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Kurdish Narratives of Identity: A Comparative Reading of Novels from Turkey and Iraq

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ABSTRACT

The division of Kurds among the countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria after World War I resulted in a fragmented identity and affected the development of the Kurdish language and literature. Consequently, in their novels Kurdish writers focus on questions of identity, such as “who you are” and “where you come from.” My research discusses the novels of two Kurdish authors—Kae Bahar’s *Letters from a Kurd* and Yaser Kemal’s *Memed, My Hawk*—who lived in different countries, namely, Turkey and Iraq. This study explores, from a post-colonial point of view, how the novelists represented the fight against oppression in distinct ways due to their different geographical-cultural circumstances. I use Pascale Casanova’s and Rebecca L. Walkowitz’s theories of language to examine the specific language choices made by these two novelists. Finally, my research investigates how Kurds in different countries resist oppression and try to build their national identity.

Keywords: Kurdish literature, Kurdish identity, oppression, resistance, post-colonial theory, Kae Bahar, Yaser Kemal

SUMMARY FOR LAY AUDIENCE

The Kurdish region is divided among the four countries of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. In most of these countries, Kurds are forbidden to learn the Kurdish language and its literature. In my work, I selected two novels, *Letters from a Kurd* by Kae Bahar and *Memed, my Hawk* by Yaser Kemal, written by Kurdish novelists: Kae Bahar is Kurdish Iraqi and Yaser Kemal is Kurdish Turkish. Both novelists wrote their novels in languages other than Kurdish: Bahar in English and Kemal in Turkish. Considering this, I use Pascale Casanova's and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's theories of language to examine the specific language choices made by these two novelists.

In addition, the division of Kurds among different countries, as well as their existence between two cultures, the Kurdish one and the culture of the host country, makes identity a major concern for the Kurds. Indeed, the identity issue is the main theme in most Kurdish novels. In the two countries of Bahar and Kemal, the central governments tried to eradicate and suppress the Kurds through the "Arabization" and the "Turkification" policies respectively. However, for a long time the Kurds have struggled for their rights. Drawing on identity concerns and the Kurds' fight against invisibility, my research will discuss the identity problem in the aforementioned novels from the viewpoint of two post-colonial theorists, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon.

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CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY OF KURDISTAN AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND IDENTITY

Kurds are a stateless nation, or “nations-as-people” (Ahmadzadeh, 4). Although the Kurdish people live predominantly in the four countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, Kurdish communities can be found in other countries as well, such as Russia and Israel. Living in other states puts them between at least two cultures. As a result, identity has become an urgent issue, especially when these countries force the Kurds to suppress their ethnicity. This suppression takes the form of prohibiting Kurdish communities from speaking and teaching their language, practicing their culture, and teaching their history and literature. One of the key challenges for identifying (or understanding) Kurdish culture arises when we want to define and delimit Kurdish literature. According to Jonathan Kertzer, nationality and literature are related: literature, by telling a history of a nation in different ways, recognizes and confirms its object. Forbidding Kurdish literature puts the Kurds themselves in doubt and questions their national identity. In this chapter, after reviewing the history of Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, I aim to investigate the difficulties facing Kurdish identity and the ways the Kurds resist and protect that identity in two novels: *Letters from a Kurd* by Kae Bahar and *Memed, My Hawk* by Yasar Kemal.

General Characteristics of Kurdistan

Kurdistan (land of the Kurds) is divided among four countries: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. *Bakur*¹, the northern part of Kurdistan, is in southeastern of Turkey; *Basur*², the southern part of Kurdistan, is in northern Iraq; *Rojhelat*³, the eastern part of Kurdistan, is in northwestern Iran; and, finally, *Rojava*,⁴ the western part of Kurdistan, is in northern

Syria. The majority of the people in these four areas are Kurds, and they speak Kurdish, even though some of them have a significantly distinct dialect. Two of the aforementioned countries, Iran and Iraq, officially recognize these areas by the name of Kurdistan; indeed, the Kurdish region of Iraq can be identified as a *de facto* state⁵ (O'Shea, 32). Due to its central location, Kurdistan has been called the heart of the Middle East, while its rich supplies of oil and water make it a geographically significant area (36).



Figure 1. Map of the Territory of Kurdistan

The History of Turkish Kurdistan

Bakur, the Kurdish territory in Turkey, which consists of the southeastern part of the country, includes 14 of the country's 67 provinces: Adiyaman, Agri, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Erzincan, Hakkari, Mardin, Mus, Siirt, Tunceli, Urfa, and Van.

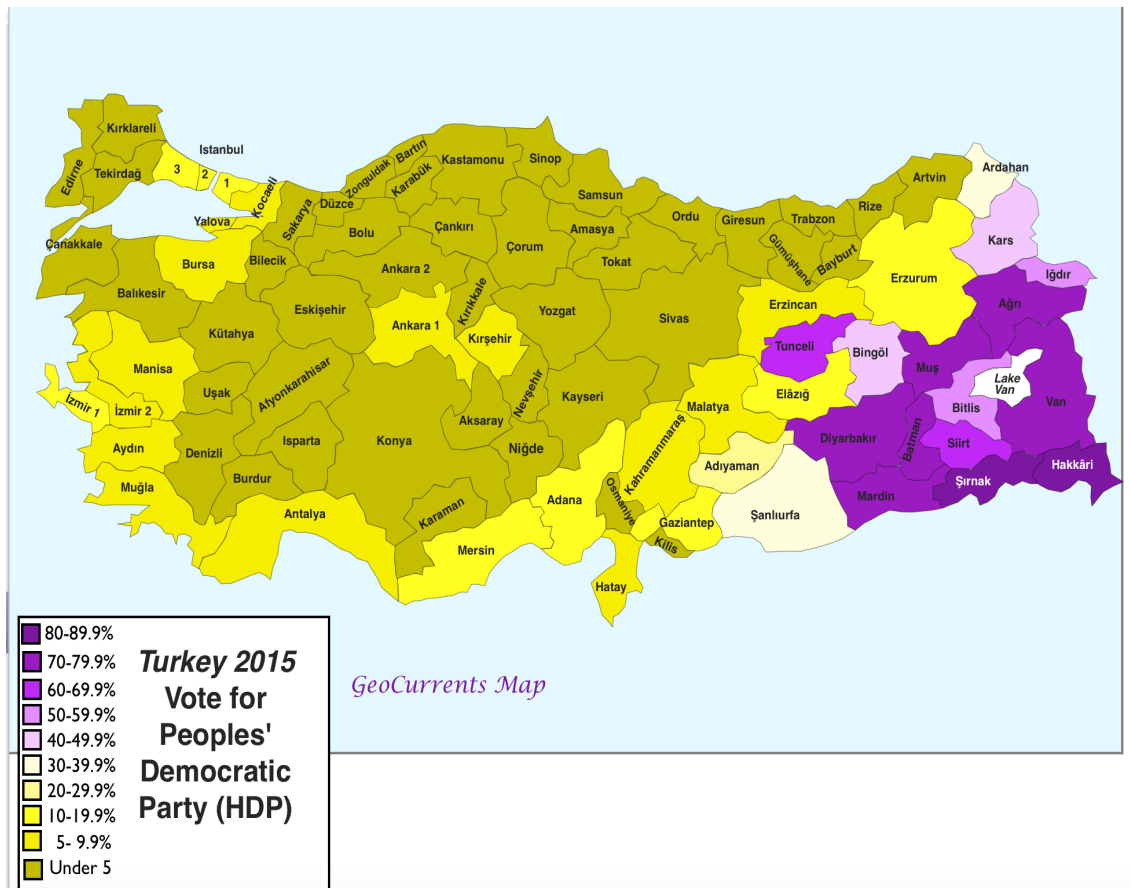


Figure 2. *Map of the Kurdish Region in Turkey*

Turkish society and its political structure were highly conservative, which became clear in 1923, with the ascendancy of Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Republic of Turkey and the nation's first president. His rule instilled a form of nationalism inspired by the concepts of "the primacy of the nation state and the central role of an official, mono-ethnic nationalism" (Heper, 32), which hinged on one nation and a unitary, indivisible state. He aimed to create a unified, centralized, and ethnically homogeneous state with a single

Turkish identity. Based on this view, nationalism necessitates national integration, whereby every value and interest separate from those of the state is considered dangerous. To that end, Atatürk introduced a program of “Turkification” aimed at eradicating non-Turkish allegiances and suppressing non-Turkish cultures (42). Accordingly, this nationalism denied the existence of minorities in Turkey, a policy that profoundly affected Kurds, who were one such minority group. Indeed, because of the state’s politically motivated desire to understate the number of Kurdish people throughout the region, it is difficult to determine how many Kurds presently live in Turkey. However, it is generally thought that their population in Turkey is the largest among the four countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (34). Kurds comprise around 23 per cent of Turkey’s population of 69 million (34) and are thus perceived by the state as constituting a great threat to Turkish conception of an integral nation state. Accordingly, Turkey suppressed all expressions of Kurdish culture, targeting in particular the Kurdish language, assertions of Kurdish identity, and pro-Kurdish political viewpoints.

During the twentieth century, Turkey tried to impose the repressive measures of the Press Law on the Kurds, which forbade Kurdish names, clothes, and songs. In fact, Turkey prohibited even the very words ‘Kurds’ and ‘Kurdistan’ officially. Further, in order to deny them completely, Turkey renamed the Kurds “Mountain Turks” because usually Kurds live on the borders close to the mountains. Other manifestations of Turkey’s oppression included severe economic underdevelopment and poverty in the southeast of Turkey, and high levels of illiteracy among the Kurds (42).

In response to this forced silencing, some Kurdish students led by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 founded the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) (Jongerden, 23). By challenging the dominant narrative against the Kurds, the PKK worked to inform the Kurdish people, who

had endured decades of repression, violence, and forced assimilation, of their natural and legal rights. In response, the Turks began an armed conflict against the PKK and started undermining Kurdish regional dominance in the southeast by destroying over 3,000 Kurdish villages and forcibly displacing their inhabitants (34). Then, in 1980, the Turkish government officially forbade any use of the Kurdish language in public and private life, arresting and imprisoning anyone who resisted (36).

The PKK's methods were violent, targeting in particular anyone who collaborated with the state. The PKK's violent behaviour even against 'disloyal' Kurds served as justification for the Turkish government to start a large-scale assault on the Kurds in the southeast, which was touted as counter-terrorism measures. This led to the forcible removal of Kurds from the southeast and their resettlement in other parts of Turkey (133). Seemingly, it was for their own benefit; however, rural Kurdish communities were placed in a catch-22 situation: they had to show their loyalty to the state by joining the Village Guard. If they did not, they would be viewed as PKK sympathizers and thus liable to attack by the Turkish security forces. However, those who signed up for the Village Guard were deemed as traitors by the PKK, and consequently found themselves—and their extended families—the targets of violent raids (134). These developments bring to light the negative aspects of nationalism.

According to Thomas Bil,⁶ there are negative aspects of nationalism which relate it to dictatorship (1). Historically, nationalism as an ideology goes back to the French Revolution. Bil explains how this ideology was reflected in the twentieth century in three European dictators: Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Francisco Franco. Both Mussolini and Hitler were in favor of Fascism. According to Bil, "[F]ascism is an ideology that seems impossible to define precisely, yet consensus is that it is inherently linked to nationalism"

(3). In his article, Bil explains that another important feature of Fascism is what “Griffin (1991) describes as the palingenetic myth, or the myth of *national rebirth*. Mussolini’s view was that Italy should restore the glory and territory it had enjoyed during Roman times (*romanita*). Essential to this rise to glory was *territorial expansion*” (3, emphasis added). Mussolini believed in the cultural superiority of the Italian race to other races; he saw the Italians as bringers of culture and education to other peoples. Like Mussolini, Hitler embraced Fascism while believing in German superiority, and subscribed to what Bil describes as “ethnonationalism,” a form of nationalism based on race (4). Franco, like Mussolini, returned to the past image of his country, creating an image of Spain as it had been for ages, namely a Catholic monarchy. He tried to create more unity within Spain by making Castilian (Spanish) the only official language while banning all other languages (5). To Bil, these dictators used nationalism in a similar manner not only to obtain, but also to stay in, power. They all used violence to weaken oppositions in the name of nationalism (7). They created a nation with an “in-group and an out-group,” i.e. some people belonged to the nation and some other people did not (8). To all these dictators, the out-group is a threat to the nation, and the in-group works together against the dangers of the out-group. “Automatic loyalty towards the nation and a hostile view towards other nations” are the potent means of nationalism (Bil, 8).

The case of the aforementioned European dictators, and the manner in which they established their respective nationalisms, is similar to the actions carried out by Ataturk. Ataturk, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, started the Turkish National Movement to resist the partition of Turkey (Zurcher, 10). His policy commenced with Turkification to create a homogeneous and unified nation (11). His first aim, to prevent division of Turkey between European countries, seemed very nationalistic, but his policies

towards minorities looked very much like a dictatorship. The pressure on minorities to repudiate their own language and speak Turkish in public is reminiscent of Franco, who tried to preserve Spain's unity by making Spanish the national language while forbidding other languages. Ataturk went even further by requiring that minorities change their last names to Turkish renditions. His famous expression, "Peace at Home, Peace in the World," sounds ironic to minorities (13).

And yet, Ataturk is not known as a dictator; on the contrary, he is honoured for modernizing Turkey. According to UN and UNESCO, he was a "remarkable promoter of the sense of *understanding between peoples* and durable peace between the nations of the world and that he worked all his life for the development of harmony and cooperation between peoples *without distinction*" (*A Window Open On The World*, 4; emphasis added). Institutions such as the UN and UNESCO admired Ataturk for understanding people and providing harmony in the country, and making peace, but the reality is different. By their endorsement, these institutions could be said to have justified Ataturk's deeds against minorities. To attain harmony, the Turkish government used its power to suppress minorities. Ataturk aimed to unify Turkey, but he did not care about minorities such as Kurds and Armenians in his country. He created a rift between the Turks and the Kurds, which resulted in an armed conflict between them that has lasted for decades. Ataturk's nationalist project, and the three nationalist European dictatorships mentioned previously, demonstrate the impossibility of nationalism in a pure sense, even though they garnered support for their attempts at unifying national populations. Decades of Kurdish resistance against being purified by an opposing nationalist project attest to the failure of this type of nationalism.

In 1998 some European countries including Italy tried to facilitate peace and end the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK by suggesting that they discuss their conflict in Italy. However, Mesut Yilmaz, the Turkish prime minister at the time, rejected any European effort. Yilmaz stated that, because “the problem at issue here is the one between Turkey and its citizens of Kurdish origin, then the only place for a solution is Turkey” (Jongerden, 159). Moreover, Turkey refused to accept any Kurdish representatives as negotiating partners, even through external mediation, to resolve the situation in the southeast. The Kurdish people themselves were disappointed with the PKK, and after 1991 some other political groups, such as the Workers’ and Peasants Army of Turkey, the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Front, and the Islamic Raiders of the Big East Front, were founded (133).

The History of Iraqi Kurdistan

After World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain meddled in the divisions of the Ottoman Empire to have control over the newly formed states. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire was an important event in the Kurdish struggle for statehood; however, this objective was not realized. Though the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 contained two articles relevant to the Kurdish question and was supposed to provide the conditions for “the creation of an independent Kurdish state,” these articles were never fulfilled. Instead, the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, in which nothing is mentioned about the future of the Kurds, replaced the previous agreement (Hassan, 175). At the end of World War I, Iraq was formed from three former Ottoman Empire provinces of Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad.



Figure 3. Map of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq

From the beginning, there have been some conflicts and divisions between Arabs and Kurds; Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, “preferred a centralized Iraq, and the Kurds, from the beginning, demanded self-government” (175). Britain appointed King Faisal as the

governor of Baghdad and Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji as the governor of the Kurdish areas around Sulaymaniya. According to Zheger Hassan, “King Faisal of Iraq lamented the lack of an Iraqi identity in the early 1930s” (175).

Since that time the opposition and struggle between Arabs and Kurds has continued. Iraq also has witnessed the “Arabization policy” during Saddam Hussein’s presidency (Yildiz, 152). *Basur*, the Kurdish region in Iraq, contains four provinces: Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniya, and more recently Halabja. The centre of the Kurdish uprisings has been in Iraq, especially in opposition to what were Saddam Hussein’s draconian policies against the Kurds. The first local rebellion was set off by Mola Mostafa Barzani in the early 1940s, but he was captured and exiled to Sulaymaniya, Iraq. Five years later, in 1945, another party known as The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was formed and joined Barzani. This party formed a special force known as *Peshmerga*,⁷ a Kurdish term meaning “those who face death” (Radpey, 3). Barzani demanded the creation of a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that would have authority over the Kurdish region’s affairs, but Saddam Hussein’s regime rejected it. Finally, in December 1969, some negotiations between Barzani and Saddam Hussein took place, which led to the March Agreement. Based on this agreement, five Kurds were appointed to the Iraqi cabinet, KDP members were appointed as governors of Sulaymaniya, Erbil, and Dohuk. Subsequently, schools and journals began using the Kurdish language. However, Kirkuk, an oil-rich city in Kurdistan, remained under the control of the Iraqi government. This accord did not last long, for in 1974 Saddam Hussein announced his Autonomy Law in Kurdistan, which gave him ultimate authority over the autonomous regions. Barzani, who survived an assassination attempt, refused to accept the new law, and war broke out that same year (4). During this war, many people were killed, and some fled to Iran or surrendered to the Iraqi army. The

Anfal⁸ campaign, which Hussein designed to break resistance among the Kurdish population, led to mass executions (5). These executions were not the end of the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime, however. In 1980, Saddam Hussein launched a war against Iran in which Kurds were the main victims. The most important calamity of this war was the use of chemical weapon in Halabja, an Iraqi village close to the Iranian border (5). The discovery of mass graves in Iraq confirmed Saddam Hussein's brutality, especially against Kurds. Finally, in 1991, with the help of the US army, the UK, and the UN, Saddam Hussein's administration was removed from the Kurdish region.

