National Identity Discourses

in Contemporary Bahdinani Kurdish Poetry in Iraq

Submitted by

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Abstract

The dissertation examines how Kurdish national identity has been culturally constructed through the contemporary Bahdinani Kurdish poetry in Iraq, specifically from the first Kurdish autonomy after Adar Agreement in 1970 to the Kurdish Independence Referendum in 2017. The main aim of the study is to identify the transformation of identity discourses produced in Kurdish poetry in accordance with the nature of the relationship between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad. The aim is to explore how Kurdish national identity was imagined and articulated during different phases of Kurdish nationalism. Based on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) on the relationship between literature and nationalism, this study analyses and discusses Kurdish identity discourses produced in Bahdinani (Kurmanji Kurdish) poetry. The examined period consists of three crucial historical phases (1970-1991, 1991-2003, and 2003-2017), each of which witnessed the emergence of a particular poetic trend in the Bahdinan region. For the first phase, under the Arab Ba'ath, the poetic work of two pioneer poets representing "Modern Kurdish Poetry" has been examined: Ebdulrehman Mizûrî and Mueyed Teyib. The second and third phases cover the period following Iraqi Kurdistan's liberation from the Ba'ath (1991-2017). For these periods, Mihsin Qoçan and Burhan Zêbarî's poetry has been examined: one as a representative of "Modernist Kurdish Poetry" in 1991-2003, and the other as a of "Popular Kurdish Poetry" during 2003-2017. It has been demonstrated that during the first historical phase, Kurdish identity was mostly imagined

through gendering Kurdistan as feminine, carrying geographical, cultural and historical significance. The identity discourses of this stage were characterised by spatial aspects and features of belonging and homeland, while discourses of resistance emerged in a mainly symbolic and indirect fashion. In the second phase, following the establishment of a quasi-independent Kurdish entity in 1991, the poetic discourses mainly focused on a critique of the Kurdish Self, especially after the Kurdish civil war in 1994 and the misrule of the newly created Kurdish Regional Government. In the third phase, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 and the Kurds' participation in Iraqi rule, poetic discourses, widely circulated through digital media, turned this time to glorify the Kurdish Self and humiliate the Arab Other in an enthusiastic manner.

Acknowledgments

To my lovely daughter Laveen

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Introductory Remarks

After the second division of Kurdistan amongst four modern nation-states, namely, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, from 1918 - 1923, Kurdish nationalism developed as a reaction to their policies of assimilation and the denial of Kurdish national identity (Vali, 2003a; van Bruinessen, 2000)[1]. The new political and geographical division participated in drawing the features of Kurdish nationalism, for which fragmentation and separation became most apparent (Vali, 2006). Moreover, the political atmosphere in each modern state deepened this fragmentation, leading to diversity within Kurdish nationalism. Denise Natali (2005) discusses the ramifications of this partition and demonstrates how in each state Kurdish nationalism took on a different shape, largely depending on the relationship between the Kurds and central governments at each particular time.[2] In other words, according to Natali, the

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[1] In general, this is also the time of the rise of nationalism in the region. See for example, Senem Aslan's *Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco* (2014).

[2] Of course, the role of ideology (socialists, religious, etc.) is also undeniable in shaping Kurdish nationalism.

shape of national identity that Kurdish nationalism struggled to construct, mostly depended on the nature of the relationship between the Kurds and the centre. For instance, in Iraq, which is the focus of the case study, Kurdish nationalism changed over time, from the royal to the republican era and from the period of the Ba'ath regime to post-Ba'ath[3]. However, acknowledging the role of others in shaping Kurdish identity, does not mean neglecting the role of the self and "ethnic elements" in this process, which have been reproduced and transformed by Kurdish nationalism.

Whether due to the reaction to the "other" or the potential of the "self", or even due to both, Kurdish literature, as a cultural discourse, contributed in the creation of national identity and sustaining Kurdish nationalism. It does not take much effort to discover that since the beginning of last century, nationalist intellectuals were interacting with literature, especially with poetry, the oldest Kurdish literary genre. The first signs of this interaction can be observed in the Kurdish cultural elite's celebration and revivification of Ehmedê Xanî (1650-1707) as a nationalist poet. For instance, his poetic work *Mem û Zîn*, which was written in the 17th century, was interpreted in the modern sense of nationalism, and it became an inspiration to many Kurdish nationalists, including poets[4]. After the second division of Kurdistan, poetry started to

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[3] Regarding the shapes of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq over the time, see D. Natali's *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (2005). However, some Kurdish scholars disagree with Natali's argument. See, for example, chapter one of Sherko Kirmanj's *Identity and Nation in Iraq* (2013). He criticises Natali's thesis and says that Kurdish nationalism developed away from the four nation-states.

[4] Several scholars have discussed this matter. For instance, van Bruinessen's Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness (2003). Also, the most recent published work about Xanî and his *Mem û Zîn* is Michiel Leezenberg's book section named Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn:* The consecration of a Kurdish national epic (Leezenberg, 2018).

become an important instrument for Kurdish nationalist movements, being transformed to foster the development of the nationalist narrative. Christine Allison (2007) emphasises this point and states that it is very rare to see a Kurdish national movement without the active role of a poet. The work of Kurdish poets in each part of Kurdistan testifies to this new national function of Kurdish poetry. For example, in Turkey and Syria the poets Rehmî Hekarî (1890-1958), Kamîran Bedirxan (1895-1978), Cegerxwîn (1903-1984), Qedrî Can (1911-1972) and Osman Sebrî (1905-1993) became prominent names. In Iran, especially during the time of the Republic of Kurdistan, the two poets Hêmin (1921-1986) and Hejar Mukiryanî (1920-1991) were promoted as "Poets of the Nation" (Blau, 2010). In Iraq, in the Sorani speaking areas of Kurdistan, the role of Pîremêrd (1867-1950), Zêwer (1875-1948), Fayiq Bêkes (1905-1948) and Dildar (1917-1948), for example, was very clear. In Kurmanji speaking areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, the role of the poets Şêx Xiyaseddîn Neqşebendî (1890-1944), Ehmedê Nalbend (1892-1963), Enwer Mayî (1913-1963), Şêx Memdûh Brîfkî (1911-1976) and Salih Yosifî (1918-1981) was notable. What is most notable, as Farangis Ghaderi (2016) highlights, is that with the rise of Kurdish nationalism, poetry, whether in the Kurmanji or Sorani dialect, gradually transformed from its classical norms to modern ones that made poetry available and understandable to uneducated people. In other words, after a long residence in Kurdish palaces and mosques in the 19th century, and mostly concerning Sufism, poetry gradually spread out from its old places and began to interact with the new socio-political contexts. From then on, it served to play a role in developing Kurdish nationalism.

The present study has the aim of examining contemporary Bahdinani Kurdish poetry through three phases of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq. The first period is prior to the Kurdish Uprising in 1991, when Iraqi Kurdistan was under the authority of the Arab Ba'ath regime, in which Arab rulers adopted policies of exclusion against the Kurds. The second period is after the Kurdish Uprising in 1991 against the Ba'ath regime, which resulted in the liberation of a large part of Iraqi Kurdistan and enabled the Kurds to rule themselves unofficially under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The third and last period is after 2003, when the Ba'ath regime completely collapsed in Iraq and the Kurds became active players in the new Iraq, in which the KRG officially became a federal region[5]. The national discourses reproduced in the contemporary Kurdish poetry during these different historical periods are the focus of this study. Analysing these poetic discourses allows the hypothesis to be made that, in the Kurdish case, like many other cases in the world[6], literature participates in the construction of national identity. Benedict Anderson (1991) in his *Imagined Communities*, affirms the role literature partly plays in nation-building as an imagined community, pointing out how it shapes and

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[5] The KRG officially administrates nearly 50% of Kurdish territories in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to the Iraqi constitution, the remaining territories, including Kirkuk, are "disputed areas". Despite the constitution having identified some mechanisms for resolving this issue, for various political reasons, it has remained unsolved. For more information, see: Peter Bartu's article: Wrestling with the integrity of a nation: the disputed internal boundaries in Iraq (Bartu, 2010).

[6] For example, such as the cases of Palestine, Sudan and Egypt in the Middle East. For more information, see Yasir Sleiman & Ibrahim Muhawi's edited book *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (2006); For the case of Uzbekistan in the former Soviet Union and post-Soviet States, see Roberta Maria Micallef's *The Role of Literature and Intellectuals in National Identity Construction: The Case of Uzbekistan* (1997). For the case of West and East Germany before the reunification, see Stephen Brockmann's *Literature and German Reunification* (1999).

disseminates national identity. More specifically, Sarah M. Corse (1996) shows a strong link between nationalism and literature, and demonstrates the constructive role of the latter, not only in building the nation as a modern concept, but also in giving it a different national identity. Acknowledging this point concerning nationalism and literature, this study is focused on the national identity that has been imagined in Bahdinani Kurdish poetry, across the three crucial stages of Kurdish nationalism.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as in other parts of Kurdistan, the diversity of the Kurdish language between two or more Kurdish dialects adds another reason for the fragmentation of Kurdish nationalism, which has challenged aspirations for the formation of a national unity (van Bruinessen, 2000). The existence of two major Kurdish dialects (or languages) in Iraq, namely Sorani and Kurmanji (Badhinani), has led to the creation of two literatures, which historically go back to the 19th and 16th centuries, respectively[7]. As the Sorani and Bahdinani literatures are different to each other[8], this has prevented the creation of one Kurdish *imagined community*, at least at the social level (see Scalbert-Yücel, 2014). Martin van Bruinessen (2006) maintains that the diversity of the Kurdish language in Iraq has led to the division of the region

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[7] In her article, Farangis Ghaderi (2015) argues that Kurdish literary history generally has had its challenges in terms of "representation, classification, and periodisation". However, there is much stronger historical and literary evidence about the antiquity of Kurmanji literature when compared to the Sorani form.

[8] Many Kurdish and non-Kurdish scholars have recognised the great differences between Kurmanji and Sorani Kurdish and hence, they recognise the Kurdish as a bi-standard language. See the special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* addressing this matter under the tittle: *The Kurdish Linguistic Landscape: Vitality, Linguicide and Resistance*:

https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/ijsl.2012.2012.issue-217/issue-files/ijsl.2012.2012.issue-217.xml

between the Sorani and Kurmanji speaking areas. The former includes the Sulaimaniya, Erbil and Kirkuk governorates, whilst the latter, which is also historically and commonly called Bahdinan, includes the Duhok governorate with some parts of the Erbil and Nineveh governorates. Furthermore, van Bruinessen adds, the diversity of language led to the division of Kurdish politics and parties (van Bruinessen, 2006, pp. 36-37). For example, the traditional Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is led by the Bahdinani leader Mesûd Barzanî and his popularity mostly is in the Kurmanji speaking area. Whilst the traditional Patriotic United of Kurdistan (PUK) party, was led by the Sorani leader Celal Talebanî (1933-2017), with his main loyalties being towards the Sorani speaking area (ibid). Put differently, Iraqi Kurdistan, which is described by many Kurdish nationalists as a united area within the KRG, is on the ground, politically, culturally, educationally and administratively provincialised between the Sorani and Kurmanji speaking areas. The former, in terms of population and language speakers, comprises the majority and hence, is dominant[9].

The aim of this study is to analyse the Kurdish poetry produced in the minority Kurdish dialect in Iraq (Kurmanji), in order to understand how a literature created under conditions of neglect and marginalisation can help to construct a national identity, on the one hand, and to protect its existence as a language

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[9] Regarding Kurdish literatures in different languages, see, for instance, Clémence Scalbert-Yücel's articles:

-"Languages and the Definition of Literature: The Blurred Borders of Kurdish Literature in Contemporary Turkey" (2011)

- "Emergence and equivocal autonomization of a Kurdish literary field in Turkey" (2012).

and literature, on the other. Despite the Sorani and Kurmanji speaking areas both being subject to the conditions of successive Iraqi governments, each dialect tells a different story. If Sorani Kurdish narrates the story of a majority and dominant literature, Kurmanji Kurdish tells that of a minority and subdominant literature, which has been, as argued here, doubly marginalised by Arabisation and by the ascendancy of the Sorani during the last half century. Even though a few years after the Kurdish Uprising in 1991, neither the hegemony of Arabisation nor the ascendancy of the Sorani remained as before, the influence of almost fifty years of marginalisation has not disappeared. In the case of Bahdinan, whilst the Kurmanji speakers in Iraq are still considered as being a minority, in the dimension of "Greater Kurdistan" they constitute the majority, making up more than 70% of the population[10]. This point, especially after the crossing of national borders in parts of Kurdistan post 1991 and following advances of modern technology, has provided the Bahdinani additional support and morale[11]. Here, within the Iraqi context, the question that needs to be answered is: if for Bahdinani poets the Arab Other has played a significant role in shaping Kurdish nationalism, what about the Kurdish Self itself? What primordial attachments and cultural materials have been used and reproduced to construct a Kurdish national

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[10] Whilst precise statistics about the exact number of Kurmanji speakers among other Kurdish dialect speakers are unavailable, the estimate, according to some scholars, like Amir Hassanpour, is between 70% - 75% of Kurdish speakers (Hassanpour, 2012a).

[11] After 1991, the Kurdish language scene in other parts of Kurdistan was also changed in favour of Kurmanji. For example, in Turkish Kurdistan, which is the main land of Kurmanji speakers, the use of Kurdish gradually became allowable. The Turkish state started undertaking some legal and political reforms in order to accede to the EU. See Hassanpour *et al.* (2012). In terms of crossing borders due to the increase in cross-border trade and other social and cultural relations, see Scalbert-Yücel (2014). For the facilities that advanced new technology and media provided each part of Kurdistan and Kurdish diaspora, see: J. Sheyholislami's *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media (2011).*

identity? Are, for example, places, memories, heroes, symbols and so on more related to the Kurmanji or the Sorani speaking area? Moreover, are they greater imagined within Iraqi Kurdistan or Greater Kurdistan?

1.2. The Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The main aim of this research is to identify the transformation of identity discourses that have been produced in contemporary Bahdinani poetry in Iraq, according to the nature of relationship between the Kurds and the centre in Baghdad. In parallel to the three political transformations that occurred in Iraqi Kurdistan between (1970-1991), (1991-2003), and (2003-2017), the Bahdinani literary scene witnessed remarkable changes, especially in the trajectory of poetry. In each period, a certain poetic trend emerged and became prominent in the literary scene in Bahdinan. However, it does not necessarily mean that by the emergence of one trend the previous ones completely disappeared. Accordingly, for study purposes, poetry from each poetic trend will be separately examined within its particular political context. For the first period (1970-1991), under the Ba'ath, the poetic work of two Kurdish pioneers, Ebdulrehman Mizûrî (b. 1948) and Mueyed Teyib (b. 1957), as representatives of *Hozana Nû ya Kurdî* (Modern Kurdish Poetry) have been chosen. For the second period (1991-2003), after the liberation from the Ba'ath, the poetic products of the predominant pioneer Mihsin Qoçan (b. 1954) have been selected. His poems exemplify the second poetic trend in Bahdinan, which was called *Hozana Nûxwaz ya Kurdî* (Modernist Kurdish Poetry). For the third period (2003-2017), following the Iraq War, the work of

Burhan Zêbarî (b. 1980) has been identified as being representative of the new poetic trend classified as popular poetry, which is usually performed with music and published as CDs. Deconstructing the national identity discourses of each poetic trend within its context, will provide a very clear image of the trajectory of Kurdish national identity construction in its cultural form.

In sum, this study involves examining the role of poetry in the construction of national identity in pre- and post-liberation eras. It is aimed at addressing the hypothesis that contemporary Bahdinani poetry in Iraq has contributed significantly to the construction and articulation of Kurdish national identity. In this context, the question of the research is: How has poetry produced discourses of national identity in three crucial periods of the history of Kurds: pre-1991, post-1991 and post-2003?

In regard to the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan, a further relevant question is: How, with the existence of statelessness and fragmentation, have Kurdish poets imagined Kurdish national identity? Moreover, sub-questions include: Is this imagination within the domain of Iraqi Kurdistan or "Greater Kurdistan"[12]? On the other hand, if identity is based on the difference between the 'self' and the 'other', who is this 'other' here? and how was it constructed through the Bahdinani poetic discourses? Is the other in the Iraqi case Arab, or is it a

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[12] Geographically, "Greater Kurdistan" constitutes the Kurdish areas in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. As a united political entity, it has not existed in history. But as O'Shea (2004, p. 2) points out, "despite its divisions, despite its inadequacies, Kurdistan, and the concept of Greater Kurdistan survive the reality as a powerful amalgam of myths, fact, and ambitions".

combination of everyone who Kurds consider as being the enemies of the Kurdish issue, including the Turks and Persians?

As one of this research project's arguments is that the Kurmanji minority in Iraq have been marginalised by Sorani institutions, another important question is: How has the 'self' been constructed, in the process of constructing identity? Regarding which, in terms of poetry construction, is it built from pure Kurmanji elements, or is it mixed with Sorani? Are these elements closer to the Sorani culture within Iraq or to the Kurmanji majority outside of Iraqi Kurdistan? These main research questions and sub-questions will be addressed through analysing and comparing the discourses of Bahdinani poetry and their articulation of the Kurdish national identity.

1.3. Theoretical Considerations: Literary Discourses and National Identity

Working in the field of Kurdish national identity requires some clarification about the circumstances of Kurdish nationalism in the modern Middle East. This is especially important for this research, as a constructivist perspective is adopted, according to which, nationalism invokes, builds and reproduces national identity. In other words, this researcher believes that, in the Kurdish case, nationalism is geared towards politicising Kurdish ethnic identity so as to make it a national one. At the cultural level, as Homi Bhabha (1995, p. 206) puts it, it attempts to *enunciate* "cultural diversities" and transfer them into "cultural differences", in which the process of identification starts. In the field of Kurdish studies, whilst there are continuing debates on the origins of Kurdish nationalism, which will be reviewed in the following pages, it is

indisputable that the division of Kurdistan after the First World War among the four states of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria, greatly influenced the character of Kurdish nationalism and, in turn, Kurdish national identity.

Several studies on the modern history of Kurds have acknowledged that the development of Kurdish nationalism has been, to a large degree, in reaction to the establishment of the modern nationalist states of the Turks, Arabs and Persians, in the form of resistance to their attempts subject the Kurds to their political power and cultural dominance. Martin van Bruinessen (2006, p. 42) points out that, to some extent, these states have succeeded in pressuring Kurds into integration into the state. However, he also notes how the process has enhanced awareness of a common identity among Kurds from different areas, dialects and beliefs, without removing the internal ethnic boundaries between Kurdish subgroups. "Awaking Kurdish ethnicity", as Bruinessen has called it, was a principal step in the process of constructing Kurdish national identity, in particular, if the activities of Kurdish intellectuals in producing the "symbolic markers of Kurdish ethnicity" and the effective role of Kurdish political movements in distinguishing Kurdish ethnicity from other dominant ethnicities is taken into consideration (see: ibid, 2006, p. 42-43). That is, both Kurdish politicians and intellectuals have played a role in the process of constituting Kurdish nationalism.

In this context, the issue of diversity and the multiform of Kurdish nationalism can be clearly observed. Some studies have described this multiform as a real fragmentation of Kurdish nationalism in the states that the Kurds inhabit. For instance, in his work about the disintegration of Kurdish identity, Abbas Vali

(2006) argues that the political form and character of Kurdish nationalism is, to a large extent, fragmented, and that it has no structural, political and cultural unity. He contends that Kurdish nationalism consists of autonomous movements, with each one following narrow local interests (Vali, 2006). Denise Natali (2005) adds to this in her analytical work on the circumstances of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, Turkey and Iran, attributing this argument principally to the diversity of political atmosphere in the states that dominate the territories of Kurdistan. Natali (2005, pp. 180–183) concludes that in each case, the historical and political changes, even in the same state across two different periods, have had an influence on the trajectory of Kurdish nationalism and national identity. Both researchers pay significant attention to the role that non-Kurds and their policies have played in shaping a particular form of Kurdish nationalism.

It is not surprising that the impact of the "Other" on shaping Kurdish nationalism appears more in its political aspect than in the cultural one. This is obviously due to the nature of cultural transformation itself, whereby it is slower than the political one. In the Kurdish case, two principal points support this argument. First, Kurdish cultural identity is, to a large extent, based on particular ethnic elements, such as language and historical inheritance. These ethnic bases, even though constructed, are not rapidly fluctuating or changing like politics, and time is required for them to change in any discernible way. Second, if the political relationship between central governments and the Kurds limits the Kurdish national aspirations of freedom, then it is argued here that the Kurdish nationalist elites (poets in this case) represent these aspirations to a greater degree than politicians. This can be noticed through

the elites' cultural productions, even when symbolically reproduced. The Kurdologist van Bruinessen (2006, p.28), in one way or another, supports this argument when he points out that, whilst Kurdish nationalists dream of an independent "Greater Kurdistan", the Iraqi and Iranian Kurdish leaders more realistically request self-determination within the states in which they live.

Before profoundly engaging in the issues of Kurdish national identity, it is deemed beneficial to review briefly the literature regarding some concepts, such as nation, nationalism and national identity in the Kurdish context. This is because there are various perspectives about these concepts and ongoing debates on Kurdish nationalism and its origins. This review will pave the way to drawing a theoretical framework for this research in terms of adopting one among the three principal directions of thoughts on the origins of nations and nationalism: primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism.

With the first approach, primordialism, it is argued that nations are natural and have ancient roots or an essential core, which existed before the modern age and remain important to explore. Primordialists consider that nations or national identities are given and are a natural part of human beings, which are "transmitted from one generation to the next with their essential characteristics unchanged" (Ozkirimli, 2010, p. 60). This perspective, which depends more on historical arguments and on the antiquity and authenticity of nations, has faced much critique in the academic field. The main reason behind this criticism, as Ichijo and Uzelac (2005a, p. 53) explain, is due to a failure on the part of primordialist academics to comprehend the issues of the world around us. In his comment on this approach, Eric Hobsbawm (2005, p. 79) states that

primordialism can only read the past as a text, and that people need to discuss the present and the future of nations and nationalism.

Under the modernist approach, on the other hand, it is argued that nations and nationalism are modern constructions that emerged through the last two centuries as a result of certain economic, political, social and cultural transformations (Ozkirimli, 2010). This approach has several faces, which focus on various aspects of modernity, such as capitalism, industrialisation and urbanisation. For example, Ernest Gellner (1983), through *high cultures* and Benedict Anderson (1991), through *imagined communities*, emphasise the role of social and cultural transformations, whilst Eric Hobsbawm (1983), through the invention of traditions, focuses on political transformation (see Dieckhoff and Jaffrelot, 2005; Ozkirimli, 2010). However, focusing on one of these aspects of modernity, does not mean that the abovementioned scholars ignored the others or their roles in the creation of nations and nationalism. From the modernist perspective, in other words, nationalism creates nations and national identity.

Building on the theoretical critiques that the modernist and primordialist proponents have constructed, ethno-symbolism emerged as a third approach that represents a middle ground between the two. Anthony D. Smith (2009, p. 74), as a main supporter of this approach, argues that whilst nationalism and nations are modern phenomena, they have very deep roots in earlier ethnic communities. The concern of ethno-symbolism, as Ichijo and Uzelac (2005b, p. 89) summarise, is to study how the characteristics and typical features of particular communities and collectivities are shaped and transformed as well

as for what reason they continue to remain in existence. Focusing on the historical, cultural and sociological character of nation and nationalism, on the one hand, and the elemental role of pre-modern ethnic identity in the creation of modern nations and nationalism, on the other, makes this approach different from others and more difficult to be "refuted" (see: Breuilly, 2005, p. 15). However, despite its middle ground position, ethno-symbolism can still be critiqued in a number of ways. For example, some critics state that the concept of ethno-symbolism is confusing, and that ethno-symbolists undervalue the variations between the modern nation and pre-modern ethnic groups (Ozkirimli, 2010, pp. 157–158).

Regarding the choice of these three approaches, the modernist one is adopted for this research for the most part and Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) drawn upon, in particular, which is in many ways relevant to this case study. That is, Anderson's theory is useful in terms of defining the role of literature in creating national identity through its participation in the process of imagination. For this research project, the category "imagination", as a textual power, is the focus of analysing nationalism more than the idea of "community" as a social level. However, this does not mean ignoring the context in which the imagined national identity has been produced. In terms of the social level, Anderson argues that literature, as print in this case, provides the conditions for the necessary cognitive transformations in imagining the nation and conceptualising its national identity. At the same time, he emphasises the role of oral language in creating an emotional attachment to the nation (see Wogan, 2001). In other words, to form imagined communities, both a printed and an oral language are required.

For the current study, both the oral and printed Bahdinani poetries are examined, taking into account their associations with affection and cognition, of course, within the Kurdish context. Such an issue is very relevant to literature in general, and to poetry in particular, due to the strong link between orality and emotion, on the one hand, and between literacy and cognition on the other. In this regard, Christine Allison (2013), in her theoretical study "From Benedict Anderson to Mustafa Kemal: Reading, Writing and Imagining the Kurdish Nation", demonstrates the usefulness of applying *imagined communities* to the Kurdish context as a theory that can help in understanding Kurdish nationalism. However, she argues that due to the illiteracy of Kurds, in general, print-capitalism as a mechanism does not respond to the Kurdish context, at least before 1991. Instead of using print-capitalism and Anderson's "unhelpful" binaries, such as orality/literacy and affection/cognition, Allison prefers to collapse them, proposing imagining the Kurdish community and national identity through discourse. The latter concept or the 'mechanism of discourse', according to Allison, will result in wider opportunities to approaching Kurdish studies, as it covers and interprets many effective factors in the Kurdish context that contribute to creating a national identity. For example, speech genres such as songs, as well as historical narratives, which convey feelings and cognitions and are sometimes even collected and published in journals as print, all play a role (Allison, 2013). In other words, the term discourse could be used as a concept to cover the binaries mentioned by Anderson.

Whilst the main aim of Allison's perspective is to discover a practical alternative to Anderson's mechanism (print-capitalism), which would fit the

Kurdish context on a social level, as a general framework, it is very important for the current study in terms of considering poetry too, as discourse. This term, discourse, will cover the oral and written poetry, which are both objects for examination in this study. In chapter three and chapter four, written poetry is the main focus, while regarding chapter five, in particular, oral poetry is the key interest, which is received on digital media and circulated as voice, rather than as written texts.

Building on Allison's argument about discourse, Bahdinani poetry could be considered as a counter-discourse against the hegemony of the Iraqi state and its discourses of Arabisation. In addition, it could be seen as a counter-discourse resisting the ascendancy of Sorani institutions and their explicit and implicit discourse of Soranising Iraqi Kurdistan. If the idea of imagined community is more achievable through the existence of the state and via a standard written language, it does not mean that it cannot work outside of the frames of state and an imposed standard language. Drawing upon Allison's previous argument, Bahdinani poetry as a discourse or even as a counter-discourse, whether written or oral, participates in the process of imagination. In other words, if the Iraqi state attempts to construct an Iraqi community, and Sorani institutions to create a Sorani version of a Kurdish community, then Bahdinani poetic discourses could be considered as attempts to create a Kurmanji version of an imagined community. In particular, through their language and their imagined world, Bahdinani poets neither accept the imposed Arabic language nor the imposed Sorani version of Kurdish language. On the other hand, even if Soranisation is considered as a counter-discourse against the process of the Arabising of both Sorani and Bahdinani

areas simultaneously, its effect on the Bahdinani region cannot be fruitful. This is because both Sorani and Arabic are difficult and considered as foreign languages to Bahdinani speakers, with these languages not being easy for them to be imagined or felt on a social level. That is why when Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 7) explains his idea about "imagined community" he describes community as "limited", which only includes the speakers of a given language. Put differently, in the current case, only the Bahdinani Kurdish language is able to involve appropriately and widely Bahdinani people in the process of imagining Kurdistan, either cognitively or emotionally.

The idea of an "imagined political community" is central to Anderson's definition of the nation (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). He describes this as "imagined" as it is impossible for its members to know or meet each other in reality, even if they share the same thoughts and feelings. He argues that a nation comes into existence when a massive number of people conceive themselves as constructing one, or act as though they have done so. This means that, Anderson adds, the way in which communities are imagined is considerable, not its authenticity. As a consequence, national identity is not a collection of certain truths or concrete facts, but instead, collective imaginings shaped by the members of the nation. In this research, Bahdinani Kurdish poets' imagination of Kurdish national identity is the case to be examined, and their imagination through poetic discourse is the target of the analysis in order to elicit how they construct Kurdish national identity with their own language.

Shaping a nation and national identity through imagination, according to Anderson, does not mean that this identity is imaginary or completely

fabricated (ibid). It rather, signifies how people imagine nation or national identity to be constructed via the use of some instruments invented or developed over time, which have become part of them, thus being considered as actual elements. For instance, one of the main elements of national identity could be created from a distinct language or historical inheritance, or any other features that make one national identity distinguishable from another. Moreover, during a constant categorisation and separation from other nationalities, people can create their own national symbols, which confirm their particular and distinguishable national identity.

Anderson demonstrates that through cultural systems of production, rather than political systems of power, members collectively imagine their communities and create their national identities. In his analysis of the origins of nationalism, he gives examples from the history of Europe in the 18th century and considers that nations, as imagined communities, can be clearly seen as forming through the newspaper and the novel (Ibid, pp. 22-36). However, if the novel as a literary genre played a significant role in Europe in terms of establishing and developing national identity, this is not necessarily true in the case of some contexts in the Middle East. Regarding which, in his edited book *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, Yasir Suleiman (2006, p. 5) emphasises Anderson's theory and agrees with him that conceptualising the nation as an "imagined community" partly depends on literature, but, as he argues, in some other contexts, such as the Arab context, poetry rather than novels plays this role. Suleiman believes that the popularity of poetry in the Arab world is sufficient evidence to support his argument. However, he admits that its contribution in the expression of national identity "varies from

context to context and from period to period within the same context" (Suleiman, 2006, p. 11).

In the Kurdish context, the position of poetry is, to a large extent, similar to the position of Arab poetry, especially in terms of its popularity and its leading role in cultural history. This can also be observed when assessing the historiography of classical and modern Kurdish literature. Regarding which, across more than three centuries, Kurdish classical poetry was the main source of Kurdish culture and intellectual expression. Sabir (2001, p. 16) shows that via poetry the Kurdish language shifted from an oral language to a language of writing, thinking and expressing feelings and meanings, in which is demonstrated the characteristics of Kurdish culture that distinguishes it from other national identities. Furthermore, due to its striking popularity, Kurdish poetry had and still has, an obvious influence on contemporary Kurdish socio-political life. This is, to a large degree, because in the Kurdish context, especially in its oral form, poetry has the ability to link individuals in space and time, thus promoting the concept of an imagined community.

The reason behind the popularity of poetry in the Arab context, according to Suleiman (2006), is due to the Arab culture itself, which is to some extent an oral and collective culture. This is true in the case of the Kurdish culture as well, for the Kurds and Arabs have a shared religious heritage, as well as many similar social norms. Accordingly, their reactions or responses to some cultural or political discourses are not very different. In the Kurdish context, as Fadil Omer (2007) argues, the process of epistemological reception mostly depends on hearing (listening) rather than seeing (reading). He categorises

the Kurdish culture as part of what he calls a "civilisation of hearing", which is oral and collective. Similarly, Christine Allison (2013, p. 110) discusses this point in the Kurdish context and builds her argument on the mechanism of discourse being based on orality, rather than print-capitalism, especially before 1991, as aforementioned. This argument could be enhanced by indicating the richness of Kurdish oral literature, which for various reasons, including the socio-political one, is still existent[13]. Moreover, the role and popularity of poetry in both the Kurdish and Arab cases is due to its having been representative of the feelings and national aspirations of the population, especially during some sensitive periods of their political history.

In the modern age, the role of poetry in the imagining community seems more apparent in the Kurdish context than the Arab. This is probably because the Kurds, as the biggest stateless nation in the Middle East, have no independent political entity to assist them in freely performing their legal national rights in most parts of Kurdistan. In such cases, Stephen Brockmann (1999, p. 10) argues that culture, through poetry in this case, is the principal way "in which nations without political boundaries locate and identify themselves". In the Iraqi Kurdistan case, this appears to be the case both in the era before 1991, when Kurdistan was directly ruled by the Arab Ba'ath, and after the collapse of the regime in 2003. The poetry before 1991, due to the censorship of the Ba'ath, was more symbolic and limited, whereas after 2003, it played a wider

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[13] Marlene Schlene has written more than one article considering the active role of orality and polices of voice in the contemporary Kurdish community in Turkey. She, in particular, focuses on the voice of female dengbêjs. See for instance, "Writing against loss: Kurdish women, subaltern authorship, and the politics of voice in contemporary Turkey" (2017); and "From shameful to public voice: Women dengbêjs, the work of pain, and Kurdish history" (2016).

and more direct role due to the new freedom of expression. Moreover, this was also due to the facilities of advanced technology, which helped in exploring an even more national(ist) poetry, an issue that will be considered in depth later.

1.4. Literature Review

1.4.1. Nationalism and Kurdish Identity

Nationalism and identity have been a key topic of Kurdish studies to date. Numerous researchers, from Kurdish intellectuals to Western scholars, have explored the topic. The majority of their works are categorised as historical, political and sociological studies, with the minority being regarded as literary ones. Moreover, some of them combine more than one field, i.e. they are interdisciplinary. These studies discuss Kurdish nationalism and identity from different theoretical perspectives. A greater part of the earlier work involved taking primordial and ethnicist stances, while the majority of the contemporary or current research has resorted to taking a modernist/constructivist stance, especially that in English. Further, plenty of work, in particular that in the Kurdish language, has dealt with the topic devoid of any theoretical underpinning. Regarding which, Amir Hassanpour (1998, p. 18) declares that the bulk of studies written by Kurds up to the beginning of the 1990s investigated the Kurds and Kurdish nationalism without a theoretical framework. Nevertheless, he still claims that they could be considered within "ethnic theory".

On the other hand, Abbas Vali (2003b, pp. 2–3) describes the majority of early Kurdish historical and political writing about Kurdish nationalism as confusing and inadequate. He argues that the assumption of the notion of Kurdish nationalism exceeds the "structural and cultural conditions of the nationalist political project" (Vali, 2003a, p. 60). As earlier explained, the question of Kurdish nationalism and identity, indeed, has divided researchers into two groups: primordialist/ethnicist and modernist/constructivist. This research is based on the body of the second perspective and adds to it.

The first group considers the beginning or historical origins and construction of Kurdish nationalism as dating back to the pre-modern era. For example, in his *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan* (1992), Amir Hassanpour explains, from a Marxist point of view, the emergence of two kinds of Kurdish nationalism: feudal and middle class. The first, he argues, starts from the first partition of Kurdistan in 1639, after the Treaty of Zuhab, until the downfall of Kurdish principalities in the middle of the nineteenth century. He bases his ideas on the introduction of Ehmedê Xanî's (1650–1707) *Mem û Zîn*. Middle class nationalism, he argues, begins after the downfall of the last Kurdish principality, and was shaped more clearly after the First World War, in 1918. In the 1960s, it developed into a coherent modern system of thought called Kurdayetî (Kurdish nationalism) (Hassanpour, 1992, pp. 49–67). There are some other Kurdish writers who share a similar perspective concerning the antiquity of Kurdish nationalism, such as Reşîd Findî in his book *Al-Fikr al-Qawmi al-Kurdi bayna Khani wa Haji Qadir al-Koyi* (Kurdish Nationalist Thought between Xanî and Hacî Qadirî Koyî) (2008). However, their primordial arguments and interpretations regarding Kurdish nationalism can

be seen as being problematic, if it is taken into consideration that nationalism, as a historical notion, is a modern phenomenon.

An example of a study that explores Kurdish nationalism without considering any theoretical perspective, is Kamîran M. Nebî's PhD dissertation *Qûnaxekanî Geşekirdinî Bîrî Netewayetî le Şi'rî Kurdî da le Seretawe ta Kotayî Sedey Bîstem* (The Stages of Nationalist Thought Development in Kurdish Poetry: From the Beginning until the End of Twentieth Century) (2005). This unpublished thesis from Salahaddin University, contrary to all other works in this field, does not concentrate on a specific period or historic stage of literature. The writer attempts to cover the "whole" history of Kurdish poetry, which he claims is over one thousand years old, in order to determine how national thoughts developed in Kurdish poetry. In conclusion, he asserts that Kurdish nationalism is an original concept, and represents the earliest example of nationalism in the world (2005, pp. 554–555). Two key points are evident in Nebî's work: he chooses to ignore theories and assumptions, whilst clearly demonstrating a bias. In regard to the first point, he (2005, p. 582) states that, in his research, he distances himself from using theories and assumptions, and instead, examines and analyses Kurdish poetry itself to determine its national features. In regard to the second point, his research reflects a strong nationalist bias, and an emotive style, rather than being academic. For instance, without investigation, he considers the fabricated character Baberaxê Hemzanî as a Kurdish poet, who was "martyred in 848", subsequently claiming that a "national consciousness" appears in his poems. By claiming that the Kurdish national consciousness was in existence more

than a thousand years ago, Nebî reduces the value of the topic and thus, makes his work an unreliable source.

