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**“YOU CAN'T BURY THEM ALL”: THE REPRESENTATION OF
WOMEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY
IRAQI KURDISH NOVEL IN BAHDINAN**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY
IN THE SUBJECT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

LOLAV ALHAMID

2017

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Abstract

This thesis aspires to place the literature of Bahdinan on the Kurdish literary map through reading contemporary Iraqi Kurdish novelistic discourse by Bahdini authors. It examines the women who inhabit the literary circles of Bahdinan today by focusing on the ways in which they are represented and the ways in which they determine to represent themselves. The study is the first fully and exclusively to investigate the literary representations and voices of Kurdish women in the novels by contemporary Bahdini male and female authors. In examining these novels, I capture the manners and mechanisms by which Kurdish women are represented in relation to the changing socio-political situation of Iraq. In reaction to the historical processes of marginalization and relegation by the different hegemonic structures in Iraq, the case of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan offers new grounds for the depiction of the lives and experiences of Kurdish women.

Focusing on the representation of female characters and themes, the thesis explores three pairs of novels published in Iraqi Kurdistan and its diaspora since the mid-2000s. The novels, which depict three successive periods of Iraq's recent history (1986-1991, 1992-2008, and 2009-2014), include Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* (2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Êkê* (*Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One*, 2013) both of which depict a time of war and political conflicts, Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: Kiçe-Jinek ji Zemanek Di* (*Mariama: A Woman from Another Time*, 2007) and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge* (2011) both of which explore gender norms and violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society and Tahsin Navishki's *Alê Di Yê Prê* (*The Other Side of the Bridge*, 2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Dwê* (*Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part Two*, 2014) in which new forms of violence that have arisen in the current moment of criminality and terrorism are represented. A three-moment periodizing model is employed to analyze the novels' representation of women and the violence they experience in relation to modern Kurdish history according to three chronological interrelated phases: women and war-related violence, women and post-conflict violence, and women and terrorism-related violence.

A feminist approach that intersects with a variety of fields including anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and economics considers literature, particularly the novel, as an influential medium for the study of gender inequality and women's socio-political roles and interests. Adopting this model

and employing textual and contextual approaches, the thesis explores the representation of the various forms and layers of violence against women during times of armed conflicts and political disputes. Kurdish women are depicted as suffering from growing levels of violence related to the traditional gender attitudes, patriarchal and tribal structures in addition to sexual and domestic war-related and post-conflict gender violence. The study also investigates the ways in which oppressed Kurdish women in Iraq resist violence, attempt to bring about change, and transform themselves from voiceless victims to influential social and political activists.

Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan suggests that despite the significant absence of novelistic production by Kurdish women writers, male writers, writing with a sense of responsibility to their community, have effectuated the depiction of women-related themes in their works. It is concluded that with the establishment of the quasi-independent Kurdish region in Iraq in 1991 and the growing production of Bahdini novels, Kurdish novelists, both male and female, have come to place more emphasis on feminist subjects and themes than ever before. These novelists endeavour to highlight the Kurdish marginalized culture and silenced history in their writing while maintaining a feminist sense of representation through focusing on the lives and experiences of female characters. These novels, studied within and in relation to the postcolonial feminist canon, emphasize the ways in which ethno-national divisions as well as long-lasting political, social, economic and cultural effects of colonialism, armed-conflicts, and violence affect women. Thus, they can be justly described as testimonies to Kurdish women's pains and sufferings as well as their determination to resist violence and subordination, thereby contributing to the emerging Kurdish literature that can be most productively explored within a feminist and postcolonial frame.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the continual help and support of many kind people around me, to some of whom I am expressing my deepest appreciation and indebtedness here. Above all, I would like to extend my sincerest and most heartfelt respect and gratitude to my supervisory team, Prof Donna Landry and Dr Stella Bolaki, for their unwavering direction, guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout the four years of conducting the research. It has been a great pleasure, privilege and honour to work under their supervision. Their constant kindness, support and most of all belief in me have been principal sources for my diligence and determination.

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I am extremely grateful to the writers Qasham Balata, Sindis Niheli, Sabri Silevani and Tahsin Navishki, whose reflections on their own works during the personal interviews have added a great inspiration to my own analytical and critical readings of their texts. Many thanks are also extended to Zozan Sa'id, Kamiran Barwari, Ni'mat Niheli, and Ameen Abdul-Qadir in the Kurdish Department in Duhok and to Arif Hitto, Hassan Silevani and Haji Ja'afar in the Union of Kurdish Writers/Duhok for their kind consideration in allowing me the opportunity and time to conduct face-to-face and telephone interviews that have been very informative in reinforcing my textual as well as contextual analysis.

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I owe all my achievements and successes to Allah and my dear family, the wellspring of love, kindness, support and hope. Thank you father very much, for being the most caring guardian, the most eager listener and the most unrelenting motivator throughout my life. Thank you mother very much, for being the most affectionate embrace, the keenest minder, and the peerless companion throughout my life. Sisters— Halat and Helen—; brothers— Parwar, Bawer, Mohammed, Honer and Sarwar—; sisters-in-law— Aveen and Sozan— thank you very much, for all the laughers, playfulness, pranks, stories, and memories that I have kept in my mind and heart, wishing to live them again soon. Special thanks also go to my extended family and my husband's family for their continuous support, care, and encouragement.

Thanks to my nearest friend, my sweetheart, my dear husband Qasim. Ever since I started to write this thesis, I have been thinking of the words that might express the role you have been playing in my life and studies. As our marriage and my PhD started at the same time, I sincerely owe you the happiest married life a woman can have and the most constructive study experience a student can enjoy; without you, neither PhD nor life in the UK (or anywhere) would have been possible. I highly thank you and appreciate your love, patience, attention, and friendship.

Note on Translation

Of all the six Kurdish novels selected for analysis in this thesis, only Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* is written in English. Translation of quoted passages from all the other five novels is self-provided. These translated passages are reinforced in the footnotes by original passages written in Bahdini in the Arabic script. Passages taken from relevant Kurdish (both Kirmanji and Sorani) and Arabic books, journal and newspaper articles and websites are also my own translation for which original passages are not provided in the footnotes to avoid confusion. However, the Kurdish and/or Arabic titles of these sources are provided in the footnotes to indicate the original language of the works.

This thesis is dedicated to my brave and beloved nephews,

Hazhi, Hari, and Haval.

“I love you to the moon and back, to infinity and beyond.”

Oh, enemy! The Kurdish people live on,
They have not been crushed by the weapons of any time
Let no one say Kurds are dead, they are living
They live and never shall we lower our flag

The Kurdish youth rise bravely,
With their blood they colour the crown of life
Let no one say Kurds are dead, they are living
They live and never shall we lower our flag

The Kurdish youth are ready and prepared,
To give their life as the supreme sacrifice
Let no one say Kurds are dead, they are living
They live and never shall we lower our flag.

(Kurdish National Anthem, Dildar 1938)¹

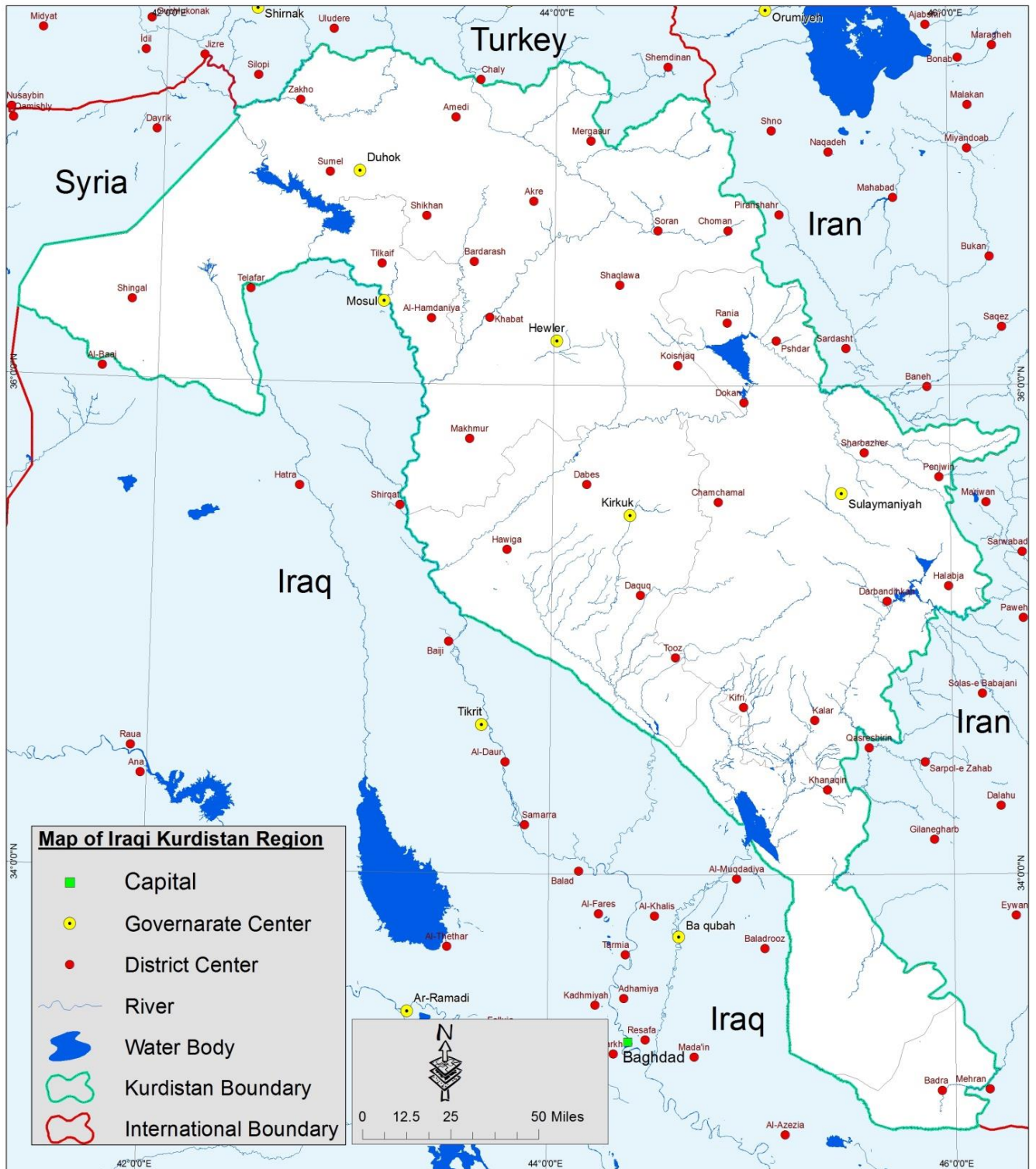
ئەهێ رهقیب هەر ماوه قەومی کورد زمان،
نایشکینی دانەریی توپی زەمان.
کەس نەلێ کورد مردوو، کورد زیندوو،
زیندوه قەت نانەوئ ئالاکەمان.

لاوی کورد هەستایه سەرپێ وەک دلێر،
تا بە خوین نەخشی بکا تاجی ژیان.
کەس نەلێ کورد مردوو، کورد زیندوو،
زیندوه قەت نانەوئ ئالاکەمان.

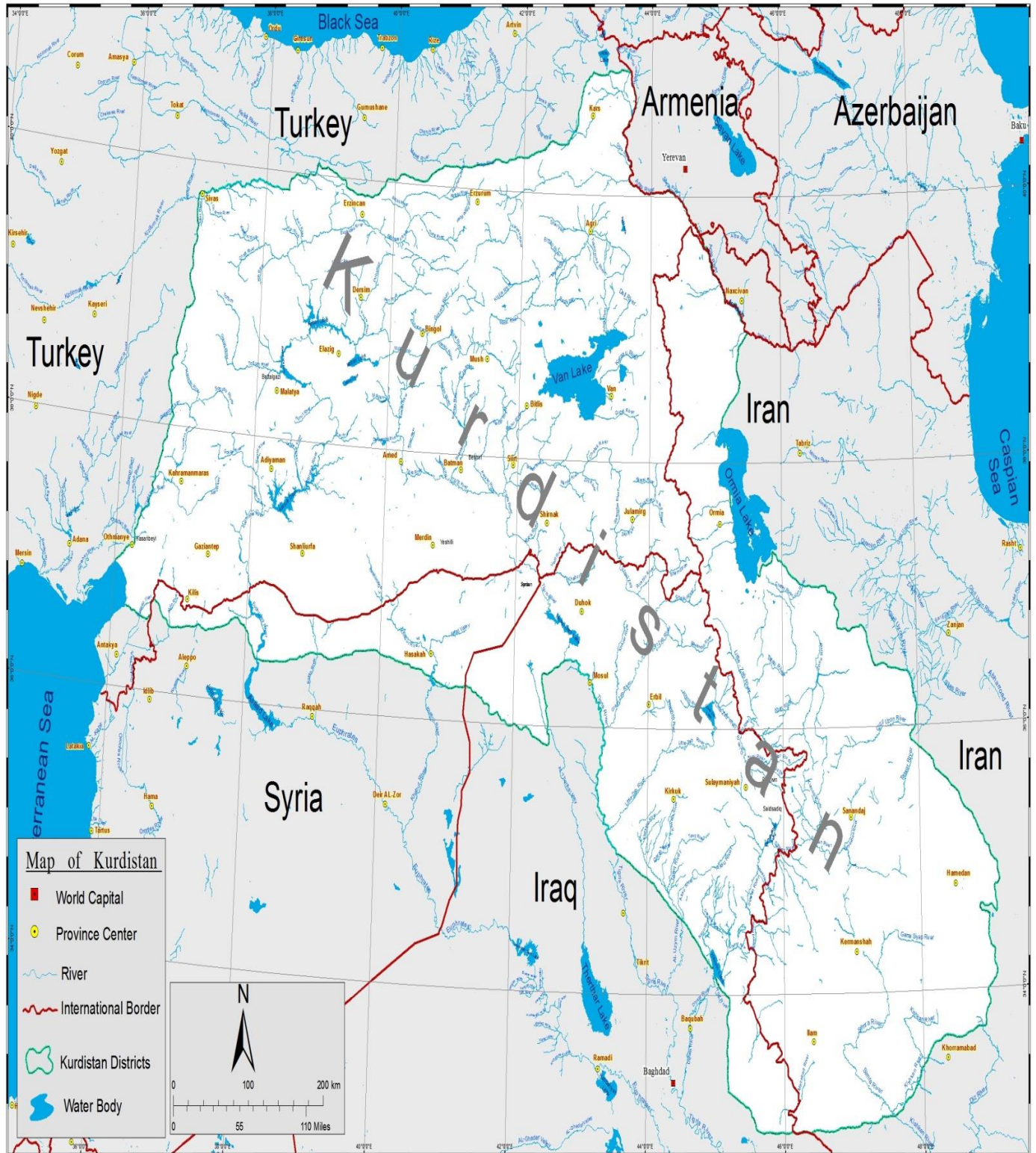
لاوی کورد هەر حازر و ئامادهیه،
گیان فیدایه، گیان فیدا، هەر گیان فیدا.
کەس نەلێ کورد مردوو، کورد زیندوو،
زیندوه قەت نانەوئ ئالاکەمان.

(سرودا نیشتمانیایا کوردی، دلدار ۱۹۳۸)

¹ Ey Reqib: Kurdish National Anthem, <http://www.kdp.se/lder.html>



Map 1 “Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).” Geo Kurds, 2017.



Map 2 “Kurdistan.” Geo Kurds, 2017.

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Appendix 1: A List of Published Novels in Bahdinan

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Transcription

The transliteration system used for the acquainting the non-Kurdish readers with the Kurdish (Bahdini) content of this study (mostly titles of Kurdish novels) is based on Ahmadzadeh's list of transliteration in his *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse* (2003). Although this system of transcription, which strictly follows the Hawar Roman alphabet, an orthography developed by Celadet Badirkhan in the early 1930s, has been developed by Ahmadzadeh to refer mainly to words written in Central Kurdish (Sorani), it can be appropriately adopted for Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji and its sub-dialect of Bahdini), the focus of this study. In the tables below, examples are added for more clarification of the individual vowels, diphthongs and consonants as used in Bahdini.

Vowels and diphthongs

Bahdini Kurdish	Latin Kurdish	Examples
ئا،ا	a	agir (fire)
ه	e	dest (hand)
ۆ	o	roj (sun, day)
ی	ê	stêr (star)
وو	û	birû (eyebrow)
و	u	kurd (Kurd)
ی	î	havîn (summer)
-	i	Dil (heart)
وی	wê	wêran (destruction)

Consonants

Bahdini Kurdish	Latin Kurdish	Examples
ب	b	bira (brother)
پ	p	pişt (back)
ت	t	tirs (fear)
ج	c	civak (society)
چ	ç	çar (four)
ه	h	hetav (sun)
خ	x	xewn (dream)
د	d	dîwar (wall)

ر	r	bihar (spring)
ر	r	rûbar (river)
ز	z	zengil (bell)
ژ	j	jan (grief)
س	s	ser (head)
ش	ş	şekir (sugar)
ع	a'	a'wr (cloud)
ع	ä	äerîb (foreign)
ف	f	ferheng (dictionary)
ق	q	aqil (reason)
ک	k	kur (boy)
گ	g	genim (wheat)
ل	l	mil (arm)
ل	l	mal (home)
م	m	dem (time)
ن	n	nav (name)
و	w	welat (country)
ه	h	heyv (moon)
ی	y	yeksani (equality)

Chapter One

Introduction

The current state of Kurdish literary production, represented here by novels in Bahdinan, can best be grasped within a feminist and postcolonial frame. By investigating novels by both Bahdini male and female authors, I have set out to capture the manners and mechanisms by which Kurdish women are represented in relation to the changing socio-political situation of Iraq in the contexts of three successive periods of Iraq's recent history (1986-1991, 1992-2008, and 2009-2014). The first period, a time of wars, mass-migration and dangerous political disputes, is represented in Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* (2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Êkê* (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One, 2013). The following period of post-conflict is represented in Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: Kiçe-Jinek ji Zemanek Di*² (Mariama: A Woman from Another Time, 2007) and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge* (2011). Tahsin Navishki's *Alê Di Yê Prê* (The Other Side of the Bridge, 2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Dwê* (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part Two, 2014) represent the third period in which Kurdish women suffer various forms of violence resulting from growing levels of criminality and terrorism. Before the significance of these novels can be properly understood, certain contextual and textual frames of reference related to Kurdish history, nationalism and literature with a special focus on Bahdinan need to be addressed.³

1.1. Introductory Remarks

The Kurds, numbering well above 22 million, form the largest nation in the world without their own independent state.⁴ Despite being large majorities within the four states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria,

² In the title the word *Kiçe*, meaning a girl, and *Jin*, meaning a woman, are combined to make one word (girl-woman) to describe Mariama as the raped girl.

³ Bahdinan, also known as Badinan, was first used to refer to the powerful Bahdinan principality founded by Prince Baha'a-al-Din between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Today, it refers to the present-day Duhok province in Iraqi Kurdistan and all the surrounding towns and cities. The term also refers to the dialect of the Kermanji Kurdish language spoken by the inhabitants of these areas.

⁴ Amir Hassanpour, "The Kurdish Experience," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 24 (July/August, 1994), 1. Although I have used Hassanpour here, different rates of population density are proposed by different scholars. For example, McDowall (2000) numbers the Kurds as at least 25 million and Mella (2005) raises the figure to 40 million.

Kurds have been historically treated as mere minorities with no recognized national, territorial, or cultural rights. Kurdish aspirations for independence and statehood have instigated revolts and rebellions, most especially since the formation of the modern Middle Eastern region following the First World War and the dispersion of Kurdistan among the different newly formed states. 'The Kurdish question,' though of geopolitical significance for the great powers, has nevertheless too often been sidelined by systematic acts of marginalization and negligence in both academic and non-academic debates. However, the question of Kurdistan and the Kurds has become increasingly important in the Middle East and the international community, particularly since the end of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the establishment of a de facto Kurdish state in the north of Iraq.

Any research in Kurdish history, nationalism, ethnography, literary experience and gender politics is very likely to pose serious practical difficulties and problems. One major reason for this difficulty is the dispersion of the Kurds' homeland among different nation-states and these states' persistent policies to assimilate the Kurdish culture and identity. The Kurds, having been subjected to different political, cultural, and social formations, have never been able to develop a homogenous cultural experience and national identity. This is confirmed by David McDowall, a specialist on Middle Eastern affairs who suggests that the study of the Kurdish experience involves the examination of two inter-related questions: First, the historical struggle between the Kurdish people and the nation states which govern them. The politics of denial and assimilation of the newly formed states resulted in relentless forms of Kurdish resistance and struggle which have become defining features of the Kurdish history and nationalism. Related to this is the second question in McDowall's discussion which concerns the Kurds' historical aspirations to constitute a unified identity and construct a coherent community with the essential characteristics of nationhood.⁵ Although different strategies at different periods of time have been administered by the governments of the hosting countries to absorb Kurdish identity, the Kurds have been subjected to cruel policies of suppression and assimilation. Accordingly, our investigation of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan inevitably requires detailed accounts and discussions of the historical and political situations that have historically shaped it.

The division of Kurdistan among several countries simultaneously divided and separated the Kurdish intellectual and cultural experience. Frontiers were not only drawn through the land but also through the language, culture and literature of the Kurds in those parts. The formal prohibition of Kurdish language as part of the process of assimilation of the Kurdish political and cultural identity in all the

⁵ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), 1.

four nation-states resulted in the creation of a considerable volume of literature in the languages of the host countries both inside Kurdistan and in the diaspora, especially in Sweden, Germany, and France. Accordingly, diversity and fragmentation have become the defining characters of all forms of Kurdish literary discourse including the Kurdish novel.

The division of Kurdistan also affected Kurdish women's experience, which developed differently and separately in the different states in which they live. Research on their political, cultural and literary experiences in Iraq, for example, is restricted by a number of factors including the historically very limited access of Kurdish women to education, literacy and political participation and the 'intellectual poverty,' in other words, the scarcity of feminist studies, research and documentation. The available historical and social studies and ethnographic literature on the Kurds is characterized by a significant absence of the representation of Kurdish women. Shahrzad Mojab, a Kurdish women's rights activist and scholar, posits that this research is shaped by its historical and intellectual context and completely lacks any gender dimension. She confirms that "despite references to women, the theory and methodology of these works lack a gender component ... [and] when gender *is* present it is mostly in relation to marriage and kinship structures."⁶ Mojab refers to the Danish anthropologist Henry Hansen's *Kurdish Women's Life* (1961) which was translated into Kurdish (Sorani dialect) by Aziz Gerdi and published in Baghdad in 1983. She confirms that although "a landmark in the study of Kurdish women, [the book] is not informed by a gendered theoretical position."⁷ Equally important are the various impediments emanating from the various traditional and tribal ideologies functioning within Kurdish society, which both confine research on gender roles and relations and Kurdish women's own access to academic debates and scholarship. These aspects will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Within this restrictive and subordinate context, a salient question poses itself: How is the Kurdish woman, her status, identity and subjectivity —both at times of war and post-conflict —represented in the Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan? In other words, what are the different forms and layers of violence and oppression that Kurdish women have and still suffer from as depicted in the contemporary Kurdish novel by Bahdini novelists? Detailed and rigorous examination of the subject

⁶ Shahrzad Mojab, "Conflicting Loyalties: Nationalism and Gender Relations in Kurdistan," in *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism*, ed. Himani Bannerji, Shahrzad Mojab, and Judith Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 119. Italics are original.

⁷ Mojab, "Conflicting Loyalties," 119.

by means of a contextual as well as textual analysis of the selected works requires a thorough engagement with the historical and cultural context within which these texts were produced.

1.2. Kurdish Literature: Blurred Borders and Definitions

Issues around the Kurdish national cause and political struggle throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have attracted more attention from outsiders as well as Kurds themselves than Kurdish culture and literature. Hence, thorough investigations of Kurdish literary experience remain comparatively scarce despite the recent revival in Kurdish studies conducted mainly in the diaspora (Europe and US). This section endeavours to introduce the concept of Kurdish literature and literary history by addressing some of the factors that have traditionally contributed to its marginalization. It focuses on Kurdish modern literary experience in Iraq making constant references to the participations of Kurdish intellectuals and writers from the other parts of Kurdistan which have influenced and, to a great extent, shaped Kurdish literature in Iraq. First, a brief overview of the difficulties of defining Kurdish literature, tracing its origins and configuring its boundaries is given followed by an investigation of the circumstances in which Kurdish literature in Bahdinan has emerged and developed keeping an extensive focus on the novelistic discourse. To begin with, although the early history of Kurdish literature (*Edebê Kurdi* in Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji) dialect) dates back to pre-Islamic times, only scant fragments of written literature are extant today due to centuries of Kurdish nomadic lifestyles and constant political and religious conflicts. These literary works are primarily written in Pahlawani,⁸ particularly in the main dialect of Gorani which was the language of the polite society and men of letters for a long time. Accordingly, Kurdish literature has mainly been transmitted as an oral tradition that survived well into the twentieth century when it began to decline as a result of modernization and the development of printing and publishing. Christine Allison, a specialist on Middle Eastern and popular cultures including Kurdisn culture and oral literature, comments on the historical significance of oral narratives and folkloric discourses in the Kurdish context: “Kurdish scholars in particular have seen folklore as a fund of information about the past, an expression of the people’s feelings, and a repository of popular wisdom.”⁹ Wendelmoet Hamelink, who connects the

⁸ Better known as Southern Kurdish, Pahlawani is the language of the Kurds inhabiting *Kirmaşan* (Kermanshah) and Ilam in western Iran and in *Xaneqîn* (Khanaqin) and Mandali in eastern Iraq. It is also spoken by a substantial Kurdish community in Baghdad and Kirkuk. It comprises a number of sub-dialects including *Kirmaşanî* (Kermanshahi), *Feylî* (Feyli), *Gerrûsî* (Garrusi), *Goranî* (Gorani), Laki and others.

⁹ Christine Allison, “Kurdish Oral Literature,” in *A History of Persian Literature* Vol. XVIII, ed. Ehsan Yarshater et al. (London: The Persian Heritage Foundation, 2010), 135.

growing significance of oral tradition and other cultural productions to the emergence of nationalist ideology, confirms that even before the notable rise of nationalism, oral discourses including songs and stories “often had a local political message; they were either used to praise and support local rulers, or as a means to express dissident views that could not be voiced directly.”¹⁰ Hamelink explains that oral narratives became major tools for the “mobilization of the masses” and contends that Kurdish nationalists “saw oral traditions as useful tools for generating and mobilizing nationalist sentiments; they were owned by the ‘masses,’ instead of by the elite; they demonstrated a common language and they expressed shared ideas about history.”¹¹

Hamelink refers to the crucial role played by the Kurdish ‘*dengbêj*,’ poet-singers in Turkish Kurdistan, and describes them as ‘guardians of history and culture.’ When Kurdish intellectuals, who have historically represented an important fraction of Kurdish nationalism, began to emphasize Kurdish ethnographic identity as distinct from those of the surrounding peoples, they, in the tradition of the poet-singers, showed a “growing interest in cultural productions of ordinary people”¹² and defined them as the preservers and protectors of the Kurdish common heritage. Hamelink also adds:

“Intellectuals aimed at overcoming the deep divisions between tribal and urban society by propagating a common Kurdish cultural heritage. Part of this heritage was the oral tradition of tales and myths.”¹³

The preservation of oral literature has been particularly important for Kurds because of the politics of assimilation into the new sovereign states, the absence of a corpus of written literature, the prohibition of the Kurdish language by officialdom, and the standardization of Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages at the cost of Kurdish language.¹⁴ The impact of oral tradition can be still felt in almost all

¹⁰ Wendelmoet Hamelink, *The Sung Home: Narrative, Morality, and the Kurdish Nation* (USA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2016), 49.

¹¹ Hamelink, *The Sung Home*, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The Kurdish language belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family which is part of the Northwestern Iranian languages. It is generally divided into three dialects: Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), spoken by the majority of Kurds, Central Kurdish (Sorani) spoken by large groups of Kurds in Iraq and Iran, and Southern Kurdish (Pahlawani) spoken by fewer numbers of Kurds in Iran and in Khanaqin, a Kurdish city to the east of Iraq. In this study, more emphasis is put on Kurmanji – particularly *Badîni*, (Bahdini, Bahdinani) also known as Southeastern Kurmanji, spoken in Hakari in modern Turkish Kurdistan and in Duhok governorate in Iraq) – and on Sorani dialects. Since Pahlawani has had little influence in Iraq within Kurdish language politics due to geo-political considerations, it does not fall within the scope of the thesis. Significant linguistic, orthographic, and grammatical differences have historically existed between Bahdini and Sorani which resulted in considerably different processes of linguistic development and literary experiences. Moreover, “since 1932 most Kurds have used Roman [or Latin] script to write Kurmanji [except in Iraqi Kurdistan where Arabic script is used]; in the Soviet Union Cyrillic is generally used [and] Sorani is normally written in an adapted form of the Arabic script” (Kreyenbroek, 1992, 55). The development of different scripts is another face of the fragmented and

the emerging written forms of Kurdish literature as well as the modern daily life of the Kurdish people where it is still considerably employed. Oral ballads and folkloric stories have been utilized in most leading Kurdish classical texts including *Mem and Zin* (1692) and *Khaj and Siyamend* (1654).¹⁵ Moreover, the historical predominance of Kurdish poetry¹⁶ and epics, which are easier to transmit

discontinuous character of the Kurdish dialects in the different parts of Kurdistan. These differences have historically impeded the development of a standard form of Kurdish language that is accessible to all Kurds. Moreover, since the division of Kurdistan between the four nation-states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, Kurdish language has been subjected to systematic policies of linguicide and acts of suppression and assimilation. Despite the absence of a unified Kurdish, Kurdish nationalists and intellectuals have historically realized the significance of language. Kreyenbroek indicates that “Kurdish language is both proof and symbol of the separate identity of the Kurds, and impressive efforts are made to preserve and develop it” (Kreyenbroek, 1992, 53). Hence, Kurdish language remained chiefly a spoken language and could not develop an appropriate written form for matters such as administration, education, and literature until late in the nineteenth century. This complexity is the result of various factors including the ongoing “rivalries between speakers of different regional variants [which] still present problems and decisions have to be made about linguistic purity” (Kreyenbroek, 1992, 54).

¹⁵ Based on a Kurdish legend, *Khaj and Siyamend* (1654) is the love story between Siyamend, a young strong horseman, and Khaj, the daughter of a chief of a powerful tribe. Because of the inequality in their social status, their love faces huge difficulties and their love story ends tragically with the death of Siyamend and the suicide of Khaj.

¹⁶ Fadhil Omer presents one of the earliest discussions of Kurdish poetry in Bahdinan and describes such influential classical poets as Sheikh Shamsaddin Akhlati Brifkani (1588-1674), Sheikh Noredin Brifkani (1790-1851), Bakir Bage Ariz (1761-1829), Hosni Bamerni (1868-1940), Ehmedê Nalbend, Ahmad Nalbend (1891-1963), and Sheikh Mamdouh Brifkani (1911-1976) as the establishers of Kurdish poetry in Bahdinan. Naturally, like the works of other Kurdish classical poets, their poetry was highly influenced by the Arabic, Persian and Turkish literatures in terms of style, form and poetic techniques. For example, a range of poetic themes including *madih* (a religious eulogy), *ghazal* (a love poem), *tasawuf* (Sufism), *ritha* (an elegy), and *wasif* (a descriptive poem) as well as various figures of rhetoric and poetic devices such as simile, metaphor, paradox, irony and many others were adopted. With regard to the form of their poetry, these poets widely employed Arabic poetic meter (*Aruz*) as well as other poetic features such as measure and rhyme. (Khaznadar, 1986, 2) With the publication of such journals as *Hewar* (Cry for Help) between 1932 and 1935 and between 1941 and 1943, *Ronahi* (Light) between 1941 and 1944, *Stêr* (Star) between 1943 and 1945 in Damascus, *Roja Nû* (New Day) between 1943 and 1946 in Beirut and *Gelawêj* between 1939 and 1949 in Baghdad, Bahdini poetry started to witness a relative advancement and “reflected a strong preoccupation with Kurdish culture and identity” (Kreyenbroek, 2005, 1). Bahdini poetry and the other emerging forms including short story and drama experienced an unrecorded flourish and promulgation in the early seventies by the establishment of a Chair of Kurdish Studies in the University of Baghdad, the inauguration of a number of Kurdish cultural centres, and the setting up of a Kurdish television station during the peaceful period following the announcement of March Manifesto in 1970. During this period, the socio-political and cultural mood was relatively mitigated and a number of journals appeared in Baghdad including *Hawkarî* (Support), *Beyan* (News), *Rojî Kurd* (Kurdish Sun) and the Kurdish section of the Arabic newspaper *Al-Ta’akhi* (Brotherhood). Most importantly, the establishment of the branch of the Union of Kurdish Writers in Duhok in 1971 and the appointment of the renowned Sheikh Mamdouh Brifkani as its president was considered a transformative experience for Bahdini literature and an excellent opportunity for the local writers and poets to publish their literary works. During the short peaceful period between 1970 and 1975, Kurdish poetry witnessed a notable progress both in quality and technique. In her influential study of the Bahdini poetry of resistance in Duhok written between 1976 and 1991, Beyan Hussein indicates that “national themes, particularly the 1975 Kurdish Revolt occupied much of the work of these poets. Their poetry was marked by a clear patriotic sense and a profound sympathy for the long suppression and enslavement of the Kurdish people” (Hussein, 2003, 29-30). Formalistically, poetry produced during this period was breaking more and more from the classical moods, styles and rhymes as Kurdish poets began to realize that such restrictions were confining their imagination and limiting their creativity. Hence, they directed their attention towards more realistic forms of writing to show life as it was under the suppressive tyranny of the Ba’ath regime. Their poems were replete with subtle symbols including roses, winds, rivers, mountains, blood, and many others inspired by the beautiful nature of Kurdistan to urge the Kurds everywhere to rebel against oppression and assimilation, and hence create a link between Kurds fighting on the

orally, has contributed to the superiority of oral traditions.¹⁷ Hence, many Kurdish scholars agree that no clear distinction can be drawn between oral and written cultural and literary discourses, and Kurdish literature should be seen, at least, as old as these seventeenth-century texts.

It is very frustrating that one of the most contentious questions in Kurdish literary studies today is how to define it and establish its boundaries. One major reason for this difficulty is the complex of political, social, economic and linguistic considerations that hamper such a definition. The Kurdish literary experience, like the Kurdish historical and national experiences, has suffered centuries of revolts and wars that have destroyed numerous studies and archival materials required for the investigation of Kurdish literary and cultural heritage. In his seminal discussion of the definitional complications of Kurdish literature, the prominent Kurdish scholar Hashim Ahmadzadeh argues that “the absence of a defined juridico-political Kurdish sovereignty, in other words, the non-existence of a Kurdish state, makes it impossible to decide the limits of Kurdish literature as a national literature.”¹⁸ These

mountains and those living in towns and cities. The preoccupation of these poets with the Kurdish resistance, love of homeland and reconstruction of Kurdish national and cultural identity is reproduced in the works of the following generations of poets including Salih Yosivi (1918-1981), Taha Mayi (1924-2000), Badir Khan Sindi (b.1943), Khalil Duhoki (b.1951) and many others. These poets developed a form of revolutionary realism in which they represented the patriotism and heroism of the Kurdish fighters, the Peshmerga, against the attacks of the Iraqi army and the Kurdish demands for liberation and independence. And, as might be expected; poetry by Kurdish women in Bahdinan emerged much later than the poetry of Bahdini male poets and for the same reasons as the factors that delayed the appearance of literature by Kurdish women in other parts of Kurdistan. This, however, is not to say that Bahdinan completely lacked literary attempts by Kurdish women to write poetry and other forms of literature. For example, earliest contributions came from such emerging women poets as Sabria Hakari (1948), Nezira Bamerni, better known as Dayka Daliaye (1955), Saud Silevani (1973), Jule Haji (1974), and Trife Doski (1974). Given this intense preoccupation with the plights of their people, these women poets exhibit a strong identification with such Kurdish revolutionary women as Layla Qasim, Rawshan Badir Khan and others not only for their roles in the Kurdish national movement but also for their emphasis on education and literacy as important weapons for Kurdish women’s resilience against gender and ethnic oppression. Significantly, despite their rather late introduction into the Kurdish literary scene, these poets endeavoured to generate a language that realistically depicted the hopes, aims, pains and worries of Kurdish women by adopting various expressions and words that are used by women rather than men. Such phrases as ‘*ez ne mînim*’ (may I die), ‘*daye gori*’ (may you bury me), ‘*hey mala min*’ (oh my fortune), and ‘*hey la li mnê*’ (oh poor me) are being instrumentally introduced into the poetry of Kurdish women in Bahdinan creating a distinct feminist identity for the works of these emerging women poets.