Kurdish Nationalism and Poetry

World War I was an important event for the future of the Kurds; it could have led to Kurdish independence, but instead 1918 was marked by the division of the territory of Kurdistan among four countries. The post-World War I period witnessed two conflicting trends: a) "efforts of Turkey, Iran, and Syria to eliminate the ethnic identity of the Kurds; b) Kurdish efforts to resist assimilation by different forms ranging from language cultivation to armed resistance" (Hassanpour, 65). These new conditions have gradually replaced the traditional way of life with a new middle-class that struggled to maintain a national identity. The first nationalist movement started with two poets in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, both of whom strove to cultivate nationalism by reviving the Kurdish language.

Perhaps the most important modern contributions to the theory of nationalism is provided by Benedict Anderson. For Anderson, nationalism does not exist from time immemorial, but it is a modern phenomenon, formed in connection with people. He believes that, in order to understand nationalism, we must find out how it is shaped

historically. A nation, according to Anderson, is an “imagined community,” since, though its members do not know each other, they share a common culture and set of beliefs. Specifically, he argues that the modern meaning of national identities is related to the development of languages. Anderson highlights two key historical events, the development of the printing press and the Protestant revolution in Europe, both of which accelerated the emergence of nationalism in the modern sense (56). These two events, by disempowering Latin, brought together large populations. When the importance of Latin was reduced, other languages unified large populations of people. Adopting new languages by regimes eased the way for the appearance of imagined communities—for nationalism (58).

Hashem Ahmadzadeh states that everyone has both personal and group identities; group identity usually refers to national identity. He asserts that national identity usually refers to an “identity that is constructed and formed within the boundaries of a nation-state” (3). Additionally, he claims that any community or stateless group of people with shared common characteristics which differentiate them from other nations can be identified as a nation. Another important aspect of identity, either individual or collective, is its dependency on “the other,” i.e. one’s identity is constructed through differentiation from others. Besides the necessity of difference to form identity, Ahmadzadeh questions the relationship between the nation and the state. Regarding this, he refers to Zygmunt Bauman, Polish sociologist, who believes that there is no established “mutual affiliation of state and nation;” for Ahmadzadeh, “the earlier established and postulated national identity and its subordination to the nation-state are drifting ‘slowly yet steadily,’ toward being ‘semi-detached couples’” (Bauman qtd. in Ahmadzadeh, 3). In other words, the formation of national identity does not relate to the existence of the state.

Furthermore, Jonathan Kertzer believes that nations are “invented not born;” they are confined to certain periods of history and to certain parts of the world. He relates nation to literature, considering both as fictitious. He further claims that literature makes the nation possible and imaginable; in other words, the nation “owes its life to literature, and to all the arts of cultural persuasion, because they articulate a national life by telling its story” (Kertzer, 12). Literature binds people above local differences, and “the poet ‘must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same’” (Rasselas qtd. in Kertzer, 14). To Kertzer, studying one’s own literary past affirms national identity.

This is why it is important to take account of the development of Kurdish literature. The Kurdish language has different dialects, the most common being Hawrami, Kurmanji, and Sorani. Literary production first began in the Hawrami dialect and soon after in Kurmanji. The Sorani dialect was the last to develop literature. Though it has a small number of speakers, the Hawrami dialect has developed a rich body of poetic literature, mainly epics, lyrics, and religious themes. However, its growth did not last for a long time due to several major factors. As Amir Hassanpour explains, “a) this speech community is an impoverished peasant society with no significant degree of urbanization; b) no visible Kurdish national activism; and c) most of the speech area lies within the Iranian side of the frontier where literary activity in any dialect was proscribed under the Pahlavi Dynasty (72). The second important dialect is Kurmanji, which has produced important literary works until the mid-19th century, when a decline of output can be discerned (72).

In fact, we can trace Kurdish literary life further back to the late fifteenth century, when Kurdish poets composed and recited not in the Kurdish language but instead in

Arabic, owing to the fact that these poets were all *mullahs*. The origins of this literary life, in other words, lays the foundation for the vexed relationship between national identity and language that this thesis discusses at greater length. Specifically, at that time Arabic was considered as the “language of God” and Persian as the language of the most brilliant literature. Scholars were not able to compare Kurdish with Arabic because of the latter’s divine status; due to its celestial dignity, Arabic was an unquestionable language. Persian was the only language that commenced literary growth two centuries after the Islamic conquest; however, it developed the same prestige as Arabic, and its poets produced many masterpieces. Under these circumstances, languages such as Kurdish, Baluchi, and Pashtu were dismissed as inferior. Though Turkish enjoyed the support of the Ottoman rulers, it ranked below Arabic and Persian.

During the seventeenth century, some poets, particularly Ahmed Khani, desired to compose their literary works in Kurdish to be independent of Persian poets, an act that reflects a sense of “linguistic nationalism” and its literary independence. Ahmed Khani, *mullah* and poet, was not the first poet to start writing literary works in Kurdish, but he was the first to develop it into a prestigious literary language. Given his contributions to the cultivation of Kurdish language and literature, the seventeenth century has been described “as the era of the Kurdish cultural and literary renaissance” (Hassanpour, 83). Khani’s masterpiece, *Mem u Zin*, is a narrative poetic romance. Its story is taken from “a Kurdish folk ballad called Mem u Zin which is still recited by Kurdish bards today;” names, characters, and setting are all Kurdish (83). The plot is “modeled on Nezami’s⁹ *Yusuf and Zulaykha*.” Mem and Zin were two lovers who could not be together because of the discord sown by Bakir (Vali, 41). According to Hassanpour, for Kurds, “*Mam and Zin* represents two parts of Kurdistan divided between the Ottoman and Persian Empires,” and Bakir

symbolizes the discord and disunity of the Kurdish leaders, which are “the main reasons for the failure of the Kurdish people to achieve sovereignty” (Hassanpour, 84). In the introductory parts of *Mem u Zin*, Khani elaborated his views on the difficulties which the Kurdish language and its poets faced and suggested how to enhance its status. Khani believed that the inferior place of Kurdish was due to “the absence of a ‘protector’ . . . and lack of state power by the Kurds” (84). He assumed that enhancement of Kurdish status could be realized through a “Kurdish king able to unite all the ‘discordant principalities;’ by “giving it official status,” a king can elevate the prestige of a language (Vali, 43). Khani was greatly influenced by this idea, and he repeated it throughout the text, even comparing the Kurdish language “with a coin that would gain currency through the king’s minting” (Hassanpur, 85).

The second means to improve the position of the Kurdish language was by “efforts of men of learning, especially poets and educators, who would use the language for literary, scientific, religious and other scholarly purposes, compile books, and raise the intellectual level of the nation.” In this regard, *Mem u Zin* was a major contribution (85). Kurdish literature has a considerable heritage, but because of political and economic constraints, many works have not been printed. Moreover, most manuscripts were destroyed under repressive conditions in Turkey, Iran, and Syria. According to Khani, these two functions—the political, formation of a Kurdish state, and the literary, writing in the native tongue—are two sides of the same coin. Undertaking these two tasks would be “the hallmark of a civilized and independent nation” (85). By composing his *Mem u Zin* in Kurdish, Khani contributed to developing his native tongue through the literary domain. This work is considered as “the national ‘epic’ of the Kurds,” and, besides being written in Kurdish, it contains “a clear statement of Kurdish nationalist ideology” (86). Before *Mem u Zin*, some

other literary works were written in Kurdish as well, but Khani's emphasis on the significance of the mother tongue started with *Mem u Zin*, where he elucidated how to cultivate it. His second important work, which also was written in verse, was an Arabic-Kurdish lexicon; to Hassanpour, this work introduced Kurdish into "the Arabic-dominated educational system of the mosque schools" (86). A century later, Sheikh Marifi Nodeyi wrote a similar work in the Sorani dialect; the importance of these two works is "in institutionalizing the use of written Kurdish in the religious educational system [rather] than in its lexicographic contribution" (89).

The Sorani dialect, when it comes to literary production, developed later than other dialects, though the reasons for this are unknown. It also "shares all the major features of Kurmanji—an essentially poetic literature, restricted audience, a clerical and aristocratic base and limited functions" (90). However, useful works have been created in this dialect. In addition to Nodeyi's lexicon, the first two works of prose emerged in the Sorani dialect in the nineteenth century: the first one is Sheikh Husen Qazi's *Mewludname*, a book on the birth of the prophet Mohammad, and the second one is a translation of the introductory part of *Gulistan* written by the Persian poet Sa'di. The Sorani dialect also has Haji Qadir Koyi as the counterpart to Ahmadi Khani in the Kurmanji dialect. Koyi's collections of poems are not comparable to Khani's *Mem u Zin*, but its significance lies in its patriotism. Like Khani, he dedicated himself to promoting his mother tongue. Although the situation in the seventeenth century was different from the latter part of the nineteenth century when Koyi lived, they both challenged similar difficulties in attempting to expand the Kurdish language. Khani's desire to form a Kurdish state to protect the Kurdish language had not materialized. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century, Kurds had achieved progress neither in political rule nor in language. Koyi was also preoccupied with the fate of his mother

tongue and complained about two sources of linguistic backwardness. According to him, the first reason was that Kurdish Sheikhs and mullahs continued to write and teach in Arabic and Persian as they did not care about the fate of the Kurdish language. The second reason was lack of political unity among Kurds. Considering these problems, he devoted much of his poetry to demonstrate how religious educational systems became a barrier to the development of the Kurdish language. Like Khani, he recommended two solutions: a) to encourage writing in Kurdish; b) to fight for statehood. Citing other nations, such as the Bulgars, the Serbians, the Greeks, and the Armenians, which were all on their way to independence even though their populations were smaller than the Kurdish one, he called on the Kurds to take up arms to achieve independence (92). According to Hassanpour, both Khani and Koyi believed in the interrelationship between language cultivation and statehood; “their mother tongue could achieve a high position among the recognized languages only if its use in literature, sciences, and education (pen) was supported by the political, moral and material power of a Kurdish state (sword)” (93). As poets, both provided the “pen” by composing in Kurdish and inspiring others to do so, but they were disappointed by the failure of the more important element, the “sword.” Their views of language development were based on the prestige and development of the two major languages, Arabic and Persian, which were supported by powerful dynasties. Their efforts to elevate their mother tongue were not fully completed.

Among the three literary Kurdish dialects at the turn of the twentieth century, Hawrami lost any chance of progress. Due to the contributions of great poets, both Kurmanji and Sorani developed, though “more or less independently each in their speech area and by their speakers.” This poses another problem to a unified Kurdish literature (96). Hassanpour claims that, “either the ascendance of one of the two dialects or their unification

remained uncertain” (97). Kurmanji speakers were more numerous compared to speakers of other dialects and received “the modern Turkish-language educational establishments in the Ottoman parts of Kurdistan;” unsurprisingly, the first Kurdish journal and printed books appeared in this dialect (97). However, its development did not last for a long time until the division of Kurdistan in 1918, while the later proscription of the Kurdish language in both speech and writing, especially in Turkey, put the Kurmanji dialect at a disadvantage and impeded any chance it might have had to become the national language of Kurdistan.

Barriers to the Development of Kurdish Poetry

One major barrier to the development of Kurdish poetry is the system of education. In the past, instead of schools as we understand them now, there were mosque schools to train mullahs who were supposed to teach and provide religious rites. Given that the holy book, the Quran, is in Arabic and is considered to be the word of Allah, everything in the mosque school was taught in Arabic and, to a lesser extent, in Persian. Besides, since the Quran is God’s word, it cannot be translated into other languages. This justifies “why obligatory daily prayers and other religious rites, such as burial, are conducted solely in Arabic” (Hassanpour, 74). According to Hassanpour, the mullahs were the largest portion of the poets in pre-1918 Kurdistan and “Kurdish literature emerged in these mosque schools” (76). In addition to the religious supremacy of Arabic, Persian was used to explain the unfamiliar Arabic language to students. The efforts of Khani and others to encourage mullahs to use Kurdish instead of Persian aimed to elevate the Kurdish language; however, it was not welcomed by all mullahs.

For developing literature, what is important is the concept of a “reading public”, that is, a large group of people who can afford to get books and then contribute to the

sustenance of writers. The reading public for Kurdish literature posed a second barrier.

According to Hassanpour,

In the predominantly illiterate society of Kurdistan the size of a body of potential readers was too small to be called a “public.” The potential audience for poetic literature were the clergy, the literate feudal nobility, scribes and in the towns, the few literate individuals in the administrative apparatus of the larger principalities. Throughout Kurdistan, in villages and towns, the mosque schools were the main centers of literary production and reception. (79)

In this restricted situation of a small and primarily clerical audience of the seventeenth century, Kurdish written literature grew slowly. Instead, it was oral literature that drew a large audience.

Kurdish Nationalism and the Novel

The novel as a genre is a modern phenomenon marked by Enlightenment ideas including rationalism, individualism, and nationalism. In Europe, the novel emerged in the first decade of the seventeenth century, but it developed more fully in the eighteenth century. The beginning of the novel in the Middle East is traced to the twentieth century, and for the Kurdish novel the date is even later. According to Ahmadzadeh, the reasons for this delay could be “the socio-political condition” of the period and the appearance of “nation-states in the Middle East” (2). Ahmadzadeh states that “[T]he whole twentieth century witnessed the various levels of a denying policy towards the Kurds, conducted by the newly formed nation-states which governed different parts of Kurdistan.” As a result any contribution to the emergence of the Kurdish novel was hindered by “political and social barriers” (2). However, by the end of the twentieth century, the Kurdish novel was established. The post-World War I division of Kurdistan among “the newly-emerged

nation-states” led to “fragmented identities” among the Kurds (3). Kurdish literature cannot be considered as a “unified phenomenon” because Kurds were subjected to different political, cultural, and social systems, and because they lacked connections across different countries (3). In fact, “the Kurdish literature is not based on a national literature that is shaped within the frames of a nation-state alone. On the contrary, it has had a cross-border and trans-national character” (3). These difficulties prompt Kurdish literary historians to use different methodologies in order to include any works in the domain of Kurdish literature. Some of them count any works in Kurdish language under the category of Kurdish literature and ignore their different dialects and orthographies.

Additionally, more attention needs to be paid to the common theme regarding the question of national identity question that surfaces repeatedly in Kurdish novels. The development of the Kurdish novel, like that of Kurdish poetry, is closely related to the expansion of Kurdish nationalism, which took place in the beginning of the twenty-first century; put otherwise, according to Ahmadzadeh, “the Kurdish novel necessarily involves the question of identity” (4). For the Kurds, who have been denied, suppressed, and marginalized for decades, identity is still a major concern. For many years they have swung between the two poles of “oppression and liberation: oppressed by the ‘others’ and always hoping to be liberated by the ‘self’” (5). The issue of identity for minorities such as Kurds who oscillate between two cultures is paramount; the questions of “where you come from” and “who you are” are central for the Kurds and are therefore reflected in the majority of the novels written by them. According to Ahmadzadeh, “[L]iterary discourse, especially the narrative discourse,” can provide a base for the members of the nation “to imagine their communion” (4). Aldous Huxley stresses the role of the novelists “as the inventors of their nations” and “the tight relationship between the literary discourse and the idea of the

nation” (50). Novelists can demonstrate various aspects of social and individual life in a given society during a certain period. According to Ahmadzadeh, “[L]iterary theory since the 1980s has regarded literary works as sources that have political and social functions,” and the potential of the literary discourse to shape identities is acknowledged (4). Besides Ahmadzadeh, Jonathan Culler also agrees with the significance of the novel as a basis to construct and question identity. Culler believes that novels, implicitly or explicitly, provide answers to identity questions (37).

The rise and development of the novel in Europe confirms the connection between novels and the political and social factors of their societies; it is considered as a medium to narrate and represent events in a society. In addition to the worldwide literary prestige of these works, Ahmadzadeh indicates the importance of novelists’ works as sources of inspiration and identification for their own societies. In the non-Western context, especially in the Kurdish novels, this function of depicting an authentic picture of their nations becomes evident as well. Kurdish novelists provide the reader with detailed information about their ways of life and thought.

