to resist the temptations of European re-settlement and instead contribute to the building of a good, moral community.

Similarly, other words and phrases distinguish the ideal Yezidi persona from the Iraqi Yezidi in the diaspora who has failed to stay true to the values expressed in the village chronotope. This is exemplified by the verse, “I will not leave my religion” (line 7). This simultaneously references the past use of forced conversion by aggressors against the community, including ISIS’s demand that Yezidis convert to Islam during the 2014 genocide, and the current concern that young Yezidis will abandon their religion. An interviewee in Germany explained to me the potential consequences of assimilation in diaspora, arguing that assimilation is the seventy-fifth *ferman* against the Yezidi community and will result in greater casualties than any of the prior *ferman*. In this way, “I will not leave my religion” has multiple associations. The value of commitment to the religio-cultural community evoked in the village chronotope is at once a demand that past injustices must not be forgotten and also a warning about the future. The linguistic and content features of the village chronotope are meant not only to evoke a particular moral persona but are also intended to stand off against the persona of an amoral person seduced by the perceived excesses and meaninglessness of diasporic living.

“We neke” (“Don’t Do It”) sung by Nishan Baadri

1	<i>Çend ciwan e gulê sor</i>	How pretty is the red rose
2	<i>Nava porê te da</i>	In your hair
3	<i>Hêde hêde êd maşiya</i>	Slowly, slowly she was walking
4	<i>Nava gundê me da.</i>	In our village.
5	<i>Ciwaniya xwe û xemla xwe</i>	Your beauty and your appearance
6	<i>Nîşa xelkê me nede</i>	Don’t show to our people
7	<i>Tirsa min ji wan kesan xeşîm</i>	(Because) my worry is from foolish people
8	<i>Le ser hala me da</i>	In our situation
9	<i>We neke, we neke</i>	Don’t do it, don’t do it
10	<i>Keçê ciwanê we neke</i>	Beautiful girl, don’t do it
11	<i>Ciwaniya te li ser rengê gul e</i>	Your beauty is the color of flowers
12	<i>Ciwaniya te li ser rengê sêv e</i>	Your beauty is the color of apples
13	<i>Yarê ij ber hatina te</i>	My love, because of your coming
14	<i>Gul barîn, gul bişkivîn</i>	It rained roses, the roses bloomed
15	<i>Hiş û aqlê min ferîn</i>	My consciousness and mind flew away
16	<i>Ji ber dîtîne te</i>	Because I have seen you
17	<i>Maçekî bide min ji wan lêve</i>	Give me a kiss, from those lips
18	<i>Bi xêra meta te</i>	In the name of your aunt
19	<i>We neke kecê dîne we neke.</i>	Don’t do it, crazy girl, don’t do it.

This example illustrates the kind of persona projected by the village chronotope through both the content of the verses and the verb forms. In this song, the singer is voicing a young man talking to a young woman who is the object of his romantic attention. The lyrics are a mix of compliments about the young woman’s physical appearance (lines 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 14) and commands that she not behave indecently (lines 6, 9, 10, 19). Content-wise, the lyrics speak to the morality appropriate for the good Iraqi Yezidi projected by the village chronotope. For women, the ideal character is modest and responsive to the requests of her male lover. For men, the ideal helps control the sexuality of the women they are associated with in order to hide their beauty and protect them from “foolish people” (line 7). In the context of a wedding, these prescriptions highlight how the production of a chronotope works as a frame that influences the kinds of responses open to the audience (Blommaert 2015). In this case, I focus not on the kind of linguistic responses that are available to the audience, which are limited by virtue of the genre of the wedding party song, where only the singer is given the right to speak into the microphone, but rather on the way the village chronotope is used to shape the nonverbal reactions of the audience. Because weddings are one of the few places where young Yezidis have been able to initiate romantic connections—though of course that is changing in diaspora—they are sites where people have a heightened awareness of young men’s and women’s sexuality. As such, when the wedding singer voices the young man in the imagined encounter with his love, the singer is also voicing commands meant to affect the young men and women in the wedding party audience. This voicing works as a performance of the village chronotope because the young man in the song is framed as a moral exemplar of village life and because the use of past tense verbs

in lines 13 and 15 situate the couple in the past in the space of the village. The use of voice and chronotope can accomplish similar tasks. As Asif Agha notes, both the use of voice and chronotope allow the speaker to “link a frame of representation to a frame of performance” (2007:330).

Like the other songs analyzed, this song also invokes the village chronotope through the use of semantically loaded language. In this example, multiple verses rely on references to natural symbols: roses (lines 1 and 14), flowers (line 11), apples (line 12), and rain (line 14). These are significant comparisons because, as many of my Iraqi Yezidi interlocutors have reported to me, the Yezidi religious tradition is focused on reverence and respect for natural phenomena, which are seen as wholesome and pure. The selection of these words then projects into the here-and-now of the urban lives of most Iraqi Yezidis, the natural values of Iraqi Yezidi village life from the past. Specifically, women’s bodies, while in need of control, are also discursively tied to the natural world, becoming representations of Iraqi Yezidi village life. In this sense, there is arguably more at stake for women in the village chronotope than for men. The comparison of a woman with loaded natural symbols of the past (pre-2014 Shingal) highlights how women and men are differently implicated by the village chronotope.