¹⁷ Ozlem Galip, “Kurdistan: A Land of Longing and Struggle: Analysis of ‘Home-land’ and ‘Identity’ in the Kurdish Novelistic Discourse from Turkish Kurdistan to its Diaspora (1984-2010),” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012), 10.

¹⁸ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse* (Sweden: Uppsala University, 2003), 127. A persistent question even in the current debates on the status of Kurdish literature is its definition as a national literature and the configuration of its boundaries. According to Carole Gerson in “The Changing Contours of a National Literature:” “[National literature] is not merely the record of a country’s mental progress; it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity, and the guide of national energy” (Gerson, 1980, 888). While discussions of national literatures require the study of their histories, their roles in the establishment of societies, and the impact of various critical perspectives such as postcolonial theories, gender studies, and ethnic literary studies on their formulation, in the case of Kurdish literature, this has become even more problematic because of the geo-political

circumstances have constrained Kurdish authors and intellectuals from making political and cultural contacts with intellectuals from other nations and countries. The absence of such relationships not only slowed the development of Kurdish literature but also prevented Kurds from learning other languages which in turn has resulted in a significant delay in the translation movement.

1.2.1. The Impact of Language Fragmentation on Kurdish Literature

While the definition of Kurdish literature has been historically bound to the political reality of the Kurdish societies in the nation-states which divide the region of Kurdistan, the most vigorous impediments to its definition and growth are the repressive and assimilative policies implemented by these states as well as the absence of a unified Kurdish language. The fluctuating state and awkward circumstances of the Kurdish language in all the four parts of Kurdistan not only complicate its potential role in the formation of an integrated Kurdish national identity, but also illuminate the Kurds' continuing historical commitment to linguistic and cultural recognition. An important demonstration of this is the Kurds' vigorous efforts to preserve oral and cultural narratives: "The creative use of the Kurdish language is a vital part of Kurdish "folklore," part of that construct of a traditional past which is essential for the development of a national consciousness."¹⁹ Hence, the efforts of Kurdish nationalists to challenge assimilation into the sovereign states have been accompanied by resolute attempts of Kurdish intellectuals and writers to create and develop a unified standard language and eliminate the persisting variations between its different dialects. Most notable are the attempts of

divisions and conflicts. The division of Kurdistan between different nation-states and these states' different cultural and political perspectives towards their Kurdish minorities has complicated the study of Kurdish literature according to its national, geographical, or linguistic character. Moreover, the impact of the national literatures of these states on the Kurdish literary experience and the growing role of Kurdish literary production in the diaspora and the effects of these writers' diasporic experiences on their writings have all resulted in a more disintegrated and diverse corpus of written literature. Ahmadzadeh confirms that "although there is a strong tendency among the Kurdish nationalists to claim that there is a homogenous Kurdish literature, the reality of Kurdish literature is far from this" (Ahmadzadeh, 2003, 128). Taking into consideration the importance of a unified national literature in defining the cultural and national identity of a people, there has been more than one attempt by Kurdish and pro-Kurdish scholars and academics to discuss the significance of bringing together, in a comparative frame, the Kurdish literary experiences in the different parts of Kurdistan. Calls for uniting Kurdish literature are repeated in the scholarly conferences where Kurdish writers and academics come together from different parts of the world and discuss Kurdish cultural and literary commonalities despite geo-political differences. Important examples are such conferences as "Kurdish Literature: Between Borders, Past and Modernity" held in Jagiellonian University, Poland in 2014 and a Conference entitled "Kurdistan Present at American Literary Conference" organized by the Association of Writers and Writing Program (AWP) in 2016 in Los Angeles, USA, where the literary works of Kurdish writers from different parts of Kurdistan were presented and discussed.

¹⁹ Allison, "Kurdish Oral Literature," 129.

Jeladet Badirkhan to cooperate with other Kurdish linguists and intellectuals to develop a unified Latin-based orthography that is equally accessible to Kurds in all the different parts of Kurdistan.

The absence of such a common standard language, however, has not only resulted in the creation of separate literary experiences, but also impeded the definition of Kurdish literature and the configuration of its borders. Thus, a Kurd from Diyarbakir in Turkish Kurdistan, for example, will not be able to read the works of an author from Kobane in Syrian Kurdistan and similarly a Kurd in Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan is not likely to read the works of an author from Sanandaj (Sine) in Iranian Kurdistan: “The Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan hardly know anything about each other’s literary activities.”²⁰ To this date, there is no standard Kurdish language or a unified Kurdish lexicon that is eligible to all Kurds and as a result most Kurdish academics and writers tend to classify and define Kurdish literary production according to their knowledge or political affiliation which makes a systematic study of Kurdish literature a very complicated, if not an impossible task. Hence, compared to the literary traditions in the states of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria:

The Kurdish one is shaped within multiple geographies in terms of writing and publishing processes, multilingual and transnational affiliations, constant mobility and a diverse socio-political context which challenges and complicates the national literature, vividly exemplifying the heterogeneity and discontinuity of national cultures.²¹

Accordingly, the definition, classification and delimitation of Kurdish literature engender multidimensional geographic, political, cultural and linguistic concerns that represent and shape the context from which it emerges. Given the open geo-political nature of Kurdish societies and the impact of the linguistic and literary experiences of the nation-states in which they live and the fact that many Kurdish writers have chosen (either for political or commercial reasons) to write not in Kurdish but in the official languages of these states, an essential and decisive question becomes what is to be defined as Kurdish literature? In other words, does Kurdish literature include the works written strictly in Kurdish or include works written in Kurdish as well as other (mostly Arabic, Turkish and Persian) languages too? The answer to this question necessitates a rigorous assessment of a multiplex web of political, geographical, cultural and most importantly, linguistic considerations (which are discussed here). The significance of the linguistic debate lies in the way “it deals with the inclusion and exclusion of the actors in the field, and is therefore concerned with the boundaries of the Kurdish

²⁰ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and the Novel*, 132.

²¹ Ozlem Galip, “Writing across Kurdistan: Reading Social, Historical and Political Contexts in Literary Narratives,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 9 (2016): 257.

literary field,” according to Clémence Scalbert-Yücel.²² Because of the dispersion of Kurdistan between different states that use entirely different languages (or different dialects as in the case of Iraq and Syria where Arabic is used) and employ different policies of assimilation against the Kurdish populations, it becomes impossible to define and limit Kurdish literature to the works written in the Kurdish language. Many important and well-known Kurdish literary figures including Yaşar Kemal (1923-2015), Mehmed Uzun (1953-2007), Ali-Ashraf Darvishian (1941) Abd al-Majid Lutfi (1906-1992), and Muhyi al-Din Zangane (1940-2010) have written their works in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. The identity of such writers and that of their works remain a point of dispute for many Kurdish (and Arabic, Turkish and Persian) critics and intellectuals. This is confirmed by Allison when she describes the Kurdish linguistic debate as “a very real and pertinent problem in Kurdish literature.”²³ Using the example of Yaşar Kemal, the Kurdish writer who writes in Turkish, she argues that although his work deals primarily with the ‘land and feelings of landscape’ which characterize Kurdish folkloric writings, there is a ‘discomfort’ with the fact that he writes in Turkish. She confirms, however, that “a writer such as Yaşar Kemal can express himself in Turkish as a citizen of Turkey and, at the same time draw on his Kurdish identity.”²⁴ Thus, the persistence of this debate has complicated and impeded the definition of Kurdish literature and the configuration of its perimeter.

In her discussion of Kurdish literature in the light of the multiplicity of Kurdish dialects within the Kurdish language and its formal prohibition for long decades, Scalbert-Yücel confirms the importance of language as the “strongest marker for differentiating the Kurdish population from neighboring peoples.”²⁵ She uses “linguistic conflict” to describe the tension between the Kurdish and Turkish languages indicating that: “one is politically dominant (the official language, the language of the public sphere and of the market), and the other one is clearly dominated (forms of domination differ from the violent and repressive to the passive and soft).”²⁶ She argues that since the dominated, in this case Kurdish, exists only in relation to the dominant (Turkish), “it seems impossible to study Kurdish literature in Turkey without taking the Turkish language into account.”²⁷ Though Scalbert-Yücel studies Kurdish literature in Turkey, her analysis can be easily adapted to address Kurdish literary

²² Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, “Languages and the Definition of Literature: The Blurred Borders of Kurdish Literature in Contemporary Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 14:2 (2011): 176.

²³ Christine Allison, “Kurdish Autobiography, Memoir and Novel: Ereb Shemo and His Successors,” *Studies on Persianate Societies*, 109 (May, 2005): 102.

²⁴ Allison, “Kurdish Autobiography, Memoir and Novel,” 103.

²⁵ Scalbert-Yücel, “Languages and the Definition of Literature,” 173.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

experiences in the other parts of Kurdistan where language is increasingly affecting the study and definition of Kurdish literary discourses. Similarly, Ahmadzadeh confirms that, given the complex political and linguistic situation, “the different backgrounds of the Kurdish societies provide the different conditions which lead to the production of the different literary discourses [hence] language by itself cannot determine the identity of a literature.”²⁸

An important perspective is that administered by a number of anthologies including A. Balı’s *Antolojiya Helbestvanên Kurd* (The Anthology of Kurdish Poets, 1992) and Mehmed Uzun’s *Antolojiya Edebiyata Kurdi* (The Anthology of Kurdish Literature, 1995) which include poets and authors from different parts of Kurdistan in acknowledgement of the literature of Kurdistan at large or what Scalbert-Yücel terms as ‘the Kurdistan Literature.’²⁹ The instrumental inclusion of literary figures from different parts of Kurdistan despite the methodological complications and problematic consequences not only aids in promoting the notion of a common Kurdish literary experience but also in “building this rather symbolic unified field of literature of Kurdistan, or literature of the Kurds.”³⁰ “Kurdistan literature,” as opined by Scalbert-Yücel and implicitly acknowledged by these anthologies:

Crosses not only international borders but also linguistic or dialectal borders, since they include authors who write in the Kurmanji, Sorani and Zazaki languages who use Arabic, Latin or Cyrillic scripts, and who come from Turkey, from Iraq, Iran, Syria, or Russia, thus unifying many rather scattered elements.³¹

Although the literature produced by Kurdish writers in languages other than their own have traditionally created a high degree of controversy and inconsistency among Kurdish and non-Kurdish intellectuals, the constructive role played by their works in the portrayal and introduction of the Kurdish reality and national experience cannot be denied. Their works have helped in familiarizing the whole world with the policies of occupation, oppression and discrimination practiced against the Kurds throughout their history by different powers and groups. Hence, the inclusion of such influential works within the category of Kurdish literature will enhance our understanding not only of Kurdish history,

²⁸ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*,” 135. To gloss his argument about the identity of texts written by writers of Kurdish origin in languages other than Kurdish, Ahmadzadeh uses the case of English literature and asks whether it refers to the works strictly produced in Great Britain or to literature written in the English language. He confirms it is not language that identifies the boundaries of a literature since “one distinguishes American, English, and Canadian literatures from each other, although all of them are written in English” (Ahmadzadeh, 2003, 135). He also refers to such complicated cases as Arabic, Spanish, and Swahili literatures which require the investigation of various ‘trends and histories’ in their definition.

²⁹ Scalbert-Yücel, “Languages and the Definition of Literature,” 176.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

ethnography and culture, but also Kurdish literary and artistic experiences which have been overshadowed by centuries of deliberate marginalization and negligence. In the following section, a short historical overview of Kurdish prose writing will be presented and the impact of the persisting linguistic debate on the Kurdish literary experience in Iraq will be further investigated to illuminate the emergence and growth of Kurdish literature in Iraq.

1.2.2. Kurdish Prose: Towards Novel-Writing in Bahdinan

The formal endorsement and ratification of Central Kurdish (Sorani) by the British authorities and then the Iraqi government not only disappointed the Northern Kurdish (Bahdini) speakers, but also negatively influenced their artistic and literary output.³² Though the legal recognition of the Kurdish national and cultural rights and the adoption of their language as a medium for education and other public spheres were considered the first real official achievements and were highly valued by Kurds everywhere, the historical negligence of Bahdinan has had far-reaching implications on the educational, political, cultural and literary progress of the region that extend to the present day.

The culturally under-developed state of the Bahdini-speaking areas compared to the other Kurdish areas in Iraq until late in the twentieth century has resulted in a dearth of cultural, artistic and literary

³² According to Ozlem Galip, “until the First World War, Kurmanji was strong as most national movements were led by Kurmanji-speaking intellectuals or figures, e.g., the Bedir Khan Brothers. In addition, early Kurdish journals, such as *Kurdistan* (1898), *Kurd* (1907), *Rojî Kurd* (Kurdish Sun, 1913), and *Jîn* (Life, 1916) were written in Kurmanji” (Galip, 2012, 9). Although Kurmanji is spoken by the majority of Kurds, historically, Sorani has benefited more from socio-political circumstances. Constraints on Kurmanji and Bahdini, as a sub-dialect of Kurmanji, including the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the promotion of Turkish language at the cost of Kurdish language in Turkey where the vastest majority of Kurdish people live as well as the initiation of the process of Arabization known as ‘linguicide’ during the 1960s in Iraq affected the development of Kurmanji in all the four states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. It is important that Sorani experienced its first enhancement during the reign of Abd al-Rahman Pasha Baban (1789-1802) who succeeded Ibrahim Pasha, Prince of Baban and advocated the use of Sorani in public administration and education as well as in literature, music and other cultural activities in Sulaymaniyah, the capital and cultural center of Baban at the time. Sorani-speaking intellectuals and poets benefited immensely from this official promotion of their language and established a number of literary schools that not only brought literary figures together but also created a resolute literary discourse that kept developing despite the fluctuating socio-political conditions. Kurmanji, on the other hand, experienced a substantial enhancement in the early years of the twentieth century following the October Revolution 1917 in the USSR, when Kurmanji literature revived remarkably in Armenia. Although it declined again in the following years, from the 1980s, Kurmanji began to revive once more, benefiting from such circumstances as “the lifting of embargoes in Turkey and Turkish Kurdistan on writing and publishing in Kurdish, and the contributions made by Kurdish migrants in Europe to publication and broadcasting” (Ozlem, 2012, 10). Moreover, Kurmanji has been privileged substantially in the diaspora: “Kurmanji which had remained a relatively backward language (due, at least in part, to its suppression in Turkey), was developed into a modern literary language adequate for political and intellectual discourses” (Bruinessen, 1992, 66).

production in the Bahdini dialect.³³ It also has had profound implications for Bahdini intellectuals and authors, who were educated in Arabic and Sorani rather than their own dialect and hence were not able to develop a Bahdini literary language.³⁴ The lack of a Kurdish prose tradition has represented a major impediment for the emerging short story writers and later for novelists. Despite the precedence of poetry over artistic prose writing, Kurdish writers have produced a number of early short stories taking advantage of the growing movement of translation from foreign languages, particularly Arabic, Turkish and Persian, as well as the possibility of publication in installments in the Kurdish journals. This was the case with Fuadê Temo's *Çîrok* (Story), the first Kurmanji short story published in Istanbul in 1913 in the influential Kurdish journal *Rojê Kurd* (The Kurdish Sun).³⁵ The development of Kurdish journalism in the following decades provided further opportunities for the production of Kurdish short stories and the translation of short stories from other languages. Cemil Saib's *Le Xewma* (In My Dream), 1925 was the first Sorani short story in Iraq published in installments in various issues of both *Jiyanewe* (Revival) and *Jiyan* (Life). In his discussion of the problematic genealogy of Kurdish short story, Ahmadzadeh argues that while it has thematically been influenced by Kurdish folklore, technically it is guided by the short story of the neighboring countries and later of the Western countries:

Folklore can only provide the themes of the short story, not its form, which differs from the traditional way of constructing a story... The background of the early writers of the Kurdish short stories convinces one that the pioneering short story writers in Kurdish knew Arabic, Persian and Turkish, in which the art of short story had already flourished.³⁶

Like other Kurdish literary forms, the Kurdish short story in Bahdinan emerged substantially late, compared to other parts of Kurdistan as well as to the Sorani-speaking areas. This late emergence can

³³ Among the very few noteworthy studies on the development of Kurdish literature in Bahdinan is Fadhil Omer's "Kurdish Literature in Bahdinan." Discussing the impact of Kurdish oral tradition on the written literary forms, Omer describes such Kurdish classical performers as *stranbêj* (popular singers), *çirokbêj* (story-tellers) and *dengbêj* (bards) as the founders of the Bahdini oral discourses. Omer's description is based on the fact that their songs, for examples *lawik* (heroic ballads), were epic in nature and recounted the heroic deeds of Kurdish heroes. Kurdish music, traditionally performed by the three mentioned actors, includes such genres of songs as *lavje* (religious songs), *heyranok* (love ballads), *payizok* (autumn songs), *narink* (erotic poems) as well as various forms of love songs, dance and wedding songs and work songs. Given their oral nature, most of these songs have been transmitted, kept and recorded in modern times and are still widely employed by Kurds all over the world. And though the article lacks subtle discussions of the emerging literary forms such as drama, short story and novel, the writer presents one of the first attempts at cataloguing Bahdini literature according to genre. He starts with a brief discussion of the significance of verbal communication in Bahdinan confirming that: "modern and contemporary literary production owes much of their progress to folklore and oral narratives" (Omer, 2009, 22).

³⁴ Abdulla Muhammad Haddad, *Lemhe A'n Tarix al-Edeb al-Kurdi* (Overview of the History of Kurdish Literature), *Journal of Kurdish Intellectuals and Writers*, 2 (1986): 36.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 160.

be attributed to a number of factors including the rural lifestyle of the Kurds in Bahdinan, their economic and social under-development, the substandard state of journalism in Kurmanji and the widespread illiteracy.³⁷ It was not until the revival of Kurdish language and literature in the 1960s and 1970s, following the cultural and economic boom and the establishment of the Union of Kurdish Writers in Duhok, that the Bahdini short story began to be produced. The first Kurdish short story in Bahdinan, *Serhatiyek* (A Tale) by Salih Rushdie was published in the third issue of the Kurdish journal *Ronahî* (Light) in Baghdad in 1960. The story depicts the painful and horrific experiences of a young Kurd from Duhok in a Ba'ath political prison in Baghdad and all the persecution and torture he is subjected to. The Kurdish writer and critic, Ismat Badal argues that despite the notable weakness in the story's language and form, it should be considered a major progress in the artistic prose writing of Bahdinan.³⁸

The period between 1970 and 1974 witnessed the publication of a number of collections of short stories including Salih Ali Guli's *Zêr Gul* (Golden Rose) in 1970, Mohammad Amin Osman's *Nan u Jiyân* (Bread and Life) in the same year, Ali Nekhshebendi's *Çîroken Kordî* (Kurdish Stories) in 1972 and Me'sum Mayî's *Îsê Delal* (Ise Delal) in 1973.³⁹ Thematically, Kurdish socio-political reality and their national question represented the major issues upon which these short stories concentrated. The following years witnessed the contribution of such prominent writers as Karim Jamil Bayani, Saleem Sowari, Sadiq Baha'ddin, Sha'ban Miziri, and Anwar Mohammad Tahir. According to Badal, "these writers addressed various complicated philosophical questions related to the changing reality of the Kurdish society, the subordinate status of Kurdish women and the increasing tensions between the rural background of the Kurdish people and the new urban lifestyles and ideologies."⁴⁰ Although it is not intended here to give a detailed review of the development of Kurdish short story, it is important to mention that with the notable increase in the number of Kurdish periodicals and printing houses and with the growing acquaintance with Western literary experiences following the creation of the Kurdish de facto state, Kurdish writers started to break with the traditional modes of narration and benefit from modern forms of arts including cinematic and fine arts together with a systematic return to Kurdish

³⁷ Khalid Salih, *Kurte-Çiroka Kurdi I Devera Behdinan* (Kurdish Short Story in Bahdinan (1960-2005), (Duhok: Union of Kurdish Writers, 2010), 5-6.

³⁸ Ismat Badal, *Kortiyek I Dor Pêdaçona Korte-Çiroka u Romana Kurdi I Devera Behdinan* (A Short Overview of the Development of Kurdish Short Story and Novel in Bahdinan), *Peyv Journal*, 33 (2005), 20.

³⁹ Abdul-Ghani Ali Yahya, *Hewle al-Qisa al-Kurdiye fi Mentiqet Badinan fi al-Iraq* (About Kurdish Short Story in Bahdinan in Iraq), *Journal of Duhok University*, 7:2 (2004), 7.

⁴⁰ Badal, "A Short Overview," 22.

folklore and cultural traditions. Also, as confirmed by Badal, they began to concentrate on the psychological impact of the political upheaval and experiment with codes of symbolism and realism to portray war-torn Kurdish society and have thus contributed to the emergence of the Kurdish novel.⁴¹

1.2.3. Kurdish Novelistic Discourse in Bahdinan: An Overview

Since language has traditionally played a fundamental role in the definition of Kurdish literary experience, the study of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Iraq requires an investigation of the works of Kurdish authors written in Arabic. Indicating that writing in Arabic was the only accepted ‘norm’ for a long time, Ronen Zeidel confirms that “writing in Arabic was a liability for Kurdish writers eager to assimilate into the intellectual circles of their countries or to become known throughout the Arabic world.”⁴² Important examples of Kurdish authors writing in Arabic studied by Zeidel include Abd al-Majid Lutfi (1906-1992), Muhyi al-Din Zangana (1940-2010), Zuhdi al-Dahoodi (1951), Azad al-Ayyubi (1956) and others. In her investigation of the identity of these writers and their works, Zeidel pays attention to the setting of the novels, their characters and subject matter. Focusing on the authors’ personal cultural and political experiences, Zeidel proposes that they are “torn between an Arab reading public, their own Kurdish identity, and the urge to represent the Kurdish cause within an Iraqi discourse.”⁴³ Although confused viewpoints and feelings regarding Arab-Kurdish solidarity and the Kurdish national cause in Iraq are expressed, almost all protagonists in Zeidel’s selected novels are Kurds and hold Kurdish names. Whether set in Kurdistan, in Kurdistan and Baghdad or in Kurdistan and the diaspora, Kurdish culture, society and landscape are “integral parts” of these novels.⁴⁴ Hence, despite writing in Arabic, Zeidel asserts that: “Arabic for these writers is a cultural means of expression and a linkage to other groups in Iraq; it is not an identity. Their identity is Kurdish and their Iraq is not only, nor even predominantly, Arab.”⁴⁵

Although the role of language in the identification of a literary text cannot be denied, here it is subject matter, theme and the authors’ national identity as Kurds that are used as measures to determine its identity. In accordance with Zeidel’s discussion, Qasham Ali Balata’s *Runaway to Nowhere*, written in English and published in the USA, is a Kurdish novel by a writer of Kurdish origin and can be

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ronen Zeidel, “Forging Iraqi-Kurdish Identity: A Case Study of Kurdish Novelists Writing in Arabic,” in *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland*, ed. by Ofra Bengio (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2014), 120.

⁴³ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 133.

appropriately discussed within the context of contemporary Kurdish literature. By selecting Balata's novel together with five other novels written in Bahdini and published in Duhok by writers of Kurdish origin, it is argued in the thesis that it is the Kurdistan-related content of these texts, vividly representing Kurdish life, culture and society that define them as Kurdish novels, along with their authors' ethno-national origins.

Moreover, the case for the inclusion of *Runaway to Nowhere* is that it is, like all novels by authors of Kurdish origin writing in other languages, replete with expressions, names and socio-political experiences that are uniquely Kurdish and are not used by native Arabic, Persian, and Turkish authors. This position is supported by most of the Kurdish writers, critics and scholars working currently in Duhok. For example, referring to the first Kurdish historical book, *Sharafnama*, (The Book of Honour) written in 1597 by Sharaf Khan Bidlisi (1543-1604) and published in Tabriz, one of the historical capitals of Iran, Barwary proposes that "it is my position that disregarding the language and the place of publication, any text that has depicted Kurdish culture, life, experiences and ideologies is a Kurdish text."⁴⁶ Moreover, according to Ahmadzadeh, we should entertain the possibility of "Kurdish literature in other languages," a designation that includes Kurdish novels such as Balata's that deal intimately with Kurdish issues even though they are not written in the Kurdish language.⁴⁷

Although different definitions of the Kurdish novel have been proposed, almost all these definitions agree that the Kurdish national cause and socio-political conditions have played a critical role in its shaping and later in its development. Ahmadzadeh indicates that the rise of the Kurdish novel is "a clear sign of the socio-political condition of the Kurds during a period in which the penetration of modernization challenged the traditional norms of life in the Middle East."⁴⁸ Since the novel, as a literary manifestation of the national and socio-political conditions of a certain group of people, has always been connected with concepts of identity, belonging and community, given the suppressed and marginalized state of the Kurdish national and socio-political identity, the development of such a literary form has been excessively complicated. However, the rise of the Kurdish novel is also conditioned by other broader circumstances: "While internal Kurdish cultural and socio-political factors have been at play behind changes in the form and content of the Kurdish novel, the "global

⁴⁶ Barwary, 20 November 2016, Personal Interview.

⁴⁷ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, "In Search of a Kurdish Novel that Tells Us Who the Kurds Are," *Iranian Studies*, 40:5 (2007), 279.

⁴⁸ Ahmadzadeh, "In Search of a Kurdish Novel," 585.

culture” has also been effectively influential in shaping it.”⁴⁹ Like other aspects of the Kurdish experience, Kurdish novelistic discourse has been increasingly influenced by the reality of Kurdish division among four different nation-states and the novel has been used as a “medium” to depict this reality. Since its first emergence, the Kurdish novel, including the Bahdini novel, has depicted characters whose private lives are part of and a reflection of the experiences of their nation. Hence, for the purpose of this thesis, it is appropriate to study the Kurdish novel in relation to the concept of ‘national allegory,’ as formulated by the American literary critic and Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson in his essay ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’ (1986). As Ahmazadeh suggests, Jameson’s paradigm is highly appropriate for analysing Kurdish novels: “Despite the fact that the Kurdish novel has been influenced by the transition of the Western novelistic discourse to the Middle East, it has, thematically, been functioning as a “national allegory” following the conceptualization by Jameson of the main feature of the “third world” literature.”⁵⁰ Though the concept remains open to arguments within Postcolonial Studies, many “Third World” writers tend to use allegory as a means to represent national experiences through the lives of individual characters:

National allegory tends to be focused on the lives of ordinary people, however, rather than heads of state or aristocracy, using their mundane daily struggles as a means of illustrating the state of the nation...Because the life of a nation, large or small, exceeds the capacity of what any novel can actually accommodate, narrative fiction of this type uses allegory as a means of expressing a dimension of existence greater than that of the lives of its individual characters.⁵¹

In his reading of Lu Xun’s *A Madman’s Diary*, a short story published in 1918 in *Call to Arms*, a collection of short stories and described as China’s first modern short story, Jameson confirms that the representational power of the text cannot be appreciated properly without some sense of its allegorical resonance. Similarly, the appropriateness of applying Jameson’s concept to the Kurdish novel stems from the fact that most of these texts become meaningful only when they are read in relation to their historical and national settings which gives them an allegorical form. According to Jameson:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical...they are to be read as what I will call national allegories...particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.⁵²

⁴⁹ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, “Stylistic and Thematic Changes in the Kurdish Novel,” in *Borders and the Changing Boundaries of Knowledge*, ed. Inga Brandell, Marie Carlson and Öner A. Çetrez, vol 22 (Sweden: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions, 2015), 219.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Oxford Reference, Overview of National Allegory, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100223851>

⁵² Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Age of Multi-National Capitalism,” *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 69.

He also adds:

Third-world texts necessarily project a political dimension in the form of allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.⁵³

In accordance with Jameson's analysis of Lu Xun's *The Diary of a Madman*, most Kurdish novels, as will be shown throughout the thesis, cannot be appreciated without a sense of their allegorical resonance by dramatizing the tensions between personal identity and public identity, between private emotional commitment and public communal expectations. In so doing, Kurdish authors attempt to formulate a new understanding of the Kurdish collective public life and national identity. Therefore, it can be safely argued that most Kurdish novels have political in addition to aesthetic motivations. Kurdish authors create a vehicle through which to consider future possibilities, arranging their narrative elements in a way that best subverts the traditionally existing notions of Kurdish identity and enables them to elaborate their national aspirations.

Equally important in this thesis is the study of Kurdish novelistic discourse within the context of social realism through which Kurdish authors attempt to present a living portrait of the socio-political conditions of the Kurdish people and their subjugation by the governments of the sovereign states. Ahmadzadeh, who is the first to study the Kurdish novel in relation to social realism, goes so far as to assert that "the early Kurdish novels are exclusively socialist realist novels."⁵⁴ Ahmadzadeh's position is based on the fact that early Kurdish writers attempted to "highlight their ideological persuasions, and consequently the novels they produced exemplified the typical characteristics of socialist realism, i.e. 'the author's world view,' 'party spirit,' 'close ties with the people' and 'artistic progress'."⁵⁵ In accordance with the characteristics of social realism, the Kurdish novel has been recording and depicting the real history and experiences of the Kurdish people which would otherwise remain marginalized and neglected. Although Kurdish novelists have been preoccupied with the portrayal and enhancement of Kurdish national struggle and identity, a predominant theme in most Kurdish novels has been a broad depiction of the various historical, political, social, and cultural circumstances of the Kurdish people. Moreover, characters in the Kurdish novel are remarkably dynamic, despite being ordinary and recognizable in an everyday context.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ahmadzadeh, "Stylistic and Thematic Changes," 223.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Despite the emergence of the Kurdish novel in the early 1930s, it was only in the 1980s that the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan witnessed its first appearance, in contrast to the comparative proliferation of the short story. The precedence of the Kurdish short story over the novel is explained by Ahmadzadeh as follows:

The considerable flourishing of the Kurdish short story, in comparison to the Kurdish novel, can be justified by various social, political, economic and cultural factors. There is no doubt that the writing of the novel needs relatively more time and consequently a more established and secure political milieu. At the same time, the publication of novels requires large economic sources and a wider reading public.⁵⁶

Though no internationally acclaimed scholarly study has yet concentrated exclusively on Kurdish novels or even prose writing in Bahdinan, the definitions and arguments of most of the available works which deal with Kurdish novelistic discourse in the other parts of Kurdistan are applicable to the situation of the Bahdini novel, including its study in relation to national allegory and social realism. The complex socio-political reality of the Kurds mentioned in the passage above, which has shaped the Kurdish novel in general, has equally affected the emergence and development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. The absence of an established common readership as a result of the divided nature of Kurdish language and orthography and the “lack of a promising market,”⁵⁷ as a result of the formal prohibition of publication in Kurdish by the governments of the nation-states, have further restricted the continuity and development of Kurdish novelistic discourse. Moreover, the non-existence of a Kurdish independent state with internationally recognized territories and borders has contributed to the complication of the definition and growth of the Kurdish novel in all the divided parts of Kurdistan.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 161.

⁵⁷ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, “The Kurdish Novel and National Identity-Formation across Borders,” in *Novel and Nation in the Muslim World: Literary Contributions and National Identities*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga and Danielle Kuzmanovic (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 69.

⁵⁸ The relationship between the Kurdish novel and nation and national-identity is discussed by many Kurdish scholars. For example, Ahmadzadeh confirms that the division of Kurdistan is the major reason behind the substandard state of the Kurdish novel because of the impact of this division on the Kurdish language and literature: “Because Kurds have since the early decades of the twentieth century have been spread across four different states, their political and cultural identity has become fragmented. This fragmentation has been further exacerbated by the fact that the Kurdish language had two main dialects, Kurmanj and Sorani...and three different orthographies, namely, modified Aramaic or Arabic/Persian, Latin and Cyrillic” (Ahmadzadeh, 2003, 135). For her part, Zozan Sadiq Sa’id confirms that Kurdish novel has been since its first emergence a representation of the Kurdish political situation and its direct relationship with the Kurdish national cause is undeniable: “Kurdish rebellions and uprising were the major factors for the flourishing of Kurdish literature in general and Kurdish novels in particular. This is evident in the way early Kurdish novels portrayed, even if indirectly, such rebellions as Sheikh Sa’id Piran’s rebellion in 1925, Qazi Mohammad’s rebellion in 1945, Sheikh Ahmad Barzani’s rebellion 1931, Mullah Mustafa Barzani’s rebellion (1935-1943), September rebellion in 1961 and May rebellion in 1976” (Sa’id, 2015, 121).

Consequently, any description of the genealogy and growth of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan needs to be preceded by at least a short introduction to the first emergence of the Kurdish novel. And given the divided character of Kurdish language and literature and the historical absence of a solid contact between Kurdish writers and critics in the divided parts of Kurdistan, the question of the first Kurdish novel remains unresolved. This genealogical scepticism arises from both the perplexing nature of the history of Kurdish literature and the confusing generic features of most of the early Kurdish novels. For example, many scholars including Ahmadzadeh, Rasheed⁵⁹ and Silevani,⁶⁰ argue that despite the fact that Ahmad Mukhtar Jaff's *Meseley Wijdan* (The Question of Conscience) was written as early as 1927 or 1928, it cannot be considered the first Kurdish novel because there are concerns not only about its publication date (the novel was not published until 1970 in Baghdad, 43 years after its writing), but also about the text's generic constitution since the work has been described as a long story on many occasions.⁶¹

Most scholars and critics agree that Kurdish novelistic discourse owes its first appearance to the efforts of the Kurmanji-speaking intellectuals and writers in the former Soviet Union who played a major role in the enhancement of Kurdish literacy and linguistic and literary activities during the 1920s and 1930s. According to Galip, these writers were “engaged in important literary and social-political activities including the creation of a literary language that is an instrument of social progress and communist education among this minority people.”⁶² Most important, it was in Yerevan, the capital of the Soviet Armenia, that the first Kurdish novel *Şivanê Kurmanca* (The Kurdish Shepherd) by the Kurdish novelist Erebe Şemo (1898-1978), known as the father of the Kurdish novel, was published in 1935.⁶³

⁵⁹ Sabir Rasheed, *Romana Kurdi: Xwendinewe u Pisyar*, (The Kurdish Novel: A Study and Investigation) (Hawler: Aras Press: 2007), 7.

⁶⁰ Sabri Silevani, *Payiza Peyvan: Xwandnên Hizri u Rexneyi* (The Autumn of Words: Intellectual and Critical Studies) (Duhok: The Union of Kurdish Writers Press, 2005), 134.

⁶¹ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 172.

⁶² Galip, “Kurdistan: A Land of Longing”, 13.