In "Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* and its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness", Martin van Bruinessen (2003) simply and logically refutes such previous works. He illustrates that even in the West, the land of nationalism, "nation" and "nationalism" are new concepts emerging at the end of the 18th century. He casts doubt on the claim that Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* in the 17th century pioneered Kurdish nationalism. van Bruinessen argues that the political and socioeconomic preconditions did not exist in Kurdistan in that era, nor the notion of creating any kind of nation. People at that time, he continues, did not identify themselves like they do today as ethnic groups or nations, with the main collectivity in that age being tribes (van Bruinessen, 2003, pp. 40–57). This kind of analytical study seeks to cast an objective eye on Kurdish nationalism. Accordingly, Bruinessen tries to foster a wider discussion about nationalism by linking it to the Kurdish situation with a modernist viewpoint.

Within the same school of thinking, in his analysis on the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, Abba Vali (2003a) demonstrates such modernist perspectives in the Kurdish case. He argues that Kurdish nationalism is a result of "modernity" and is related to the practical use of the modern nation-state system in the Middle East (Vali, 2003a, pp. 63–67). He argues that, despite Kurdish nationalism is not a direct consequence of building a nation, the institutions of the Turkish, Arab and Persian nation-states, through a policy of assimilating their minorities, led to the formation of Kurdish nationalism

(Vali, 2003b, pp. 1–13). Vali argues that Kurdish national identity is modern and that its origin is not ethnic, but rather, it is the relationship between self and other, following the appearance of Turkish, Persian and Arab identities at the beginning of the last century. This origin does not indicate that it is uniform or stable, as it depends on the 'other' and its policy of "recognition/denial, rebellion/suppression". Vali makes a comparison between European and Kurdish nationalism, concluding that, whilst both have been the result of modernity, they have brought different consequences. The current research project is built on Vali's perspective about the role of "modernity" in creating Kurdish nationalism, exploring Kurdish national identity within the context of the impact of the other (the Iraqi state in this case) through different political periods.

1.4.2. Nationalism and Kurdish Literature

Despite Kurdish poetry being the most noticeable feature in Kurdish literature, even throughout Kurdish diaspora (Ahmadzadeh, 2003, p. 139), studies in English focusing on Kurdish poetry are still uncommon (Shakely, 1996, p. 327), especially regarding the contemporary form. The range of the few available studies becomes even smaller when it comes to the Kurmanji Kurdish poetry in Iraq. Among them, there is only one study that deals with Bahdinani poetry.

The first available source that has a general tittle that was supposed to cover contemporary Kurdish poetry is a book edited by Sabir, Mirawdeli and Stephen titled *Modern Kurdish Poetry: An Anthology and Introduction* (2006). It consists of an introduction to Kurdish poetry, written by Sabir, with

translations of Kurdish poetry from Iraqi Kurdistan. In his introduction, after presenting an historical overview of three schools of classical Kurdish poetry, Sabir discusses the first period of the modern form. He focuses on the last decades of the 20th century, revealing the role poetry has played in Kurdish culture (Sabir, R, 2006, pp. 13–29). Whilst these types of books usually provide readers with ideas and a background to the target literature, his introduction and the anthology that he presents with the other two editors completely neglects modern Kurmanji (Bahdinani) poetry in Iraqi Kurdistan. This observation is why, when Satu Grondahl introduces this work, he critically comments and states that there is a Kurdish literature written in other Kurdish dialects or languages, referring to Kurmanji and Zaza, hoping that there will be a translation of it soon for a Western audience (Sabir *et al.*, 2006, pp. 7–8). Grondahl also raises a question about the matter of representation and asks whether this specific literature has the right to be considered as being "representative" of Kurdish literature. The point that makes this book most interesting is Grondahl's critical words. In the context of the role literature plays in nation building, he states that nowadays fiction and poetry are significant in the creation of collective identities for ethnic minorities, and to a large degree, give expression to the ideas of "imagined communities".

The only available English study concerning Bahdinani Kurdish poetry is Edward Harry Magin Jr.'s *Northern Kurdish Poetic Features with an Application to Translation* (2012). It is "the first" academic study (MA) of its kind in English. It is mainly a linguistic study, comparing the poetic language with the ordinary one, analysing them both from phonological and syntactic perspectives. Specifically, it focuses on the linguistic deviations of poetic texts

from three historical periods of Bahdinani Kurdish poetry. He classifies them as the Neo-classical, New, and Modern periods. The last two periods are the same as those covered in the current research; however, here the term Modern Poetry is used for "هۆزانا نویخواز" and Modernist Poetry for "هۆزانا نوی". Despite his study not paying attention to Bahdinani poetry in terms of identity and nationalism, it is still useful for this research in terms of the interviews he made with poets and critics about Bahdinani poetry and its description of contemporary history. However, in terms of selecting poets as representative for each period, he was not very accurate. That is, as an example for modernist poetry, he incorrectly chooses the popular poet Şe'ban Silêman as one of them. Consequently, in his research conclusion, E. Magin Jr. finds in Silêman's poetry some poetic peculiarities, which he comments upon having never read or seen in any other modern (modernist) Kurdish poetry (2012, p. 222). In spite of this, Magin's study is still an important work due to its being a pioneering step in the field of Bahdinani Kurdish studies in the English language.

Another study on Kurmanji poetry partly relevant to the current work is Metin Yukse's *I Cry Out So That You Wake Up*: Cegerxwîn's Poetics and Politics of Awakening (2014). His article was originally a part of his unpublished PhD dissertation at the University of Chicago, entitled: *Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival and Revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925–1960*. It demonstrates the role Cegerxwîn played in the progressive political discourses of his era, through his poetry and political activities, from adopting a religious perspective through to a Marxist one. Despite referring to the reception of Cegerxwîn's poetry outside of Syrian

Kurdistan, including Turkish Kurdistan and the Soviet Union, Metin does not point to that of his poetry in Iraqi Kurdistan. Actually, Cegerxwîn is very well-known in Bahdinan too. After he became a lecturer in the Kurdish Department at the University of Baghdad between 1958-1963, and after his poems were published and became songs, his poetry received more attention than any other Kurdish poet outside Iraqi Kurdistan. Even though Metin's study only focuses on one poet outside of Iraqi Kurdistan, it is still useful in terms of knowing how rhythmical and non-complex poems can be an effective tool in constructing and spreading nationalism.

Two other important studies written in English about Kurdish literature and the issue of nation-building and identity are Hashem Ahmadzadeh's *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse* (2003), and Ozlem Galip's *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture and Society* (2015). Whilst both studies explore Kurdish novels, not poetry, they are still useful in terms of providing a vivid picture of "imagining Kurdistan" through fiction and under various conditions of living *in* and *out* of Kurdistan. Ahmadzadeh, mainly through drawing on the "*Imagined Communities*", investigates the role of novels in the process of Kurdish national identity. He seeks to discover the relationship between the emergence of the novel and the rise of nationalism. He concludes that the non-success of Kurdish nationalism in constructing a Kurdish state supplies the Kurdish novel with the space to embody the struggle of Kurds in their quest for national identity.

On the other hand, building on theories of space and collective memory, Ozlem Galip analyses a great number of Kurdish novels from Turkish

Kurdistan and the diaspora. She explains the way in which Kurdish novelists construct Kurdish identity and the homeland they imagine as a country. Ahmadzadeh and Galip's works are important in terms of knowing how Kurdistan, as a concept of Kurdish identity, is imagined through novels. However, the question does arise whether the genre of the novel is popular among Kurds and whether it is able to link readers together as poetry does.

Regarding what has been researched on Bahdinani poetry in Kurdish language, two studies can be found. Both were published after 2000, following the establishment of the Kurdish Department in the University of Duhok in 1994. Before this period, Kurdish (Kurmanji-Bahdinani) literature was marginalised by the Kurdish academic institutions under the pretext of supporting the Sorani dialect as the only standard language[14]. Away from of the academic world, at the beginning of the 21st century and later, the Kurdistan Regional Government, particularly owing to the initiative of its Bahdinani Prime Minister N. Barzanî, financially supported and established Kurdish institutions in Bahdinan. This step helped Kurdish writers to publish their work in Kurmanji Kurdish more widely, particularly via the Union of Kurdish Writers and the Spîrêz House for Press and Publishing[15].

The first relevant Kurdish study on literature and nation is Beyan Ehmed Hisên's *Hozana Bergîrê li Serdemê Şoreşa Gulanê* (Resistance Poetry at the Time of the Gullan Revolution), which was an MA dissertation written in 2003

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[14] The issue will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

[15] This initiative in support of Bahdinani Kurdish institutions and later, Kurmanji Kurdish in the education system was heavily criticised by Sorani speakers. Hiwa Selam's *The Language and Politics of Iraqi Kurdistan* (2015) reflects some of this criticism.

and published in (2007). The book consists of four chapters and covers the period from 1976 to 1991. Chapter four, which is the main one, concentrates on the role of resistance poetry during the Gulan Revolution. The writer, without depending on any theory or mentioning any methodology, comments on poetic examples from numerous Bahdinani poets. The literary value of much of the selected poetry and its aesthetics was not taken into consideration. Other forms of resistance themed poetry are categorised as "prison poetry", which motivates one to question to what extent has this poetry influenced people, if nobody was able to read or hear it? The absence of a theoretical framework, therefore, can at times make this work appear like a collection of dispersed comments on examples of poetry.

Through his MA dissertation, entitled *Ceveng di Hozana Riyalistîka Kurdî da* (Symbol in Kurdish Realistic Poetry) (2004), Îmad Weysî Xalid provides the first technical study on Kurmanji poetry in Bahdinan, covering the period from 1970 to 1991. This was the era when Kurdish poetry in Bahdinan became renewed, with the poets starting to abandon the neo-classical forms, with a preference for a modern style. Due to the scarcity of Kurdish sources, Xalid includes many unpublished interviews with Kurdish intellectuals and poets, who lived during the events between 1970 and 1991. He generally seeks to analyse the function of symbols in Bahdinani realistic poetry through the use of a stylistic approach. His study is the first MA written in Bahdinani Kurdish in Iraq.

Further away from the academic studies, two other general works on Bahdinani poetry are worth mentioning, including Fadil Omer's *Zimanê*

Sêyem: Kaniya Herûher Nûkirinê (Third Language: The Spring of Renewal Forever) (2001), and Hoşeng Şêx Mihemed's *Derçûn ji Deshelata Manayê* (The Exit from the Authority of Meaning). In the last section of his book, Omer focuses on the issues of modernisation and the development of poetic language in Bahdinan. He briefly analyses the poetic language of "modern" Kurdish poetry of 1970s and 1980s, comparing it with that of the "modernist" poetry of post-1991. His book is useful in terms of realising the differences between two styles of Bahdinani poetry, especially through the language. Hoşeng Şêx Mihemed, on the other hand, attempts to identify the intellectual structure of the Bahdinani poetry, from the neo-classical period to the day of publishing his book. After providing some philosophical perspectives on poetry and analysing a few poetic examples of each selected poet, he concludes that the majority of Bahdinani poetry is built on religious and nationalist bases, not a poetic one. In his book, he suggests writing poetry for poetry, not for religion or nationalism. In spite of his philosophical and deep discussion at the beginning of the book, when it comes to the analysis, he only selects a few examples that serve his argument. Due to the lack of analysed examples, he does not persuade his reader that he has effectively proven his claims. In other words, the poets he selected, and the few poetic extracts led to his analysis being superficial and sometimes just manifesting itself as some critical comments. However, these two books do shed light on some important aspects of Bahdinani poetry,

In conclusion, is clear that there are several works, mostly in the Kurdish language, that have sought to analyse the contemporary Bahdinani poetry with an emphasis its link with Kurdish nationalism. Whilst the majority

neglected applying theoretical approaches, they could still be considered as preliminary attempts that need further work. Different what to has been pursued so far, the current research is based on clear theoretical considerations, which help to interpret texts and the study findings distinctively. The majority of Kurdish researchers that have dealt with the issue of nationalism and literature, consciously or unconsciously, have adopted a primordialist point of view, considering the Kurdish "nation" and its national identity as given and natural. Building on modernist nationalism theories, a constructivist perspective is taken up here, with the assertion that nation and national identity are modern constructions. Accordingly, literary works (poetry in this case) participate in constructing national identity, not in reflecting it in a passive way. In other words, regarding this research, the reflection theory perspective of literature, like the majority of Kurdish criticism that considers literature as a mirror of "nation" and in turn, reflects its national identity, is not advocated here. Instead, in adopting a constructivist perspective, the literature is considered as a discourse that has the power constructs and shapes Kurdish national identity. Through this standpoint, it is anticipated that Bahdinani Kurdish poetry can be distinctively interpreted, which has not been the case with previous commonly presented stereotypical readings of poetry and nationalism.

Secondly, by considering Bahdinani literature in Iraq as a minority, which was double marginalised by Arabisation, on the one hand and by Sorani Kurdish institutes, on the other, this research will contribute to the knowledge of the subject from a unique standpoint that has not been applied to Bahdinani poetry. Thus, from this point of departure, the final thesis will address this

question: How does a literature, under specific conditions of neglect and marginalisation, stand between constructing a Kurdish national identity and promoting its existence as a specific language literature? It is also anticipated that this research will form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of this subject by investigating the identity discourses that have been produced by Bahdinani poetry in terms of ambivalent belonging between the Kurmanji culture outside of Iraq, which Bahdinani literature is a part of, and Sorani Kurdish inside Iraq, which culturally differs from it.

Thirdly, the thesis is set out to identify the transformations of national identity discourses that were produced by Bahdinani poetry in the aforementioned three successive political periods of the Kurdish nationalism trajectory in Iraqi Kurdistan. The aim is to show how, according to the contexts the identity discourses shifted form one period to another. Of course, this is not as a mirror to the contexts, but rather, as being partially responsible for creating them, even in terms of the causal relationship or interactions between them.

1. 5. Methodology and Materials

In this research, the poetic discourses of each stage of Bahdinani poetry will be analysed and interpreted within their socio-political contexts, as this will help to reveal the possible meanings of the content during each historical period. Discourses, according to Michel Foucault's perspective, are connected with extra-linguistic factors, especially with socio-political power (see: Schmitz, 2007, pp. 140-158). More poignantly, as Michel Pêcheux (1982, p. 111) puts it and expands upon this idea, the meaning of discourses and their words differ from one context to another, depending on the place,

time, and even on the speakers and their positions. Here, drawing on this statement, when analysing the national identity discourses that belong to each context, the theories of colonialism and post-colonialism are considered, being referred to throughout the text. This is because the poetry that is examined belongs to three contexts and two different times: before and after the liberation. These theories can help in understanding national identity discourses more precisely, since living under the conditions of colonialism is obviously different from that of post-colonialism and self-rule.

On the other hand, dealing with poetic texts as the linguistic manifestations of discourses, means to consider the "text" from a theoretical perspective too. Building on the modern literary theory, it is considered here that literary and even non-literary texts are intertextual (Allen, 2006, p. 1). However, the conception of intertextuality in this research is not an infinite vision of textuality as structuralists would put it, but rather, it is subjected to Foucault's perspective that forces limit "the free circulation of the text" (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p. 27). Here, it is not the *horizontal intertextually* among receivers and their response to each other that is pertinent, but the *vertical intertextuality*, when a text relates to others (see: Hodges, 2015, pp. 44–45). Put differently, despite every text having unlimited points of connection with other texts, these relations locate works within socio-political power, which together create and discipline "the text's ability to signify" (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, p. 27). Thus, the combination of these intertextual relations and circulations of particular selected contexts will construct an understanding of Kurdish national identity. Accordingly, the intertextuality is not just a concept, but also a critic tool that will be used to approach the selected texts.

This is, of course, whenever the text responds to the tool and perhaps more importantly, it depends on me as a reader/researcher and how I interact with the text. All this is considered within the framework of the modern theory of nationalism, as explained in the theoretical considerations section.

In order to obtain some precise results that adequately respond to the questions of the research and its arguments, the analytical part of the research is divided into three main chapters that are chronologically organised, from the era of modern Kurdish poetry to the present. Such categorisation will help in realising the trajectory of identity discourses of contemporary Bahdinani poetry from its beginnings up until now. Moreover, it will help in identifying the successive transformations of Kurdish national identity, according to the political periods of Kurdish history. Aligning the political eras of the Kurds with the emergence of the new literary trends in each period is an additional reason for adopting a chronological approach for the research.

In each chapter, the poetic products of one or two Bahdinani pioneer poets, as representative of their literary trend and their era, will be examined. Whilst it is difficult to claim a pure objectivity in selecting them, there are still some factors that have been taken into account. Drawing on Hashem Ahmadzadeh's (2003, p. 31) suggestions in selecting novels in his case and in general, the following factors in the case of this study have been considered. However, they cannot be equally applied to each poet due to the conditions and specificity of each poetic trend they belong to, as will be shown later. The first factor is the literary value of the poetry; second, "the general perception of the work in the society"; the third factor is the degree of poetry

circulation; the fourth, is the number of "editions and reprinting"; and finally, there is consideration of the reviews of the work in literary critique. When deciding which poets to focus upon, these factors and in some cases others as well can help to ensure a kind of legitimacy in the selection process.

For the first analytical chapter (chapter 3), which concerns modern Bahdinani poetry (1970s- 1991), the work of two pioneers - Ebdulrehman Mizûrî (b.1946) and Mueyed Teyib (b.1957) - were selected. Despite the relevance of the five previously mentioned factors in Mizûrî's poems, some additional reasons are behind choosing his work. First, he is one of the most prominent creators of modern Bahdinani poetry in Iraq and one of the most well-known poets in Bahdinan. Secondly, he differs from his generation in his efforts to theorise modern poetry and publishing critical opinions about it. Furthermore, he is the only poet that all poetic generations from the 1970s until the present admit has had an influence on them. Some of Mizûrî's poems became songs as well. During his literary life prior to 1991, two collections of his poems were published: the first titled ژ ئەڤینا چرایێن کەڤن (In the Love of Ancient Candles) (1980), and the second collection, named ل خەلکی تەحلیێ.. ل من شرینێ (Bitter to Others... Sweet to Me). Some of his poems were translated into Arabic by Bedel Revo Mizûrî (1989, 2009) and Hesen Silêvanî (1998).

To a large degree, the selection of Mueyed Teyib's poems also responds to the same criteria. However, his special circumstances of living in Iraq under the Ba'ath and later being in exile, made his work more interesting for selection than certain others. Further, many young poets were influenced by his poems, which one can easily observe from the style of their writing. His

collection of poems ستران و بهفر و ئاگر (Songs, Snow and Fire) was reprinted four times, being translated into Persian by Mesûd Gulî (1997), and three times into Arabic by Tehsîn Ibrahim Doskî (1999), Selah Berwarî (2010) and Majid al-Hayder (2010, 2016). Teyib's poems were sung by famous Kurdish singers, such as Tehsîn Taha (1941-1995) and Hesen Şerîf (b.1969). In sum, all of these factors were taken into consideration when choosing Mueyed Teyib and Ebdulrehman Mizûrî's poetry as representative of modern Kurdish poetry and as texts for the first analytical chapter of this study.

For the second analytical chapter (chapter 4), which concentrates on post 1991, the poetic work of the prominent modernist Mihsin Qoçan (b.1954) was selected. He was one of the main founders of the modernist poetic group called *Nûkirin Herûher* (Renewal Forever). Through this group, which was founded in 1994 in Bahdinan, he attempted to renew the technique and style of modern poetry that was written in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite their claim and call for individualism and writing poetry for poetry's sake, they could not be completely isolated from the issues of society and what was happening around them. Hence, the second and third of the suggested criteria of selecting poets for this study does not properly respond to his work, since this poetry was circulated only amongst a very small number of people. His poetry is frequently considered as "difficult poetry" owing to the complicated style of writing and challenging content, which served to reduce the popularity of his work, often even alienating his audience. In spite of this "difficult poetry", Qoçan's influence on a number of young poets in Bahdinan is noticeable. After publishing several poetic collections, in 2009, the Union of Kurdish Writers in

Duhok republished all of his poem collections in one large book, titled ل بەرسفكا
مه بەفر بارى (It Snowed in Our Courtyard) (2009).

The third analytical chapter (chapter 5) focuses on Bahdinani pop poetry that emerged in the post-Saddam era in 2003. This poetry, which is usually performed with music and circulated via digital media, gained a notable popularity across many segments of Bahdinani society. However, it was not recognised or welcomed by the "high" literary institution in the form of the Union of Kurdish Writers, at least during the first decade of its emergence. During that time, of course, the modernist trend of Bahdinani poetry did not stop presenting activities in the literary arena of the region. For this chapter, the popular poets Şe'ban Silêman from Duhok and Burhan Zêbarî from Akrê are the focus. The first was selected, because he was the founder of this new performed poetry and the second, as he was deemed a rich source for poetic analysis. Whilst to many Kurdish critics the literary quality of their work is poor their poetry still deserves to be examined. The popularity of these poets, the wide circulation of their poems, whether through CDs, mobile phones, or TV channels and the numerous invitations to perform their poems (usually with music) at mass gatherings and national public events, all justify selecting them for this study.

Before analysing the discourses of national identity of each period, in the next chapter, I will present the Bahdinani literary scene.

CHAPTER TWO

Bahdinani Poetry

A Marginalised and Invisible Kurdish Literature

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, it is contended that in spite of the relative antiquity of Bahdinani

Kurdish literature, and despite its rapid flourishing, especially post 1991, it has

remained a marginalised and invisible literature. It has not only been

marginalised *by* the Sorani speakers in Iraqi Kurdistan, as I argue, but it is

also an invisible literature to its neighbours, the Kurmanji speakers in Turkish

and Syrian Kurdistan. It cannot be denied that the negative impact of a divided

Kurdistan is germane to the creation of this situation, the responsibility for

which can be attributed to the Kurds themselves. The controversial debates

about this issue will be elaborated upon in this chapter to present a clear

image of the circumstances that Bahdinani Kurdish has gone through, in

general, especially during its existential struggle with Arabisation and

Soranisation. In the chapter, special attention is also paid to the location of

poetry in the Bahdinani cultural scene, in which, until recently, has a notable

presence. The map of Bahdinani poetry will be drawn starting from the

beginnings of its classical poetry in the 17th century, crossing through the neo-classical era, until the contemporary period is reached. In particular, there is detailed exploration of the different poetic trends of the contemporary period: modern, modernist, and popular poetry. Each of these poetic trends emerged and flourished in a particular political stage of Kurdish nationalism. Through exploring this complicated image of Bahdinani poetry and its circumstances, this chapter will serve to contextualise the following ones. At the same time, it will constitute a significant step towards introducing this marginalised and invisible literature, which, intentionally or unintentionally, has been neglected by non-Bahdinani Kurdish scholars and by Western Kurdologists as well.

2.2. The Region of Bahdinan

Bahdinan is the name of a particular region in Iraqi Kurdistan, most of its territory being located between the Tigris and Great Zab rivers. Unlike the majority of the Iraqi Kurds, the people of this region speak Kurmanji Kurdish (Gunter, 2009, p. 18) or what is commonly known as Bahdinani. This name was inherited from the former Kurdish principality Bahdinan, which was, according to investigated available historical documents, established in the 14th century and continued ruling the region until 1842 (Mizûrî, 2014; Reuf, 2011). During this period, princes from "an aristocracy of great sanctity" from the "Bahdinan family" ruled the region, with it being passed from son to son (Longrigg, 1925, p. 7). Like all other Kurdish principalities in the 19th century, Bahdinan was overthrown by the Ottoman Empire as the latter changed its

policy towards the administrative division under its influence[16]. This fallen principality was then incorporated into the *sanjaq* of Mosul (MacKenzie, 2012), its name having remained in use until the present day. Currently, this region includes the same geographical areas that were ruled at the time of the principality (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 3). While the term is no longer circulated officially in the new administrative division in Iraq and its part of Kurdistan, it is widely used at the linguistic, cultural, and political levels. The region presently comprises Duhok governorate and some districts from the Nineveh and Erbil governorates. In other words, Bahdinan comprises the Kurdish areas of Iraq, where the population speaks Kurmanji Kurdish. In comparison with the Sorani Kurdish speakers in Iraq, Kurmanji is a minority language, whilst when taking into account all the Kurmanji speakers of "Greater Kurdistan", they comprise the majority.

Regarding the name Bahdinan (بەهدینان), there is an etymological debate surrounding the word and another alternative spelling, which is written as Badinan (بادینان) too. Some Kurdish historians (e.g. al-Botani, 2013; Amedi, 2000) claim that the latter term is more original than the former. They assert that Badinan came from the word Edyabin, the very ancient name of the region, which is mentioned in some historical texts. Some other scholars criticise this claim and state that due to incorrect historical and etymological evidence, this interpretation should lose its credibility (al-Doski, 2007). Hence,

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[16] Whilst the Bahdinan principality was independent in 14th century, after the Battle of Chaldiran between Ottomans and Safavids, in 1514, when the territories of Kurdistan were divided between them, it came under the influence of Ottoman Empire, and the rule of the principality turned from being independent to semi-independent. For more information about the natural relationship between the Kurdish principalities and the Ottoman Empire, see Haruti (2008).

the majority of Kurdish authors, especially Kurmanji speakers, whether from this time or earlier, spell the name as Bahdinan. They clearly concur with the Kurdish historian Şeref-Xanê Bidlîsî (1543-1603) that the word Bahdinan came from the name of the prince (Baha al-Din - بهاء الدين) and his dynasty (Baha al-Din-an - بهاء الدينان), who ruled the principality of Omadia (Amêdiyê) [17] for centuries (Bidlīsī, 2005). At an earlier time, especially before the age of Kurdish codification, people naturally and spontaneously changed Arabic names that came under the influence of Islam into Kurdish forms in response to the Kurdish language input. For instance, it can clearly be seen that the following common Arabic names in the Kurdish language, (Taj al-Din - تاج الدين), (Iz al-Din – عزالدين), and (Shams al-Din – شمس الدين) were changed to (Tajdin - تاجدين), (Izdin – ئیزدين), and (Shamdin – شەمدين), respectively. In accordance with the same linguistic adaptation rule, (Baha al-Din - بهاء الدين) changed to (Bahdin – بەهدين) and its plural (Baha al-Dian-an – بهاء الدينان), which means that the Baha al-Din family changed to (Bahdinan - بەهدينان).

Understanding this linguistic adaption rule allows for confidently claiming that the latter form Badinan – بادينان is merely a simplified form of the word Bahdinan – بەهدينان. This claim can be linguistically proven by bringing extra examples from the Kurdish language that have the same phonological change. In historical linguistics, this phenomenon is called rephonemicisation, and it takes different forms, one of which involves merging two phonemes and the emergence of a completely new one (Crowley and Bowern, 2010, p. 69). In this case, the consecutive phonemes (- e) and (- h) were merged and the new

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[17] Omadia (Amêdiyê) was the name of the Bahdinan Principality in earlier times.

phoneme (- a) was created. This form of rephonemicisation, which is called "conditional merger", can be observed in many other examples in the Kurdish language. For instance, the word: شەهر has been changed to شار , and in the same way, the following words have changed: بەهر = بار , پەهن = پان , خوەهر = بەهر, خار , رەهن = ران . This is exactly what happened to the word بەهدینان in that it was changed to بادینان. However, this phonological change is more common in Sorani Kurdish than Kurmanji. Hence, the form Bahdinan is more commonly in circulation amongst Kurmanji speakers, while Badinan is more widely used among Sorani speakers. In other words, the latter is predominantly a Sorani pronunciation and spelling of the word Bahdinan. For many Bahdinani speakers this simplified form is not very welcome, being often seen as a kind of depreciation or a diminution of the region, especially when it comes from the Sorani Kurdish people. However, the above described situation has not always been the case[18]. In particular, recently, under the influence of the Sorani media, and probably due to some of the Kurmanji speakers who border the Sorani speaking area, some of the new generation in the region have started using this simplified form as well.

In addition to the etymological and linguistic evidence, according to historical documents, the only recorded form of the region after Bidlîsî's *Şerefname* in the 16th century was (بەهدینان) Bahdinan, not Badinan. This implies that the former is the original and not the latter. Accordingly, the Kurdish poet Noredinê

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[18] Whilst the phenomenon is generally seen as a linguistic issue, when it is related the social level, it becomes sensitive. Similar sensitive reactions among Sorani Kurdish speakers are observed when people from Bahdinan pronounce the word "Soran" as "Sora". In other words, this is an offensive action to them; however, it is fundamentally a linguistic issue as people from Bahdinan usually do not pronounce the N at the end of words, especially when in the plural condition. For example, even for the word Bahdinan sometimes they say Bahdina.

Brîfkî (1790 - 1851) in his poem (I'm lonely in Kurdistan) proudly mentions that he is from Bahdinan (بههدينان):

ژ بههدينانێ خاسم ئهز، ژ پيرانێ خهواسم ئهز

ل مهيدانێ رهقاسم ئهز، ژ دهعوا ناكهوم يا رهب

Ji Behdînanê xas im ez, ji pîranê xewas im ez

li meydanê reqas im ez, ji de'wa nakewim ya reb (Brîfkanî, 2002, p. 80)

Likewise, old historical documents from the first half of 19th century show that people of this region called their principality Bahdinan. This appeared in a document that was found recently in an Ottoman archive in Istanbul (Doskî, T. Î., 2015). The document originally was a petition signed (stamped) by 33 notables from the region appealing to the Ottoman Sultan to intervene in the region and stop the army attacking of the Soran principality on Bahdinan in 1833. In this letter, which was written in Persian, the name of the principality was spelled by them as بهدينان (Bahdinan). In the same regard, this spelling remained adopted by Kurds and even by non-Kurds who studied the region. For example, during the British occupation of Iraq in the first quarter of the 20th century, Captain E. F. Jardine, the assistant political officer in Duhok, wrote a book about learning the Bahdinani Kurdish language, which he entitled *Bahdinan Kurmanji* (Jardine, 1922). Also, the majority of the famous books about this region adopted the same spelling, like: *Imarat Bahdinan al-Abbasia* (The Abbasid Principality: Bahdinan) (1969), *Imarat Bahdinan al-Kurdiya* (The Kurdish Principality: Bahdinan) (1999), *Al-Akrad fi Bahdinan* (The Kurds of

Bahdinan) (1999), *Bahdinan fi Awakhir al-Ahd al-Othmani* (Bahdinan during the Late Ottoman Era) (2007).

It is worth mentioning that there are two forms of adjectives derived from the name Bahdinan/Badinan, which are: Bahdini/Badini (بەهدینی\بادینی) and Bahdinani/Badinani (بەهدینانی\بادینانی). They clearly describe what is relevant to the region and what belongs to it. The former (Bahdini / Badini) is more of a local formulation of the word and most commonly circulated in Kurdish, whilst the latter, especially Bahdinani (بەهدینانی), appears frequently in Arabic and English sources. However, as this research is written in English, for its readership I use the latter form. Most importantly, I use Bahdinan because it is widely circulated in literary and linguistic writings. Accordingly, for this research, Bahdinan is adopted as the name of the region and Bahdinani as its adjective, which describes whatever is associated with or belongs to it.

2.3. In and out of Iraq: The Triple Marginalisation of Bahdinani Kurdish Literature

It is difficult to claim that there is something called "Kurdish literature" in Iraqi Kurdistan, because at least two different such literatures exist, with the main ones being Sorani and Bahdinani[19]. Each of them has been written in a different Kurdish language and has a different story of emergence and

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[19] Actually, in Iraqi Kurdistan, when the Sorani and Bahdinani scholars refer to their "literatures," they both simply use the phrase "Kurdish literature", without adding the adjective "Sorani" or "Bahdinani". However, Bahdinani scholars use the phrase "in Bahdinan" to signify that they are referring to their literature, whilst Sorani scholars do not add any words to the term "Kurdish literature". This is because, they consider "Kurdish literature" equals their literature, which they claim is written in the Kurdish standard "language", while to them, Bahdinani is written in a minor "dialect" of Kurdish.

development, in such a way that one can hardly find an interaction between the two. This categorisation, thus, is not a heterodox perspective adopted in this research, and the aim is not to construct a wall between the two main literatures. Rather, it is the first necessary step towards making a claim for the specificity and the significance of the marginalised one, namely the Bahdinani literature. This marginalisation is attributed to the policy of successive Iraqi governments and to the Sorani dominance on Kurdish cultural and educational institutions in Iraq, especially prior to 1991. Also, the unsuccessful policy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) towards the Kurdish language in the post 1991 era played a role in this marginalisation, or at least it resulted in isolating Bahdinani literature from the Sorani Kurdish in Iraq and the Kurmanji Kurdish productions beyond its borders. Analysis of this matter throughout this section will help to contextualise the position of Bahdinani literature and to deal with some other relevant issues, such as the question of national identity and that of modernity in the case of Bahdinan.

2.3.1. The Story of Bahdinani in the New Iraq before 1991

As aforementioned, even though Kurmanji, which Bahdinani is a part of, is the most widely spoken Kurdish and the only language (or major dialect) spoken in every part of "Greater Kurdistan", it is considered a minority dialect when compared with the Sorani Kurdish in the Iraqi part (Kreyenbroek, 2005, p. 55). After the end of the First Word War and following the establishment of the Iraqi state, in 1921, Sorani Kurdish was supported by the British Mandate power as the dialect of the majority of the Kurds in Iraq (see: Allison, 2007; Hassanpour, 1992). According to the Local Language Law that was issued by

the Iraqi government in 1931, Sorani officially became the language of education and administration in the Sorani-speaking region. In Bahdinan, the Kurmanji-speaking area of Iraq, the Kurds were deprived of using Kurdish in schools or for official matters, being subordinated to the Arab Mosul *Liwa*, thereby becoming victims of the Arabisation policy (Allison, 2007, p. 141). Despite the Local Language Law giving the right to Kurmanji-speakers to choose their dialect for education and official matters, the Bahdinani people's demands to these ends on various occasions fell upon deaf ears.

During the course of the first half of the 20th century, according to available historical documents reviewed by Musedeq Tovî (1999), there were five attempts to promote Kurmanji Kurdish as an official language in Bahdinan. The first was in 1908, when Ebdulselam Barzanî (1868-1914) motivated a number of Kurdish tribal leaders and religious scholars in Bahdinan to sign what was called as the "Duhok document". It demanded of the Ottoman authorities certain administrative reforms, like considering the Kurdish (Kurmanji) language as the official language in the region, and allowing Kurdish to be taught in all five Kurmanji *qadhas'* schools in Bahdinan that followed the *wilayat* of Mosul (see also: al-Doski, 2007, p. 135). According to Wimmer (2002, p. 170), this was the first time in Kurdish history that someone had demanded "certain elements of a discourse of ethnic representivity". Despite E. Barzanî's demands to reduce the direct rule of the Young Ottomans within the frame of the Ottoman Empire, his attempts were interpreted as a plan against them. Later, after armed clashes and victories of Kurdish rebellion, Barzanî was hung in Mosul in 1914 (al-Doski, 2007; Wimmer, 2002).

The second attempt was in 1922, one year after the establishment of the Iraqi state, when the British vice-consul of the *liwa* of Mosul and its education adviser visited some schools of Amêdiyê *qadha*. The vice-consul, in response to the demands of the local people decided that Kurdish must be taught in the schools of Kurdish *qadhas*, and he commanded Kurdish teachers to translate Arabic education programmes into Kurdish, but the decision did not reflect this on the ground (Tovî, 1999, p. 14). This is probably due to the British authorities at the time urging Kurds to use their own languages in education and administration, subsequently being astonished when they found out there was no standard Kurdish language. Hence, they encouraged the Kurds to approve one dialect as a standard and finding Sorani to be the dialect of the majority of Iraqi Kurds, decided to promote it over Kurmanji.

The third attempt was in 1929, when six Kurdish deputies requested that the Prime Minister of Iraq and the British High Commissioner detach the Bahdinani *qadhas* from the *liwa* of Mosul and establish a new Kurdish *liwa*. The Kurdish deputies also requested for Kurdish to be promoted as an official language in the new *liwa*. However, the request, which was renewed in 1930 as well, was rejected both times (see: Allison, 2007, pp. 141–142; Tovî, 1999, p. 15) Over a decade later, one of the Mela Mistefa Barzanî rebellion's demands to Iraqi government in 1943-1945 was to gather Kurmanji Kurdish *qadhas* that followed Mosul in the *wilayat* of Kurdistan and to consider Kurdish as the official language in Kurdistan (see: Barzani, 2002; Jwaideh, 2006, p. 232). However, none of these five attempts at promoting Kurdish were successful and neither Bahdinani Kurdish nor Sorani Kurdish was used as an official language in the Bahdinan area.

As a result, during the period of the British Mandate (1921-1932) and during the monarchical era (1932-1958), Bahdinani Kurdish in Iraq did not present any cultural productions, except for the works of Kurdish classical poets. Even these poetic works remained unpublished and were circulated only among a limited number of people in *tekyia*s, *medrese*s and mosques. According to Amir Hassanpour's statistic, during 1920-1958 only two books were published in Bahdinani (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 193). However, in contrast to Bahdinan, in the Sorani-speaking areas, in 1919, the British authorities established the first Kurdish printing press and supported Sorani. Over the course of a decade, as Joyce Blau shows, Sorani poetry and prose evolved as a result of contact with the West and translation from its literature, taking it out of its isolation (Blau, 2010, p. 19). Despite in the beginning of the 1940s a few poems of Bahdinani poets being published in Sorani magazines, its cultural transformation did not influence the Bahdinani literature. In general, this remained isolated from the Sorani culture.