كذاب الذي يقول الغربية تنراد / *Kadhaab aldhi yaqul al-ghorba tanraad* (“It Is a Liar Who Says Living in a Strange Place is Needed”) sung by Tarek Shexani

1	كذاب الذي يقول الغربية تنراد	It is a liar who says that exile is needed
2	والله وهمان	I swear it is an illusion
3	بكينا على الغربية ولقينا الغربية ذل	We cried about exile, and found exile to be humiliation
4	بكينا وأتينا إلى الغربية والغربة ذل	We cried and we came to exile, and exile is humiliation.

A final example highlights an alternative way of being in the diaspora that is contrasted with the village chronotope. As Agha writes, “the concept of chronotope is of vanishingly little interest when extracted from a frame of contrast” (2007:322). Without contrast, a chronotope is just a “possible world” (322) or a simple reference to an imagined spacetime, but when embedded in a broader landscape of linguistic tropes, a chronotope becomes value-laden. Moreover, the “dialogical relationships” (Wirtz 2016:349) between chronotopes produce new layers of meaning. The excerpt sung by Tarek Shexani at an Iraqi Yezidi wedding in Germany speaks to the development of a contrasting chronotope to the village chronotope: the chronotope of diaspora. While this chronotope is arguably less well established in the Iraqi Yezidi community in Germany, given that ways of speaking that evoke diaspora life appear to be varied and complex in my interviews, it is a useful counterpoint to the village chronotope. Here *الغربة* (*al-ghorba*), translated as “exile,” represents the spacetime of present diaspora life in Germany. Compared with all of the words used in the previous examples that are meant to associate village life with honor, this song associates the strange spacetime of diaspora with shame and humiliation (ذل [*dhul*], lines 3 and 4). These associations are reflected in the sociopolitical realities of diaspora living, where many of my interviewees have reported humiliating experiences of exclusion from German society. While I argue that this song excerpt represents an alternative to the village chronotope, it was still incorporated into a wedding music set and was

reworked by the singer to stylistically match the other songs. This demonstrates that the village chronotope exists only as a part of the broader ecology of Yezidi oral culture.

This example also serves as an illustration of how language ideologies factor into the production of chronotopes. I argue that Kurmanji Kurdish, especially its Yezidi variants, is an essential part of the Iraqi Yezidi village chronotope.⁷ In the diaspora, many Iraqi Yezidis have become increasingly concerned with parsing out what aspects of Iraqi Yezidi cultural and religious practices are *really* Yezidi and which are a result of influence from Islam. Given these concerns, some Yezidis have started to reject specific Arabic phrases they consider to be particularly close to Islam (examples include *إنشا الله* [*in shā'allāh*], “if God wills,” and *الحمد لله* [*al-ḥamdu li'llāh*], “praise be to God”), and some Yezidis have even stated to me that they will no longer speak Arabic at all. Given these associations, it makes sense that an alternative chronotope that projects a spacetime in contrast with the village chronotope would be produced in Arabic. That this Arabic song was still performed in a wedding and stylized to fit with the Yezidi wedding song genre, however, emphasizes again the diversity of linguistic associations and ideologies (which sometimes even directly contradict each other) in the Yezidi community.

Wedding Singers and Authority

Weddings are important events in the social lives of Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany. Shifts in traditional Yezidi authority structures over time, including a broad decline in the social and political capital of the upper castes and members of the supreme spiritual council and changes in transmission of religious knowledge (Ackermann 2008; Allison 2001; Leezenberg 2018; Omarkhali 2014), have arguably created new opportunities for Yezidi individuals to emerge as political and cultural leaders. In this context, I suggest that wedding singers have a unique role. Wedding singers are able to write and perform songs that comment on Yezidi identity, proper Yezidi comportment, and cultural values without much controversy. There are only a few men who routinely sing at Iraqi Yezidi weddings, and they have garnered significant followings. It has been my experience that most Iraqi Yezidis are familiar with these wedding singers and their music. While the popularity of these singers does not itself suggest that they have a significant role in shaping Yezidi identity, I argue that their popularity enables broader circulation of the messages in their music. Moreover, in an environment where people (especially from younger generations) desire more clarity about Yezidi culture and identity, the messages in popular songs might have a more significant impact than they would in other contexts. Even if people do not necessarily agree with or even consciously reflect on the messages embedded in the songs performed by popular wedding singers, the repeated performance of popular songs results in broad recognition of the common tropes, like the village chronotope.