⁶³ Upon his release from imprisonment by the Russian authorities before the 1917 Russian Revolution, Erebe Şemo worked as a translator in the Russian army and joined the Bolshevik Party, becoming a member of the central committee of the Armenian Communist Party in Yerevan. (Dewran, 2007, 1) He became the chief editor of *Rêya Taze* (The New Path) from 1930 to 1938 and started to work on Kurdish language and literature. In 1937, Şemo was sent into exile and returned to Armenia 19 years later in 1956. In addition to *The Kurdish Shepherd*, Şemo has produced several works such as *Jiyana Bextewer* (Happy Life) in 1959 and the outstanding historical novel *Dimdim* in 1966. Written in the *Alfabeya Şemo-Marogûlov*, (the Şemo-Marogulov Alphabet), the first Kurdish Latin-based system of alphabet developed by Erebe Şemo and Îsahak Marogûlov in 1928, Şemo's *The Kurdish Shepherd*, an autobiographical novel based on his own life in Yerevan, chronicles his personal struggle as a member of the Soviet communist party and depicts the oppression and

In Iraq, the rise of Kurdish novelistic discourse benefited from the socio-political changes, the relative cultural and linguistic flourishing, and the official approval of using Sorani in local education and administration in the second half of the twentieth century. Ibrahim Ahmad's socialist realist novel, *Janî Gel* (The Agony of the People) written in 1956, and published in Sulaymaniyah 16 years later in 1972, as a result of political restrictions on Kurdish publications, is the first Kurdish novel in Iraq.⁶⁴ Throughout the 1980s, the Kurdish novel written in Sorani flourished with the publication of such influential works as Hussam Barzangi's *Zelil* (The Miserable) in 1982, Hussein Arif's *Şar* (City) in

subjugation of the Kurdish people by both the feudal powers and Soviet authorities. The novel also depicts the events of the 1917 Russian Revolution, war against imperialism, and the Russian Civil War (1918-1921). Another influential Kurdish novelist who lived in the former Soviet Union, although originally from Iranian Kurdistan, is Rahim Qazi, whose *Peshmerga*, published in 1961 in Baghdad, is considered the first Kurdish novel written in Sorani. The novel depicts the subjugation of Kurdish people in the period immediately before the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad in Iran during the reign of Shah (King) Reza Pahlavi (1878-1944). It also describes Kurdish peasants escaping the deteriorating socio-political conditions and joining the Peshmerga in the mountains. The novel, furthermore, tells of the treacherous collaboration of the Kurdish tribal leaders and aghas, particularly Qereni Agha of Sagaz, with the occupying Iranian forces against the Kurdish nationalists. Most important, Qazi's novel depicts the social restrictions imposed on Kurdish women by the hegemonic powers and Kurdish society's patriarchal norms that oppress Kurdish women, including such acts as exchange marriages, polygamy, and gender-based violence. (Sa'id, 2015, 122-123) Despite the appearance of a number of significant novels in the USSR by other prominent novelists, including Ali Avdal Rahman and Sa'id Ibo, "the bans and prohibitions imposed by the Turkish Republic hindered the presence and growth of Kurdish publications and literature" (Galip, 2012,13). In his discussion of the thematic concerns of the early Kurdish novels published in the former Soviet Union, Ahmadzadeh indicates that: "The main themes of these novels are love, Kurdish traditions, the powerful feudal and religious leaders, historical social movements, and the exploitation of the people and the spread of socialist and egalitarian ideas among the Kurds" (Ahmadzadeh, 2015, 225). He also confirms that these novels are increasingly reflective of the Kurdish socio-economic situation of the Kurdish people at the time: "In these novels, by comparing the conditions of life before and after the establishment of socialism, it is intended to highlight the superiority of socialism over capitalism" (Ibid.).

⁶⁴ A distinguished novelist, Ibrahim Ahmad (1914-2000) played a major role in the enhancement of Kurdish language and literature in Iraq not only as a writer and translator but also as the founder of the influential Kurdish journal *Gelawêj* (1939-1949). He also played a significant role in the Kurdish political struggle against the Ba'ath government by working as an editor in more than one Kurdish political journal including Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) *Dengî Rastî* (The True Voice) in 1944 and *Rizgarî* (Liberation) from 1949 to 1956, and later as KDP's Secretary General in 1953. Although they remained unpublished for decades because of the rigid political atmosphere, Ahmad wrote a number of influential novels including *Awat u Naomêdi* (Desire and Hopelessness) in 1933, *Dirik u Gul* (Prickles and Flowers) in 1961 and *Jiyan u Xebat* (Life and Struggle) in the same year. To avoid political persecution at the time of writing, Ahmad chose to use Arabic names instead of Kurdish names and to dedicate his novel to the Algerian revolutionaries. (Ahmadzadeh, 2015, 226) Regarded as "the milestone" of Kurdish literature in Iraq, his *The Agony of the People* tells the story of Jwamer, whose wife dies during childbirth because he is caught and imprisoned by the Ba'ath security forces while seeking a midwife. Upon his release, ten years later, Jwamer learns that his son was never born and died with his mother and so he decides to join the "Patriotic Liberation Army" in the struggle for Kurdish liberation. It is important that through using the word *Jan*, meaning agony, in the very title of the novel, Ahmed employs the double meaning of the Kurdish phrase which can mean both the agony of the Kurdish people and the agony of a woman giving birth to a child. (Sa'id, 2015, 123) Sa'id comments on the double pillars upon which Ahmad concentrates and confirms that the novel represents both "the oppression of the Kurdish tribal leaders and feudalists against the poor Kurdish farmers and peasants as well as the suppression of Kurdish population by the Ba'ath dictatorial authorities" (Sa'id, 2015, 124). The book has been transcribed into the Kurmanji dialect and has been translated into more than one language including Persian, Turkish and French.

1986 and Salah Abdul-Ghafour's *Twanewe* (Strength) in 1988. According to Ahmadzadeh, these novels had a political as well as a social message: "Class struggle as the main theme of this novel does not exclude the question of 'national identity' as one of the main concerns of the protagonists."⁶⁵ The Sorani novel benefited from a growing academic interest, the most notable example being Ibrahim Qadir Mohammed's 1990 M. A. dissertation, *Romani Kurdi le Iraq da* (Kurdish Novel in Iraq), which paved the way for many other critical studies. Although the dissertation has excluded a number of significant novels because of political restrictions, it represents one of the earliest attempts to study the rise and development of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Iraq and identify its thematic and formal aspects and features. Mohammed attributes the dearth of fictional production, even its absence, from the years of the Second World War through the 1960s to economic, cultural and political conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan. He also indicates that the Kurdish novel in Iraq owes much of its flourishing to the active movement of translation during the 1970s and 1980s, confirming that these translated texts provided Kurdish writers with a form of contact with innovative Western and other techniques and styles.⁶⁶

Unlike the Sorani novel, the Bahdini novel had to wait until the second half of the 1980s for its first emergence with Karim Jamil Biyani's *Deravê Teng* (Difficult Situation) published in 1988 and Nafe'e Akrayi's *Buhjîn* (Assimilation) published in 1989. Portraying the physical and psychological effects of the war between Iraq and Iran, Biyani's novel, subtitled *Experiences of War*, portrays a war-torn Kurdish society with Kurdish people fighting on two fronts, against the oppression and assimilation of the Ba'ath regime, and against the Iranian army in their fight against Iraq. The novel is a realist account of Rigesheh, the protagonist, suffering both from the social traditions and norms of Kurdish society and from the discrimination and persecution of the Ba'ath security forces. Although upon completing his studies, Rigesheh joins the Peshmerga on the mountains, he soon realizes that his definition of Kurdish political struggle is incompatible with the reality of the Kurdish national movement, which is hampered by growing internal antagonisms. Akrayi's *Assimilation* chronicles the development of Sa'id, who is obliged to work in various factories to maintain his family, and at the same time pursues his education. Similar to Biyani's *Difficult Situation*, Akrayi's novel depicts social and political tensions and their impact on the various classes of Kurdish society. An important thematic thread that runs throughout the text is the Kurdish collaboration with the Ba'ath regime and

⁶⁵ Ahmadzadeh, "Stylistic and Thematic Changes," 227.

⁶⁶ Ibrahim Qadir Mohammed, *Romani Kurdi le Iraq da* (Kurdish Novel in Iraq), (M. A. diss., University of Salahaddin, 1990), 2.

the dangerous effects this collaboration has both on people in cities and towns and the Kurdish national and political struggle. An important illustration is A'wni Agha, who gathers people together and obliges them to swear on the Holy Quran that they are not supporting the Kurdish national movement and have no family members fighting in the mountains.

It becomes evident from the short introductions of the early works published both in the former Soviet Union and in Iraq that since its first emergence, Kurdish novelistic discourse has been dominated by a clear socio-political dimension that is intended to reflect Kurdish people's suffering from a multi-layered system of oppression. This two-edged focus originated from the growing political upheavals that have historically characterized the Kurdish society in Iraq and the conflicting ideologies of Kurdish people regarding Kurdish national struggles for independence. The novels also depict the Kurdish individual caught between various forces endeavouring to understand and create a balance between his rural background and the new urban life that conflicts with his established beliefs and values. It is important that despite the difference in their setting, these texts offer an astute criticism of the self-interested and opportunistic Kurdish tribal leaders who cooperate with the Ba'ath government to protect and reinforce their personal interests. Equally important is the novelists' attention to the importance of literacy and education as important pillars for the creation of social equality as well as for the enhancement of the Kurdish national movement. Through their depiction of Rigesh and Sa'id, Bayani and Akrayi seem well aware of the significance of providing the Kurdish national movement with new forms and levels of resistance inside the city where the oppressor operates and extends his hegemonic policies. Formally, the very limited corpus of Kurdish novels, despite the presence of other forms of prose writing such as the short story, has had a visible impact on the structure and technical constitution of this emergent genre. Early Kurdish novels are characterized by simple structures, plain forms of narration and traditional stylistic and formal techniques.

1.2.4. The Role of Diaspora in the Enhancement of Kurdish Novel

During the 1980s, Kurdish authors in the diaspora started to make outstanding contributions to the development of Kurdish novelistic discourse.⁶⁷ Although a large number of Kurds arrived in Europe as

⁶⁷ Throughout the course of their history, Kurds have been exposed to systematic operations of forced (in few cases, voluntary) migration, mass-deportation, and replacement as part of their national and cultural suppression and assimilation. During the 20th century, millions of Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria were forced to leave their homes to look for better working opportunities and freer conditions of political and cultural changes (Ahmadzadeh, 2003, 162). A considerable number of them have migrated to other parts of the states in which they live, especially such big metropolitan cities as Istanbul, Izmir, Tehran, Baghdad, Basra and Damascus. Large numbers also went abroad to the

immigrant workers, they soon re-discovered and developed their national and cultural identity through organizing intellectual, linguistic and literary activities without fear of persecution and repression.⁶⁸ According to Bruinessen, “there is now a large Kurdish diaspora— in western Turkey, throughout Europe and the Middle East, in North America and Australia— and it is increasingly well-organized.”⁶⁹ The growing diasporan Kurdish communities have been playing important roles in changing and enhancing the social, economic, political, and cultural experiences of the Kurds both in Kurdistan and in these countries. Benefiting from the freedom of expression and organization of cultural and literary activities in the new countries (mostly in Europe), they have succeeded in developing new Kurdish intellectual and literary forms of expression, becoming today “the main home of the Kurdish novel.”⁷⁰ According to Ahmadzadeh:

countries of the Middle East, Europe, North American and other parts of the world. Although accurate numbers are still hard to come by, the Kurds have their largest diaspora in Europe, which is estimated at 1.2-1.5 million with the vast majority of them (700,000-800,000) in Germany. According to Bahar Baser, “the Kurdish migration to Europe can be divided into three categories: economic, environmental, and political” (Baser, 2013, 7). Kurds who migrated to Europe before the 1960s mainly did so for economic reasons, most notably the Turkish Kurds who arrived in Germany and other European countries to work. In 1966 and 1976, a massive number of Kurds left Turkey because of several earthquakes in Mush and Muradiya-Van. (Baser, 2013, 9) Most Kurdish migrations, however, occurred as responses to the growing political upheaval— the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the military coup in Turkey in 1980, the continuous struggle between the Turkish army and PKK, and the violent war between Iran and Iraq, including the genocidal Anfal campaigns. This notion is supported by Ofra Bengio and Bruce Maddy-Weitzman who describe Kurdish diasporan groups as “extremely political in their orientation, as befitting the bloody conflicts in Iraq and Turkish Kurdistan and severe repression in Syria and Iran” (Bengio and Maddy-Weitzman, 2013, 78). Despite their different migration experiences and trajectories, Kurdish diasporas are mainly dominated by a political outlook rather than a sense of kinship or religion. Since the late 1970s students and political refugees have played a key role in politicising Kurdish diasporan communities. Bruinessen asserts that an ethnic and national sense among the migrant groups was in the beginning almost absent, but with the growing political awareness of the various organizations and institutions: “These communities’ orientation towards development in Kurdistan was considerably strengthened, and political and cultural organizations that transcended local and state boundaries became more prominent among them” (Bruinessen, 2000, 3). Showing a profound empathy for the economic, cultural, political, and national developments of their homeland, it is no surprise that most advances in these spheres of Kurdish experience took place outside Kurdistan. One of the first literary movements in the diaspora was organized by the Kurdish writers and intellectuals in Sweden where a number of Kurdish institutions and cultural centres were established and a number of journals appeared. Although the majority of these activities were aimed at the Kurmanji-speaking audience, other linguistic groups benefitted too, including Sorani and Zaza speakers. In Paris, the Kurdish Institute was established in 1983, and a number of journals began to appear, *Hêvî* (Hope) in 1983 and *Kurmancî* (Kurmanji) in 1987. Kurdish intellectuals started to focus “on the modernization of the Kurdish usage and orthography and [...] to contribute to the development of a Modern standard Kurmanji” (Kreyenbroek, 2005, 7). According to Khalid Khayati, “to reinforce the Kurdish language, culture and literature, similar institutes were established by Kurdish intellectuals in Brussels (1989), Berlin (1994), Moscow (1996) and Washington DC (1997) as well as a well-endowed Kurdish library in Stockholm (1997), each serving a different clientele and promoting a distinct type of activity” (Khayati and Dahlstedt, 2013, 59).

⁶⁸ Bahar Başer, “The Kurdish Diaspora in Europe: Identity Formation and Political Activism,” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2013), 9.

⁶⁹ Martin Van Bruinessen, “The Kurds in Movement: Migrations, Migrations, Communications and the Globalization of the Kurdish Question,” *Tokyo Islamic Area Studies Project* 14 (1999), 3.

⁷⁰ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 161.

Two main possibilities of the diaspora, the freedom of publication and certain facilities for promoting the literature of the minorities and migrants, in a form of state subventions, especially in Sweden, have been among the determining factors for the development of Kurdish literature, particularly the novel.⁷¹

It is important that novels published in the diaspora came in different languages (Kurdish, English, French and others) and different dialects (Kurmanji and Sorani) and by Kurdish authors from all the four parts of Kurdistan. According to Galip, in the novels written in diaspora, Kurdish writers focus on the Kurdish national and cultural identity and on 'Kurdistan' as a homeland rather than on the countries in which they dwell.⁷² These novels, laden with memories of the past and the experiences of wars, fragmentation, displacement and alienation depict characters both burdened with these memories and torn between their original Kurdish identity and the identities acquired in the host countries. The novels are dominated by a clear sense of nostalgia and a connection with the country of origin:

The authors generally place their subject matter within a historical context, or base it on the current political and socio-cultural environment in Kurdistan, while their ethnic identity, country of origin, and history are regarded as more significant than concern for the identity and history of the host nation and the authors' experiences within that context.⁷³

It is important that Kurdish writers from all four parts of Kurdistan have participated in the development of the Kurdish novel, with notable contributions by such authors as Mehmet Uzun, Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, Bavê Nazê, Helim Yusiv, and Hassan Ibrahim, among others. Although these authors live (either permanently or temporarily) in the West, their novels offer explicit autobiographical elements that underline their personal experiences of war and oppression in their countries of origin. Similar to the novels produced in Kurdistan, Kurdish diasporan novels are

⁷¹ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 164. In Sweden and the other countries in which they dwell, Kurdish intellectuals and writers have begun to publish books, journals, organize literary gatherings and conferences, and inaugurate more than one satellite television station. Finding it a 'national duty,' in Ahmadzadeh's words, these Kurdish intellectuals and writers endeavoured to preserve their historical and national identities and promote their culture in exile through making the most of the "well-organized institutions [which] have contributed to the process of the construction of a distinct identity as a necessary step towards nation" (Ahmadzadeh, 2003,163). It is also in the diaspora that Kurmanji was finally developed into a literary language that can be employed in the cultural and political disciplines after long years of marginalization and negligence. The importance of the diaspora as the main source of the Kurdish novel is illustrated in the large numbers of publications, particularly novels that have appeared during a relatively short time: "A general survey of 12 publishers in Stockholm shows that they have published 46 novels...during the 1980s and 1990s. This is the first time in the history of Kurdish literature that the number of novels had risen to such a level" (Ibid. 165-166). These statistics and figures are the outcome of a personal survey that Ahmadzadeh conducted through contacting some Kurdish publishers, visiting publication centres and book fairs in Sweden. He proclaims the probable availability of other Kurdish novels that he couldn't find because they were published by non-registered publication centres in Sweden.

⁷² Galip, "Writing across Kurdistan," 257.

⁷³ Ozlem Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture, and Society* (London: CPI Group, 2015), 88.

dominated by cultural and political ideologies that manifest the socio-political intentions and sentiments of the authors. Like the mainstream Kurdish diaspora, diasporan Kurds from Iraq share memories of trauma, oppression, violence and genocide. Because their migration has been in most cases forced (with little hope of return), Kurdish migrants from Iraq have emphasized a notion of nostalgia and homesickness. For these communities, diaspora has been equivalent to exile, an aspect that explains their excessive use of such terms as *darbadari* (migration), *awarebon* (homesickness), *penaberi* (sanctuary), *dirati* (remoteness), *barzabon* (loss), and *xaribi* (alienation), all of which have negative connotations. The anthropologist Diane E. King maintains that the first contemporary wave of ‘out-migrations’ from Iraqi Kurdistan occurred as a response to the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion in 1975. The migrants were mainly young fighters and political activists who had to flee imprisonment and execution by the central government in Iraq.⁷⁴

1.2.5. The Kurdish Novel in Bahdinan after 1991

Given the lack of a Kurdish prose tradition, especially the novel, and therefore the lack of any accompanying literary criticism, the Kurdish novel has yet to be described in terms of periodization, and various Kurdish writers and intellectuals have proposed different classifications based on the contexts and scopes of their studies.⁷⁵ In his investigation of the Kurdish novel written before the 1990s, Ahmadzadeh points out to the visible predominance of questions of national identity, confirming that the “Kurdish novel has not been successful in combining native questions with universal ones.”⁷⁶ He also demonstrates that a discernible formal shortcoming is that “the language of some of these novels is mostly the language of romance, which, contrary to the language of the novel, is lofty, elevated, poetic, and epic [and] vocabulary and structure have been deficient.”⁷⁷ Such deficiencies are undoubtedly related to such impediments as the inability of the early Kurdish novelists to form any contact with the outside world and hence gain acquaintance with European and other

⁷⁴ Diane King, “Back from the “Outside”: Returnees and Diasporic Imagining in Iraqi Kurdistan,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 10:2 (2008), 209.

⁷⁵ A credible and relevant classification is the one offered by Sabir Rasheed in *Romana Kurdi: Xwendinewe u Pisyar* (The Kurdish Novel: A Study and Investigation), whereby he proposes three phases for the development of Kurdish novel in Iraq: “Birth and early works (1927-1970), establishment and growth (1985-1990) and development and innovation (1991-now)” (Rasheed, 2007, 8). In his suggested periodization, Rasheed seems to be concentrating on the stylistic and thematic changes that the Kurdish novel has undergone. Rasheed confirms that despite the discontinuous nature of the Kurdish novelistic discourse as a result of the socio-political reality of the Kurds, the Kurdish novel has managed to emerge and prove itself as a genre within modern Kurdish literature. (Ibid. 11)

⁷⁶ Ahmadzadeh, “In Search of a Novel,” 587.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

novelistic traditions, as well as the unavailability of an established body of literary criticism and scholarship.

There is a general agreement among Kurdish writers and critics that the 1990s represents a pivotal and shifting phase in the progress of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Iraq and other parts of Kurdistan. Ahmadzadeh argues that this relative growth “cannot be explained by anything less than the new economic, social, political, and intellectual situation of the Kurds, both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora.”⁷⁸ It is important that this development was not only quantitative but also qualitative. After the 1991 Kurdish Uprising and the creation of the quasi-independent Kurdish Region,⁷⁹ Kurdish periodicals and printing experienced an unprecedented development backed by the newly established Kurdish government and the growing economy. This phenomenon has directly influenced the output of Kurdish novelistic discourse which increased substantially from only a dozen in the 1980s to a few hundred in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The Kurdish writer and critic Arif Hitto associates the development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, and the other parts of Kurdistan, to the development of Kurdish literary critical studies. Although still substantially limited, it was only after the critical investigations of Kurdish critics, in which they began to study the thematic and formal properties of the Kurdish novel, and their assessment of the various psychological, social, aesthetic, moral, ideological, and formal conventions upon which these texts had been based, that the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan began to develop. He indicates that with the notable progress of Kurdish literary criticism from the 1990s onward, Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan have focused their attention on refining and reinforcing both the content and the form of their novels. Hitto believes that Kurdish novelists began to understand that content and form need to develop together: “The formal construction of the novel shapes its content in the same way that content needs to be delivered within a recognized and solid structure.”⁸⁰

Reviewing and scrutinizing a number of Kurdish novels published in Bahdinan, it can be argued that the development of Kurdish novelistic discourse has undergone three major time-periods: the first period starts in the second half of the 1980s and extends to 1990, the second period starts in 1991, following the creation of KRG, and ends in 2002, shortly before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The third

⁷⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁷⁹ The Kurdish Region in the north of Iraq, also known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), is the official ruling body of most of the areas inhabited by Kurds in the north of Iraq ever since the creation of the de facto autonomous Kurdish state in 1991.

⁸⁰ Arif Hitto, *Roman Xodika Jiyane: Xandnên Shrovekari yê Dero-Civaki bu Romana Devera* (Behdinan Novel is the Mirror of Life: Socio-Psychological Studies of the Kurdish Novel in Bahdinan) (Hawler: The Intellectual Press, 2011), 4.

and last period extends from 2003 until the present day and might be considered a golden age for Kurdish novelistic discourse in Iraq, given the substantial qualitative and quantitative progress that it is achieving. This progress is directly associated with the visible development of other sectors in Iraqi Kurdistan, including economy, culture and education, which have provided excellent conditions for the development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. It is also part of the political leniency, freedom of expression, and governmental support that characterized much of this period. The development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan is, moreover, associated with a growing familiarity of Kurdish novelists with modern Western techniques and styles of writing. This more outward-facing atmosphere has been accompanied by the growth of academic and critical studies and assessments of Kurdish novelistic discourse through the establishment of Kurdish centres, the organization of conferences, and the publication of literary journals and books in the diaspora.

During the 2000s and 2010s Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan started to experience a quintessential shift following the notable economic and socio-political flourishing of KRG, and the emanation of an educated generation that is more concerned about the state and enhancement of Kurdish language and literature. Although a few novels were published in the 1990s including Sidqi Hirori's *Kurê Zinarê Ser Blind* (The Son of the Undefeated Zinar) in 1996 and *Evin u Şewat* (Love and Fire) in 1998, it was in the 2000s onward that the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan was able to establish itself as a steady literary genre within the Kurdish literary tradition. The 2000s witnessed the publication of a very considerable number of novels, including Hassan Silevani's *Gulistan u Şev* (Gulistan and Night) in 2000, Anwer Mohammed Tahir's *Geryan Li Babê Berze* (Search for the Lost Father) in 2001, Hassan Ibrahim's *Evîn u Enfal* (Love and Anfal) in 2002 and *Dozexa Spî* (The White Hell) in 2004, Muhsin Abdul-Rahman's *Viyan Di Demekê Jandar Da* (Love in a Painful Time) in 2005 and Tahsin Navishki's *Çavê Sitaşkê* (The Eye of Shadow) in 2007. In the 2010s, the number of published novels almost doubled with a clear qualitative development in the texts' content and form.⁸¹ Influential works include Sabri Silevani's 2010 *Sîfra Silêvi* (Silevi's Journey), Sami Sileman's 2011 *Mergi Geranewe* (The Pain of Coming Back), Ahmad Balayi's 2012 *Pêlek Ji Bayê Reş* (A Wave of Black Wind), and Tahsin Navishki's 2013 *Çavê Spî* (The White Eye).

Although the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan remains understudied compared to the Sorani novel as well as the Kurdish novel written in the other parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora, the first serious discussions and analyses of Bahdini novelistic discourse emerged during the 2000s with the works of several local

⁸¹ Hitto, *Novel is the Mirror of Life*, 5.

writers and critics. These studies represent a solid ground upon which further scholarly work can be developed, despite their lack of a systematic approach and an established conceptual framework. In his discussion of its setting, Mohammed Chelki indicates that even though increasingly set in a city landscape where characters are defined by an urban socio-economic reality and culture, the Bahdini novel is still laden with a sense of Kurdish rurality and the effects of the traditional values and beliefs of Kurdish society. This rural background can be in part attributed to the fact that most Kurdish authors draw upon their personal experiences and life-stories, which have been mostly rural and village-related, to depict characters and storylines.⁸² Despite the different modes of portrayal and the inclusion of major aspects of modernity including individualism and nationalism, in most cases, Bahdini novelists depict characters suffering under the burden of social traditions and restrictions developed in villages which do not necessarily address characters' urban perceptions. In most cases, characters are found attempting to search for more balanced alternatives that both correspond with their own desires and society's expectations of them.

In his study of the narrative elements of the Bahdini novel since 2003, Silevani expresses his concern about characterization, indicating that Bahdini novelists have not been able to develop effective mechanisms by which to depict characters outside the traditionally established templates in which the protagonist represents the axis around which all the fictional world revolves. An important shortcoming in this mode of representation, according to Silevani, is that most major characters and minor characters are hardly given enough attention to register any notable presence and readers are not given sufficient glimpses into their inner worlds and feelings.⁸³ Moreover, because of the tendency of most authors to play a commanding and guiding role over the world of the novel and the characters' decisions and destinies, characters are not allowed enough space to move and express themselves. Another significant component of this manner of characterization is dialogue that is, in many cases, restrictive and fails to express characters' personalities, viewpoints and perspective.⁸⁴

Exploration of the thematic elements of the Kurdish novel demonstrates that it is more concerned with the macro-picture of the Kurdish national cause, and the mechanisms through which complex socio-political concerns function, at the cost of such micro-aspects as the predicaments of the Kurdish individual and the Kurdish family, men/women interrelations and the socio-political rights, obligations

⁸² Mohammed Chelki, *Avriyek bu Romana Kurdi I Bashor* (An Overview of Kurdish Novel in Southern Kurdistan), *Peyv Journal*, 56 (2011), 30.

⁸³ Silevani, *The Autumn of Words*, 134.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

and participation of women in Kurdish society. This is evident in almost all novels produced by male Kurdish novelists and especially those written before 2003. Novels by Kurdish women emerged late, compared to those by male writers, as a consequence of the “various political, social, cultural and economic conditions of Kurdish society.”⁸⁵ Similar to the novels written by Kurdish men, Kurdish women’s novels have suffered from notable literary deficiencies in terms of narration and characterization, which can be attributed to the lack of a tradition of novel writing by Kurdish women, reflecting the same impediments that have hampered the development of Kurdish literature in general:

Characters do not in general reveal themselves through their speech and actions— it is rather the narrators who impose their sometimes ideologically motivated themes on the characters without applying significant literary devices and techniques. As far as the literary quality of these novels is concerned, the lack of literary devices often means they read too much like journalistic reports. Dialogue is weak and the narrators constantly interfere to tell the reader about the events of the novel.⁸⁶

With the emergence of novels by Kurdish women, it becomes essential to question whether they follow the same paradigm or if they are written in a way to serve as a medium to explore feminist issues and women’s various social and political and cultural conditions, and their roles within the social organization of labour. Through his reading of a number of novels by Kurdish women, Ahmadzadeh asserts that the gender of the author is not relevant since their novels depict the same themes as male writers, namely, the representation of the suppression of the Kurds by the hegemonic powers: “The plight of the Kurds as a people and the historical tragedies of their modern history have equally acted as the theme of novels by both men and women.”⁸⁷ In his investigation of the world of Kurdish women’s novels, Ahmadzadeh asks such questions as:

What are the main themes in the novels written by Kurdish women? Are there any significant feminist themes in these novels? Do the Kurdish women novelists follow the dominant pattern in the novels that are produced by Kurdish men, i.e. emphasis on the nationalist themes and the suppression of the Kurds and their struggle for national rights? Can one point out the main common characteristic and generic features of these novels?⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, “The World of Kurdish Women’s Novels,” *Iranian Studies*, 41:5 (2008), 720. In this article, Ahmadzadeh studies a number of novels by Kurdish women from Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan and their Diasporas. He indicates that to his knowledge, Ehlam Mansur’s *Alwan* (2004), written in Sorani dialect and published in Sulaymaniyah, is the only novel produced by a Kurdish woman in Iraq, observing that although “oppression and the rape of women are among the central themes of the novel” (Ahmadzadeh, 2008, 728), the novel primarily presents Kurdish women as Kurds rather than as women as such. In other words, like the majority of novels written by Kurdish women, this novel too portrays the Kurdish national question and Kurds’ socio-political situation as central rather than feminist questions.

⁸⁶ Ahmadzadeh, “The World of Kurdish Women’s Novels,” 731.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 737.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 721.

Also similar to novels produced by Kurdish men, Kurdish women's novels can be appropriately classified as social realist novels, given that they reflect social, cultural and political realities. Although the exploration of novels by Kurdish women and the investigation of their stylistic and thematic features indicate that these novels represent, at least partly, the situation of women in the Kurdish society, Ahmadzadeh asserts that "feminist themes are not dominant in most of these novels [and] the most common theme is the suppression of the Kurds and their severe political condition."⁸⁹

With the notable progress of the Kurdish novel in terms of theme and technique after 2003, Kurdish women writers have begun to experiment with new ways to represent feminist issues of honour killings, exchange and arranged marriages, and the subjugation of women within the social and political spheres of Kurdish society. Kurdish women writers, as indicated by the female authors analyzed in this thesis, namely Qasham Balata and Sindis Niheli, draw on their own social and political experiences and bring female sufferings to the fore to make a feminist case that challenges patriarchal values and beliefs. Women in these novels share the same suffering, both from the oppression and tyranny of the central governments in the states in which they live, and from the confining traditions of a patriarchal Kurdish society. Women are also represented as protectors of Kurdish national identity and reproducers of the nation. This thesis will map both the state of consensus regarding representations of women, by both women and men, in the contemporary novel in Bahdinan, and explore emergent developments.

1.3. Research Questions and Argument

This thesis examines the representation of the experiences of women in the contemporary Iraqi Kurdish novel in Bahdinan during times of armed conflicts and political disputes. In this context, one principal question posed is: What are the forms and layers of violence imposed on Kurdish women as part of a nation torn by dictatorship and oppression, as depicted in a selection of novels written by Bahdini writers? Adopting a conceptual framework based on 'feminist criticism,' 'identity construction,' 'gender and nation,' 'gender-based-violence,' and 'women's resilience,' the study investigates the ways in which subjugated Kurdish women in Iraq resist violence, attempt to bring about change, and transform from voiceless victims to influential social and political activists. Other related questions posed in the research include: How are the social environment and historical moment perceived to shape women's transformation in the novels? What are the mechanisms employed by

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Kurdish women to transcend the ethnic and patriarchal politics of representation adopted by State and community institutions?

With the persisting absence of novelistic production by Kurdish women writers, it becomes crucial to question whether and to what extent women-related issues have been depicted in the male-dominated Kurdish literary discourses. In investigating female representation in the Iraqi Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, it is important to mention that although Kurdish women in Iraq have historically played a vital role in the Kurdish social life and the national struggle for independence, they remained, for a long time, mere guests on the Kurdish literary scene. A clear reason is the tendency of the Kurdish writers to focus on themes related to Kurdish nationalism rather than feminist issues of importance to women's changing needs and aspirations. After the establishment of the quasi-independent Kurdish region in Iraq in 1991 and the growing production of Bahdini novels, Kurdish novelists started emphasizing feminist subjects and themes alongside the national ones. These novelists endeavour to bring marginalized cultures and silenced histories into their writing, creating feminist representations through focusing on the lives and experiences of female characters. In a certain sense, their novels become the first testimonies to Kurdish women's pains and sufferings as well as their determination and resistance to violence and subordination.

The objective, hence, is to go further and explore the extent to which the historical, socio-political and cultural context has contributed to the production and progression of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. In so doing, textual representations of various historical moments and political situations and their impact on the individual and community will be explored. These textual representations will demonstrate how the fragmentation and statelessness of the Kurds not only affect the literary identity of the Kurdish texts, but also the setting, themes, characters and the world of the novels selected. Moreover, close readings of the texts show how boundaries between Kurdish novelistic discourse and other discourses, historical, cultural, social and political, have become blurred. The notable conflation of the Kurdish novel with such interdisciplinary fields as political and social sciences, cultural anthropology, and ethnography also influences and restricts novelists' choice of literary styles and techniques. Although this is not a new or unique phenomenon, in the Kurdish context and as a result of the comparatively limited experience of Kurdish novelists, these influences have not been overcome.

A number of subsidiary questions are also considered in the research: For instance, considering the vital role played by Kurdish women in the Kurdish national struggle for independence how is the

interplay between feminism and nationalism represented in the Bahdini novelistic discourse? Related to this interplay is the way wars in Kurdistan defy the conventional spaces of the “gendered dichotomized” roles of war, with men at the front and women safely at home, and, hence how does the contemporary Kurdish novel depict the increasing conflation of battlefronts and homes?

1.4. Methodology: Textual and Contextual Analysis

In this thesis, a novel is defined as Kurdish when it is authored by a writer of Kurdish origin and depicts Kurdish socio-political and cultural conditions disregarding its language and place of publication.⁹⁰ This statement is supported in the thesis, staking a clear position within ongoing discussions as to whether a text written in any language other than Kurdish should be considered within the boundaries of Kurdish literature. Accordingly, the text’s content rather than language is considered a criterion in the selection of novels in the thesis. Taking into consideration that text selection, here, is guided by the focus on the representation of female characters and themes, I have included novels by Bahdini authors published in Iraqi Kurdistan and its diaspora since the mid-2000s, when Kurdish authors started to take feminist issues as central elements in their works. Most essentially, my selection of texts is based on the way female representation is considered to have developed in relation to the historical and political situation in modern Iraqi Kurdistan.

It is important to mention that my point of departure for focusing on the region of Bahdinan was mainly derived from the fact that Kurdish novelistic discourse, including the representation of women, has developed independently and separately in each part of Kurdistan. Thus, the definition and state of the Kurdish novel in Iraqi Kurdistan differ substantially from that produced in Turkish, Iranian and Syrian Kurdistan because of the different socio-political and cultural contexts in these nation-states. Most scholars of Kurdish novelistic discourse (for example, Ahmadzadeh, 2003 and Galip, 2012) contend that a comprehensive literary study and analysis of Kurdish novels produced in all the different parts of Kurdistan is almost impossible. In addition to differing historical and socio-political conditions, Kurdish novels produced in the different parts are also divided by the different dialects and

⁹⁰ This position can be further validated taking into account the outstanding theorizations and debates of national liberation movements (for example, those by the Guinean national theorist Amílcar Cabral) in which the cultural heritage of the indigenous people (in this case, the Kurdish people) has been stored, transmitted, and employed in an attempt to preserve the national and cultural identity. Kurdish liberation movements, as representatives and defenders of the culture of Kurdish people have historically been conscious of the state and condition of Kurdish literary activism (as has become evident through their respect of and attention to the classic works of Khani and Koyi) and have always turned to it for raising national awareness.

different scripts used by Kurdish writers. Ahmadzadeh indicates that: “The different backgrounds of the Kurdish societies provide the different conditions which lead to the production of the different literary discourses, which in their turn create different types of identities.”⁹¹ The discontinuous and fragmented character of the Kurdish novel has also affected its study and generated a number of methodological and experiential complications for Kurdish scholars and researchers. Hence, the scope of this thesis is limited to contemporary novels written by Bahdini authors and published in Iraqi Kurdistan and its diaspora.