Emergence of the Kurdish Novel

Prior to the twentieth century, the Kurds were subjects of the Ottoman and Persian Empires, so that the famous Kurdish classical poets, such as Nali, Talebani, and Mehvi, wrote mostly in Arabic and Persian. Some poets, such as Khani, started emphasizing the role of language “as an identity-making factor” (Ahmadzadeh, 6). By the end of the nineteenth century, this need became more urgent, until finally the emergence and development of the Kurdish novel helped to construct a nationwide Kurdish identity. Modernization of the Ottoman and Persian Empires, as well as the use of the printing press,

accelerated the cultivation of Kurdish novels, though the first Kurdish novel emerged in the Soviet Union instead of the Ottoman or Persian Empires. Gradually, Kurdish novels developed, and many novels were composed in the Kurdish language, or even in other languages but with Kurdish concerns.

Barriers to the Development of the Kurdish Novel

Ahmadzadeh argues that in addition to the trans-border characteristics of the Kurdish novel, it has “fragmented character” (7). In addition to lack of connection between two distinct dominant dialects of the Kurdish language, Kurmanji and Sorani, the Kurdish novel “did not have any access to a rich prosaic discourse” (7). Further, the Kurdish novelists have been mostly “polyglot,” i.e. they have used the official language of those countries where they live to learn the art of the novel, and sometimes even due to the political pressure of those countries they produced their novels in other languages rather than the Kurdish (7). Due to formal institutional pressure, prominent writers such as Salim Barakat, Yasar Kemal, and Ibrahim Yunesi belong to a generation of Kurds who were made to write their novels in the official languages of the countries in which they lived. Besides, the Kurdish writers who live in “the diaspora” produce their works in languages other than Kurdish (7). The question of counting these novels as part Kurdish literature has prompted debate within Kurdish intellectual circles. From Ahmadzadeh’s point of view, because these novels deal with the Kurds and their concerns, they can be classified as Kurdish literature.

For political reasons, the first Kurdish novels, in Kurmanji dialect, appeared in the former Soviet Union in the early 1930s. However, it took some decades until a few of those novels were translated into the Sorani dialect. Regrettably, these novels were not accessible

to Kurds beyond the Soviet border, so they could not be a source of inspiration for further development of the Kurdish novel in other countries. Thus, the Kurdish novel in each part of Kurdistan went its own way. The political restrictions imposed on the Kurds in general and the Kurdish literature in particular hampered any continuity in the development of the Kurdish novel. Absence of connection between these two dialects, dialect differences, and different orthographies mean the Kurdish novel “suffers from the lack of a common readership” (7). Ahmadzadeh states that “the novelistic discourse of these two major dialects has developed without any considerable influence on each other” (7).

According to Ahmadzadeh, the lack of a promising market is another impediment for the development of the Kurdish novel. Only during the past few years have the Kurds freely published books in Kurdish. Ahmadzadeh notes that “[T]he flourishing of Kurdish publications in Iraqi Kurdistan, mostly with official sponsoring of the major political parties in Kurdistan, shows the importance of political and economic facilities for the development of publishing, especially the novel” (8). Many novels, such as Bakhtyar Ali’s *The City of White Musicians*, *Peshmerge* (Partisan), Ibrahim Ahmad’s *Jani Gal* (Suffering of People), etc. have been published in Iraqi Kurdistan. It seems that the semi-stable political conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan have been very influential for this purpose. The golden chance for the Kurds to develop the Kurdish novel has happened in the diaspora; this demonstrates how improving the socio-political conditions of the Kurds affects the cultivation of literary works, especially novel.

In this thesis, I examine the works of two Kurdish writers, Yaser Kemal and Kae Bahar. Both texts—Kemal’s *Memed, my Hawk* and Bahar’s *Letters from a Kurd*—are debut novels, and both novelists were forced to compose their works in languages other than Kurdish. Because of the ban of Kurdish in Turkey, Kemal composed his novel in Turkish,

and Bahar, for other reasons, such as the international attention to Kurds' situation in Iraq, wrote his novel in English.

Yasar Kemal's Biography

Yasar Kemal (1923?-2015) was a prolific Turkish-Kurdish novelist and short-story writer. He was born in Hemite, renamed Gökçedam, in southern Turkey, the heart of the Chukurova region, where most of his novels are set. His parents were Kurdish refugees who had fled the Russian oppression resulting from the occupation of the Eastern Anatolian city of Van in 1915. His works abound with “profound knowledge of folk culture ... and the quasi-feudal living conditions in Chukurova region” (Mignon). When he was eight years old, he realized the power of writing and “started to recite poetry, though in Turkish, as the formal teaching of Kurdish was banned in the Turkish Republic” (Mignon). He became known as Kemal the Bard, and unsurprisingly the first literary works that he published were poems. He published his first poem, “Seyhan,” in 1939. He traveled in the Chukurova region to collect “samples of oral literature in the villages,” and he also went to Van, Diyarbakir, and Gaziantep, mainly Kurdish cities, to collect material for his future novels (Mignon). His contribution to collecting folk literature established him as a folklorist. In 1943 he published his first book, *Ağitlar* (Elegies), an anthology of folk verse collected in the villages of the Chukurova region. Throughout his life he participated in “left-wing activism,” “Marxism and revolutionary politics,” and was accused of setting up a “Communist party” (Mignon). Some of his important works include *Memed, My Hawk*, a collection of longer reportages *While Chukurova Was Burning*, and the novella “The Drumming Out” in *Anatolian Tales*, *The Wind from the Plain* trilogy. In 1996 he was awarded the International Prize of Catalonia, and in 1997 he was presented with the Peace

Prize of the German Book Trade. Many of his works have been translated by his wife, Thilda Serrero.

The English translation of *Memed, My Hawk* was published in 1961, five years after its initial Turkish publication in 1955. It achieved international success, though it was banned in Turkey. The book marked a turning point in Kemal's career; it also landed him a nomination for the Nobel Prize in 1960. This novel is the story of young Memed's rebellion against Abdi Agha, an exploitative and oppressive local landlord; by the end, Memed becomes the avenger of the oppressed peasants. *Memed, My Hawk* is a combination of "political themes such as the condemnation of feudal-like social conditions in the Chukurova region with a doomed love story" (Mignon). His use of "folk themes combined with his use of vernacular expressions and sayings" had political consequences; he is an author who "wrote back to the centre" (Mignon). He tried to introduce "the place of southern Anatolian and Kurdish culture within Turkish literature" (Mignon). In a country that denied Kurdish identity, Kemal's literary works challenged official policy regarding the Kurdish question. In order to defend his people, he talked about their suffering and gave them hope.

Kae Bahar's Biography

Kae Bahar is a UK-based Iraqi Kurdish novelist, producer, actor, and director. He was born in Kirkuk, Iraq which he was forced to leave at an early age. *Letters from a Kurd* is the first Kurdish novel in English. It depicts a detailed representation of the Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan during the critical years of 1971-1988 under Saddam Hussein's regime. It deals with the cultural, social, and political history of the Kurds during those traumatic years in response to assimilation policies, including "Arabization" and

“linguicide” i.e., banning the use and study of the Kurdish language, which were implemented by Saddam Hussein during his reign in Iraq. These are also central themes in *Letters from a Kurd* (Hassanpour, 144).

Letters from a Kurd is narrated from a teenager’s point of view, Marywan Rashaba (Mary), who lives in Kirkuk, a province in Iraq. This novel demonstrates Marywan’s progress from political, ethical, and social naivety to maturity. Marywan desires to leave Iraq and go to America to be a filmmaker. Marywan finally renounces his decision to go to America; instead, he joins the peshmerga, the Kurdish guerrillas fighting for Kurdistan’s liberty against Saddam Hussein’s army. In *Letters from a Kurd*, Bahar blends fact and fiction, so as to represent Kurdish society and culture in depth.

In his conversation with Allen Bosquet, the French novelist, Yaser mentioned that he wanted to recite epics in Kurdish but could not; he also said that he knew Turkish more than Kurdish. Later on, as a journalist, he went to different villages in southern Anatolia to investigate the Kurdish folk culture. Personally, I identify more with Kemal than Bahar—I similarly know Persian, Iran’s national language, more than Kurdish. Because of the ban on learning the Kurdish language and its literature at school, I was not familiar with Kurdish literature. Dr. Zheger Hassan, my second thesis reader and examiner, recommended these two novels to me. After reading them, I felt they were what I needed to know: these novels reveal to the readers, and to myself as well, how various difficulties have shaped the Kurdish identity during the last two centuries. Despite their differences—Kemal’s novel, as noted above, originally was published in Turkish in 1955 and Bahar’s in English in 2014—both texts demonstrated how the Kurds resisted imposed invisibility and voicelessness.

I wrote this thesis for my own self-awareness. One would think that, even if the independence of Kurdistan were not allowed, at least governments would provide freedom of expression and equal rights for all minorities and cultivate the conditions for minorities to learn their mother tongues and their literature at school. Language and literature form identity. As an Iranian Kurd, I do not identify with the Iranian government, but when I look for my Kurdish identity, I feel there is a vacuum there.

By focusing on close reading of the novels, in particular their complex address of an English-reading public, their representation of figures of resistance, most notably, the bandit, Oriental tropes, and folk themes, I explain how these authors contest the forces that would seek to destroy Kurdish identity. These literary works attest to the presence of Kurdish selfhood, one that unfolds through the novel form.

CHAPTER TWO: RESISTANCE IN BAHAR'S *LETTERS FROM A KURD*

Kae Bahar is a writer, actor, and documentary film director who was born in Kirkuk, a city located in the province of Kurdistan, Iraq. As a teenager he left Iraq for Italy and, after a short time there, moved to England in 1993. After moving to London, he produced documentary films for the BBC, Channel 4, ITN, and Al Jazeera International, in addition to performing as an actor on stage and screen (Austin). *Letters from a Kurd*, his debut novel that addresses issues of Kurdish identity, was originally published in English in 2014.

Letters from a Kurd is a novel written in English for a broad readership that explores the challenges of Kurdish resistance, offering a voice for Kurds and means to publicize their oppression as a consequence of Saddam Hussein's anti-Kurdish policies. The novel focuses on a character named Marywan Rashaba (who goes by the name Mary), whose gender identity is ambiguous, as I explain in more detail shortly. Though he identifies as a "gender nonbinary,"¹⁰ neither boy nor girl, his appearance was similar to a girl—long hair, pretty appearance. However, he has a boy's name, Marywan, which is shortened Mary. Mary always desired to be known as a boy not a girl. He was mocked by Shawes Dog, later on Abu Ali, and his son, Kojak, for his feminine countenance. Invoking the form of an epistolary novel though not strictly structured as such, *Letters from a Kurd* includes a series of letters, each written by Mary.

As a sexually ambiguous child living in Kirkuk, Marywan recounts traumatic events that he and his friends, who go by nicknames such as Peaceful, Rabbit, Jam, Sunshine, experienced in Kurdistan at that time during the Ba'athist regime. Marywan likewise is given the nickname Mary. All the letters are addressed to his favorite American actor, Clint Eastwood, whom he describes as his "Gringo," a Latin American slang term for a foreigner,

usually a white man. Mary's interest in cinema opens a dream world, which helps shelter from the atrocious events in Iraq. In his letters, he sketches daily events and asks Gringo to come to Iraq to save him and take him to America to be a filmmaker. Because of the political turmoil in Kurdistan, his letters are never posted, and Mary does not have any chance to connect to Clint Eastwood except through letters. Finally, Mary becomes disappointed after receiving no reply from Gringo, and he loses faith in America; it is a dream world that can never be actualized. Instead, he joins peshmerga, a term that, as noted in Chapter one, refers to Kurds who fight and are willing to die for Kurds' rights.

Kurds faced difficult times in Iraq and suffered "internal colonialism" for decades, something that Bahar indicates in his works (Blauner, 3). Although Iraq was not colonized in the sense typically employed in postcolonial studies, the colonial dialectic, as discussed by theorists Edward Said and Franz Fanon, is still relevant when it comes to the conditions of the Kurds in Iraq. Edward Said believed that, although colonialism was ostensibly over, its system of thinking and representation persists. In *Orientalism*, Said went on to expose how the colonial framework and its principles are embedded in different structures of representation.

Franz Fanon likewise demonstrated the hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and how the oppressed remained psychologically dependent upon the oppressors. In his book *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan also claims that "neo-colonialism exists side by side with auto-colonialism" and is the "highest stage of oppression" (44). Kurdish issues in different Middle Eastern countries attract the attention of the world because of decades of oppression against the Kurds. Kurdish artists have, in turn, engaged with these issues by representing oppression through diverse media. Bahar takes up these concerns in his novel. The

theoretical framework provided by Fanon and Said helps illuminate the ways in which *Letters from a Kurd* engages with the persistence of the colonial dialectic and considers Kurdish reactions to this dialectic. In *Letters from a Kurd*, Bahar highlights this hierarchical relationship between the Kurds and the Arabs, which was one of colonial domination. Just as importantly, he critiques orientalist tropes.

To understand the significance of Kurdish resistance against oppression, we need to first consider the influence of Hegel's account of recognition and the master-slave dialectic. In his famous master-slave dialectic, Hegel stresses the mutual aspect of the process of recognition, whose outcome is that one becomes the master and the other the slave (232). He who is recognized by the other "without reciprocating" becomes the master, and the other who "recognizes but is not recognized" becomes the slave (232). Moreover, recognition is not possible without struggle; the struggle for recognition is a struggle for identity (Kojève, 8-12). The master might find out that he is on the "wrong track," but he is not able to change himself (Bulhan, 104). In this situation the only remaining option for resolving the master-slave relationship is to kill the master, a point that is also taken up by Fanon when, in writing about struggle, he asserts that violence is a legitimate option for the oppressed in order to be recognized (104).

Fanon became familiar with Hegel's master-slave dialectic through Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosopher whom Fanon admired. Fanon himself was a descendent of slaves; additionally, his emotional engagement with the oppressed led him to study the "psychopathology of the master-slave dialectic" (Bulhan, 114). Fanon also emphasizes the essentiality of reciprocal recognition, as without it there would be no identity. Fanon stressed the psychological and cultural aspects of violence. He believed that, in the process of assimilation, oppressed peoples break away from their own cultural custom by affirming

the dominant culture. This process continues until the oppressed must choose between their own people or the colonizers. Fanon states that prolonged oppression inevitably influences the oppressed in such a way that they internalize the oppressor without: the oppressed assimilate into the culture of the oppressor and try to imitate his social behaviors. In this sense, the oppressed become the agents of their own oppression (*The Wretched*, 8-12). Fanon believes that the process of internalization compels the oppressed to engage in “auto-accusation and auto-destructive tendencies” and act out the violence imposed on them on each other (185). In *Letters from a Kurd*, the highest point of the effects of assimilation is represented through Abu Ali, the agha of the village, who betrays his own people and oppresses them.

This chapter provides context for challenges encountered by Kurds in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s regime, as a way of exploring how *Letters from a Kurd* takes up these issues, drawing on Said and Fanon’s postcolonial theories as well as Pascale Casanova and Rebecca Walkowitz’s theories of language, which illuminate the language politics evident in Behar’s decision to write in English. Specifically, in this chapter I examine how Bahar draws on English, the language of colonial oppression that has helped create and perpetuate orientalist tropes, as a means of resisting this oppression.

Oppression and Resistance

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein’s government adopted anti-Kurdish policies as part of the Arabization¹¹ plan, which asserted the dominance of the Arabic language and culture over other languages and cultures due to its religious status. This religious status was said to stem from the composition of the Quran in Arabic: since the Quran is God’s words, it has a privileged and unquestionable status among Muslims. Bulhan interprets Fanon’s idea that

“the institutionalization of oppression in daily living also entails an internalization of the oppressor’s values, norms, and prohibitions”—“the occupation of land thus entailed the occupation of psyches” (Bulhan, 123-139). According to Bulhan, the people who do not have land or a fair share of land, so that their social and cultural bonding are disrupted, are doomed to “a life of eternal rootlessness, insecurity, dependence, and premature death physically, socially, and psychologically” (177). Many Kurds became peshmerga, people who risked their lives to combat Saddam Hussein’s oppression, even though the oppressor within peshmergas had died long before. For Fanon, reciprocal recognition through reason is futile. As he states, “the oppressor was still adamant and impermeable to reason,” meaning that the only option that remained was “to practice and organize counterviolence against the oppressor,” which offers “social reconstruction and psychological liberation” (Fanon, *The Wretched*, 51-75). Mary, his brother, and many other young characters in Bahar’s *Letters from a Kurd* become peshmerga in their teens because they find that the Kurds’ situation does not change through dialogue with Saddam Hussein. The fact that many Kurds joined the peshmerga reveals the failure of Saddam Hussein’s attempt to have the Kurds internalize the regime’s values.

Expanding on Fanon’s idea of internalized oppression, Bulhan states that the oppressed “become *autopressors* as they engage in self-destructive behavior injurious to themselves, their loved ones, and their neighbors” (126, my emphasis). Abu Ali is an obvious example of an autopressor. When Abu Ali meets other Kurds, he acts like an Iraqi, the majority, and as an oppressor; he “demands more space and privilege.” In contrast, the Kurds behave like the minority and try to flee him; the Kurds “tend to settle for less” (123). He rapes Aida, Mary’s first girlfriend, but Mary can do nothing to save her. Abu Ali’s injurious behavior is not limited to these others; he also imposes it on his ex-

wife and his son, Kojak. Kojak describes to Mary what happened to his mother and himself after his father, Abu Ali, was released from prison, saying that, “he was [released] to serve the Mukhabarat. He got married to a young woman by forcing her family to accept it. Then he kicked my mother and me out. When I stood up to him, he threw acid in my face” (*Letters from a Kurd*, 373).