The cultural authority of Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers also shapes their performance of the village chronotope. When wedding singers perform songs with the set of features and moral framings of the village chronotope, they themselves become representatives of the moral persona

⁷ There are a few Yezidi villages in Iraq, however, where Yezidis do not grow up speaking Kurdish and instead speak mostly Arabic.

projected by this chronotope. In the excerpts above, the singers themselves become the subjects they voice in the songs; the first-person pronouns in the lyrics become references in the moment of performance to the singers. As Hilary Parsons Dick (2010) notes, when speakers articulate a chronotope, it might result in an association between the possible personae projected by the chronotope and the speakers themselves. Moreover, in my interviews with wedding singers, they all conveyed their interest in representing Yezidi cultural values. The association of Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers with the moral values represented in the village chronotope was also present in my discussions with other Iraqi Yezidis in Germany and the United States. Daxil Osman, for example, is respected by many of my Yezidi contacts for his commitment to the community following the Shingal genocide. He stayed in Iraq to fight to protect Shingal until he became ill and came to Germany for treatment. For Yezidis who know this information about Daxil Osman, it arguably enhances the effectiveness of the village chronotope evoked in his music as Daxil Osman's respected character merges with the moral persona evoked by the village chronotope in his songs.

While I have argued that Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers have a special cultural role, my ethnographic data and analysis of songs performed at weddings indicate the need for additional research on the cultural significance of Yezidi popular culture figures. Scholarship has thoughtfully addressed the way globalization and diaspora have enabled new opportunities for charismatic individuals (Ackermann 2008; Omarkhali 2014), but little scholarship addresses the influence of popular culture figures. In other contexts, anthropologists and sociologists have described the cultural significance of popular culture personalities in identity debates (Bilaniuk 2016; Roda 2015; Shipley 2013). Given the rapid changes over the past years in authority in the Yezidi community and growing popular attention to Yezidi identity, I argue that similar ethnographic projects focused on popular culture are particularly needed at this moment in time.

Yezidi Wedding Party Songs as a Genre

Wedding party songs are one of several melodized speech genres important in the Iraqi Yezidi community. A song played at a wedding party, called *dûrik* (lit. “a song”) by my interviewees, is distinct from other forms of melodized speech like *qewl*, holy hymns that allude to religious stories and are memorized by certain Yezidis; *stran*, epic songs; or *kilamê ser*, melodic expressions of sadness about a loss or traumatic event.⁸ It is important then to understand Yezidi wedding party songs in the context of Yezidi “communicative ecologies” (Shoaps 2009) as an understanding of the many Yezidi oral forms indicates there is a widespread appreciation among Iraqi Yezidis of melodic speech as a medium for conveying information about Yezidi culture, religion, and history. A Yezidi interviewee in the United States explained the significance of melodized speech arguing that “Yezidis only know who they are through songs.”⁹ Wedding party songs are arguably some of the most accessible songs for

⁸ See Estelle Amy de la Bretéque's (2012) analysis of *kilamê ser* in Armenia.

⁹ The interviewee, in this context, used “songs” to describe all of the forms of Yezidi melodized speech events.

Yezidis as they are readily available on YouTube, unlike the religious *qewl*, and because Yezidi weddings, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were quite frequent and large: more than 1,000 guests is not unheard of.

I argue that wedding party songs are a discrete genre with each example bearing similar stylistic features, but the understanding and appreciation of individual examples of the wedding party song genre also varies based on the time and place of performance. As William Hanks (1987) suggests, genres at once have features that exist in each iteration of the genre across space and time and that allow for its performance and interpretation in the context of very different historical circumstances. Informed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theorization of "habitus," Hanks argues that a genre carries a set of instructions for the speaker and audience of that time and place leading to historically situated variations on the genre. In the context of Yezidi wedding party songs, this duality between standardization across examples and specificity in different historical contexts is important given how recent Yezidi history affects the interpretation of what are, according to my interlocutors, longstanding features of Yezidi wedding party songs. Specifically, Yezidi contacts have told me that references to village life are and long have been quite common in songs performed at Yezidi parties. Given the 2014 genocide, however, and the mass displacement of Iraqi Yezidi populations in the homeland and abroad, I argue that these references have taken on new associations coalescing into what I refer to here as the village chronotope. Indeed, what might have seemed to be general references to village life, have become positioned in the village chronotope as more specific projections of village life in Shingal prior to the genocide.

Conclusion

The significance of the village chronotope lies in the reality that what it means to be Yezidi in Germany is currently deeply contested and eagerly explored. This article is an attempt to outline some examples of seemingly mundane linguistic strategies—like those in popular songs—that demand an alignment to the moral and ideological associations of what I have here described as the village chronotope. My analysis of the village chronotope aims to highlight the cultural significance of songs performed at Yezidi weddings, the features of certain kinds of allusions to pre-2014 Shingal life, and the consequences of these specific references to pre-2014 Shingal life for Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany. As other scholars have noted, chronotopic analysis is particularly useful for explicating the social and political challenges created in a community split across borders (Chávez 2015; Dick 2010). In the context of Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany, I argue that chronotopic analysis of songs performed at Iraqi Yezidi weddings offers a concrete way to understand the mechanisms by which framings of life in Iraq shape Yezidi identity today in diaspora.

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