My selection is pivoted on the manner and mechanisms by which Kurdish women are represented in relation to the changing socio-political situation of Iraq. To achieve an extensive picture and a practicable outcome of female representation, novels that offer common historical, socio-political and cultural ideas concerning Kurdish women are analysed. These novels are treated in three pairs to explore the ways by which Kurdish women are represented in the context of three successive periods of Iraq’s recent history (1986-1991, 1992-2008, and 2009-2014). These years in Iraq are characterized by threatening shifts in political power and the outbreak of unpredictable armed conflicts and socio-economic tribulations. Most importantly, they are characterized by blurred boundaries in conflict zones and militarized spaces, whereby the battlefronts and civilian sites are no longer separate and eventually result in higher numbers of female victims.

Given the direct and multidimensional impact of armed conflicts and patriarchal gender norms on the real lived experiences, as well as the fictional representation of Kurdish women in these periods, any study of their suffering and the atrocities they have encountered needs to address each and all of the forms and layers of violence imposed on them. Hence, it becomes essential to outline an approach that allows the investigation of key factors that contributes to the production of meaning in the novels selected. I have developed an approach in the form of a model, a three-moment periodizing model that divides the novels’ representation of women and the violence they experience in relation to modern Kurdish history according to three chronological interrelated phases: women and war-related violence, women and post-conflict violence, and women and terrorism-related violence. Importantly, the general structure of the thesis (to be explained further in the Chapter Overview section) follows this division. It should also be noted that this three-moment periodizing model is both derived from and follows Kurdish authors’ own portrayal of the different patterns of violence practiced against Kurdish women, and the different structures and actors responsible for its perpetuation and persistence.

⁹¹ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 135.

The first pair of novels, Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* (2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da*, Bergê Êkê (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One, 2013) depict the first phase which concerns Kurdish women's experiences of violence during a time of war and political conflicts such as the Anfal Campaigns in 1986, the Kurdish Uprising in 1990, and the Kurdish mass-exodus in 1991. The second phase of the three-moment periodizing model, in which Kurdish women suffer from growing levels of tribal and patriarchal norms and institutionalized acts of violence within the post-conflict Kurdish society, is represented in Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: Kiçe-Jinek ji Zemanek Di* (Mariama: A Woman from Another Time, 2007) and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge* (2011). Tahsin Navishki's *Alê Di Yê Prê* (The Other Side of the Bridge, 2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da*, Bergê Dwê (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part Two, 2014) describe the third phase of the three-moment periodizing model in which Kurdish women experience a new form of violence through the rise of criminality and terrorism.

The importance of this methodical approach to the study of the life and experiences of Kurdish women in Iraq, as well as the violence exerted against them, is that it not only identifies the different existing forms of violence but also the various modes and contexts in which it is executed. And by drawing attention to the multiple apparatuses and settings in which gender-based violence is exercised, it becomes less challenging to develop mechanisms to combat, prevent and eliminate it.

It is unequivocal that, because of its highly unsettled generic configuration, the study of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan requires diverse approaches. In other words, the research needs to be located among different analytical and critical discourses in an attempt to tease out the significance of textual representation in relation to its context. Because my goal is to develop a subtle and rigorous examination and understanding of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan and the way it depicts Kurdish women in relation to Kurdish history, national movements and social trajectories, it is essential to maintain a focus on authorship and socio-political contexts in addition to the texts' form and content. Thus, taking into consideration the importance of contextualizing the Kurdish novel/novelist, the conceptual framework of the thesis considers matters of historiography, nation formation, political theory, and social science analysis. To achieve this rather complex and cross-disciplinary scrutinization of the selected novels, I have profited from both textual and contextual approaches as well as a number of other research paradigms.

In this thesis, the study of the linguistic, semantic, structural and formal properties of the text is primarily achieved through close readings of the texts. These research methods, basically inherited from such schools and movements of literary criticism and literary theory as Formalism and New Criticism, investigate the text on its own account without taking into consideration such extra-textual elements as the text's historical moment and its socio-political and authorial contexts. Applying these techniques to the Kurdish novels selected here will, in many instances, offer interpretations of individual words and phrases as well as a detailed analysis of the connections between sentences and ideas. Most importantly, examining the formal, both linguistic and semantic, characteristics of the text will provide an understanding of the way in which it has been structured, the meanings it intends to convey, the development of its stylistic and thematic elements, and what particular perceptions and sentiments it has attached to such concepts and words as women's position and subjectivity.

It should be noted that the formal structure of the novels produced in Bahdinan is a subject of debate. Ni'mat Niheli points out that because most Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan used to be poets and short story writers, "they haven't been able to develop well-structured forms and experiment with the significant literary techniques and styles that are necessary in building the world of their novel."⁹² Accordingly, the investigation of formal elements including the style, narrative form and use of literary devices, such as imagery and symbolism, independent of historical and authorial contexts, is unlikely to achieve a satisfactory understanding of this emergent genre. My analysis of the novels, as will be elucidated in the following chapters, demonstrates the dominant role of the historical period portrayed in the text, especially as it concerns the evolution of the Kurdish national and political cause, changing cultural and socio-economic outlooks, and the psychology and ideology of the authors. Most important, through adopting contextual analysis, the impact of historical and socio-political conditions and authorial intentions on the representation of gender relations and Kurdish women's position in the society can be explored. Describing the importance of contextual factors in the analysis of Kurdish novels, Galip concludes that:

It is therefore argued that the process of constructing meaning within the Kurdish novel is shaped mainly by autobiographical and realistic elements intertwined with socio-political and cultural aspects of Kurdish existence. Moreover, this autobiographical and realistic dimension is reinforced through the intervention of the novelists themselves in the text.⁹³

⁹² Ni'mat Niheli, 20 November 2016, Personal Interview.

⁹³ Galip, "Kurdistan: A Land of Longing," 27.

Although the authors of the novels I analyze in the thesis have asserted that their works aren't autobiographical during the personal interviews I conducted with them, they have indicated that their works represent many of their personal experiences and ideologies. Moreover, as confirmed by Silevani, "Bahdini authors have the tendency to play a commanding and guiding role over the world of the novel and the characters' decisions and destinies."⁹⁴ This commanding role is evident in the way a clear identification is usually observed between the narrator and the protagonist.⁹⁵ Allison points out that "for the Kurdish context the usefulness of attempting a clear distinction between both seems limited; boundaries between autobiography and novel, like those between autobiography and memoir, are apt to be blurred."⁹⁶ She adds that, "in the Kurdish context, it seems that self-narrative is very important in the development of the novel."⁹⁷ Although author-oriented approaches per se, in which "dates, facts, and events in an author's life are juxtaposed with literary elements of his or her works in order to find aspects which connect the biography of the author with the text,"⁹⁸ are not adopted in the thesis, autobiographical elements are noted whenever appropriate especially in terms of authorial voice.

This thesis adopts a feminist approach that endeavours to study gender inequality and women's social roles and interests. Feminist theory interacts with a variety of fields including anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and economics. Although this will be discussed below in the "Theoretical Considerations" section, it is important to mention that because it places gender at the center of attention, feminist literary theory asserts that "gender difference is an aspect which has been neglected in traditional literary criticism and, therefore, that traditional domain of literary criticism have to be reexamined from a gender-oriented perspective."⁹⁹ To contextualize this study, I also employ a Marxist approach that links the novel to society and social milieu and views literary texts as reproductions and representations of the society from which they emerge. According to Terry Eagleton, Marxist criticism is not merely the 'sociology of literature,' it rather aims to pay "a sensitive

⁹⁴ Silevani, *The Autumn of Words*, 135.

⁹⁵ Allison, "Kurdish Autobiography," 102.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mario Klarer, *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, 3rd edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 34.

⁹⁹ Some Basic Approaches to Literary Study, <http://anang0592.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/some-basic-approaches-to-literary-study.html>

attention to its forms, styles and, meanings [and] grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history.”¹⁰⁰

My research fieldwork conducted in Duhok/ KRG include interviews with a number of carefully selected participants, including critics and fellow researchers, as well as the four authors I examine in the thesis. The interviews (both face-to-face and on the phone), which were semi-structured in format and followed a guided conversation, provided me with detailed firsthand information relating to the definition and development of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan as well as individual texts including ones selected here. The recorded conversations were summarized, transcribed and translated into English and the observations and findings were adopted wherever appropriate in the thesis. Because of the dearth of scholarly research and criticism on this literary form, the data collected represents a useful source of information in its own right.

Taking into consideration the three-moment periodizing model as a general outline for the thesis, it becomes clear that despite my interest in the structure and formal properties of the texts, the principal direction of the study is thematic. And because the thesis outline itself depends to a substantial degree on the selected texts, an appropriate methodology is to be attentive to how the texts themselves might speak; reveal their content and connotations and their inner meanings and thematic constructions. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to achieve careful observations of the psychological and socio-political conditions of the characters and the setting and seek common themes and ideas in relation to other Kurdish texts as well as when it appears, a more global intertextuality. Describing it as “definitely a method” rather than a term representing the focus and interests of the research, Arendt Lijphart confirms that the comparative method is “regarded as a method of discovering empirical relationships among variables,” and a method to look for the “validity of general empirical propositions.”¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the comparative approach is most appropriate for the discussion of the ways in which the portrayal of women has developed in relation to the changing historical and political situation of Kurdish society. Given its compatibility with the field of political science, a comparative feminist and Marxist literary approach is very useful in the investigation of Kurdish novelistic discourse as written by Bahdini novelists, which is replete with political themes deriving from the highly complicated and volatile socio-political situation of Kurdistan and the region.

1.5. Theoretical Considerations

¹⁰⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2.

¹⁰¹ Arendt Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” *Women’s Studies*, 65:3 (Sept., 1971), 682-683.

The feminist critic Sybil Weir argues that throughout the history of the novel, conventional plots have constrained women in passive domestic roles: “Women, as described by both female and male novelists, maintain the status quo, preserving class distinction, transmitting the accepted morality, and insisting on order and decorum.”¹⁰² She also indicates that the novel has traditionally “celebrated the coming to manhood of the male, he runs the river, deflowers a virgin, or travels through uncharted water.”¹⁰³ These conventional plots, based on aspects of strength, autonomy, and ambition, are mainly confined to male protagonists. Weir suggests that in such plots, “it is the man who embarks on voyages of self-discovery [while] women stay safely on the shore, content to accept society’s definitions of themselves.”¹⁰⁴

Feminist theorists have historically “directed their attention to liberating women from the stereotypes to which the cultural and literary tradition confined them in a search for positive role models.”¹⁰⁵ It is important that since its first emergence in the nineteenth century, theorists and critics have formulated and reformulated various definitions of feminism. Most of these definitions have advocated the notion of the historical struggle for equal social and political rights for women as a central aspect of feminism. Many women, however, find that feminism should not simply be seen as a struggle to end male domination, especially when a number of feminists of colour started in the 1980s to incorporate race-related issues in their discussions of feminist issues. These women highlight the tendency within mainstream Euro-American feminism to focus on gender and sexual politics as the only generators of women’s oppression. As it will be clarified in this section, minority feminist writers and critics find themselves pressured by more than one force of oppression: gender, race, and class as well as by correcting the negative images traditionally attached to women.

In the Kurdish context, the heterogeneity of women’s experiences and particularly the multifaceted oppression they face on account of their gender, ethnicity and class, is central to Kurdish women’s efforts to resist marginality and violence. As Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan began to incorporate feminist themes in their texts at the turn of the twentieth century, the multidimensional forms of oppression and violence against Kurdish women became central aspects of their works. They have been attempting to write narratives of individuals who tell stories not only of personal but collective

¹⁰² Sybil Weir, “The Morgesons: A Neglected Feminist Bildungsroman,” *The New England Quarterly*, 49:3 (September, 1976), 427.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Gayle Green, “Feminist Fiction: Feminist Form,” *A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 11: 2/3 (1990), 83.

and group marginalization. The theoretical framework of this thesis is divided into two interrelated parts: “Self-identity, collective consciousness and the act of writing/speaking” and “gender, history and nationalism in the contexts of war and peace.” In so doing, the thesis attempts to theorize and position the significant interconnectedness between gender, history, nationalism, consciousness and identity in the writings of the Kurdish novelists who confirm the importance of remembering, retelling, and rewriting to create spaces of struggle and self-determination.

1.5.1. Self-identity, Collective Consciousness and the Act of Writing/Speaking

The first part of the theoretical framework is partly derived from Chandra T. Mohanty’s designation of “imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systematic.”¹⁰⁶ By configuring such a concept, it is Mohanty’s objective to “explore the links among the histories and struggles of third world women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital.”¹⁰⁷ Mohanty points out the ‘fluid boundaries’ of these communities of women asserting her belief in the ‘international coalition’ among women of different historical and geographical backgrounds.¹⁰⁸ Thus, she challenges the notion of women as a ‘homogeneous configuration,’ in other words, women forming communities based on a shared gender, race or nation. According to her, women are connected by a ‘common context of struggles’ against discrimination and exploitation.¹⁰⁹ In her introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, a collection of essays from different historical and geographical contexts, Mohanty presents the basis upon which third world feminism has been developed:

(1) the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism; (2) the crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing their/our daily lives and survival struggles; (3) the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency; and (4) the differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to third world women’s organizations and communities.¹¹⁰

While Mohanty’s discussion of postcolonial third world feminism can be appropriately applied to Kurdish women, whose public political participation has traditionally been restricted, the second and

¹⁰⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra T. Mohanty et al. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Mohanty, *Third World Women*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 10.

third categories are of greatest relevance. In the process of the aggressive hegemonic nationalism of Iraq, the Kurds, who have historically been exposed to discrimination and marginalization, have failed to find any form of recognition within the discourses of the Iraqi state. Kurdish authors and historians have been making efforts to challenge such assimilating policies by retelling and rewriting their own traditions, evoking a shared sense of history and knowledge. They have been attempting to construct and record a history of the Kurds through narratives that represent their historical and cultural practices and define their identities against the dominant history of Iraq, which they have never trusted. This is certainly the case in the novels in this thesis, in which the authors construct life-oriented stories, testimonials and oral histories as means to remember and write stories of struggle and survival. Moreover, writing/speaking as an activity is increasingly becoming part of the processes of producing and confirming Kurdish identity and collective consciousness through depicting the relationship between Kurdish identity and resistance.

Written from feminist perspectives, the novels selected here are the clearest manifestation of how the activity of writing/speaking has been adopted to depict the various historical, socio-political and economic processes through which Kurdish women can achieve relative forms of subjectivity and self-identities. To explore this aspect in these texts, I benefit from the increasing trans-nationalization of feminism, in particular from the works of such feminist theorists and literary critics as Rita Felski, Chandra Mohanty and others who argue for the employment of a transnational approach in discussing women's experiences across the world. Transnational feminism, as a feminist paradigm, is a reaction and rejection of both terms 'international,' which foregrounds nation-states and 'global,' which describes feminist theories based on global sisterhood and ignore the perspectives of third world women and women of colour on gender inequality. Similar to Mohanty's 'imagined communities' of women, transnational feminism is concerned with women's experiences of oppression and struggle across nations, races, genders and classes.

In her discussion of rewriting as a medium through which women of different historical backgrounds and geographical locations can record and assert their stories of struggle against racial, sex and class oppression, Mohanty explains that the proliferation of third world feminist texts is an indication of the writers' conviction to 'bear witness' to their true histories. She also confirms the centrality of the act of writing/speaking within the framework of feminist analysis:

This is a process which is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history, but because the very practice of remembering

and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself.¹¹¹

Mohanty states the example of Palestinian narratives of childhood, which she describes as ‘narratives of resistance’ and confirms the urgency of remembering and recording history as a way to achieve selfhood, identity and consciousness:

In the case of Palestinians, the destruction of all archival history, the confiscation of land, and the rewriting of historical memory by Israeli state mean that not only must narratives of resistance undo hegemonic recorded history, but they must also invent new forms of encoding resistance, of remembering.¹¹²

Reacting to similar processes of destruction of the Kurdish national and cultural identity and the rewriting of false versions of historical memory by the Iraqi state, Kurdish novels, inspired by oral histories and narratives of resistance, illustrate the interconnected relationships between Kurdish history, struggle for independence, and forms of resistance. These Kurdish narratives, whether oral or written, have traditionally contributed to the empowerment of the Kurds and the enhancement of their perception of self-identity and collective consciousness, as well as the conceptualization of their shared unrecognized national and ethnic history and identity. In her exploration of the intertwining relationships between writing, memory, consciousness, and political resistance, Mohanty proposes several essential factors:

(a) the codification of covert images of resistance during nonrevolutionary times; (b) the creation of a communal (feminist) political consciousness through the practice of storytelling; and (c) the redefinition of the very possibilities of political consciousness and action through the act of writing.¹¹³

Accordingly, a crucial aspect of writing against the narratives of hegemonic power in the Kurdish context, as in the Palestinian context, is the writer’s attempt to create spaces and images through which to resist. The act of writing/speaking (telling) as a tool to recuperate and record history and collective memory can also be manifested in the African American feminist perspective that, in the words of Mohanty, “collectively rewrites and encodes the history of American slavery and the oppositional agency of African-American slave women.”¹¹⁴ Paying a similar attention to gender equality and collective consciousness for black women, African American feminist theory endeavours, in the words of Robert J. Patterson, to “inscribe black women and their cultural contributions into the historical

¹¹¹ Mohanty, *Third World Women*, 34.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

narrative. In so doing, it aims to expose sexism alongside racism within and outside the black community, and to eliminate all forms of oppression for everyone.”¹¹⁵ In her discussion of black feminist theory, Mohanty specifically refers to 1980s African American women’s fiction and indicates that it retrieves true stories —‘true histories’ as opposed to the official history written by hegemonic groups— and creates characters who speak to the historical exigencies of repressed individuals and communities.¹¹⁶

Relatedly, another important aspect of black feminist thought and criticism relevant to the Kurdish context is the emphasis on the rigorous relationship between writing, resistance and activism. In her conceptualization of the tradition of black feminist activism, Collins claims that it has occurred along two dimensions:

The struggle for group survival is the first dimension... consists of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing structures of oppression. The second dimension consists

¹¹⁵ Robert J. Patterson, “African American Feminist Theories and Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women’s Literature*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Tyler (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90.

¹¹⁶ According to Dana Williams, African American women’s fiction offers “full expressions of the complexity of contemporary African American life, particularly as this life relates the black woman” (Williams, 2009, 71). Williams also confirms that writing from feminist perspectives, African American women writers attempt to “explore the Black feminine self, a self heretofore unexamined” (Ibid, 72). African American writers responded to the unfair representation of black female characters by rewriting the process of personal growth towards positive self-definition, and rejecting the negative depictions in the hegemonic discourses. An essential manifestation of the re-writing of the history of African American women’s oppression is Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), which, set during the American Civil War (1861–1865), is inspired by the true story of an ex-slave, Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery in Kentucky and fled to Ohio. Self-disruption, a predominant theme in *Beloved*, occurs at the crossroads of the personal and the political, which indicates the testimonial nature of the text. For example, Sethe, the main character in the novel, understands her trauma as a specific personal event —being exploited, violated, raped and tortured at the hands of her holders —as well as a part of a more general subordination of her people to the institution of slavery. As a historical novel, *Beloved* presents a powerful account of the foundation of black America as the memories of the characters extend to the beginnings of American slavery which destroyed much of the heritage of the Africans brought to America. Moreover, it “seeks to depict and understand the horrible impact of slavery both on the psychology of individuals and on the larger patterns of culture and history” (Hatami, 2001, 11). Morrison’s attempts in *Beloved* to rip the veil over “proceedings too terrible to relate,” (Morrison, 2007, 110) is repeated in *The Site of Memory*, first presented as a lecture and subsequently published in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (1995), also showing the difficulties of undertaking such a responsibility when she explains that re-writing history is “critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic” (Morrison, 1995, 89-90). Morrison’s reference to the silencing and erasure of black history, and the importance of reclaiming it, is repeated in almost all her work, whether fiction or non-fiction: “The reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can’t really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There is a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of the black people have been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours” (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, 86).

of the struggle for institutional transformation- namely, those efforts to change existing structures of oppression.¹¹⁷

Discussing the same context, Robert J. Patterson elucidates the important connection between the black feminist movements as a black counter-public sphere, and black women's writing: "in fact, the black feminist movements paved the way for black women's writing to be recovered and later institutionalized in the academy, as well as, the emergence of black feminist literary theory."¹¹⁸ Patterson illustrates that it is black feminist literary criticism that both studies and recovers "black women's history of writing, inscribing them into historical narratives and resisting their marginalization."¹¹⁹

Locating feminist self-identity and collective consciousness at the crux where resistance and struggle against gender, ethnic/racial, and class oppression can be sustained through writing/speaking is also the project of the testimonial writings of Latin American women.¹²⁰ In the last decades of the twentieth century, and as a backlash against the hegemonic literary discourses, a new form of literature emerged known as testimonial literature, or the *testimonio*, as an "attempt to restructure and challenge mainstream literature and add the real perspective and discourse of the "other," marginalized groups, and create a consciousness of their existence and importance in the greater society."¹²¹

In the testimonial literature which is "powerfully gendered by the voices of women,"¹²² the female self "cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self-engaged in a common struggle."¹²³ Although testimonial writings may appear to be similar to biography or autobiography in form, "the structure and practice of producing testimonial literature erodes the centrality of the author"¹²⁴ as the author perceives of himself as 'an allegory' of his people rather than a single person. Describing

¹¹⁷ Mohanty, *Third World Women*, 142.

¹¹⁸ Patterson, "African American Feminist Theories, 89.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹²⁰ Similar to the third world and African American, as well as Kurdish, contexts, Latin American history is loaded with political and social instabilities, oppression and exploitation of the indigenous people by European powers as well as the atrocities of repressive regimes: "Indigenous and peasant groups in Latin America have suffered the worst mistreatment, being exploited, harmed, and even eliminated by colonization, political regimes, neoliberalism, etc" (Walker, 2011, 1). One major drawback in the Latin American colonial experience is the tendency of most authors to write from the perspective of the dominant groups while completely excluding and marginalizing the subaltern people. Accordingly, subaltern groups have not been able to develop spaces through which to express their socio-political and cultural standpoints and find a voice that truly represent them in the historical and literary discourses.

¹²¹ Walker, "Evolution of Genres," 1.

¹²² Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney, "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives*, 18:3 (Summer, 1991), 8.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

testimonial narrative as a representation of multiple struggle and plural consciousness, Mohanty confirms that “testimonials do not focus on the unfolding of a singular woman’s consciousness; rather, their strategy is to speak from within a collective, as participants in revolutionary struggles, and to speak with the purpose of bringing about social and political change.”¹²⁵ She adds that the primary purpose of testimonial narratives is to:

(a) Document and record the history of popular struggles, (b) foreground experiential and historical “truth” which has been erased or rewritten in hegemonic, elite, or imperialist history, and (c) bear witness in order to change oppressive state rule.¹²⁶

Mohanty compares her analysis of the testimonial writings in the Latin American context to the way third world women’s writings focus on gender or sexual difference in the form of cross-culturally monolithic notions of male-dominance. This process is based on the assumption that women are “an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions.”¹²⁷ Undertaking to define and challenge this process of homogenization of the oppression of women, feminists have started to draw attention to the diversity and heterogeneity of women’s experiences in these contexts.

Most important in the postcolonial and third world women’s writings is the exploration of the relationship between women and nation within a postcolonial feminist framework. Third world women’s fiction, in particular, tends to reject national cultures because of their obvious complicity with patriarchal ideologies which confine women’s roles and identities. This aspect of postcolonial feminism is also discussed by Gina Wisker whereby she indicates that:

In countries with a history of colonialism, women’s quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfilment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of wider struggle for liberation and nationalism. Does to be ‘feminist’ therefore involve a further displacement or reflect an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism?¹²⁸

Despite the differences in their historical backgrounds and geographical locations, feminists from different parts of the world —postcolonial feminists, third world feminists, African American feminists, Latin American feminists as well as feminists in other countries with a history of colonialialism—are struggling against such discriminatory representation. This statement is also

¹²⁵ Mohanty, *Third World Women*, 37.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Gina Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 57.

relevant to the case of Kurdish women, who have been exposed to systematic acts of silencing and marginalization from both the Kurdish patriarchal social structures and the national governments ruling them. This aspect of Kurdish women's life is studied in the work of Cihan Ahmetbeyzade in which she examines women's narratives of resistance and struggle against the patriarchal oppression of their families and communities, and their attempt to achieve subjectivity and empowerment, which inevitably contribute to the construction of their personal and collective identities. Conducted in an exiled Kurdish community in Istanbul between 1998 and 2000, Ahmetbeyzade's research explores perceptions of the socio-political and economic processes of the diaspora. Ahmetbeyzade's aim is to

document how displaced minority ethnonational Kurds create their political identities by drawing upon their historical, social, political and economic differences. I show that identity construction is a historically contingent product based on the relations of difference which the individual subject continually acts to reform and reconstruct.¹²⁹

Characteristically, as the above passage clarifies collective consciousness and memories function as a form of empowerment for the Kurdish exiled community in their attempt to reclaim history and construct identity. Importantly, Ahmetbeyzade's position is that through 'narrativizing' violent Kurdish history, by rewriting stories of individual and collective struggle and resistance, Kurdish communities, especially women, are able to lay claim to social and political identities. The present thesis adopts a similar perspective by describing the way rewriting/speaking (retelling) stories of violence and oppression becomes a means of empowerment and collective consciousness as well as a force of transformation and development for the female characters represented in these Kurdish novels from Bahdinan. The personal stories these women tell/write/paint not only delineate a traditionally silenced and marginalized group of women, and denounce the various actors and structures behind their subjugation, but also problematize the damaging effects of a variety of social structures and political movements. Despite the potential physical and emotional perils of confronting the memories of a painful and humiliating past, they are determined to confront these pains, either to ensure a healthy life or to enlighten the wider society, or both. Choosing to write from the perspective of Kurdish women, a historically neglected and degraded group, Kurdish authors are in a sense developing modern realist forms of fiction that are thematically and formally comparable to the testimonial narratives of the Latin American context as well as African American women's writings, and can be appropriately studied within similar conceptual frameworks.

¹²⁹ Cihan Ahmetbeyzade, "Struggling to Be Kurdish Diasporic Legacy of Violent History" (PhD diss., Binghamton University State University of New York, 2004), IV.

Thus, current feminist literary criticism not only confirms the importance of documenting history from a female perspective through narratives but examines the mechanisms by which these narratives are structured and communicated. For example, in her analysis of third world women's writings, Mohanty explains that:

It is the way in which [the narratives] are read, understood, and located institutionally which is of paramount importance. After all, the point is not just to record one's history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant.¹³⁰

The analysis of modern writing by women as a medium through which female political identities and collective consciousness are constructed and represented is nowhere clearer than in Rita Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989) which examines the structural and thematic properties of a wide selection of recent texts by women from diverse backgrounds including the United States, Canada, England and other countries with diverse histories and experiences of colonialism. Felski's transnational arguments provide much of the theoretical framework for the thesis. In a similar manner to Mohanty, Felski relates the growing emergence and proliferation of feminist texts to the social, political and ideological frameworks behind their production. It is important that the first essential motive for adopting Felski's position in the thesis is her 'descriptive' definition of feminism that "is intended to embrace the diversity of contemporary literary texts which engage sympathetically with feminist ideas, whatever their particular form."¹³¹ This definition not only aids in establishing the boundaries of the theoretical framework of the thesis, but also allows for the analysis of the Kurdish novels by Bahdini authors within a feminist literary context, despite being derived primarily from current American and European feminist literary theory. Felski indicates that although it is difficult to determine the criteria and boundaries of feminist literature because of the variety of feminist positions, according to her, feminist literature "encompasses all those texts that reveal a critical awareness of women's subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category, however this is expressed."¹³² Additionally, the thesis is inspired by Felski's emphasis on realism in feminist fiction: "The literary text needs to be seen as one important site for the struggle over meaning through the formulation of narratives which articulate women's changing concerns for self-perception."¹³³

¹³⁰ Mohanty, *Third World Women*, 34.

¹³¹ Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 12.

¹³² Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 14.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 78.

The second point in Felski's argument that is of interest in the thesis is her description of feminism as "an increasingly sophisticated body of theory, [and] also a political ideology linked to a social movement concerned with processes of change."¹³⁴ Reflecting the relationship between theory and practice, Felski's description of feminism attempts to highlight questions that have preoccupied feminist discourses for decades, namely, "questions of the representation of women and the gender of authorship."¹³⁵ Felski aims to situate feminist literature in a broader context of feminist theory inspired by social structures and political movements. Related to this point is the way the thesis analyses are achieved through constant contextualizations of the Kurdish texts as well as the attempts of the Bahdini authors (disregarding their gender) to create literary forms as mediums through which to represent the contradictions in Kurdish women's lives and their struggle for recognition and identity. Accordingly, a central issue in contemporary feminist fiction, as a medium of 'self-exploration' and social and cultural criticism, is the construction of a form, i.e., a genre that best addresses and represents women's changing needs and interests. Discussing the social meanings and functions of feminist literature, Felski indicates that:

Because many women writers of the last twenty years have been concerned with addressing urgent political issues and rewriting the story of women's lives, they have frequently chosen to employ realist forms which do not foreground the literary and conventional dimensions of the text, but encourage a functional and content-based reading."¹³⁶

In her investigation of the generic features of feminist texts, Felski discusses two 'representative' genres, including the 'novel of confession' and the 'novel of self-discovery,' which she describes as "a continuum rather than exclusive categories."¹³⁷ While in the first category, in which narrative is through the exploration of the female character's perception of self-identity, the text is closely aligned with autobiography, in the self-discovery novel, which Felski defines as "a narrative of emancipation derived from the political ideology of feminism,"¹³⁸ the text catalogues the female character's transformation from a sense of alienation to a state of awareness of female identity, as well as communal consciousness and affinity. Felski further sub-divides the category of self-discovery into two prominent divisions: The 'feminist Bildungsroman' and the 'novel of awakening,' both of which represent the trajectories of female development through progressive stages from childhood into

¹³⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

adulthood and maturity. Written within a context of feminist politics and from a feminist perspective, all these genres:

Superimpose a broader politically inspired pattern of meaning onto the representation of subjective experience, whether this is objectified in the text in the form of a narrative of self-emancipation, or simply affirmed by the narrating consciousness which comes to realize that the feminist interpretation of gender provides the hermeneutic key to decoding the meaning of individual life histories.¹³⁹

Although detailed explanations of these forms of feminist writings are provided in the following chapters whenever appropriate, it is important to mention here that a crucial factor both in the selection of the texts for examination and my attention to their formal properties is indebted to Felski's categorization of texts, which usefully acknowledges and validates generic variety and fluidity. Moreover, the analytical standpoint of the thesis is informed by Felski's explication of the problematic genre classification of novelistic discourse. She indicates:

The novel constitutes the first posttraditional genre, a "chameleon" form characterized by a seemingly infinite formal and thematic flexibility. This dissolution of traditional generic categories continues into the present as the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, the novel and the short story, the diary and the autobiography, become increasingly difficult to demarcate in much contemporary writing.¹⁴⁰

Felski's discussion of the unsettled boundaries of the novel is aptly applied to the much debated definition and categorization and the formal and thematic confusion of the Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan. The first pair of novels selected for analysis in the thesis, namely Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One* are studied in relation to Felski's category of self-discovery and specifically to feminist Bildungsroman. This contiguity is partly based on the way the generic constitution of the feminist Bildungsroman is appropriately suited to incorporate historical, social and national issues as central factors in the formal and thematic structures of the text. For example, the developmental trajectories and self-discovery processes of Nareen and Hizar, the protagonists in Balata and Niheli's novels respectively, are completely shaped by their social environment and historical situation.

Moreover, the protagonists' socio-political attitudes towards their communities, their journeys toward recognition and their searches for identity and consciousness are defined in relation to a wider female community. The importance of communal affinity in a feminist text is derived from the fact that

¹³⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

“intimacy between women involves overcoming the negative value which women have been conditioned to place upon their own sex; the recognition of the other women serves a symbolic function as an affirmation of self, of gendered identity.”¹⁴¹ In Niheli’s text, Hizar’s journey towards self-determination is described in association with both political situation and emotional identification with Ako, as a lover and an activist in the Kurdish national movement and Shavin her female companion with whom Hizar shares all her life experiences. Similarly, Nareen’s private experiences and her difficult quest for self-recognition and future social activism is shaped by the experiences of her female friends as well as the various women she interacts with in the refugee camp on the Turkish border. Both novels thoroughly conform to Felski’s discussion of the importance of female community in shaping the feminist Bildungsroman when she indicates that:

It provides a means of access into society by linking the protagonist to a broader social group and thus rendering explicit the political basis of private experience. It also functions as a barrier against, and a refuge from, the worst effects of a potentially threatening social order.¹⁴²

The construction of female identity as a dimension of female solidarity and interdependence has only marginal effects in the second division of self-discovery narratives, the ‘novel of awakening,’ with which Sabri Silevani’s *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and Tahsin Navishki’s *Tavgé* are compared. Unlike the feminist Bildungsroman, in which recognition of female identity and emancipation is attained through a shift from the enclosed domestic sphere to the outer world, here self-affirmation is “grounded in a moral and aesthetic revulsion against the very nature of contemporary social reality, which is perceived as alienating and debased.”¹⁴³ In both texts, protagonists do not seek social integration, but in contrast, they attempt to depart from society, as a necessary “precondition for the attainment of a meaningful identity.”¹⁴⁴ Being exposed to various forms and layers of patriarchal and state-sponsored violence, both *Mariama* and *Tavgé* are suddenly awakened to their vulnerability and subordinate position and initially choose to withdraw from their social environment to tell stories of oppression and violence in an attempt to reconcile with their painful past experiences: “The protagonist moves away from a corrupt society, undergoes some form of powerful transfiguration or illumination of consciousness in exceptional circumstances, and must decide whether or not to return to the community to pass on this knowledge.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴² Ibid., 139.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 143.

Felski's argument for the increasing interrelation between literature and feminist politics is also adopted throughout the thesis, particularly in so far as she develops the category of a feminist counter-public sphere as a collective oppositional site for political action and effect. According to Felski, the concept of a feminist counter-public sphere "provides a model for the analysis of diverse forms of recent artistic and cultural activity by women in relation to the historical emergence of an influential oppositional ideology which seeks to challenge the existing reality of gender subordination."¹⁴⁶ Within feminist counter-public spheres, discussion must move beyond the literary text to analyze the actual "effect of women's movement as a force for change in the public realm."¹⁴⁷ Employed in the thesis as a manifestation of feminist ideological, social and political oppositionality and activism, the feminist counter-public sphere, in relation to which Tahsin Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two are investigated, confirms the contribution of Kurdish women to the elimination of political, social, and professional discrimination. The two texts emphasize women's political power and impact on state policy and security as significant factors in combating criminal and terrorist activities. The meticulous activism of Rawshan, Khunav, Warkhaz and Hizar in the two texts confirms that gender equality goes far beyond such issues as social justice and women's immediate social and political position to include important questions of interstate security and state-level discrimination against women.