Bulhan argues that “internalized oppression is most resistant to change.” Thus, for him, there are two fronts to defeat: “the oppressor within and the oppressor without” (123). In general, the Kurds only have to fight “the oppressor without.” However, some Kurdish characters still have “the oppressor within,” which prevents them from acting. One such character is Darwesh Rashaba, Mary’s father, who, in the past he was also peshmerga, but, because his entire family was killed by Saddam Hussein’s soldiers, he put his gun down and became obsessed with religion. Ironically, his submission is betrayed in two ways: first, when he loses his oldest son who resisted Saddam Hussein’s oppression and became peshmerga, and, second, when he can finally afford to buy a house for his family and leaves the house of his brothers-in-law where he has lived for many years. This was the summit of his disappointment. When Saddam’s soldiers compel him to leave the house, which they want to give to an Arab family, he pulled out his three gold teeth to give to the soldiers as a bribe to allow him to stay. Unsurprisingly, the soldiers took his teeth and forced him to leave the house anyway. This is the tragic irony of oppression: though the oppressed yield to subjugation for fear of death, this fear results in servitude and guilt.

Other characters who still suffer “the oppressor within” are Mary’s friend, Peaceful, and Shamal, Peaceful’s father, who is also their English teacher. Both Peaceful and his father surrender to Iraqi forces to protect their family. Though the teacher indirectly resists by informing his students about the oppression, Saddam Hussein’s forces eventually

pressure him to give up this subversive instruction. His son, Peaceful, is compelled to spy on Mary when the regime feels threatened after reading Mary's letters. Peaceful also tries to stay away from Mary so that he would not have any information for the Mukhabarat. It seems that "the oppressor within" for the Kurds was not internalized, and they submitted to the regime only to protect their families. However, they used different methods to minimize the threat to their Kurdish friends.

Abu Ali is the only Kurd in the novel to betray the Kurds. Fanon calls such middlemen who captured, sold, and delivered fellow black people "factors." These "factors" were large firms, as well as Africans who adopted the manners and greed of the oppressor (Fanon, *Black Skin*, 64). In the plantations, these African factors are the "house niggers" who handled all the master's needs and reported on the "field niggers to the master" (Bulhan, 44). The factor is very rare among the Kurds, who call them jash, and are considered to be most hateful. Abu Ali is the only factor and jash character in *Letters from a Kurd*, and the Kurds do not count him as Kurdish anymore.

Fanon provides two solutions for the oppressed: one for the Negro intellectual and the other for the Negro laborer. For him, intellectuals should question their lost identities and rediscover themselves through self-analysis and the study of black history. However, the only choice for the laborer is to fight for their freedom (Fanon, *The Wretched*, 132-149). Both of these options are implied in the novel. Bahar discusses the dissent between Kurdish leaders in Iraq. Kurdish history is full of oppression and suppression; for him, the only option for freeing the Kurds is for leaders to put away their disagreements and unite. Fanon's solution for laborers is represented through the peshmerga's fight; they know that only combat with the oppressor can save them. In fact, every Kurd is a peshmerga who has fought for many years for the freedom of Kurdistan. Yet Saddam's regime maintained

control in many ways: for example, Mary's letters, which, along with his personal experiences included all the violence and oppression of the Ba'athist regime against Kurds, were never posted but all were read by the Mukhabarat. The Ba'athist regime was aware of the threat posed by the letters, where Mary talked about everything from personal experiences to the restrictive policies of the regime against the Kurds. Mary wrote how he lost his family, one by one, due to repressions: how, for example, the Kurds were forced to leave all their possessions to Arab families. Part of the complete racism of the Arabization policy was the fact that the Kurds could not buy houses because of their race until they assimilated as Arabs. The large numbers of armed police as well as the social control through the media, the schools, and the Mukhabarat itself all demonstrate the vulnerability of the oppressor through the threat of Mary's letters.

Fanon's idea about the oppressor within has no meaning for the Kurds; the only barrier to their independence is the oppressor without. The political discussions between the Kurdish leaders and Saddam Hussein confirm that reasonable discourse to achieve compromise becomes so irrational when it comes to Kurdish issues that the only choice left for some is to fight. Fighting as the last resort for the Kurds is represented through Mary's ultimate refusal to go to America. In his last letter to Gringo, he writes "I am not going to America," having arrived at this decision after his disappointment with his former idol and disillusionment with the American dream, upon realizing that the U.S. was helping Saddam Hussein:

You should know that your American money and weapons, given to your beloved monster, are used to spread terror in my country, and to take away the lives of many innocent women and children of all faiths and races: Kurds, Arabs, Turkman and Christians. Your American government has surely

proved that the mountains of Kurdistan are our only true friends. I no longer want to go to America but to the mountains to fight for my freedom and that of my people. (*Letters from a Kurd*, 331)

Mary's disillusionment with America made him change his life direction, which aligns with Fanon's perspective about resistance. The novel suggests that Kurds could achieve freedom by fighting. Regarding Fanon's theory of the oppressor/the oppressed and the efforts for recognition, fighting is the only option to defeat the actual oppressor and to be recognized. As the next section explains, a crucial component of this very fight is the struggle for self-expression, to tell the story of resistance.

Oriental and Occidental Tropes

Bahar introduced many orientalist tropes in *Letters from a Kurd* such as a male/female, Oriental/ Occidental binaries. By drawing on Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, this section reveals how Bahar resists these tropes. Said created a revolution by deconstructing the manner in which the East and the West are portrayed. He introduced the concept of orientalism and described how the Western's (occidental) studies have shaped the understanding of the East (oriental). Historically, the West has imaginatively constructed the Orient as its opposite, and there has been "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees" (Said, 5). This hierarchal relationship between the West and the East demonstrates "the hegemonism of possessing minorities," which justifies dominance and intervention of the West in the political affairs of the East (Malek qtd. in Said, 108).

Bahar demonstrates the images of the Middle East that his Western readers expect and have heard about. For Maryam Soltan Beyad et al., Bahar, by writing in the English

language, which is “heavily burdened with Orientalist tropes,” and choosing the novel, “a Western genre,” inadvertently informs his readers of a number of “familiar Orientalist tropes,” such as political corruption, violence against women, oriental superstition, and so on (4). The most obvious orientalist trope is the front cover of the novel, which depicts a teenage boy, probably Mary, playing “Halukan,” a local game. The picture is full of colors of yellow and red; the boy wears an old shirt and has messy hair. The cover informs Western readers that “they are about to read an exotic tale about a forsaken land” (Beyad et al., 4). For Beyad, this illustrates the associations of “the Middle East with preindustrial, medieval settings untouched by civilization and modernity” (Beyad et al., 4). Some of these Orientalist tropes are rendered by “[a] British gentleman,” who states that “the Kurd has a curious habit of disparaging himself and his brethren” and describes them as “hardworking, avaricious savages” in his history book (Bahar, 280-281).

In his novel Bahar recounts some details of his homeland’s culture and tradition that are unfamiliar to the Western readers. According to Beyad et al., Bahar’s “account of the political, cultural, and social circumstances of a nation by an insider satiates the foreign readers’ thirst for authentic “exotic” stories of distant lands” (3). Such literary works are “instances of what Fatemeh Keshavarz calls ‘eye-witness literature’ and what Saba Mahmood terms ‘native testimonials’” (qtd. in Beyad et al., 3).

Beyad et al. claim that *Letters from a Kurd* is a “global” novel in a way that it promotes “literary tourism or tourism at home” (4). The term literary tourism is borrowed from Pheng Cheah, who discusses tourism in his *What is a World?*, his book on consumption and voyeurism. Literary tourism provides Western reader with an opportunity to know about “the lives of people in distant lands . . . [and] pay a visit to the unknown worlds of the novel at a very low cost (Beyad et al., 5). This literary journey decreases the

risk of travel to “unknown, war-stricken, dangerous places like the Middle East” where “linguistic and cultural barriers duplicate the problems of communication” (5). However, for Beyad et al., this type of travel increases the risk of orientalism. It postulates a “hierarchical relationship between the Easterner and the Westerner,” wherein the Westerner “becomes the active voyeur, the gazing subject” and, in contrast, the Easterner becomes “the voyeured, the seen, the passive object of gaze” (Oliver qtd. in Beyad et al., 5).

Bahar demonstrates these dualities in many ways. Most notably, the novel portrays two types of women: typical Middle Eastern women and the “Occidental,” modern and open-minded, ones. The first group confirms Western readers’ assumptions about the Middle Eastern woman: “she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her” (Said, 6). Mary’s mother, for example, is one of these women. Mary describes his mother’s relationship with his father, her role in the family and in society, and informs the readers that she is a subjugated and voiceless woman who is possessed by her husband. According to Beyad et al., there is no loving relationship between the couple: “[F]ather did not greet her. No ‘good morning’ or ‘good night’ or ‘have a nice day’ like the husbands and wives do in American films. I had never seen him give Mother a hug or a kiss” (Beyad et al., 5; Bahar, 20). Cyrus Amiri states that this “cold marital relationships” was rooted in cultural and religious understandings of the man–woman relationship (qtd. in Beyad et al., 5).

This Orientalist trope of Middle Eastern women is contrasted by Bahar’s representation of some other female characters, such as Papula, Sunshine, and Aida, who resist the Orientalist explanation. These characters “speak out against harassment and discrimination, seek love, or defy social norms in other ways” (Beyad et al., 5). In contrast with Mary’s mother, Papula is a modern woman who does not accept women’s traditional

roles. She is a strong, independent, and outspoken woman who objects to conventional gender roles by complaining, “I was not born to be a housewife” (Bahar, 116). However, she weds Arsalan, Mary’s uncle, in an “arranged marriage” (117). In response to her obstinacy, Arsalan plays the role of “a possessive, authoritarian, and controlling husband,” the role of a typical Middle Eastern man, father, husband, or son (Beyad et al., 5). He prevents her from continuing her education at secondary school and makes “restrictive rules to confine her” (5). The Middle Eastern husband does not allow his wife to be alone when he is away home for work, so Arsalan, for example, sends Mary to his house to be with her. These restrictions demonstrate how women are dominated in a patriarchal society. Papula’s “revolutionary spirit” ends with her suicide (5). According to Beyad et al., “her suicide can be read as the final expression of her subversiveness and her revolt against her husband’s control” (5).

Two other female figures in the novel who act as foils to Mary’s mother are Aida, Mary’s first love, and Khorataw, or Sunshine, his second love and wife. Aida is a Christian Iraqi girl who dares to work in one of Kirkuk’s shopping malls under the harsh and insecure conditions of Kirkuk. Aida, as a confident woman who questions “the sexually biased norms of her country” by working outside the house, pays with her life: she is raped and killed by Abu Ali (6). Sunshine is the daughter of Mary’s English teacher and his intimate friend’s sister who, like Mary, is interested in film and photography and starts a romantic relationship with him. She also challenges the gender roles imposed on women. Her final political act is to join peshmerga—the summit of her fight—to oppose the stereotypical gender roles of the Middle Eastern women who, because of their sex, are believed to be unable to engage in any political activity.

Regarding orientalist gender roles, Bahar also describes two types of men in the novel: the prejudiced, narrow-minded, men of the East versus open-minded, respectful men of the West. Mary's father, Darwesh Rashaba, and his uncle Arsalan, Papula's husband, are two obvious examples of the men who restrict their wives and "deprive them of their human rights" (6). These men hold no love for women, whom they view as possessions, and to whom they assign socially determined gender duties. The second group is in contrast with "the stereotypical portrayals of Middle Eastern masculinity" (6). Shamal, Mary's English teacher, is "an enlightened man whose relationship with his wife and daughter is based on reciprocal respect and love" (6). He also admires music, film, and art, in contrast with Mary's father who "associated music and arts with the Devil" (6). Jam, Mary's close friend, admires art and is also interested in film, and so helps Mary learn more about movies. Like Shamal, he also believes in equity and respect for women. And finally, Mary's maternal grandfather, for example, "loved his wife" and called her "Gulbahar, Spring Rose." As his Mother tells him, "every year when the roses blossomed, your grandfather would cut a bunch and place it on your grandmother's grave" (Bahar, 21). For Said, orientalism is constructed through the dominance of one culture, the Occident, over another one, the Orient. He also mentions that orientalism is a cultural construct that implicates the interaction between the Orient and the Occident (Said, 213). Shamal, Jam, and Mary himself are distant from the Middle Eastern objectification of women; instead, they respect women because they are in touch with English language, Western films, and books. These tropes confirm the established thinking that Westerners esteem women while the Middle-Easterners do not. These Middle-Eastern exceptional men are young and have contact with Western resources, which shape their views and performance. However, Mary's grandfather deconstructs these hypotheses; he has no contact with the Western culture, but

he respects and loves his wife. His behaviour towards his wife dismantles the restrictions of stereotypical gender roles.

Further dismantling of stereotypical gender roles can be seen in the figure of Mary, the protagonist of the novel, who experiences sexual ambiguity from childhood to his youth. The first half of the novel depicts Mary's ambiguity regarding his gender and its problems as a "boygirl" (Bahar, 9). Because of his appearance— the long hair, his mother's treatment of him as a girl, and also his abbreviated name, Mary—he became the target of Zao'Adin, Shawes Dog (later on named Abu Ali and Kojak's father), and Kojak, all of whom abuse him psychologically and sexually. The practice of a boy being abused by other men is referred to as *hiz* in Kurdish, and is, to say the least, unpleasant for any boy who has Mary's concerns during all his childhood. To deal with this problem, his father asks Zao'Adin, the city *molla*,¹² to treat Mary because Mary's father believes that his sexual ambiguity is a sickness that can be cured by a religious person. Unfortunately, Zao-Adin wants to abuse the boy as Shawes Dog had. Because of this gender ambiguity, Mary is permitted to stay with Papula while his uncle works.¹³ This opportunity provides him with a way to resolve this sexual ambiguity by asserting his heterosexuality. When Mary sleeps with Papula one night, he is able to claim his manhood. This assertion of masculinity influences his later decisions, particularly his political activism.

Though orientalist tropes depict political activity as a male endeavor and deem women unable to participate because of their supposed weakness, Bahar also depicted strong women, such as Aida, who resisted orientalist stereotypes by working outside home. There is also Papula, who withstood her husband's attempts to control her, and finally Sunshine, who joined the peshmerga. Sunshine, by joining a political and military group,

deconstructs the gender-politics equation. Here, Bahar again does not limit his characters to one side.

In addition, Beyad et al. analyze the orientalist portrayal of America, which is described through the eyes of Mary from his childhood until adolescence. When he was a child, he had a deep interest in America, especially its cinema. The Hollywood actor and filmmaker, Clint Eastwood, his “Gringo,” was his role model and, as noted earlier, the addressee of all his letters. The letters referred to in the title of the novel are the letters that Mary writes to Gringo: “[W]ith no one to talk to,” Mary says, “[I] turned to Gringo, and I secretly wrote him my first letter, crying for your help to come and take me away to America” (Bahar, 54). Mary also chooses the nickname, Gringo, for his role model and states that it is his favourite nickname for him. Mary sits in front of a poster of one of Eastwood’s films, *A Fistful of Dollars*, in which Eastwood was the main actor. In that movie Eastwood played the role of a stranger who entered a town where there was a feud between two families competing for control. Mary’s choice of the nickname, Gringo, is related to Eastwood’s role in this film. Gringo is a Spanish word that means a foreigner and, particularly, in Spanish-speaking countries refers to an American who is not Hispanic and who is often white (*English Oxford Living Dictionaries*). Regarding shooting the movie in Spain and Eastwood’s role as a foreigner and a savior, Mary’s choice of Gringo as the nickname for his own role model is understandable.



Figure 4. *A Fistful of Dollars* Poster

The reason Mary refers to this actor as his savior requires further attention. Eastwood's personality is associated with a certain kind of masculinity, something Mary talks about in his first letter:

I am sitting opposite your portrait taken from the film, *A Fistful of Dollars*. I often talk to you and have decided to write you a letter. I like your poncho, the cigar in your mouth and the way you hold the pistol. I don't like guns, except for yours. You only use it in films and to defend your freedom. I wish you could come here and help me with my freedom too. (Bahar, 9)

Mary's desire to solve his sexual problem and to be a man is related to his interest in Eastwood, whom he associates with aggressive masculinity, a theme emphasized in the poster that hangs in Mary's room, which portrays the character as a violent man with a

bloody face and a gun in his hand. Furthermore, Eastwood's roles that depict him as a vigilante fighting for justice echo the second part of the novel in which Mary starts his political activity after asserting his masculinity. Modeling himself after Gringo's decisive actions, Mary decides to fight for his freedom by joining the peshmerga against Saddam Hussein's violence and oppression.