One might attribute this isolation to the issue of subjecting Bahdinan to the Arab Mosul *liwa*, which separated Bahdinan administratively, educationally, and culturally from Sorani speaking areas. Whilst it is acknowledged that this factor did play a role in this issue, it is argued here that the principal reason for the non-interaction and isolation is the marked linguistic contrast between Sorani and Bahdinani. These noticeable differences have prevented the process of communication, comprehension, and influence from being easily undertaken. The Kurdologist, Philip G. Kreyenbroek supports this perspective, when referring to the conclusion of D. N. MacKenzie (1926-2001), asserting that the differences between Sorani and Kurmanji are as different as those

between English and German (Kreyenbroek, 2005, p. 55). Whilst for nationalistic reasons, many Kurdish intellectuals would reject the idea of classifying Sorani and Bahdinani as two Kurdish languages, others acknowledge the differences between them as a linguistic fact (see e.g. Haig and Öpengin, 2014)[20]. In this regard, Magin (2012) states that the linguistic differences between Sorani and Bahdinani are sufficient enough that the development of one group in poetry would not necessarily impact on the other. This statement is backed up, for instance, by observing the chronology of the modernity trajectory of Sorani and Bahdinani poetry. That is, the former was modernised in terms of form and content, whilst the latter did not experience this until somewhat later and mostly through witnessing changes in content. As an example of this, the poems of the modern Sorani poet Ebdulla Goran (1904_1962) can be compared with those of any other Bahdinani poet during that period, such as Şêx Xiyaseddîn Neqşebendî (1890-1944), Ehmedê Nalbend (1891-1963), or Enwer Mayî (1913-1963).

At a time when the Kurmanji in Iraq was experiencing a policy of marginalisation and exclusion, in Turkey, it was facing a strict policy of suppression and linguistic cleansing. However, two decades prior to the establishment of Turkey in 1923, Kurmanji was progressing and living in a golden period. For example, the publication of the first Kurdish newspaper in Cairo in 1898 by the Bedirxan family, the publications of Kurdish magazines for the first time in the history of Kurds in Istanbul, such as *Kürd Teavün*

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[20] Regarding this issue, see also Ergin Opengin's interview with Medyascope.tv, published on 13 Jun 2017 on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMf-vDLDsl4

(1908), *Roji Kurd* (1913), *Hetawi Kurd* (1913) and *Jîn* (1918-1919), as well as the introduction of a number of Kurdish books. All of these cultural conditions, led to Kurmanji Kurdish witnessing a remarkable leap forward in its prose (see e.g. Blau, 2010) and also its poetry (see e.g. Balekî, 2005). The first modern Kurdish poetry collection was printed and published by Ebdulrehîm Rehmî Hekarî (1890-1958) (see, e.g. Pîrbal, 2002), alongside Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* as a printed book. However, following the foundation of the Turkish Republican in 1923 until the end of the 1950s, Kurdish experienced a period of linguicide through the Kemalist regime, where using the Kurdish language even at home was forbidden and considered a crime (Blau, 2010, p. 18; Hassanpour, 2012b, p. 56). Consequently, after two decades of using Kurmanji in the press, and following the publication of some prose and books, Kurdish was repressively banned in the Turkish Republic, and the curtain came down on the flourishing period for Kurmanji.

In contrast, Syria, under the rule of the French Mandate, saw relative freedom, which allowed Kurmanji to be published, but not taught in schools. After the emigration of numerous Kurdish elites from Turkey to Damascus, taking advantage of this freedom, the "cultural struggle" of these people began and later, resulted in the evolution of Kurmanji (Blau, 2010; Hirorî, 2010). During the mid 1920s until the mid 1940s, Kurmanji intellectuals published nearly thirty books in Kurmanji in the Latin alphabet (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 212). The brothers Celadet and Kamîran Bedirxan published the Kurdish magazines *Hawar* (1932-1943) and *Ronahî* (1942-1945) along with the weekly newspapers *Roja Nû* (1943-1946) and *Stêr* (1943-1945). These cultural activities led to associations among a number of Kurdish writers, for example,

the poet Qedrî Can (1911-1972), Cegerxwîn (1903-1984) and Osman Sebrî (1905-1993). Some those mentioned above, in particular Qedrî Can and Kamîran Bedirxan, participated effectively in modernising Kurmanji poetry and establishing a new trade for it in Syria (see, e.g. Zengî, 2001).

Despite numerous copies of the Syrian Kurmanji magazines reaching Iraq (see, e.g. Zengî, 1998)[21], their effectiveness was not enough to take the Bahdinani poets out from their isolation. According to the issues of the Syrian Kurmanji press, the participation of Bahdinani writers was very limited. During the period between1932-1943, only four Bahdinani poets wrote poetry for *Hawar* magazine, with three of these, namely, Salih Yosifî (1918-1981), Şêx Memdûh Brîfkî (1911-1976) and Enwer Mayî (1913-1963), being among them (see, e.g. Tovî, 1999). Despite the relatively new content of their poetry, they retained a classical style and literary form. In other words, the modern poetic style of the pioneers Kamîran Bedirxan and Qedrî Can did not inspire the classical or neo-classical Bahdinani poets to adopt theirs. Neither did those who continued publishing their poems in *Hawar* nor those who wrote without publishing their poems, including Hisnî Bamernî (1868-1938), Şêx Xiyaseddîn Neqşebendî (1890-1944), Ehmedê Nalbend (1892-1963) and Şêx Tahirê Şoşî (1917-1962).

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[21] In 1998, drawing on the special archive of Celadet Bedirxan's wife (Rewşen Bedirxan), the Syrian Kurdish writer Dilawerê Zengî published an article about the subscribers to *Hawar* magazine. The article mentioned many names at that time who did so from Bahdinan. Whilst it is not clear when exactly they became subscribers or when they stopped, it does show that people from Bahdinan were amongst the subscribers. See, Abûneyên Kovara Hawar (The Subscribers of *Hawar* Magazine), *Mîdiya*, issues: 34, 35, and 36.

Several reasons could account for the non-existent interaction between the Kurmanji intellectuals of Syria and Iraq, especially among the poets. The new geo-political border between them was one of the significant obstacles, which prevented a close interaction between them. It is also likely that the grand legacy of classical Bahdinani poetry and the poets' long experience with classical poetry did not allow them to accept a modern style of poetry at that time. The third reason, which could be argued as being the most crucial, is that the majority of Syrian Kurmanji publications were written in the Latin alphabet, which made it difficult for classical and neo-classical Bahdinani poets to read them, as they were only familiar with the Arabic alphabet. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the majority of intellectuals in Syria had emigrated from Turkey and chose the Latin alphabet after the Turkish state adopted the same. However, in Iraqi Kurdistan, which remained within the Arabic system, access to the Latin alphabet for the community was not easy, although some members of the Hiwa political party (1937-1946) in Bahdinan were determined to it to teach people (see, Hirorî, 2010, p. 176).

Following the declaration of the Iraqi Republic in 1958, and according to its new constitution, for the first time the Kurds were recognised as partners of the Arabs in Iraq, with the Kurdish language, for a time, being officially encouraged (Allison, 2007; Blau, 2010; Kreyenbroek, 2005). Even though Sorani Kurdish was the first beneficiary of this official encouragement due to its accumulated experience in the press and education, Bahdinani Kurdish, for the first time, received the opportunity to play a role in the Kurdish media. In 1958, the first newspaper in both Bahdinani and Arabic (*Rastî/ Al-Haqiqa*) was published in the *liwa* of Mosul, as well as the first Bahdinani magazine

(Ronahî) being published in Baghdad in 1960, after a struggle with the Iraqi authorities[22]. Kurdish broadcasts in Baghdad devoted a space to Bahdinani Kurdish alongside Sorani, despite some Sorani Kurdish speakers, under the pretext of assembling a Kurdish standard language and protecting the unity of the Kurds, having a dismissive attitude towards this step (Hassanpour, 1992, pp. 159–162; van Bruinessen, 2006, p. 27). Two years later, the official encouragement for the Kurdish language stopped, and tensions between the Kurdish Nationalist Movement and Iraqi government took hold again. Nonetheless, the first two years of Bahdinani writing and broadcasting in Baghdad were considered the basis for promoting Bahdinani Kurdish and its development in Iraq.

In 1970, precisely two years following the Ba'ath coup d'état in 1968, the Adar Agreement between the new Iraqi government and the Kurdish Nationalist Movement was signed, with the Kurdish language being recognised as the second official language of Iraq (Kreyenbroek, 2005, p. 60). Despite the agreement, in reality, continuing for just four years, and Sorani Kurdish becoming the de facto official language, this period could reasonably be considered as a renaissance for Bahdinani Kurdish in Iraq. Two main events in Bahdinan, in particular, played a prodigious role in this renaissance: First, in terms of administrative issues, due to the pressure of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement on the Iraqi government, in 1969, the majority of the Bahdinan region became detached from the Arab Mosul *Liwa* and gathered under the newly created Kurdish governorate (Duhok). Secondly, in terms of cultural

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[22] For the details about the story of publishing *Ronahî* magazine and the difficulties that it faced, see Hafiz Qazî's *Bîrhatin* (*Memories),* 2004.

change, a branch of the Union of Kurdish Writers was established in Duhok in 1971, which inspired Kurmanji writers from all Bahdinani *qadhas* effectively to engage in the promotion of Bahdinani Kurdish literature as a national duty[23]. Thus, the real flourishing of Bahdinani started after this political transformation, which opened the door to administrative changes that provided cultural opportunities for writing and publishing in Bahdinani.

However, again, many Soranists were against the idea of writing and publishing in Bahdinani, as they claimed that this action would divide the "Kurdish standard language". The Bahdinani intellectuals, in response, argued that even assuming that they were able to write in Sorani Kurdish, it would be a pointless activity as the people of Bahdinan were not able to comprehend it (Tahir, 2013). They also believed that Soranising Bahdinan under the name of Kurdishness would lose the opportunity of promoting Kurmanji as the dialect of the majority of Kurds in Greater Kurdistan (ibid). Ultimately and after a long struggle with the Soranists, who occupied the majority of Kurdish cultural institutions in Iraq, a number of books were restrictively published in Bahdinani[24]. One of the prominent Bahdinani scholars and linguists in this arena was Sadiq Behaeddîn Amêdî (1918-1982), who theorised and played a crucial role in reviving Bahdinani Kurdish language and literature. To many Kurdish authors, he was like a spiritual father of Bahdinani. Not only did he promote, for he also struggled to defend Bahdinani against the dismissive attitudes of Soranists, in Baghdad, in particular (see, e.g. Ebdulmecîd, 2014).

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[23] For example, see Findî (2007) and Tahir (2000).

[24] Several Kurmanji writers on different occasions have stated how they faced difficulties when they attempted publishing Bahdinani books. For example, see Zero (2013).

Amêdî collected many manuscripts of classical Kurmanji poets from Bahdinan and other parts of Kurdistan, whilst also publishing some important books about Kurmanji literary heritage, like: *Dîwana Pertûyê Hekarî* (Pertûyê Hekarî's Diwan Poetry) (1978), *Nûbihara Seydayê Xanî* (The Nûbihar of the Teacher Xanî) (1979), *Hozanvanêt Kurd* (The Kurdish Poets) (1980), *Mewlîda Melayê Bateyî* (Melayê Bateyî's Mewlîd) (1982). He also, very importantly, wrote *Îdyemêt Kurdî* (Kurdish Idioms) (1973), then *Rêzmana Kurmanci* (The grammar of Kurmanji) (1976), and finally, he wrote an expanded edition of Kurmanji grammar compared to that of Sorani, which was published after his death: *Rêzmana Kurdî: Kurmanciya Jorî û Jêrî ya Havberkirî* (The grammar of Northern and Southern Kurmanji) (1987) (see, e.g. Badî, 1999; Sindî, 1983). During this stage of Kurdish cultural life, in addition to collecting manuscripts of Kurmanji classical and neo-classical poets, plentiful oral Bahdinani literature was collected and published by many writers. According to Ridênî's bibliography about Bahdinani writers, nearly 20 of them published books / collections of the oral Bahdinani literature genres (Ridênî, 2006). Also, Bahdinani collections of modern poetry, short stories and plays were published for the first time in Iraq.

Despite the dismissive attitude of many Soranists towards Bahdinani writings, the Iraqi government did not really distinguish between the two languages in the context of supporting or not supporting Kurdish publications. This neutrality, indeed, gave the chance to Bahdinani to be relatively well published in spite of the obstacles raised by the Soranists. The Iraqi government's unbiased stance, however, was interpreted by Sorani speakers as a part of the Iraqi government's conspiracy to show that there was no unified Kurdish

language, but rather, only diverse dialects. They seemed to forget the fact that in the Iraqi constitution, it was already recognised that the Kurdish language was an official language in Iraq, and that the education programmes were written in Sorani Kurdish. However, even assuming that the Soranists' claim might carry a part of the truth, the existence of two Kurdish dialects or languages in Iraq was and still is, an undeniable fact. Observing this issue in a broader context illustrates that writing in Bahdinani was not a part of a conspiracy, at least from its side.

Outside of the state of Iraq, during the same pre-1991 period, the literary and non-literary productions of Bahdinani writers never stopped. Moreover, many Bahdinani publications were supported by the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, in particular. Prior to 1991, more than 20 Bahdinani authors published their books outside of Iraq. Ridênî's bibliography lists a number of writers, with the place where their works were published, including Iran, Syria, the Lebanon, Sweden and Germany (see Ridênî, 2006). This indicates that writing and publishing in Bahdinani was not a part of an Iraqi regime conspiracy against the Kurdish language. It is held here that, interpreting this issue as a conspiracy theory does not shed light on what truly occurred. Rather, it should be understood in light of the cultural and national rights of people, who wanted to express themselves via their own language and not through one imposed upon them.

It is worth mentioning that a few years after the Adar Agreement, when the Bahdinan region's schools like other parts of Iraqi Kurdistan submitted to the Sorani Kurdish education programmes, they complained against Sorani

Kurdish and preferred to study in Arabic, as before, instead. Whilst it is not undeniable that the Iraqi regime urged parents to complain against Sorani Kurdish, people themselves were also receptive to this step and signed petitions about it. This does not mean that the Bahdinani people were against the Kurdishness, but rather, they found that Sorani was strange and difficult for them to understand. Between the two foreign languages, Sorani Kurdish and Arabic, they preferred the latter, because they had experience of it through the education system since the establishment of the Iraqi state. Also, whilst Sorani was hard for pupils, it was a big challenge for the teachers as well, many of whom only understood Bahdinani Kurdish and Arabic. At the end of the period, only one school amongst all the primary and secondary institutions continued to teach Sorani, with the rest returning to Arabic. In this regard, the Bahdinani Kurdish elites were not happy with the decision of the people; however, they received a clear message that learning and teaching as well as writing in Bahdinani Kurdish was not only a national right, but also, a national duty to pursue in order to counter the influence of Arabic.

2.3.2. The Story of Bahdinani post 1991

With the Kurdish uprising against the Ba'ath regime in 1991 and the subsequent establishment of a security zone across much of Iraqi Kurdistan by international forces in 1992, Iraqi Kurds began ruling themselves and enjoying freedom. Whilst it was an "unknown freedom" (Blau, 2010, p. 28) and a "freedom with fear" (Omer, 2013, p. 63), it progressively changed the majority of the aspects political and cultural life in Iraqi Kurdistan, including the status of language and literature. In terms of how it affected political life,

numerous political parties and a variety of organisations engaged in a new democratic life in the territory. The Kurdish people participated in general elections and voted for establishing the first Kurdish parliament in their history, which resulted in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the setting up of institutions across different levels. The creation of new Kurdish universities in the major cities was one of these developments[25]. Throughout Kurdish cultural life, alongside personal publications, the majority of the Kurdish political parties published newspapers and magazines, with some of them even launching local radio stations and television programmes. Furthermore, a notable number of private and government printing presses appeared[26]. All of these new changes resulted in the crystallisation of a new flourishing linguistic and literary landscape in Iraqi Kurdistan. The new political and cultural transformations liberated the three Kurdish governorates (Duhok, Erbil and Sulaimaniya) from Arabisation, whilst also, to a large degree, in subsequent years, liberating Bahdinani from the ascendancy of Sorani (see e.g. Hassanpour, 2012).

In terms of this linguistic alteration, following the withdrawal of the Ba'ath authorities from Kurdish areas, the process of the "Kurdicisation" of the education system and administration began. This step provoked friction between the Sorani and Bahdinani, but did allow the latter speakers, for the first time, to use their dialect successfully. According to the population of each

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[25] For more information about theses transformations of Iraqi Kurdistan, see Mahir A. Aziz (2014), *The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan,* I.B.Tauris: London – New York.

[26] See, for example, Joyce Blau (2010).

dialect in an area, the geographical borderlines between Sorani and Kurmanji (Bahdinani) populations were "spontaneously" drawn. The Bahdinani region was successful in using Kurmanji as the language of the curricula in primary schools. However, it could not achieve this goal entirely until the beginning of the 2000s. Prior to this time, due to the political and administrative challenges, this process did not go smoothly and went through different stages. After the liberation of 1991, the Bahdinani region, like other parts of the Iraqi Kurdistan, submitted to replacing its schoolbooks from Arabic into Sorani Kurdish, as the only available option at that time. Then, for many reasons, including to the difficulty of Sorani Kurdish to the teachers and students as well as because of the complaints and pressure of the Bahdinani masses, the school textbooks turned into Kurmanji alongside Sorani. Later, after a struggle, the education system in primary schools became completely Kurmanji. In 2007, the Bahdinani region gradually started transforming the high school textbooks into Kurmanji despite fierce opposition from the authorities on the Sorani side.

Meanwhile, after the process of using Kurmanji textbooks in high school had just started, in 2008, a group of 53 Soranists, who identified themselves as "Kurdish writers, literary figures and academics", signed and published a petition urging the highest authorities of the Kurdistan Regional Government to adopt the Sorani dialect as the only Kurdish language that deserved to be used in education and administration[27]. They, as Hassan Ghazi (2009) points out, confusingly used and mixed the concepts like "standard", "official", "state" and "unified". They called for establishing a national institution for studying

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[27] For more information about this petition and its English translation, see Ghazi (2009)

and archiving Kurmanji and other Kurdish dialects. The petitioners claimed that using Kurmanji and Sorani would divide the Kurdish nation. However, this is exactly the opposite to the truth, especially, if the linguistic landscape of Kurdistan is taken into account, as Hassanpour (2012b) puts it. Supporting Bahdinani/Kurmanji in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in the age of communication technologies, would mean contributing and giving support to the language of nearly 75% of the Kurds, who speak Kurmanji in Turkish, Syrian and Iranian Kurdistan as well as in Armenia. The opportunity for supporting Kurmanji would strengthen the position of Kurdish in other parts of Kurdistan, especially given that the new Iraqi constitution officially recognised Kurdish as one the official languages of Iraq. The attitude of this 53 Soranists received condemnation not only from Bahdinan, but also from other parts of Kurdistan and further afield. Meanwhile, the KRG itself has not taken sides or an official attitude towards this friction, it let the whole education system in Bahdinan to become Kurmanji.

This step and the earlier initiatives that the Bahdinani institutions had taken, indeed, helped Bahdinani to flourish quickly, and positively affect the cultural sphere of the region. In terms of literary and cultural activities, the new transformation in Iraqi Kurdistan paved the way for the newly established Bahdinani institutions to construct bridges with other Kurmanji speaking areas outside of Iraq. For instance, in addition to the *Nûbûn* magazine, some of the important Bahdinani magazines, such as *Metîn* and *Peyv*, allocated a number of their pages to publishing cultural materials in Latin script, the commonly circulated script in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan. This, along with other activities, such as organising cultural events and festivals, gave a mutual

opportunity for Kurmanji writers and poets in each part of Kurdistan to cross

borders and participate in the evolving Kurmanji[28]. Whilst the purpose of this

bridge building was to enhance the new de facto position of Bahdinani, it could

be read as a message to the Sorani institutions that Bahdinani had its own

linguistic, geographical, historical and cultural depth with Kurmanji in Turkey

and Syria.

However, despite all of these literary and cultural activities, Bahdinani

literature has faced serious obstacles in terms of cultural communication with

the Kurmanji speakers outside of Iraq and vice versa. After being liberated

form the policy of Arabisation and partly from the dominance of Sorani,

Bahdinani institutions have not removed the obstacle of an ununified script,

with the neighbouring Kurmanji outside of Iraqi Kurdistan, as yet.

Approximately 95% of Bahdinani literary productions are written in Arabic

script, which is inaccessible to the Kurmanji speakers of Turkey and Syria,

who only use Latin script. At the same time, Bahdinani readers are not familiar

with the latter script, meaning they do not read Kurmanji productions in it.

Whilst there were some important steps taken by Bahdinani institutions, as

have been set out above, they were not sufficient to link Bahdinani with the

other parts of Kurdistan[29].

This can basically be attributed to the policy or non-policy of the Kurdistan

Regional Government, which up until now has been hesitant to link Bahdinan

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[28]About crossing borders between Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan and their influence on Kurmanji culture, see Clemence Scalbert-Yucel's paper: Les dynamiques d'intégration d'une littérature pankurde - Réflexions à partir de l'espace turco-irakien (2014).

[29] Including transferring some literary works from Latin into Arabic script and vice versa.

with its Kurmanji depth outside of Iraq. Presumably, one of the principal reasons is political, as the majority of the other Kurmanji are pro or under the political hegemony of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is not in harmony with the KRG. Otherwise, through its education system, the KRG, for instance, would simply add a mandatory textbook in Latin script, crossing the obstacle of alphabet and closing the distance between both sides. Whatever the reasons behind this ambivalent attitude are, as a result, after more than 25 years of self-rule, Bahdinani literature remains isolated and circulated mostly within its area, marginalised and invisible to the other Kurds inside and outside of Iraqi Kurdistan. Neither the Sorani, nor the neighbouring Kurmanji, pay attention to this literature. However, as will be demonstrated on the next section, Bahdinani literature emerged more than two centuries that of before Sorani. In other words, the label "smallness" that might describe Bahdinani literature according to its current situation, cannot be attributed to its lack of a genuine history, but rather, it is as a result of particular political transformations of the region in the modern times.

2.4. The Dominance of Poetry in the Bahdinani Literary Scene

2.4.1. From Classical to Neo-Classical Poetry: The Power of Roots

The story of Bahdinani literature is similar to that of most literatures in the Middle East. It all began with poetry, or at least that is what history tells us. In the Kurdish case, Joyce Blau (2010, p. 3) points out that the beginnings of Kurdish written literature being unclear owing to many manuscripts having been destroyed. She attributes this unknowing to the conflict on Kurdistan's territory throughout its history, which led to much destruction of the written

narrative. In the Bahdinani case, in particular, Fadil Omer (2005) argues that the dissemination of the Yezidi religion in Bahdinan was another factor that caused a paucity of writing in this region, thus allowing its beginnings to become obscured. He explains how the Yezidi do not allow written religious texts to be saved, and this had an effect on the writing of Kurdish texts as well (Omer, 2005, p. 23). Though Blau's point is reasonable as the historical evidences support it, Omer's one is refutable. Firstly, this is because the religion that has dominated Bahdinan and other parts of Kurdistan for more than one thousand years has been and still is Islam. Secondly, the tradition of memorising Yezidi religious texts and keeping them unwritten lately appeared as a reaction to the attacks on Yezidis when their religious texts became a target for burning. Thus, the argument regarding the dissemination of the Yezidi in Bahdinan and its impact is not strong enough to provide an explanation for what Omer calls it the "delaying" of the process of writing in that region.

Moreover, there are no notable differences between what the history saved for the Kurds, whether in Bahdinan, where most of the Yezidis lived, or in Botan, where relatively few resided. First, in both places, all of the surviving ancient Kurdish written literatures were in the form of classical poetry. Second, despite the geographical distance and privacy of the political condition in each region, the poets who wrote these classical texts were contemporaneous to each other. For instance, Botan Principality offered Melayê Cizîrî (1567-1640), whilst in the same century, in Bahdinan Principality, Şemseddînê Exlatî (1588-1674) produced his work. Both are considered prominent classic poets and they had their undeniable impact on Kurmanji poetry. However, the influence

of the former is more obvious. Put differently, the first Kurdish written literatures saved by history, whether in Botan or in Bahdinan, were in synchronisation, and the Yezidi religion did not deny the process of Kurdish writing in Bahdinan.

In comparison with many other parts of Kurdistan, the historical evidence shows that Bahdinan Principality had a rich cultural life and writing poetry in Kurdish was one of its literary norms. During his visit to Bahdinan in the mid of 17th century, the Ottoman traveller Avliya Çelebi (1611-1682) in his *Siyahatname* (The Book of Travels) witnessed that the people of the principality were very proud of their language. According to him, they believed that Kurdish was a sacred language, because the prophet Younis (Jonah) spoke it. Also, they believed that it was, besides Arabic, the language of the people of Paradise. Çelebî adds that Bahdinani was a dialect amongst many other Kurdish ones, describing it as clear, nice and smooth. Their people, he continues, wrote poetry in Kurdish and very much in the following poetic forms: pênc-beytî, muselles, murebbe', muxemmes, museddes, musebbe' and musemmen. In addition to this important information about Bahdinani poetry, he gives a lively picture of the people of *Amêdiyê*, mentioning their love of poetry. He records that in the days of Newroz, "all people, scholars and non-scholars, adults and children, stand on roads, meet and read poems to each other". Such a clear image of this unique carnivalesque calibration shows the prestigious position of poetry in Bahdinan. This also demonstrates it being an old tradition and when compared with Sorani poetry, it emerged more than two centuries earlier.

Such strong relationships between the Bahdinani people and Kurdish poetry might become less surprising, if we made cognisant of the fact that not only the religious scholars, but also the princes of Bahdinan supported it. In addition to the positive impact of the circulated religious thoughts in enhancing Kurdish as a "sacred language", the princes of Bahdinan adopted a policy that helped creating a strong cultural infrastructure in the region. This can be observed through the number of mosques, medreses, tekyas, and children schools that they set up. During his visit to Amêdiyê, Çelebî documented many important manifestations of its cultural life[30]. For example, he listed in some detail the names of eight *medrese*s: Qazî, Emîr Haj, Zêbarê, Muradxaniye (Murad Xan), Mem Xan, Melik Ezdîn, Seyid Xan, and Sultan Husên (Qubehan) medrese. Once, for instance, he refers to Emîr Haj *Medrese*, stating that it had a great library that contained ten thousand select and valuable books. Also, he impressively describes the most famous medrese, Qubehan, writing that it was big like a "castle", with 16 durable domes, consisting of 60 *hucra*s. He adds that almost always there were 300-400 students studing all kinds of science and art, "from the science of Aristotle to the science of nature". He concludes by saying that he "travelled 11 years in Kurdistan, but he never saw any medreses like this". In such a cultural

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[30] All information about Avlia Çelebi's visit to Bahdinan are quoted and translated from Nizar Eyûb Gulî's article: *Ji Hozanvanêt Kevinêt Behdînan* (From the Old Bahdinani Poets), 2016. The first Sorani translation of *Siyahetname* by Se'îd Nakam (1979), did not include Çelebi's travel to Bahdinan! Also, R. Findî's translation of *Siyahetname* from the Sorani version into Arabic in (2008) and (2014) did not include his visit to Bahdinan. Probably, as Gulî comments, Nakam and later Findî depended on the first printed edition of *Siyahetname* by Ahmet Cevdet (Istanbul 1896-1901), which is for unknown reasons did not included Çelebi's visit to Bahdinan.

atmosphere, Bahdinani poetry grew up and found for itself a prestige status amongst the elite as well as the public.

The classical poetry of Bahdinan fundamentally originated from *medrese*s and shared common characteristics with the Kurmanji classical poetry in other areas in terms of form and content. During the authority of the Bahdinan Principality, which, as aforementioned, lasted approximately 500 years, from the 14th century until 1842, there were a number of famous *medrese*s that produced manuscript books (Mizûrî, E., 2014, pp. 7–12). Regardless of the Amêdiyë medreses that Çelebî mentioned them, according to Mizûrî's research, were: Mayê, Brîfka, Ribetkê, The Big Mosque of Duhok, Geliyê Ruman, Etrûş and Hêtût (ibid). All of these *medrese*s were mainly built on a religious basis and presented an Islamic culture, mostly in Arabic and Persian, except for poetry, which was in Kurdish and this was sometimes mixed with Persian, Arabic and/or Turkish. The phenomenon of mixing more than one language or using foreign words with Kurdish was very common in Kurdish classical poetry, which at that time was considered as a feature of the ability of classic poets. The dominant discourse of most poetry was a religious Sufi one.

In order to describe clearly the scene of Kurdish classical poetry in the era of the Bahdinan Principality, it is deemed appropriate here to group the classical poets together according to the areas to which their *medrese*s belonged. In this regard, four areas or zones were identified. The first is that of Amêdiyê, the capital city of the principality, which includes all the *medrese*s that Çelebî has mentioned them. So far, only the names of the following poets were saved from

the history: Hemîdî (lived in the 16th century)[31], which considered the oldest Bahdinani and Kurdish poets, Mela Remezanê Ebbasî (lived in the mid of the 17th century)[32] Mihemed Teyar Pasha (?–1817), Mela Mensûrê Girgashî (from the 18th century), Hemkê Tovî (from the 18th century), Bekir Begê Erizî (1731 - 1835), and Mihemed Se'îdê Mîhrî (1795 – 1883). The second one is the zone of Brîfka, which includes the *medrese*s of Brîfka and Hêtût. One of the oldest poets in this zone and in Bahdinan is Şêx Şemseddînê Exlatî (1588-1674), the founder of this *medrese* and after him came his grandchild, the famous poet Şêx Noreddînê Brîfkî (1790-1850). The third zone is Akrê, which presented the poets Xalid Husênê Zêbarî (1756-1805), Seyfiyê Şoşî (lived between the 18th and 19th century) and Ebdulselam Mela Ebdullayê Barzanî (?-1884). The fourth zone, in the era of the Bahdinan Principality, was Mayê and delivered the poet Feq Hamidê Mayî (lived between the 18th and 19th century).

After the collapse of the Bahdinan Principality in 1842, the region saw a clear literary stagnation, extending for approximately 80 years. During this long era, only one poet appeared from the Mayê zone, namely Şêx Tahayê Mayî (1843-1919). After this discontinuity, some new classical poets appeared between the first quarter of the 20th century up until the beginning of the 1970s. Whilst the majority of them were Mela and Şêxs with religious backgrounds, a national discourse comprising a realistic tone alongside a religious perspective appeared in some of their poems. However, the impact of

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[31] Only one manuscript of his poems was published by Mesûd Kitanî in *Peyv* magazine in 1998. The researcher Se'îd Dêreşî believes that he lived in the era of Sultan Husên Welî (1533-1573) as the poet clearly mentioned the name of this sultan. For more information, see Dêreşî (2013).

[32] Nothing left from his poetry unless the poem that Evliya Çelebî published in his *Siyahetname*. For more information about him, see (Gulî, N., 2016)

classical language in their poems did not disappear and the language, to some extent, became closer to the language of ordinary people. In this period, as mentioned previously, the Bahdinani Kurdish language did not have the opportunity to be taught in schools or published, unlike Sorani Kurdish and hence, the only dominant genre in the literary landscape of Bahdinan remained classical and neo-classical poetry. The following new classical poets are examples of that era: Hisnî Bamernî (1869-1938), Şêx Xiyaseddîn Neqşebendî (1890-1944), Ehmedê Nalbend (1891-1963), Enwer Mayî (1913-1963), Şêx Memdûh Brîfkî (1911-1976) and Salih Yosifî (1918-1981), whilst later came Sebrî Botanî (1927-1998) and Bedirxan Sindî (b.1943)[33].

2.4.2. The Faces of Contemporary Bahdinani Poetry: The Will for Change

After nearly half a century of near silence and living in the shadows, Bahdinani writers exploited the first real opportunity to perform their language loudly in a variety of literary forms. According to the Adar Agreement between the Kurds and the central government in 1970, Sorani as the de facto Kurdish language was taught in Bahdinani schools for a few years, but Bahdinani intellectuals began writing their literary works only in their language, producing their own discourse and articulating Kurdish national identity. Whilst they wrote texts for a number of different areas of literature, due to its historical roots and the nature of eastern communities, in general, poetry remained the dominant genre. The modernisation of Bahdinani poetry started quite recently in comparison with Sorani in Iraq or with Kurmanji in Syria, for various reasons,

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[33] A number of the mentioned poets remained writing as classical poets, using the language and discourse of Sufism, such as Şêx Tahirê Şoşî (1917-1962).

as mentioned previously. Moreover, during its trajectory from the 1970s until now, its face has changed in accordance with the Bahdinani community.

2.4.2.1. Modern Bahdinani Poetry 1970-1991

Some years after the March Declaration (*Beyana Yazdey Adarê*) of 1970 between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish National Movement, Bahdinani Kurdish began progressing at the cultural level, especially in the literary world. Actually, for the Kurds of Bahdinan, literature was the only available way to use their language in its written form. The establishment of the Duhok branch of the Union of Kurdish Writers (*Êketiya Nivîserên Kurd*) in 1971 had a significant role in promoting this language. Prior to this time, as previously discussed, Bahdinani Kurdish had been marginalised by the Sorani institutions, and it was presented by them as an oral dialect of Kurdish that should be used for songs and needed to be treated as a part of folklore[34]. The union started undertaking a variety of cultural activities, such as organising seminars on linguistic and literary issues, managing events for poetry and story readings, and holding daily meetings between the active members, thus making it a vital centre for promoting Bahdinani (see: Findî, 2014). These activities motivated Bahdinani authors to publish their literary productions and to take advantage of the new political situation after 1970. However, they struggled until the dominant Sorani Kurdish cultural institutions published for them. The former chief of the Union of Kurdish Writers in Duhok, Ehmed Zero

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[34] It was a common saying among the Sorani cultural milieu pre-1991, and many Sorani intellectuals still support the idea that Bahdinani should be archived and Sorani should be promoted as the only Kurdish language that deserves to be used in education and administration. See, for example, the petition of the 53 Sorani intellectuals, who demanded that the authorities of the KRG announce the Sorani dialect as the "Standardised Kurdish language" and called for the archiving of other Kurdish dialects in Iraq (53 Writers, 2008).

(2013, p. 10), explained how pre-1991, Kurdish writers in Bahdinan were in a difficult situation in terms of publishing their literature. The union, he added, several times formally complained against the Soranists, who occupied positions of cultural responsibility, which caused tensions between them and Bahdinani authors.

Amongst this sensitive atmosphere of the ascendency of Sorani, and the hegemony of Arabisation, especially in the education system, the new generation of Bahdinani poets emerged. They, alongside the old generation, who started writing in 1960s, took advantage of every opportunity to use Bahdinani[35]. In the case of minorities' literature, as Pascale Casanova (2004) emphasises, the use of language always carries political and national ties. This is absolutely true for the case of Bahdinani literature. During the 1970s and 1980s, the question of national identity, especially through the use of language, became very important in Bahdinan. It was considered both a challenge against the policy of Arabisation and also against the ascendancy of Soranists and their side lining of Bahdinani. By using language through creative writing, alongside reviving Kurmanji literature through collecting and investigating manuscripts and oral cultural heritage, as mentioned previously, this literature promoted the language and thus, made it relatively familiar among the people of Bahdinan.

Surprisingly, in her review of the written Kurdish literature in Iraq between 1958-1990, Blau (2010, p. 22-24) does not mention any Bahdinani authors,

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[35] There was a circulated saying coming from the Kurmanji poet Sebrî Botanî (1927- 1998), which encouraged Bahdinani authors to write anything they could, even swear words.

nor the progress that was taking place in Kurmanji Kurdish in Iraq. However, from 1970 onwards, a number of Bahdinani figures played a significant role in establishing and developing the new literature in Bahdinan. Within the short story genre, which was relatively a new form in Bahdinan, the roles of figures like Enwer Mihemed Tahir, Îbrahîm Selman, Nizar Mihemed Sei'd, Celal Mistefa and Mihemed Selîm Swarî were considerable[36]. In the poetry genre, which is the only one that has deep roots in Kurdish cultural heritage, several new prominent poets emerged, such as Ebdulrehman Mizûrî, Feysel Mistefa, Xelîl Duhokî, and Mueyed Teyib. They, for the first time, wrote Bahdinani poetry in a modern style and transferred the neo-classical forms and their content into a modern form[37]. This step ended a long period of writing in the traditional style of poetry in Bahdinan, which, in comparison to Sorani poetry, was very late (Ebdulla, S., 2012, p. 184; Omer, 2001, p. 49).

Following the work of these figures many new names participated in this process and imitated the new style. Regarding the number of Bahdinani "poets" who published their productions in the Kurdish press between 1970 and 1991, Îmad W. Xalid (2004, pp. 183–191) gathered statistics, which show that between 1970 and 1975 there were 19 poets, while between 1975 and 1980 this number rose to 39, but then, between 1980 and 1991 the number sharply increased to 365 poets. However, some of those "poets" only published one poem, and many others wrote their poems in a prosaic style,

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[36] For more information about the Kurdish short story and its progress in Bahdinan, see: Xalid Salih's book *Kurte Çîroka Kurdî li Devera Behdinan, 1960 - 2005* (The Kurdish Short Story in Bahdinan, 1960-2005) (2016).

[37] During earlier stages, Bedirxan Sindî had some modern poems, but only in terms of content. What I mean here are both the form and content together.

which makes it difficult to consider them as real poets. On the other hand, and this is the point, their huge number indicates the popularity of poetry, and their writers' will to use their language, if they were allowed to do so[38].