As will be illustrated in the following chapters, the thesis attends to postcolonial, Latin American, African American and Third World literature, in comparison with Kurdish novelistic discourse, because a transnational approach to Kurdish women's socio-political aspirations is needed. Investigating the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan in relation to different categories of realist, women-centered writings, such as third world women's writings, testimonial narratives, African American 1980s fiction, and novels of self-discovery, serves the primary function of linking both formal and thematic analysis in the creation of theoretical frameworks and at the same time maintaining a focus on the contextual, historical, and socio-political considerations of these Kurdish feminist novels. As will be explained in the following section, Kurdish women-centered novels can only be meaningful and effective when studied in relation to the historical and cultural moment and political situation from which they have emerged. To this end, the work of Stella Bolaki on 'mixed genres' in the American ethnic feminist bildungsroman is invaluable. Bolaki examines a number of texts such as Jamaica Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984),

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 164.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) against the traditional definition of the Bildungsroman, alert to specific histories and political differences.¹⁴⁸

1.5.2. Gender, History and Nationalism in the Contexts of War and Peace

Given the impact of Kurdish political history on the life and experiences of Kurdish people, any discussion of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan entails a conceptual framework that is closely informed by Kurdish historiography and nationalism, especially as it concerns the traditionally complicated stance of Kurdish women in relation to these two aspects. In my surveying of a considerable number of texts by Bahdini novelists, including the novels selected for analysis in this thesis, it has become clear that, in most cases, authors endeavour to challenge acts of silencing and marginalization imposed on the Kurdish people by the hegemonic Iraqi state. In their project of reclaiming an identity that has not been recorded, they are forced to go back in time to a past where they can search for traces that link their characters to the possibility of future agency. In so doing, they represent the characters' quest for identity and their urgent need to reclaim their past in order to live in the present. Arguing that Kurdish writers "bear witness" to acts of historical silencing and marginalization of their people, the first part of this section draws from the famous question of the Indian literary and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "Can the subaltern speak?"¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Stella Bolaki, *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction* (New York, Amsterdam, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is an essay first delivered in 1983 by Spivak establishing her position among the ranks of feminists who consider history, geography, and class in thinking woman. (Spivak, 1988, 271-313) A term first employed by the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci in his cultural hegemony work to refer to the marginalized classes in a society, 'subaltern' has now been widely employed in postcolonial, Latin American and African American studies to identify groups in formerly colonized countries who were perceived of as the most marginal and who had no roles in the public sphere. According to Nabarun Ghosh, subaltern signifies "all the persons who have been denied their subjectivity on the basis of gender, sexuality, education, or race" (Ghosh, 2012, 4). Dealing with the term on a broader scope, Monika Choudhary contends that subaltern "now relates to everyone who has been marginalized, exploited, discriminated, tortured physically, mentally and psychologically, and the one who has been turned into an 'other'" (Choudhary, 2011, 57). The term is used here to refer to the marginalized voices of Kurdish people. While it is true that history and literature necessarily involve representation, it can be safely assumed, as confirmed by Mantra Roy, that: "Just as Marxist and nationalist historical narratives have been critically dissected by the Subalternist historians in an attempt to revive the fragments of the nation, literature can be dissected in similar ways to reveal hegemonic voices that re-present subaltern experiences" (Mantra, 2010, 39). Thus, unlike the conventional forms of writing produced by the dominant public spheres (the colonizers), which systematically promote ideologies of subjectivity and subalternity, literature may be produced by subaltern groups in reaction to such policies of marginalization. Such writing also aims at reconceptualising historiography in a way that guarantees the existence and value of the subalterns (the colonized).

Although Spivak paradoxically claims that the voice of the subaltern cannot be unproblematically retrieved, contemporary Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan attempt exactly to capture the contributions of ordinary men and women to the Kurdish struggle for liberation as well as their efforts in nation-building and peace-preservation in the post-conflict Kurdish society. Moreover, these writers highlight the fact that Kurds, as a marginalized category, were never allowed to represent their voices and participate in documenting their own history. In a similar manner to the narratives of exile examined by Ahmetbeyzade (mentioned in the previous section), their novels act as “individual accounts of the past formulated by the narrators as events belonging to a collective past; commentators contribute to the unfolding of the narration in creating a collective belonging to a past as recounted by the narrator.”¹⁵⁰ This notion is also supported by Allison, when she confirms that the Kurdish self-narratives and the works of memory are inspired by the collective past:

The traumatic upheavals of twentieth-century history, the rise of the nation-state and its accompanying nationalisms, and even the forces of modernity (and latterly, globalization) have all led to the re-evaluation of the past and an obsession with reclaiming it.¹⁵¹

According to Ahmetbeyzade, these accounts, which she describes as ‘unwritten narratives’, “intertwine the relationships between Kurdish history, struggle for survival, and Kurdish resistance practices.”¹⁵² She acknowledges the importance of such narratives as testimonies that challenge marginality and subalternity:

Their act of remembering is a counterhegemonic practice and has a very close relation with their conditions in exile. In this collective historical production, individuals’ experiences enter history to give voice to the collective Kurdish past, which was historically silenced by various power sources. These narratives, as shared experiences with oppression, are then inscribed in the collective Kurdish memory. Each member of the collective group becomes the memory bank of the past whose history starts before her or his birth, and yet whose memory is a recreated investment for the future.¹⁵³

In order to establish the project of reclaiming unwritten narratives, Kurdish novelists thus need to conflate the fields of historiography and fiction, a topic that has received significant attention in recent studies of contemporary historical theories and narrative. This process can be easily compared to the historian who relies upon a priori information to reconstruct and recover the past. According to Mae Henderson both novelists and historians

¹⁵⁰ Ahmetbeyzade, “Struggling to Be Kurdish,” 8.

¹⁵¹ Allison, “Kurdish Autobiography,” 117.

¹⁵² Ahmetbeyzade, ‘Struggling to Be Kurdish’, 8.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

make it [their] business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole. Both the novel and the history are self-explanatory, self-justifying, the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity; and in both cases this activity is the a priori imagination.¹⁵⁴

Similarly, Hayden White examines the possibilities of conflating history and narrative, and argues that historical writing conflates with literary writing in many ways, especially in its reliance on narrative to create meaning. White pays a particular attention to Anthony Hutchins's thematic discussion of Philip Roth's novel *I Married a Communist* and finds Hutchins's discussion to be confirmatory of his own obsession with history asserting that Roth is "a good example of a writer who genuinely believes that the historical and the fictional can be mixed for certain literary purposes but ought never to be confused."¹⁵⁵ In his discussion of Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, White demonstrates that by using the kinds of literary devices employed by writers of fiction—including "topoi, tropes and figures, characterization, personification...and so on," Levi shows the readers the "difference between a truthful account of an event and an artistic treatment of a real event in the past."¹⁵⁶ History should be considered a major factor in the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, in which artistic fictional accounts of the lives of the characters, rather than merely autobiographical writings chronicling real events of the writers' pasts, are foregrounded.

White had earlier addressed the conflation of history and fiction in an article, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," in which he confirms that narrative, as reviewed within historical studies, is neither a product of a theory nor a basis for a method, but rather is a form of discourse which he assumes "may or may not be used for the representation of historical events, depending upon whether the primary aim is to describe a situation, analyse a historical process, or tell a story."¹⁵⁷ For White, what distinguishes historical from fictional stories is first and foremost their content, rather than their form, and he concludes by asserting that with respect to narrative representation of the "human past," which is itself comprised of events that are already past, and thus no longer exist, representation cannot be achieved except in an imaginary way that essentially requires a reconfiguration of existing genres and forms.

¹⁵⁴ Mae G. Henderson, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Remembering the Body as a Historical Text," in *Toni Morrison's Beloved: a Case Book*, ed. William L. Andrews et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84.

¹⁵⁵ Hayden White, "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality," *Rethinking History*, 9:3 (June, 2005), 153.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵⁷ Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory*, 23:1 (February, 1984), 1.

Exposed to acts of formal silencing and elimination, Kurdish historians, intellectuals and writers have traditionally been preoccupied with reclaiming Kurdish history. The Kurds have suffered continuous wars and migrations under cruel hegemonic systems that destroyed entire families, displaced whole communities, banned their language, stopped their music, eradicated their cultural practices and stripped them of their identities as Kurds. Recovering their history, thus, requires identification with their past and piecing together the stories and memories transmitted to them generationally. This is a major reason why they depend, to a great extent, for the structure and construction of their fictional as well as non-fictional works on various forms of oral narratives. Folk arts, oral narratives and songs express the alienation and estrangement that Kurdish people have lived and represent their search for freedom and selfhood and the ways they survived in their outrageous worlds. The intersection of storytelling and oral history with narrative and imagination is very frequent in Kurdish writing and it frequently allies itself with political as well as aesthetic trends. In her discussion of autobiography and life-writing in the Kurdish context, Allison considers the complex construction of subaltern narratives as a political act when she writes:

Kurdish contemporary self-narratives are, for the most part, currently focused on chronicling events as a struggle against oubli, as a way of informing non- Kurds, and, in many cases, as a part of a wider national work of memory aimed at reclaiming national history.¹⁵⁸

Following the same tradition, Kurdish novelistic discourse brings together the art of storytelling and questions of ethno-national conflicts, wars and State-discrimination within a complex political context. It negotiates a very complex structure of an unwritten history and presents ways to construct subaltern narratives which can in turn open up a new space for a cultural practice. For any Kurdish writer to give the past a different reading, to represent the Kurdish experience not simply as it has been measured by dominant powers but as it has emerged in terms of a multi-leveled struggle over existence and selfhood, will inevitably involve a re-invention and reconfiguration of the traditional methods of story writing and of the dominant formal, stylistic and thematic construction. Furthermore, Kurdish novelistic discourse involves historical and political perspectives that bring past memories of the historical struggle of the Kurdish people and the exigencies of hegemonic impositions into play. Kurdish novelists are most concerned with how to describe things kept unsaid in the ‘official history’ which systematically worked to damage the Kurds’ relationship with their history and their homeland. This issue has to do with perspective and narrative construction. Their wide employment of popular communicative forms, visual, oral, and musical, is an integral part of the project to speak against the

¹⁵⁸ Allison, “Kurdish Autobiography, Memoir and Novel,” 117.

suppressing and silencing systems and to reclaim the lost unwritten narratives of the Kurdish nation. In so doing, Kurdish novelists both revive authentic Kurdish cultural and literary forms and articulate the Kurdish historical and social experience against the hegemonic experience.

Keeping in mind that Kurdish history is, to a considerable degree, the history of Kurdish nationalism, descriptions of the oppressive practices in Kurdistan, the issues of Kurdish national struggles and their experiences of counter resistance are some of the central themes in Kurdish novelistic discourse. Being denied the right to have an official written history of their own, Kurdish women, in particular, are allowed no access to important cultural and historical experiences of their past. This has eventually affected their perception of their identity and place in a world that treats them as an inferior and marginalized category. The search for self and place has become a frequent theme in modern women-centred Kurdish novels, whether in those taking as a setting and background war and imprisonment, or the multi-dimensional cultural structures of the Kurdish community. In this sense, like most of the testimonial narratives perceived as historical records, the novels selected for analysis here not only report the historical events that are witnessed by the female characters, but also serve as psychological testimonies to their desire for self-esteem and identity. The novels are marked by an intrinsic ideology based on the notion of an individual and a community in continuous search for identity in historically and nationally troubled contexts.

Ahmetbeyzade points to the complex ethno-national identities of Kurdish women and the ways their cultural and socio-political activities have been established as a product of their complex traditional backgrounds. She also points to the ahistorical approach that has largely disregarded power networks among Kurdish women:

The ways in which Kurdish women acted and reacted to historical changes taking place in the region, the tactics they developed to secure the survival of Kurdish life, and the means by which they negotiated their position within their own societies are hardly considered.¹⁵⁹

Ahmetbeyzade also describes the way femininity and female identities are constructed through women's relations to the process of nation-building in the Kurdish context in Turkey. She emphatically points to the increasing political consciousness of Kurdish peasant women and their significant contribution to communication between various Kurdish villages which inevitably mirrors their roles in nation-building. Moreover, confirming that no longer described as mere 'biological and

¹⁵⁹ Cihan Ahmetbeyzade, "Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey and the Role of Peasant Kurdish Women," in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mater (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 199.

symbolic reproducers of the nation,' these women have managed to become "heads of households and have access to power and resources within their own communities they are able to negotiate their own positions by resisting familial, tribal and even state patriarchies."¹⁶⁰ Ahmetbeyzade's argument partly acknowledges the growing interplay between gender boundaries and the nation emphasized in the recent feminist studies of nationalism and nation-building. Feminist discussions demonstrate that "while it is men who claim the prerogatives of nation and nation-building, it is for the most part women who actually tend to accept the obligation of nation and nation-building."¹⁶¹

Another significant factor for the relegation of Kurdish women is the considerable weakness or absence of feminist consciousness within Kurdish social, political and nationalist discourses. Despite the lack of a gender dimension in earlier studies of nationalism, the emphasis of the emerging feminist scholarship on gender as a category of analysis has enhanced the representation of women's roles in the processes of nation-building. This is very well manifested by Tamar Mayer:

As gender and its connection to sexuality continue to be explored, scholarship about nationalism has come to involve, more explicitly, analysis of both men's and women's relationship to the construction of the nation and of the ways in which national discourse constructs man and woman.¹⁶²

The importance of women in national projects in the diverse contexts tackled in Mayer's book, including Indonesia, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Turkish Kurdistan and others, is based on their increasing roles as the biological and symbolic reproducers of the national identity, transmitters of the national culture, and participators in the national struggles. In the Kurdish context, Mojab indicates the ways in which nationalists depict women "as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its "motherland," the "honour" of the nation, and guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language."¹⁶³ What is more, nationalists and political institutions have been either emphatically describing the few cases of women's activism or limited freedom, compared to their neighbouring nations, as evidence of Kurdish women's superiority, or treating gender equality as secondary to national oppression, claiming that the "nation's unity should not be jeopardized by internal conflicts

¹⁶⁰ Tamar Mayer, "Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage," in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mater (USA: Rutledge, 2000), 17.

¹⁶¹ Mayer, "Gender Ironies of Nationalism," 2.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶³ Shahrzad Mojab, "Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount the War," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 19:4 (1998), 89.

based on gender or class.”¹⁶⁴ These very depictions have traditionally been exploited to relegate women into subordinate positions because in these contexts

the nation is virtually always feminized and characterized as in need of protection; women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation and as “pure” and “modest,” and men defend the national image and protect the nation’s territory, women’s “purity” and “modesty,” and the “moral code.”¹⁶⁵

Correspondingly, literature regarding gender and nationalism in the Kurdish context is characterized by a similar theme in which Kurdistan is described as a feminized motherland in need of protection by the nation’s sons who are rendered with images of patriotism and heroism. Described as a source for moral purity, women, thus, have become essential in shaping the relationship between Kurdish men and the nation as illustrated by Mojab, who explains the Kurdish cultural viewpoint of women as ‘property’ and confirms that they have been seen as more ‘inviolable’ than other properties: “The honour of the husband was unequivocally tied to the ‘chastity’ (namus) of his wife and other female members of the family. The husband and all the members of the family or even of a tribe had the duty to protect their namus.”¹⁶⁶

Because of the many cultural, social, and religious restrictions imposed on Kurdish women, Kurdish nationalism has historically been constructed as a predominantly masculine movement despite the contributions of Kurdish women. Women have also received very little attention in the literature of Kurdish nationalism which has resulted in more relegation of their roles and prevention of their participation in national and political discourses. Furthermore, since the Kurdish national project has been evolving within a militarized context of brutal acts of political discrimination, armed conflicts, and eradication of ethno-national identity, the Kurdish question has not developed as an ideological, intellectual or political discourse recognizing all the fractions of Kurdish society. Kurdish women’s relegation in the nationalist discourse can also be attributed to the misogynistic attitudes of many tribal leaders and political personalities who have “failed to challenge the lingering pre-capitalist gender and class structures.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶⁶ Mojab, Shahrzad. “Conflicting Loyalties: Nationalism and Gender Relations in Kurdistan,” in *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism*, ed. Himani Bannerji, Shahrzad Mojab, and Judith Whitehead, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 124.

¹⁶⁷ Mojab, “Conflicting Loyalties,” 147.

This gender-blind perspective within Kurdish nationalist discourses has resulted in a hierarchical relationship between men and women, with men constantly attempting to control women's behaviour and sexuality, and an imbalanced power-structure, with men controlling the economy and politics. As a result, nascent scholarship on Kurdish women's roles and participation has been actively addressing the ways in which women have "acted and reacted to historical changes taking place in the region, the tactics they developed to secure the survival of Kurdish life, and the means by which they negotiated their position within their own societies."¹⁶⁸

Although it is discussed thoroughly in the second chapter, it is essential to mention here that in the thesis, the interplay between Kurdish feminism and nationalism is tackled in two interrelated contexts: War and peace. In the first context, Kurdish women are represented as direct targets of the enemy and recipients of the violence and discrimination resulting from decades of wars and terrorist attacks. In the second context, Kurdish women are described as suffering from growing tribal-like ideology and patriarchal gender norms in the post-conflict Kurdish society. In both contexts, however, Kurdish women are relegated and marginalized and suffer a three-fold oppression: that of the Iraqi state, the traditional/tribal system and the patriarchal family structure of Kurdish society.

Like most aspects of Kurdish women's experience in Iraq, investigating the socio-political, physical and psychological impact of war on their lives is a very challenging task, taking into account the notable absence of a gender dimension from the increasing literature on war and armed conflicts in Kurdistan. Criticizing the way many Kurdish political organizations and even feminist groups have treated armed conflicts in Kurdistan, Mojab asserts that they have "focussed more on two aspects of women and war... 'Women as Direct Casualties' and 'Women as War Refugees.'"¹⁶⁹ Although these two categories reflect the brutal victimization of Kurdish women, Mojab believes that there are many other ways in which Kurdish women have been affected by the continuous wars. For example, she refers to sexual and domestic war-related violence, loss of family, community and social stability, and war-related environmental and economic destruction.

Since the Kurdish novels selected for analysis in the thesis discuss all these forms of war-related and terrorism-related violence, and depict the notable increase in the number of civilian casualties, their physical and psychological impacts on the lives and experiences of Kurdish women in Iraq need to be investigated within theoretical frameworks that consider the growing interconnection between civilian

¹⁶⁸ Ahmetbeyzade, "Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," 199.

¹⁶⁹ Mojab, "Vengeance and Violence," 90.

homes and battlefronts. Accordingly, Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman's description of the ending of boundaries between combatants and civilian spaces is adopted to investigate the atrocities of the Ba'ath regime, including the genocidal Anfal Campaigns, and the Kurdish mass-exoduses during the 1980s and early 1990s, and the activities of the secret terrorist groups in Mosul/Iraq in the early 2000s, and the terrorist attacks and invasion of ISIS in 2014 against the Kurdish population in the north of Iraq. Giles and Hyndman indicate that, unlike wars fought in the past, when civilian peoples' homes were safe and male soldiers fought enemies on battlefronts, "contemporary conflicts blur such distinctions, rendering civilian women, men, and children its main casualties."¹⁷⁰ Most important for my investigation, is the way they connect the violence of war and armed conflicts to other expressions and forms of violence, such as wife beating and honour killing:

While "home" was once demarcated as a "private" space beyond the purview of public responsibilities, violence perpetrated at home is increasingly understood as part of broader social, political, and economic processes that are embedded in state policies, public institutions, and the global economy.¹⁷¹

An important manifestation of the blurred boundaries between military and civilian sites as represented in many Kurdish novels by Bahdini authors, including both parts of Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, is the wide scale on which sexual violence has been perpetrated against Kurdish women in the concentration camps during the Anfal campaigns conducted between 1986 and 1989. This fact brings us back to the notion that the nation's dignity and eminence depend on women's honour and purity, and by violating women, the enemy is, in a sense, destroying the nation:

Because women's bodies represent the "purity" of the nation and thus are guarded heavily by men, an attack on these bodies becomes an attack on the nation's men... Rape of women becomes an attack on the nation, figuring as a violation of national boundaries, a violation of national autonomy and national sovereignty."¹⁷²

It is important that in the Kurdish context gender violence in all its forms is represented as inseparable from the violence of war and terrorist atrocities. A clear manifestation is the dangerous increase in acts of honour-killing during the Kurdish civil war:

The prevalence of gender violence, especially honor killings that seek to "cleanse" a family or tribe's honor by killing a woman, has increased sharply. There were 22 reported honor-motivated

¹⁷⁰ Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, eds. *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 2004), 3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷² Mayer, "Gender Ironies of Nationalism," 18.

assassinations of women in 1994, but that number jumped to 166 in 1997 and has not shown signs of receding.¹⁷³

The correlation of war with gendered and domestic violence is well illustrated in the novels examined here. The novels investigate the ways in which gender inequality, as the main cause for domestic violence in times of war, is reproduced by governments, political parties, militaries and even families in the Kurdish conflict zone in Iraq. This is emphatically illustrated in Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* in which various women are exposed to physical and verbal abuse from male family members, battering, and other forms of gender violence in the refugee camp at the same time as they suffer from the brutal enormities of the Ba'ath regime. For example, after fleeing Duhok city to escape the air raids of the Iraqi army and losing her only baby in the camp, Shukria, Nareen's neighbour in the camp, is constantly beaten, abused and humiliated by her patriarchal father-in-law. Similarly, Rawshan, who is kidnapped by a terrorist group in Mosul in Naveski's *The Other Side of the Bridge*, suffers from verbal humiliation and indifference by her husband after miraculously surviving sexual offences and physical abuse by the terrorists.

An important illustration of the interplay between fighting and civilian spaces is the wide contributions of non-combatant women in the processes of aiding humanitarian agencies, elimination of gender violence, political activism, and participation in military intelligence, nation-building, and conflict resolution. The success of these processes can be described as part of national unity and a socio-political system based on mutual respect between men and women as well as recognition of gender equality. Giles and Hyndman indicate that "conflict resolution, reconciliation, and prevention cannot begin until lucid and comprehensive understanding of the gendered politics that perpetuate and perpetrate violence in the first instance is provided."¹⁷⁴

Throughout the thesis, war-related atrocities and violence are regarded as direct causal factors for the increasing levels of violence in the post-conflict Kurdish society. Although the end of the Kurdish civil war (1994-1998) and the dethroning of Saddam Hussein in 2003 marked the end of armed conflicts in Iraqi Kurdistan until 2014, when KRG was forced into a war against ISIS, the effects of decades of wars and political disputes on the Kurdish community still persist. And despite the relative economic flourishing and the development in trade and tourism, a tribal-like ideology has dominated the Kurdish men who attempt to overcome their insecurity and prevent further conflict and violence. Moreover,

¹⁷³ Kathryn Olson, "Like Sun and Water: How Women Hold the Keys to Kurdistan's Future," *NIMEP*, 13 (2011), 186.

¹⁷⁴ Giles and Hyndman, eds. *Sites of Violence: Gender*, 4.

gender roles and relations started to become traditionalized more than ever, and patriarchal attitudes have started to prevail with a new intensity inside the Kurdish family and society, including the political parties which have obviously not been willing to fulfill their promises of gender equality and women's recognition. Accordingly, violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society works on three levels: male, community and state-related violence.

Two of the selected novels, Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge*, depict Kurdish women exposed to these three forms of violence. The two novels represent violence against women as an extension of Kurdish cultural norms and social practices and view Kurdish people as sharing a system of ideology that promotes aggressive gender attitudes and man's right to dominate and control the family and society. To investigate Kurdish women's exposure to these forms of violence, Johan Galtung's 1990 three-fold typology of violence is adopted as a theoretical framework. In Galtung's typology, the personal characteristics of individuals and the political, economic, and cultural structures of a society are viewed as factors affecting the generation of gendered aggression. It is important that Galtung connects the various layers of violence by identifying three interrelated forms: direct, structural and cultural violence; these will be explained in detail in Chapter Four. Equally important is the congruity between Galtung's typological model and the feminist perspective on violence, which asserts the significance of the male-dominated social structure and socialization practices associated with gender roles, power, and patriarchy, as contributing to the persistence of violence. Mariama's, Zhila's, and Tavge's exposure to direct acts of violence emerges as connected to larger contexts, such as the police and justice systems, religious fundamentalism, political orientations, and familial structures.

1.6. Chapter Overview

This introduction has addressed a number of complicated issues regarding the definition of Kurdish literature and the configuration of its boundaries, which have necessarily affected the status and growth of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. I have argued that the division of Kurdistan among several nation-states and the diversity and fragmentation of the Kurdish language have impeded the development of Kurdish literature. The chapter has also tracked the specific development of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan, focusing on the many circumstances that have resulted in its late emergence and slow progress, as well as the lack of a novelistic tradition by Bahdini women until very

recently. Moreover, a detailed discussion of the textual and contextual approaches employed throughout the thesis for the analysis and exploration of the selected novels is presented in this first chapter.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the contextualization of various historical, political and literary circumstances that have historically affected the intellectual and literary production in Iraq with particular attention to Kurdish women's position and perspective on these changes. The chapter introduces a number of hectic periods of Kurdish history and national movement in Iraq, including the creation of the Iraqi state in 1921, the military coup overthrowing the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, the first Gulf War, and the establishment of the de facto Kurdish state in the early 1990s. More importantly, the chapter presents a comparative perspective on nationalism and Kurdish women's political participation, comparing their national activism in Iraq with that of women in other contexts, and paying particular attention to their situation before and after the creation of KRG.

Chapters three, four and five of this thesis are formed and structured according to the three-moment periodizing model which I am proposing to represent different forms and layers of violence experienced by Kurdish women in three successive periods: war-related violence, post-conflict violence, and terrorism-related violence. In these chapters, textual and contextual approaches are adopted to investigate Kurdish authors' portrayal of Kurdish women's subjugation by various historical, social, and political forces, as well as their relentless struggle for recognition. The primary aim in Chapter Three, which pairs Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* (2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One* (2013), is to explore the interplay between Kurdish national struggle for independence and Kurdish women's struggle for socio-political recognition focusing on the impact of armed conflict, mass migrations, and political disputes on their lives. Informed by studies that integrate literary and social theory, particularly the work of Rita Felski and Stella Bolaki, the chapter investigates the transformational trajectories of the female protagonists from silenced victims to resilient activists, in other words, the multi-layered mechanisms they develop to resist violence and subjugation.

Studying two novels by men, Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* (2007) and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge* (2011), Chapter Four aims to investigate the various political actors, social systems, and ideological structures that perpetrate and enhance violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society. The chapter also studies the primary motivations of Kurdish male authors,

writing with a sense of responsibility to their community and nation to focus and experiment with feminist issues and themes. Silevani and Navishki emphatically indicate that gender norms and beliefs surrounding male domination and superiority, created by a gender power imbalance that accords men greater status is the vital causal factor of Kurdish women's oppression. Because of the multi-dimensional nature of violence against women in the Kurdish society, Johan Galtung's three-fold typological model of violence is adopted to consider the ways in which the shifting political, economic, and cultural structures of a society are viewed as factors affecting the generation of gendered aggression, as well as how more permanent cultural aspects such as religion, ideology, and language contribute to the spread and continuity of direct and structural forms of violence.

Chapter Five, which investigates Tahsin Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* (2010) and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part Two* (2014), and to a lesser degree Khidher Domle's *Al-Maut al-Aswed: Ma'asi Nisa' al-Yazidiye fi Qabdet Da'esh* (The Black Death: Tragedies of Yezidi Women in the Grip of ISIS (2015), explores the impact of the lack of security, unconcealed inter-ethnic and sectarian hatred, extensive political struggles, and, most dangerously, criminality, and extreme political and religious ideologies and terrorist activities, on the lives of Kurdish women. A principal argument proposed in the chapter concerns the threatening interplay between growing levels of embedded corruption within the Kurdish social and political spheres and the perpetuation of criminal and terrorist activities. Equally important is the argument that the social and political empowerment of Kurdish women is an effective strategy to combat gender violence and counter extremist and terrorist ideologies. Implying that there is a relationship between the treatment of women in a society, and the perpetuation of gender and terrorist-related violence, the texts emphasize the importance of the guarantee of gender equality and women's rights as measures of peace preservation and conflict resolution. The conclusion presents the main and central findings of the thesis. The thesis closes with appendices that present a list of the novels published in Bahdinan since the 1980s when it first emerged as well as the texts of the personal interviews conducted with a number of Kurdish writers, critics and scholars in Kurdistan.

Chapter Two

Kurdish Women's Experience in Iraq: History, Politics and Literature

This chapter studies the conspicuous impact of the changing historical and political situation in Iraq on Kurdish intellectual and literary production with particular attention to Kurdish women's position and perspectives on these changes. Focusing on the most hectic periods of Kurdish history and national movements in Iraq (and the other parts of Kurdistan), the chapter traces the ways in which Kurdish intellectuals and writers reflect national and socio-political themes related to the long-standing resistance and struggle for recognition. The study and analysis of the works of Kurdish authors in Iraq establish an understanding of the political and historical frameworks that have oppressed and assimilated the Kurdish population in Iraq as well as the other states that govern the Kurds. It is also important to note that Kurdish history, national movements and women's standpoints in Iraq are closely related to and, to some extent, shaped by comparable developments in the neighboring states.

2.1. The Formation of Iraq and the Kurdish National Awakening

The modern nation-state of Iraq was artificially created in 1921 following the First World War but only attained its formal independence from Britain in 1932.¹⁷⁵ Its membership in the League of Nations was conditioned by its acknowledgement of the civil and political rights of the Kurds as a minority. Yet, the case of the Iraqi Kurdish minority has ever since been one of violent ethnic and sectarian conflicts under the successive Iraqi governments. In his reflections on the Kurdish question in Iraq, Michael M. Gunter, a professor of political science who has published prolifically on Kurdish and Middle Eastern issues, proposes a number of reasons for the repeated Kurdish revolts against the successive Iraqi regimes. First, Kurds in Iraq have long constituted a greater and more critical proportion of the population than they did in any other state which enabled them to play a more vital national and political role. Second, in addition to its ethnic division, Iraq is "further divided by a Sunni-Shia' Muslim division absent in Turkey and Iran."¹⁷⁶ Third and most important according to Gunter is the very significant geographical location of the Kurdish regions in Iraq:

¹⁷⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Iraq>

¹⁷⁶ Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 201.

Because approximately two-thirds of the oil production and reserves and much of the fertile land were located in the Kurdish area for many years, it has been felt that Kurdish secession would strike at the economic heart of the state.¹⁷⁷

While Kurdish hopes for self-rule were never fully or practically recognized by either the Ottoman or British empires, the Treaty of Sevres (1920) provided the first possibility for an independent Kurdish state.¹⁷⁸

Kurdish aspirations for independence evaporated, again, during negotiations on the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the final Treaty concluding the First World War signed between Turkey and the Allied Powers.¹⁷⁹ With the exception of the province of Mosul, which comprised Iraqi Kurdistan and contained the valuable oil reserves of Mosul and Kirkuk, much of historical Ottoman Kurdistan was assigned to the new Turkish republic. Again no reference was made to the Kurds' fate. In reaction to the Treaty, Kurds in Iraq who refused an Arab administration started creating a number of cultural societies with oppositional and political attitudes in 1926 and 1927 which were exposed to the suppression of the British police.

The Treaty of Alliance (also known as the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty) signed in 1930 between Britain and Iraq to end the British mandate and regulate future relations and correspondence between them also made no reference to the Kurds and their political and civil rights.¹⁸⁰ Even when Iraq attained its independence in 1932, it did not implement its international obligations to acknowledge and protect the rights of the Kurds as a minority. What was more, in the period between Iraq's independence and the 1958 revolution,¹⁸¹ all the Kurdish petitions and appeals to the League of Nations were ignored and the revolts led by Shaikh Mahmoud Barzinji were brutally suppressed.¹⁸² As a result, the Kurds in

¹⁷⁷ Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq*, 202.

¹⁷⁸ Signed between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman government, the Treaty, which ceded all the territories of the former Ottoman Empire (plus Morocco, which had never belonged to it) to European control, predicted the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. (Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Sevres>) However, the Treaty was never implemented because of the military victories of Mustafa Kemal, later Atatürk, in the Turkish war for national independence and the resulting conflicts which required, in Karim Yildiz's remarks, "a new accord to settle issues of sovereignty, claims, rights, and the like" (Yildiz, 2004, 12).

¹⁷⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 274.

¹⁸⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglo-Iraqi-Treaty-United-Kingdom-Iraq-1930>

¹⁸¹ The 1958 revolution was a military coup led by Abd al-Karim Qasim to overthrow the Iraqi monarchy and the pro-Western government of Prime Minister Nuri Sa'id. For more details see Bruinessen (1992).

¹⁸² Shaikh Mahmoud Barzinji was appointed by Great Britain as a governor of Sulaymaniyah and the surrounding areas in 1918. He led a number of revolutions and called himself king of Kurdistan. After his final revolt in 1931, the sheikh lived

Iraq have ever since been engaged in a persistent struggle for national integration and independence. There are a number of studies on the emergence and activities of the Kurdish national movements in all the divided parts of Kurdistan. Among the most significant studies are those by Martin Van Bruinessen, David McDowall, Gerard Chaliand, and Shahrzad Mojab, from which it becomes clear how Kurdish nationalism and its ideal of Kurdistan represent a group claiming self-determination and territorial autonomy or independence based on their distinct cultural and ethnic characteristics both in the region and the international society. The most prominent notion of Kurdish nationalism is the belief in Kurdistan, a pan-Kurdish nation which encompasses parts of the territories of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. For the Kurds, the term Kurdistan connotes belonging, identity, and territory and it maps ethno-national boundaries and borders which practically stand in exact opposition to the reality of their divided homeland.

Because of the persistent Kurdish national struggle, the period following the First World War has been one of the most unsettled in the region.¹⁸³ Despite their long-standing determination and struggle for self-rule, Kurdish people in these states remained far from being a unified people. This lack of unity may be explained by the variety and diversity of the Kurds' own historical, linguistic and social formations, which were further exacerbated by their dispersion among different countries. In his discussion of Kurdish nationalism, McDowall demonstrates several reasons for the difficulty of establishing a consistent collective national movement and subsequently a Kurdish nation. In addition to the absence of an internationally recognized Kurdish territory, McDowall confirms the importance of a shared language which remains a very lively issue in the thinking of nationalists:

The Kurds face a practical difficulty based partly upon language differences, the very recent creation of a literature (since 1920s) and the prevalence of different scripts— Latin in Turkey, Cyrillic in the ex-Soviet Union, and Persian in Iraq and Iran.¹⁸⁴

out his long life under house arrest in the south of Iraq. Subsequently, his rebellions came to be seen as an early symbol of Kurdish nationalism. (Gunter, "The Kurdish Spring," 25)

¹⁸³ Following the formation of the Turkish state in 1923, the Kurds in Turkey started to engage in a number of revolts in 1925 and 1930 to resist assimilation into the Turkish nation state. Their revolts, however, were all "brutally suppressed and resulted in the killing and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Kurds" (Mojab, 1996, 68). Although the heated Kurdish national activities in Iran resulted in the establishment of the short-lived Republic of Mahabad,¹⁸³ the Kurds suffered from the extremist nationalists of the Pahlavi monarchy (1925-1979) and even after the Iranian Revolution 1979. (Mojab, 1996, 68) In Iraq, too, the situation has not been better as the Kurds have been seeking autonomy and independence ever since the formation of Iraq in 1918 under the British mandate. The various Iraqi regimes that came into power have always been hostile to the Kurds and "despised the decade-long Kurdish uprisings, rebellions, and political campaigns arguing for independence" (Albert, 2013, 217).

¹⁸⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3.

Paying a similar attention to the importance of a shared language as a tool to attain unity and collectivity, Ahmadzadeh illustrates that the process of the standardization of the official languages, namely, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian did not allow the Kurds to develop and standardize their own language. This process resulted in the Kurds' inability to construct a unified identity and consequently assimilation into the newly formed nation-states. Asking why the Kurds have not been able to form their own state, Graham E. Fuller asserts that the formation of a Kurdish state needs international recognition which cannot be obtained because of the threat of the turmoil and violence that will result from the breakup of existing states. He also adds that part of the problem lies in Kurdish culture and society and the very characters of the Kurds themselves:

The Kurds are not a united people. A system of strongly individualistic tribes, clans and communities has always dominated Kurdish society, regularly poisoning one clan against another according to the immediate interests of the given group.¹⁸⁵

A further obstruction to Kurdish nationalism, according to Fuller, is the geographical nature of the Kurdish areas within all four states. The areas in which the Kurds live are characterized by being "far from the capitals and centers of political activity, deprived of developmental funds relative to other regions of the state...and are neglected and underdeveloped."¹⁸⁶ This geographical and economic setting has been a major cause of the isolation and separation of the Kurds and their national movements across the different parts of what might constitute 'Kurdistan.' Hence, an important hindrance to a well-organized Kurdish national movement is the lack of any practical contact between the various nationalist groups, especially in the light of the brutal practices of the existing states that contain them to suppress their emergence. The political reality of the region inhabited by the Kurds has led to the rise of different disconnected fragmented nationalist movements which, as suggested by Ahmadzadeh, "despite their mutual influence on each other, have not been able to create a Kurdish nation with defined and specified borders."¹⁸⁷ The recurring Kurdish rebellions and revolts in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, and to a certain extent Syria, have constantly been overpowered and suppressed by the nation-states which have denied any characterization within their boundaries other than the officially acknowledged identity. Equally important is the lingering relationship between Kurdish nationalism and tribalism which Eli Amariyo describes as double-edged:

¹⁸⁵ Graham E. Fuller, "The Fate of the Kurds," *Foreign Affairs*, 72:2 (Spring, 1993), 109-110.