For Mary, America was his dreamland where he thought he could pursue his ambition to become a filmmaker. Because of the politically unstable condition of his homeland and his father's disrespect for the arts, it was improbable for him to become a filmmaker, so he always dreamed of leaving his country for America (Beyad et al., 7). According to Beyad et al., Mary's country is represented as "America's uncanny other," and American cinema and English language as "agents of intellectual awakening" (7). American films generally and Gringo specifically become "an alternative space to the political, cultural, and ethnic oppressions" where Mary can escape (7). Therefore, a person such as Mary from the Middle East relies on America "as the sole redemptive source" where he can learn about freedom, equality, and democracy (7). His childhood dreams shatter as he grows up and little by little becomes aware of the reality of this dreamland.

Mary's first understanding of Americans begins when his uncle talks about Henry Kissinger, the American secretary of state under President Gerald Ford Jr., "who betrayed the Kurds in 1975 in our war against Saddam, bringing disaster to our people"; Mary becomes "truly disappointed to learn that Kissinger was American. Until then, I believed the Americans were all great people" (Bahar, 61). Watching the film, *Soldier Blue*, about the history of America is a turning point for Mary, who becomes disillusioned with the U.S., as he relates in his next letter to Gringo: "[I] believe your people treated the Native Americans atrociously. They suffered terrible injustices, just as my people and I are

suffering now at the hands of the occupying powers in our land” (237). Another disillusionment with America comes when he learns that the American government supports Saddam Hussein’s oppression against his people by sending weapons and helping him financially. Finally, Mary changes his mind about going to America, even though Jam’s American wife comes to take him there. He decides to stay, join the peshmerga, and fight for his people.

Regarding setting, characters, and the content of the novel, Bahar resists the dichotomy of oriental/occidental tropes by taking a position in between. Considering these dichotomies, Beyad et al. claim that Bahar adjusts himself to Gillian Whitlock’s point of view of a writer. For her, a writer is “a mediator between two cultures” (Beyad et al., 3). A writer is neither an insider nor an outsider; she is both ‘Other’ in representing her characters and “at the same time familiar enough not to alienate her audience” (Whitlock qtd. in Beyad et al., 3). Beyad et al. state that such writers are in a “a liminal position . . . they are not complete insiders or outsiders to either the home or the host cultures” (3). This is precisely the strategy adopted by Bahar, who does not restrict his novel to either of the two extremes but inhabits the space between the oriental and the western tropes.

The Role of Language

Beyad et al. describe *Letters from a Kurd* as a “born-translated novel” (2). This novel is written in English; however, it has non-English references as well. Many Middle Eastern novelists, like Bahar, have recently demonstrated interest in writing their novels in English rather than in their native languages. This is because globalization compels many writers to compose in English, so that they can reach an audience. This issue is further complicated by the fact that the number of works translated to English is more than in other

languages. In many countries, English is the first, second, or third language so that it becomes “the world’s dominant language” (Ammon qtd. in Dumanig).

The fact that the global dominance of English compels many novelists write in English rather than in their native languages led Walkowitz to introduce the term “born-translated novel”: born-translated novel refers to novels which treat translation as “a condition of their production” (qtd. in Beyad et al., 4). Born-translated novels are written simultaneously for translation and as translation from the beginning. In other words, these works are “pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed” (Walkowitz qtd. in Beyad et al, 4). The born-translated novel targets a heterogeneous range of audiences: some may be proficient in several languages, some may be less proficient in English, or some may be proficient in one version of English. Further, these readers also have different experiences: the work may be foreign and difficult to some, or it may be familiar to others. The challenges posed by addressing different readers become more prominent among migrant writers who write in different languages and also have diverse political and literary affiliations. According to Walkowitz, these affiliations complicate writing because these writers address many places and different experiences that are difficult to express in English (4-10). For Walkowitz, “born-translated novels in English often focus on geographies in which English is not the principal tongue,” that is, novelists purposefully use another language that does not correspond to one geography or one people (19). Given the different audiences, anglophone writers are inclined to produce born-translated novels by including multilingualism within their works to make a connection between these diverse types of readers. Born-translated novels, accordingly, target a diverse range of geographies, audiences, and even writers. These differences dismantle the relationship between language and geography in born-translated

novels. For this type of fiction, translation in the general sense is not secondary to the works; it becomes “a condition of their production” (Walkowitz, 4). Therefore, for these works, “translation is not secondary”; it becomes a medium rather than an afterthought (4). Besides composing in English, writers of born-translated novels include words, terms, and expressions written in different languages. According to Walkowitz, this strategy challenges “the global dominance of English, complicate[s] native readership, and protect[s] creative works against misinterpretation”; moreover, it problematizes the traditional role of the novel “as an instrument of monolingual collectivity” (46). For Walkowitz, the born-translated novel challenges the binaries of native/foreign, original/translation, monolingual/multilingual, and nation/world (43-45). Most likely, Bahar selected English rather than Kurdish for his novel to appeal to a wider readership or to introduce himself as an international author (Beyad et al., 2). Bahar prefers an international language over what Casanova calls a “small language” (qtd. in Beyad et al., 2). This status of born-translated is pivotal for my discussion of how Bahar, by writing his novel in English rather than Kurdish, resists Kurds’ invisibility and gives them a voice by revealing the long decades of violence and oppression against them.

Significantly, *Letters from a Kurd* has a Kurdish setting and deals with the political turmoil and harsh conditions of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein’s regime. For Beyad et al., considering its simultaneous composition in a global language and references to Kurdish terms, *Letters from a Kurd* is “an intentional self-translation from the outset” (2). For Walkowitz, born-translated works demonstrate the practice of “self-translation,” a term used by translation specialists to denote works that are “limited to authors who produce both an original work and the translation of that original work” (19). Self-translated works are not translated works in the general sense of moving between separate languages or

literatures. *Letters from a Kurd* is “self-translation” that contains the translation within itself by involving another language (Beyad et al., 2).

By choosing material from his homeland and presenting it in an international language, Bahar makes a connection between English-speakers and Kurdish ones. In *Letters from a Kurd*, as noted earlier, almost all the characters have a nickname: Hiwa is nicknamed “Rabbit”; Jwana, “Beautiful”; Ashti, “Peaceful”; Khorataw, “Sunshine”; Papula, “Butterfly.” In Aras Ahmed Mhamd’s interview with Kae Bahar, Bahar explains the purpose behind this choice. He states that, given that the novel has international readers and Kurdish names could be difficult for foreign audiences to pronounce and remember, he uses nicknames. The nicknames are the English equivalents of the Kurdish ones or simply represent the personality of the characters. The name Peaceful, for example, represents the personality of one of the characters; it describes what kind of person he is so that, based on the nickname, readers presumably like and sympathize with him. On the contrary, the nickname of another character, Zao’Adin, is “The Light of Religion”; considering his abuse of young boys as a clergyman, readers will understand that this appellation is ironic. He behaves in a manner that goes against his mission as a religious man. Through nicknames, Bahar helps readers understand his ideas by using familiar words whose meanings are known to all. By doing so, he builds a bridge between the Kurdish and the English languages. Moreover, his novel questions the relationship between language and geography and thus deconstructs the dichotomies of original/translation, center/periphery, and native/foreign (Beyad et al., 2).

Bahar’s stance as minority novelist producing work in a marketplace where he does not have literary dominance is also significant. In her book, *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova discusses how literature might be reconsidered through the historical

method of world systems analysis (20-38). World systems analysis argues that capitalism began to take shape in the sixteenth century when the world was divided between powerful nations and weak nations. Related to this, literary works are also divided into center and periphery; a literary world without borders is ideal. She states that Paris was the center for writers to gain a world audience and, thus, build a literary reputation. Therefore, literary works in other languages needed to be translated into French if they wanted to attain many readers. This “unequal hierarchical system” makes non-English writers compete to achieve literary recognition; however, it is not easy for writers from the peripheral countries. Because they “struggle against invisibility that threatens them from the very beginning of their careers, writers have to create the conditions under which they can be seen” (Casanova, 177). The dominance of this center imposes two choices on peripheral writers: first, assimilation, which is evident in the works of some writers such as Hanif Kureishi, who align with central values and write in the language of the dominant literary center; second, differentiation, which becomes evident in works of the marginal writers such as Salman Rushdie, who insist on the distinctiveness of their literary works. By assimilation and “integration within a dominant literary space through a dilution or erasing of original differences,” these writers “betray their heritage and, deny[ing] their difference, assimilate the values of one of the great literary centers” (179-180). Although writing in the languages of peripheral countries provides an uncertain future for these writers, something that is rarely recognized in the dominant literary world, they obtain “a claim to national identity” (179).

According to Beyad et al., Bahar as a novelist from a peripheral region neither assimilates into nor differentiates from the dominant language, even though he writes his novel in English (2). They believe that Bahar combines both choices by integrating the

details of the culture of his homeland into an English-language novel. These details about his homeland are unfamiliar to the English-speaking reader or readers from other languages as well. However, he familiarizes the different range of his audiences by using known nicknames and by frequently referring to American cinema. Because of the global reputation of Hollywood cinema, most people are familiar with Hollywood movies and their prominent characters. Referring to known Hollywood movies, Bahar establishes a “balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar” (Beyad et al., 3). Although Bahar’s references to American cinema affirm its influence on a Kurdish boy, he has neither confined himself completely to global cinema nor restricted himself to Kurdish national tradition.

Specifically, Bahar operates between two sides—violence/counter-violence, Kurdish/English, men/women, and modern/traditional—but he does not limit himself to either one. Kurds live on the borders of their host countries and believe the mountains are their only friends. In this respect, the novel establishes a liminal position as a means of resisting binaries. Behar mingles both sides and makes bridges between oppositions to dismantle hierarchical power relations, to overcome the constraints of stereotype, and to address an international audience drawing upon the resources afforded by a “global” English.

CHAPTER THREE: RESISTANCE IN KEMAL'S *MEMED, MY HAWK*

Memed, My Hawk—*Ince Memed*, its Turkish name means “Memed, the Slim”—is Yasar Kemal’s debut novel, which narrates the resistance of Kurds against violence and oppression in Turkey. Sadik Kemal Gokgeli, known as Yasar Kemal,¹⁴ was born in 1923 in a village in the Chukurova region of Anatolia in southern Turkey. Kemal lived in a Turcoman village, and his parents were Kurdish refugees who came there after Russian forces invaded and occupied the Eastern Anatolian city of Van in 1915. In a conversation with the French author Alain Bosquet, Kemal recalls that his was the only Kurdish-speaking family in the village. Kemal became familiar with Kurdish folk poetry from the age of eight, which he heard from traveling minstrels. At this age, he also began to recite poetry in Turkish because, as he explained, “the formal teaching of Kurdish was banned in the Turkish Republic” (Mignon). Thus, because of the political situation in Turkey, Kemal composed his literary works in Turkish not Kurdish. However, his works nevertheless implicitly represent Kurdish themes.

Kemal also worked as a newspaper reporter, short story writer, and novelist. In most of his works, he wrote about the people of Anatolia. The Anatolian countryside, especially the villages of the Chukurova plain, is the main setting in Kemal’s novels. As a journalist Kemal traveled and explored his native Chukurova region to collect samples of oral literature in the villages, an experience which gave him ample knowledge of folk culture, which he would incorporate in his own writings. He included the oral folk tradition of Kurdish with the written literatures of Turkish to record implicitly the difficulties and oppression of the Anatolian region, which I explain in greater detail below (Mignon).

Drawing on his knowledge of folk culture, thus, his first published literary work, *Agıtlar (Elegies)*, was an anthology of poems that he collected in the villages of the Chukurova region (Mignon). In addition to his literary attempts to defend Kurdish tradition, he “spoke out during clashes between autonomy-seeking Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish troops in mid 1990s” and in his articles, he accused the Turkish army of destroying Kurdish villages (*apnews*). Kemal was arrested many times for his revolutionary political activities, which is why he selected the pen name Yasar Kemal to avoid the police.

In 1952 he married Thilda Serrero (the granddaughter of Sultan Abdulhamid II's chief physician), a translator fluent in three other languages besides Turkish, namely French, English, and Spanish. In 1955, *Memed, My Hawk* Kemal's debut novel was published in the Turkish language. It won the Varlik Prize, an important literary distinction in Turkey, for best novel of that year. The jury included some of Turkey's great literary figures from the first half of the twentieth century, including Resat Nuri Güntekin, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, as well as some harsh critics, including Nurullah Ataç and Yasar Nabi Nayir, the editor of *Varlik* (Mignon). Kemal's national acceptance of his novel led to him composing three other novels related to *Memed, My Hawk*, *They Burn the Thistle*, *Ince Memed 3*, *Memed, Der Letzte Flug des Falken*. This award by Turkish literary scholars provided hope for the Kurdish question and the freedom of expression.

Serrero's translations of Kemal's short stories and novels subsequently helped him garner a wider audience and eventually he received international recognition for *Memed, My Hawk*. Since the 1955 publication of *Memed, My Hawk*, Kemal has become famous in Turkey. However, he gained international recognition only after his works were translated into dominant languages particularly English. As Pascale Casanova asserts, peripheral

authors must use a global language instead of a small language to gain literary dominance. *Memed, My Hawk*, at first, was translated into French, and the prestigious French daily *Combat* in 1960 and the Swedish Art Academy and Writers Union in 1987 nominated *Memed, My Hawk* for the Nobel Prize (Tharaud and Loy). In 1961 Edouard Roditi translated the novel into English and almost two dozen other languages. In 1997 Kemal was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. However, because of the political stance that Kemal took in his own life and that he evinced in his novel, the film adaptation of *Memed, My Hawk*, was delayed for many years. Finally, because of obstacles to shooting movie adaption of the novel in Turkey, the film was shot in Yugoslavia and released in 1984. However, it was not until twenty-five years afterwards, in 2013, that this film adaptation was released, at a point when the Turkish state deemed it had lost its subversive characteristics.

Memed, My Hawk is a narrative that centers on a boy named Memed, who lives with his mother in a village on the fringes of the Toros Mountains, near the southeastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey. He lost his father when he was very young. Memed and his mother work on a land for Abdi Agha, the local tyrant of the village, and in return he gives two thirds of the crop for them to live on, but they barely survive. Abdi Agha forces the villagers to plow barefoot in a thistle field in winter and summer. He abuses Memed physically and psychologically until Memed runs away to a nearby village and finds shelter in the house of a kind old man by the name of Old Suleyman. Memed becomes his goatherd but he worries about his mother, who needs to harvest the crops by herself. Abdi Agha also searches everywhere for Memed to return him to the village. Finally, Memed comes back, and as punishment for running away, Abdi Agha takes three-quarters of their crops instead of the usual two-thirds, making them face starvation in the wintertime. He also forbids other

villagers from giving them food. Memed's mother gives up their cow and recently born bull calf to Abdi Agha in exchange for food. The calf is Memed's only hope for a better future, but Abdi Agha keeps making their conditions worse.

As he grows up, Memed finds solace in his childhood sweetheart, Hatce. However, Abdi Agha has arranged for his nephew Veli to marry Hatce. The two lovers elope, but finally, with the help of a famous tracker, Lame Ali, Abdi Agha and Veli find them. Memed shoots both of them, sends Hatce back to the village, then flees himself. Veli dies, but Abdi Agha survives. Abdi Agha, in order to take revenge, convinces some of the villagers to testify against Hatce rather than Memed for shooting Veli. She is convicted and sent to prison.

Memed once again takes shelter in Old Suleyman's house. Old Suleyman takes him to the mountains and introduces him to a bandit leader called Mad Durdu. In the mountains Memed learns how to survive, though he finds out that Durdu is very cruel and just as vicious as Abdi Agha. Finally, with two friends in tow, Sergeant Rejep and Jabbar, he leaves the band and decides to kill Abdi Agha after hearing that Hatce had been sent to jail and Abdi Agha has become even more cruel himself. Memed wants to free the villagers so they could keep their total crops for themselves instead of giving most of them to Agha. Abdi Agha hears that Memed is planning to kill him and hides in another village. Memed's plan to kill Abdi Agha leads to the burning of the whole village, but again the villain survives. Abdi Agha returns to the old village and beats Memed's mother to death.

Meanwhile, Memed disguises himself as Hatce's younger brother and during a prison transfer, he frees Hatce and her companion, Iraz, who shares the same cell. They live in the mountains for three years, changing their cave many times to flee police. Finally, Hatce is killed by a police bullet, and Iraz takes their new-born son to another village to

raise him. Memed, with the help of Lame Ali, who is remorseful and tries make up for what he did by tracking Memed and Hatce previously, finds out that Abdi Agha hides in the house of a relative, Safa Bey, an oppressor similar to Abdi Agha, in Chukurova. Memed's fame for his bravery in confronting and killing oppressors spreads everywhere and villagers compose ballads and legends about him. At long last, Memed manages to kill Aga and then flees to the mountains, never to be seen again.