If in Kurdish classical poetry, as Ahmadzadeh (2003) points out, it is difficult to see a distinct Kurdish identity that makes this poetry separate from Arabic, Persian or Turkish poetry[39], in neo-classical poetry and later in modern Kurdish poetry this is not the case. In neo-classical Bahdinani poetry, an ambivalence between religious and national discourses can be observed. Whilst in the modern form, a thematic and formal transformation can be seen in favour of a Kurdish national identity. One figurehead, E. Mizûrî, as well as playing a pioneering role in establishing a new style of writing poetry with an apparent national discourse, also participated in the dissemination of the theoretical concepts of his poetry. For example, in terms of metre and rhythm, Mizûrî emphasised a free style of poetry based on rhythmical units from Kurdish folklore[40]. He and other poets, such as M. Teyib, abandoned the use of Arabic metre (*Aroz*) or any other kinds of traditional style of neo-classical poetry. They also stripped their poetic language of foreign words, especially Arabic ones, so that their own language dominated Bahdinani Kurdish poetry[41]. The new generation of poets, hence, used a pure Kurdish language

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[38] The main driver behind the increase in the number of poets was *Bizav* weekly newspaper, which was published in Bahdinani Kurdish for only one year. Ehmed Zero attributes the reasons for its closure to some intelligence reports from Soranists, see (Ehmed Zero, ibid).

[39] This is, as he justifies, due to its sharing the same perspective of Islam and neo-Platonism, with the common traditions of poetry (see Ahmadzadeh, p. 140-141).

[40] For example, see Ebd86.

[41] For example, the neo-classical poets, such as Ehmedê Nalbend (1891- 1963) and Şêx Memdûh Brîfkî (1911- 1976), used Arabic words in their poems.

in order to demonstrate a distinct Bahdinani poetry, and to show a cultural difference in light of the dominance of Arabic culture.

The significance of the new poetic transformation is not only important owing to the value of its new literary form, but also, regarding its content as a national value. Thematically, this poetry participated in constructing a Kurdish national identity with a noticeable disappearance of religious discourse (see Mihemed, 2005). The majority of the new generation of pioneering poets, unlike most of those from the previous the neo-classical period, did not graduate from mosques, *tekya*s or religious *medrese*s. They were students or graduates from universities, which helped them to connect with contemporary culture and read Arabic modern poetry as well as Arabic translations of western literature. In understanding contemporary poetry and the impact of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, the new generation have been inspired to emphasise the specificity of some elements of Kurdish ethnicity, such as those associated with a specific homeland, "Kurdistan", as well as with common Kurdish myths and historical memories. Kurdish poets have also tried symbolically to depict non-Kurds as oppressive occupiers of Kurdish land. The Kurdish poets of this period believed that poetry alongside the work of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement invoked, built, and reproduced Kurdish national identity.

The relative freedom of cultural activities during the period of the March Declaration 1970-1974 paved the way for creating a solid foundation to Bahdinani poetry and thus, for Kurdish interests gradually to be renewed. After the Kurdish Nationalist Movement was terminated in 1975, the Iraqi government adopted a strict cultural policy towards Kurdistan, but, as S.

Ebdulla (2012, p. 161) points out, it could not prevent the course of the development of Kurdish poetry. Whilst some Kurdish periodicals and newspapers were closed, and publications were subjected to a strict censorship, thus limiting freedom of expression in comparison to before, Kurdish writers resorted to continue writing their literary works, but with an ambiguous style, in order to pass censorship. The new policy of the Iraqi government had negative ramifications in terms of freedom; however, it provided Kurdish poetry with the opportunity to add extra aesthetic components. For example, the poetic language of Kurdish poetry became more symbolic, and the poets reduced the usage of the direct style, especially in the transformational period from the neo-classical stage to the stage of contemporaneity. This will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

2.4.2.2. Modernist Bahdinani Poetry - Post 1991

In terms of this literary revolution, the remarkable thing in Bahdinan was the emergence of a new orientation in literature in the form of modernity, especially in poetry. Whilst the phenomenon of claiming modernity in Sorani poetry goes back to the beginning of the 1970s[42], it only started in Bahdinan in the mid 1990s, when a group of poets from Duhok appeared and called themselves *Nûkirin Herûher* (Renewal Forever), whilst another group from Akrê, who called themselves "*Gropê Akrê*" followed them, adopting their same thoughts on modernity. These groups, through the influence of Arabic translations of Western modernist literature and by taking advantage of Arab modernity itself, had the power to change the intellectual and artistic structure

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[42] After the March Agreement in 1970, two groups of poets in Kirkuk and Kifrî emerged calling for modernity. See, E. Serwer (2012).

of Bahdinani poetry. In spite of both groups' justification being to modernise literature and to improve the Kurdish community, both were strongly criticised by academics, intellectuals and the political establishment in Bahdinan. Some academics criticised their claim to modernity as a kind of imitation of the Arab experience of this, which was essentially a clone of Western literature and not a natural consequence of a historical stage, as they claimed[43]. Furthermore, in the name of protecting the sacred religious and national symbols as well as in defence of Kurdish heritage, conservative intellectuals had a dismissive attitude towards their perspectives of modernity. Due to these reasons and political pressures, the modernist poets were unable to continue working in groups, but as individuals they were not stopped.

The political transformation of 1991 and its consequences in Iraqi Kurdistan inspired the members of *Renewal Forever* to rethink the function of literature, in general, and poetry, in particular. They, and later the group of Akrê, believed that after the liberation, Bahdinani poetry should not remain as an instrument in the hands of politics, as it was before 1991. Instead, the Kurdistan Regional Government and its national institutions should play this role. The true function of poetry, according to them, was to play a literary role and concentrate on the aesthetic issues, forming doubts and questions around sacred things, thus meaning poets should not give the same answers as before[44]. The implementation of these concepts was reflected through complicated and ambiguous expressions, which created a kind of alienation between the

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[43] In this regard, a debate between academics from the University of Duhok and modernist poets from Duhok and Akrê was published in the *Metîn* periodical; see issues: 71, 72 and 74 (1997-1998)

[44] Arif Hîto in an interview (cited from Ziyab, 2005).

modernist poets and the Bahdinani audience, who for the first time were hearing poems that conflicted with their poetic memory. In other words, due to the new complicated expressions of poetry and the dismissive attitude of committed writers towards this literary tendency, the popularity of poetry did not remain the same. The inconsistency between their literary works as modernists and their actual social and political behaviour created a vast gap between them and their audience.

The disconnect between the modernist poets' discourse[45] and their real attitudes as well as the audience's difficulty in receiving and understanding the new modernist poetry, led to a thick wall being created between the two parties. Despite such poets always claiming that the audience was not important for them and that they were writing for elite audiences or for the future of poetry[46], this position demonstrates a type of retreat from their original stance. Hoşeng Şêx Mihemed (2005, p. 75)) points out that even though at the beginning they had called for modernity, which emphasises individualism, they could not move forward. Even though they dealt with national issues, they continued using their modernist poetic techniques, which meant they could not move closer to the audience. Furthermore, technological developments and the increase of alternative entertainment, meant that globalisation strongly participated in expanding the gap between Kurdish audiences and poetry, despite the popularity of the latter in the long literary

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[45] Whether this be in the discourse of their poems, the discourse of their writings, in general, or even their interviews.

[46] In more than one interview they adopted this opinion.

and political history amongst the Kurds. These matters will be considered in detail in chapter four.

2.4.2.3. Bahdinani Pop Poetry

In such an atmosphere of losing the audience of Kurdish poetry, which coincided with the era of post-modernism and globalisation, a new literary tendency of Kurdish poets with a poor literary background gradually emerged within the popular milieus. Under the name of poetry for the community, they aimed to achieve the goal of creating a new model of Kurmanji poetry. A massive number of people, especially students in secondary schools and undergraduates, followed their poetry. These new poets in their productions concentrated on two main themes: Kurdish nationalism, and love. They, in contrast to modernist groups, used direct, simple expressions combined with rhetorical enthusiasm, usually alongside playing music. Like singers, these poets produced CDs of poetry recorded in studios, even with video clips for their poems. In Bahdinan, the popularity of these poets was just as high as that of famous singers. Whilst they received tough criticism from the Kurdish cultural elite, as well as the Union of Kurdish Writers in Duhok, initially not accepting their membership, they became a phenomenon in Bahdinan, which meant the union was forced to accept them. Moreover, due to their popularity and their role in the creation of Kurdish national consciousness, they received support from the political institutions in Bahdinan. These issues will be discussed widely in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE

Modern Bahdinani Poetry

Imagining Kurdistan and Writing Resistance

3-1- Introduction

After the unexpected collapse of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in its political form in 1975[47], and after the Kurds of Iraq faced intensified persecution and unprecedented Arab hegemony, the cultural form became the most obvious face of Kurdish nationalism. Due to the repression endured

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[47] In 1975, an agreement was signed between Iraq and Iran called the Algiers Treaty to end the March Declaration (*Beyana Yazdey Adarê*) of 1970 between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish National Movement, which was intended to solve the Kurdish issue peacefully. In 1974, from its side, the Iraqi Government imposed their version of the draft of the Autonomy Agreement and gave the Kurdish National Movement two weeks to respond. The latter rejected the agreement, as it excluded Kirkuk from Kurdish autonomy. After the Algiers Treaty, the policy of the state changed towards the Kurds of Iraq. For more info, see (Bengio, 2012).

by the Kurds during the middle of 1970s and later[48], the Kurdish community, in general, became politicised and the limited cultural activities that were run by its intellectuals were nearly always interpreted nationalistically. On the one hand, the intellectuals took the responsibility to compensate as much as they could for what the Kurdish politicians lost after at least fourteen years of armed and political struggle since the last Kurdish revolution in 1961. On the other, the audience themselves expected them to take or create any opportunity to make the Kurdish voice heard. However, as the majority of Kurdish cultural activities were presented by individuals within the Iraqi frame, one may question whether their discourses were singular and representative of the Kurds, especially given the absence of a real Kurdish political entity. Drawing on Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd's *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (1990), it would seem reasonable to claim that: despite the differences in the details, the Kurdish intellectuals' "shared antagonism" towards the Arab dominant culture and their political regime, even symbolically, was the point of their contact that made their discourse singular and united.

The Arab Ba'ath regime's adoption of excessive political repression towards its Kurdish citizens in Iraq, and the Kurds' antagonistic attitude towards their compulsive policy, created a heterogeneous relationship between both sides, which was often considered by the latter as that between occupier and

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[48] For instance, according to Human Rights Watch, Middle East, during Iraq's crime of genocide, in 1975 and later, hundreds of Kurdish villages were demolished in Duhok and Nineveh, and over 150 of the governorate of Diyana too. In 1983, the Iraqi army abducted between 5,000-8,000 Kurdish males aged 12 or over and they were never seen again. For more info, see: Human Rights Watch/Middle East (1995) *Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds*. New Haven and London: Human Rights Watch, Yale University Press.

occupied. That is, after excluding more than half of the Kurdish territories from Iraqi Kurdistan under the offer of autonomy and after the expansion of the campaigns of Arabisation (Hassanpour, 1992, pp. 4–7), the Kurds tended to see themselves as occupied people by the Arabs and their authorities; not as partners of the country. In this case, whilst some claim that ordinary Arab people had nothing to do with Iraq's policies of exclusion, others believe that since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state in 1921 the Kurds have suffered from successive Iraqi rulers, who all came from the same Arab matrix. In other words, all Arabs, whether they were in power or accepted becoming a part of the Iraqi regime's plans, were not very different from each other, as all participated in making the project of Arabising Kurdistan successful. For example, there were Arab people who accepted moving to live in settlements in Kurdish territories to change the demography of Kurdistan. Hence, the classification of occupier and occupied or coloniser and colonised within the frame of Iraq, is central to Kurdish thinking. This is a question that needs to be studied further and this research participates in doing so. Of course, to a large degree, the Kurdish elites, including poets, played a role in shaping this perspective of themselves as being occupied and the others as occupiers. However, drawing on Denise Natali's (2005) argument, the relationship and then, the process of rethinking of the Self as Kurd and the Other as Arab took different forms, depending on the nature of the association between the Kurds and the centre in Baghdad, as is contended in this research.

Statistics and facts on the ground show that the worst relationship between the Kurds and the Arab rulers was during the time of the Ba'ath regime, especially after the Treaty of Algiers in 1975, which was followed by ethnic

cleansing and genocide. Accordingly, it can be seen through Kurdish intellectual literature, how negatively the image of the Other was produced, not just as an occupier, but also, as the Kurds' enemy, who wanted to efface their identity, thereby threatening their entire existence. However, the majority of the literature that was written expressed this in an indirect and symbolical fashion. In this regard, of course, there is a variance between the degree of explicitness and implicitness in each author's product, depending on his or her artistic tools, experience, and even the personal conditions he or she experienced. This matter reminds us the argument that Fredric Jameson (1986) makes about third world literature. He argues that such literature almost always projects political dimensions in the form of "national allegory". Despite this argument widely being criticised by some scholars (cf: Lazarus, 2011), it is still very applicable to the Kurdish poetry under the Ba'ath. The analysis of this and of the coming chapters will demonstrate and prove the point Jameson made.

Regarding the case studies for this work, a relative distance can be observed between the two selected poets: Ebdulrehman Mizûrî (b. 1946) and Mueyed Teyib (b. 1957). This distance appears to manifest itself more precisely through the analysis of their poetic texts below. Mizûrî, because all his poems were published after passing through censorship, has a lower tone of challenge and resistance than Teyib. Many of Teyib's poems, though, were published in newspapers and widely read at events, even becoming songs. However, censorship by the Ministry of Culture ultimately embargoed publishing his poems as a book, and he was intimidated due to his "inflammatory words". As a consequence, he abandoned Iraq in 1982 and

joined the Peshmerga forces. There, and one year later in the diaspora, he found the opportunity to broadcast and record his published and unpublished poems, which, due to the space of freedom and new context, contain a sharper resistance discourse. In sum, the constraint of the censorship and the outlets of the publication impacted on the actual content and form of the texts.

This chapter examines the modern Bahdinani poetry that was written under the Arab Ba'ath regime prior to 1991. The focus is on the poems of Ebdulrehman Mizûrî and Mueyed Teyib, two of the most influential Kurdish poets in Bahdinan during the 1970s and 1980s. First, the identity discourses of Mizûrî's poems, especially those concerning spatial aspects of belonging and homeland, are explored. Through examining his poems, it will be shown how the geography of Kurdistan, whether expressed explicitly or implicitly, was employed to create a specific image of Kurdistan, and to counter the pan-Arabist hegemonic discourses, against the Kurdishness of Iraqi Kurdistan. Second, I explore the identity discourses of Teyib's poetry, especially those depicting the Iraqi regime as occupier. In other words, this chapter will show how Mizûrî imagines Kurdistan through his poetry and how Teyib writes resistance through his poems. However, simultaneously, Mizûrî's imagination of Kurdistan could be considered writing resistance and Teyib's writing on that matter could be seen as imagining Kurdistan. Both these themes, to a large extent, overlap one another, as this chapter will demonstrate.

3-2- Greater Kurdistan vs. Iraq

In the Kurdish case, the process of constructing a national identity and developing Kurdish nationalism noticeably benefited from the discourses that

focus on the geography of Kurdistan. These discourses, as research has shown, have influenced Kurds and shaped their perception of themselves and Kurdistan. In her book, *Trapped between Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan (2004)*, Maria T. O'Shea demonstrates how the Kurdish nationalistic propaganda of "Greater Kurdistan" has positively affected Kurdish people's relationship with Kurdistan. She argues that due to the pressure on Kurds to deny Kurdistan, they have reacted in an over-exaggerated manner by "imagining" it as a being larger territorial unit than what was commonly understood and known as Kurdistan (O'Shea, 2004, p. 5). She illustrates this in contexts, including songs, historical sources, academic writings, and political publications of the Kurds, in particular, those that were published in exile. However, contemporary literary sources, including poetry, play no part in her analyses[49]. In this research, it is argued that the discourses of poetry are an important part of Kurdish culture and cannot be neglected in the process of Kurdish national identity construction.

Poetry, a dominant genre in Kurdish literature, has witnessed since the beginning of the last century, thematic transformations and "Kurdistan" has become one of the main themes of the nationalistic form. It is commonly believed that "Greater Kurdistan", as a geographical entity within the nationalistic discourse, was first imagined in the work of the Kurdish classical poet Ehmedê Xanî (1651-1707), an assumption that for two reasons would appear to be refutable. First, as Martin van Bruinessen (2003) states, Xanî's poems were written in the pre-nationalistic era and not until nearly two

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[49] O'Shea only points to a few classical verses of *Mem û Zîn* by Ehmedê Xanî, in a very limited context, not like the other mentioned discourses.

centuries later actually published as a printed production. Second, as Michiel Leezenberg (2014) points out, Xanî never used the word "Kurdistan", and perhaps most importantly, his focus was on Kurdish people not Kurdish territories. However, this does not deny the fact that after the publication of his poems in the *Kurdistan* newspaper (1898-1912) and after reprinting them as a book in Istanbul in 1919, Xanî's work was interpreted nationalistically, being employed as propaganda for "Greater Kurdistan" (see van Bruinessen, ibid). His poems since the last century have become an inspiration for many Kurdish nationalists, including poets, and contemporary Kurdish poetry has engaged in intertextual relationships with these works. The theme of Kurdistan was widely employed by Kurdish poets from different parts of Kurdistan and in different eras, the degree to which depending on the amount of freedom space of each nation-state in which these poets were living.

In the Iraqi part, explicit propaganda for "Greater Kurdistan", to some extent, can be found in some neo-classical Bahdinani poetry, but this became heavily censored after the collapse of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in 1975. After this historical event, the Arab Ba'athist regime restarted its campaign of Arabising Kurdistan and its features more widely than it had done previously (Mexmûrî, 2006, pp. 33–42). The hegemonic discourses of the Iraqi state concentrating on an "Arab" official memory, sought to deny the Kurdishness of Kurdistan and to assimilate its features into the "crucible of Iraq". These discourses and ensuing discursive actions prompted a number of Kurdish intellectuals to counter them in a symbolic way, taking advantage of the limited cultural rights of Iraqi Kurds. Focusing on the geography of Kurdistan was one

of the vital aspects of the counter-discourses that were produced by some Kurdish poets.

The Ba'ath regime, through its media, cultural institutions and education system employed a number of slogans promulgating the notion of Iraq as being one geographic entity infused with an Arab identity. For instance, the following were part of the formal hegemonic discourse of the state, which imagined Kurdistan as part of "Arab Iraq": عراق العروبة (the Iraq of pan-Arabism), العراق من زاخو الى الفاو (Iraq from Zakho to Faw). In contrast, any mention of the Kurdish region of Iraq was delivered through particular epithets that denied Kurdistan as having attributes that rendered it geographically as a specific area inhabited by Kurds, the original native people. Accordingly, the following utterances were repeated constantly by the Ba'athist media and by the official apparatus of the state, which thus soon became part of Arab people's thinking and reflected in their daily discourses, namely: شمال العراق (the North of Iraq), شمال القطر (the North of the Country), الشمال (the North) and منطقة الحكم الذاتي (the Autonomous Area). These were very unwelcome words to the Kurds, being extremely uncomfortable to listen to. Moreover, certain other epithets, which at first glance sounded positive, were used to describe the Kurdish territories, such as الشمال الحبيب (the beloved North) or شمالنا الحبيب (our beloved North), but their hidden and real meaning, at least for intellectual Kurds, was quite clear, whereby they were being deployed as a way of occupying Kurdish minds and territories.

Through their poems as a form of cultural resistance, a number of Kurdish poets countered this hegemonic discourse by producing a Kurdish

nationalistic one. However, especially for Kurds who were considered a minority in Iraq, producing independent discourses was not easy and was not without serious obstacles. This is because discourses, in general, are "controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216). Hence, for the Kurds under the rule of the Ba'ath authorities, the production of their own discourses was greatly restricted. The censorship on Kurdish publications was strict and sometimes the life of Kurdish poets and authors came under threat even after the publication of their works. Kurdish poets, thus, resorted to the use of multi-interpreted symbols, which helped their poems bypass the censorship, thereby being able to deliver their nationalistic discourses to the knowing Kurdish audience. James C. Scott (1990, p. 157) argues that subordinated communities usually use their "public expressions" indirectly and in a garbled manner such that their production gets read in two ways, which thereby provides them with "an avenue to retreat when challenged".

Whilst it is difficult to prove that there was a semi literary or cultural agreement between Kurdish poets and their audience in terms of understanding and interpretation, the meaning and the message of many poems became familiar and understandable. This appeared through the reception and reaction of the audience to the Kurdish poets, especially after their poems were published and thus, became out of their control. For instance, when their poems were published or performed as songs for the public, they were subsequently repeatedly reperformed at private parties, or when poems were reread during cultural activities, such as student gatherings and even at some public events

or festivals, like *Newroz*[50]. In such cases, as Scott affirms, a cultural production can be performed in various ways, from the seemingly innocent in front of antagonistic and unsecure audiences, to a rallying call in front of a friendly and safe one. Additionally, Scott continues, almost always subordinated groups are able to interpret all performances in a particular way in favour of their case (ibid, p. 162). Hence, one can understand why in Iraqi Kurdistan after the dissemination of poetry among Kurdish audiences, the Iraqi authorities started banning the use of certain words. They obviously banned them after realising these particular words had become like symbols, being interpreted in favour of the Kurdish case.

For example, in some contexts the following words became forbidden: کاوه - Kawe (the name of a mythical Kurdish figure, who smashed with his hammer the head of the Ejdehak, ending the tyrannical rule of the king); کەو - Kew (the name of bird that lives in the Kurdish mountains, which became a symbol of the Peshmerga based in these mountains); Şivan شفان - shepherd (usually interpreted as a Kurdish leader); Azadî ئازادی - freedom; and Xebat خەبات - struggle (it was interpreted as political struggle) (Xalid, 2004). However, so long as there was a space for expression, even with the existence of strict censorship[51], nothing could completely prevent Kurdish poets and their

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[50] Like many Iranian people, the Kurds celebrate *Newroz* on 21 March as the beginning of their New Year. However, the way of celebration differs from one group to another. For Kurds, *Newroz* celebration was politicised and charged with meanings of freedom and victory over tyranny. This point, indeed, annoyed the states that share Kurdistan. In Iraqi Kurdistan, for instance, in an attempt to discharge its political content, the Ba'ath regime changed the name of this day to عيد الشجرة (Tree Day). However, they could not do so as the Kurdish nationalists kept inventing stories about this day and linking it to the origins of Kurds. For more info, see (Aziz, 2014, pp. 35–36).

[51] Officially, the censorship was administered through the Censorship Division. It was a part of the Information Department in the Ministry of Culture and Information in Iraq. Its role was to check each prepared publication according to the Publications Law of Iraq. This Law was established and started its implementation after the overthrow of Royal Rule in Iraq in 1958.

audience from playing this game that Scott refers to. In the following sections, poems of Ebdulrehman Mizûrî and Mueyed Teyib have been selected to show how they produced their poetic discourses under the rule of the Arab Ba'ath regime's censorship and its security agencies.

3-3- Ebdulrehman Mizûrî: Imagining Kurdistan as a Female

Ebdulrehman Mizûrî is considered one of the key modern Bahdinani poets in the 1970s and 1980s during the time of Ba'ath regime. Through poetry, he participated effectively in producing a nationalistic Kurdish discourse by the process of imagining Kurdistan. Two main directions, in general, constitute his poetic discourse: the geographical one, which includes the topography and landscapes of Kurdistan and the historical direction, which emphasises some selected historical events in Kurdistan. This is the process of what has been called intentional history. These two directions, though dwelling on different elements, overlap on some levels. In his article *Invention, Memory and Place* (2000), Edward Said brings geography and history together and shows how useful is history in providing meanings to the geography as a place that is socially constructed and protected. He emphasises that geography is a

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At the time of Ba'ath, it was changed and adjusted to fit the principles and thoughts of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Time after time, these changes were updated in favour of the Arab Ba'ath. For example, during the 1980's it was updated four times, in 1981, 1982, 1986, 1989. For more information see: (The Minister of Culture and Information, 1989). Unofficially, other Iraqi agencies played the role of censorship as well, like the Iraqi Security Agency, for instance. For more information, see: (Ahmad, 2014).

powerful element in the process of building memory and thereby, an imagining community.

In general, Mizûrî's poetic project of imagining Kurdistan does not just concentrate on the Iraqi part, for it extends to covering "Greater Kurdistan", which has become a conceptual icon of Kurdish national identity. For him, geography is a part of his literary project and it became a distinctive feature of his poems. Mizûrî's expertise, as a geography teacher, probably added an extra awareness to the significance of this object. However, in comparison to other literary genres, such as the novel or the short story, poetry has a limited space and fewer words to ground such themes. Moreover, the nature of poetry itself differs from them by its more emotional aspects, for as Jonathan Culler puts it, until recently poetry was seen as "the expression of powerful feeling" (Culler, 2011, p. 74). This point, indeed, was exploited by Mizûrî to explore his feelings of love for and belonging to Greater Kurdistan by gendering Kurdistan and its geography in the feminine form. This provides additional emotions and feelings, especially when it comes to the expression via the relationship between lover and beloved.

Through almost all of his poems that deal with Kurdistan, Mizûrî symbolises a maiden girl as an objective correlative to Kurdistan. The literary process of gendering Kurdistan during his poetic experience is gradually displayed. Considering the whole of his poetry as one project, one can recognise this development. In the very beginnings of his poems Mizûrî discloses to his audience that the described girl in his poetry is a metaphor, and that the imagined and referred to is Kurdistan. In other words, regardless of his

aesthetic project, he is determined to deliver a nationalistic message to his audience to reinforce their national feelings and their national affiliation, thereby getting them to (re)shape their perspective of themselves and of Kurdistan. He does this also to counter the pan-Arabism discourses that surround the Kurds in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. In a poem titled سلاڤ (Greeting), he reveals his cards and plays the game of signifier and signified:

ئەگەر تو ب رێکەکێ دا چووی

تە جوانەک دیت

بەژنا وێ یا شەنگ و زراڤ..

گەلەک گەلەک

ژ بەژنا تەرحێد چنارێ،

شرینتر بوو

پێلا پرچا وێ یا زێرین

ژ پێلێد گۆم و رووبارا..

بلندتر بوو

گەرمیا هەردو چاڤێد وێ

ژ ئاگرێ هزار کوچکێد زڤستانێ..

گەرمتر بوو

تو ب خودێ کەی،

ژێ نەبۆره

ئەو پەری ب راست و درستی

وارێ منه

هێلین و ئاقارێ منه

نە، نەبۆره ژ وێ خاتوینێ

تو سلاڤێد ئاگرینێد من،

بگەهێنێ

تو بگەهێنێ

Eger tu bi rêkekê da çûy

te ciwanek dît

bejna wê ya şeng û zirav..

gelek gelek

ji bejna terḧêd çinarê,

şirîntir bû

pêla pirça wê ya zêrîn

ji pêlêd gom û rûbara..

bilindtir bû

germiya herdu çavêd wê

ji agirê hizar kuçkêd zivistanê..

gerimtir bû

tu bi xudê key,

jê nebore

ew perî bi rast û dirstî

warê mine

hêlîn û aqarê mine

ne, nebore ji wê xatûnê

tu silavêd agirînêd min,

bigehînê

tu bigehînê

If you go along a road

And see a beautiful girl

Her charming and thin stature...

Is much sweeter

Than plane trees' stature,

Her golden hair wave

Is higher

Than the lakes and rivers' waves

Her eyes' warmth

Is warmer than thousands of winter fireplaces

Please,

Don't pass by

That fairy is really and truly

My country

My nest and land

No, don't pass by that lady

Send her my very warm greetings

Please send her. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 5–7)

Whether due to censorship or for aesthetic reasons, Mizûrî does not articulate the name of the missing country that he is looking for, but through the context and some attributes in the text, the Kurdish reader effortlessly realises that the imagined country is Kurdistan. Some signs in the text, which are elements of Kurdish landscapes and are inspired by a Kurdish girl's face, help to create

such an atmosphere and drive the poem to be interpreted in this way. The images of some words, like بێڵند گۆم و ڕووبارا,(plane trees' stature), بەژنا تەرحێد چنارێ (the lakes and rivers' waves), کوچکێد زڤستانێ (winter fireplaces), in a Kurdish memory refer to the landscape of "Kurdistan", not Iraq, because it highlights characteristics of the Kurdistan landscape (more mountainous, and humid than the plains of Iraq). This is especially when they are expressed nostalgically and in pure domestic Kurmanji Kurdish. Mother tongue, in many contexts, can play an additional role in memory-making and with the oriented imagination. For instance, expressing the same poem سلاڤ in Arabic (if it is assumed it is relatively understandable to the Iraqi Kurds) will prevent the reader getting such a feeling and nostalgia for Kurdistan or will prevent evoking memory of Kurdistan, and might open the door for some other distant interpretations. On the other hand, according to the Iraqi constitution, despite Iraq being the official country for Arabs and Kurds, Mizûrî has no feelings of belonging to this "imposed" country. This is witnessed through his nostalgic quest for a "real – ب راست " and "true– درستی " country that he misses, which is unquestionably Kurdistan.

Whilst in his poem "Greeting- سلاڤ "Mizûrî symbolised his imagined country via a "maiden girl", in a stanza of the poem "Heyranok – حەیرانۆک " he maps his country more precisely and shows its geographical features. The map extends beyond the borders of Iraq to reach each Kurdish part of Turkey, Iran and Syria. In حەیرانۆک, which is a borrowed name from a very short lyrical "genre"[52]

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[52] I put the word "genre" between two quotation marks, because as Christine Allison shows there is a problematic issue in categorising the genres of Kurdish oral literature (Allison, 2010, pp. 41–45).

in Bahdinani folklore, Mizûrî, in a symbolic way, constructs the map of his "true" and "real" country, which differs from Iraq. The genre *Heyranok* originally consists of mutual oral love messages between lovers and beloveds, who due to social, economic, or religious obstacles, could not meet or get married (see e.g. Ebdulla, 2006; Xeyat, 2002) . Mizûrî, through an intertextual connection between the structure of his poem and the dialogic structure of the *Heyranok*, exchanges the social content of the genre so as to be broader in his offering by including such as the political and nationalistic issues. In other words, he expands the genre of *Heyranok* to include extra meanings and usages. By so doing, which also makes a rhythmical intertextuality with Kurdish folklore meters, he paves the way for the creation of an atmosphere that facilitates spiritual, emotional and cultural interaction between the receiver as lover and Kurdistan as the beloved and homeland. Here, I use the word "receiver" instead of "reader" as the former is technically more accurate, which includes the process of reading and listening. Actually, listening to poetry is another possibility, especially in the Kurdish case. However, in literary criticism, the term "receiver" also carries a literary and philosophical stance, in which the receiver too is responsible for the meaning of the text. That is, according to the literary theories "Reception Theory" and the "Aesthetics of reception" (see e.g. Holub, 2003).

Heyranok begins with the phrase کچکێ دینێ (O crazy girl), which is replied to by کوڕکۆ دینۆ (O crazy boy) or vice versa. Mizûrî writes eleven stanzas on the same track and the following is the first:

- کچکێ دینێ

کەمزیێد ته، زێ و خابیرن

چاڤێد ته، دەریا ئورمێ و..

وانا کویرن

سالا ل دووڤ سالێ دبەزیت

هلم وبێنا ته یا پیرۆز..

دەم و گاڤێ،

من ل بیرن

- Kiçikê dînê

keziyêd te, Zê û Xabîrin

çavêd te, derya Urmê û..

Wana kûrin

sala li dûv salê dibezît

hilim û bêna te ya pîroz..

dem û gavê,

min li bîrin

- *O crazy girl*

Your plaits are Zab and Khabur

Your eyes are Urmia lake and

the deep Van

Year is running after year

Your holy breath and smell…

Every moment,

Is remembered by me. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, p. 8)

In this extract, through the features or data that Mizûrî provides, a symbolic map of Greater Kurdistan has been drawn to be imagined by the audience of his poetry. The two eyes of his beloved are two Kurdish lakes, with the first (Lake Urmia) being located in Iranian Kurdistan and the second (Lake Van) in Turkish Kurdistan. Moreover, the two plaits represent two rivers, the first (Khabur River) runs through Syrian Kurdistan, whilst the second (Zab River) is located in Iraqi Kurdistan. By gathering these four features, which complete the image of the girl, one can get the whole picture of "Greater Kurdistan", which here has not just been imagined, but also, felt as being still alive and breathing. A noteworthy point in this regard is that each part of Greater Kurdistan is represented by a form of water source, the "source of life", which provides an extra meaning in that it refers to the continuity of life and hope in Kurdistan. The importance of drawing this image is not only in symbolising "Greater Kurdistan", which was very risky at that time, but also in its effectiveness on the side of the receiver, and in naturalising such a cultural process into a social one. Here, of course, the point is not about the reliability or non-reliability of these or other geographical data that were provided in this or similar texts. It is rather, essentially about the significance of producing such geographical discourses that counter the Iraqi pan-Arabism one aimed at assimilating the Kurdishness of Kurdistan.

In different ways, Mizûrî emphasises the unity of all parts of Kurdistan as an incontrovertible fact that must be protected. He does not acknowledge the new established territorial boundaries after WW1 that divided Kurdistan in four parts, nor the particularity of each one. In a stanza of another poem, he addresses his beloved Avivan, the symbol of Kurdistan, as follows:

ئاڤیڤانێ

ڤان درندا و هۆڤا دڤێت

ته ل ناڤبەرا خۆ،

لێکڤەکەن

رووبارێ ڤینا من و ته ئەو ببرن

مە ژێکڤەکەن

لەورا ئەزێ پەرستڤانێ

بەژنا ته یا شەنگ و شەپال..

سووندێ دخۆم

چ ئەڤرۆ بیت، چ سوباهی

ئەو دڤێتن

هەموو هیڤێید ته یێد فڕی

هەموو کەزیێن ته یێن بڕی

جارەکا دی ب دار و چووڤێد ئەگیدا..

ئەو پێکڤەکەن

Avîvanê

van dirinda û hova divêt

te li navbera xwe,

lêkve ken

rûbarê vîna min û te ew bibirin

me jêkve ken

lewra ezê peristvanê

bejina te ya şeng û şepal..

sûndê dixwem

çi evro bît, çi subahî

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ew divêtin

hemû hîviyêd te yêd firrî

hemû keziyên te yên birrî

careka dî bi dar û çûvêd egîda..

ew pêkve ken

O Avivan

These evils and savages

Want

To share out you

Among themselves

To cut our love river

To separate us

Therefore I, the worshipper of your charming and beautiful stature,

Swear

Whether today or tomorrow

By the braves' sticks and canes

They must gather again

All of your unreached hopes

All of your severed plaits. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 25–26)

Linking this stanza with the previous one illuminates the hidden meaning of some words and probably the purpose of their utilisation. However, according

to contemporary theories of reading literature the author loses his or her authority after his or her text gets published, and it is thus, not necessarily guaranteed that the poet's intent is grasped nor his or her poems interpreted exactly as he or she means (see e.g. Freund, 1987; Holub, 2003; Iser, 1978). Here, drawing on the first stanza of *Heyranok*, which depicts the two Kurdish rivers (Zab and Khabur) as plaits of the beloved Kurdistan, the poet calls for a united Kurdistan by gathering its "severed plaits" or Kurdish territories, which were separated by the "evils and savages – درندا و هۆڤا". Whilst his enthusiasm of collecting the parts of Greater Kurdistan is expressed indirectly, he does not hesitate to refer to the use of power by the Kurdish rebels when he states that this will be achieved "*by the braves' sticks and canes – ب دار و چووڤێد ئەگیدا*". Whilst in the first poem he depicts Kurdistan as a united territory, living in an ideal dream, in this one, he sees the reality and admits its partitions; however, he still calls for a utopian Great Kurdistan: "*They must gather again/ All of your unreached hopes*".

Indeed, the notion of Greater Kurdistan as one geographical entity in Mizûrî's poetic discourse has become a myth that constructs Kurdish national identity and counters the surrounding discourses of pan-Arabism. In the poem titled پەردە (Curtain), he raises the curtain on the future of Kurdistan and imagines that all of its parts are united. This poem differs from the other poetic texts in its abstract representation of Greater Kurdistan. Each of its parts has been gendered as a fairy and ultimately, all four fairies unite to become one, as "Greater Kurdistan", in a festive ceremony:

ئەز دبینم

ل هنداڤ سەرێ من چار پەری

چەرخا ددەن و دزڤڕن

جار ئێکودو هەمبێز دکەن،

جار دفڕن

کارێ وان لەیز و دیلانە و..

ماچیکرن

هۆ دبینم

هەر چار پەری راست بوونە ئێك

هەر بلند بوو.. بلند فڕی

وئ شاپەرێد خۆ ڤەکرن

گول ژئ بارین

تەڤ گولێد خۆ..

ب هەر چار قولاچا وەرکرن

تەڤ گولێد خۆ..

ب هەر چار

قولاچا

وەرکرن

Ez dibînim

li hindav serê min çar perî

çerxa diden û dizivirrin

car êkudu hembêz diken,

car difrrin

karê wan leyz û dîlane û..

maçîkirin

ho dibînim

her çar perî rast bûne êk

her çar perî rast bûne êk

her bilind bû.. bilind firrî

wê şaperêd xwe vekirin

gul jê barîn

tev gulêd xwe..

bi her çar qulaça werkirin

tev gulêd xwe..

bi her çar

qulaça

werkirin

I see

Four fairies above my head

Are turning and swirling,

Sometimes hugging

Sometimes flying

They are dancing and kissing.