¹⁸⁶ Fuller, "The Fate of the Kurds," 111.

¹⁸⁷ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and the Novel*, 128.

On the one hand, as a military system, tribalism has served as a backbone for the Kurdish national revolts, constituting the primary framework by which the Kurds conducted their national revolts. On the other hand, tribalism as a cultural system, with its tendencies toward divisiveness and rivalry, retribution, and short-lived alliances, has created an ongoing obstacle to Kurdish national unity.¹⁸⁸

Amarilyo's above description invokes the two opposing approaches that scholars have developed for explaining the dual relationship between Kurdish tribalism and nationalism. He confirms that the first group considers tribalism a reinforcing force for Kurdish nationalism and indicates that "all prominent national Kurdish leaders hailed from a tribal society and used their tribal prestige and alliance to promote the Kurdish national cause."¹⁸⁹ Opposing this approach, the second group contends that tribalism is a major hindrance to an effective Kurdish national movement. According to this group, "the tribal culture prevents the Kurds from uniting and establishing a nation-state, while enabling central governments to exploit tribal rivalries and crush any revolt by inciting one tribe against another."¹⁹⁰ Although tribalism can be effective both as a political (military) system and as a cultural system as Amariyo argues, there are many factual instances in which tribal structures and mores have caused serious antagonism and conflicts over political and economic privileges within Kurdish national groups. Most prominent of these is the growing animosity between General Mustafa Barzani and Jalal Talabani which will be further discussed below.

Although Kurdish nationalism has historically been male-dominated, prominent cases of women's participation in the Kurdish national cause appear throughout its history. Some of these women have even developed into Kurdish national symbols remembered and celebrated by Kurdish people. An important example is the prominent role of Hafsa Khan (1926-1953), who was one of the first Kurdish women to call for both gender equality and national liberation. With her political associations, Hafsa Khan¹⁹¹ was able to establish the first school for girls in Sulaymaniyah in 1926 and make appeals on behalf of Kurdish women to the United Nations asking to end the oppression of the Kurdish people. A second significant example is Adela Khanum of Halabja, wife of the Bagzade chieftain Usman Pasha, the governor of Shahrizur during the rule of the Ottoman government. Adela Khanum is most known for her personality and authority both during her husband's life and after his death in 1909. Though no records clearly associate Adela Khanum's name with specific national aspirations, Bruinessen

¹⁸⁸ Eli Amariyo, "The Dual Relationship between Kurdish Tribalism and Nationalism," in *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland*, ed. Ofra Bengio (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2014), 63.

¹⁸⁹ Amariyo, "The Dual Relationship," 63-64.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁹¹ Khan, Khanum meaning Mrs. or lady.

confirms that “she resolutely assumed the leading political role,”¹⁹² particularly when her son Ahmad Beg was appointed a governor, when she continued to manifest a resolute influence and strength of character.¹⁹³ In his discussion, Bruinessen refers to the remarkable participation of various Kurdish women in the social, political and even military domains. Fatima Khanum of the Marash tribe, Perikhan Khatun of the Raman tribe, Shemsi Khatun of the Omeryan tribe, and Fasla Khatun are all cases of renowned Kurdish women leading tribes through various difficult situations of tribal rivalry and military conflict both with and against the Ottoman state and against other powers such as Britain and Russia.

While these few instances of Kurdish women’s leadership are not invoked by modern feminists as evidence of Kurdish women’s social and political participation and equal rights, since these women only attained power through their ancestries and marriages (to be discussed in more detail in a following section), these instances suggest that Kurdish women have been active participants in the Kurdish national struggle throughout their history. Most important, women have always been regarded as preservers of Kurdish social values and reproducers of the Kurdish cultural and national identity: “Nationalists depict women as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its "motherland," the "honour" of the nation, and guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language.”¹⁹⁴

Despite this relatively significant acknowledgement, the majority of Kurdish women remained far from achieving any notable progress in terms of their socio-political participation and remained subjected to travesties of power-sharing by the foreign hegemonic powers as well as by Kurdish nationalists. They also remained absent from the male-dominated literary and intellectual domains. While the division of the Kurdish land among different nation states and these states’ consistent policies of assimilation hampered the development of a Kurdish literary discourse by women, the main reason for its lack was the underdeveloped conditions of Kurdish society. The Kurdish tribal structures and traditional attitudes towards women obstructed their educational development and consequently

¹⁹² Martin van Bruinessen, “From Adela Khanun to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History,” in *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, ed. Shahrzad Mojab (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 3.

¹⁹³ Upon her first arrival in Halabja, Adela Khanum established a steadfast fame when she brought the sophisticated and aristocratic Persian style of household into the relatively humble style of Halabja. Bruinessen indicates: “Inviting craftsmen from Sine [the capital of the Ardalan principality], she built two fine mansions in the village, the likes of which could not even be found in the proud town of Sulaymaniyah. She had Persian-style wooded gardens lay out and transformed Halabja from a dreary dusty place into a pretty, green little town. She also had a bazaar built after her own design in Halabja, and she attracted merchants to the town (many of them Jewish), seeing to it that Halabja developed into a significant centre of trade” (Bruinessen, 2001, 2).

¹⁹⁴ Shahrzad Mojab, “Vengeance and Violence”, 89.

their access to literary and intellectual circles. Nevertheless, Kurdish women have, throughout their history, contributed to the enrichment and enhancement of Kurdish oral literature which for the Kurdish people was of great value because their cultural, intellectual and linguistic development was considered a threat to the hegemonic powers and was often prohibited by law.

For a long time, Kurdish women's voices remained restricted to oral literary traditions such as those of the *Hayranok* (ballads) and *Stranet Kochk u Diwana* (folk songs). These oral forms were the main outlets through which Kurdish women channeled their voices to challenge restrictive social and political conditions. Women's influence has been analyzed by Haji Jaafar in *Dengê Afreta Kurd d Heyranoke da* (The Voice of Kurdish Women in the Ballad), in which he describes ballads as 'love songs' and provides a formal and thematic discussion of the form. According to Ja'afar, the Kurdish ballad consists of a four-line verse but there are also instances of three-lined and double-lined ballads, usually anonymously authored, but which women can employ to express their otherwise silenced and invisible experiences.¹⁹⁵ Themes such as Kurdish social traditions and manners, love, man/woman relationships, elopement and marriage are the most commonly represented topics in these ballads. Women also employed ballads to communicate issue of specific importance to them such as dowry, familial issues and divorce. In addition to ballads, Kurdish women also have experimented with such performances as work songs, dancing songs, *serkê zaway*, (wedding songs), and *pê gutin*, (lamenting songs) which, like ballads, are folkloric and their source and authorship remain mostly unknown.

Whereas there is an absence of any literary tradition among Kurdish women, Kurdish men have developed a distinguished written literary discourse from the early modern period onwards with the works of such notables and writers as *Şerefxanê Bedlîsî* (Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, 1543-1603), *Feqîyê Teyran* (Faqi Tayran, 1590–1660), *Melay Cezîrî*, (Malaye Jaziri, 1567-1640), *Ehmedî Xanî*, (Ahmad Khani, 1651-1707), *Nalî*, (Nali, 1800-1856), Salim (1805-1869), *Hacî Qadirî Koyî*, (Haji Qadir Koyi, 1817–1897) and many others. Most of these writers are concerned in their works (mostly poetry) with the social/political instability of the Kurdish people.

Any so-called national aspirations in these centuries would be better described as those of a non-state nation. Some anticipation might be found in these works as well on the agendas of many Kurdish rulers and princes. More convincingly, notions of Kurdish national awakening have also found starting points in the few issues of *Kurdistan*, the first Kurdish newspaper founded in Cairo by the Badir Khan

¹⁹⁵ Haji Jaafar, *Dengê Afreta Kurd d Heyranokê da* (The Voice of Kurdish Women in the Ballad), *Peyv Journal*, 2 (1994), 62.

family and published between 1898 and 1902. In addition to the representation of Kurdish struggle for independent rule, one of the most recurrent subjects in these works is the call for the elimination of feudalism and division that characterized the Kurdish society at that time.

Before proceeding to discuss the ways in which the works of these notables helped to formulate the Kurdish national awakening, it is important to remember that though many of these works were not produced in Iraqi Kurdistan, they were very influential in Bahdinan and indeed influenced national awareness-raising amongst Kurds everywhere. For example, written in 1597 by Bidlisi, the ruler of Bidlis principality, *Sharafname* is regarded as the first written resource to chronicle the origin, history and ethnography of the Kurdish people. Though the book cannot be described as strictly a nationalist text in the modern sense of the term, it focuses primarily on the delineation of the social and political systems of the various Kurdish principalities that were in power during the sixteenth century: “[Bidlisi] mobilized a form of ethno-political discourse which helps us gain an insight into the nature of the Kurdish identity during the early modern period.”¹⁹⁶ The book, moreover, has been very helpful for Kurdish historians to create a national narrative: “Kurdish nationalists have long regarded *Sharafnama* as evidence of the Kurdish national spirit as well as an expression of the Kurdish nation’s desire to determine its own destiny.”¹⁹⁷

The encounter of notions of *Kurdayeti*, Kurdishness and Kurdish identity, politics and nationalism is nowhere more apparent than in the work of the revered Kurdish poet and thinker Ahmad Khani, particularly in his *Mem U Zin (Mem and Zin, 1692)*, which has been historically employed as evidence for Kurdish national awareness. Khani’s *Mem and Zin* is read both as the classical tragic love story and death of two young lovers, Mem and Zin, from two different clans, and as an allegory for the subjugation of the Kurds by the Persian and Ottoman empires. For many Kurdish nationalists, *Mem and Zin* symbolizes their struggle for unity and homeland and the treachery that causes the lovers’ separation symbolizes the oppression and division of the Kurdish people.

Several writers and researchers have focused in their works on Khani’s themes of Kurdish distinct national identity and kinship.¹⁹⁸ For example, this theme in Khani’s work is confirmed by the prolific

¹⁹⁶ Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s Sharafnama: Kurdish Ethno-Politics in the Early Modern World, Its Meaning and Its Legacy,” *Iranian Studies*, 45:6 (2012), 799-800.

¹⁹⁷ Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s *Sharafnama*,” 797.

¹⁹⁸ In his discussion of the impact of Khani’s work on the Kurdish national awakening and his significant position in the ‘collective Kurdish imagination,’ Zheger Hassan contends that: “His work divides Kurdologists and Kurdish nationalists into two camps: Those who believe his writings demonstrate the ancientness of the Kurdish nation and those who see it as

Kurdish writer and journalist Rashid Findi: “Khani provides long discussions of the validity and distinction of the Kurdish national identity and calls for the ruling princes to unite and maintain their independence.”¹⁹⁹ Findi cites various lines from Khani’s work that indicate its national sense and his enthusiastic endeavours to define Kurdish people as separate from the neighboring empires of Persian and Ottoman. Similarly, Kamiran Barwari, a professor of Kurdish literature in the University of Duhok, describes Khani’s sense of responsibility towards his people and contends that “it was the first time in Kurdish history that a writer clearly and so passionately expresses his melancholy over the subjugation and statelessness of the Kurdish people.”²⁰⁰ Despite the significant body of literature that focuses on Khani’s nationalist themes, there are a few contradictory studies that relate Khani’s work to notions of Sufism and Islamic creed:

Khani’s primary objective in *Mem and Zin* is to serve the philosophy and principles of Islamic Sufism and has failed to extend his literary tradition outside this zone. Moreover, Khani lived in a time where notions of nationalism and national independence did not even exist which raises concerns about his description of the Kurds as distinct from other foreign nations: The Ottomans and Persians.²⁰¹

This approach is, however, rejected by the vast majority of Kurdish and non-Kurdish critics and intellectuals who agree on Khani’s nationalist message not only in *Mem and Zin*, but in his other works as well, particularly in the collection of poems, *Shi’r u Xazal (Poetry and Courtship, 1680)* in which he makes constant references to Kurdish identity and the difficult socio-political conditions of the Kurdish people. Khani was also concerned with the state of the Kurdish language which was overpowered by the Arabic and Persian languages. To respond to this process of assimilation, Khani wrote *Nû-Buhara Zarokan (Children’s New Spring, 1683)*, an Arabic-Kurdish dictionary to help reinforce and enhance Kurdish. Khani’s most consistent message across the entire body of his work was calling for “a strong king [who] would be able to make the Kurds stop fighting each other, liberate them from foreign domination, and bring them progress and prosperity.”²⁰² A similar theme resonates in the work of another revered Kurdish nationalist poet, Haji Qadirê Koyi (1817–1897), whose work

constitutive of modern nationalism” (Hassan, 2013, 80). However, most reviewers and critics focus on “Khani’s calls for a Kurdish King to unite and free all the Kurds under foreign rule and his chastising the Kurds for their internal disunity and divisiveness” (Ibid.).

¹⁹⁹ Rashid Findi, *Dengvedana Navê Dewletê d Hozana Klasikiya Kurdi da* (The Resonance of the State’s Name in the Kurdish Classic Poetry), *Peyv Journal*, 32 (2005), 16.

²⁰⁰ Kamiran Barwari, *Xani: Pêshangê Hizra Netewayeti, 1650-1707* (Khani: The Leader of National Ideology),” *Peyv Journal*, 43 (2007), 10.

²⁰¹ Barwari, “Khani: The Leader of National Ideology,” 11.

²⁰² Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 267.

reflects “the socio-political conditions of the Kurdish people similar to those expressed in Khani’s work.”²⁰³ Adopting similar nationalistic themes in his writings, Koyi calls upon the Kurdish tribal leaders: “To compose their feuds and unite, berates the literate elite for neglecting their mother tongue to write in Persian or Turkish... Urge all classes to rouse themselves from the torpor to appreciate the values of education.”²⁰⁴

Throughout his work, Koyi employs a systematic two-dimensional focus when he endeavours to elevate the socio-political and intellectual state of the Kurdish people: “In Koyi’s opinion, a flourishing independent Kurdish state would be one that depends both on a powerful military system to strengthen its territories and borders and an effective literacy and educational system to enlighten the Kurdish individual.”²⁰⁵ Characteristically, such early writers as Khani and Koyi, although they never mentioned an independent Kurdish state in their works, have constantly attempted to reflect on the perilous disputes between Kurdish chiefs as well as the Ottoman and Persian plans to subjugate the Kurds.

Kurdish national awakening also owes much of its influence to Kurdish journalism starting in 1898 with *Kurdistan* newspaper printed in Egypt, Switzerland and England but was never published in Istanbul despite the Badir Khan family’s many pleas to Sultan Abdul Hamid II. *Kurdistan*, a fortnightly social, political and literary newspaper published by Miqdad Midhad Badir Khan, from the Badir Khan princely family originally from Botan, initiated a new stage of the Kurdish national struggle for cultural and political recognition.²⁰⁶ Although the newspaper only lasted four years, its

²⁰³ Barwari, “National Themes in Khani’s Work,” 12.

²⁰⁴ C J Edmonds, “Kurdish Nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6:1 (1971), 89.

²⁰⁵ Findi, “The Resonance of the State’s Name,” 18-19.

²⁰⁶ It is important that the Badir Khan family, who revolted against the Ottoman Sultan in 1843, had a further role in the reinforcement of Kurdish politics, culture and literature beyond the publication of *Kurdistan*. The Badir Khan notables were influential in the Kurdish national movement both in Istanbul and Egypt where the family was forced into exile on grounds of being anti-Kemalist, in other words, opposing Mustafa Kemal’s movement in Anatolia. Jeladet Badir Khan (1893-1951) and his brothers Kamuran Badir Khan (1895-1978) and Rawshan Badir Khan (1909-1992) were prominent and active politicians, well-educated and well-travelled in Europe, who spoke more than one European language besides Kurdish, Turkish and Arabic and had important relationships with British and other prominent European intellectuals and diplomats. Jeladet Badir Khan worked as a typesetter in a printing house while he was in exile and acquired a firsthand knowledge of typing and printing. This experience helped him in personally printing and publishing the important Kurdish journals, *Hawar* (Appeal, 1932-1935 and 1941- 1943) and *Ronahî* (Light, 1942-1945) in the Kurdish-Kurmanjî dialect. Jeladet Badir Khan’s concern for the disintegrated state of the Kurdish language and his endeavours to unify and standardize Kurdish alphabets is discussed thoroughly in a biography prepared by Dilan Roshani and published on the Kurdish Academy of Language website where Roshani comments that: “Jeladet believed that Kurdish language could play a major role in unifying the Kurds and their struggles for the right to self-determination. He lived in an era (post-World War I) when the Kurds repeatedly lost the chance to establish their own country because they were so disunited in voice” (Roshani, 2).

issues were very influential not only in promoting Kurdish language (the Kurmanji dialect), intellect, identity and national awareness, but also in providing the Kurdish and non-Kurdish audience with one of the few ethnographies of the Kurdish people available at the time. In an attempt to introduce the newspaper in his editorial section, Miqdad Badirkhan wrote:

In this newspaper, I emphasize the importance of education and science. Wherever there are great schools and institutions I shall report to the Kurds. I shall also inform the Kurds about any war that is taking place, about the deeds of the great imperial countries, how they fight and how they trade. No one has ever produced a newspaper like this, mine is a pathfinder.²⁰⁷

Although he failed to achieve a standard Kurdish language through co-operation with other Kurdish intellectuals, particularly Tewfiq Wehbi Bey, who also endeavoured to codify a Kurdish alphabet based on Latin characters, Jeladet Badir Khan was able through his publications and the various issues of *Hawar* to acquaint a wide audience with significant aspects of Kurdish history, politics, culture and literature. It is important that intellectual and national activism was not restricted to the male members of the Badir Khan family as some female members played a role in the national and intellectual domains. *Kurdistan* newspaper was republished in 1916-1917 by Suraya Badir Khan (also an editor of *Kurdistan* published by Miqdad Badir Khan) under the pseudonym Ahmad Azizi.²⁰⁸ Rawshan Khanum, wife of Jeladet Badir Khan, also had a distinguished role in Kurdish nationalism in Syria (1920-24) in the period of the Turkish Republic both during Jeladet's life time and after his death in Damascus in 1951.

As such concepts of nation, national identity, collectivity and community became prevalent and gained acceptance in the minds of Kurdish nationalists and intellectuals by the beginning of the twentieth century, the works of these writers became essential historical and ethnographical resources for the nationalists of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the classical works of Khani, Koyi and the other Kurdish intellectuals and thinkers have also inspired the work and perspective of the following generations of writers in all the divided parts of Kurdistan. Kurdish national awakening and their calls for national independence did not take modern form until the early twentieth century when the Kurds started resisting assimilation into the newly formed nation-states after the First World War. This was strongly reflected in the Kurdish literary production of the time, particularly the novel, which emerged alongside the rise of notions of nations and nationalisms. Although a substantial discussion of the content and form of the Kurdish novel has been presented in the previous chapter, it

²⁰⁷ Kurdish Academy of Language, <http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/533>

²⁰⁸ Karim, *Kurdish Journalism*: 67.

is important here to note the relationship between the Kurdish novel and the formation of national identity, as observed by Ahmadzadeh:

National boundaries are strongly present in the Kurdish novel, whose main themes show deep affiliation with the question of national identity. As such, the Kurdish novel has mainly portrayed Kurdish individuals in their struggle against all obstacles to achieve national and democratic rights.²⁰⁹

The Kurdish novel, unlike the novel emerging in the official languages of the newly formed nation-states in the wake of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, emerged in the absence of an independent Kurdish state and eventually reflected the stateless nature of Kurdistan and its division among the new nation-states. Important examples are the works of Ereb Shemo, Ali Avdal Rahman, Said Ibo, and other writers whose works tackled historical and ethnographical issues of particular importance to the Kurds living in the Soviet Union. Some of the recurrent concerns in their writings were the oppressive feudal system, the tribal structures and conflicts within Kurdish society and their subjugation by the Ottoman emperors and Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union.

Despite the promising emergence and notable progress of the male-authored Kurdish novel during the twentieth century in the different parts of Kurdistan, Kurdish women remained far from this scene of literary production. This absence of literary discourse by Kurdish women would have serious consequences in the future, as Kurdish women writers emerging in the final years of the twentieth century have testified. Novels authored by Kurdish women show significant affiliation with the novels of Kurdish men in terms of content and form despite a tendency to focus on issues of primary importance to the changing roles and needs of Kurdish women. Ahmadzadeh considers this affiliation as a direct result of the absence of a literary discourse by Kurdish women.²¹⁰ This is clearly demonstrated in Ehlam Mansur's *Alwan* (2004), the first novel by a Kurdish woman in Iraq which deals with the atrocities of the Ba'ath regime against the Kurdish people and their repeated rebellions and revolutions to achieve independence. The following section presents an overview of the historical period that is represented in this novel in which the Kurds in Iraq challenge the central government's constant attempts to consolidate its power and sovereignty through the assimilation of Kurdish cultural and national identity.

2.2. Kurdish People and the Schemes of Ba'ath Regime 1958-1988

²⁰⁹ Ahmadzadeh, "The Kurdish Novel and National," 68.

²¹⁰ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, "The World of Kurdish Women's Novels," *Iranian Studies*, 41:5 (2008): 736.

Like many leaders in postcolonial Middle Eastern newly independent states, rulers in Iraq engaged in an uncompromising struggle to consolidate the sovereign power of the state while accommodating its plural society. As a consequence of its multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian polity, Iraq has experienced violent strife and civil wars in the postcolonial era.²¹¹ An example of such a state centralization is the policy of suppression and discrimination exercised by the Iraqi regimes against its Kurdish minority developing in particular under the rule of General Abd al-Karim Qasim who on 14 July 1958 led a military coup overthrowing the Iraqi monarchy. With the elimination of the monarchy, the clandestine parties such as the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party came into the open.²¹² The most important occurrence during this period, particularly from a Kurdish perspective as argued by Yildiz, “was the emergence of a powerful and charismatic political leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani.”²¹³ Barzani as a leader is synonymous with the Kurdish national movement in Iraq. Being the leader of KDP (founded in 1946), he fought the Iraqi governments for more than half a century. Beginning a series of revolts from 1943 until 1945 first in his local area of Barzan and then in wider zones around the city of Sulaymaniyah, Barzani was eventually forced to leave for Iran where he started supporting the KDP there and the establishment of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. After the fall of the republic in 1946 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Barzani had no choice but to flee to the Soviet Union where he remained for eleven years as a refugee together with five hundred of his men.²¹⁴ Although Kurdish nationalism comparatively declined in the following decade, the 1960s showed a feverish re-emergence of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq as well as in Turkey and Iran.

Barzani, who was appointed the leader of the KDP, was invited to return from the Soviet Union and soon became the leader and spokesman of the Kurds in Iraq. For the first time, the national rights of the Kurds had been recognized in the constitution of the Iraqi state. Qasim legalized the KDP and authorized the publication of a number of Kurdish journals including *Khabat* (Struggle), *Jin* (Life),

²¹¹ Maria T. O’Shea, *Trapped between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (USA: Routledge, 2004), 9.

²¹² Established in Iraqi Kurdistan holding its first congress in Baghdad on August 16, 1946, Kurdistan Democratic Party is an offshoot of the Kurdistan Democratic Party founded in 1946 in Mahabad and led by Qazi Muhammad in Iranian Kurdistan. Currently, Kurdistan Democratic Party is one of the major leading political parties together with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (also referred to as PUK). Both acronyms KDP and PDK are used to refer to the political party with the first referring to the English usage and the second in the Latin-based Kurdish language. However, both are frequently confused together. In this thesis, only KDP is used to refer the party’s name.

²¹³ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 16.

²¹⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 26.

Hetaw (The Sun), and *Azadi* (Liberty).²¹⁵ However, this democratic atmosphere did not last for long as Qasim aspired to strengthen his authority and state sovereignty through military dictatorship and started attacking the political parties. In the meantime, controversies arose between Barzani and a relatively sophisticated urban group of KDP party men who opposed his overt tribal mores. Qasim, who exploited this rivalry, seemed to offer no practical solution to the Kurdish claims for autonomy. Although the Provisional Constitution of 27 July 1958 was based on Kurd-Arab co-operation and association, he seemed to advocate the belief that Iraq was an inseparable part of the Arab nation and denied the existence of any other nationality within the Iraqi state.

Describing Qasim's rejection of a pluralist Iraq, Avshalom H. Rubin observes that first and foremost, "he sought to centralize the state and consolidate his sovereign power."²¹⁶ Relations between Barzani and Qasim started to deteriorate as the latter refused to support the Kurdish claims and clashes between them developed into a civil war in 1961. This war contributed, in part, to the downfall in 1963 of Qasim, whose rule and policy envisaged the totalitarian policies of the following Iraqi governments. With the ascendancy of the Ba'ath party, Kurdish hopes that the new government would prove sympathetic to Kurdish autonomy evaporated, particularly when the Ba'ath regime initiated a process of Arabization that continued until the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003. Abdessalam Arif (1963) and Hassan al-Bakr (1968) with Saddam Hussein as a Vice-President both began their administrations, like Qasim, with promises to the Kurds but soon disapproved of Kurdish autonomy and indulged in brutal wars against them. It should be noted that during this period not all Iraqi Kurds were in opposition to the Iraqi governments and some groups even fought against Barzani and the KDP. Splits became more apparent within Kurdish opinion— between those who supported the government and those, like Barzani, who did not. Rivalry between Barzani and other members of the KDP, most prominent among them being Ibrahim Ahmad and his son-in-law Jalal Talabani, came into the open. Barzani responded to this conflict by organizing his own party congress. These Kurdish internal conflicts ceased temporarily as Talabani and all of Barzani's tribal enemies had no choice but to reconcile themselves with Barzani when the 11 March Agreement proved unsuccessful without him. Disagreements and clashes between the Kurds and the successive Iraqi governments continued until 1970 when an agreement that seemed acceptable to all parties was to be signed.

²¹⁵ Gerard Chaliand, *A People Without a Country: Kurds and Kurdistan* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993), 165.

²¹⁶ Avshalom H Rubin, "Abd al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq: Centralization, Resistance and Revolt 1958-63," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43:3 (May, 2007): 353.

With the inception of the Iraqi state, the linguistic and cultural rights of the Kurds were recognized and reconfirmed (on paper) in the Constitution of 1958 and on several other occasions. This proved particularly true of the 1970 March Manifesto (also called Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement or the Iraqi-Kurdish Peace Talks) drafted with the commencement of the Ba'athists, who wanted both to control the civil, political, and military power of the state and reduce pressure from the north.²¹⁷ Negotiated by Saddam Hussein and Mahmoud Uthman, the KDP representative, the Manifesto was proclaimed as going into effect in 1974, following a census to determine the frontiers of the area in which the Kurds formed the majority of the population.²¹⁸ According to the Manifesto, an autonomous Kurdish region comprising the three Kurdish governorates of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah and the adjacent districts would be created. In his detailed discussion of the Manifesto, Yildiz confirms that, on the face of it, all of Barzani's demands were agreed on. For example, Barzani demanded that

Kurdish, alongside Arabic, was to be an official language in areas where the majority of the population was Kurdish, and taught throughout Iraq as a second language; Kurds would participate fully in the government, including senior army and cabinet posts; Kurdish education and culture would be reinforced and all officials in Kurdish areas would be Kurds, or speak Kurdish; Kurds would be free to establish student, youth, women's, or teachers' organizations.²¹⁹

In addition to the advancement of the linguistic, cultural and political experiences of the Kurdish population in Iraq, the Manifesto was directed towards the "official promotion and promulgation of Kurdish literary, artistic and cultural endeavours, a Kurdish press and a television station."²²⁰ These demands coincided with a fervent attention by the Kurdish nationalists, notables and intellectuals to the importance of the press which witnessed a relative progress in the initial period, though very short, of the implementation of the Manifesto. It was important that there had already been some actions on the part of the 'sizeable' class of Kurdish intellectuals, including official use of Kurdish language in the administrative and educational systems from the 1920s onwards, in addition to a 'limited' experience of Kurdish journalism and a few publications, mainly poetry and folklore:

Side by side with these there grew up a steadily rising output of anthologies, collected works of the classical poets, contemporary verse, histories, books on economics and on religion and morals, fiction (mostly translated), political essays, Kurdish grammars and vocabularies, and the like, varying in size from mere pamphlets to a monumental *History of Kurdish Literature* running to 634 pages.²²¹

²¹⁷ For details of March Manifesto see Yildiz (2004)

²¹⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/March-Manifesto>

²¹⁹ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 18.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²²¹ Edmonds, "Kurdish Nationalism," 94.

The restricted but regular flourishing of the Kurdish press and weekly and monthly periodicals in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil, as well as Kirkuk and Baghdad, contributed to the enhancement of Kurdish national and cultural identity. The relative prospering of Kurdish journalism and other publications would not have been possible without the printing press, which witnessed its first installation in 1920 in Sulaymaniyah under the British Mandate. Known as *Chapkhanay Hukumat*, (Government Press), this first Kurdish printing press “printed six books, 118 issues of the weekly *Peskewtun*, (Development), 14 issues of *Bangi Kurdistan*, (Appeal of Kurdistan), and 16 issues of *Roji Kurdistan*, (Sun of Kurdistan) between 1920 and 1923.”²²² Kurdish nationalists and notables acknowledged the importance of the printing press and personally provided for the machinery and other costs during the economic troubles of the First World War: “[The press] was a very effective means of unification of a nation's thoughts and feelings and also of protecting the science and literature of a people.”²²³ The nationalists even temporarily took the printing press to the countryside and the mountains northwest of Sulaymaniyah when they were forced to leave the city during the revolt of Shaikh Mahmoud Barzinji.

While the first Kurdish newspaper and other influential periodicals were printed outside of Kurdistan, a number of newspapers owed their regular issues to the printing presses in Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition to the periodicals mentioned above, a weekly magazine *Umedi Istiqlal* (Hope for Independence), was published in 1923 under the emblem “unity and national love.”²²⁴ With the installment of *Matba'ay Zari Kurmanji*, (Kurmanji Tongue Press, 1926) and *Matba'ay Jiyan* (Life Press, 1937) which was later renamed *Jin* meaning Life, a number of books on Kurdish history and culture as well as periodicals appeared. After the elimination of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, a number of presses started to operate including the significant Kamaran Press in Sulaymaniyah in 1958, which “had been the most active and printed 161 books between 1958 and 1975 as well as several periodicals and various types of commercial materials.”²²⁵ In the 1970s, particularly beginning with the March 1970 agreement, Kurdish demands for the establishment and funding of printing and publishing houses increased. Amir Hassanpour explains the importance of printing in Kurdish: “The printing press made a considerable contribution, by producing excellent and voluminous books hitherto inexperienced in the Kurdish book world, and by printing the works of individual authors at reduced prices.”²²⁶ Duhok Press in Duhok (1970), Kakay Falah Press in Sulaymaniyah (1972), the Sulaymaniyah University Press in

²²² Kurdish Academy of Language, <http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/553>

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Kurdish Academy of Languages, <http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/565>

Sulaymaniyah (1973) and The Municipality Press in Erbil (1974) were all very effective in publishing materials on Kurdish history and ethnography.

Although such initial steps taken by the Iraqi government proved highly positive, most presses were soon moved to Baghdad and fell under the strict watch of the Ba'ath government and were deliberately left suffering from technical and shortage issues. In the political domain, the amendments of the Constitution which confirmed that Kurdish nationalism existed alongside the Arabic one (Kurdish-Arabic brotherhood) were overlooked in the following years, and it soon became clear that Saddam Hussein was not willing to implement the Manifesto. Several incidents validated the Kurdish worries regarding Saddam Hussein's false promises, including the government-backed attempts to assassinate Barzani, the rejection of Habib Karim as a Kurdish representative vice-candidate, the policy of Arabization and the continuous disputes over the status of Kirkuk. Falling short of Barzani's demands, the agreement collapsed, and Kurdish-Iraqi clashes broke out again in 1973, which later developed into a civil war in 1974.

By 1975, major political upheavals started influencing the fate of the Kurds and the whole Iraqi state, most important being the growing conflict over border and water rights between Iran and Iraq. Negotiations between Iran and Iraq resulted in a peace agreement signed at an OPEC meeting in Algiers.²²⁷ The Algiers Agreement of 1975 (also known as the Algiers Accord) was meant, in part, to end disputes over borders in Shatt al-Arab and end the relentless Kurdish rebellion in the north of Iraq. In return for stopping his support for the Kurds and their national movement, the Shah of Iran was to obtain sovereignty over half of the disputed waterway, and Iraq would abandon its claim to Khuzistan, an oil-rich region in Iran.²²⁸ Returning from Algiers, the Shah presented Barzani with three choices, to surrender to the Iraqi forces before the end of the general amnesty decreed by Baghdad, to seek refuge in Iran, or to continue fighting with the borders closed and guarded by the Iranian-Iraqi-Algerian police.²²⁹ With no sponsor and no military support, the Peshmerga could not withstand the brutal military campaigns led by the Iraqi army who created a security zone between the Kurdish regions and Turkey, Syria and Iran.

²²⁷ The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

²²⁸ Yidiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 23.

Consequently, several thousands of Peshmerga surrendered to the Iraqi forces, a few thousand went into exile and others went underground. Defeated militarily and emotionally, Barzani had to pass leadership to his son Massoud Barzani. The military campaigns by Iraqi forces resulted in the destruction of 1,500 Kurdish villages, the deportation of almost 300,000 Kurds to Arabic regions and their replacement by Arabs, and the mass departure of more than 100,000 others to Iran and Turkey. Meanwhile, the continuous internal Kurdish disputes concluded with the establishment of the PUK in Damascus led by Jalal Talabani. The following years saw persistent systematic processes of Arabization imposed on the Kurdish population by the Iraqi Executive and Regional Councils to prevent new revolts or armed struggles.

These hectic historical events are reflected in the works of many Kurdish historians and writers, both working at the time and in the more recent years. Like the works discussed in the previous section, the Kurdish literary production of this period was highly shaped by its historical and socio-political moment. The main concerns in these works are the persisting conflicts of the Kurdish people with the central government in Baghdad. Although the works representing this setting are too many to be covered here, an important example is the poetry of the internationally renowned Kurdish nationalist and poet *Cegerxwîn* (Jigar Khwin, 1903- 1984).²³⁰ Throughout his poetry, Jigar Khwin compares Kurdistan to a beautiful, elevated and protected Kurdish lady, a state that he hopes both for Kurdish women and for Kurdistan. In his discussion of the image of the Kurdish woman in Jigar Khwin's poetry, Jaafar comments that: "Jigar Khwin has profoundly reflected on the Kurdish woman's dilemma; she has no access to educational and professional opportunities, she is exposed to violence in a society that is highly tribal and is discriminated against an oppressive government."²³¹ Moreover, in his poetry, Jigar Khwin presents a revival of the classical works of such significant literary and nationalist figures as Khani and Koyi by constantly alluding to their ideas of a free and independent

²³⁰ Jigar Khwin's nationalist and literary career started in Qamishli, Syria, where he became an active member in the *Civata Azadî û Yekîtiya Kurd* (Council of the Kurdish Liberty and Union), and also became a member of the Syrian Communist Party in 1948, and was even nominated for the Syrian parliament in 1954, and established the political organization *Azadi*, (Liberty) in 1957. The year 1959 is considered a turning point in Jigar Khwin's literary career when he moved to southern Kurdistan and started teaching in the Kurdish Department in the University of Baghdad until 1963 when he joined Mullah Mustafa Barzani's revolution against the Ba'ath regime. His national and political activism is highly reflected in his entire poetry collections which Jaafar describes as a 'uniquely Kurdish national poetry' and confirms that "Jigar Khwin is most concerned with raising national awareness in the Kurdish society, calling for the love of Kurdistan even though it is not an independent state and describing its natural beauty" (Jaafar, 2006, 10). Most important in Jigar Khwin's work is his resolute concern with the subordinate status of women in the Kurdish society and his calls for them to seek literacy, education and political participation.