Memed, My Hawk is semi-biographical: Kemal represented many of the characters based on his personal experiences. Through the character of Memed, Kemal demonstrated his own difficulties and injustices during his childhood and adulthood. Like Memed, he too suffered the oppression and injustices of aghas in the Chukurova region. His difficulties continued when he became a journalist. Kemal changed his name after running away from Chukurova to Istanbul to hide from the police. Memed also thinks of changing his name when, for the first time, he flees to Suleyman's village; Big Ahmet is similar to his maternal uncle Mahiro, who also was a famous brigand; Big Ismail is based on the real-life Ismail Agha from Kemal's village; Horali, a watchman of a melon garden, is a reference to Kemal himself, who was a watchman of a melon garden (Fraser).

In *Memed, My Hawk*, Kemal demonstrated different types of resistance, specifically through selected settings, Memed's activities, and the peasants' reaction to Memed's revolt. This chapter focuses on the first novel of *Memed, My Hawk's* tetralogy, and concentrates on diverse forms of resistance. Although the Kurdish language and its culture were prohibited in Turkey, Kemal revives Kurdish tradition in his novels and pays particular attention to the symbolic significance of landscape as a resource for defending against oppression, incorporating Kurdish culture through oral folk themes.

The Chukurova Plain and the Landscape of Resistance

Significantly, *Memed, My Hawk* is set in the Chukurova plain of southern Anatolia and focuses on the tumultuous events of the 1920s and early 1930s. Specifically, Kemal reflects on the significance of the resistance of the Chukurova region in relation to two historical events—World War I (1914–18) and the Turkish War of Independence (1918–1923). Indeed, the Chukurova region is the major setting in almost all of Kemal’s novels; it is a contested area in Turkish history, and a site of different forms of resistance. Chukurova was a site of resistance for a long time, particularly because its people never identified with the political concerns of the central state, even during the Ottoman Empire. According to Santesso, troops were ordered to settle Kurds in other regions in order to “domesticate” the tribes in the Chukurova valley (5). In *Memed, My Hawk*, an old brigand describes the resistance of the tribes against the Ottoman command in 1876:

I remember . . . the great struggle against the Ottomans, in which the Ottomans were victorious. They captured our Kozanoghlu and carried him off. Then they exiled the Ashvars to Bozok and scattered the whole tribe. . . . Then the Ottomans settled the tribes by force in the Chukurova and distributed fields to them and drew up deeds of possession. They stationed soldiers on the mountain roads so that we might no longer migrate to the summer pastures in the highlands. The nomads died like flies in the Chukurova, some from malaria, some from the heat or some from epidemics among them. But the nomads had no intention of settling down. (Kemal, 246)

The Ottomans forced many nomads in Chukurova to settle in other places as farmers and cultivate land so that they could contribute to the state economy, but the assimilation policy of the Ottomans was not totally successful as many tribes refused to leave their homes and rebelled. However, the nomads were forcibly resettled eventually because the Ottomans obstructed their summer pastures. Worse yet, the government compelled nomads to pay a

tax, thereby legitimizing Ottoman rule. Compounding the oppression was the fact that these nomads also had to “serve in the very military that was operating against them” (Tharaud, 65-67).

And yet, though the Chukurova region is contested—as a land in which Kurdish nomads struggle for recognition and autonomy—nevertheless the Chukurova region is often portrayed as a postcolonial one because its people fought against the French troops who came there to usurp it after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Specifically, the people in southern Anatolia revolted against the invasion of a Western imperialist power. Kemal demonstrated the people’s unification against a foreign invasion in *Memed, My Hawk*:

[T]he brigands, the deserters, the irregulars, the thieves, those who were good-for-nothing and the honest men, the young and the old, all the people of the Chukurova joined in the fight to throw the enemy out of the plain. They drove the French out and the whole country was thus liberated. A new government was set up and a new era began. (231-232)

Foreign attacks unified the different groups of people against a common enemy; this national unification¹⁵ to protect their land is similar to the Algerian fight for independence from the French. Fanon argues how Algerians unified to defend their land and ended violence:

[The] native's violence unifies the people. By its very structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it and separates them. The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. Violence is in action all-inclusive and national. It follows that it is closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. Thus the national parties show no pity at all toward

the caids and the customary chiefs. Their destruction is the preliminary to the unification of the people. (55)

After World War I and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the political structure of Turkey changed dramatically, with the abolition of the sultanate and its replacement by a republic in 1923. In Ankara, a central government was established, which abolished the feudal landlords. At the same time, a new social element, the *aghas*,¹⁶ appeared. The problems that this new form of tyranny introduced became a major focus of Kemal's novel.

Life conditions in the Anatolian area are difficult. Not only is the climate harsh, with hot, dry summers and intensely cold winters, but also the few roads isolate villages from each other and other cities (Tharaud and Loy). Though villagers rely on farming and planting crops for their livelihood, they faced the challenges of poor soil and harsh weather, and constantly worried that their food storage would not last until the next harvest. The novel depicts villagers as suffering from the privations of their life conditions: most of them slept on the floor; used dried dung to warm their houses because few could afford to burn wood; lacked radio and postal service; and were illiterate. The remote villages of Anatolia were the last part of Turkey to benefit from nationalist reforms. Some problems, such as few connections between town and country, made it harder for the villagers to take advantage of the new republic.

Villagers' illiteracy, remoteness of the villages from the central government, and lack of state attention to the harsh conditions of peasant life made it possible for the emergence of tyrants such as the aghas. Aghas were the newly rich peasants who earned their fortune during World War I and tried to increase their land "either through purchase or less ethical means," and soon dominated many villages. The agha was "the intermediary

between the peasants and the government; the peasants had to work through the aghas if they wanted something from the government, and the government used the aghas to obtain votes or taxes from the peasants” (Tharaud and Loy). Kemal himself grew up in a village and faced many aghas. In his interview with Bosquet, he mentions that,

Often the agha were without pity. They starved the people, seized their few belongings, and treated them like slaves. . . . They were completely deceitful, dishonest, and recognized no human values. They certainly knew how to give orders to everyone, and they exploited without pity the tenants who showed any strength or independence. . . . The ag[h]as were petty tyrants. Their power and wealth came not from tradition and family, but from land and cattle. (137)

In contrast with the aghas, villagers did not own any land and were serfs. In this system, the villagers were completely dependent on their landlord, “who controls the entire surplus,” and could not leave the land (Mignon).

“[T]he idea of segregation” and remoteness is represented in the opening lines of the novel wherein Memed’s village is described as “boundless, wilder and darker than a forest,” where “a deep silence, a frightening stillness reigns.” Dikenli is a world by itself, with its own laws and customs. The people of Dikenli know nothing beyond their own village and very few have even ventured beyond the limits of the plateau. Outside, nobody seems to know of the existence of the village or its people and their way of life” (Santesso, 6; *Memed*, 3-6). For that matter, the central government did not care about the villages because officials felt that, “[P]eople [in the villages] did not know, or did not understand, or did not care what the central government was doing” (Stirling qtd. in Tharaud and Loy). The government is also absent in the novel: “most villagers distrusted the central government on general principle, associating government officials with such hated practices as the collection of taxes or interference with cherished traditions and

customs” (Tharaud and Loy). Its representatives, such as the tax collector or the police commander, rarely appear, and they are considered as “outsiders”: “[E]ven the tax collector goes there only every two or three years, and he has no contact with the villagers” (Santesso, 6; *Memed*, 6). The remote locations of the villages, or “geographical marginalization,” can be seen as the main reason that peasants did not recognize the central government, leading to “political isolation” (Tharaud and Loy). This further represents the gap between the efforts of the central government in Ankara for nationalization and its reality in the peripheral and rural parts of Anatolia. Police, as the representative of the central government, are outsiders in the novel; the villagers do not trust them and when police come to the village to capture Memed they did not say a word about his hideout.

In *Memed, My Hawk*, Kemal describes the difficult life of the villagers: each year in hot summer and cold winter, Memed and the other peasants made their living by planting in “the arid, thistle-ridden soil of the foothill plateaus of the Taurus Mountains” (Tharaud and Loy). Their conditions worsened under Abdi Agha, who oppressed and exploited them, for they had to give most of their crop to him and could only consume one third of what they produced.

Thistles are the symbol of oppression which move the main character, Memed, to resist against Abdi Agha. In the beginning of the novel, Kemal describes Dikenli as “the Plateau of Thistles” and following this, he described them:

[T]histles generally grow in soil which is neither good nor bad but has been neglected. Later the peasants may root out the thistles and sow there. . . . The tallest thistles grow about a yard high, with many twigs decked with spiny flowers, five-pointed like stars, set among tough, prickly thorns. There are hundreds of these flowers on each thistle. The thistles do not just grow in groups of two

or three. They sprout so thick, so close together that a snake would not be able to slip through them.

(6-7)

The novel then describes Memed's flight to another village, where he found shelter in Suleyman's house. In the darkness of the night, Memed saw an old man; he approached him and said: "I'll be your goatherd, Uncle," "I'll plough your fields too. I'll do every kind of work for you, Uncle" (10). An exhausted Memed goes to bed early and in the morning talks about his escape to Suleyman. He tells him that because Abdi Agha, village's agha, forced Memed, his mother and other villagers to plow these thistles he has decided to flee to Dursun's village. A friend of Memed, Dursun, talks about his village, where "they don't beat children, they don't force them to plough. Thistles don't grow there earlier" (13). Memed could not withstand Abdi Agha's cruelty so he fled the village. Thistles are, accordingly, the symbol of Abdi Agha's oppression as evident in the fact that peasants are forced to plow them: "[F]or two years I've ploughed his fields. The thistles devour me. They bite me. Those thistles tear at your legs like a mad dog. That's the sort of field I ploughed" (14). Besides thistles, Abdi Agha also beats him every day until yesterday he again beats Memed so all his body aches, "[S]o I ran away from there. I'll go to that village. He won't find me there, Abdi Agha" (14). For Memed, Dursun's village is the symbol of hope and release, where he searches for freedom: "I'd rather die than go back to Deyirmenoluk. I'll never go back again. I won't" (14). Memed's flight is his first courageous deed in opposition against Abdi Agha's tyranny. Additionally, when the peasants thought Abdi Agha was burned in the village fire, Memed defiantly burns the thistle fields so that villagers might more easily farm the land. This also represents "the downfall of their corrupt village agha (Tharaud). The Chukurova people accordingly

resisted multipronged attacks from outside, from the French, and from inside, from the Ottomans. They also resisted Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's policy of nationalization.¹⁷ The way that its people withstood violence and oppression is further demonstrated, as we see in the next section, through the peasants' reaction to Memed's brigandage.

Kurdish Folk Resistance

Kemal incorporated folk materials into his story as part of a tactic of cultural resistance. One of the folk themes used in *Memed, My Hawk* is “the outlaw as folk hero” (Tharaud and Loy). He first attempts to protect himself against Abdi Agha's torture by fleeing his village, as we just saw. *Memed, My Hawk* narrates Memed's childhood flight from his village and its feudal lord, Abdi Agha. When Abdi Agha took Memed and his mother's only cow and its bull calf in exchange for wheat, all his hope for his future was gone, “Abdi kills Memed's hope for a better life” (Tharaud and Loy). Abdi Agha's oppression worsens, until he finally seeks to betroth Memed's childhood love, Hatce, to his nephew, Veli. Though Hatce and Memed escape, a famous tracker, lame Ali finds them. Memed eventually kills Veli, wounds Abdi, and flees to the mountain to become a brigand.

Although “in those days brigandage was a kind of fashion,” it was the only way to withstand Abdi Agha and, in this manner, achieve the kind of recognition discussed in the previous chapter (Santesso, 7). As Hegel's dialectical method elaborates, recognition entails a master-slave relationship, wherein the master position is attained when one is recognized but does not recognize the other; conversely, the slave is the subject who recognizes but is not recognized. Hegel adds that recognition entails struggle, a point that Fanon extends when he asserts that only through fighting can the oppressed attain recognition. These theories provide a useful framework for understanding why Abdi Agha

is so adamant and impervious to reason that the only option for Memed is to flee and become a brigand. For Santesso, brigands embody two types of marginalization: first, they are “subaltern subjects” who disavow their government; second, from the point of view of the villagers, they challenge the agha’s rules. According to Santesso, “though the brigand is marginalized,” he “requires violence” (7).

After killing Abdi Agha’s nephew and injuring him, Memed escaped to Suleyman’s village to help him. Suleyman took Memed to the mountain and introduced him to Mad Durdu, the leader of a brigandage in the mountain. Memed learns brigandage but is disillusioned when he realizes Mad Durdu similarities with Abdi Agha. For Mad Durdu is a greedy and cruel brigand who robbed passengers. Mad Durdu’s violence is not “liberatory” because it only benefits him and not the collective. He humiliates his victims, strips, and robs them, declaring: “[W]e take their underpants, so that our fame will spread around the countryside” (*Memed*, 116). Mad Durdu is the only brigand to go to such lengths and boasts about it: “[L]et them know that they have been robbed by Mad Durdu” (116). His selfish and humiliating behavior repels Memed, who finds that the mountains do not supply the freedom he sought; here, one tyrant replaces another. He feels that “there’s no difference between the mountain and the prison. There are leaders in both places, and those who follow are their slaves” (101). Ultimately, Memed breaks from Mad Durdu and decides not to respond violently unless justified.

His rejection of Mad Durdu and this form of brigandage marks a major turning point: Memed transforms “from a common brigand to a brigand with a social agenda”; his violence is “not only for self-protection but also to instigate reform” (Santesso, 8). When he becomes a brigand, “his reputation and image undergo a miraculous change in the minds of the peasants” (Tharaud and Loy).

In the Chukurova and on the Taurus mountains Memed's adventures were repeated, much exaggerated, from mouth to mouth, everyone supporting Memed's cause. . . . At last the village had found a champion. They were elated and all began inventing tall stories about Slim Memed, who soon assumed legendary proportions in their eyes. They told of so many heroic deeds and fights that the lives of ten men would not have sufficed to perform them all. (Kemal, 274)

Memed went through a transformation from an “ordinary peasant to folk hero”; his deformed and too thin appearance because of poverty and malnutrition was lost in his bravery. Slim Memed changed into a champion. Memed's nickname, *My Hawk*, refers to his agility, acuity, and his resemblance to a bird of prey. One of the villagers, Big Osman of Vayvay, considers Memed as “my hawk” so as to idolize him. When he hears Memed is shot by the police, he laments: “[W]hat a gallant man was my hawk! Such large eyes, such brows, such slim fingers! And so tall, like a cypress!” (Kemal, 338). When he learns that Memed is alive, he rejoices and claims “that his Hawk will defeat anyone the *aghas* send against him” (Tharaud and Loy).

Kemal also characterizes Memed in a manner similar to “the legendary bandit Big Ahmet,” who was famous for mercy and shrewdness. Through good deeds, such as returning money to the poor and refraining from killing Abdi Agha's children, Memet inspires love and fear (Tharaud, 4). Just as importantly, he becomes “an independent brigand,” or what Kemal names *mecbur*—a Turkish word borrowed from Arabic—meaning “committed” (8). According to Santesso, *mecbur* refers to “those who are forced by circumstances to take radical action against cruelty,” and it indicates “a belief so strong that the character who has it cannot act against it” (Seyhan qtd. in Santesso, 8). Memed's first revolt was for his own protection, but later on it leads to “social justice” (8). In other words, his violence turns into a political tactic against tyranny insofar as he decides to

punish Abdi Agha and end his cruelty against the peasants. The theme of an honorable brigand is thus another folk theme that Kemal represented through Memed; this theme borrows from “the tradition of Big Ahmet, Resit the Kurd, and other bandits who are remembered in folksongs sung by Anatolian bards of oral lore” (Tharaud and Loy). This type of brigandage protects the poor and fights oppression. For example, in the part when Memed wants to rob Ali and Hasan, two peasants who were on the way to return their village, they would rather die than return home empty-handed after working many years in Chukurova. Memed frees them and returns their money.

Another important theme which represents Memed’s fight for justice is, then, his resemblance to a Robin Hood figure, one that strengthens the significance of “social banditry” and protests against poverty and oppression. Some historians who examined the “conception of social banditry” believe that brigandage was a “protest against poverty and oppression in various cultures”:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported. This . . . distinguishes [social banditry] from two other kinds of rural crime: from the activity of gangs drawn from the professional “underworld” or of mere freebooters (“common robbers”), and from communities for whom raiding is part of the normal way of life, such as for instance the Bedouin. (Hobsbawm qtd. in Tharaud and Loy)

In the history of Turkey, social bandits were regarded as honorable, and many of them, such as Pir Sultan Abdal, Koroglu, and Dadaloglu, “acquired the status of folk heroes in Ottoman Anatolia” (Tharaud and Loy). All of them fought against oppression. By representing a Robin Hood characterization of Memed, Kemal did not mean to portray him

as a so-called noble savage and idealize the villagers. Instead, he sought to represent the realities of the Anatolian region and their difficulties, which were inspired by his personal life.