Suddenly I see

All four fairies become one fairy

Flying higher and higher

Opening her wings

Flowers drop from her

She scatters all of her flowers

On the four corners. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 52–54)

Whilst in this specific example the four symbolised parts of Kurdistan show no Kurdish cultural characteristics, in many other poems Mizûrî utilises the issue of gendered Kurdistan more fruitfully. This point, to some extent, distinguishes him from many other Bahdinani poets in 1970s and 1980s, who also participated in one way or another in the same nationalistic project. Put differently, the gendering of Kurdistan in Mizûrî's poetic discourse cannot be understood only by ascribing it to the issues of censorship or by an aesthetic concern. Rather, it should be read and explained within a wider framework, that of nationalism and gender. This is to appreciate how gendering Kurdistan helps his nationalistic discourse to be constructed and how Kurdish national identity is imagined in his poetry.

Since for this research the modern theories of nationalism are adopted, with the belief that nations and national identities are constructed and partially imagined through cultural productions, the creation of an icon or image, according to Beth Baron's (2005) definition, is crucial in this process. Baron holds that "images of the nation were meant to reaffirm the unity of the collective and give the concept of nationhood greater immediacy" (Baron, 2005, p. 57), which is a way to conceptualise and disseminate nationalism, especially in the cases of the Middle East (ibid). In the Kurdish context, the image or the icon of Greater Kurdistan, which is, in literature and poetry, in particular, represented by a female image, effectively plays this role. Mizûrî and many other Kurdish poets as well, through their nationalistic-poetic discourses, have attempted to construct this image. Moreover, personifying the image of nation or homeland in a male or female form has been widely used in different contexts throughout the world in the imagination of nation

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and homeland. Ania Loomba (2005), for instance, illustrates Britain as the coloniser and India as the colonised in various ways and for different national purposes, with each being depicted as women, whether via abstract concepts, metaphors, or even in the shapes of real women. For example, Britain was presented via the figure of Britomart and Queen Elizabeth, while India was signified in the image of Rani of Jhansi and Kali (Loomba, 2005, p. 180). On the other hand, in some other cases, such as the USA, the homeland is represented as a male, in this case, through the image of Uncle Sam (Baron, 2005). Sometimes, even "the spirit or dilemma of an entire culture is sought to be expressed via a female figure—the story of Malintzin (or La Malinche) occupies such a place in Chicano culture " (Loomba, 2005).

In the Kurdish case, the exact reasons behind gendering Kurdistan as a female are not entirely clear. The use of such images is common in different literatures and nationalist symbols. This could be due to the influence of foreign literature, especially the Arabic form or more probably owing to the influence of Kurdish folkloric stories with the fairy. In her study of the Egyptian case, Beth Baron (2005, p. 57) states that gendering nation-states in Arabic culture is a novel phenomenon, and she believes this idea like that of nationalism has come from Western culture. However, she does not exclude the influence of Egyptian folklore, which calls Egypt *Bahiya*, and in turn, might have played a role in gendering Egypt as a woman. In the Kurdish case, whilst there is no specific reference in Kurdish folklore to describing Kurdistan as a female, many intellectuals have striven to symbolise *Zîn* the heroine of the Kurdish "national" epic *Mem û Zîn* as Kurdistan, whilst the protagonist *Mem* is

depicted as a rescuer who eventually sacrifices his life for Kurdistan[53].

However, this was not the aim of *Mem û Zîn*'s author, Ahmed Xanî (1651-1707), who rewrote this Kurdish folkloric story. Nevertheless, as is known, nationalist movements or groups are able to change concepts by providing them with new national meanings.

In his attempts at embodying Kurdistan in a female form, Mizûrî not only transforms the role of *Mem and Zîn* from a natural love to a political one within a new nationalistic context[54], for he also exploits many other famous Kurdish folkloric stories that have occupied Kurdish public memory. Through creating intertextual links between his modern poems and the folkloric ones, Mizûrî gives a new nationalistic role to all those protagonists. For example, *Xec* (the heroine of the famous Kurdish folklore story *Xec û Siyabend*) is symbolised as Kurdistan, and *Siyabend* depicted as a saviour hero in his poem *Lawik* (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 74–75). Furthermore, the story of *Le'lîxana Goveyî* with *Hesem Axa* and that of *Edla Xan* with *Derwêşê Ebdî* from Kurdish folklore are employed by Mizûrî for the same purpose (Mizûrî, E., 1980, pp. 109, 112–114, 1987, p. 15). It is important to note, that all of the mentioned stories in reality or as folklore have a sad end. They are considered as tragedies in which none of the protagonists unite with their beloved at the end. However, through transforming their roles, Mizûrî makes each male protagonist an awaiting hero

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[53] The artistic usage of Zin and Mem as Kurdistan and saviour can be found in different creative works of Kurdish authors. For example, it has been used in Bedirxan Sindî's poem: *Dengvedana Xanî (Xanî's Echo)*(Sindî, 1995); Fadil Omer's fiction: Werguhezken Memoy (Memo's Transformations) (Omer, 2002) and Arif Hîto's poem: *Jivanê Min û Wê Beheşta Hêşta Nebûy: Pêkolek ji bo Vêdana Pirtên Zînê (My date with the paradise that has not been born yet: An attempt to collect the pieces of Zin).* (Hîto, 2007).

[54] For example, like his first stanza named *Xanî* in his *poem Ji Evîna Çirayên Kevin (In the Love of Ancient Candles)*. See: (Mizûrî, E., 1980, pp. 75–77).

or saviour, who is seeking freedom for his beloved (Kurdistan). Notably, he focuses on the positive part of the story, which is the sacrifice in the name of the beloved. However, (re)producing the image of *Xecê* or *Siyabend* from Kurdish folklore, for example, with new semiotic transmission of meaning, can send the nationalistic message even more effectively:

سیابەندێ سلیڤی مە

شەڤا دبرم

ل سەر بانێد عەورا دفرم

پەرداخەکا ئازادیێ من دڤێتن،

پێدڤی مە

هندی رەش چاڤێد خەجۆکێ..

بتەیسن و..

بلقا بدەن

وەکی ستەیرۆکێد ئەسمانا..

شلقا بدەن

ل سەر ئەڤێنا خۆ یێ رشتم

لێڤە نابم،

ب هیڤی مە

Siyabendê Silîvî me

şeva dibirrm

li ser banêd 'ewra difirrm

perdaxeka azadiyê min divêtin,

pêdivî me

hindî reş çavêd Xecokê..

biteysin û..

bilqa biden

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wekî steyrokêd esmana..

şilqa biden

li ser evîna xwe yê riştim

lêve nabim,

bi hîvî me

I'm Siyabendê Silîvî

I cut the darkness

I fly above the clouds

Seeking a glass of freedom

I need it.

As long as Xeco's black eyes

Are shining, and

Like the stars of the sky

Are waving,

I'm serious in my love

I will not retract,

I'm hopeful. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 74–75)

In the case of occupied countries and those struggling for freedom, especially in the Middle East, as Baron (2005) argues, personifying the homeland in the female form is more fruitful than that of a male. The main reason predominantly is due to the strong link between female and honour in Middle Eastern communities, which, in turn, entails people defending. This why Baron

affirms that nationalists, poets in this case, work to promote "a sense of national honour" as a significant factor in collective memory building (Baron, 2005, p. 40). In Arabic Algerian literature, for instance, as colonial and postcolonial studies show, the issue of national honour and national resistance was embodied or symbolised in the veil (hijab) of women (see e.g. Fanon, 1965, pp. 37–38; Loomba, 2005, pp. 161–162) This became a distinctive religious and then cultural marker, which created a different identity for Algerians, not the one that the colonisers wanted to impose. In the Algerian case in the time of French colonialism, honour from a religious perspective played a role in constructing collective memory and identity, as well as more recently so in the case of the Palestinians. Interestingly, in the Kurdish case, constructing national honour from a religious perspective has not happened, at least in the case of contemporary Bahdinani poetry. Rather, the Kurdishness (*Kurdewarî*) motivations work better, because in this context the occupiers (Arabs, Turks, and Persians) and the occupied (Kurds) share the same predominant religion, namely Islam. Hence, national honour from a Kurdishness (*Kurdewarî*) perspective and motivations works better than allusions to religion. Moreover, instead of the dichotomy of Muslim and non-Muslim, or the East and West described in Arab cases, the dichotomy of native and stranger is more fitting. Mizûrî plainly produces this discourse through gendering Kurdistan in a female form (Avîvan), which refers to the woman who brings water from springs:

ئاڤیڤانێ

بەختێ تە مە

زوو-زوو نەچە کانیا

ئاڤا خۆ یا سار و شرین..

نەکەی بدەیه بیانیا

کوریّد خەلکی

دزارۆکن – دزەوزەکن

دئ ژ ته فرینن و دزن

تەڤ گرنژین و کەنیا

Avîvanê

bextê te me

zû-zû neçe kaniya

ava xwe ya sar û şirîn..

nekey bideye biyaniya

kurêd xelkî

dizarokin – dizewzekin

dê ji te firrînin û dizin

tev girinijîn û keniya

O Avivan

I beg you, please

Don't go frequently to the springs

Don't give the strangers

Your cool and fresh water

The people's sons

Are childish and naive

They will steal from you

All smiles and laughs. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 20–21)

Seemingly contentiously, the discourse of identity in some poems extends the frame of Kurdish social values (such as socialising natives and dissocialising strangers) into racial discourses. By gendering Kurdistan, Mizûrî attempts to construct some racial differences between Kurds and Arabs by producing binary opposition between them. For example, in the following extract, Mizûrî embodies Kurdistan in the form of a beautiful girl, who has a sweet and white face, like the snow of Kurdish mountains, and the Arab "occupiers" as ugly bald people with black lips (in reference to those who came from the desert). At the same time, by employing some specific indicator words, namely tattoos and moles, which represent Arab traditions, he cautions against the campaigns of Arabisation and how the "Other" is attempting to change the Kurdish identity. The aim of focusing on such features is to show the deep differences between the Kurds and the Other. For, as R. Miles and M. Brown (2003, p. 89) point out, "races are socially imagined rather than biological realities":

کچکێ دینێ

دلکێ مین سۆلینا تەرە..

تو سیس نەکە

دێمێ خۆ یێ بەفر و شرین..

ب خال و دەقا،

تو پیس نەکە

تەیر و تلۆرێد بیانیا

د لێف رەش و تەڤ کەچەلن..

ل سەر سینگێ خۆ،

تو لیس نەکه

Kiçkê dînê

dilkê mîn solîna tere..

tu sîs neke

dêmê xwe yê befir û şirîn..

bi xal û deqa,

tu pîs neke

teyr û tlorêd biyaniya

di lêf reş û tev keçelin..

li ser sîngê xwe,

tu lîs neke

O crazy girl

My heart is a small brook

Don't render it barren.

Don't put

Moles and tattoos

On your sweet and white face

Don't make it dirty

The birds of strangers

Have black lips and all are bald

Don't allow them

To stay

On your breast. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, p. 12)

In addition to focusing on the racial differences between the Kurds and the Others (the Arabs in this case), depicting the external cultural characteristics of the former is also crucial in Mizûrî's discourses. The imagined Kurdish girl in his poems is carefully designated to obtain and reproduce their authentic culture. She is represented in Kurdish folk costume with some important attributes referring to the places that parts of costume have come from or have been made, like " کراس و کورتەک - Kiras and Kurtek"[55], " گوهاریّد حەیدەرانی - Heyderanî earrings"[56], "سۆلا بابانی Babanî shoes"[57] and "گۆڤەندا شیّخانی – Şêxanî dance"[58]. All of these references are presented through a girl, who in Mizûrî's poetry becomes a bearer of "cultural authenticity"[59]:

هەچییێ کو خەم نەدییه

خەم کچەکا کوردییه

هەرا ب کراس و کورتەک و..

گوهاریّد حەیدەرانییه

سۆلا د لنگیّ ویّ دا ژی

---

[55] *Kiras* and *Kurtek* are two main pieces of Kurdish women costume.

[56] Heyderanî was one of the most powerful Kurdish "confederative" tribes, with territories located between the Ottoman Empire and Iranian Empire. According to Erdal Çiftçi (2018, p. i), during the 19th century it enacted its "own political and economic agendas under a separate tribal collective identity".

[57] Baban is the name of a Kurdish principality (1649-1851) covering the present territory of a part of Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan.

[58] *Şêxanî* dance is a type of Kurmanji Kurdish dance, common in the Bahdinan region in Iraqi Kurdistan and in other Kurmanji speaking areas.

[59] " [B]earers of cultural authenticity" is an expression borrowed from D. Kandiyoti's article: *Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation*. See: (Kandiyoti, 1991).

ژ چێکرنا هۆستایەکێ بابانییە

خۆش خۆش دچیتە گۆڤەندێ و..

کەیفا وێ ل سەر شێخانییە

Heçiyê ku xem nedî ye

Xem kiçeka kurdî ye

hera bi kiras û kurtek û..

guharêd ḧeyderanî ye

sola di lingê wê da jî

ji çêkirina hostayekê Babanî ye

xweş xweş diçîte govendê û..

keyfa wê li ser Şêxanî ye

For anyone who has not seen Xem

She is a Kurdish girl

Always wears Kiras and Kurtek

And Heyderanî earrings

Her shoes

Are made by a Babanî professional

She often goes dancing

Her favourite is Şêxanî dance. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, p. 79)

Through the pervious examples of Mizûrî's poetic discourses, it has become

apparent that a female is positioned as central to the image of Greater

Kurdistan and as a significant symbol of it, whether in producing its

geographical or cultural features. In other words, Mizûrî constructs and defines the Kurdish national identity in terms of the existence of a specific homeland, which is symbolically embodied as a female. Usually the represented females in his poetry are famous and popular protagonists taken from authentic Kurdish folkloric romantic stories, of course, after putting them in a political context and transforming their romantic roles into a nationalistic one via intertextual relations, such as those of *Zîn*, *Xec* or *Le'lîxan*. Furthermore, sometimes the depicted females are completely invented by him and they play a nationalistic role as well, or at least they could be interpreted in such a way, like *Avîvan* and *Xem*. For, due to their strong link with past and memory, employing folkloric female characters might be more influential to Kurdish receivers in terms of imagining Kurdistan.

However, it is apparent that some of his poems give a masculine impression and the female is imagined in a weak condition, which usually involves her waiting for a male to save her. This image, especially from a feminist point of view, could be considered or read as a denial of the female's position in the imaginative process. In Middle Eastern societies, in particular, in Kurdish society, it is not surprising to see a woman being positioned as the follower of man or on a secondary level, but when elites or intellectuals confirm such perspectives it becomes a problematic issue. For instance, consider this stanza of the *Heyranok* poem:

كوركۆ دينۆ

كانيك و باپيرئ خەما

هەلگرتنا

بارئ فئ ديرۆكا دێرين..

هەر بۆ تە ما!

دێ وەرە دەستێ یارکا خۆ

بگرە و برەڤینە

ژ دەڤێ گورا..

ژ پەنجێد هەما

Kurko dîno

kanîk û bapîrê xema

helgirtina

barê vê dîroka dêrîn..

her bo te ma!

dê were destê yarka xo

bigire û birevîne

ji devê gura..

ji pencêd hema

O crazy boy

The source and ancestor of

sorrows

The burden of

This ancient history

Was left for you!

Come on; hold your beloved's hand

And

Take her away

From the wolves' mouths

From their claws.

In all likelihood, from a feminist point of view, the above would be interpreted as reducing a female's status, such that she is not able to protect herself without a male, "Come on; hold your beloved's hand/ And take her away/ From the wolves' mouths/ From their claws". However, from a nationalism perspective, it can be seen that Mizûrî exploits the "weakness" of the female to serve a national aim, by encouraging the audience and Kurdish people in general, to defend their "national honour" and their country. These kinds of examples, indeed, are not rare in Mizûrî's poetry. He frequently produces this discourse as one of his strategies, which really works in Middle Eastern communities and in the Kurdish case, in particular. Calling for help from a male by a female without any positive reaction by the former is considered as a shame on him, according to the traditions of Kurdish society:

کورکۆ دینۆ

ئاڤا رووباری گوندێ مه

پێل و پێله

ل سەر سینگێ من ژ چار لاڤه،

کێل و ڤێله

هەڤسوی و جیرانێد مه ژ کەڤن

د بەخت ڤاژینه

د دەستا دا،

من نەهێله

Kurko dîno

ava rûbarê gundê me

pêl û pêl e

li ser sîngê min ji çar lave,

kêl û vêl e

hevsû û cîranêd me ji kevin

di bext vajî ne

di desta da,

min nehêlh

O crazy boy

Our village's river is

Extremely wavy

My chest, from four sides, became

A target

Our neighbours, since time immemorial,

Are perfidious.

Don't leave me alone

In their hands. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, p. 13)

Here, again, Mizûrî tries to emphasise the same point and make sense of a "national honour" by producing this discourse in different ways in order to protect "Greater Kurdistan", the icon of Kurdish national identity. This time, by referring to the unscrupulous behaviour of Kurdistan's neighbours, who "since time immemorial" have treated Kurdistan in this way and he enhances his argument by absorbing some famous verses of Ehmedê Xani's *Mem û Zîn* (Mem and Zin), the "Kurdish national epic". This extract contains some key

words, which are semantically understandable in the Kurdish context and deliver its functional discourse, like: "four sides", "target" and "our neighbours". However, deploying their intertextual links with Ehmedê Xanî's (1651-1707) work, allows for these poetic verses to illuminate the text and its meaning-making process further. Whilst in his poetic verses Xanî focuses on the Kurds as a people and does not mention Kurdistan as a country, Mizûrî, through an intertextual relationship, transforms Xanî's patriotic idea into a nationalistic one. He achieves this by focusing on Kurdistan as geography and country, which became a target of their "perfidious" neighbours, namely Arabs, Turks and Persians, from the time of Xanî and even earlier. Xanî says:

بفكر ژ عەرەب هەتا ڤە گورجان

كورمانجە بووى شوبهى بورجان

ئەڤ رۆم و عەجەم ب وان حسارن

كورمانج هەمى ل چار كنارن

هەردو تەرەفان قەبيلێ كورمانج

بۆ تيرێ قەزا كرينە ئامانج

Bifikir ji 'ereb heta ve gurcan

Kurmanc e bûy şubhî burcan

ev Rom û 'Ecem bi wan hisarin

Kurmanc hemî li çar kinarin

herdu terefan qebîlê Kurmanc

bo tîrê qeza kirîne amanc (Doskî, T. Î., 2008, p. 45)

Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians,

The Kurds have become like towers.

The Turks and the Persians are surrounded by them,

The Kurds are on all four corners.

Both sides have made the Kurdish people,

Targets for arrows of fate.

Despite Mizûrî's poems depicting how Kurdistan is always imagined as a female (and sometimes in a vulnerable condition, needing help from a strong male to save and protect her), in my point of view, this does not mean that he diminishes the female position. By taking all of his poems as one common work, it would appear that the saviour himself has gained his power from the imagined feminine. It also appears that the female is portrayed as Mizûrî's saviour or liberator from his longing and yearning. For instance, in this extract, the strength of Avivan, the symbol of Greater Kurdistan, is clearly shown:

ئاڤیڤانێ

دێ تو رابه

دەولەت سەرێ خۆ لەزەکێ،

تو بلەزینه و ..

قورچەکا ئاڤا گۆلا خۆ،

گۆلا (وان)ێ..

ژ مه را بینه

یان هندەکێ ژ گۆلاڤا خۆ،

گۆلاڤا (خابوور)ێ مەزن..

ل مه بەرەشینه

بەلكو-بەلكى

ژ ئەڤرۆ پێڤە

تێنا مە یا دژوار و سەخت..

چاك بشكێت و..

تەڤ نەمینە!

ئاڤیڤانێ

ستى و ئاسیكا زۆزانێ

خوشتڤیكا مە هەمیانێ

ئاگرێ عشقا تە گەرمە و..

ئەم قرقچین،

تە ئاڤ کانێ..!؟

تە ئاڤ کانێ..!؟

تە ئاڤ کانێ..!؟

ئاڤیڤانێ..

Avîvanê

dê tu rabe

dewlet serê xwe lezekê,

tu bilezîne û ..

qurçeka ava gola xwe,

gola Wanê..

ji me ra bîne

yan hindekê ji gulava xwe,

gulava Xabûrê mezin..

li me bireşîne

belku-belkî

ji evro pêve

têna me ya dijwar û sext..

çak bişkêt û..

tev nemîne!

Avîvanê

sitî û asîka zozanê

xweşitvîka me hemiyanê

agirê 'şqa te germe û..

em qirqiçîn,

te av kanê..?!

te av kanê..?!

te av kanê..?!

Avîvanê..

O Avivan.

For pity's sake,

Come on quickly.

And bring to us

A sip of your lake,

Van Lake.

Or

Spray us with

Some of your perfume,

The Great Khabur's perfume

Maybe

From this day on

It quenches well our excessive thirst

And we never get thirsty again!

O Avivan

The deer of the mountain

Cherished by everyone

Your love fire is hot and

We are dying of thirst,

Where is your water?!

Where is your water?!

Where is your water?!

O Avivan. (Mizûrî, E., 1987, pp. 27–29)

If in the previous instances, the gendered Kurdistan (female) appears weak and in need, whilst in the example above the gendered saviour (male) also appears in need and waits for the female's power or her help, which is geographically embodied through Lake Van and the Khabur River in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan, respectively. The last example and some other similar examples as well, show that gendering Kurdistan in Mizûrî's poetry does not mean denigrating the female's status or her level, but rather, they prove that she is positioned centrally in the process of imaging Kurdistan. For without her, the Kurdish national identity cannot be constructed or imagined either geographically or culturally, on the literary and social levels. However, the role

of female and male in the whole process could be changed from a lover to a beloved or from a beloved to a lover. More specifically, gendering Kurdistan in the form of a female and the Kurdish "nation" in that of a male is about coming through a complementary relationship involving a lover and beloved or two enamoured lovers, neither of whom can bear to be without the other.

One interesting point that deserves a mention, is that Mizûrî's nationalistic discourse consists of Kurmanji cultural material, with very little referral to that of the Sorani. Apart from indicating some places from the Sorani area as a necessity to complete the drawing of the whole picture of Greater Kurdistan, starting from language, meters and rhythms, right up to traditions, symbols and heroes, his references are all from Kurmanji culture. For example, in terms of gendering Greater Kurdistan in the form of a Kurdish girl, her transfigurations are always in Kurmanji symbols: Zîn, Xec, Edla, Li'lîxana Goveyî, Mîhrebana Berwarî, Selma Cizîrî and Perîxana Herîrî. This clearly means that he has attempted to construct a pure Kurmanji version of Kurdish national identity, on the one hand to promote the Kurmanji Kurdish and protect it from the ascendancy of the Sorani, whilst on the other, to counter the hegemony of Arab discourses that aim to assimilate Kurdish identity.

3-4- Mueyed Teyib and Context

Another widely read and hugely influential Kurdish poet in Bahdinan is Mueyed Teyib. He was born in 1957 in Duhok, Iraqi Kurdistan. He attended primary and middle schools there and finished his high school in Erbil. In 1978, he started his higher education in the College of Law and Politics at the University of Baghdad. However, political circumstances forced him to leave

his studies and join the Peshmerga forces in 1982. A year later, he went to Sweden and spent thirteen years there in the diaspora. In 1996, some years following the Kurdish Uprising, he returned back to his homeland, Kurdistan, and settled in his place of birth. In 2010, he was elected as a representative of Duhok governorate in the Iraqi parliament, the Council of Representatives of Iraq. Despite being exposed to a suicidal terrorist attack in Baghdad in 2011, Teyib survived with an injured thigh and received treatment in Austria. Three years later, after completing his duty as a member of parliament, he returned to Duhok city continuing his cultural activities, which had started with his poetry in 1975.

Through his cultural activities *in* and *outside* Iraqi Kurdistan, M. Teyib has played an important role in defining the features of the Bahdinani cultural scene. His activities include writing poetry, working in Kurdish media as well as founding and running cultural institutions. Among this variety of cultural achievements, he is proud of himself regarding his poetry, in particular, and prefers to be known as a poet more than anything else (see e.g. Teyib, 2015; 'Waar', 2014). Teyib admits that poetry is the most obvious feature that identified him and built his fame ('Waar', 2014). He joined the world of poetry after the collapse of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in 1975. In an early stage of his life, he became a prominent name on the map of modern Kurmanji poetry in Bahdinan. The spirit of resistance against the Ba'ath and his modern unique style of writing poetry (Doskî, M. E., 1999, p. 6) made him one of the best-loved and respected poets by the public as well as the elite (al-Haydar, 2010, p. 2) . In spite of his presenting many poems at poetic events, and publishing poems in the Kurdish press, the Iraqi censorship banned his first

applied collected poems *Stiran û Befir û Agir* (Songs, Snow and Fire) from being published in 1979. Following that, the poet was exposed to threats, especially after refusing to join the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Working as an editor on the *Hawkarî* weekly newspaper during his studies in Baghdad in 1978 as well as working as a preparer and presenter of a popular programme broadcast on Kurdish radio at the same time[60], increased the political pressure on him. In 1982, he realised that he was not safe, especially after refusing to write a poem praising Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath. That year, he left his studies and his jobs at the newspaper and on the radio to join the Peshmerga, thus starting a new journey (Teyib, 2009; 'Waar', 2014, pp. 9–10). From 1982 onwards, his poems became forbidden in Iraq, however, some of them had already become songs (Teyib, 2015; 'Waar', 2016).

In his new poetic struggle as member of the Peshmerga, Teyib worked in the Kurdish radio *Dengê Kurdistanê* (The Voice of Kurdistan), reciting and broadcasting his resistance poetry with his deep and unique voice. As his stay with Peshmerga lasted only one year, he recorded a cassette of his poems at the *Dengê Kurdistanê*'s studios, which were broadcast frequently even after he went to Sweden (see e.g. Teyib, 2009, p. 9). In the diaspora, Teyib recorded a new cassette of his poetry and it was published in those European countries with Kurdish communities (ibid, pp. 9–10). Even though he remained in the diaspora for a long time, he did not publish his banned poem collection

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[60] The name of the programme was *Her Stiranekê Çîrokeka Hey* (Each Song Has a Story), and it was prepared and presented by him. According to Teyib, it was one of the most popular programmes in terms of receiving letters from listeners. Due to its popularity, Teyib adds, some local cassette shops in Bahdinan recorded the episodes of his programme and sold them, which was rare. The programme lasted nearly three years, and he usually invented the stories behind the selected songs. (see e. g. 'Waar', 2014).

Stiran û Befir û Agir until 1992[61]. In its first edition, he included the poems that he wrote when he was with the Peshmerga and those when he was in the diaspora as well. After the first edition, his poetic collection was republished three times (2004, 2009, 2014). His poems were translated into Persian by Mesûd Xalid Gulî (1997), and by Şêrzad Şefî' Barzanî (201?). Also they were translated into Arabic by Tehsîn Ibrahim Doskî (1999), Selah Berwarî (2010) and Majid al-Hayder (2010, 2016). After a period of poetic silence, Teyib published his second collection of poems, *Piling Dema Birsî Dibin, Mirov Dema Têr Dibin* (When Tigers Get Hungry, When People Get Full) (2012). Two years later, his third collection of poems, which includes all of his poems, was published in the Latin alphabet in Istanbul, entitled *Ne Ba Min Siwar Dike Ne Ax Min Peya Dike* (Nor Wind Takes Me, Neither Earth Carries Me) (2014). Four years later, he published his last poetic collection *Ne Şev Têra Xewnên Min Diket, Ne Roj Têra Xemên Min* (Nor the Night is Enough for my Dreams, Neither the Day for My Sorrows) (2018). Furthermore, Teyib writes poetry for children and he published two collections of poems for them. Moreover, with the language of the education system in Bahdinan region having been recently changed to Bahdinani Kurdish, Teyib's poems have been put into the new curriculum from elementary to secondary schools.

In addition to his poetic activities, Teyib occupied important cultural positions especially after his return to Kurdistan. In the diaspora, in 1983, he worked as

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[61] Teyib says that due to the wide spread of his poetry among the people, for a while, he gave up the idea of publishing them as a book. Then, he noticed that people started treating his poetry as folklore, and time after time they changed, added, and removed some words of his poems. The second reason, he adds, some of his published poems in newspapers and magazine during 1978-1982 were slightly changed by the censorship. After the Kurdish Uprising, he saw that the time was suitable for publishing them as a book (see: Teyib, 2009, pp. 9–11).

editor on *Berbang* magazine, later becoming its editor in chief. When he returned his country in 1996, he headed the Media and Relations Office in Duhok. In 1999, he became the director of Kurmanji programmes on Kurdistan Satellite TV, and he was one of its founders. In 2002, he founded *Dezgeha Spîrêz ya Çap û Weşanê* (Spîrêz House for Press and Publishing) in Duhok and he has become its administrator[62]. He also was the editor in chief of *Kepir* magazine for more than five years[63], and he published several children stories, translated them from Swedish into Kurdish. In 2007, as one of Bahdinani representatives, he became a member of *Ekadîmyay Kurdî* (Kurdish Academy) in Erbil, defending Bahdinani Kurdish and its passion, in particular[64].

3-5- Writing Resistance through Snow and Mountain

Through some distinctive features of Kurdistan's landscape and its nature, Teyib imagines Kurdish national identity and attempts to construct a narrative for the Kurds. In comparison with the Arab Iraqi territories and landscape, the two very distinctive features of the Kurdish landscape that distinguish Iraqi Kurdistan are snow and mountains. These two features almost became symbols of identity for Kurds, something even understandable to the Arabs. They were widely exploited by Kurdish intellectuals to empower and relate them to their identity. This could be seen not only in their internal discourse to the Kurdish receiver, but also in their external one to the Arab readership in

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[62] *Spîrêz* is one of the most important cultural foundations in Bahdinan. It was supported and sponsored by the prime minister of the KRG (Nichirvan Barzani). Up until 2018, it had published nearly 450 books.

[63] *IKepir* was a monthly children's magazine and 68 issues were published.

[64] The members of the Kurdish Academy consisted of 20 members, with only three of them being from Bahdinan, while the rest were from the Sorani speaking area.

their language in the case of translated Kurdish works. For example, in an Arabic library, one can find titles like: ومضات جبلية من الشعر الكردي المعاصر (Mountainous Sparkles of Contemporary Kurdish Poetry) (Mizûrî, B. R., 1989), النسر: شعراء من وطن الثلج والنار (The Eagle: Poets from the Homeland of Snow and Fire) (Mizûrî, B. R., 2013), قصائد من بلاد الثلج (Poems from the Homeland of Snow) (Berwarî, 2010), في يوم مثلج (On a Snowy Day) (Zêbarî, 2015). These two natural/ geographical features (snow and mountains), especially in the Iraqi context, very plainly refer to a specific landscape and a specific homeland, different from the rest of Iraq. However, in Teyib's collected poems *Sitran û Befir û Agir* (Song, Snow and Fire) they are more obvious and exceed their material concepts and meanings to represent wider contexts. Snow, in his poems, becomes an objective correlative of the Kurdish race, soul, purity, innocence and most importantly, as a tool to construct Kurdish identity, while mountains become an objective correlative to the existence of Kurds, their continuation and their resistance.

Considering the rule of the Arab Ba'ath regime in Iraqi Kurdistan as that of occupation or colonialism, at least from Teyib's point of view, it is understandable why he attempts to produce a kind of discourse that excludes what relates to the Arab. In his poetry, he not only focuses on the racial differences between the Kurds and the Arabs as an indicator of their two different identities, but also, he attempts to invent a special Self to differentiate the Kurds from what they have in common with the Arabs. Obviously, oppressed people under the rule of colonialism try to construct a distinctive identity that excludes the cultural features and beliefs of the coloniser.

In a poem entitled Befir بەفر (Snow), different to what the Kurds and Arabs commonly believe in as religious thought about the theory of creation, Teyib attempts to claim something completely novel:

ئەگەر راسته..

(ئادەم) ژ ئاخێ چێبوویه

(حەوا) ژ پەراسیا وی بوویه

پا خەلكینۆ!

دێ بزانن

ئەز نه كورێ ئادەمی مه.

چنكی نەژادێ وی ئاخه..

یێ من بەفره.

Eger raste..

(Adem) ji axê çêbû ye

(Hewa) ji perasiya wî bûye

pa xelkîno!

dê bizanin

ez ne kurê Ademî me.

çnikî nejadê wî ax e..

yê min befir e.

If it's true that

Adam was created from dust

Eve was born from his rib

Then people!

You need to know…

I'm not Adam's son.

His origin is from dust...

Mine is from snow. (Teyib, 2009, p. 43)

The poet explicitly tells his audience of an invented physical difference between the origin of the Kurds and their Other as a metaphor for two different identities. At the same time, he implicitly attempts to take the Kurds away from what they, religiously, like the Arabs, believe in. Since the religious belief of more than 90% of Kurds is Islam, which came via the Arab conquest, Teyib indirectly puts these beliefs in doubt in order to leave a distance between the Kurds and their colonisers. This is apparent in the first words of his poem, when he says: "ئەگەر راستە - if it is true', which is absolutely a shock sentence for Kurdish believers of Islam, who have been taught that Adam was created from dust. Then, in the following step, even after assuming that the story of creation might be true, he rejects being Adam's son. Of course, the point here is not about the reality or non-reality of Adam's origin, but rather, it is about the symbolic meaning of saying NO to what was narrated by their colonisers or to what they share religiously with them. Alternatively, by claiming he is from snow, he seeks to establish a different story, which is that of the Kurds:

گەر ئەز مرم..

هوین بوونە ریز، وە ئەز برم..

وەسیەتا من ل هەوە ئەو بیت:

من ڤەشێرن،

ل کۆپێ چیایەکێ بەفرین..

بەفر و کەڤی ژێ بارنەکەن..

گەر لێ هاربوو گەرم و هاڤین

دا ئەز ژی مینا ئادەمی

بزڤرمە ڤ نەژادێ خۆ

ببمە بەفر..

ببمە کەڤی!

Ger ez mirim..

hûn bûne rêz, we ez birim..

wesiyeta min li hewe ew bît:

min veşêrin,

li kopê çiyayekê befrîn..

befir û kevî jê bar neken..

ger lê har bû geirm û havîn

da ez jî mîna Ademî

bizivirime nejadê xwe

bibime befir..

bibime kevî!

When I die..

And you stay in a row and carry me

My commandment to you

Bury me

On the peak of a snowy mountain

Where snow and ice never leave

So when the summer and the heat rage

I return, like Adam,

To my origin

To become snow…

To become ice! (Teyib, 2009, pp. 43–44)

Whilst the invented myth of snow recurs throughout his poetry collections as an element for creating the Kurds' own identity or the "Self", Teyib attempts to create the Kurd's "Other" as well to complete the picture. According to scholars who work in the field of identity (Barth, 1969; Said, 2003), making one's own depends on differences with the "Other". For instance, in his *Orientalism*, Edward Said affirms that "each age and society re-creates its Others" (Said, 2003, p. 332). Of course, intellectuals, whether individually or within institutions, are involved in the process. Here, Teyib, in terms of recreating the Kurds' Other depends not only on natural differences between the landscapes of Kurdistan and that of the Iraqi Arab part, but also, on some racial differences between the skin of the two peoples. That is, the former generally have a white skin like the snow of a Kurdish mountain (according to Teyib), whilst the latter have black skin, as of people who belong to the desert. Whilst there is a kind of exaggeration in this classification between Kurds and Arabs, at the popular level, this labelling is common among Kurdish people, especially when it comes to describing the Arab other.

In the following first stanza of his poem *Sitran û Befir û Agir* (Song, Snow and Fire), the binary opposition between black and white or snow and soot in Teyib's imagination shows how he is articulating Kurdish identity. After the collapse of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, the Iraqi regime started their

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campaign of Arabisation, treating Kurdistan like one of its colonies. The Arab Ba'ath regime systematically deported the Kurds from their areas to the south of Iraq and built Arab settlements in Kurdistan, in order to change its demography and identity (see e.g. Mexmûrî, 2006). Put differently, through his invented words and poetic expressions, Teyib tries to make snow, whiteness and lightness, as symbols of Kurds, Kurdistan and Kurdish identity. Simultaneously, he attempts to make soot, blackness and darkness as those of Arabs, Arabism, and their identity. The critic M. A. Doskî (1999, p. 57) comments how in a satirical style and with very simple words, Teyib addresses one of the Arab rulers, who thinks that after the collapse of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement the game is over:

نه ئەزبەنی!
نەكه كەنی!
وەلاتێ من.. بەفرە، بەفرە و
كەنگی بەفر بوويە تەنی؟!

Ne ezbenî!

neke kenî!

welatê min befir e, befir e û

kengî befir bûye tenî?!

No sir!

Don't laugh!

My homeland is snow and snow...

Have you ever seen the snow turned to soot? (Teyib, 2009, p. 57)

Whilst this extract shows the satirical attitude of Teyib towards what the Other thinks of Kurds, in another stanza from فڕەكا باى (A Slip of Air) his words show

his concern about those Kurdish people who have been compulsively deported to the deserts of Iraq in the south. In a footnote, Teyib reports that he wrote this poem in summer on his way to Basra City, in the south of Iraq, when he saw through the window of the train a Kurdish girl beside an Arab tent in the desert suffering under the burning sun. Teyib, like a person who screams out to somebody to survive, writes:

کوردستانێ!

فرەکا بای..

ژ چیایەکێ بەفر لێ مای..

Kurdistanê!

fireka bay..

ji çiyayekê befir lê may..

O Kurdistan!