²³¹ Haji Jaafar, *Jin u Bzava Jinê d Hozanê Cigerxwini da* (Kurdish Women's Struggle in the Poetry of Jigar Khwin), *Peyv Journal*, 49 (2007): 12.

Kurdistan, a leader who eliminates Kurdish internal struggles for political power, and the importance of literacy and education.

Similar socio-political arguments can be found in the poetry of such prominent Kurdish writers and poets in Iraq as *Ehmedê Nalbend*, (Ahmad Nalbend, 1890-1963), Rafiq Hilmi (1898–1960), Dildar (1918-1948), *Shex Memdohê Brifki* (Shaikh Mamdouh Brifki, 1911- 1976), Ala'addin Sajjadi (1907–1984), and *Ibrahîm Ehmed*, (Ibrahim Ahmad, 1940-2000), among others. Being notable politicians, journalists and social activists, these Kurdish writers focused in their works on the policies of the Ba'ath regime against the Kurdish population. Moreover, they had a sustained concern for the status of Kurdish historiography, ethnographies, and social and literary studies. For example, Ala'addin Sajjadi, who was an active journalist and prolific writer, became Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Gelawêj* 1941, and in 1948 published *Nizar*, a journal in Kurdish and Arabic, and had a number of publications on the history of Kurdish literature that are still regarded by many scholars as the best introductions to Kurdish literary history. Similarly, Rafiq Hilmi, who established the Kurdish literary party, *Hîwa* (Hope, 1938), which was closely associated with the creation of the Republic of Mahabad until its collapse in 1947, published various books (in Kurdish) on Kurdish history and language, including *Kurdish Poetry and Literature* (1941), a second volume in 1956, and *The History of Kurdistan* (1961).

Again, and despite the regular progress achieved by Kurdish male writers in the fields of historical, cultural and literary studies, no production by Kurdish women in Iraq during this period is recorded. Kurdish women in Iraq remained far from benefiting from the ideological openness, economic boom and the relative political ease that characterized Iraqi society during the 1960s and 1970s. Most importantly, the majority of them remained far from any practical access to literacy and education that were easily accessible and affordable for their Arab counterparts. Although the social/tribal and geographical nature of the Kurdish society had been an important impediment to the educational and professional opportunities for Kurdish women in Iraq, the restraining policies of national and cultural assimilation by the Ba'ath regime contributed to the unprogressive status of Kurdish women. There are, however, important cases of Kurdish women's active participation in the Kurdish national movement in Iraq. The most obvious and prominent example is Leyla Qasim, a renowned Kurdish woman known for her resolute struggle against the Ba'ath regime in the early years of 1970s.²³² Qasim

²³² In 1971, Qasim was enrolled in the Department of Sociology at the University of Baghdad. Through her brother, Salam Qasim, the young, motivated and devoted Qasim started her political activism by joining the *Yekiti Qotabiyeni Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Students Union) in the University where she met her husband Jawad Hemewendi, who was also an activist in the Kurdish national movement and a strong believer in the rightful freedom of the Kurdish people. Despite living in

was born in 1952 in Khanaqin, a small town in the present-day province of Diyala, to a poverty-stricken but very patriotic Faylee Kurdish family who were relocated to Erbil in 1956.²³³ The family then moved to Baghdad in 1971, as part of the Ba'ath policy of forced deportation of the Kurdish Faylees, because "the period between March 1970 and March 1974 the "golden age" of Faylee Kurds'²³⁴ participation in the Iraqi Kurdish movement when that movement was united under the leadership of the late Mustafa Barzani."²³⁵

As a University student, Qasim became a source of national and political inspiration for the Kurdish students in Baghdad and made outstanding contributions to their national awakening, and to the mobilization and organization of the Kurdish national movement. She secretly joined the Peshmerga in the mountains for a brief time where she was introduced to the Kurdish resistance on the ground and became better acquainted with their organizational methods. She, however, believed that the Kurdish national movement needed support and action inside cities alongside resistance and fighting in the mountains. Qasim, moreover, believed in women's social and political roles and participation and in gender equality: "Leyla not only openly expressed her love for Kurdistan but she also proved to many that women could join the political arena with men and work hand in hand to liberate Kurdistan."²³⁶ On the 28th of April, 1974, she together with Hemewendi and three of their friends were arrested in an operation of the Ba'athist intelligence and security forces on grounds of treason and a plane hijacking plan.

Qasim was held in prison, tortured severely, subjected to various forms of physical and psychological violence and eventually sentenced with death in a short trial. On the morning of the 12th of May, 1974, Qasim and her comrades were executed and the news was soon spread throughout Iraq, becoming a national symbol for Kurdish resistance and struggle for independence. Being the first female political prisoner to be executed in Iraq and the Middle East, Qasim's execution caused international

Baghdad, Qasim and Hemewendi shared a great love for Kurdistan and Kurdish society, regarding which they conducted a collaborative scientific research project in 1974 and worked very hard on a publication opportunity that they was never granted.

²³³ Faylee Kurds joined the Kurdish national movement on a wide-scale, created various secret organizations and cells in Baghdad, and supported the KDP financially and even provided housing for its members in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. Barzani's promotion of Kurdish Faylees to high and sensitive positions in the party and the government and his great confidence and belief in their heroism and contribution was a primary reason for the Ba'ath regime's growing antagonism toward them at the beginning of the 1970s.

²³⁴ Feyli Kurds, who speak the dialect of Southern Kurdish reside as diverse areas as Ilam, Kermanshah and Lorestan provinces in Iran and some part of Diyala Governorate in Iraq.

²³⁵ Leyla Pekoz Caliskan, "Leyla Qasim: symbol of freedom, and Independence," *The Kurdistan Tribune*, 2014, 3.

²³⁶ Ibid.

resentment, and the diasporan Kurds in many European countries organized protests as reactions to the Ba'ath atrocity. Today, Qasim's sacrifice, heroism and devotion to the Kurdish national movement in Iraq are still celebrated by Kurdish nationalists and feminists and in the Kurdish political and literary circles where her final words are still remembered: "Kill me! But you must know that after my death, thousands of Kurds will wake up. I feel proud to sacrifice my life for the freedom of Kurdistan."²³⁷

In 1980 Iraq openly abolished the Algiers Agreement, driving the nation into war with Iran (better known as the Persian Gulf War or the Gulf War), one of the longest wars in the history of the Middle East (1980-88). Motivated by both his fear that the 1979 Iranian Revolution would inspire the Shia' majority in Iraq to rebel and his thought that the revolution had weakened the Iranian political and military forces, Saddam Hussein waged an invasion via air and land on Iran in 1980 following the long dispute over border and waterways. However, Iran proved a tough enemy as it soon repelled the Iraqi forces and regained its control over all lost territories by 1982. In the final stages of the war, the Iraqi economy was deteriorating, and Saddam Hussein felt further threatened by the truce between the joint Kurdish forces of KDP and PUK and the Iranian government. Responding to this alliance, he appointed his cousin Ali Hasan Al-Majid²³⁸ to command the Northern Bureau of the Ba'ath.²³⁹

Al-Majid, who had been given absolute power, headed a series of systematic genocidal attacks against the Kurdish population in the north known as the Anfal Campaigns or the Kurdish Genocide. Extending from 1986 until 1989 and culminating in 1988, the Anfal Campaigns were mainly meant to settle the Kurdish question in Iraq definitively.²⁴⁰ In the first months of his administration, Al-Majid started a wave of race-clearance in the Kurdish villages, destroying hundreds of them and relocating their inhabitants into governmental camps. He also used chemical weapons against the town of Halabja (the Halabja Massacre) on 16 March 1988, killing more than 5000 people and causing the death of many others of complications, diseases, and birth defects. Yildiz asserts that what distinguished Anfal from the previous military attacks was the systematic use of chemical and deadly gases against the civilian population. Although exact figures have never been established, the Anfal campaigns resulted

²³⁷ The life of Iraqi revolutionary Kurdish woman Leyla Qasim becomes a film, *E Kurd Daily*, 2012 <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/12/state6691.htm>

²³⁸ According to Michael M. Gunter, Ali Hasan Al-Majid is the "cousin of Saddam Hussein who was given unprecedented powers to act ruthlessly against the Kurds when he was appointed secretary general, or governor, of the Baathist Northern Bureau in northern Iraq on 3 March 1987" (Gunter, *The A to Z of the Kurds*, 131).

²³⁹ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 25.

²⁴⁰ The 1988 Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan, Online Encyclopedia: <http://www.massviolence.org/the-1988-anfal-campaign-in-iraqi-kurdistan>

in “the physical destruction of an estimated 3000 villages, the displacement of approximately 1.5 million people and the mass execution of civilians...it is believed that up to 180.000 people were killed.”²⁴¹ The final waves of the campaigns saw the heaviest increase in the elimination of Kurdish civilians because of false promises of a general amnesty. The final Anfal campaign was commenced on 25 August 1988 with poison and gas attacks on the villages of Badinan to crush Kurdish resistance controlled by the KDP.²⁴² Despite the international responses to the Anfal campaigns, Iraqi forces continued on their systematic racial clearance of the Kurds up until Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, which then generated a series of events that led to the First Gulf War in 1990 that will be discussed in some detail in the following section.

2.3. The First Gulf War: From Uprising to a De Facto Kurdish State

The Persian Gulf War (1990-91) was an international conflict that followed Iraq’s invasion and annexation of Kuwait, aiming at the acquisition of Kuwait’s large oil reserves, the cancellation of a large debt that Iraq owed Kuwait and the expansion of its power in the region.²⁴³ Intervening immediately, the UN Security Council called for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, imposing, at the same time, a worldwide ban on trade with Iraq. Upon refusing to withdraw, Saddam Hussein had to face the Allied Coalition comprised of a number of nations including the US, Britain, France, Egypt, Saudi, Syria and others. The coalition forces commenced military attacks against Iraq in January 1991 and succeeded in a couple of months in repelling Iraqi troops out of Kuwait and forcing Iraq to recognize Kuwait’s sovereignty, and most importantly of all, getting rid of all its weapons of mass destruction, namely nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

During the war, the Iraqi regime had warned the Kurds to stay quiet or face a more dreadful fate than Halabja. Fearing these threats, the Kurdish political groups and parties refused to take military action.²⁴⁴ Believing that his army had lost ground after two successive wars in the aftermath of Iraq’s defeat, Kurds in the north and Shia’ in the south rose in rebellion against Saddam Hussein. Encouraged by the US, the Kurdish rebellion, better known as the 1991 Kurdish Uprising, was a massive popular rebellion in which numerous civilians and thousands of former government collaborators participated alongside the Peshmerga. Although sudden and chaotic, the Uprising was, from a military perspective,

²⁴¹ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 25

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Persian Gulf War 1990-91, Encyclopedia Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War>

²⁴⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 44.

at first a notable success. For a few weeks, a feeling of victory and freedom prevailed as the Kurds dismantled the existing government institutions and security buildings. Over 50,000 members of the Iraqi armed forces either surrendered or went home and all big cities and the surrounding districts and villages were under Kurdish control. Unfortunately, with the US dropping its support, it was easy for Saddam Hussein to crush the rebellion. In the south, his forces quickly regained the cities of Basra, Najaf and Karbala' with unprecedented brutality in which 300,000 people, mostly Shia', were killed. In the north, the Uprising collapsed quicker than it had begun when the Iraqi forces led a military operation with intense bombing first in Kirkuk and then in the rest of the Kurdish cities. Despite initial defenses held by the Kurds led by Massoud Barzani, Iraqi forces made important advances deep into the north. With these attacks growing more intense, fears of the possible use of chemical weapons forced hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people to evacuate cities and run for their lives towards the Turkish and Iranian borders.²⁴⁵

According to one estimate, about 450,000 Kurds concentrated on the Turkish border, while approximately 1.5 million fled toward the Iranian border.²⁴⁶ Though the Kurdish refugees were allowed in Iran, they suffered from a terrible lack of humanitarian relief. The Turkish government refused to open its borders, leaving around half a million Kurdish refugees in dreadful conditions. It was only with "the pressure of western public opinion" that "the United States engaged in a massive relief operation on the Turkish-Iraqi border."²⁴⁷ In addition to the relief operation agreed between the Turkish government and the US, the UN created a "safe haven" in the north of Iraq, encouraging the Kurdish refugees to return home. After the establishment of the safe haven, the Kurdish political parties started negotiating an autonomy agreement supported by the Coalition, most notably the UK and European Community. Out of the devastation of the 1980s, the First Gulf War, the Uprising and the subsequent refugee crisis emerged the de facto Kurdish state in the north of Iraq. KRG has many of the fundamental elements of an independent state including: "Its own president, prime minister and parliament; its own flag and national anthem; its own army that even prevents Baghdad's army from entering the Kurdish region; its own international airports and educational system."²⁴⁸

Filling the administrative vacuum left by the forced withdrawal of Iraqi forces, three Kurdish governorates were formed, the Kurdish leadership agreed to collaborate, and questions of power and

²⁴⁵ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 44.

²⁴⁶ Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq*, 85.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Michael M Gunter, "The Kurdish Spring," *Third World Quarterly*, 34:3 (2013), 445.

control were negotiated peacefully instead of by means of warfare. In May 1992, the Kurds held their first democratic elections in the history of Iraq and the whole region. According to Yaniv Voller, the decision to hold regional elections was based on two major considerations: “First, the increasing tensions between the PUK and the KDP about the division of power within the region [and] second, the need to guarantee international legitimacy for the existence of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.”²⁴⁹ The elections ended in a minor success for the KDP, with 51 seats against 49 seats for the PUK. The two political parties and their allies agreed on a power-sharing policy (the so-called 50:50 scheme) and established a Council of Ministers. Suffering a double embargo, one imposed on Iraq by the UN and one imposed by Saddam Hussein on the region, the economic situation increasingly deteriorated and contributed, in part, to the growing antagonism between the two dominant parties, namely the KDP and PUK. The power-sharing plan collapsed, and serious clashes between them broke out in 1993 that developed into an intra-Kurdish war between 1994 and 1998.

After the war, KRG was divided into two administrations with PUK taking Sulaymaniyah as a base and KDP becoming dominant in Erbil and Duhok. Having to approve the new Iraqi Constitution, however, the two political parties which had formed two separate governments were forced to sign the Kurdistan Regional Government Unification Agreement. Philip S. Hadji indicates that the agreement “outlined how the two parties would share power in the government [and] called for rotating the position of Prime Minister between KDP and PUK.”²⁵⁰ Described as a period of ‘institutionalization,’ the two administrations have been functioning like the government of one sovereign state since 2003. Sponsored by the UN Resolution 986, KRG has secured thirteen percent of Iraq’s oil income which helped strengthen KRG’s economy and promote construction projects. With the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government in 2003, KRG gained even more autonomy. Michael J. Kelly describes the Kurdish political interactions vis-à-vis the Arab Sunni and Shiite during this period as a “bargain” confirming that:

Although the political logistics proved challenging, the ultimate bargain put both PUK and KDP members into a Kurdish regional assembly under an Alliance List (a form of unity government),

²⁴⁹ Yaniv Voller, “From Rebellion to De Facto Statehood: International and Transnational Sources of the Transformation of the Kurdish National Liberation Movement in Iraq into the Kurdistan Regional Government,” (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012), 142.

²⁵⁰ Philip S. Hadji, “The Case for Kurdish Statehood in Iraq,” *Case W. Res. J. Int’l*, 41:2 (2009), 519.

appointed the KDP's leader Massoud Barzani as head of the regional government, and sent the PUK's leader Jalal Talabani to Baghdad as president of the national government.²⁵¹

After that KRG enjoyed, to quote from Hadji, "the country's highest living standards, highest level of foreign investments, and the highest level of security."²⁵² Describing the same period of prosperity, Graham E. Fuller contends that: "Kurds are now traveling widely, studying abroad, meeting Kurds from other countries, exchanging views and developing a more coherent sense of their own ethnicity than ever before."²⁵³ Most important, the long-lasting opposition between the KDP and PUK was relatively alleviated which contributed to the social and political progress of KRG which is successfully engaged in foreign relations with other countries and continually host political and business figures and tourists from the US, Europe and many other parts of the world. Despite such pending key issues as political reintegration into Iraq, conflict over oil trading and revenues and the status of Kirkuk, the legalization of the Peshmerga, the determination of the borders of KRG and the federalization of the government and despite all the destruction, chaos and terrorism that characterized the Iraqi society after the US occupation in 2003, KRG enjoyed considerable peace and security and social and political progress.

Also important in this period, Kurdish women's social and political roles witnessed notable progress, particularly after the major political parties' approval of women's participation in the parliamentary elections of KRG in 1992. In the following section, the historical interplay between the national movement and Kurdish women's participation in it as a major aspect of their experience in Iraq will be fully discussed. Kurdish women's political participation and treatment by the dominant political parties currently in power in Iraq will be compared to the feminist interaction with the national bodies in a number of Middle Eastern countries and to the situation of women in Iraq. Moreover, a further comparison will be drawn between the social and political participation of Kurdish women in Iraq before and after the First Gulf War and the creation of KRG in 1991.

2.4. Kurdish Nationalism and Women's Political Participation in Comparative Perspectives

It is a very sad fact that in all the four nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, Kurdish women have historically been fighting on more than one front and struggling against many forms of

²⁵¹ Michael J. Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja: Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide* (London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 49.

²⁵² Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja*, 520.

²⁵³ Fuller, "The Fate of the Kurds," 112.

oppression. In her discussion of this interlocking system of oppression imposed on Kurdish women, the transnational feminist Dilar Dirik indicates that:

While the four different states over which Kurdistan is divided display strong patriarchal characteristics, which oppress all women in their respective populations, Kurdish women are further ethnically discriminated against as Kurds and are usually members of the lowest socioeconomic class. And of course, the feudal-patriarchal structures of Kurdistan's internal society restrict women from living free and independent lives as well.²⁵⁴

Although Kurdish women have a long history of participation in the Kurdish national struggle for liberation and independence alongside men, they have often been marginalized even within the national movements:

While majoritarian feminists in the four states over which Kurdistan is divided often exclude Kurdish women from their struggle, male-dominated chauvinist Kurdish parties with very feudal, patriarchal structures, whose understanding of freedom does not move beyond primitive, empty nationalism, often silence women's voices as well.²⁵⁵

Similarly, in her study of Kurdish feminist practice and scholarship and the way Kurdish national movements have overshadowed emerging feminist projects among educated women and political activists, Mojab states that in most non-western contexts, including the Kurdish context, a growing gap of time separates the first declaration of women's rights and the rise of women's studies programmes in the academic centres which she considers as a form of relegation and marginalization. She goes on to say:

This gap between women's political activism and feminist scholarship highlights the uneven course of the struggle for democratization of gender relations. This is especially true in the non-western world where a contradictory mix of pre-capitalist relations, nationalist movements, religion, and continuing western domination combine to constrain the unfolding of feminist practice and theory.²⁵⁶

Since the mid-80s, Postcolonial and Third World feminists, including Asian, African and Chicano feminists have been reacting to the exclusionary politics of Western feminism. Engaging new models of feminist discourse and cultural interrogation, these feminists have been challenging the imperialist politics of silencing and negative stereotyping of Third World and Middle Eastern women based on racial and economic privileges. They have been endeavouring to address and recognize the role and

²⁵⁴ Dilar Dirik, "What kind of Kurdistan for Women?" *Kurdish Question*, (2015), 1.

<http://www.kurdishquestion.com/index.php/woman/what-kind-of-kurdistan-for-women/25-what-kind-of-kurdistan-for-women.html>.

²⁵⁵ Dirik, "What kind of Kurdistan for Women?" 2.

²⁵⁶ Shahrzad Mojab, "Crossing the Boundaries of Nationalism, Patriarchy, and Eurocentrism: The Struggle for a Kurdish Women's Studies Network," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 17:2 (1997), 68.

identity of women struggling under the interlocking systems of race, sex, and class oppression in under-developed conflict-torn societies.

In order to understand the interplay between Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish women's participation, it is essential to start by illustrating that in general the relationship between feminism and nationalism, as advocacies of liberation and social and political equality, has generated one of the major debates in modern times. Various studies endeavour to demonstrate how feminism has been redefining nationalism and national consciousness in many countries. For instance, by adopting the concept of feminist nationalism,²⁵⁷ Hee-Kang Kim indicates that feminism and nationalism reinforce each other in the South Korean context and proposes that: "Feminism and nationalism not only can be compatible, but also the interaction between them can strengthen each of the two terms."²⁵⁸ Reiterating the same challenge to the notion of gendered, as in male-dominated nationalism, Kumari Jayawardena's influential *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986) presents feminism as part of the economic, social, and political context from which it emerges. Jayawardena, a pioneer Sri Lankan feminist, studies diverse cases that include, among others, Egypt, India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Korea, and Japan. She contends that these countries should recognize "women's participation in the social and political movements, in nationalist and patriotic struggles, working-class agitation, and peasant rebellions."²⁵⁹

Most studies of female roles and participation in national movements in these contexts, however, demonstrate that despite being an essential part of the socio-economic structures and national movements, women's rights have mostly been relegated or completely ignored. An important manifestation of this tendency is documented in *Women, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, edited by Rich Wilford and Robert L. Miller, which investigates the status of feminism at times of political transitions in diverse contexts such as South Africa, North Ireland, Yemen, Malaysia, and Lebanon. Wilford and Miller observe that in all these countries the national movements and the processes of identity formation have been extremely disadvantageous to women, relegating them to the status of second-citizens. In his introduction to the book, Wilford asserts that feminist scholars in all these countries

²⁵⁷ Realizing that women's issues are mostly hidden or ignored in the national agenda both in particular cases and in the global context, Lois A. West suggests the concept of "feminist nationalism," which basically links the struggle for women's social and political rights to the struggle for national sovereignty. (West, 1997, 10)

²⁵⁸ Hee-Kang Kim, "Should Feminism Transcend Nationalism? A Defense of Feminist Nationalism in South Korea," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009), 116.

²⁵⁹ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 254.

struggle to confirm the centrality of gender to the project of national integration.²⁶⁰ A manifestation of such a struggle is Sikata Banerjee's "The Masculinization of Hinduism and Female Political Participation," in which she examines the Indian context. The understanding of Indian nationalism as masculine is based, according to her, on the "socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity to shape female and male participation in nation building."²⁶¹ Despite this negative outlook, Indian women have created an increasingly influential space for themselves by "casting themselves as warriors, utilizing ideas of nation as women and focusing on women's role as mothers."²⁶²

Similar to the Indian and many other Third World and Postcolonial Middle Eastern contexts, the interaction between women's movements and nationalism in Iraq has been very troubled and complicated. Throughout their history, Iraqi women have been portrayed (with different degrees at different periods) as passive victims of male, religious, and state oppression. Before the Ba'athist takeover, Iraqi women played a vital role in the fight for independence from Britain. A number of women's organizations were established, the most prominent being *The League for Defense of Women's Rights*, founded in 1952. With influential efforts in women's organization and mobilization, this organization staged significant protests to call for national liberation and women's civil and legal rights.²⁶³ The following years witnessed an increase in women's social, political and legal activity when a number of laws in favor of Iraqi women were introduced. The 1970 Iraqi provisional constitution, drafted by the Ba'ath regime, declared men and women equal under the law, and Saddam Hussein's government initially appeared fully supportive of women's rights. An important illustration of this has been the creation of the Ba'ath-controlled organization *The General Federation of Iraqi Women* which had branches in all the eighteen Iraqi governorates. While the organization had a significant role in organizing women, promoting literacy, and encouraging women in the labour force, it had no or very little effect on issues of particular importance to women such as polygamy, divorce, and inheritance. Most significantly, the organization was working as part of the Ba'ath regime for the interest of the government rather than as an independent institution. Accordingly, Iraqi women were

²⁶⁰ Rich Wilford and Robert L Miller, ed. *Women, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition-ExLibrary* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1998), 11.

²⁶¹ Sikata Banerjee, "Gender and Nationalism: The Masculinization of Hinduism and Female Political Participation in India," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26:2 (2003), 167.

²⁶² Banerjee, "Gender and Nationalism," 178.

²⁶³ Nadjé Al-Ali, "Iraqi Women and Gender Relations: Redefining Difference," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35:3 (2008), 405.

not permitted to organize themselves and hence “never learned the organizational and mobilization skills that their sisters in Latin America, Asia, and Africa often did.”²⁶⁴

Despite its initial promises, the Ba’ath regime soon extended its dictatorship and oppression to women, who are, even today, exposed to cruel atrocities ranging from political repression, changing state policies and a series of wars, to patriarchal administrative systems as well as economic depression. According to the Iraqi scholar and political activist, Nadjé Al-Ali, Iraqi women “represent the epitome of oppressed Middle Eastern women with images of heavily veiled women, stories of violence against women, sectarian killings and honor-killings.”²⁶⁵ Iraqi women constitute a diverse and heterogeneous population and their positions vary by social class, ethnicity, and urban/rural location. Iraqi women are also divided ideologically and politically: Ba’athist groups, who were active before 2003, Sunni groups, Shiite groups, and Kurdish groups as well as a variety of other minor groups. Throughout Iraq, women have been exposed to systematic acts of discrimination and violence in the home, in society, and in the workforce. One survey confirms that “five percent of women (in a sample size of more than 16,000) personally knew somebody who had suffered regime-related assaults.”²⁶⁶ Among these groups, Kurdish women have been the most heavily targeted recipients of state oppression and gender-based-violence as they were faced with state-sponsored atrocities of imprisonments, abductions, and sexual abuse as well as the Kurdish highly patriarchal mores and traditions.

Thus, in spite of Saddam Hussein’s initial rhetoric favouring women’s liberation, women in Iraq were relegated to inferior marginal positions. Moreover, the elimination of the Ba’athists in 2003 had contradictory outcomes for Iraqi women, who have been exposed to various forms of violence in war and its ongoing aftermath of occupation and terrorism (with a unique variation in the case of Kurdish women who have been living in the autonomous region of Kurdistan since 1991). There is considerable evidence that, as a result of national feelings of inferiority and helplessness, Iraqi men, more than ever in the history of Iraq, have begun restricting women’s freedom, thinking that by so doing they “not only provide protection for the weaker sex, but also try to gain a sense of authority and moral order in a country that has seen little in the last decades.”²⁶⁷ While women in pre-2003 Iraq suffered from continuous wars, economic sanctions and various forms of ethnic and sectarian violence,

²⁶⁴ Lucy Brown and David Romano, “Women in Post-Saddam Iraq: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?” *NWSA Journal*, 18:3 (December, 2006), 53.

²⁶⁵ Nadjé Al-Ali, “Iraqi Women and Gender Relations,” 409.

²⁶⁶ Brown and Romano, “Women in Post-Saddam Iraq” 56.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

today they are still exposed to atrocious acts in a society that is going back more than ever to patriarchal behavior and oppressive social values. To be more precise, Iraqi women not only suffer from the horrors of war and political transition, but also from the bondage of tribal and feudal forces. It is important to note that in Iraq, as elsewhere in the Middle East, socio-cultural norms and patriarchal tribal structures have become increasingly blended with religious dogma and Islamic Sharia' (laws). This is strongly demonstrated in a study of Iraqi tribalism:

Tribal leaders adopted Islam and used their new faith to organize the existing forms of social organization they presided over. Islamic and tribal traditions become so intertwined over the years that they are often confused as being one and the same.²⁶⁸

The importance of religious beliefs/tribalism in Iraq is based on the fact that seventy-five percent of the populations are members of one of the country's many tribes. One of the most significant characteristics of the modern Iraqi society is the dichotomy of urban/rural structures and populations, and despite the country's notable urbanization, most Iraqis still hold on to family and tribal connections and values. It is very clear that women's subordinate status in Iraq is deeply rooted in the country's hierarchical tribal structure as well as its economic situation. During the 1950s, when Iraq started exporting its oil and the country's economy grew remarkably, women throughout Iraq, especially in the urban areas, had better opportunities and their social status increased in very notable ways.²⁶⁹ That trend continued through the 1960s and 1970s as the country's economy continued to flourish. During this period, Iraqi women were provided with significant opportunities for education and work in various sectors.²⁷⁰ This progress in Iraq's economy was accompanied by the Ba'ath government's rejection of tribalism as an out-dated social practice and an advocacy of urbanization and modernization. However, with the outbreak of the war between Iraq and Iran in 1980, and the enforcing of economic sanctions on Iraq that lasted through the 1980s until 2003, people as well as the government began to re-adopt the many forms of traditional behavior and customs in their attitudes towards women.

Surveying gender relations during the various periods of political transition in Iraq from monarchy to republic to federal, Brown and Romano demonstrate that Iraqi women have been historically subjected to increased political, ethnic and sectarian violence and to systematic changes of regimes and state

²⁶⁸ Lin Todd, "Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe," *A Study by the Department of Defense*, (2006), 27.

²⁶⁹ Al-Ali, "Iraqi Women and Gender Relations", 406.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

laws, most prominently under the Ba'ath regime. Whatever their ethnic, sectarian, political or social background, women in Iraq were exposed to diverse forms of violence and exploitation, with the most extreme atrocity being the use of women as instruments to extract information from dissidents: "A preferred regime tactic involved sending dissidents video tapes of their female relatives being raped by members of the secret police. Hence, women were threatened, jailed, murdered, and raped in pursuit of control."²⁷¹ Confronted with these state-authorized acts of oppression and violence, women in Iraq have been engaged in a constant struggle for recognition: "As activists in parties, coalitions and women's groups, they support nationalists, religious and class-struggle agendas, on the one hand, and those of gender equality, on the other."²⁷² Despite their relative progress, Iraqi women's organizations continue to confront a community destroyed economically by decades of sanctions, militarization, and political, ethnic and sectarian tensions.

Many scholars of gender relations in Iraqi nationalist discourses (Mojab, Brown and Romano, Al-Ali and Pratt, and Fischer-Tahir) agree that the creation of the autonomous Kurdish state in the north of Iraq in 1991-92 has advanced the emergence of a feminist awareness and struggle not only in the Region but also in the rest of Iraq. While there had been historical instances of Kurdish women's participation in the Kurdish struggle for national independence and gender equality, Kurdish women in Iraq had a long way to go before accomplishing any notable progress. It was only after the First Gulf War and the creation of the quasi-independent Kurdish Region that they have been able to create an organized movement. The creation of KRG enabled Kurdish women "to increase their involvement through participation in women's unions, women's organizations and groups not linked to political parties."²⁷³ However, most studies confirm that Kurdish nationalism works as an obstacle to the advancement of gender relations and women's participation. Most extreme in its criticism is the essay "Nationalism and Gender Relations in Kurdistan" (2001) in which Mojab challenges the concept of a feminist nationalism, asserting that such theorization overlooks the influence of the social and economic formations and political limitations on feminism in such cases as the complex Kurdish case. She explains:

²⁷¹ Brown and Romano, "Women in Post-Saddam Iraq," 54.

²⁷² Andrea Fischer-Tahir, "Competition, cooperation and resistance: women in the political field in Iraq," *International Affairs*, 86:6 (2010), 1381.

²⁷³ Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, "Women's Organizing and the Conflict in Iraq since 2003," *Feminist Review*, 88 (2008), 76.

The nationalists of Iraqi Kurdistan failed to challenge the lingering pre-capitalist gender and class structures. Instead of democratizing religion and secularizing politics...they sanctioned oppressive gender relations, supported fundamentalist politics, and suppressed radical political activism.²⁷⁴

The nationalists in Iraqi Kurdistan employ patriarchal standards which promote oppression and sexual segregation. Mojab returns to this subject in "Vengeance and Violence" (1998), indicating that the Kurdish case is an example of a gendered, as in male-dominated, nationalism in which women emerge as symbols rather than political agents:

Nationalists depict women as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its "motherland," the "honor" of the nation, and the guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language. In these depictions of women, or in the relegation of equal rights to the future, the Kurdish case is by no means different from other nationalist movements.²⁷⁵

In a similar manner to Mojab, Sozan McDonald explains that although the objectives of the Kurdish national organizations are "laudable": "the restructuring of power, the creation of a society based on equality and non-exploitation, the freedom of speech, religion, and association,"²⁷⁶ the nationalist agenda ignores the feminist objectives of gender equality, women's rights of leadership and independent organizations. Thus, while Kurdish nationalists endeavour to guarantee women's autonomy, they insist on determining the content of this autonomy. An important manifestation is *The Kurdistan Women Union* (KWU), KDP's women organization division formed in 1952. Ever since its formation, the organization has been fighting on two fronts in a struggle against both oppression and discrimination, in other words, participating in the Kurdish national struggle for the determination of democratic rights for the Kurdish people. Despite its fervent attention to Kurdish women's socio-economic needs and political aspirations, the organization which is still active in KRG today, remains strictly linked to KDP's political aspirations and their struggle for geo-political influence and domination.

This gendered yet specifically nationalist configuration of Kurdish feminism is based in part on the fact that Kurdish women's rights emerged and developed inside Kurdish nationalist organizations. Investigating these issues, the Kurdish writer and human rights activist Nazand Begikhani endeavours to uncover the exclusionary politics of the Kurdish nationalist movements towards women. In a paper presented at the University of Exeter (2001), Begikhani emphasizes the influential participation of Kurdish women's organizations and unions in the advancement of both the Kurdish national

²⁷⁴ Mojab, "Conflicting Loyalties," 147.

²⁷⁵ Mojab "Vengeance and Violence," 89.