In this way, the novel reassesses the meaning and value of violence. For the peasants, Memed is not an outlaw like Mad Durdu or other brigands. Instead, he becomes a legend (9). Many admiring rumors about him circulate: “[B]ullets can’t harm him,” “[H]e is a giant” (Kemal, 267). For the peasants, he becomes a “symbol of hope” (Santesso, 9), even as Memed’s violence becomes more severe when he decides to kill Abdi Agha. Once he finds Abdi Agha hiding in the Aktozlu village, he sets the whole village on fire:

In less than twenty minutes ten houses were ablaze. . . . The flames rose even higher, scattering sparks into the sky, bending and twisting as they fitfully lit up the darkness. . . . Villagers were running hither and thither in their white underclothes, trying to save their possessions from the burning houses as the fire spread. (Kemal, 234)

Just as Fanon believes that violence is the only viable way for the oppressed to liberate themselves from servitude, so for Memed violence “becomes a route to justice” and necessary to the task of overthrowing a tyrant (Santesso, 8).

By using folk themes and vernacular expressions in *Memed, My Hawk*, Kemal transferred his political message. His depiction of the anti-colonial activities in *Memed, My Hawk* affirms neither Mustafa Kemal’s nationalist movement in Turkey nor “military commitment to the broader Turkish War of Independence” under the name of Kurdistan Workers’ Party¹⁸ (PKK) (Santesso, 4). Many critics believe that he is an author who wrote back to the center to challenge the status of Kurdish culture within Turkish literature. By

creating a new style—integrating oral and written components—Kemal challenges the homogenization policy aimed at denying Kurdish identity.

Memed's Resistance Against the Oppressor

Memed, as the protagonist of the novel, drew on what can be seen as a Fanonian approach to violence to fight against cruelty. It is important to note that Memed is upset to cause pain to the peasant by burning their houses, no matter how inadvertent this act was. However, Memed's accomplice, the Sergeant, says that the villagers need to pay for their justice: "If they've lost their homes, they're still not much worse off than before. They're as poor as they've always been" (Kemal, 235). What the Sergeant said to Memed is aligned with Fanon's idea. Fanon believes that "counter-violence" has a positive effect on the oppressed:

At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. (*The Wretched*, 55)

Memed's violence attracts the attention of the central state. In this manner, violence becomes a means through which he compels recognition. As a subaltern subject, he revolted against his village agha, became visible to the state, and gained "political agency" (Santesso, 7). In response, for the first time, police come to Chukurova: "[T]hey'll send a telegram to Ankara to say that a village has been destroyed by fire. Yes, there'll be plenty of trouble" (Kemal, 235). Further, after he rescues Hatce from the prison while she is being transferred, the central government deems him a threat to the "legitimacy of the state"

(Santesso, 10). Not only does committing violence make Memed recognized and visible, his violence also makes Dikenli recognized because the guards have to go through the village to get to Memed: “the door of Dikenli . . . [to the rest of] the world” (*Memed*, 348).

Though he is a nuisance and an outlaw, Memed brings Dikenli into the attention of the state. Through these actions, Memed makes possible the first contact between Ankara and Dikenli. Although in his effort to destroy violence Memed could not unify the peasants against a common oppressor, this failure put him in a liminal, paradoxical space of recognition and invisibility. However, by modifying his form of violence from self-protection to violence against tyranny, Memed takes control and exerts agency. Individuals give legitimacy to locations. Not only is he recognized himself but the forgotten region of Chukurova is recognized too, as it becomes a problem to the center.

Kemal reveals another meaning of violence from self-protection to social protection through the characterization of Memed. Memed’s fight demonstrated not only the recognition of the subaltern but also recognition of Dikenli. However, Memed’s reaction to oppression is distinct for the villagers, which I discuss in next section.

Peasant Resistance

Another form of resistance in *Memed, My Hawk*, can be seen in the response of the peasants to Memed’s violent deeds. Fanon believes that violence can unite the oppressed to overcome the trauma of oppression and gain their dignity. According to Fanon, “[V]iolence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them” (*The Wretched*, 147). According to Santesso, however, Memed’s violent attempts to change subalternity and give people dignity is different from the Fanonian approach to

violence. Notably, the peasants' reaction to Memed's violence is ambiguous. When he set the village on fire—an act that resulted in the death of Abdi Agha, or so the peasants believe—everyone celebrates his success and bravery: “[O]ur Slim Memed!’ ‘No more begging like dogs.’ ‘No more selling the cows.’ ‘No tyranny!’ ‘Everyone can go where he wishes.’ ‘Everyone can have guests in their own home’” (Kemal, 276). However, when peasants are informed of Agha's survival, praise immediately changes into condemnation: “[T]hat pauper Ibrahim's son!’ . . . ‘The idiot!’ ‘He's become a brigand and burns villages!’ ‘He can't even carry a gun.’ ‘He's become a brigand and wants to hand out our Agha's field and oxen as if they were his own.’” (281). According to Santesso, the double reactions of the peasants to violence deviates from the Fanonian model. She believes that, “even though the conditions for a more collective revolt is [sic] now possible, the villagers now fail to unite around Memed” (9). Memed does not benefit from public support; not only do the villagers fail to help him when he is in danger, they also repeatedly change their sides. Santesso argues that Kemal “introduces a twist unanticipated by Fanon”: he represents a realistic depiction of violence, and “the novel's depiction of [the peasant's] situation is hardly optimistic—or simplistic” (10).

However, I contend that Kemal's depiction of the peasant does not deviate from the Fanonian model. The villagers have not overcome the internal oppressor. They are still scared of Agha, which is why they change their positions to protect their self-interest. Fanon's depiction of violence is not ideal or simplistic. On the contrary, it is absolutely realistic: the history of Algerian independence provides support for his belief that only through fighting and counter-violence can the oppressed save themselves. In addition, there are traces of hope in the peasants' oscillating positions. In the beginning of the novel, they did not join Memed's revolt. However, by the end of the novel, the peasants have made

progress. When Agha returns to the village and the police come to capture Memed, the peasants demonstrate some signs of resistance, such as their reactions to the returning of Abdi Agha to the village and to the police as well, which their resistance is hopeful. They neither opposed agha's authority—in contrast, they exaggerated their welcome: “[W]e would gladly give our souls for our Agha”—nor told anything to the police though they were threatened with torture (*Memed*, 346). The villagers preferred to be speechless. Here, Kemal introduces a new form of resistance that deviates from the Fanonian model: “[T]he villagers submitted to being beaten, cursed, driven from pillar to post like a flock of sheep, but not a sound escaped their lips. The whole population of five big villages was speechless” (*Memed*, 347). According to Santesso, by “re-embracing their Subalternity” and “accepting their voicelessness,” the peasants resist authority. By selecting silence and opposing both the threat of state and of the agha, they achieved “political agency” (Santesso, 11). There is a difference, then, between Memed's and the peasants' resistance. From the outset, by becoming a brigand, Memed shakes off his subalternity and uses violence for social justice, while the peasants end their subalternity by apparently accepting their submissiveness and adopting silence.

Kemal's Resistance as a Novelist

As a socialist who questioned the social status of Kurds,¹⁹ Kemal challenged in his art, “the place of eastern Anatolian narrative folk tradition within the novel” and inserted Anatolian folk literature within the Turkish ones (Mignon). He developed this integration of Kurdish narration through language. His new style also included “local vocabulary and turns of phrases into standard Turkish” (Mignon). In his conversation with Bosquet, he explained the necessity of this innovative approach:

I wanted to create a new kind of narrative, beginning with a whole new language. . . . At a time when we were striving to create a new literature, I thought new narrative forms and a new language had to develop. I had the opportunity to benefit from both the Turkish language as well as the Kurdish language. I had access to a new cultural patrimony. . . . I grew up with two languages. To determine the exact share of Kurdish culture in my background would be difficult. As a child, I loved the Kurdish epics, stories, and songs as much as the Turkish. However, I never had an adequate knowledge of the language to recite the Kurdish epics in front of an audience, although I was a master at reciting Turkish epics. (Tharaud, 65-67)

His style challenged the Turkish Language Institute to “homogenize the written language” (Mignon). Kemal’s new style was a blending of the “language of Istanbul literary establishment with the Kurmanji dialect of Southeastern Anatolia” (Tharaud and Loy).

Regarding language, I could not find any examples of Anatolia’s dialect in the novel because Turkish Kurds speak in the Kurmanji dialect, which I am not familiar with. In an email conversation with Dr. Hassan, who is a Kurmanji dialect speaker, he mentioned that due to “the risks associated with explicitly using the Kurdish language in Turkey,” Kemal did not use Kurdish terms explicitly. He recalled the term “*Köküç*, which refers to a game involving crocuses”—this flower is very common in the Kurdish regions in the spring, so I believe that it is in such a term, for instance, Kemal endeavors to revive Kurdish associations indirectly. Further implicit connections are also established in the novel.

In these ways, then, Kemal in *Memed, My Hawk*, reveals different forms of resistance to the oppressive policy of Turkey against minorities in particular against Kurds. Kemal as a social activist demonstrates resistance in different ways in his novel, especially through the invocation of landscape and incorporation of folk tropes, most notably, in the figure of the brigand. In Turkey, Kurdish questions also have had a long history that became

very harsh during Ataturk's nationalist policy. However, because the Kurdish language and its mores were banned, some Kurdish novelists such as Kemal revived their traditions indirectly in their novels. Kemal represented Memed's struggle against Abdi Agha, from childhood which was for his own protection until his adulthood which was to protect the peasants, the oppressed. As a legendary outlaw, Memed provides a means for the villagers and Chukurova to attain recognition. The peasants' struggle against tyranny is different from Memed and separates from Fanon's idea who emphasized on the unity of the oppressed against the oppressor. Though the peasants did not openly join his fight against Abdi Agha, they nevertheless embraced their subalternity by resisting with him in silence.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

National identity is not restricted to an identity within a nation-state; in fact, the state and the nation are no longer exclusively related to each other. Instead, national identity can refer to a group of people with common characteristics, such as language, ethnicity, and culture. These characteristics differentiate stateless nations or "nations-as-people" from other nations (Ahmadzadeh, 4). After World War I and the division of Kurds among the newly formed nation-states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the questions "[W]here do you come from?" and "[W]ho are you?" became the main concerns of the Kurds on the national level. Some critics have sought for answers to these questions in literary works.

Aldous Huxley, one of these critics, discussed the relationship between literary works and national identity: for him, novelists can be inventors of their nations. Novels can be mirrors to various aspects of social, political, and individual lives of characters in

society. According to Huxley, literary works in general, and novels in particular, have political and social functions and can operate as “the building of identity” (50). Jonathan Culler further adds that novels are concerned with questions about identity. Novels, implicitly or explicitly, provide answers to these questions (37). Through the creation of characters, an exploration of their choices, and the influence of the social and political forces on their lives, novels provide resources for us to examine national identity. As this thesis has shown, Kae Bahar’s *Letters from a Kurd* and Yaser Kemal’s *Memed, My Hawk*, are novels that poignantly exemplify this complex function.

The concerns of the Kurds are clearly demonstrated in *Letters from a Kurd*. Many of the characters—for example, the protagonist Mary himself, his brother Peaceful, Kojak, and many others—affiliate with the peshmerga in their teens. However, some characters face what Fanon describes as the oppressor within. One notable example is Mary’s father who, due to the loss of his family in the past to the Ba’athist regime, does not connect with the peshmerga; instead, he focuses on religious practice and insists that Mary do the same. Some characters, such as Peaceful and his father, also suffer the oppressor within; however, their fear of the regime comes from wanting to protect their families. Other characters, such as Abu Ali, become factors, or, in Kurdish, jash, who betray Kurds to satisfy their ambitions. Abu Ali exemplifies Bulhan’s notion of the autopressor. As a Kurd, he fully internalized the characteristics of the oppressor and hurt or destroyed other Kurds. Abu Ali lost his humanity, killed many Kurds, raped Aida—Mary’s first girlfriend—and even threw acid on his own son, Kojak. It could be said that the oppressor “determines” the types of the oppressed. In the novel, the Kurdish characters react in myriad ways to the many forms of violence by different oppressors.

Mary's own suffering stems from two related causes. Because of his sexually ambiguous status and abuse at the hands of powerful men as a consequence, Mary wishes to assert his masculinity—a desire that the novel integrally connects to his own awakening sense of national identity. After he “proves” his masculinity by consummating an affair with his close female friend, he is able to overcome these ostensibly personal matters and participate more actively in political matters. However, the political activity of Sunshine, Mary's wife, deconstructs the orientalist association of gender with politics, whereby only men can accomplish political deeds. In reality, many female peshmergas, in contrast with stereotypically gendered representations of politics, fought courageously for Kurds' release from such tyrants such as ISIL and Bashar al-Assad, as evident in the recent war in Kobane, Syria (Asaad, and Salih).

Bahar's choice to compose his novel in English instead of Kurdish is another example of how Bahar himself as a novelist resisted the invisibility of Kurds in the world so as to attract international attention to the Kurdish oppression under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. As a born-translated novel—a novel that is both a translation from the beginning and also written for translation—*Letters from a Kurd* challenges the significance of translation, which is considered secondary to the original work; in other words, Bahar deconstructed the dichotomy of the original and the translated work. By composing his novel in English, Bahar addressed his novel to different ranges of readers with diverse experiences. He also used Kurdish words so as to avoid estranging his Kurdish readers even though the novel is in English. However, inserting Kurdish terms did not alienate the non-Kurdish readers either; he used nicknames, the English equivalents for Kurdish names, or, if there was no equivalent in English, he used descriptions. In this way, Bahar built a bridge

between Kurdish and English. In other words, *Letters from a Kurd* as a born-translated novel decouples the relationship between language and geography.

Considering Bahar's decision to compose in English, Casanova states that the global dominance of English necessitates this choice, not only to gain the attention of many readers in the world but also to achieve literary dominance. The threat of invisibility makes many writers from peripheral countries compose in English. However, the dominance of the literary canon imposes two choices on them: assimilation or differentiation. These marginal writers have to either align with the center and write in the language of the dominant literary center or differentiate themselves and insist on the distinctiveness of their literary works. For Casanova, when the first group assimilates into English they betray their native tradition, while the second group risk their literary status and have an uncertain future. Bahar, however, neither assimilates into English nor differentiates himself from the dominant language. According to Beyad et al., he integrates the Kurdish language and culture into his English-written novel, thus resisting assimilation while also demonstrating his distinctiveness by integrating Kurdish language, culture, and concerns into his novel. By writing in English, he safeguards what would have been an uncertain future for his novel as a minority novel and provides an opportunity for international readers to become aware of the oppression against the Kurds. Moreover, by placing himself on the border of multiple dichotomies, original/translation, female/male, oriental/occidental, assimilation/differentiation, Bahar was able to resist both sides, the orientalist and the occidental perspectives.

In his approach to representing Kurdish themes of resistance, Yaser Kemal differs from Bahar. In Turkey, due to Atatürk's policy of nationalism, the languages and cultures of minorities, such as the Kurds, were banned from the public space. This policy aimed to

eradicate non-Turkish traditions. Therefore, Kemal incorporated Kurdish literature and culture into his novel *Memed, My Hawk* implicitly rather than explicitly. The following discusses how Kemal is distinct from Bahar by focusing on the novel as a tool to build identity.

In his conversation with Bosquet, Yaser Kemal stresses the role of language and its power. He believes that language, besides being “a means of communication,” can “save humanity”; it has the capability to resolve everything, even political problems, and “renew humanity and enhance it” (39). He mentions that the Anatolian and the Ottoman cultures were separate from each other in the sense that the Ottoman culture was based on Persian and Arabic literature while the Anatolian culture was based on local culture. Anatolian literature was mostly oral, enriched by different sources via the nomads, minstrels, and sailors who came from diverse counties and cultures. However, its written form was poor and impoverished. During nationalist movements Ataturk eradicated all non-Turkish literature and culture from the Turkish one, and what remained was an impoverished written literature. Drawing on this, Kemal attempted to create new literature by mingling the oral and rich literature of Anatolia with the written and poor literature of Turkey. As a Kurd, because of the political restrictions and the ban of Kurdish language, Kemal could not explicitly integrate Kurdish literature into the Turkish language; instead, he mingled important aspects of his region indirectly into the official language of Turkey. In addition, Kemal implicitly integrated Kurdish folk literature into his Turkish-language novel. Kemal used diverse folk stories centered around a sort of Robin Hood figure, an honorable and social outlaw. He also drew on his training as a journalist to do research in the Chukurova region of southern Anatolia where he collected information about its folk literature, which resulted in his first work, *Elegies*. Selecting the Chukurova plain as the main setting in all

his novels, Kemal demonstrated his effort to revive the name of the Kurdish region from invisibility. In this way, Kemal took an intermediary position between Turkish and Kurdish, integrating both Turkish and Kurdish folk literature in his novels instead of embracing one while rejecting the other.