Give me a sip of air

From a snowy mountain. (Teyib, 2009, p. 19)

Asking or begging for a sip of air from a snowy mountain of Kurdistan for the Kurdish girl, is about protecting the Kurdish identity of those who are under the threat of assimilation and Arabisation. Through exposing his worries and describing the Arab's different environment, Teyib produces the Kurds' Other, who are opposite to them and their identity. In his poem, the Arab identity is depicted through a landscape that poetically includes the following words: رۆژا (sweat), خوەیێ (desert), دەشتەکا چۆل (fiery sand), خیزێ شاریای (burning sun), ئاریای

and كوينەكێ رەش و دریای (a ripped black tent). While the Kurdish identity is created mainly through the depicted characteristics of a girl, who is an orphan: ئەزێ دترسم\ ژ دلبەرا دێم بەفر و خوین\ ژ ئەنیا كەڤەر (*I'm worried / For the beloved with a snowy and bloody face / For the stony forehead*) and from some images of Kurdistan that all together produce the variation between the two imagined communities. After comparing the two identities, Teyib plainly expresses his anxiety that Kurdish identity is under the threat of the Arabism and its forced identity:

ئەزێ دترسم..

رۆژا ئاریای..

كرێت بكەت..

هزار دەقا.. ل ئەنیێ بدەت..

رەنگێ چیا.. ژ دێمی ببەت!

Ezê ditirsim..

roja ariyay..

kirêt biket..

hizar deqa.. li eniyê bidet..

rengê çiya.. ji dêmî bibet!

I am worried

The burning sun

Disfigures her

Puts thousands tattoos on her forehead

Removes the mountains' colour from her face! (Teyib, 2009, p. 20)

One can see throughout Teyib's poetry that there is a conflict between two binary opinions, such as snow and soot, mountain and desert, white and black or lightness and darkness. However, the focus in this chapter is specifically on snow and mountains as fundamental distinctive features that could clearly distinguish between two homelands in the Iraqi state: Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq.

3-6- Conclusion

In this chapter, the poetic discourses of the Bahdinani Kurdish poets under the Arab Ba'ath during the 1970s and 1980s have been explored. It has been demonstrated how Bahdinani poetry, as minority discourse, countered the hegemony of the Arabism discourse of the Iraqi state. Taking the opportunity of the limited available space for expressing *cultural diversity* in Iraq, the Bahdinani poets emphasised their *cultural differences* and participated in constructing their Kurdish identity. Despite their poetry being presented mostly in a symbolic way, its messages were understandable to the Kurdish audience and interpreted nationalistically. It has been argued and evidenced that in spite of imposing the Iraqi-Arab identity on the Kurds, it was resisted by them and instead of imagining Iraq as a country, the Bahdinani poets imagined a Kurmanji version of the "Greater Kurdistan". The analysis has shown that though there were differences in the details, the Kurdish poets' "shared antagonism" towards the Arab dominant culture was their point of contact. In the case of Ebdulrehman Mizûrî, geographical discourses occupied a great part of his poetic project.

The discourses concerning spatial aspects of belonging and homeland were usually presented in relation of gendering Kurdistan and its geography in the form of a female. The analysis has shown that the female is positioned as central to the image of Greater Kurdistan and as a significant symbol of it. The females represented in his poetry usually were taken from authentic Kurdish folkloric romantic stories, after putting them in a political context and transforming their romantic roles into a nationalistic one via intertextual relations.

In M. Teyib's poems, snow and mountain were employed as symbols for the Kurds and as tools for resistant against the Other. For him, snow was the most distinctive feature that he selected from the nature of Kurdistan to separate his identity as a Kurd form the Other as Arab. Opposite to his Other, who was depicted by him with black, darkness and evilness, Teyib utilised snow in depicting the Kurds and charged it with the meaning of purity, innocence and goodness. It can be summed up that resistance, geography, race and otherness were pivots in Bahdinani poetry under the Ba'ath.

CHAPTER FOUR

Modernist Bahdinani Poetry and Politics

Separation or Incorporation?

4.1. Introduction

As has been shown in chapter two, after the Kurdish Uprising in 1991 and the subsequent changes in the political arena of Iraqi Kurdistan, a new literary movement appeared on the Bahdinani cultural scene that adopted modernism in poetry and called for the modernising of the Kurdish community. This movement or group, which called itself Nûkirin Herûher (Innovation Forever) and its members *Nûxwaz* (modernists), claimed to liberate poetry from the influence of politics and separate poetic issues from nationalist ones[65]. They

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[65] These claims have been repeated by Nûkirin Herûher's members several times and on different occasions. See, for example: Fadil Omer's responses to Nefîsa Hajî in *Peyv* magazine (NO. 66) in 2013 or Mihsin Qçoan's responses to Sînemxan Çêyî in the Evro Daily newspaper (NO. 570) in 2010.

believed that poetry should serve itself only, and that the Kurdistan Regional Government's specialised institutions should take up their responsibility for Kurdish nationalism. This is because, as they believed, throughout its trajectory, Kurdish poetry had submitted to serving different life aspects, such as politics, society, love, pain etc., but not poetry itself (Qoçan, 2010). Poetry, according to the group's perspective, should be returned to its essential function, that of aesthetic values and literary pleasure. However, as argued and demonstrated in this chapter, they could not separate their poetry from politics, and they failed to liberate it from the issues of Kurdish nationalism. In other words, a great part of their poetry remained producing its discourses within the influence of the new political atmosphere of post-1991 and alternating between criticising and complimenting it.

Ironically, only a few years later, most of *Nûkirin Herûher*'s members, who declared the project of modernity, joined the criticised traditional parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They, due to their political loyalty, occupied prestigious posts in the government and in their parties as well (see, e.g. Nihêlî, 2009). However, they justified their engaging in politics and power as a step towards reforming these parties and authority. For example, in his interview with *Peyv* magazine, the poet Arif Hîto (b. 1968) points out that living under the shadow of the ruling authority is not always a negative action and after all, he adds, "it is the authority who needs intellectuals not vice versa" (Hîto, 2009, p. 152). But the poet Mihsin Qoçan after a decade of his experience with the existing power frankly and cynically states "we have no intellectuals, we have only half-intellectuals" (Qoçan, 2008). Fadil Omer, known as one of *Nûkirin Herûher*'s

theorists, also after almost two decades since the establishment of their group admits that their project of modernity was more an imaginary one, which had not succeeded in bringing the thought into reality (Omer, 2013, p. 59). Celal Mistefa's comments on them might shed light on a part of the truth about their experience with modernity. He states that in poetry, *Nûkirin Herûher*'s members are modernists, while regarding their social perspectives and real political attitudes they are traditionalists (Mistefa, 2013)[66]. However, in this chapter, it is contended that even in their poetry there is a kind of regression and transformation in their poetic attitudes, especially after they engaged with politics and lived "under the shadow" of the ruling authority. In other words, their project of modernity was not reflected on the ground, and their poetic discourses transformed from self-criticism to compliments.

This chapter, in the first place, concerns the poetic discourses of Bahdinani modernists, rather than their discursive activities or changed attitudes after the Kurdish civil war (1994-1998). Their articles, debates, interviews or any other activity will not be the core target of the analysis. At the same time, of course, they will not be ignored, especially when the research needs them, whether for supporting an idea, enhancing an opinion or even for illuminating a point relating to their poetic texts. As has been mentioned in the first chapter, M. Qoçan's poetry will be the target of the analysis, and the focus will be particularly on the period between 1991 to 2003. This is because, from the literary aspect, his poems could precisely represent the modernist poetic movement as a novel and notable phenomenon in the Bahdinani literary

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[66] Whilst Celal Mistefa's comments came very recently in an interview published in *Peyv* magazine (NO. 66) in 2013, earlier, some other writers commented on this matter as well. For example, see Ebdal Norî Ebdal's article: Nûkirin Herûher (Innovation Forever) (Ebdal, 2002).

scene at that time. Moreover, from a political perspective, the problematic context of Iraqi Kurdistan during that period justifies examining this specific poetry decade. More precisely, the continuity of the civil war and its ramifications along with the enduring Ba'ath regime at the top of the power structure in Iraq are two crucial reasons to see that political period differently to both pre-1991 and post 2003. That is, the political transformation and shifting between the balance of power influenced other life aspects, including the cultural one during this focal period, in a distinct manner. As Edward Said emphasises, there are always ties between politics and culture and hence, humanistic study should involve considering the nature of the relationship between them (Said, 1978).

In this chapter, it is argued that if pre-1991Bahdinani poetry discourses participated in constructing Kurdish national identity, after 1991 its discourses shifted to criticism and doubt regarding this constructed identity, with some existential identity questions being raised. Before the Gulf War and the Kurdish Uprising in 1991, during the time of Arab Ba'ath regime, as has been demonstrated in chapter three, Kurdish poetry played a role as a counter-discourse symbolically resisting the Arab hegemony and its attempts at assimilating the Kurds and their identity. At that time, Kurdish poetry to a large degree characterised its role of repelling the external risks to the Kurds and their existence. While post 1991, the poetic discourses shifted to playing the role of pointing to the internal risks to the Kurds and their threatened identity. However, due to their claim of not submitting to the Kurdish political parties, at least through their poetry, Bahdinani modernists would not agree to classifying their poems as political poetry or as poetry in the interest of politics.

The claim, in one way or another might hold a part of the truth, but their criticism of political parties was still in the interest of Kurdish nationalism. This point, clearly refutes Bahdinani modernists' contention about separating poetry from politics or nationalist issues, at least during the sensitive time of the Kurdish civil war.

To achieve the aims of this research, chapter four is divided into two main sections. In the first, there is discussion on the Kurdish civil war and on the main players who were involved in the conflict. The important events are presented chronologically. Some brief information about both political parties' zones of influence is also provided. The category of Kurdish intellectuals, including poets, is discussed to show how they reacted to the civil war.

The second section is dedicated to analysing the identity discourses of the modernist movement in Bahdinan, with Mihsin Qoçan's poems having been chosen as representative of this movement. The analysis will show how Kurdish poets acted and reacted to the civil war, as well as how they culturally built their literary worlds. The methodology that has been adopted in selecting Qoçan's poems pertains to consideration of their response to the issues of identity, mostly with the theme of the civil war. The poets' criticism to the Kurdish Self during the civil war could be considered as a necessary step towards (re)constricting Kurdish identity. Perhaps more significantly, this critique reveals how the formation of this identity failed since it could not prevent the civil war. In this regard, extracts from various Qoçan poems have been chosen to provide evidence for this view as opposed to focusing on one or two particular poems. For the research, a link is sought between different

poems' extracts, to identify the episteme that constructed his attitude and his perspective.

4.2. The Kurdish Civil War and the Bahdinani Poets' Attitudes

Only two years after relatively successful elections and the establishing of the first parliament in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992, intra Kurdish disputes started between the two main winners: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Both political parties, who equally occupied the parliamentary seats after the elections, constituted the first cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Despite agreeing to the principle of "fifty-fifty" to share power equally and govern together the liberated areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, friction increased between them, leading to infighting and ultimately, to civil war in 1994 (Gunter, 1996, pp. 231–233). The magnitude of the conflict conspicuously expanded, drawing in Kurdish fractions from Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan, in addition to the military forces of Iran, Turkey and Iraq. In such a complicated situation and after the failure of several Western attempts to stop the war, the United States of America's forces involvement and its political pressure eventually ended the fighting.

Both the KDP and the PUK signed the Washington Agreement in 1997 and thus, the bloody page of the Kurdish civil war, which cost the lives of more than 3,000 people was eventually turned (Gunter, 2018, p. 31). However, the ramifications of the war and its bad consequences remained, with each party keeping control of a part of Iraqi Kurdistan. The KDP's sphere of influence is publicly called the Yellow Zone, while that of the PUK is called the Green Zone, with both names coming from the colour of their political parties' flags.

Regardless of who started the infighting or why, or what were the subjective and objective reasons behind the conflict, the civil war was extremely shocking for the dreamers of a free, just, and peaceful Kurdistan. After more than fifty years of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement's military and political struggle for a free Kurdistan, people did not believe or expect to see the liberators of yesterday, the KDP and the PUK, become today's civil war players. However, before 1991, during the time of their struggle against successive central governments in Baghdad, both parties witnessed tensions and the relationship between the representatives of both zones was not always good (see e.g. Waisy, 2015).

The distance between the politicians' nationalist slogans pre-1991 and the reality on the ground post 1991, especially under the circumstances of the civil war, led to some intellectuals revisiting the past and questioning the present. The old constructed beautiful romantic image of Kurdishness, Kurdistan, and its national identity started losing its gloss. This was particularly so for those who had believed that the Kurdish parties and their historical leaders represented the great hope for achieving the Kurdish dream of building a free Kurdistan and getting the right to self-determination.

The reaction of Kurdish intellectuals and their stand towards the warring parties and the violent clashes was variant. Their attitudes swung between condemning the conflicting parties who had caused the civil war, supporting one of the parties, usually depending on the zone they live in, or just remaining silent[67]. Some names, especially those who were already affiliated to one of

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[67] This was obvious to anyone who witnessed the Kurdish civil war. Interestingly, some years following the end of the conflict, the controversial magazine *Livîn* published the names of

the political parties, became important players in their partisan media machines during the period of the conflict. However, most of the famous intellectuals, including poets, from both zones, condemned the civil war and blamed both sides. Through their cultural products, they were critical of the warring parties, arguing that they were jeopardising the future of Kurdistan and pointing out how they were causing the loss of the lives of many Kurdish people through their internal infighting. Other intellectuals, who located themselves in the middle, took "neutrality" as a principle and preferred the attitude of silence. Some explained the silence as a kind of repudiation of the whole situation, adopting a philosophical stance. For instance, Enwer Mihemed Tahir (b. 1949) referred to the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and his concept of silence. He believed that being silent in such a situation means "double speaking" (Tahir, 2002). Some others, of course, chose silence as a safer way to maintain their personal interests, whether with one of the conflicting parties or generally, within the zone that they lived in.

In Bahdinan, which is considered the KDP's main zone of influence, many writers, in different ways, condemned the civil war and criticised the politicians who had led the newly liberated country towards a such fate. The discourse of self-criticism was the dominant discourse in the literary scene. This can be evidenced through reviewing the literature of that period, which plainly shows criticism of the war and its ramifications[68]. The increase in and the verity of

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writers, who via the media and their cultural productions participated in the conflict and supported one political party against the other, whether from Yellow Zone or Green Zone.

[68] An overview of the poetry of that time will prove this claim. For example, see: Selman Kovilî's poems in دەمێ چوارگۆشه (The Square time) (1998); Arif Hîto's poetic collection: نان و برین (Bread, Wound, and Smile) (1995), and the poetry of Mihsin Qoçan, the case study of this research.

producing such critical cultural discourses, indeed, provided the intellectuals a kind of power to be daring and relatively outside of the Kurdish authorities' control. The power obtained through their discourses led to them becoming a difficult cohort, one that refused to be manipulated by the politicians in the way that they wanted. On the other hand, of course, some of Bahdinani partisan writers, similarly to the writers who belonged to the Green Zone, attempted to legitimise the infighting by considering the opposite conflicting party as a threat to the future of Kurdistan, thus backing their political organisation[69]. But the number of the latter writers was much less than that of the former type, who condemned and criticised both conflicting sides.

Whilst all literary genres dealt with the issues of the civil war and identity, poetry remained the predominant one during the period of the conflict and later. This was not only due to the popularity of poetry and its deep roots in Kurdish culture, for it can also be attributed to the nature of poetry itself, whereby it reacts to circumstances faster and might create its special world more easily than prose. Hence, the lion's share of literary works during this time manifested themselves as poetry. Interestingly, not only the members of *Nûkirin Herûher* Group stood against the conflict, but also the poets who were classified as conservative from neo-classical and modern poetry trends. Despite their variant perspectives and different literary arguments, poetry became the literary genre that gathered almost all types of poets around one

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[69] For example, during the era of the civil war, the poet Remezan Îʿsa (1953-2014) from the Yellow Zone published his poem جەحشنین شنیست و شەشی against the PUK, which was recorded and broadcasted frequently on the KDP's Xebat TV, as a part of the media war. However, when he collected his poems into one divan entitled ژ فەلسەفا بەرخودانێ)(From the Philosophy of Resistance) in (2005), he did not include this poem.

table against one issue. This included those with a classical and neo-classical style, like Mesûd Kitanî (1933-2017), Bedirxan Sindî (b. 1943), Tehsîn Ibrahim Doskî (b. 1970) and Mihemed Emîn Doskî (b. 1962), along with the modern poets, who were also called the 1970s and 1980s' poets generation. They contributed by producing their critical discourses against the Kurdish infighting. Regarding the third and most recent cohort of poets, called *Nûkirin Herûher* Group and their followers, almost all took the same attitude, for example, Mihsin Qoçan (b. 1954), Selman Kovilî (1953 – 2003), Arif Hîto (b. 1968), Şukrî Şehbaz (b. 1964) and Hizirvan (b. 1965).

Whilst all three of the above classifications of poets took part in the ongoing narrative of condemning the civil war[70], it was the modernist Mihsin Qoçan who became an unforgettable name and one of the most famous critics of the conflict at that time. His two collections of poems, *The Eyes* (چاڤێن ئەوێ کەچکا هەنێ *of that Girl)* 1995*, and* ئەو رووباریێ ژ خوارنا لەشیێ خۆ تێر نەبیت *(The River that could not Get Full from Eating its Body)* 1996*,* testify to his dismissive attitude towards what was happening[71]. He subsequently became better known, even within some popular milieus, after his controversial poem گریێل سەر مریەکیێ هێشتا نەبووی *(Cry on an Unborn Dead)*. At the first cultural season of the College of Arts at the University of Duhok in 1995, he read his poem to a massive number of students, governmental officials, party officials and the mass media, which was followed by a huge reaction of both negative and positive responses.

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[70] Some years after the end of the civil war, *Livin* magazine, under the title *Qelemekanî şerî Birakujî (The Pens of Kurdish Fratricide)*, published the names of the writers who became a part of the civil war.

[71] These two mentioned collections of poems, in addition to his other poetic collections were republished in one book entitled ل بەرسفکا مه بەفر باری (It Snowed in Our Courtyard) in 2009.

Despite the lack of popularity that modernist poetry has suffered from, and the difficulties that audiences face in receiving such kind of poetry, a slang swearword of his poem about the civil war, describing the Kurds as "کەر" (ass – stupid), stimulated the audience and the media to react to it.

The media played an important role in promoting the poet's fame, especially through interviews with those critics who were in conflict with modernism. During their critiques, some of the interviewees, like Reşîd Findî (b. 1948), took the opportunity to rail against the modernist style as well[72]. Furthermore, at that time, some propaganda was disseminated, probably by the loyalists of the PUK, that Qoçan's life was being threatened by the KDP's authorities. The latter refuted this claim, by publishing a collection of his poems, including the abovementioned poem, within the KDP Publications Series in Duhok, titled ئەو روبارێ ژ خوارنا لەشێ خۆ تێر نەبیت (The River that could not Get Full from Eating its Body). However, before publishing his poems, the KDP media (*Xebat* TV) held an interview with the poet asking him for an explanation of the use of some phrases that had upset the audience. The poet attempted to normalise the situation and stated that the word ass or donkey was only a metaphor and he did not mean this literally. He also referred to the Holly Quran and how it sometimes uses words such as dog, monkey, cattle, etc., in some contexts, to deliver a message[73]. In fact, Mihsin Qoçan wrote the following words on the dedication page of his poetry collection: "These words are like fire; therefore, they are dedicated from me to me" (Qoçan, 2009). Despite the event passing off safely, his words "هەبوو نەبوو/ کەس ژ کوردان کەرتر نەبوو" (Once upon a time,

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[72] For example, there is Xebat TV's interview with the critic Reşîd Findî (b. 1948) about this poem in 1995.
[73] ibid

nobody was more stupid /a donkey than the Kurds) remained in the memory of many Bahdinani people and later, on various occasions were evoked, especially when the Kurdish politicians got it wrong on national issues.

4.3. Modernist Kurdish Poetry: Revisiting Kurdish National Identity

Having devoted a section to illustrate the circumstances of the Kurdish civil war and Kurdish intellectuals' reaction, this paves the way towards contextualising the poetic discourses of modernist Bahdinani poetry. Since in this research it is acknowledged that "texts exist in contexts" (Said, 1978), *Nûkirin Herûher* Group's poetic texts are considered within their political and even cultural context. However, this does not mean ignoring the role of the reader in interpreting the text, as language is elusive and hence, there is no absolute meaning in the text. In other words, according to what the contemporary literary theory argues, the meaning is made in and out of the text (Buchbinder, 1991). In this regard, the poetry of the representative figure Mihsin Qoçan and his revisiting and questioning of Kurdish identity will be analysed within the atmosphere of the unsettled political situation of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially under the conditions of the Kurdish civil war. Alternatively, dealing with his poetic discourses devoid of their political or cultural context would not be without problems, or at least would take the research direction away from its proposed aims. Qoçan's attempts at deconstructing the general image of the Kurdish Self as the core part of Kurdish identity within these two contexts is germane to the research carried out for this thesis. Put differently, as a modernist throughout his search journey, Qoçan has attempted to break the narrated or constructed image of Kurdish identity, particularly after it failed to prevent the Kurdish civil war, with

its proponents missing the opportunity to transfer the values of Kurdishness into reality during the first period of Kurdish self-rule. Instead, as he indicates, the Kurds who were in power, were only partially dealing with the process of Kurdish nation building. Hence, throughout his poetic discourses, from the one side, he revisits Kurdish national identity and sceptically questions its existence, whilst from the other, he attempts to deconstruct the Kurdish Self itself.

In his poem titled چاوێن ئەوێ کەچکا هەنێ (The Eyes of that Girl), under the "darkness" and "fogginess" of the Kurdish civil war, Qoçan starts his quest for the missing Kurdish identity. The horrific civil war and its negative impact on people as well as on the political future of the Kurdish autonomous entity, made him regretfully believe that the Kurds had almost lost themselves, their identity and their future. In his poetry, he acknowledges that the Kurds have lost their identity in a stupid game. In this regard, he blames, in the first place, the war men or the Kurdish leaders, who he accuses of the missing Kurdish identity. He strives to make this point clearly and to promote the idea that the Kurdish political elites are mainly responsible for what is happening, such that they deserve to be condemned in the worst way. Opposite to what people think of them, in an imaginary sexual scene, he diminishes the war men, identifying them as "بێ شیان و چەك" (unable and powerless) and uselessly trying to fuck themselves. In other words, in his eyes, since the war is about internal infighting, claiming victory does not differ from experiencing defeat. In both cases, playing such a game is useless, for it means declaring the fall or the loss of Kurdish identity. The depicted sexual image, however, becomes more

negatively connotative, when the word "نێرەمۆك" (androgyny) is interpreted within the Kurdish cultural and social context:

ل چاڤێن ئەوێ کەچکا هەنێ

مژه

ژ قێژیێن بەرهاڤێتنا عەورێن بەلەك

بالەبالا حەزا گەرما گوهنێلیا

نێرەمۆکێن بێ شیان و چەك

ئەڤ باژێره هشیار دبیت

وه هزر دکەت ناسناما خۆ بەرزەکریه

د بن تاریێ ڤە..

د بن مژێ ڤە..

یێ ل خۆ دگەریت

ل ناسناما بەرزه دگەریت

Li çavên ewê keçika henê

mije

ji qêjiyên berhavêtina 'ewrên belek

balebala heza germa guhnêliya

nêremokên bê şiyan û çek

ev bajêre hişiyar dibît

we hizir diket nasnama xwe berzekiriye

di bin tariyê ve..

di bin mijê ve..

yê li xwe digerît

li nasnama berze digerît

In the eyes of that girl

There is fog.

The city is waking up

From the miscarriage scream of

Black clouds,

From the hot desire and sexual shouting of

Unable and powerless androgyny

It thinks it has lost its identity.

Under darkness

Under fogginess

The city is looking for itself,

It is looking for the lost identity. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 269)

Here, most of the stanza's expressions and their images are negative, being devoted to constituting the notion of "ناسناما بەرزە" (the lost identity). This is embodied in the general created atmosphere of the stanza, which is fundamentally based on the key words: "مژ" (fog), "مژ" (fogginess) and "تاری" (darkness). Creating such an atmosphere paves the way for delivering a message about the uncertain future that waits for the Kurds due to their leaders' behaviour. Even the poem's main characters are depicted as people who have no specific identity, being of indeterminate sex "نێرەمۆك" (androgyny). Apparently, non-gendered people are stigmatised people in Kurdish society and this word was chosen to undermine those Kurdish leaders and the fighters who engaged the conflict. In addition, the possibility of their infighting leading to success or having sexual intercourse is anathema, because they are described as "بێ شیان و چەك" (unable and powerless). In other words, from the beginning, the text attempts to produce a discourse that the civil war is already

a lost game and the players are unknown, having no clear identity and not knowing what to do. By providing these features and considering the missed opportunity of getting the goodness and blessing of the "عەورێن بەڵەك" (black clouds), the stanza provides the reader an impression of a feeling of a loss of identity. He also articulately repeats phrases that directly refer to the same theme, such as: "یێ ل خۆ دگەریت" (lost its identity), "ناسناما خۆ بەرزە کریە" (looking for itself), and "ناسناما بەرزە" (the lost identity).

Unlike the 1970s and 1980s generation of Kurdish poets, who glorified and eulogised the image of the Self during the process of constructing Kurdish identity, Qoçan criticises and doubts the Kurdish Self. If national identity is fundamentally based on the differences between the Self and the Other, for him, at least at the time of liberation, the Self, not the Other, is the focal element. This is because in the age of anti-colonialism, particularly when the coloniser becomes the subject of decolonisation, the Other appears more significantly. While in the post colonialist era or after liberation, the Self becomes necessarily the focus, especially when it is exposed to what Frantz Fanon calls it the "pitfalls of national consciousness" (Fanon, 1968), or when it reaches a more atrocious level, like the civil war, such as in the Kurdish case. Here, for Qoçan, the differences that appear between the invented beautiful Kurdish Self in the pre-liberation and the really ugly or "ruined – هەرفتی" Self during the post-liberation, is the issue. Contrary to pre-1991, he sees the Kurdish Self negatively, not believing that it has the same image as before. In the following stanza, with doubts and uncertainty, he looks at himself and his broken identity, whilst beginning his journey of doubt and contemplative self-questioning:

ئەز نزانم

یێ هەنێ ئەزم، یان نه ئەزم

ل بەر جامخانا پێشانگەها جلکا

مێزه دکەم سەروچاڤێن خۆ یێن هەرفتی

Ez nizanim

yê henê ez im, yan ne ez im

li ber camxana pêşangeha cilka

mêze dikem serûçavên xwe yên heriftî

I don't know

If this is me, or not!

By the glass pane of a clothes exhibit

I look at my ruined face. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 271)

Whilst expressing these doubts, whether through the general atmosphere of "The Eyes of that Girl" or via some specific phrases, like "ئەز نزانم" (I don't know) and " یێ هەنێ ئەزم یان نه ئەزم" (that is me or not), he admits that the Kurdish Self and its identity or face has been "ruined". Reflecting on the Self and criticising it, probably, is a step to figuring out its hidden and untold aspects, which were kept silent during the recent pre-1991 era. After 1991, Qoçan insists on digging up the Kurdish past to comprehend the present and deal with its challenges. Put differently, there is no place for nationalist slogans and compliments as they do not help in understanding the originality of the Kurdish Self and what it really is. Qoçan, as a modernist, makes this point clearly, especially after Kurdish values and nationalist slogans failed to prevent the occurrence of the civil war. Through the phrase " سەروچاڤێن من یێن هەرفتی" (my ruined face) and many other expressions, he emphasises in one way

or another the breakdown of the previous ideal image of Kurdish identity, which was partially constructed by the cultural discourses of the 1970s and 1980s generation of Kurdish poets. This is, indeed, the main transformation of the poetic cultural discourse in the pre-1991 and post-1991 eras, as will become clear in the forthcoming examples.

In the last verses of چاڤێن ئەوئ کەچکا هەنێ (The Eyes of that Girl), whether as a poet or as a narrator of the poem, Qoçan attempts to represent the Kurdish Self and declare its loss. He encourages the audience to come with him and to search together for the "پارچێن بەرزه" (missing parts) of this Self. The call could be considered as a manifesto by the poet and an invitation to his audience to revisit Kurdish identity:

ئەزئ د چاڤێن کەچکا هە دا

ئەوا د بەهۆی دا روینشتی

یئ بەرزه بوویم

وەرن ئەز و هوین

دا ل پارچێن من یێن بەرزه بگەرین

Ezê di çavên keçika he da

ewa di behoy da rûnişitî

yê berze bûym

werin ez û hûn

da li parçên min yên berze bigerîn

In the eyes of that girl,

Who is sitting in the lobby,

I'm lost.

Come on! me and you,

Let's look for my missing parts. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 271)

Based on the facts on the ground and on the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group's recognition that in their poetry they address the cultural elite, not ordinary people, this call could be considered as a significant invitation to the former to search objectively for the "missing parts" of Kurdish identity. However, it is undeniable that the construction of national identity itself is a selective process that concentrates on positive aspects and subjectively memorising proud "parts" of a nation's history. Here, in this case, revisiting the past and investigating the Kurdish Self away from nationalistic enthusiasm is understandable, especially after the Iraqi Kurds were liberated from direct Arab domination. However, when it comes to poetry and national identity, subjectivity and objectivity are thrown into doubt, but usually the former dominates the latter. In Qoçan's poetry, even though emotional aspects are unavoidable, there is a wide space for rational and philosophical discourses. He produces a kind of rational discourse and encourages his audience to think critically about the Kurdish Self. He raises some existential questions like, "who am I as a Kurd?", away from the nationalistic enthusiasm that the first generation of modern Kurdish poets used to express. The above stanza, for Qoçan, is like the point of departure towards a real critical journey of revisiting Kurdish identity. This is not only found in his poem collection چاڤێن ئەوێ کەچکا (The Eyes of that Girl), but also in ئەو روویارێ ژ خوارنا لەشێ خۆ تێرنەبیت هەنێ (The River that could not Get Full from Eating its Body).

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From the beginning of his searching for the "missing parts" of Kurdish identity, Qoçan finds that animosity and fratricide are original parts of the Kurdish Self that need to be disclosed and criticised. In a poem titled ڤەگەڕیانا قابیلی (The Return of Cain), before revealing the hidden aspects of the Kurdish Self, he depicts fratricide in the image of a monster and asks it not to come back:

دگەل میلێن دەمژمێرئ نەزڤرە

د ناوسكا خۆ یا تاری ڤە

تەنا روینە

(...)

دەنگڤەدانا تە كەتنە

تو... ئەی كرێتترین هەلامەتئ

هابیل و قابیلا رێکا خۆ ژ بەر بەرزەکری

Digel mîlên demjimêrê nezivre

di nawiska xwe ya tarî ve

tena rûne

(...)

dengvedana te ketine

tu... ey kirêttirîn helametê

Habîl û Qabîla rêka xwe ji ber berzekirî

Don't come back with clock hands.

Sit peacefully

In your dark cave

(…)

Your echo

Is downfall.

You…

The ugliest monster, who made

Cain and Abel

Lose their way… (Qoçan, 2009, p. 273)

The principal idea of this stanza is expressed through making an intertextual reference to the ancient story of the brothers Cain and Abel. The story, according to the Abrahamic religious texts (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), is the first story of fratricide in the world. Those texts state that Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's firstborn sons, but for some reason, Cain murdered his younger brother (see e.g. Byron, 2011)[74]. Foregrounding such an example, whether through the intertextual title (The Return of Cain) or via the first stanza itself, could be easily interpreted as a warning sign to the Kurdish brothers, the PUK and the KDP, not to repeat the same horrific act of fratricide. Qoçan takes the story from its religious and social context into a political and national one. He indicates that fratricide will cause the Kurds to lose the new Kurdish entity and its identity that has just started taking a kind of political form, as represented by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). However, the poet believes this warning is not going to prevent the loss of Kurdish identity, especially as the act is no longer casual or accidental, but rather, it has become a part of the Kurdish Self structure and its identity. The following

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[74] When in it comes to the details, there are differences between the narrations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but they all share the common idea of fratricide between Cain and Abel. Recently, their names have become symbols for the crime of murder between two brothers. In Kurdish, after the civil war, the new created word *birakuji* became very common. It literally means fratricide.

verses of the poem, in essence, sum up the accumulation of animosity and bloody internal infighting regarding the history of the Kurds:

دەرئ كەنيا مە ل تاقه

خۆكوشتن ل نك مە تفاقه

ئەم ب سيتافكا خۆ دكەين كەنى..

Derê keniya me li taqe

xwekuşitin li nik me tifaqe

em bi sîtafka xwe dikeyen kenî..

We laugh openly…

Fratricide, for us, is agreement

We laugh at our shadow. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 274)

Unlike modernist Kurdish poetry principles, which involved abandoning traditional rhyme, the first two verses were written with a strong rhyming chime and make an intertextual link with the famous verses of the classical Kurdish poet Ehmedê Xanî (1650 – 1707), who also wrote about the lack of agreement and unity amongst the Kurds. Nearly three centuries prior to Qoçan, in his epic poetry *Mem û Zîn* (Mem and Zin), Xanî wrote about the problematics of the Kurdish Self, which has "always هەميشه" been fragmented and in conflict with itself. However, Xanî's approach to the Kurdish Self during that age was from a patriotic perspective, not a nationalistic one, as there were no national thoughts and identities like in the modern age (see: Vali, 2003). Notwithstanding this, since the beginning of the twentieth century, Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* has been read and interpreted nationalistically (see: van Bruinessen, 2003). Here, in these verses, regardless of the similarity of the theme that

Qoçan and Xanî deal with, the rhythmical intertextuality of the rhyming words "ل تاقه" (open) and "تفاقه" (agreement) from Xanî's rhymes "بێ تفاقن" (with no agreement) and "شیقاقن" (disunity), is inviting the reader to consider Qoçan's verses in the light of Xanî's poetic text. These rhymes, which originally are from Arabic, were widely used in classical Kurdish poetry and could easily evoke the reader's memory of that poetic heritage. In particular, *Mem û Zîn*'s introduction was almost entirely dedicated to Kurdish issues, concerning the Kurds and their disunity. Xanî writes:

لـهو پێکڤه هـهمـیشـه بـێ تـفاقن

دائـم ب تـهمـهررود و شیقـاقن

گـهر دێ هـهبـوا مـه ئتتفاقـهك

ڤـێـكرا بـكـرا مـــه ئـنقیـادهك

رۆم و عهرهب و عهجهم تهمامى

هـهمـیان ژ مه را دكـر غـولامـى

تـهكمیل دكر مه دین و دهولهت

تهحصیل دكر مه عیلم و حكمهت

Lew pêkve hemîşe bê tifaqin

dayim bi temerrud û şîqaqin

ger dê hebûya me ittifaqek

vêkra bikira me inqiyadek

Rom û 'Ereb û 'Ecem temamî

hemiyan ji me ra dikir ẍulamî

tekmîl dikir me dîn û dewlet

tehsîl dikir me 'îlm û hikmet (Doskî, T. Î., 2008, p. 47)

They are always with no agreement

Continually in conflict and disunity

If only there were agreement among us,

If we were to obey a single one of us,

All of the Turks and Arabs and Persians

Would become our servants,

We would reach perfection in religion and state

We would become productive in knowledge and wisdom[75].

The intertextual relationship between the two previous texts in terms of the theme and rhyme provides the reader an impression about the continuity of the problematic Kurdish Self, which has been determined by disunity and conflict over a long historical period. Considering the contemporary age of Qoçan, who wrote about the recent Kurdish civil war, and going back three centuries to the era of Xanî, who also wrote about internal Kurdish conflict, provides a good illustration of the extent and the depth of this issue. In particular, the latter's poetry is not about any specific Kurdish conflict, but rather, it is his concluding reading of the Kurdish Self and its history. The reading is articulated through the utility of some very significant relevant words that indicate a long duration of time, such as the word "always – هەمیشه" or "continually - دائم". In other words, the historical line of the disunity and problematic Kurdish Self, backwardly, starts from Qoçan, passing Xanî, until

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[75] Regarding the translation of Xanî's verses into English, I did not depend on one single translation. I was selective in choosing the appropriate one, according to what I thought was the best translation. Sometimes, I even edited the selected one in a way to serve the target text, especially when I needed the literal translation of some specific Kurdish words. The following sources are the references that I drew upon: (Gardi, 2009; Mirawdeli, 2012; O'Shea, 2004; Saadalla, 2008).

it reaches a far unknown point of Kurdish history. In the following verses, Qoçan promotes this idea clearly, building upon Xanî's reading of the ancientness of Kurdish animosity and disunity, by describing the Kurds as:

"پەهلەوانێن مێژوویا کەچ(the heroes of a perverted history):

کەرب و کین

خوداوەندەکا دێرینە

ژ نەبوونێ یێ بووی

خۆ ب خۆ یێ دای

خەلکی هەمی یێ هەی کری.. یێ تەلاق دای

هەر تەنێ ئەم

پەهلەوانێن مێژوویا کەچ

ئەختوباری ل نك مه یا مای

kerb û kîn

xudawendeka dêrîn e

ji nebûnê yê bûy

xwe bi xwe yê day

xelkî hemî yê hey kirî.. yê telaq day

her tenê em

pehlewanên mêjûya keç

extubarî li nik me ya may

Animosity is

An ancient God

It was born from non-existence

She created herself

All people abandoned her… divorced her

Except us

The heroes of the perverted history

We remained loyal to her. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 275)

Again, alongside Xanî, Qoçan highlights the historical line of disunity and animosity among the Kurds and thereby, produces the same as his critical discourses. If in the age of Kurdish nationalist awaking, this kind of discourse in Bahdinani poetry was silent, in the time of semi-independence, Kurdish disunity had notably become a crucial poetic theme. The occurrence of the civil war, obviously, was behind reproducing these discourses. However, pre-1991 there had also been some internal infighting and conflict between the Kurdish factions. But the external threats to the Kurds and their identity had led to the contested issues being swept under the carpet. After 1991, intense light was shed on the Kurdish Self as a matter of identity. In the above verses, through providing intertextually with Xanî's two words impressed in the Kurdish cultural memory, namely "هەمیشه" (always) and "دائم" (continually), Qoçan re-emphasises the problematics of Kurdish identity. According to him, the Kurds are the only people who are still suffering among themselves from animosity and fratricide. Throughout these verses and in previous stanzas, he produces some specific discourses to re-imagine Kurdish identity, but this time not selectively and without refinement. Thus, by depending on reading the past and experiencing his problematic present, Qoçan constitutes his poetic discourses about Kurdish identity through words like: "کەرب و کین" (animosity), "خۆکوشتن" (fratricide), as well as through evoking Xanî's words, such as: "بێ تیفاق" (disunity), "شیقاق" (disputes) and "تەمەررود" (conflict).

