



CHAPTER 2

Between Honour and Dignity: Kurdish Literary and Cinema Narratives and Their Attempt to Rethink Identity and Resistance

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*All the beauty you see here is only visible to those in whose souls
the poet has overcome the king.*

*Bakhtiyar Ali (2007, 573) Unless stated otherwise all the English
translations of Kurdish literature in the chapter are
made by the author.*

*I threw my stone toward the place I heard the voice with the blindness
of a hunter. While my stone was still in the air, I glanced at the spot
from where I had heard the voice and I regretted what I had done.*

*The small kitten. White. The ball of snow. I wanted my stone to
become cold, to fall to the ground or return and hit my head.*

Mehmet Dicle (2010, 82).

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J. Bocheńska (ed.), *Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities*,
Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93088-6_2

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this chapter is to understand the ethical transformation revealed in Kurdish literary and cinema works. Following Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010), I argue that this alleged ethical or moral upheaval is an unstudied, though significant, part of modernity that changes the concept of honour and entails its reconsideration and reimagining. Accordingly, more attention should be paid to narratives that illustrate this process. The ethical transformation that results in such modern concepts as dignity is definitely not an exclusive feature of Kurdish artistic production. It can be discussed in relation to many other works, including, for example, the 2017 Oscar-winner, the *Salesman* (2016) by Asghar Farhadi. Nevertheless, the Kurdish context is exceptional in at least one way: constituting remote provinces of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq, Kurdistan was long isolated from the impact of many contemporary ideas, even if Kurdish intellectuals took an active part in the cultural and political changes in the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century. Kurdistan's twentieth-century encounter with modernity was thus a sudden one and so better able to expose the changes involved. What is more, the Kurdish context offers us an interesting insight into both traditional and modern narratives, such as oral folk stories told or sung by traditional storytellers, as well as modern novels, short stories or poems written by contemporary authors. Furthermore, the aggressive discriminatory policy towards the Kurds that was launched in different forms by all four Middle Eastern states mentioned above both challenged and stimulated the ethical transformation. On one hand, it fostered the preservation of the traditional honour system, which was based on courage and deemed crucial to resisting the oppression. On the other hand, the experience of suffering forced the Kurds to acknowledge that they were not only subject to colonial oppression but also oppressors themselves. This seems significant for any postcolonial reconciliation project, which cannot discuss only 'their colonial attitude to us', but should also focus on 'our responsibility toward others', whom we often treat in a humiliating way, without even noticing. Therefore the experience of suffering may be seen as an eye-opener, which is well expressed in Kurdish narratives. Moreover, when creating the contemporary imaginary framework for dignity, the Kurds apply their pre-modern resources and this makes the