As noted in the previous chapters, Fanon, who was indirectly influenced by Hegel's theory of the master-slave dialectic, was aware that mutual recognition is the basis of identity. For Hegel, those who are recognized but unable to recognize others become the masters and oppressors, while those who recognize but are not recognized become slaves, the oppressed. The Kurds in Iraq had fought for many decades to be recognized by the central state, but according to Fanon, because of the lack of a reasonable compromise between the Kurdish leaders and the Ba'athist regime, the Kurds had to take up arms to be recognized. In *Letters from a Kurd* resistance against the oppressor, that is, against Saddam Hussein's regime, is represented through the peshmerga, a military and political group that fights for the independence of Kurdistan. In *Memed, My Hawk*, however, resistance against tyranny is represented through brigandage, which becomes a means to resist violence. Brigandage challenges, at first, the role of agha in the village and, second, the legitimacy of the central state. Agha was the representative of the central state; if peasants needed to contact the central state, they went through the agha. The first reason that Memed became a brigand was for his own protection. However, when Memed changed his aim to protect the oppressed by resolving to kill Abdi Agha so as to release the villagers, he lost his fear. He was determined to kill Abdi Agha; in contrast, Abdi became scared of him. Abdi Agha, the agha of five villages with a strong connection to the central government, hid himself from Memed. Brigandage became a tool for Memed to fight against Abdi Agha's tyranny. According to Fanon, only counter-violence works against an oppressor who does not

surrender to reason; indeed, Memed's actions and the reversal of Abdi's position of power emphasize this point.

By representing different types of women and men in *Letters from a Kurd*, Bahar subverts orientalist gender stereotypes. The cover of *Letters from a Kurd* depicts a teenage boy, probably Mary, playing Halokan, a local game. The picture is full of colors of yellow and red; the boy wears an old shirt, his hair messy. This image dictates to the Western reader that the story is about a faraway place, and the reader anticipates one of those clichéd exotic stories, which Bahar challenges through different characterizations. His novel deconstructs orientalist stereotypes and reductive dichotomies. For example, he demonstrated two types of women: an eastern voiceless woman and a western assertive woman. However, most of the women in the novel, except for Mary's mother, are open-minded women who resist the customs of a male-dominated society. In the same way, Bahar represented two types of men: an eastern dominant man and a western man who respects women. Both types of women and men live in the Middle East. Bahar revealed that in the exotic Middle East you can find modern, open-minded men who respect women and also the traditional ones; similarly, there are the Middle-Eastern women who do not accept the male-dominated restrictions and resist them, just as there also exist the voiceless ones. Bahar's novel is not idealistic: he demonstrated both sides, the positive and the negative, and in this way he resisted orientalist tropes imposed by Western readers.

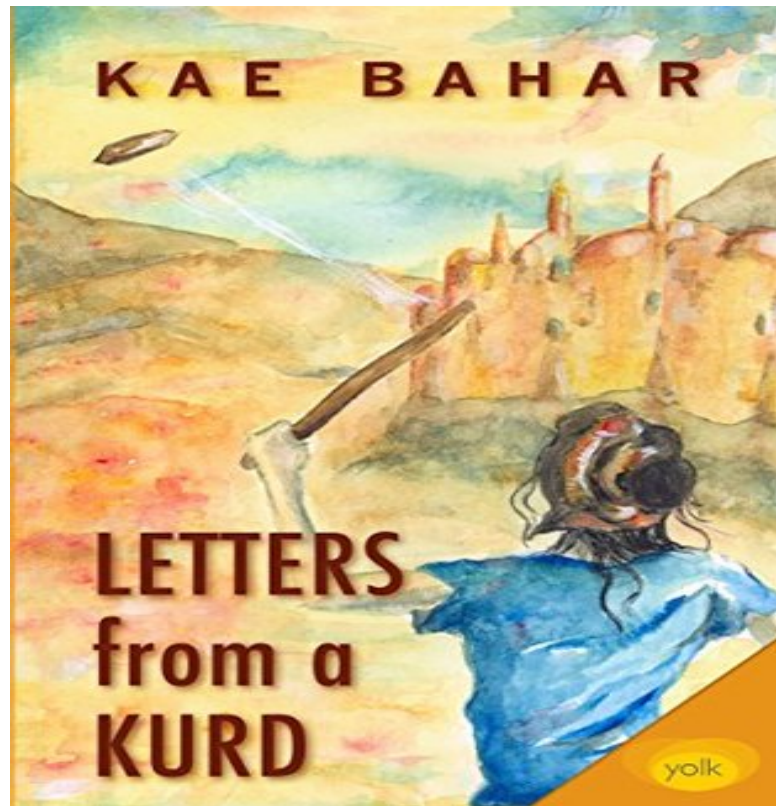


Figure 5. Cover of *Letters from a Kurd*

The back of *Letters from a Kurd* includes a brief summary of the plot, an endorsement by a critic, and a brief statement by Bahar himself. He said that he lived in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime and that only storytelling and watching films could help him bear these conditions. Similarly, for Mary, life without film meant nothing. Contrary to the religious bias of Mary's father, Mary watched movies to survive the dictatorship. Bahar also mentioned that he desired to share his experiences in Iraq with others; in the same way Mary, after his disillusionment with Eastwood, kept writing, and at last, realizing the importance of his letters, gave them to Jam's wife to turn them into a film. This semi-biographical novel ends with Mary joining the peshmerga, and it aligns with the bold statement at the back of the novel: "Don't live to die, but die for living." The cover of *Letters from a Kurd* represents the oppressed, represented by a teenager who is a

victim of Saddam Hussein's violence, but that important quotation is the mission of the peshmerga. Through peshmerga, the Kurds wanted not to have a life of slavery but to sacrifice their lives, that is, to die building a good future for their children, the next generation.

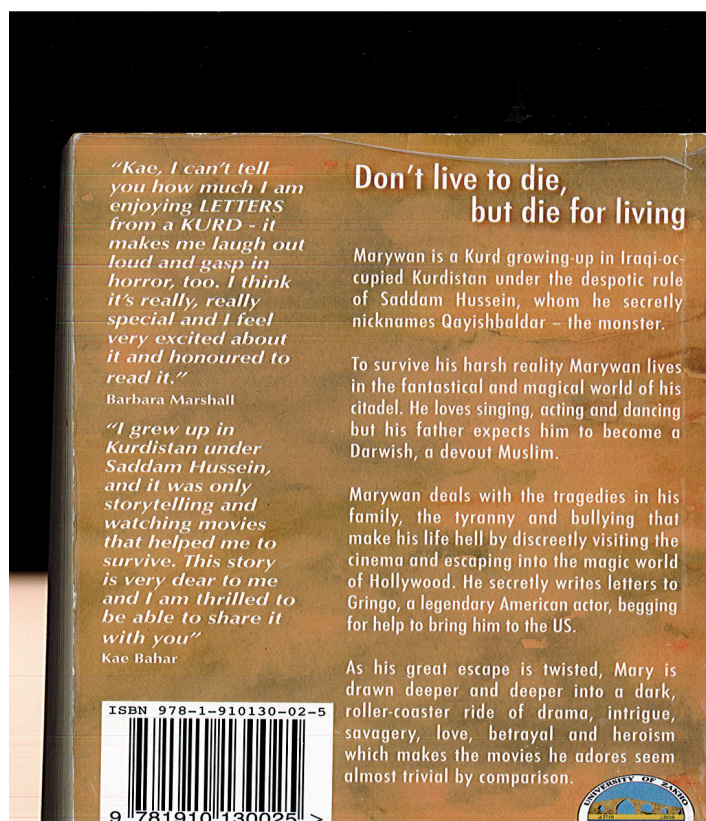


Figure 6. Back of *Letters from a Kurd*

The cover and back of *Memed, My Hawk* also represent resistance. The cover page contains two images: the highlighted and close-up image is the picture of a young man with black clothes riding a black horse, and at the back of the book cover the blurred image of a goatherd child. In fact, the whole life of Memed is revealed on the cover page. He fled to Suleyman's village to be away from Abdi Agha's cruelty and became Suleyman's goatherd; his aim was to protect himself against Abdi. However, the young man whose black clothes are in contrast with the white image of the goatherd highlighted the bigger

decision of Memed who took up brigandage to protect the villagers against Abdi Agha. Most of the back of *Memed, My Hawk* is occupied by the picture of Kemal himself, the image of a man similar to Memed, who fought for the rights of minorities. Kemal was a social activist: he neither identified himself with central state of Turkey nor with the radical group of PKK that fought for Kurdistan's independence. Instead, Kemal fought for the freedom expression of all minorities. The image of Kemal at the back aligned with the role of a brigand who tried to bring justice and stand up against violence and any discrimination.

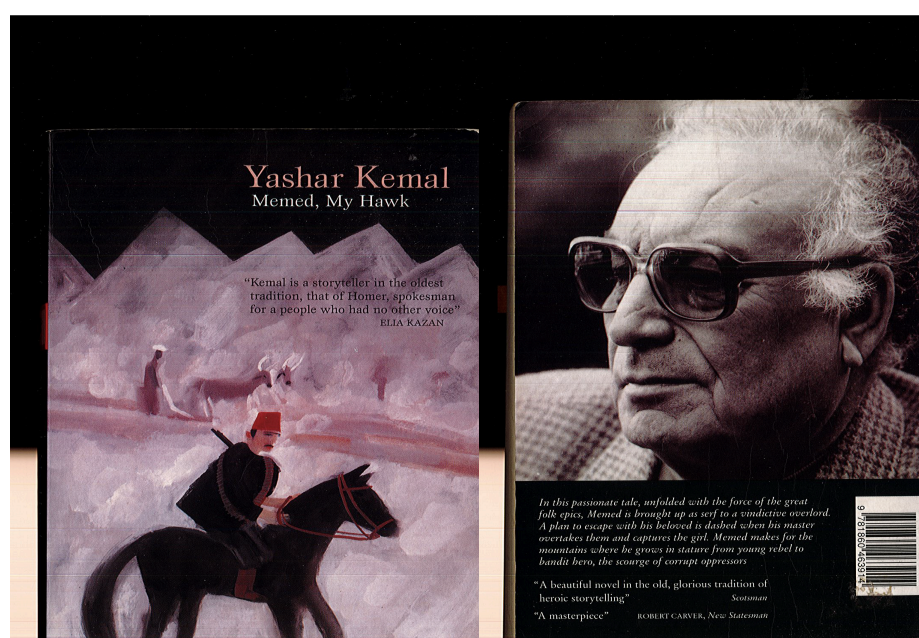


Figure 7. Cover and Back of *Memed, My Hawk*

The second key argument this thesis makes is that, although both protagonists, Mary and Memed, imagined a utopia for themselves, they became disappointed or did not know how to find it. Memed, when he went to Suleyman's house, told him about Dursun's village. When he talked about it, his eyes shone. He said to Suleyman that there no one beat children and forced them to plow. Dursun's village becomes Memed's utopia. For Mary, the equivalent of Durson's village is America. However, Mary became disappointed with America as the ideal place to achieve his ambition when he did not receive any responses

from Clint Eastwood; his disenchantment increased even more when he learned that America supported Saddam Hussein against the Kurds. Memed was also discouraged to find Dursun's village; he did not know the name of the village he was looking for. When Suleyman asked him the name of his friend's village, he remembered Dursun did not say the name of the village. Memed did not know where his utopia was and decided to stay with Suleyman. Mary was also disappointed with America and resisted his own desire to leave his country.

Both characters, Mary and Memed, do not have any hopes about the future in their places of birth. In his childhood Memed lost all his desire to have a good future when his mother in return for some wheat to prevent starving gave their only cow and bull to Abdi. Mary also felt turmoil and insecurity in his hometown since he was a child, so he started writing letters to his favorite actor to release him from the horror of war. In fact, Mary's letters function as a safe and emancipatory place for him to talk about his desires, personal experiences, and the events in Kurdistan during that critical time. Both characters looked for their desires somewhere else. However, their emotional attachments to their family and people stopped them from chasing their own desires and leaving their places of birth. Memed, after a year living with Suleyman, worried about his mother who could not harvest crops by herself and returned to the village. Mary also renounced his childhood wish to go to America and become a filmmaker, a wish so strong that life without it meant nothing to him. When he saw the difficulties and the tumult of his country—when he saw his father being forced to leave the newly-purchased house that had he spent all his life savings to buy—he changed his mind to leave his people and pursue his interests. Instead, he stayed in his country, joined the peshmerga, and fought for his people. Both characters sought happiness and solace somewhere else, but both changed their minds. They stayed in their

own regions to resist against the oppressor. Though Memed went to the mountain, he still was in the Anatolia region in which he killed Abdi Agha. Mary also stayed in his hometown, Kirkuk, and joined the peshmerga to defend his land.

Bahar inserted his Kurdish tradition into a novel composed in English and connected Kurdish readers to other non-Kurdish readers with different experiences. In this way, he familiarized international readers to the customs, traditions, and the situation of Kurds in Iraq. However, Kemal's way of representing the Kurdish culture under political restrictions is different from Bahar's. Kemal's protagonist in *Memed, My Hawk* is an international character who fights for justice against a tyrant. Memed, similar to Robin Hood, becomes a legendary outlaw who defends the oppressed. This ideal character is not limited to a specific geography or a region, making it understandable and familiar for every reader with any background and any language. According to Walkowitz, a literary world without borders is the ideal, and this lack of borders is seen in Kemal's *Memed, My Hawk*.

Iraqi Kurds always talk openly about their conditions in Iraq. This is rooted in their main desire, existing from the beginning of the newly formed state of Iraq after World War I, according to which they wanted independence from Iraq. They have never identified with the central state of Iraq. Bahar as an Iraqi Kurd openly demonstrated the harsh conditions of the Kurds during Saddam Hussein's regime. For global attention, he wrote his novel in English. This trend has recently been common among Kurdish artists. The Kurdish singer Helly Luv for example, sings in English and wears Kurdish clothes; some of her songs are about the influence of violence on children. Kurds are worried about their children, the next generation. Bahar's concern about the future of Kurdish children who do not have any hope because of war made him depict these difficulties through Mary's eye as an instance of the lives of many "Marys."

By representing the difficult living conditions of the peasants, Kemal's novel proves that Ataturk's nationalism that supposedly guaranteed the full rights of all minorities was not realised. Kemal as a social activist defended the rights of all minorities, especially the Kurdish. Kemal himself as an artist used his novel to resist the forced invisibility of the Kurdish culture by inserting its folk literature into the Turkish one. His hybrid style challenges the national state's policy of homogenizing languages and imposing a single language and culture. That Kemal was awarded the Varlik Prize for *Memed, My Hawk* as the best novel of the year by a jury of some of Turkey's great literary figures signals the failure of the homogenization policy and reveals a promising future, for both the Kurds and the Turks, free from bias and restriction.

Taken together, this thesis has examined the different forms of resistance depicted by two Kurdish novelists, Kae Bahar and Yasar Kemal, in different countries, specifically, in Turkey and Iraq. Due to the distinct political situations in these countries, they revealed resistance in different ways. Mary joined the peshmerga to fight for Kurds' rights, but Memed, similar to Kemal, protected the rights of minorities and defended the peasants against the oppressor. Through my exploration of their novels, I demonstrated how the formation of identity affects the Kurds split between different countries. The distinct situations in different countries make their methods of fighting different: one was a radical and one a defender of the rights of all minorities. However, both attempted to defend the rights of Kurds.

NOTES

¹ Kurdish name for the Kurdish territories in Turkey.

² Kurdish name for the Kurdish territories in Iraq.

³ Kurdish name for the Kurdish territories in Iran.

⁴ Kurdish name for the Kurdish territories in Syria.

⁵ De facto states, according to Zheger Hassan, are “entities that possess control over a defined territory, population, and government, but without recognition from other states” (8).

⁶ This section was part of my research for the *Fundamentals of Comparative Literature 2* course taught by Professor James Miller.

⁷ The Peshmerga are the Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq. originally the peshmerga were “loosely organised tribal border guards in the late 1800s” that after the fall of the Ottoman Empire become “the national fighting force of the Kurdish people” (Turkey Targets Kurdish Forces in Afrin). Along with the growing of the Kurdish nationalist movement, they become “the key part of Kurdish culture” and “nationalist fighters for an independent Kurdish state” (Turkey Targets Kurdish Forces in Afrin).

⁸ Anfal is the name of a verse in the Quran, used by the Ba'athist regime as a code name to carry out a series of genocidal attacks against the Kurds in northern Iraq.

⁹ Nezami was a great Persian poet.

¹⁰ Bahar called him “boygirl.”

¹¹ The Arabization policy refers to the forced displacement of minorities—Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, and Armenians—to other cities. Regarding assimilation policy in Iraq under the Ba'athist (Saddam Hussein's regime) from the 1960s to the early 2000s, minorities' cities were handed to Arabs to settle there. Its purpose was to increase Arab domination and ethnic cleansing of minorities.

¹² In Islam, molla is the person who is qualified in Islamic religious learning.

¹³ Among the Kurds, it is not usual to leave a young wife alone while her husband is not home. A female or a confidential person stays with her until her husband comes back.

¹⁴ He changed his name to Yasar Kemal to escape from the police, who had arrested and tortured him because of his social and political activities.

¹⁵ National unification refers to ethnic affiliation rather than loyalty to a national central government, which these people resisted as well.

¹⁶ Aga is similar to lord in Feudalism.

¹⁷ In the Turkish War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal was a leader who defeated the Greek army invasion of 1922. He became the first president of Turkey after the *Treaty of Lausanne*, according to which Turkey was recognized as an independent nation. He started modernizing Turkey, and due to his efforts he was titled Ataturk, “Father Turk.”

¹⁸ PKK, as Chapter One explained, was a political organization that started an armed conflict with the Turkish government to achieve independence.

¹⁹ Kemal was accused of Kurdish separatism in the 1990s.

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