These discourses of identity, on the one hand, participate in shaping the Kurdish Self, whilst pointing out the missing parts of Kurdish identity, on the other. Their aim is get the audience to face some home truths and urge the Kurds to revisit their identity. His poetic discourses are a kind of invitation to deconstruct and understand the Kurdish Self, and they could be considered as warning signs for the Kurds to give up the "dark" parts of their identity. For Qoçan, the time is right to face truths as they are, not to invent some imagined ones. After the semi-independence of the Iraqi Kurds, disputes, disunity, animosity, fratricide and conflict have not been ended or been given up. On the contrary, these attributes and attitudes have stayed with the Kurds, becoming a real threat to their new national entity (KRG). In this regard, the most inconvenient point for Qoçan is the Kurds' loyalty to animosity and hate, which caused fratricide, in their case, similar to what happened to Adam and Eve's sons. That is why he shamefully admits and even emphasises how these attributes are original parts of Kurdish identity and they need to be disclosed, not ignored or hidden. However, for him, these attributes of the Kurdish Self or this part of identity, are "فەھێتیا فەھێتیێ" (the shame of shame) and "رەشه نیشان" (the black mark) of the Kurdish past and present, which can be seen in this extract:

هەی فەھێتیا فەھێتیێ

رەشه نیشانا سەردەمێ کوردکوژیێ

ژ بەر گازندێن مه نەرەڤه، کەهی بمینه

ئەم حەز ژ ته دکەین

تو مێهڤانا شەڤێن سۆر بی

سەمایێ بکه د خوینا مه دا

د ناڤ نڤێنێن (کوردینیێ) دا

رویس بمینی.. بمینی شڵیای

Hey fihêtiya fihêtiyê

reşe nîşana serdemê Kurdkujiyê

ji ber gazindên me nereve, kehî bimîne

em hez ji te dikeyn

tu mêhvana şevên sor bî

semayê bike di xwîna me da

di nav nivînên (Kurdîniyê) da

rwîs bimînî.. bimînî şelyay

You, the shame of shame

The black mark of Kurd-cide age

Don't escape from our complaints,

We love you

To be the guest of red nights

To dance in our blood

To stay naked on the bed of Kurdishness

To stay unclothed. (Qoçan, 2009, pp. 275–276)

4-4- Narrating the Passive History

If the process of building national identities in the first place depends on remembering positive aspects of history and forgetting negative ones, as Ernest Renan argues (see Renan, 1990), in this transformative period of modern Kurdish history, Qoçan recalls or remembers only negative points. He believes that the age of "Kurdishness" in his era is repeating the same

unsuccessful attempts of Kurds during their history of obtaining national entity or even of saving what they gained in terms of "national" achievements in their ancient history. Whilst he considers himself as a modernist poet, he has a primordialist stance towards nation and nationalism. In the following stanza, he digs up what was considered "the history of Kurds". He works to disclose the Kurds' "shameful" facts of the past and to link them to the present. Unlike the generation of poets of the 1970s and 1980s, he believes that the Kurdish problem in the past and even in the present is with the Kurdish Self itself, not with the Other. He selectively narrates passive events of "Kurdish" history, starting with the collapse of the "Kurdish" Media, through to the time of the fall of the Kurdish principalities in the era of the Ottoman Empire, right up until the failure of "پەرلەمانێ ففتی ففتی" (fifty-fifty parliament) in the recent civil war. By doing so, he replaces the typical narrated discourses about Kurds and their history with something that could be considered shocking for the audience of his poetry:

کراسێن شۆر بۆ گورگێن شەڤێ

کەر نەکەن

کەتنا مادێ

فەتوایا مەلایێن خەتێ

روندکێن کەلها هەرفتی

برینا بادێ

ئالۆزیا سینەم خانێ و

خولیکینیا پەرلەمانێ ففتی ففتی

ل بەر دفنا مە دویکێلێ دکەن

kirasên şor bo gurgên şevê

ker neken

ketina Madê

fetwaya Melayê Xetê

rundikên kelha heriftî

birîna Badê

aloziya Sînem Xanê û

xulîkîniya perlemanê fiftî fiftî

li ber difina me dûkêlê diken

Don't sew long cloths for

The wolves of the night.

I'm still smelling the smoke of

The fall of Media

The Fatwa of Melayê Xetê[76]

The tears of the collapsed castle[77]

The Badê's[78] *injury*

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[76] Melayê Xetê was the Mufti of Soran Principality at the time of the last prince (Mire Kore) in the 19th century. Xetê issued a fatwa in the interest of the Ottoman Empire when the latter gathered its army to overthrow the Soran Principality. His fatwa stated that whoever fights against the army of the Caliphate of Islam will become Kaffir (non-Muslim). Many contemporary Kurdish scholars, including the poet Qoçan, consider his fatwa as treason. However, some other scholars have a different reading of it. About this issue and these different opinions, see: (al-Dawudi, 2003).

[77] It is very likely he means Dimdim Castle, which was built (or rebuilt) by the Emîr Xan Lepzêrîn in Bradost region at the beginning of the 17th century. According to the narrated epics and ballads, one of the reasons behind its sacking by the Safavid Empire army was animosity and treason. For more information about Dimdim Castle events, see (Nêrweî, 2018).

[78] Badê is the name of a village located in Duhok City. The phrase "برينا بادئ یه" (it is Badê's injury) is a Kurdish saying, common in Bahdinan. It is typically used when someone is exaggerating in claiming pain due to having a simple cut, but in reality, it does not cause that much pain. Here, in this poetic extract, we can understand that the Kurdish leaders are not honest in their claiming to be in pain, due to their "care" of Kurdistan.

The anxiety of Sînem Xan[79]

The ash of the fifty-fifty parliament. (Qoçan, 2009, p. 321)

Through narrating these selected historical events, he attempts to shed light on the hidden aspects of the Kurdish Self. Usually, the institutional and cultural narration about the mentioned events focuses on their light aspects, but Qoçan focuses on the dark ones. Regarding the "fall of Media", for instance, many Kurdish nationalists proudly claim they are the descendants of the ancient Medes, who toppled the Assyrian Empire six centuries B.C.E (see e.g. O'Shea, 2004, pp. 56–66) . Here, the poet emphases only the defeat of the Medes whose, and this is the point, last King was deposed by someone from his family. In such an example and in others, like "the Fatwa of *Melayê Xetê*" or "the tears of the collapsed castle", he tries to figure out the problematic Kurdish Self, which often repeats itself in the same way even in different contexts. He highlights how fratricide or treason is a fundamental element in the Kurdish personality and it formulates Kurdish identity. In this poetic extract, he links all these events with the Kurdish civil war to get the result that the Kurds have the same attributes and that they have exhibited them repeatedly throughout history. In the first two lines of the stanza he declares: " کراسێن شۆر بۆ گورگێن شەڤێ کەر نەکەن" (don't sew long cloths for the wolves of the night). The two lines in an intertextual link are based on the Kurdish proverb: " پا مه کراسێ شۆر بۆ ته کەرکر بوو" (but we had sewn the long cloth for you!). The proverb is a metaphor, meaning we expected good things from you, but we were wrong. It

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[79] Sînem is the name of a protagonist in a famous Kurdish folkloric tale (Pahizok). She became a victim of betrayal between two close friends, one of whom was her husband. For more details about her story, see (Ozdemîr, 2015).

is usually used in a situation when positive things are expected from someone, but he or she has done something awful. Here, the poet tells the audience not to expect something positive from "گورگێن شەڤێ" (the wolves of the night), who from the fall of Media until the destruction of the fifty-fifty parliament, have not delivered any achievement that was promised. In fact, throughout his journey through Kurdish history the poet cannot find a positive sign for the today's Kurds and their future.

Qoçan's remarkable reading of the Kurds' experience and the issue of constructing Kurdish identity appear in his controversial poem " گریا سەر مریەکێ هێشتا نەبووی" (Cry over an Unborn Dead). The poem, with some of its verses being very well-known even among the popular classes, summarises his reading of the Kurdish leadership experience with identity and their policy, especially after 1991. This daring poem in some of its verses contains slang words and direct discourses. It reveals the Kurds' contemporary behaviour and indicates their failure in building their nation and national identity. It also shows how they deal with their heritage, aesthetics, philosophy and other aspects of life. In brief, it shows the Kurds' world view, which from Qoçan's perspective is based on facts on the ground and it could be considered as the poet's reading of the Kurd's behaviour in the past and present:

هەبوو، نەبوو

کەس ژ کوردان کەرتر نەبوو

بچویکەکێ نەبووی هەبوو، سەرێ وی

مار

هەمی شەڤا

مالبچویکێ دایکا خۆ دخوار

خانی دخراند

جوانیا سەلوایێ پێشیل دکر

هۆزانا جزیری ددراند

ل کەلا دمدم خوین بەلاڤ دکر

خوین ڤەدخوار

هەستیکێن میرگەهێن دێرین

د قۆرا چاڤێن خۆ دا دهێرا.. دکره

ئار

(...)

چ چیرۆکەکا فهێته

Hebû, nebû

kes ji Kurdan kertir nebû

biçûkekê nebûy hebû, serê wî

mar

hemî şeva

malbiçûkê dayka xwe dixwar

Xanî dixirand

cwaniya Selwayê pêşîl dikir

hozana Cizîrî didirrand

li Kela Dimdim xwîn belav dikir

xwîn vedixwar

hestîkên mîrgehên dêrîn

di qora çavên xwe da dihêra.. dikire

ar

 (...)

çi çîrokeka fhête

Once upon a time

No one was more stupid than Kurds

They had an unborn baby

His head was a snake.

Every night

He was eating his mother's womb

He was dragging Xanî

Destroying Selwa's beauty[80]

Raping Cizîrî's poetry[81]

He was spreading blood in Dimdim Castle[82]

Drinking blood,

He was grinding the bones of ancient principalities

In his eye sockets, and

Making them powder

(…)

What a shameful story! (Qoçan, 2009, pp. 287–288)

These poetic discourses of Qoçan's poetry criticise the performance of Kurdish nationalism and condemn its failure to deal properly with the issue of nation-building and national identity. The poem "گرى ل سهر مريهكێ هێشتا نهبووى" (Cry over an Unborn Dead) was written and presented at the time of the

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[80] Selwa is the beloved of the Kurdish poet and theologian Melayê Cizîrî (1570-1640). In his poetry, she was depicted as a symbol of the real and metaphorical beauty.

[81] Cizîrî (Melayê Cizîrî) (1570-1640) is one of the top Kurdish classic poets and theologians, from the Botan school of poetry.

[82] Dimdim Castle was built (or rebuilt) by the Emîr Xan Lepzêrîn in the Bradost region at the beginning of the 17th century and sacked by the Safavid Empire army. See: (Nêrweî, 2018).

Kurdish civil war. It shows the poet's evaluation of the performance of the Kurdish political leadership after the liberation from the Arab Ba'ath, when the Kurds of Iraq obtained quasi-independence. It indicates how the Kurds misled and lost the opportunity to promote the gains of the Uprising into something better, by failing to keep their quasi-independent entity away from the civil war. Qoçan imagines the new Kurdish entity as a "ٮچوٮکەکئ نەبووی" (an unborn baby), that went to its death before her or his birth being celebrated. In other words, the unborn or uncompleted entity that had not being given a clear identity was destroyed, this time, by the Kurds themselves who did not pass in the first examination of self-rule. Labelling the new entity as dead, signifies declaring its failure, at least from the poet's point of view. When producing his poetic discourses about Kurdish identity, he ascribes this failure to the Kurdish leadership, which was depicted as "مار" (snake) that eats the womb of Kurdistan. More significantly, however, he blames the Kurds in general, who have selected or elected such a "head - سەر" to lead them.

Through the poetic discourse of this stanza, and even through some other poems, he attempts to handle the Kurdish problematic present, by resorting to the Kurdish heritage and recalling it in such a way as to stimulate the collective memory of the Kurds. He often attempts to shock his audience by telling unnarrated stories about their history and this time. Here, unexpectedly and with an intertextual link to the folktale motif "هەبوو نەبوو – once upon a time", he narrates the contemporary story of the Kurds and their failure in building a nation an and identity. Of particular interest, is the stanza's intertextual literary references to children's folktale motifs and the structure of conventional Kurdish stories, which were employed to touch the memory of the audience.

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Though through his poems Qoçan usually addresses cultural elite and he does not write for ordinary audience, in the first two verses " كەس ژ، نەبوو هەبوو کوردان کەرتر نەبوو - Once upon a time/ No one was more stupid than Kurds) he intentionally brooks his complicated stereotype style. Thus, he clearly delivers a message to everyone and emphasises that not just the Kurdish leadership was responsible for the civil war, but all Kurds, including the ordinary people, who invariably are the real players on the ground. By doing so, the message has reached different levels of people, not just because of its controversial and slangy expressions, but also, because it involves employing a folktale motif through which it could easily reach the audience due to the close link between the people and folklore.

The shock that occurred from the above intertextual stanza is not due to the first line "هەبوو نەبوو" (كەس ژ کوردان کەرتر Once upon a time), but to the second, " كەرتر کوردان ژ کەس نەبوو" (No one was more stupid than the Kurds), which shatters the reader's horizon of expectation. That is, whilst the first line plays an important role in attracting the reader's attention due to its touching on Kurdish childhood memory, the second verse is the shocking one, which left his audience offended. The feeling of offence was expressed by many people, including the cultural elite, some of whom took the phrase not as a metaphor, but as having a literal meaning. Of course, the literal meaning of the phrase is very offensive in Kurdish cultural context, especially when it becomes populist. Qoçan utilises the word "کەر", which means "ass" or "donkey" in English, but here it comes as an adjective that describes the Kurds as silly-asses. So, the literal translation of this line "کەس ژ کوردان کەرتر نەبوو" would be "no one was more of a donkey than the Kurds", which is more offensive than "No one was more

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stupid/foolish than the Kurds" at least in the Kurdish context. It is worth mentioning that almost always the two first lines of an original folktale start with "هەبوو نەبوو، کەس ژ خودئ مەزنتر نەبوو" - once upon a time, no one was greater than God", and then the storyteller starts narrating his or her story.

In this stanza, Qoçan justifies why he considers the Kurds, particularly in this sensitive stage of their history, to be very irrational people in comparison with other nations. Whilst poets are not required to justify their ideas like researchers, one can find in Qoçan's poems some signs of this so as get across the point that he wants to make. Through his poetic narration, he gradually builds up a negative image about the Kurds, obviously, based on his reading of their behaviour and handling of events, especially after the liberation of post 1991 and subsequently. Here, rather than simply depicting and criticising the men of the civil war, he indicates some reasons behind describing the Kurds as irrational people. For instance, through his narration, he points out the indifference that Kurds demonstrate towards their national heritage, which is represented here via the name of Ehmedê Xanî. Qoçan evaluates the Kurdish rulers' response to Xanî's calls for unity and agreement. He pessimistically concludes that the Kurds were disrespecting Xanî/ dragging Xanî "خانی دخراند". The story from this aspect is embodied through utilising the name of Xanî, who is considered an inspiring symbol of Kurdish nationalism and for many nationalists, is the first historical voice that called for "national" unity among Kurds. Moreover, in his poetic narration, Qoçan shows that Kurds disrespectfully treat the values of beauty, when he says that they are: "Destroying Selwa's beauty – جوانیا سەلمایئ پێشیل دکر". Selwa is the beloved girl, who was created as a literary figure by the famous classical poet Melayê

Cizîrî (1570 - 1640). Almost all Cizîrî's real and metaphorical love along with his attitude towards beauty issues, was expressed through her, which she became a symbol of beauty.

In addition to Kurdish indifference towards their national heritage and aesthetical values, Qoçan points out that they and their rulers do not esteem *high culture*. Melayê Cizîrî, as the iconic classic poet, whose whole divan survived history, unarguably represents Kurdish (high) culture. This is not only due to his *high language* and complicated style of writing, but also, owing to his philosophical and sophist content, which influenced a number of classical poets. However today, it is hard even for many intellectuals to approach his poetry. Here, when Qoçan narrates the story, he indicates that Kurdish society, including its rulers, has been "Raping Cizîrî's poetry – هۆزانا جزیری ددراند". This metaphorical line or artistic expression depicts the Kurds being disrespectful of cultural production and knowledge, at least from his point of view. He also, through the word "ددراند" (raping), shows how the voice of violence has become louder than that of culture and knowledge. On the part of rulers, they chose war language and became involved in internal fighting, whereas the people do not recognise culture and beauty, not realising its value. The image that Qoçan narrates about the Kurds has an intertextual link with the general image that was narrated by Ehmedê Xanî about them. Three centuries earlier, the latter had criticised Kurdish society for not respecting knowledge and wisdom. In both images, the narration about Kurds is very negative. However, Qoçan's depicted image is sharper, darker, and more abbreviated than Xanî, as he says:

گەر علمی تەمام بدی ب پۆلەك

بفرۆشی تو حکمەتێ ب سۆڵەك

کەس ناکەتە مەیتەرێ خۆ جامی

راناگرتن کەسەك نیزامی

Ger 'ilmî temam bidî bi polek

bifiroşî tu hikmetê bi solek

kes nakete meyterê xwe Camî

ranagiritin kesek nîzamî (Doskî, T. Î., 2008, p. 51)

If you give away the whole of science for one shilling

And sell wisdom for a slipper

No one would make Camî[83] his groom

No one would employ Nizamî.[84]

An interesting point worth mentioning is that Qoçan's critique is oriented towards the Kurds and their rulers in both zones, namely Bahdinani speaking areas and Sorani speaking ones. However, he has no audience at all in the latter. For him, both sides share the responsibility of creating such a situation. Whilst he specifies the head or the Kurdish leadership as the main player, he criticises all Kurdish people for having such a head, attributing that to Kurdish foolishness and idiocy. Describing the Kurdish people and labelling them in such a harsh way is like a message to make them aware of the catastrophic destiny that awaits their "*unborn* – نەبووی" entity. What one can understand from his poetic discourses, whether in this stanza or the previous one, is that

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[83] Camî (1414-1492) is one of the famous Persian poets and theologians (Davis, 2007).

[84] Nizamî or Nizamê Gencewî (1140-1202) is one of the greatest Persian poets (Talattof and Clinton, 2000).

the poet believes that who lives in events, consciously or unconsciously, will become a part of them. This hypothesis would be more acceptable, if it is taken into consideration that the Kurds, in general, are not just politicised, for also, to a large extent, they are provincialised and partisan, in accordance with the Yellow and Green Zones. In other words, in this Kurdish-Kurdish conflict, the people who belonged to the Yellow Zone supported the KDP and their fighters, exactly like the people who belonged to the Green Zone, who backed the PUK and theirs. Hence, the poet criticises both zones, the Yellow and the Green, including their leaderships and people. However, in terms of audience and readership, due to the difficulty of understanding between Bahdinani and Sorani languages, M. Qoçan's poetry only had the chance to be read and understood in the Yellow Zone.

Here, by linking Mihsin Qoçan's poetic narration with the question of nation and national identity, the narrated story about Kurds, and the image of identity that he has attempted to construct, would be a very terrible one. The poetic discourses that he has left behind are still dangerous and they can work in another direction. Building on Homi K. Bhabha's argument that a nation is a narration (Bhabha, 1990), whereby the act of narrating involves making nations and national identity, Qoçan's poetic narration and his cultural act of doing identity would result in crystallising a very unpleasant image of it. He himself at the end sadly says: "چ چیرۆکەکا فەیتە!" (What a shameful story!). He may see that these discourses and narration would help to correct the trajectory of nation-building and identity, but the results would be opposite as such discourses may contribute to shaping Kurds' thinking regarding themselves. However, it is undeniable that the popularity of modernist Kurdish

poetry, in general, is very limited and this has reduced the impact of such discourses.

4-5- Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the modernist Bahdinani poetry that was produced during the period 1991-2003, when the Kurds of Iraq experienced self-ruling in their quasi-independent entity. I focused on the national identity discourses of the predominant poet Mihsin Qoçan, as a representative of Bahdinani modernist poetry. It was argued that despite the claim of separating poetry from politics and literature from nationalism, the modernist poets could not liberate their poetry from the political issues of Kurdish nationalism. The analysis demonstrated that self-criticism, on the one hand, and sceptically questioning Kurdish national identity, on the other, were the dominant discourses of this poetry. The examined poetic works refuted the modernist poets' contention about separating poetry from politics or nationalist issues, especially during the time of the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict. Their discourses criticised the performance of politicians and condemned their failure to deal properly with the issue of nation-building and national identity.

In his poetry, Qoçan attempted to deconstruct the typical image of the Kurdish Self and to narrate the hidden and untold points about Kurds. Through his searching for the "missing parts" of Kurdish identity, he emphasised disunity, fratricide and treason as fundamental parts of the Kurdish Self. For his quest, Qoçan adopted a rational and philosophical trend in his poetry, whilst encouraging his audience to think critically about the Kurdish Self. Some existential questions were raised like, "who am I as a Kurd?", away from the

nationalistic enthusiasm that the first generation of modern Kurdish poets used to present. Actually, he selectively narrated passive events from Kurdish history and related them to the present. Here, by linking Mihsin Qoçan's poetic narration with the question of nation and national identity, the narrated story about Kurds, and the image of identity that he attempted to construct, would be an extremely terrible one. Some of the poetic discourses that he left behind are still dangerous and they can work in another direction. If national identity is fundamentally based on the differences between the Self and the Other, for him, at least at the time of post colonialism or liberation, the Self, not the Other, was the focal element in his poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bahdinani Pop Poetry

Glorifying the Self and Humiliating the Other

5.1. Introduction

Following the Operation Iraqi Freedom[85] in 2003 and after the Kurdish involvement in rebuilding post-Saddam Iraq, a new popular poetic trend emerged onto the Bahdinani cultural scene. It aimed to return poetry to the people; making it available for everyone. The trend mostly involved poets from the younger generation, who had no rich literary background. In a relatively short period of time, they became popular and they were very much welcomed by public. To a large degree, they obtained their popularity due to their enthusiastic nationalist discourse, especially their anti-Arab one. The increasing tension between the Kurds and the Arabs helped establish a broad popular base for these poets, who promoted the sensitive issue of nationalism.

After a period of relative dormancy during 1991-2003, Kurdish nationalism was woken again. The issue of disputed territories between the Kurds and the Arabs, the attack of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) on Kurdistan as

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[85] This is the official name of the war that was led by the USA and its alliance to topple the Iraqi Ba'ath regime from power in 2003. However, for many, especially Arabs, this name is not acceptable as they considered the war to be an invention and occupation, whilst the Kurds and their media were glad to call it the "Freedom War".

well as referendum[86] and independence all played a significant role in this stimulation. The young poets exploited these matters and dealt with them as poetic themes. Further, the audience saw themselves in their poetry and loved it. However, there were some other important factors that helped these poets become popular. For example, performing their poetry with music and songs, writing poems in a simple way, and exploiting new technologies in disseminating their work. In particular, they recorded their poetry and published CDs, as well as making video clips like singers and pop stars.

These attributes that characterised their poetry made it enjoyable to many people. In particular, the simplicity of their poetry made it easy for everyone to understand and here it will be explored as a part of popular culture. According to Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick's *Cultural Theory* (2008, pp. 246–247), popular culture, in its simple definition, is " the culture that appeals to, or that is most comprehensible by, the general public". Hence, due to these conditions being attributable in this poetry, I will explore it as a part of cultural poetry and call it *pop poetry*. This is also because, these poets themselves have not named their poetry, except to describe it as a "poetry for all". Drawing on Edgar and Sedgwick's definition (ibid), the other point that makes this labelling appropriate, is that popular cultural artefacts serve to articulate some differentiations in society, including "ethnic identity". Actually, this is the third reason behind categorising this poetry as a part of popular culture and identifying it as pop poetry. Interestingly, this type of poetry is only found in

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[86] Two referendums on Kurdistan independence, one in 2005 and the other in 2017 were held. This first one was unofficial, but the second was official.

Bahdinan. Neither the Sorani speaking area, nor Arab Iraq, has witnessed such a phenomenon, which eventually became a style of poetry in Bahdinan[87].

After the Kurdish Uprising in 1991, Bahdinani poetry critically focused on the Kurdish Self through questioning its national identity, whilst after the toppling of the Arab Ba'ath regime in 2003, it turned to glorifying the Kurdish Self and humiliating the Arab Other. Arabs' culture, race, geography, landscape, and even their interpreting of Islam became targets of Kurdish poets' criticism. As never witnessed before, they were successful in making their poetry as the poetry of the day. It became available almost everywhere, on mobile phones, CDs, TV and radio channels, as well as at various events organised for the poets. They played an important role in mobilising people around Kurdish national identity and in shaping their perspectives about themselves as Kurds and about the Other as Arabs. Previously, prior to 1991 under the rule of Arab Ba'athists, Kurdish poets symbolically resisted pan-Arabism, but after 2003 the new young poets produced their identity discourses more directly and usually in a straightforward way, promoting the Self and criticising the Other. Despite the popularity that they gained amongst common people, their poetry was often criticised by the modernist poets, who argued that they were soiling the reputation of poetry. But whether agreeing with their style or not, these

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[87] In Iraqi and in many Arab countries, besides the written Arabic poetry in "الفصحى" (al-Fusha), there is oral poetry in "العامية" (al-'Amia) or spoken slang. It has different names, depending on the region that they belong to, like "الشعر النبطي" , "الشعر الشعبي" , "الشعر العامي". However, all of them are different form Bahdinani pop poetry. The Arabic form belongs to the oral and slang language and it is a continuation of the oral Arabic heritage, while the Bahdinani one is a new phenomenon belonging to the age of post modernism.

pop poets occupied a lead position in the general cultural scene of Bahdinan. Whilst the modernist poets relied on their poetry's artistic values and a cultural elite as an audience, the young poets counted on their new paradigm of poetry and on the wide base of the common people as their audience.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to contextualise this poetic trend by shedding light on its popularity and exploring it as a part of popular culture. To do so more precisely, the popularity of two prominent poetic trends in two different eras is compared, namely before and following 2003. This will help in providing understanding of the emergence of the post 2003 generation and its movement to popularise poetry again. The first poetic trend is represented by the modernist poets, *Nûkirin Herûher* group, and the second by the pop poets. This chapter is aimed at demonstrating the success they achieved in this regard and linking this to the issue of Kurdish national identity. Notably, the pop poetry was exploited and supported by the KDP, the dominant political party in Bahdinan. This chapter is also concentrated on the discourses that were geared towards humiliating the ethnic Arab, whilst glorifying the Kurdish Self. Furthermore, in the chapter, it is argued that, despite these poets' claim of having a pure Kurdish identity, this was hybridised by or with the Arab ethnic identity. In other words, the ethnic Arab identity influenced the Kurdish poetic trend of post-2003. This influence, which crossed the language of these poets to reach their culture and their way of thinking, will be analysed. To this end, the poems of the prominent young pop poet Burhan Zêbarî (b. 1980) have been selected. Moreover, this chapter sheds light on the cultural trajectory of the pop poet Şe'ban Silêman, who founded this trend and inspired a number of young poets. Also, this focus is because, amongst all new poets of this

generation, Silêman is the most famous poet, attending debates and defending this paradigm of poetry.

5.2. Prior to the Pop Poetry: The Issue of Audience and Accessibility

Almost about a decade after the Kurdish Uprising in 1991, the good relationship between poetry and the audience witnessed a noticeable decrease. That is, the popularity of poetry, as the dominant genre in Kurdish literature, significantly declined. This was particularly when the movement of modernist poetry and the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group were at the forefront of the Bahdinani literary scene. Due to the complexity of their writing style, ambiguity dominates their poems and due to the abstract syntax of their poetic language, a thick wall was built between poetry and the audience. This issue and its ramifications were clearly reflected in local newspapers and cultural magazine pages[88].This matter also became the focus of discussion circles and literary events at the Union of Kurdish Writers (Duhok branch) and at the University of Duhok[89]. Some of critics, announced a crisis in poetry and some went further to declare its death. For example, Y. Hesenî (2002) in the *Peyman* weekly newspaper argued that, post 1991 Kurdish poetry started losing its audience, which had been very close to in in the past. He supported his

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[88] For example, see: ♦ Hesenî, Y. (2002) Piştî Serhildanê: Hozana Kurdî Hêdî Hêdî ya ji Erşê Xwe yê Zêrîn Dihête Xwar (After the Uprising: Kurdish Poetry Started Coming Down from its Golden Throne). *Peyman*. ♦Xabûr, I. (2002) Bersivek bo Yasirê Hesenî (A Response to Yasirê Hesenî). *Peyman*. ♦ Osman, S. (2004) Mirina Şi'rê (The Death of Poetry). *Peyv.* ♦ Mihemed-Tahir, E. (2004) Erê Raste Hozan ber bi Mirinê Diçît? (Is it True that Poetry is Going towards Death?). *Evro*.

[89] For instance, within its cultural activities of the summer season in 2004 the Union of Kurdish Writers in Duhok organised a debate between the modernist Azad Dartaş and the critic Se'îd Osman about the life and death of poetry. Also, the University of Duhok within its annual cultural season in 2007 raised the question of poetry's death. The panellist Hemo Mihemed presented: *Erê Helbest Miriye?* (Has poetry died?).

argument by stressing the weak attendance of people at poetic events and by the low sale of poetry collections in local bookshops. In *Peyv* Magazine, S. Osman (2004) declared "the death of poetry". He claimed that in the time of globalisation and new technology, people no longer admired poetry. He ascribed the reasons behind this situation to the availability of many other tools of entertainment that were taking poetry's place. This kind of reading and evaluation of Kurdish poetry and its popularity was followed by robust responses, especially from the modernist poets' side, who had another point of view, with a different reading of the whole story.

From the very beginning, the poets who had adopted modernism in poetry attempted to deconstruct some commonly circulated phrases and expressions in the Bahdinani literary milieu, such as "the crisis of poetry" or "the death of poetry". They fundamentally doubted whether Kurdish poetry ever had popularity before 1991. The main point they based their argument on was that Kurdish poetry, under the rule of the Ba'ath, had no popularity, as some critics and researchers had proffered. To the modernists, what was considered popularity, in reality, belonged to *Kurdayetî* (Kurdishness), not to poetry itself[90]. In other words, prior to 1991, the audience at poetry events was not attracted to the poetry itself, but rather, came to listen to the *Kurdayetî* discourse, which was embodied in their poetry[91]. Also, the modernist poets

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[90] This point was made clearly and on different occasions. For example, during the debate about the death and aliveness of poetry in the cultural summer season of the Union of the Kurdish Writers in Duhok in 2004.

[91] The discussion about contemporary Kurdish poetry pre-1991 and its concerns with Kurdishness rather than poetics was something especially promulgated by the modernists, whether working within the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group or outside it. For example, see an interview that Sînemxan Qêyî made with Mihsin Qoçan in the *Evro* Daily newspaper. Qoçan claimed that Kurdish poetry pre-1991 was under the service of everything: politics, society, love,

interpreted the increased attendance at literary events at that time as a challenge to the authorities of the Ba'ath regime, as Kurdish poets wanted indirectly to deliver a message of resistance to it[92]. Regarding post 1991, whilst the modernists admitted their limited audience, they asserted that this was a natural phenomenon. They believed that there was no reason to be concerned as long as the audience really enjoyed poetry and not something else (i.e. the identity discourse). Moreover, they proudly claimed they had been successful in returning Kurdish poetry to its rightful position, which, according to them, should only be available to those able to experience literary pleasure and to understand its aesthetic values, away from *Kurdayetî* or social reformation issues.

In fact, the Bahdinani modernists attempted to normalise the unpopularity of their poetry by resorting to discourses based on "binary oppositions". Through their power as a literary movement and via the authority that they obtained, the modernist poets attempted to position their poetry as the only true representative of the Bahdinani poetic scene. The binary oppositions, such as valuable and invaluable, important and unimportant, high and low, and elite and populace, were used by them to relocate the question of poetry and its popularity in Bahdinan[93]. Through these dichotomies, as expected, the

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pain… except poetics (Qoçan, 2010). Also, close to this claim, in a chapter of his book, *Derçûn ji Desthelata Manayê* (Liberation from the Authority of Meaning), Hoşeng Şêx Mihemed (2005) argued that the general structure of Bahdinani poetry in the pre-1991 era was a nationalistic structure not a poetic one. He even affirmed that this poetry had a nationalistic value not a poetic one.

[92] This point is circulated frequently among Kurdish writers in general, and modernists in particular (ibid).

[93] For example, in his interview with *Evro* newspaper, the poet Hizirvan as a member of the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group and a representative of modernist poetry, describes popular poetry as "not poetry, and it is lower than the folkloric songs level" (2007).

modernist poets categorised their own poetry as a valuable, important and high literature that was written exclusively for the elite (See, e.g Hizirvan, 2007). Of course, their audience became very limited as the elite's cultural productions always have a limited audience, which was especially so in the Kurdish case. In one of his interviews with the *Waar Daily* newspaper, a member of the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group Arif Hîto plainly says that by targeting elite and those who have literary experiences and intellectual backgrounds, they had "returned poetry to its throne" (Hîto, 2011). In other words, according to him, they had successfully and proudly reduced the popularity of poetry by taking it from ordinary people's hands to be limited and available particularly for the elite, who had the tools to receive "high" poetry[94].

This type of thinking, which theoretically divided Bahdinani poets and their audience into the elite and populace, had its ramifications on the ground and resulted in the adoption of the policy of inclusion and exclusion. Despite the fact that in the beginning the members of the *Nûkirin Herûher* Group were in literary conflict with the obligated cultural dimensions, they later became a de facto literary movement, especially after the political parties in Bahdinan successfully contained them. As a part of its containment policy, the political power in Bahdinan let them or probably helped them to occupy important cultural positions. For instance, the chairman of the Union of Kurdish Writers (Duhok branch) and many of its administrative bodies were run by modernists,

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[94] Stating that the audience was not important to them, possibly was only an excuse to cover for their failure in terms of having one.

as well as their being the editors in chief of *Peyv* magazine[95] in Duhok and of *Biyav* magazine[96] in Akrê. In addition, the literary supplement of the *Peyman* weekly newspaper[97], for a long time was run by the pro-modernists, who attracted *Nûkirin Herûher*'s ideas of modernism and its poetry style. In one way or another, the Bahdinani modernists and their supporters used their literary and administrative positions to centralise their specific style of writing as the poetic paradigm of the day. This meant they marginalised and ignored those who did not adopt such a literary paradigm in terms of style and point of view. Adopting this policy in a confident way was probably inspired by the notion of modernism itself, which is fundamentally based on centralisation. The Bahdinani modernists believed that their style of writing and their literary perspectives were simply the only valid literary discourses of the day.

When this paradigm of poetry became the dominant form in the literary mainstream in the 1990s and at the beginnings of 2000s, some poets resorted to imitating such a style and in turn, they deepened the gap between poetry and its audience. In addition to being the literary model of the day, modernist poetry also became almost the only accepted and celebrated model, whether for publishing or presenting at poetic events. After the negative impact that the first generation of modernist poets left on the popularity of poetry, their second generation, too, played a role in reducing this popularity further. If

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[95] *Peyv* is the first seasonal and cultural Kurmanji magazine issued in Duhok, which was established in 1993 by the Duhok branch of the Union of Kurdish Writers. It uses the Arabic and Latin alphabets.

[96] *Biyav* was one of the important intellectual and critical magazines issued in 2002 in Akrê.

[97] The *Peyman* weekly newspaper was published in Duhok between1994-2003, funded and supported by the first branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

modernist poetry is full of complexity and ambiguity, the second generation added extra ambiguity and incomprehensible expressions, which meant their poetry became extremely difficult. In addition, the ambiguity itself became an aim of poetry writing, being seen as signifying high quality of poetry[98]. This phenomenon got worse when some poets began to believe that a comprehensible poem was superficial poem. In consequence, if the first generation of modernist poets drove the audience to having an aversion to poetry, the second generation doubled this. Clearly, this factor directly or indirectly played an important role in decreasing the popularity of poetry among the audience of the common people and kept modernist poetry isolated and uncirculated among the public.

Furthermore, a few years after the liberation of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, the Kurdish region started witnessing an opening up, through which new technologies, satellite TV, and the internet entered the life of Kurdish society, thus contributing to the decrease in poetry's popularity. From 1991 until 2003, Iraqi Kurdistan was under a double siege, from the United Nations and the Iraqi regime, but its borders with Syria, Turkey and Iran were informally opened, so for the first time, without censorship Iraqi Kurdistan got connected with the globe. Naturally, these things occupied a great part of people's lives and they changed their lifestyle, spending time engaging with entertainment tools. With such political and social transformation, the position of poetry in society declined. New technologies as well as the new political and geopolitical conditions diminished the interest of the common audience in

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[98] Some critics commented that these poets hid their literary weaknesses through this artificial ambiguity (see e.g. Doskî, 1998; Hesenî, 2002).

poetry. This issue, indeed, also concerned modernist poets, many of whom said that the new technology, revolution in communication and information within the context of globalisation made Kurdish society more complex. Regarding which, on different occasions, M. Qoçan and his group mentioned that such a complicated world required a more complicated poetry (See e.g. Omer, 2001; Qoçan, 1997). In other words, modernists poets argued that poetry should be written with ambiguity and complexity as, according to them, these were the characteristics of the modern age of Kurdistan. This, indeed, is no different to T.S. Eliot's argument, when he stated that in the age of civilisation the poet must be difficult (see: Shetley, 1993, p. 1) Responding to the new "complex life", by deliberately writing poetry in a complicated way, eventually cost the Bahdinani poetry its popularity to a very great extent.

5.3. The Emergence of the Pop Poetry Movement

Interestingly, post-2003, in the climate of dwindling audiences for poetry, another literary tendency, that of the youngest voices, gradually emerged and challenged *Nûkirin Herûher* and its followers. In comparison with the latter, the youngest poets did not have a rich literary background. However, they wanted to return poetry an audience of the common people, and they were to a large degree successful in this initiative. Regardless of their poetry's quality, they proved that the genre could be made accessible to the people such that they could enjoy it even in times of modernity and post modernity. These poets believed that poetry should be for pleasure, beneficial and particular, it had to be clear, simple and comprehensible so as to reach out to everyone. Hence, in this regard, they took a contrary stance to *Nûkirin Herûher* and to those who adopted modernity in poetry. The latter were accused by the post-2003

youngest generation that their poetic intricacy and ambiguity prevented people from receiving and loving poetry. They claimed that the members of *Nûkirin Herûher* Group themselves could not understand each other's poetry as their poems had become like enigmatic puzzles. Meanwhile, the post-2003 generation's poetry, in a very short time, obtained widespread public acceptance, especially amongst the common people, and very quickly they became famous poets.

In addition to the simplicity of their poetry, two other factors, the issues of nationalism and new technology, led to people identifying with their poetry. Whilst the modernist poets argued that these two factors were the reasons behind the loss of the audience, for the youngest poets, they were catalysts for increasing the popularity of poetry. They were, indeed, very well exploited by them to serve the popularity of poetry, not vice versa. In the following sections, these three factors, nationalism, new technology, and simplicity, are discussed in more detail.

5.3.1. Kurdish Nationalism

As aforementioned, for a long time, the modernists poets claimed that the main reason behind the popularity of poetry in pre 1991 was Kurdish nationalism. They believed that under the Ba'athists, poetry was exploited as a tool to mobilise people around the issues of Kurdishness. For them, after the Uprising and national freedom, poetic themes like national allegory were no longer drawing people's attention, especially after the setting up of the KRG's institutions and the new political life. In other words, for *Nûkirin Herûher* Group and its followers, after 1991, the curtain was lowered on Kurdish

resistance poetry and it became something from the past. But, contrary to their perspective, the pop poets raised the curtain on resistant poetry again, their nationalist poetry becoming the key towards fame and later towards making money as well. In this regard, they were successful, especially after the Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and the overthrow of the Ba'athists from power in Baghdad. The national Kurdish issue progressed and shifted to another significant stage. Consequently, nationalist and resistance poetry worked again in terms of public acceptance and mobilising the people.

A few years after 2003, the Kurdistan Region has witnessed dramatic changes, very much depending on, and influenced by the nature of relationship between the KRG and the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Despite the Kurds becoming key players in establishing the new Iraq and notably participating in writing its new constitution, as a minority, they struggled in stabilising their constitutional rights (See, e.g. Rafaat, 2008)[99]. They had to contend with the agendas of Shi'a political parties and Arab nationalist parties, with the former trying to impose a religious character and the latter aiming to make it a pan-Arab constitution. However, with USA support and after consultation with them, the Kurds were successful in establishing a federal constitution and stabilising a federal political system for Iraq. This new constitution was supposed to be capable of protecting Kurdish national rights, whilst at the same time honouring the sectarian rights of Shi'as and Sunnis (See e.g. Danilovich, 2014). In the new Iraq, despite the Kurds having

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[99] Regarding the Kurdish participation in rebuilding post-Saddam Iraq, Aram Rafaat argues that " [d]etermining the future of the disputed areas of northern Iraq is the main reason behind the Kurdish involvement in rebuilding the Iraqi state" (Rafaat, 2008).

witnessed relative success in economic growth, stability of security, and development in the democratic process, they had concerns about Baghdad (Abdulhakeem K. Jawzal, 2010). The American scholar K. Katzman, who prepared a report for Members and Committees of American Congress, summarises these according to three aspects: political autonomy, disputed territories, and the financial file (Katzman, 2010). The Kurds believed that there was manipulation of power by the Baghdad government and avoidance of implementing some of the constitution's articles. Eventually, dispute arose between the KRG and the Iraqi Prime Minster Nori al-Maliki as well as with other Arab leaders, who claimed that the Kurds were making "excessive demands and [are] threatening Iraq's integrity" (ibid).

These tensions rapidly developed and were reflected on the ground, especially after Nori al-Maliki politically used the card of "disputed areas" against the Kurds and publicly called for stopping the Kurdish tide. Jawzal (2010) concludes that ever since the establishment of Iraqi state in 1921, this became the first time that the Iraqi state inflamed an Arab-Kurdish conflict at the public level. For him, this inflame was one of the most obvious change in the Kurdish issue in post-2003, which was used by the Shi'a Prime Minister to weaken the Kurds and the Arab Sunni in northern and western provinces in Iraq (ibid). In his presented report to the American Congress, Katzman also clearly describes the Kurd-Arab tensions. This inflaming of the situation increased, especially after al-Maliki established the Dijla Forces and sent them to Kirkuk (one of the disputed provinces between Kurds, Arabs and Turkman), sending some other forces to Mosul, of which province some cities belong to the Kurds.

These disputes resulted in producing anti-Kurd discourses among Arabs, and as reaction, anti-Arab discourses among Kurds as well. For example, one popular culture production, the Shi'a TV al-Fayha, in 2010, published a poem in Arabic, titled "ها كاكه حمه", which sarcastically questioned the value of the Kurdish character and depicted them as an enemy of the Arabs, who did not care about Iraqi blood. Even though the TV station apologised to the Kurdish people, this poem became infamous, being circulated on social media and YouTube very quickly. On the Kurdish side, there were also many popular cultural productions, especially poetry that could be read as being a reaction, not only to Arab politicians, but also, to anything relating to Arab culture as a whole. Indeed, this issue and nationalist themes were exploited by post-2003 pop poets and were very much welcomed by the Kurdish audience. This factor, thus, could be considered as being one of the first essential reasons behind the popularity of their poetry.

5.3.2. New Technology

The second factor that the modernist poets claimed had decreased poetry's "popularity" was the new technological developments as well as the revolution of communication and information in the age of globalisation. For them, this new world had taken away the reader's attention from poetry, he or she no longer being interested in it as before. This justification, whilst holding more than a grain of truth, was challenged by the new generation poets of post-2003 as being an excuse. They took it as being a positive factor for increasing the popularity of poetry, not as an obstacle against it. Indeed, they changed their tools of communication with the receiver in such a way as to fit the new age. In contrast to the modernist poets, they exploited the new technologies

and turned them into being the key factor for getting the receiver's attention to poetry. The new young poets merged poetry and the new technologies to provide the former with a new vigour that reached a much greater audience, and this has been a vital characteristic of this poetry. Their poems became available on CDs, mobile phones, satellite televisions and the internet. It became accessible even for those not able to read poetry or those who had no time to read it. In this regard, the inventor and pioneer of multimedia poetry, Şe'ban Silêman (2008) states that new technologies and the internet help people to experience poetry whenever and whatever they are, not just letting them see it, but also to hearing and feeling it.

During Silêman's engagement with the merging of poetry with technology, this new model has gone through various stages, each one effectively contributing to increasing poetry's popularity. Whilst orality was an essential element in all these stages, he added image and performance accompanied with musical instruments and in many times in the form of video clips. Due to the success of these sorts of poetic offerings, art production companies like *Stêr*, *Hesen Şerîf* and *Vîn*, *Şevîn* as well as satellite television stations engaged in producing this poetry. It, eventually, became a commercial project, whilst at the same time, a participant in the cultural project of Kurdish nationalism. In each stage of presenting their poetry, poets from the new generation attempted to imitate Silêman in his new poetic paradigm and to adopt his style. However, one can detect a plurality of voices, whereby each keeps his individual fingerprint on this style. The poets Burhan Zêbarî (b. 1980), Helgord Qehar (b. 1980) and Lalyêq Kurêmey (b.1971), are amongst the new voices that represent this new poetic paradigm. However, in terms of proficiency and

popularity, at the beginning, they were not successful like Silêman but, later and in a short period time, they achieved popularity. Some, like Zêbarî, competed successfully with Silêman. He, became a very prominent poet, with a huge number of common people admiring his poetry. Silêman alongside with Zêbarî successfully exploited technologies and brilliantly performed on the stage, and their video clips widely circulated. They are the best known and are treated as famous stars, invited to appear on very interesting programmes, not only those produced by Kurdish satellite TV in Iraqi Kurdistan, but also in a trans-border dimension, such as on Turkish channel TR6.

In his first stage of merging new technology with poetry, Silêman started recording his poems with music on CDs, which got sponsored by art production companies, like *Stêr*, *Hesen* Şerîf, *Vîn*, *Şevîn*. Whilst there were some unofficial attempts by the poets of 1970s and 1980s generation to record poetry with music, Silêman's work was distinguished from them by its professionalism. Producing CDs for poets (like singers) by various art production companies was an unprecedented occurrence, not only in the cultural history of Bahdinan, but also, the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan. Most interestingly, due to its success it became a kind of business. In one of his interviews Şe'ban Silêman articulately says that he aims to make poetry valuable through two things: popularising it among the common people and getting financial benefits from it. He believes that the moral value of poetry depends on its commercial value as well. At the very beginning, in 2000, Silêman started reading poetry with music online on the Paltalk website, https://www.paltalk.com, particularly in the well-known Kurdish chat room

Kochka Kurdistan[100]. These internet room services helped him to achieve a certain level of fame, which led to Duhok Radio offering him the opportunity to record his poems in its special recording studio and to broadcast them. With increasing popularity, in coordination with *Tomargeha Doskî* (Doskî Recordings Shop), he put out his audio recordings onto the market as the first CD test of his poetry. After that, Silêman gradually rose to stardom and fame. In 2002, *Dezgehê Hesen Şerîf* (Hesen Şerîf Art Production Company) published his divan CD, *Tora Evînê* (The Net of Love). In 2004, *Dezgehê Stêr* (Stêr Art Production Company) published his divan CD, *Peyama Eşqê* (The Message of Love). In 2007, *Dezgehê Hesen Şerîf* also published his divan CD, *Tu hatiye Çi?* (What have you come for?). In 2008, the satellite television *Vîn TV* sponsored his divan CD, *Bûka Baranê* (The Doll of Rain), which was recorded in Istanbul. In 2009, *Vîn TV* sponsored another divan CD of him, named *Gotgotk* (Propaganda). In 2011, also under the sponsorship of *Vîn TV*, Silêman published his divan CD, *Rabe Xanî* (Get up, Xanî!).

The second stage of his experience with poetry and new technology was the innovative idea of poetry video clips. This kind of poetry technically is no different to modern song video clips in terms of scenario, montage, actors and direction, other than the poet replacing singer. Hence, despite the poetic text, the quality of his voice and ability to perform in addition to his presence, played a significant role in getting widespread acceptance of his work amongst the

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[100] Kochka Kurdistan was established in 1999 abroad by some Bahdinani Kurds, including Kamiran Derki. In 2003, the people who worked in this room established Kochka Gele Kurdistane. This chat room became very famous and invited important people, including politicians, singers, poets… For more info, see: *Pênaseyek li dor koçka Kurdî û koçka gelê Kurdistanê, Rojnameya Evero* jmare 569 li 27 10 2010.

people. Besides making divan CD, in 2003, he started making poetry videos with Kurdistan TV, but his real beginning with this style was in 2006, with *Vîn TV* and his poetry *Bersiv* (The Answer). Then, in 2007 he made a video clip for his poem *Tu Hatiye Çi?* (What have you come for?). In 2009, he made *Wexer* (Traveling) and after that, in 2010 with Delal TV he published *Erdewan Zaxoyî*. In 2011, he produced *Duhî û Evro* (Yesterday and Today) and *Tu bi Tine ya ji Hejî* (Only You Deserve), which were sponsored by *Vin TV* and *Duhok TV*, respectively. In 2012, *Vin TV* produced his poem *Rabe Xanî* (Get up, Xanî!). In 2013, the poems *Kekê Pêşmerge* (Peshmerga) and *Baran* (Rain) became video clips under the sponsorship of *Vin TV* and *Dezgehe Şevîn* (Şevîn Art Production Company), respectively[101]. Due to the accessibility of the internet almost everywhere and owing to the ubiquitous availability of various new electronic devices, such as computers, laptops and smart mobile phones, these poetry video clips became widely disseminated among the people. In particular, YouTube and social media, especially Facebook, helped in spreading his work

The third stage of Silêman's attempts to disseminate his poetry, was making video clips with Kurdish singers and performing as a duo. Whilst in terms of engaging new technology this stage was no different to the second, it was considered to be a new leap in terms of popularising poetry. That is, he raised his profile substantially by getting the singer's audience to listen to his poetry.

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[101] For example, see the following YouTube links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTEyMGOHxho&frags=pl%2Cwn

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wliXb9xc9Vo&frags=pl%2Cwn

This kind of video clip is a mix of singing (from singer's side) and performing poetry (from poet's side). This new paradigm emerged in 2014 immediately after Iraqi Kurdistan was exposed to militant attacks by ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Sham). In particular, this was after some Kurdish areas were occupied by ISIS and the Sinjar massacre, which is officially considered a disputed area by the KRG and Iraqi government. For instance, *Vin TV* sponsored the poet Şe'ban Silêman and the singer Rêkêş Seranî in their video clip Da'ish (ISIS). Also, in 2015, *WAAR TV* sponsored Silêman and the singer Hesen Şerîfin for their video clip *Koban*ê. In the same year, *FA Production* sponsored his video clip *Dewlet* (The State) with the singer Rêkêş Seranî'.

5.3.3. Simplicity

Whilst two external factors, namely nationalism and new technology, were effectively exploited by the new young poets to popularise their poetry, these cannot adequately explain the reason for their widespread acceptance. When it comes to the poetry of this group another factor should be taken into consideration, that of simplicity. It helped their poetry to be widely disseminated and become acceptable among the public. The common characteristic among almost all popular and mass culture is its simplicity. In her article about popular poetry, Janet Gray holds that "[t]he popular success of a poem depends on its being readily understood and on its delivering to the audience meanings and values that is already among them". Simplicity was one of the factors that the generation of post-2003 poets have always insisted on being apparent in their poems as a literary value. Silêman (2014, p. 10) states that he wants to make poetry like bread; available for everyone. However, for the *Nûkirin Herûher Group* writing poetry in a simple way means

disrespecting the reader's abilities and skills. But being easily and quickly understood was one of the distinguishing marks between this group and *Nûkirin Herûher*'s poetry, which eventually, in terms of popularity and reaching the audience, the post-2003 poets were successful.

5.4. Bahdinani Pop Poetry and Anti-Arab Discourse

An anti-Arab discourse emerged after the participation of the Kurdish minority with the Arab majority in power in the new Iraq, especially after the Arab leaders in an authoritarian way started depriving the Kurds of their constitutional rights. On several occasions, Kurdish politicians from various political parties claimed that the Arab majority had started to adopt a policy of exclusion and abusing the principle of partnership with Kurds in ruling and administrating post-Saddam Iraq. The perceived mistreatment resulted in serious tensions between Kurdish and Arab politicians, and thereby between the Kurdish and the Arab streets. The disputed issues between them were often interpreted nationalistically, as between two nations, rather than political disagreements within Iraq as one "nation". Since 2003, as partners in the new Iraq, despite the Kurds having had a political presence in Baghdad, they have not considered themselves as players within the game of "democracy". Rather, they see themselves as nationalists in an arena of struggle, whose duty is to compete with the Arabs to get Kurdish nationalist rights[102]. Even in their internal discourses, Kurdish politicians intentionally showed that their duty in Baghdad was to protect Kurdish rights from the domination of Arabs[103].

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[102] This is often repeated by Kurdish MPs of Iraq, for example, like Rênas Cano, Cemal Koçer.

[103] Whilst this was generally true, there were some Kurds in Baghdad seeking posts and finance for personal reasons, not necessarily for nationalist purposes.

Notably, those Kurdish representing the Iraqi state in an official capacity or administrative posts were usually labelled by Kurdish people as *Iraqçî*, which is a fabricated negative term meaning Iraqist or one who works for the Iraqi state, not for the Kurds in particular.

In such a sensitive nationalistic atmosphere and political tensions between Kurds and Arabs, Kurdish poets considered themselves as being in a position of resistance to anything relating to Iraq and Iraqiness. Through their poetic discourses, they mobilised people to stand against the dominance of the Arab majority and to reject involvement with the Iraqi state. The new Kurdish generation's nonfamiliarity with the Arabic language effectively helped these poetic discourses to become very welcomed and acceptable. Moreover, the Kurdish poets generated discourses against the Arabs and their culture, without distinguishing between Shi'a or Sunni Arabs. In other words, these discourses were built on rejecting the Arab Other without taking into consideration the closeness to or distance from the Kurds to Shi'a or Sunni Arabs. In one of his very viral poems, the popular poet Burhan Zêbarî clearly tackles this matter when he says:

تو شیعه بی یان ژی سوننهی

ته ئێک کهلتۆر و زمانێ ههی

رێکا وه ههردووا ئێکه

دئ بۆچی من دگهل خۆ بهی؟

Tu şî'e bî yan jî sunney

te êk keltor û zimanê hey

rêka we herduya êke

dê boçî min digel xwe bey?

Whether you are Shi'a or Sunni

You have one culture and one language

You both have the same way

Why are you taking me with you?

In spite of the deep sectarian disputes between Shi'a and Sunni Arabs, for Zêbarî, there is no difference between them as long as they have the same origin and the same mentality when they treat the Kurds. Indeed, before the toppling of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, Kurdish people and their leaders had a kind of sympathy towards Shi'a people, as they were, like the Kurds, oppressed and humiliated by the Sunni Saddam Hussein. The root of this sympathy goes back to earlier times in the 1960s, when the prominent Shiite cleric Imam Muhsin al-Hakim (1889-1970) stood against the demands of Iraqi government and issued a fatwa that killing the Kurds was haram or proscribed by Islamic law (Al-Bayati, 2011). Another reason for preferring Shi'as to Sunnis, was that the Kurds had never suffered from the former, who had never ruled Iraq since its establishment in 1921. Additionally, the distance between Kurdish geographical areas and Shi'as population areas, prevented much direct contact and nationalistic wrangling between them. However, a few years after 2003, when the Shi'a came to power in Iraq, Kurdish leaders heavily criticised their policy towards the Kurds, when they found that there was no such difference between Shi'as and Sunnis, in that both did not accept the Kurds as real partners in the new Iraq. Despite federalism being recognised as a political system in Iraq, the Kurds were treated as subordinates, who should submit to the centrality of Baghdad. In the above

poetic extract, Zêbarî indicates this mentality of centralism and way of thinking when saying: دێ بۆچی من ل گەل خۆ بەی؟ (why are you taking me with you?). Here, he attempts to participate in producing a discourse that Shi'a are not preferable to the Kurds, as was previously believed among them. Put differently, the eighty years of Sunni rule in Iraq and later the rule of the Shi'a post 2003, witnessed how both types of Arab rulers have treated the Kurds from the position of dominance such that the Kurds were located as secondary citizens in Iraq and saw themselves in that way.

With Kurdish politicians' participation in the establishment of the new Iraq, they were criticised by both the common people and Kurdish cultural elites. From its beginning, the Kurdish people on the street did not welcome the initiative of moving to Baghdad, but their leaders joined the centre and became a part of its political system. The Kurdish leadership was aware of the attitude and the demands of their people, but the internal, regional and international complex equations drove them to taking the decision of joining the centre[104]. Collecting information about the attitude of the Kurdish people could be easily carried out in a variety of ways. Probably the most obvious one was the result of the referendum, which was held after the collapse of the Ba'athist regime in January 2005 alongside the first Iraqi national election. Despite this referendum being informal and organised by the Kurdistan Referendum Movement (KRM), which was a non-government organisation (NGO), its results were important for capturing the pulse of the Kurdish people about remaining in Iraq or declaring independence. More than 98% of the electors

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[104] Obtaining political posts in Baghdad might be one of the reasons to move to the centre.

voted for detaching from Arab Iraq and announcing the independence of Kurdistan.

Regarding the cultural elites in particular, they were themselves the establishers and supporters of the KRM and behind mobilising people to vote for independence[105]. They also did not stop producing the discourses of independence and building a Kurdish state. The Kurdish leadership was very close to these elites and even encouraged them regarding such initiatives. However, they did not articulately and publicly state this. For instance, in one of his meetings with Bahdinani cultural elites in Duhok in 2006, the Kurdish leader Mesûd Barzanî was asked to imply his support for a Kurdish state through his speeches and interviews. He responded by saying that owing to diplomatic reasons and political commitments the Kurdish leadership could not promote independence. But at the same time, he urged the elites to work on such a project and pay attention to independence in their writings and activities to keep this discourse familiar and thus, make it a popular demand.

The poet Zêbarî, like many other poets, worked on establishing a discourse based on ethno-national attributes. Despite the fact that the Kurds of the Kurdistan Region officially belong to Iraq as a nation-state and their leaders agreed to join the political system in Baghdad, Zêbarî emphasises the binary divisions between Iraqi Kurds and Iraqi Arabs. He almost always attempts to depict the Arab Iraqis as Other and define the Iraqi Kurds as Self, away from the banner of the "Iraqi nation". These identity discourses were produced to

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[105] For instance, in Duhok, the poet Beşîr Mizûrî and in Sulaimaniya the poet Şêrko Bêkes were active members of this campaign.

create a "pure" Kurdish identity away from the dominance of Arab culture or the influence of Iraqi identity. As such, these discourses are aimed at demonstrating the deep rift between these two categories of people who never felt as one nation throughout the modern history of Iraq. In his poetic discourses, Zêbarî centralises the Kurdish ethnicity as the reference in order to evaluate the Other Arab and then to call for separating the Kurds from the Arabs:

كەلتۆرێ مه و كەلتۆرێ ته

ئەرد و ئەسمانان ژێک فەرقن

زمانێ ته و زمانێ من

جیاوازی غەرب و شەرقن

تو ب دشداشه و عەگالی

و ل بەژنا من شال و شەپکن

تو بیابان و خیزێ كەلی

ئەز چیا و دۆل و سەرنشیڤ و

پانه دەشتم

تو قورەیشی

ئەز زەردەشتم

تو جەهنەمی

ئەز بەهەشتم

تو دارقەسپا رەق و هشکی

ئەز داربەریا گرێ رەقم

تو میشێل عەفلەقی و

ئەز عومەرێ خاوەرم

Keltorê me û keltorê te

erd û esmanan jêk ferqn

zimanê te û zimanê min

ciyawazî xerb û şerqin

tu bi dişdaşe û 'egalî

û li bejina min şal û şepikin

tu biyaban û xîzê kelî

ez çiya û dol û serinşîv û

pane deşt im

tu Qureyşî

ez Zerdeşt im

tu cehnemî

ez beheşit im

tu darqespa req û hişkî

ez darberiya girê req im

tu Mîşêl 'Efleqî û

ez 'Umerê Xawer im

The difference between our culture and your culture

Is like the difference between the land and the sky

Your language and my language's difference

Is like the difference between east and west

You are in dishdasha and agal

But I wear şal and şepik

You are desert and hot sand

I am mountain, valley, slope and wide plain

You are Quraysh

I am Zarathustra

You are hell

I am paradise

You are a dry and solid palm tree

I am the oak tree of the solid hill

You are Michel Aflaq

I am Omerê Xawer

Whilst these discourses focus on the Kurds and Arabs as representatives of two unlike identities, they cannot be categorised as identities within the multiculturalism of Iraq. Rather, drawing on Homi K. Bhabha(1995)'s distinguishing between *cultural diversity* and *cultural difference*, these discourses are considered a serious attempt to demonstrate the *cultural difference* between the Kurds and the Arabs. As Bhabha points out, by *enunciating* the culture and expressing it, the process of *cultural difference* works to identify it. It also could free its racial or ethnic signifiers to be able to provide different meanings, and thereby to exceed the stereotype signifiers into new constructed identities. In doing so, it takes the culture from the category of diversity, which is "comparative and categorised" into the category of difference, which is the process of identification. Here, in Zêbarî's poetry and in his way of enunciating and presenting the culture and its features, he locates them to face or to meet with Arab culture, which is the point when problems occur, as Bhabha says, and resistance starts. In other words, through the use of language in a particular way, and due to the popularity of his poem, Zêbarî's poetic discourses participate in producing and empowering

Kurdish national identity. In turn, these discourses shape his audience's perspective not only about themselves as Kurds, but also, about their Other as Arabs.

In the above poetic extract, in addition to identifying the Kurdish Self, Zêbarî identifies the Arab Other as well, but in a specific way: promoting the former one as "paradise" and calling the latter "hell". During the process of producing his poetic discourses, Zêbarî does not show any neutrality even when he deals with the natural features that refer to the Kurds or the Arabs within the Iraqi context. He proudly produces Kurdish natural features, while insultingly representing the Arab one. However, neither the former nor the latter technically created or participated in creating natural features. For instance, in this extract he imagines and enunciates the Arab Other offensively: " تو بیابان (You are تو دارقەسپا رەق و هشکی" (You are a desert and hot sand), or "و خیزئ کەڵی" a dry and solid palm tree). As it is clear, physically, there is nothing wrong with "hot sand" or "dry and solid palm tree", but the way of enunciating them is offensive as the poet presents them humiliatingly. Even in this context, the pronoun "تۆ" (You) adds extra offensive tone when the poet intentionally overlaps the nature feature with the Arab character. However, fundamentally, due to the Kurdish language, there is no existence of any Arab receiver of the text and thus, there is no Arab *implicit receiver* to feel insulted or to understand the assumed traducing. The idea, after all, is to produce the Other and depict it in the eyes of the Kurds in such specific way. Meanwhile, at the same time, the compared Kurdish natural features were proudly presented and enunciated specifically to demonstrate the *difference*: " ئەز چیا و دۆل و سەرنشیڤ و "ئەز داربەریا گرئ رەقم" (I am a mountain, valley, slope and wide plain) or "پانه دەشتم

(I am the oak tree of the solid hill). Of course, it should be taken into consideration that in real nature, for instance, an oak tree is not necessarily better than a palm tree, but the idea is to enunciate the culture according to the principle of *difference* and through that to construct Kurdish identity.

In addition to enunciating these geographical aspects and inferring the huge distance between Kurdish and Arabic culture and language, the poet specifically highlights the Kurdish costume as another physical appearance that differentiates the Kurds from the Arabs. Dress, as Alex Ward points out, can be used as a tool for nation building and for ethnic differentiation. Its visual manifestation can be seen as a symbol of national identity, through which it embodies and expresses people's national aspirations (Ward, 2014). Through his words and the way of presenting them, Zêbarî utilises Kurdish costume as a theme to mobilise people around Kurdish identity and creates aversion to whatever relates to Arabs. Zêbarî primarily focuses upon *differences* between Kurdish and Arab costumes as a powerful tool of resistance, thereby participating in constructing his people's own national identity. However, when it comes particularly to Arab men's costumes, spontaneously, they were almost always rejected by the Kurds. Even previously, in the time of Ba'ath regime, the policy of Arabism through costume was not successful except in some limited Kurdish areas that became heavily the focus of the Ba'athist project of Arabism, like in Sinjar, for instance. In the vast majority of cases, Arab costumes were shunned by the Kurds. Here, in this stanza, the poet negatively describes the Arab Other through dress with a disparaging tone: "تو ب دشداشه و عەگالی" (You are in *dishdasha* and *agal*), while when it comes to himself as a Kurdish person he loudly with a tone of pride says: "ول بەژنا من"

"شال و شه‌پکن" (And I wear *şal* and *şepik*). Actually, as external characteristics, costumes in Iraq became one of the first distinctive marks that one's "national" identity could be recognised through. If in the past costume was only like a vision of cultural diversity, in the new Iraq and especially for the new politicised generation, it became a symbol of cultural difference.

Zêbarî does not stop there, for the identity discourses of his poetry go further and exceed focusing on the external characteristic differences between the Kurds and Arabs to reach the internal one. In this stanza, the religion that the majority of Kurds and Arabs believe in, is revisited by him. After producing enthusiastic ethno-nationalist expressions, he attempts to deny even the religious commonality between the Kurds and Arabs. His aim is to promote the idea that the Kurds are Zarathustran and their Arab Other are Muslim, thereby denying the fact that the majority of Kurds, like Arabs, believe in Islam and follow it. The religion of Islam, apparently, plays a significant role in Kurdish thinking and this reflects in Kurdish social and cultural life. Zêbarî's poetic discourses in this regard, therefore, are novel to Kurdish society, especially in its popular level in Bahdinan. However, the indirect way of expressing this idea probably helped him in doing so. Zêbarî says: "تو قورهیشی ئه‌ز زه‌ردهشتم" (You are Quraysh/ I am Zarathustra). Here, in the first line, "تو قورهیشی" (You are Quraysh), is metaphorically expressed. Whilst the word Quraysh does not necessarily mean the prophet of Islam who belonged to Quraysh tribe, when it is put as versus Zarathustra, this does refer to the Prophet Mohammed or his religion. This is especially true, if we know that the name of Prophet Mohammed in Kurdish Islamic culture usually comes with

the nickname Qurayshi[106]. But at the same time, it remains a multi-meanings word, which helps the poet to claim something else, if he is accused of being anti-Islamic.

Here, when Zêbarî attempts to identify the Kurds and look for an essential or a "pure" Kurdish identity versus an Arab one, he will face challenges as identities of contacted cultures are inevitably *hybrid*. This is according to the notion of *hybridity*, as recreated by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). He argues that due to the existence of traces of various cultures in the subject, all identities are shaped by these traces and there is no pure identity or standard definition of nation. From this point of departure and through the deconstruction of Zêbarî's poetic discourses it is clear that the identity he attempts to construct is already submitted to *hybridity*. The *hybridity* is particularly between Kurdish and Arabic as two contact-cultures, where at least three factors a play role in such contact: the relationship of neighbourhood between Kurds and Arabs, the impact of the religion of Islam that the Kurds believe in, and more significantly, the exposition of Kurdish culture to systematic processes of assimilation since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. These three factors, in one way or another, participate in shaping Kurdish identity, in contrast to what Zêbarî claims about the purity and originality of this identity.

One of the significant elements that clearly shows the *hybridity* of Kurdish national identity in Iraq is Kurdish language. Throughout its political struggle in Iraq, Kurdish nationalism heavily depended on language as a distinctive

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[106] For instance, on can note this in Kurdish *Madiha* when Sufis sing their religious song: "ya Muhammedê Qureyşî, xêr û şeran tu dikêşî…".

element of Kurdish identity. The issue of Kurdish was one of the main demands that the Kurdish leadership always put on the negotiating table with Baghdad. At the same time, all successive Iraqi governments at the centre have responded to this demand according to the strength or weakness of the Kurdish political position. In this regard, the flexibility of Baghdad's formal response varied between permission to recognition until it became an official language of the Iraqi state beside Arabic in 2007. However, on the ground and in reality, Kurdish has never placed high on the agenda of the Iraqi state. Rather, in practice, it has always been influenced by political ambivalence between Kurds and Arabs. From the side of Kurdish nationalism, the language was considered as a symbol and almost a cultural equivalent to Kurdish national identity. In this regard, when Zêbarî produces his poetic identity discourses he emphasises the important of this point as one of the vital elements that distinguishes Kurdish identity from Arabic. He addresses the Arab Other:

زمانێ ته و زمانێ من

جیاوازی غەرب و شەرقن

Zimanê te û zimanê min
ciyawazî xerb û şerqin

Your language and my language's difference
Is like the difference between east and west

Although linguistically it is true that Kurdish language is different from Arabic, as the first belongs to Indo-European languages family and the second to Semitic languages, the impact of Arabic on Kurdish is not avoidable. These

two lines appropriately support this argument and simultaneously disprove the poet's claim of there being no meeting point for Kurdish and Arabic. The irony here is that the poet himself could not convey his idea properly about the difference between the two languages without resorting to the use of some Arabic words. In the second line, for instance, he utilises two Arabic words: شرق (east) and غرب (west). However, these words have their synonyms in Kurdish, which are رۆژهەلات (east) and رۆژئاڤا (west). The idea, after all, is not merely about these two lines or these two words in particular, rather it is about *hybridity* and the traces of Arabic culture in Kurdish, which exceeds language to reach the culture and the way Kurds think. For instance, in this poem, despite Zêbarî's claim that the Kurds are Zarathustran being a way to distinguish Kurdish identity from whatever belongs to Arab, he could not do so without the use of Arabic Islamic terminology. Zêbarî addresses Arabs:

تو قورهیشی
ئهز زهردهشتم
تو جههنهمی
ئهز بهههشتم

Tu Qureyşî

ez Zerdeşt im

tu cehnemî

ez beheşit im

You are Quraysh

I am Zarathustra

You are hell

I am paradise

Contrary to Zêbarî's claims, using the Arabic and Islamic term: جهنم (hell) instead of the Kurdish one: دۆزەخ (hell) in such a way shows the deep impact of Islamic thought on Kurdish thinking through language. The hybridity in this example is not merely about the use of Arabic at the level of vocabulary, it is about carrying perspectives and concepts behind them as well. On the other hand, when it comes to popular poetry in particular, it illustrates the expansion of Arabic traces in Kurdish culture and the *epistemes* that characterise the thought patterns among popular circles. This is especially if we know that popular poets select common and circulated words within their culture as they look for shorter ways to deliver their messages. Hence, if in the past, for instance, the usage of Arabic, Persian and Turkish vocabulary in Kurdish classical poetry was read as evidence of the poet's wide knowledge and his familiarity with foreign languages, after 2003, particularly in Kurdish popular poetry the phenomenon should be read as a sign of influential Arabic traces in Kurdish popular culture and thoughts. Such phenomena cannot be understood or read just through technical or artistic issues, such as rhyming or poetry music, as some researchers believe in the case of classical poetry[107]. Rather, it is about the hegemony of Arabic culture over Kurdish and it is about the issues of identity, which needs to be read within a broader context, as earlier discussed, according to the coloniser-colonised divide.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the national identity discourses of a new Bahdinani poetic trend that emerged post 2003, named pop poetry. I have

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[107] See M. C. Reşîd (2013).

shed light on this poetry, which is usually performed with music, and I have traced the reasons behind its popularity. In addition to the simplicity of this poetry and the role of digital media in disseminating it, I found that it has been very much welcomed by the public due to the nature of identity discourses that the pop poets have produced. Their poetry, which I have proposed as being treated as a part of popular culture, has played an important role in mobilising people around Kurdish national identity, and in shaping their perspectives about themselves as Kurds and about Arabs as the Other. The analysis has shown that glorifying the Kurdish Self and humiliating the Arab Other through race, culture, landscape and geography, are the central points in these discourses. Two poems of the prominent young poet Burhan Zêbarî have been examined as examples of this pop poetry in this chapter.

C'HAPTER SIX

Conclusion

For this research an important part of a marginalised Kurdish literature written in the Kurmanji language, namely Bahdinani literature, was examined. The focus was on its contemporary poetry part, which goes back to the beginning of the 1970s. The transformation of identity discourses produced in this poetry in accordance with the nature of the relationship between the Kurds and the centre in Baghdad has been uncovered. The study involved exploring the cultural role of this poetry in constructing Kurdish national identity in Iraq. The poetry of three political periods that Iraqi Kurdistan has gone through from the last decades of the 20th century until recently was examined. How Kurdish national identity was imagined and articulated during these different political periods of Kurdish nationalism was investigated. The examined periods were between 1970-1991, 1991-2003, and 2003-2017, with each having witnessed the appearance of a specific poetic trend in Bahdinan: modern poetry, modernist poetry, and pop poetry.

Regarding the first stage, under the Arab Ba'ath, the poems of the prominent modern poets Ebdulrehman Mizûrî and Mueyed Teyib were examined. The study demonstrated that during the first historical period, Kurdish identity was mostly imagined through gendering Kurdistan as feminine, carrying

geographical, cultural and historical significance. The identity discourses of this stage were characterised by spatial aspects and features of belonging and homeland. For the second period (1991-2003), following Iraqi Kurdistan's liberation from the Ba'athists, the poems of the modernist poet Mihsin Qoçan were scrutinised. The poetic discourses of this period were mainly focused on a critique of the Kurdish Self, especially after the Kurdish civil war in 1994 and the misrule by the newly created Kurdish Regional Government. For the third stage, which covers the period of post-Saddam Iraq up until 2017, the pop poetry of Burhan Zêbarî was examined. In this stage, during which the Kurds participated in Iraqi rule, the poetic discourses turned to glorifying the Kurdish Self and humiliating the Arab Other in an enthusiastic manner.

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