²⁷⁶ Susan McDonald, "Kurdish Women and Self-determination: A Feminist Approach to International Law," *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, 7 (2001), 150.

movements and the social structures of Kurdistan. She refers, for example, to the role played by such organizations as the *Independent Women's Organization* and *Women's Cultural and Information Center* in areas as diverse as women's awareness-raising, handcraft-training, education and campaigning against honour crimes and other forms of gender-violence. These activities, however, remain under the strict watch of the dominant political parties in which women's political needs and rights are not recognized. The gendered politics of these political bodies are drawn mainly, according to Begikhani, from "the social and political structures from which they have emerged, [their] tribal and religious dynamics and the geopolitical forms of the nation-states dominating Kurdistan."²⁷⁷

Discussing the interplay between Kurdish nationalism and women's participation, it is important to consider the research conducted about the Kurds, their history, culture and ideology. These studies are mainly characterized by a clear absence of the gender dimension even when they deal with the impact of wars and political tensions, within which women represent a high percentage of the victims. One of the ways in which Kurdish nationalist studies have silenced women's issues is by claiming that Kurdish women enjoy more freedom than their Turkish, Persian or Arab counterparts. This assumption is based on Kurdish women's "limited" freedom to associate with other men in the family, the absence of veiling (the a'abaya, a cloth that covers the body from head to foot), and the few cases of rule by women in some territories. Most anthropological and social studies of the Kurds have the tendency to focus on these few cases in which women have enjoyed high political status as affirmation of gender equality throughout Kurdish society. An example is the work of Abdul-Satar Sharif, in which he considers women's political roles as manifestations of the moral superiority of the Kurds. He refers, for example, to the leading role of Hafsa Khan (mentioned earlier in this chapter) as proof of the respected and influential position enjoyed by Kurdish women. However, the clear pitfall of his study seems to be his inclination to generalize the case without any consideration of the rigidly male-dominated structure of Kurdish society.²⁷⁸

Unlike Sharif, Bruinessen confirms that not all Kurdish women have enjoyed the same privileges and high status. In his discussion of the distinctive roles of such figures as Adela Khanum of Halabja (1909-1924), the wife of Usman Pasha, the Begzade chieftain, Hamayl Khan (1960s), the wife of

²⁷⁷ Nazand Begikhani, "Kurdish Women and National Identity," *Kurdish Media*, 2003, 4.
<http://kurdishfeminists.com/kurdi/niviskar.php?id=98>

²⁷⁸ Abdul-Satar Sharif, "Kurdish Society: A Social, Cultural and Political Study," *Kurdistan Sun*, 35 (February, 1976), 4.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani, and Leyla Zana, the wife of Mehdi Zana (1991-present), mayor of Diyarbakır and the first Kurdish woman in the Turkish parliament, Bruinessen contends:

It is true that some women have achieved extraordinary influence in Kurdish society, but the vast majority of them have none. It is true that in some parts of Kurdistan women have a certain freedom of movement...this is certainly not characteristic of all Kurdistan.²⁷⁹

As indicated in this passage, the instances of rule by women constitute a few exceptional cases, which most Kurdish feminists are not inclined to consider as evidence of gender equality since these women only reached high political positions through either birth or marriage. In other words, all the women mentioned in Sharif and Bruinessen's studies belonged to aristocratic families and obtained authority either through their fathers or husbands, while the majority of Kurdish women have never been able to achieve any influence in the political and public spheres. The other method employed by the national movements to silence women is the relegation of their rights until national liberation is achieved. An important manifestation of this tactic is the continuing prevalence of various forms of patriarchal violence in the autonomous Kurdish Region, that is to say, Kurdish women in Iraq are still exposed to violence even when national liberation has been to a certain extent obtained, and they are completely excluded from political activity except for the few instances in which women work not independently, but as part of the ruling political parties.

Despite significant cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical differences, KRG is similar to the rest of Iraq in terms of its highly tribal, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic social structure. The Kurdish people, their ideology, and their behavior are increasingly influenced by tribal mores and structures. While this chapter has no direct interest in presenting detailed definitions and descriptions of Kurdish tribalism (*ashiret geri*), it is crucial to note, as Bruinessen most comprehensively does, the continuing importance of the general pattern and structures of Kurdish tribalism. According to him, a Kurdish tribe is

a socio-political and generally also a territorial (and therefore, economic) unit based on descent and kinship, real or putative, with a characteristic internal structure. It is naturally divided into a number of sub-tribes, each in turn again divided into smaller units: clans, lineage, etc.²⁸⁰

Significantly, even the large, non-tribal groups are very much influenced by tribal structure and politics, showing the domination of tribal ideology and patriarchal practices at all levels and structures in Kurdish society. Accordingly, male-female relations and women's status are heavily determined by

²⁷⁹ Bruinessen, "From Adela Khanun," 10.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

the tribal and feudal politics of the Kurdish society and political system. The persistence of these structures can be attributed to a number of factors including the rural nature of most Kurdish areas, the suppressive policies of the Iraqi government, which worked against the modernization of these regions, and the very conservative ideology of most Kurdish people, especially tribal leaders and Islamists. In these areas, the position of women and the family and tribe's reputation are heavily associated with women's honour and behavior. As a result, they are increasingly objectified as mere property and forced into kinship-based marriages, exchange marriages and arranged marriages. In cases of rejecting these marriages or in more serious cases of elopement, emotional or sexual involvement, women are punished to death. The indifference of many governmental institutions and the misapplication of Islamic laws concerning the regulation of women's sexuality have contributed to the prevalence of such judgments, based on patriarchal rather than religious considerations.

Reports and studies vary as to how much the creation of KRG has contributed to the changing of traditional attitudes towards gender relations and women's status, and the elimination of violent patriarchal practices against women. For example, Mojab asserts that while the major political parties approved of women's participation in the parliamentary elections in 1991, they "became the major obstacle to the florescence of women's struggle. They argued that Kurdish society was Islamic, and that women should respect the traditional way of life."²⁸¹ She also disapproves of what she calls 'the misogynist' politics of KRG which has enhanced many of the patriarchal codes already prevailing in the Kurdish society. She condemns KRG's initial adoption of the Iraqi civil code of 1990 which allows a man "to kill a female member of his family on charges of violating 'namûs,' 'honour,' or 'chastity', the Islamic and feudal patriarchal codes of female sexual conduct."²⁸² Unlike Mojab, Kathryn Olson, an activist in refugee crisis and gender politics in the Middle East, observes the rapid economic growth of KRG and acclaims the supportive attitudes of most Kurdish politicians towards eliminating gender violence and improving women's status. She also points to the large number of local and international women's groups and organizations. She goes on to describe the relative success of women's rights legislation in Kurdistan, particularly the eradication in 2000 of the 1990 civil code which made honour-killing legal, and the introduction of a law in 2011 that equates honour killing with murder and rejects the reduction of sentences for criminals charged with honour crimes. Olson confirms, however, that these progressive legislative policies have not changed the culture of gender violence in Kurdistan as most laws have not been implemented on the ground. Attributing the prevalence of patriarchal codes

²⁸¹ Mojab, "Conflicting Loyalties," 145.

²⁸² Ibid.

in the post-conflict Kurdish society to the tribal tendencies of the Kurds, Olson indicates: “Honor killings and other forms of gender violence are symptoms of the persistence of tribal justice mechanisms and a culture that values tribal honor.”²⁸³

Discussing gender violence and women’s status in Iraqi Kurdistan, Brown and Romano indicate that KRG has made several significant advances regarding women’s issues, most prominent being the relatively wide representation of women in high governmental and political positions. However, they assert that “Kurdistan has still not thrown off a popular culture that relegates women to an inferior position in society.”²⁸⁴ They also confirm that although most of the women’s organizations and shelters that exist today in Iraq have been established in Kurdistan, the eradication of gender violence is still actively on the agenda of these institutions. Similarly, Dirik explores the relationship between traditional gender attitudes, patriarchal and tribal structures and acts of violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society and demonstrates that despite KRG’s internationally acclaimed economy and relatively democratic policies, Kurdish women’s status is still determined by traditional gender roles. She confirms that not only have women’s lives been restricted by the feudal-patriarchal structures, but also distinctions between the personal and the public domains have limited and marginalized women’s resistance to violence: “Domestic abuse, child and forced adult marriage, rape, honour killings, polygamy are often regarded as private issues, instead of problems that require societal engagement and active public policy.”²⁸⁵

Moreover, Dirik indicates that the question of gender equality and violence against women needs to be seen as a matter of democracy and freedom for all of society. Yet this case has never received the political attention and measures required for its successful implementation. Although women activists are working to raise consciousness on the dangers of gender violence, the regulations enacted most often fail to be acted upon. Dirik confirms that violence against women in the Kurdish society is both epidemic and on the rise and the government is doing very little to fight it: “In 2011/12, almost 3000 cases of violence against women were recorded, but only 21 people were charged, leave alone all the underreported cases. The few men who do get persecuted are often released soon again.”²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Olson, “Like Sun and Water,” 189.

²⁸⁴ Brown and Romano, “Women in Post-Saddam Iraq,” 56.

²⁸⁵ Dirik, “What kind of Kurdistan for Women?” 1.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

The creation of KRG has not only had impacts on Kurdish women's historical and political roles in Iraq but also on their intellectual and literary prospects, which witnessed a dynamic progression after 1991. As we saw in the previous chapter, women's literary production in Bahdinan needs to be understood as part of wider Kurdish literary traditions as well as developments in print culture in Iraq and KRG. This chapter has set out to show why and how Kurdish women's literary production has been so intimately bound up with their historical and political experience.

Chapter Three

“Why are we not from a peaceful place?” Kurdish Women Making a Change in Times of Conflict in Qasham Balata’s *Runaway to Nowhere* and Sindis Niheli’s *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One

Throughout history, war and armed conflicts and the traumatic psychological and physical effects they leave on people have inspired the perceptions and works of many authors. This chapter explores the ways in which contemporary Kurdish writers reflect such trends in their narratives. The chapter studies the attempt of these writers to construct narratives through which to represent the political and historical frameworks that have subjugated the lives of the Kurdish people for years. As suggested by the question posed in the chapter title, Qasham Balata and Sindis Niheli portray characters whose lives express the devastation, the pain, and the struggle of a nation torn by dictatorship and oppression. They endeavour to give voice to Kurdish communities subjected to constant acts of cultural and national assimilation by successive Iraqi governments.

The chapter focuses on the first phase of the three-moment periodizing model I developed specifically for this thesis to divide the representation of women in relation to modern Kurdish history into three phases: women and war-related violence, women and post-conflict violence, and women and terrorism-related violence. As the first chapter of the three-moment periodizing model, this chapter examines the ways in which Kurdish women suffer from increased levels of violence in the contexts of wars and migrations. The chapter confirms that in addition to the violence practiced against women as direct targets of political antagonism and destructive wars, Kurdish women suffer from growing rates of gender-based violence and rigid cultural and social mores and structures.

Balata’s *Runaway to Nowhere* (2010) and Niheli’s *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Êkê*, (*Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One, 2013) express these historical aspects of Kurdish women’s lives with a particular focus on the personal experiences of the two women writers as expressive not only of the lives of their female protagonists but also of the collective Kurdish experience in Iraq. Writing from a feminist perspective, Balata and Niheli focus on the lives and experiences of two female characters and depict their transformation from hopeless victims to well-informed social and political activists. By cataloguing the experiences of various women in the period immediately before and during the Persian Gulf War 1990-1991, the Kurdish popular Uprising, their subsequent mass-exodus to the Turkish and

Iranian borders, and the creation of a de facto Kurdish state in the north of Iraq, the writers show the implications of such events on Kurdish women. Significantly, they write with a sense of responsibility to their nation by narrating the stories of regular women that will otherwise remain marginalized and invisible. The stories of Nareen and Hizar, the two female protagonists, reveal the hard trajectories and painful reality affecting Bahdini Kurdish women from Duhok.

Balata²⁸⁷ wrote and published *Runaway to Nowhere*, her first and only novel so far, in English confirming that a main reason for writing it has been to show the world the reality of the Kurdish historical and socio-political situation, at least in Iraqi Kurdistan.²⁸⁸ She also describes her novel as a kind of tribute and an expression of her feelings of responsibility to record and depict some of the miserable experiences of the Kurdish nation and the atrocities and violence imposed on Kurds, particularly Kurdish women, who remain the recipients of the worst of the continuing violence and oppression.²⁸⁹ In her reflection of the book, Kani Xulam of the American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN) describes the novel as a book about love, war, and the haplessness of the Kurdish woman. She further adds that:

It is about the cruelty of the Kurdish man. It is about the brutality of Arabs. It is about the fickleness of 'Great Powers.' It is about the dearth of virtue. It is about the absence of honor. And yes, it is also about the transience of freedom.²⁹⁰

It is important that Balata's text is an extension to the linguistic debate discussed in Chapter One, that is whether or not language should be considered a measure by which to determine the identity of the text and its inclusion or exclusion within the context of Kurdish literature. Balata believes that "language cannot be used to determine the identity of a literary text. It is the spirit of the text, that is, the culture, the social manners and traditions that are represented that should be used as measures to define a literary text."²⁹¹ Despite the fact that Balata has produced her first book in English, she has participated in more than one event where Kurdish writers writing in Bahdini have come together. An

²⁸⁷ Born in 1968 in Duhok city, the capital of Duhok Governorate in the Kurdish Region, Balata has witnessed many of the challenges faced by the Kurdish people in Iraq. After completing a B. A. degree in translation from the University of Mosul, Balata wrote and translated various articles for Mateen magazine and worked for two years as a news-editor and translator for Kabat TV in Duhok. In 1995, Balata started working for an American organization, *Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance*, OFDA and migrated with her family to Boston, USA shortly after that. After getting an M. Ed from Cambridge College in Boston, she moved back in 2007 to settle in Iraqi Kurdistan where she is still teaching English language at the University of Duhok.

²⁸⁸ Balata, 17 November 2016, Personal Interview.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Kurdistan Commentary, <https://kurdistancommentary.wordpress.com/2011/03/02/runaway-to-nowhere/>

²⁹¹ Ibid.

important illustration has been the paper she presented in ‘The Forum of Kurdish Novel in Bahdinan’ (2012) in Duhok emphasizing that although many Kurdish writers have attempted to focus in their works on the Kurdish mass-exodus from Kurdish cities and towns in Iraq to the frozen mountains on the Turkish and Iranian borders, no one has concentrated on the interior sentiments and pains of Kurdish women during such difficult situations.

Like Balata, Niheli, born in 1987 in Duhok, aims to depict the historical experiences of conflicts and wars of the Kurds in Iraq and their struggle to assert their national and cultural identity. Niheli is the very first woman writer in Bahdinan to produce a novel written in the Kurdish language and has received much recognition and awards from the local literary and feminist institutions and agencies for her book. She has published a number of poems and short stories in the local magazines and newspapers. Niheli’s first and only novel *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One, 2013 and its second part, published in 2014, with the same title, expresses her sense of responsibility to record the atrocities exerted against her nation throughout their recent history. Written in Bahdini, both parts reflect women’s historical participation in the Kurdish national struggle alongside men.

In an interview with *Evro* daily newspaper, Niheli compares Hizar, the female protagonist in both parts, to Layla Qasim and Layla Zana in terms of her persistent and tireless struggle for the creation of a liberated and independent Kurdish state.²⁹² Like Balata, Niheli interweaves themes of historical and national struggle with questions of gender roles and women’s participation in the Kurdish national struggle. Although, unlike Balata, Niheli has not been involved personally in most of the historical events she has depicted in her novel, she indicates that she is still a part of a world torn by wars, displacement and political struggles.²⁹³ She adds that her family, like most Kurdish families has lost more than one member because of their participation in the Kurdish national cause, has been displaced more than once even before she was born and has witnessed fear, hunger and persecution.²⁹⁴

By incorporating feminist issues of social inequality, domestic abuse, violence against women, and women’s socio-political activism into broader questions of nationalism and national struggle for liberation, the novels selected here affirm the significant and problematic interplay between feminism and nationalism in the Kurdish society. Adopting this interplay throughout, the writers give a national

²⁹² Layla Zana is the wife of Mehdi Zana (1991-present), mayor of Diyarbakır and the first Kurdish woman in the Turkish parliament. She is very well-known for her support and contributions to the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

²⁹³ Sindis Niheli, 14 November 2016, Personal Interview.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

sense and meaning to characters' personal experiences. For example, many readers may see *Runaway to Nowhere* as the love story between Nareen and Karwan, but in the preface to the novel, Balata identifies the national dimension of her work by confirming that "their love story crosses the path of the first Gulf war and all the subsequent events."²⁹⁵ Similarly, in *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One, Hizar's identity as a woman within the patriarchally-inscribed Kurdish society is simultaneously portrayed through her identity as a Kurdish political and national activist. Her mother believes that no matter what position she holds in the political sphere, or what might be the national situation of the country, Hizar is still defined as a *woman* and should comply with the Kurdish society's definitions and expectations. On one important occasion, her mother throws some drops of ink on a white cloth and asks her to clean it. The drops do not clean and Hizar is told:

My daughter, we, women, are like this cloth, white and clean. It is gossip and rumours that dirty our reputation, whether they are true or not. Trust me; even if gossips around a woman don't kill her, they are enough to make her unworthy and unwanted.²⁹⁶

Niheli's representation of Hizar indicates the way personal and political aspects are conflated in the Kurdish context. Hizar embodies the strong personality and high morality of the Kurdish woman. She is a very respectful woman who, despite being in-love with Ako and living and studying in a Western country, continues to hold to the religious and traditional manners of her Kurdish society and cares most about her reputation and image as a woman. Additionally, her commitment to national and political activism highlights Kurdish women's political role and determination in fighting the enemy during the time of war and fighting such issues as corruption, illiteracy and violence against women in the post-conflict society.²⁹⁷

Accordingly, both novels depict feminist themes alongside the broader questions of Kurdish social norms and national struggle. Taking this interrelation between Kurdish women's issues and social and national questions throughout, the chapter explores the ways in which Balata and Niheli, as Kurdish women writers, represent marginalized cultures of silenced groups in times of both conflict and peace in their works and produce for the first time in Bahdini literature a feminist sense of representation

²⁹⁵ Qasham Balata, *Runaway to Nowhere* (USA: American Publishing House, 2010), 11. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses).

²⁹⁶ Sindis Niheli, *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One (Duhok: Khani Press, 2013), 121-22. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses). All English in-text quotations from this work are my own translation and will be annotated throughout the thesis with the original corresponding passages from the Kurdish (Bahdini) text.

کچا من، ئه‌ها ئهم ژن وه‌کی فی پاته‌ی د سپی و پاقرین. لێ ناخفتن و گوتگوتک مروفی ده‌تکینن، قیچا چه‌ ئه‌ف گوتنه راست بن یان زی ژبی به‌ختی و به‌دبه‌ختیا ژنی بن، یا گرنه‌گ من بو ته‌ گوت.

²⁹⁷ Sindis Niheli, 14 November 2016, Personal Interview.

through paying attention to the experiences of various characters that stand for the majority of Kurdish women in society. By adopting the theories and critical arguments of such transnational feminists as Felski, Mojab, Bolaki, Begikhani and others, I investigate the ways the literary imagination of women writers is transformed into critical knowledge to deal with the interlocking system of sex and ethnicity oppression. The writers under investigation here problematize the tradition-bound image of women by creating counter-public discourses that accommodate their socio-political roles and participations. Exploring these key issues, the chapter answers such questions as how is the interplay between Kurdish nationalism and female political participation represented in the Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan? How do Balata and Niheli portray women's oppression? How do the social and historical contexts shape women's transformation? And by exploring their socio-political roles as portrayed in the two novels, how is women's resilience represented? It is important to mention that these questions are now urgently on the agendas of scholars from contexts as diverse as war and peace studies and both the cultural and literary domains of Kurdish studies.

3.1. Women and Violence in the Kurdish Conflict Zone: Nareen and Hizar Facing War Aggression

Forms of violence against women vary according to the circumstances in which they occur. War and peace are two different contexts in which violence against women is practiced. War and armed conflicts turn women of the enemy into direct targets of such brutal war-related acts as deportation, mass-rape, emotional and bodily abuse and mass-murder throughout the conflict-zone.²⁹⁸ For almost a decade, Kurdish women in this conflict zone were exposed to both an internal war waged by the patriarchal society and an external war aimed at the suppression and elimination of the Kurdish national and cultural identity by the Iraqi regime. On the internal level, they were subjected to various forms of domestic abuse, forced marriages, polygamy, sexual violence, honour-killing and a gendered division of labour. Moreover, as a part of the Kurdish nation, women were exposed to systematic acts of genocide and ethnic, cultural and linguistic assimilation.

²⁹⁸ In 1987 Saddam Hussein feared the collaboration of the joint Kurdish forces (KDP and PUK) with Iran to which he responded by appointing his cousin Hassan Ali Al-Majid. Al-Majid was given absolute power and command over all "intelligence agencies, including military intelligence (al-Istikhbarat), and all domestic security forces, including the Popular Army Command (Qiyadat al-Jaysh al-Sha'bi) and the military commands in the northern region" (Yildiz, 2004, 25-26). He commenced his military administration by creating a war-zone that was by 1989 thirty kilometers wide, including most of the strategic Kurdish towns and villages. He started a series of operations of Kurdish village mass-destruction, relocation and ethnic cleansing.

Runaway to Nowhere and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One present many references to these forms of oppression as well as to characters' growing tactics of resistance and survival. Their experiences are dramatized against the background of a destructive war. *Runaway to Nowhere* presents, in a combination of first and third-person narration, the story of Nareen's development from a simple woman having no control over her life and decisions to a mature woman with a good degree of freedom and independence unavailable to most women in the Kurdish society of the nineties. An effective critical explication of the novel needs to follow the two principal story-lines: Nareen's physical journey towards the Turkish borders prompted by her urge to survive and save her brother and her emotional journey represented by her transformation from a state of passivity and submission to a state of resistance and activism. Nareen, who becomes the reluctant chronicler of this mass exodus' to the mountains tells of the way Kurdish people have to wait and contemplate fluctuating political circumstances as they suffer economic sanctions, threats of wars and progressing dangerous air raids of the Iraqi military. Nareen's detailed chronicle of the outbreak and collapse of the Kurdish 1990 Uprising and the deteriorating conditions of the Kurdish people running for their lives is accompanied by a close description of her love to Karwan and the way they are separated as Karwan chooses to stay and defend the city against the Iraqi army. Once in the refugee camp, Nareen befriends a number of women whose solidarity soon becomes a form of resistance signified by their refusal to succumb to destructive forces most prominently the discriminative authority of the men in their families. Although she loses Karwan, who is killed by the Iraqi army, Nareen's experiences in the camp inspires her to commit to social activism as she works, by the end of the novel, in a centre for women's advancement and protection.

Nareen is naturally defiant and refuses to be defined according to the set standards and expectations of a gendered community. She is also headstrong and is determined to make changes even in the most difficult moments of her life. An important illustration of her strength and determination occurs on her journey to the Turkish borders. In the middle of chaos and fear, Nareen comes upon a three old year child left with a blanket and a piece of bread under a tree. Nareen, already burdened by her little brother, decides not to leave him:

How will I leave this boy alone in the mountains? There is no way I could do that. How will I be able to stand in the classroom and talk about principles and values? How I will be able to look Karwan in the eyes? Will I be able to ever feel love again? ... What example am I setting for my brother who will witness my crime? Will he ever trust me again? (159)

Nareen's developmental process assumes central importance in the text from the very start. The opening paragraph of *Runaway to Nowhere* situates the reader in a very specific place and time: room number 4, University of Mosul, January of 1991. The narrative begins with worries of the up-coming war as Saddam Hussein has invaded Kuwait and is threatened with a great war by the Coalition Forces if he refuses to withdraw. Expressing her fear of the devastating effects of war on people, Nareen tells her four female friends who share room number 4 in a student hostel on the university campus about her previous experiences of war. She is sorry to have to stop her studies again and especially in the final year. Nareen narrates how she had to leave school in 1974 during the Kurdish Revolution against Baghdad when she was only six years old. Taking mountains as the only shelters from air raids, Nareen describes how they had to stay for whole days and nights with no food or drinks or medicines. She emphasizes the importance of literacy even in times of war by adding that the teacher "would gather all of the school age children and teach us...the alphabet and some numbers orally because there were no books or notebooks" (34).

Choosing to tell the story from different perspectives and points of view, Balata's novel presents a vivid criticism of the social aspects concerning different women's subordinate roles, the strict codes of behavior imposed on them and their limited freedom and independence. The simple act of visiting a friend or a relative may raise serious parental concerns and investigations. Balata shows that "in Kurdish culture, girls go out when there is a reason, for example to see a doctor and are occasionally allowed to visit friends and relatives by themselves so as not to disregard all rules of decent behavior" (94). On one important occasion, Nareen ignores her mother's orders and decides to visit her friend Bafreen. Coming home she is met face-to-face with her father's anger and retribution. Defending her rights, Nareen says, "I am twenty-three years old, and I will graduate from college this year" (96). She is responded to with a very painful fact about her identity when her father tells her that she is 'still a woman' and that he "didn't send her to college so she can do whatever [she] thinks is right" (96). Despite his relative open mindedness, Nareen's father holds on to the Kurdish ideology in which masculinity is superior to femininity: "The father and daughter loved each other intensely. Even though they were close, one thing that always upset Nareen was when her father used to tell her that he wished she were a boy" (46). After giving birth to Nareen, her mother couldn't have a second baby for more than fifteen years despite all efforts and medical help, which made her mother-in-law, encourage her son to take a second wife so he could have a son. After years of constant quarrels over the subject, Nareen's mother gave birth to Salih. In the Kurdish society, it is the son who holds the name and

dignity of the family while the daughter is merely seen as the property of other people because she goes to live with her husband's family after marriage. Nareen is aware of this gender dichotomy even though she does not believe in it. This is exemplified by her intense efforts to keep her brother safe in the journey to the Turkish borders:

God, I can't do anything. I'm sick, tired, and starving, but you are God. You can do anything, and you know everything. You know how precious Salih is to my parents. Please, help me to take him safely to them. (153)

While Nareen's father has never been to school himself, he believes in the importance of education and is happy to send Nareen to the university even though she has to live in a different city despite his apparent support of the Kurdish traditional social norms and values. Unlike Nareen, Aishe, her neighbour and friend, has never been sent to school because her father believes a woman's place is in the home, whether her father's or husband's. Aishe's father represents the typical cruel patriarch of Kurdish society: "[He] ruled his family like a dictator and whatever he said, the others had to agree. Aishe was not a happy person because of the way her father treated her" (62).

A key element in the depiction of Nareen and the other female characters is the need to expose and eradicate the social restrictions imposed on them by the patriarchal ideology of the society. In her tireless search for self-recognition, Nareen tries to establish the impossible balance between her own desires and society's expectations of her as a female. She rhetorically asks Aishe, "[C]ouldn't I be in love and respect the tradition of our society at the same time?" (64) Nareen, who technically embodies the narrative voice in the novel and whose point of view implies Balata's own apparent authorial point of view, argues for the existence and identity of the woman as separate from the man. In defending her aunt Amina's right to get a divorce from her husband who has taken a second wife, Nareen confirms that her aunt "is still a complete human being with or without her husband. She is a good person and mother, and her husband will never make her a better mother or human being" (80). The lives of women in Kurdish society are highly affected by such cultural practices as polygamy, arranged marriages and exchange marriages in which a man gives his sister, daughter or any woman in the family to another man as a wife in exchange for another woman from that man's family. These practices systematically support and underline men's superiority and control over women.

In his analysis of the social themes in *Runway to Nowhere*, Hitto suggests that, writing from a female perspective, Balata "surveys all the negative aspects of the Kurdish society trying to show the multi-

dimensional impacts of patriarchal traditions and values on the lives of women.”²⁹⁹ While strongly disapproving her husband’s act of polygamy, Amina, like most Kurdish women, realizes the patriarchal forces that dominate the Kurdish society and the many cultural and economic barriers to women’s self-reliance. Thinking of the unpleasantness of the situation, Nareen asks why an eighteen-year old girl will marry a married man with four children. Amina replies, “[b]ecause of money. Her parents practically sold her; they took a big dowry” (54). Throughout the text, we see Nareen disapproving of such acts of inhumanity and oppression. One of her most important moments is refusing to marry Saman, her aunt Saffe’s rich brother-in-law, saying “No, I can’t marry this way. I am sorry, Aunt Saffe” (78).

Kurdish women’s entrapment in confining roles takes a more political shape in Niheli’s text. Although the text is more concerned with the direct implications of war and its physical and psychological effects on women, it nevertheless makes many references to the ways women have been oppressed inside the Kurdish communities. Living in a state of semi-feudalism in rural areas and strongly influenced by long-established customs, Kurdish people increasingly believe in the importance of marriage as a production power, especially at a young age. Despite her prominent position within the political sphere, Hizar is always judged by her gender and is constantly reminded of her limitations as a woman, even by her family and friends. For example, her friend Shavin, who has herself experienced gender inequality insists that all her work and struggle are not as important as marrying: “You are working so hard for the national cause and an independent Kurdish State that you are forgetting yourself and Ako. You are thirty-nine and are waiting for the Kurdish State as your dowry” (175).³⁰⁰ Shavin had been married to A’uni for seven years, and had a little daughter, when he was seriously wounded in the Kurdish civil war between KDP and PUK (explained in Chapter Two). Although he was sent abroad for treatment and stayed more than a year, he ended with a physical handicap, namely an inability to have sex. Despite his permanent handicap and terrible psychological state, Shavin still loved him and has promised to stay committed to him forever. A’uni, however, couldn’t live with his condition and committed suicide. This news was worsened by a letter he left for Shavin in which he told her that he had divorced her sometime before his injury and that he had been having an affair with

²⁹⁹ Hitto, *Novel is the Mirror of Life*, 306.

³⁰⁰ دمو له ت بون ته هوسا كریه پشتینی خو، نهفه ژبی ته سیه ونهه ساله و هیشتا كچی، ته مزگینیا دمو له تون کریه مههرا خو.

another woman during the civil war. Shavin says the news was like a shock: “I was paralyzed. When I woke up, I was on a hospital bed, the same bed he died on three days before” (180).³⁰¹

With a particular effort of historical imagination, Niheli’s text embodies the undocumented experiences of Kurdish women and calls into question the national and cultural concerns of an entire nation torn by years of forced divisions, wars, and policies of assimilation. Conflating historical and autobiographical facts, Niheli describes the growth and experiences of a young Kurdish woman whose life is directly affected by her people’s struggle for national liberation at a very early age. Told through not only Hizar’s voice, but also that of Ako the Peshmerga, her lover, Shavin, her friend as well as an unknown narrator, the novel traces Hizar’s experiences that encompass the horrible events of the Anfal campaigns, the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurdish popular Uprising, the creation of a de facto Kurdish state in the north of Iraq, the Kurdish civil war between the dominant political parties, and their later reunification.

The narrative opens at an unspecified point during the Anfal campaigns with images of people leaving their homes to escape the growing Iraqi air raids. While Niheli makes visual use of imagery to open the novel, she tends mainly to employ imagery in a way that invites reading it symbolically. Most of these images evoke sensory experiences associated with fear, destruction, and death; familiar aspects of war. For example, in one of the opening passages, we are told that:

Streets and valleys were soon filled with people. Tanks and mountain guns began to fire. The smock from burning villages, mountains, and crops turned our day into a dark night. The smell of burning human flesh soon mingled with the smells of blood and gunpowder. (9-10)³⁰²

With this opening scene, Niheli introduces Rizgar, one of Hizar’s relatives, who has just recently lost his wife, trying to save his mother, four sisters and little child. The situation is worsened by the intensity of bombing and his child’s death from hunger. We soon realize that these images are haunting Hizar’s mind as the scene shifts to Hizar, currently a political activist studying in the US and working at a Kurdish radio station called *Khin* (Blood). She is on her way with Ako, going to a governmental institution to invite some diplomats and officials to the public discussion of her doctoral thesis. This eloquent juxtaposition of past and present events is one of the defining features of the text and the book clearly follows this structural line through its focus on Hizar as a victim of war and

³⁰¹ ئەز هەشک بووم. دەمەکی من چاڤین خۆ ڤه‌کرن، ئەزا ل سەر وی تەختی نەخوشخانە ئەوی بەری سێ رۆژا وی گیانەوری ل سەر گیانە خۆ یی پێس دەستدای، ژ

³⁰² جاده وگه‌ له‌ ژي پري مروف دبوون. تانك و زري پوش وتوپين چيا كه‌ فته‌ كاري. دوكتيلا سوتنا گوتد وده‌ شت و گه‌ نم و دكاكي، رۆژا نيفرو كره‌ شه‌ فستانه‌ كا تاري. بيه‌نا سوتنا گو شتی مروفان، د گه‌ ل بيه‌نا خوينی و باروتی تیکه‌ ل بوون.

political conflicts (past) and a political activist (present). Niheli's identification with the turmoil of her nation becomes evident throughout the novel and Hizar, who devotes her entire life to the national cause of her people, is a clear embodiment of such identification. She is exposed to various levels of oppression before and after her involvement in the national movement. In a seminar she presents in Washington at the request of some diplomats to define Kurdish nationalism, she confirms that her personal story is the story of Kurdish oppression as well as Kurdish resistance. Describing the Anfal campaigns, Hizar says:

I was only fourteen when the Iraqi forces attacked us. They gathered us all in a field...killed men with rocks that smashed their heads...rivers of blood started running... Women and girls started screaming...The forces separated women from men and pulled them into military trucks... As I watched through the window, I saw my fiancé Nazi, handcuffed, being beaten to death by two security policemen. (60-61)³⁰³

Images of brutal atrocities practiced against Kurdish women are repeated throughout the text as they become direct targets of the Ba'ath military forces. Most important among these is Niheli's graphic use 'rivers of blood,' an image that defines the bloody history of the Kurds and their struggle for national independence. In addition to its wide association with religious sacrifice and association with race and kinship in many contexts around the world, including the Kurdish context, blood as a symbol, evokes images of death, war and destruction. Although it is not easy to trace the employment of blood as a symbol of war and death in the Kurdish literary tradition, given the nature of Kurdish historical and national experiences, it can be safely argued that blood frequently appears in Kurdish poetry and other forms of literature. It is important that in both the parts of *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life* (the second part will be dealt with in the fifth chapter), blood appears very often and in such phrases as 'rivers of blood,' 'watered their land with blood,' and 'smell of blood and gunpowder' to symbolize the aggression and extremity of the military attacks of the Iraqi forces.

Most important, as the above passage indicates, the war in Kurdistan defies the conventional spaces of the "gendered dichotomized" roles of war with men at the front and women safely at home. Unlike most narratives that depict war as a central theme, Niheli does not need to connect the war fronts with the home as the war zone is the characters' very homes and villages. Accordingly, Kurdish women as well as men were victims to cruel State-sponsored operations of genocide and ethnic cleansing. As the

³⁰³ وی دەمی ژیی من چارده سالبوون... رژیمی ب سەر مه دا گرت... ل گورمیانا کهلهها ههلامهتا ب داس و بفران کومقهکرین... زهلام دانهمر بلوکان. کوشتن، سهرین وان ههershاندن... ریبارین خوینی دبن دههگهها دا چون... کچان سینگی خو بی سیزده سالی فهفوتان... مینا پهزئ سپی ژیک چهرت کرین و کچ و ژن ژی جارها دی داینه بهر قامچیان کرینه د زیلین لهشکری دا... دبن پاتهی را و د پهنجههکا بجیکا زیلی دا من دیت، نازی بی کور خالی من دهستین وی پشتیقه دکهلامچه کرینه، دوو پولیسین نهمنی ددهنه بهر شهق و بینا.

narrative goes on, more and more images of the horrible atrocities of the Ba'athist regime during the Anfal campaign are illustrated. Women, who were pulled into military trucks, were taken to concentration camps miles away from their original towns and villages. Having some nursing experience, Hizar volunteers to help the survivors of the chemical weapons. The images are terrifying:

Oh. Most of them were blind. Some have lost parts of their bodies. Cries of pains from burns of mustard gas and cyanide reached the sky... A pregnant woman died in front of my eyes and I saw her baby's movement stopping inside her belly... I was ordered to inject two little very sick boys but they couldn't make it. Then I realized the injections were poisonous...when I refused to give more, an officer started beating me with his belt. (65-67)³⁰⁴

The narrative delivers concrete instances of the ways women were exposed to verbal and physical abuse. In one instance, Hizar describes how the Iraqi forces “would walk around the piles of women and choose some. Then, they would undress them and sexually violate them in front of the rest of us and they would even film their monstrous atrocities” (68).³⁰⁵ Describing her experiences during an investigation by an Iraqi officer years later, Hizar cries as she remembers the way she was beaten and threatened with rape if she did not give information about her fellow activists. When some guests ask her how it was that she could survive the experience, she becomes traumatized and leaves the hall. Ako continues the seminar and starts with an apology:

Please forgive her. Her burden is very heavy and much beyond her powers. She fights on behalf of forty million Kurds. She struggles to gather the fragmented pieces of her nation. She wants to dry the tears from her mother's eyes and stop the bloodshed from her heart. She hopes to bring a smile back into her mother's lips. (80)³⁰⁶

Because of the very brutal methods employed by the Ba'ath secret police and security officers during investigations, the memories of her days in prison keep haunting Hizar. The far-reaching implications of imprisonment for the Kurdish people are evident in the fact that these institutions were the first targets of the Kurdish rebellions during their national Uprising:

There was no more fear. Everyone participated. We entered the Iraqi security building...the walls were all covered with blood and human flesh hung from the ceilings. But these were familiar

³⁰⁴ ناخ ناخ پتريا في خلكي ل فيهرى د كوره بوون و هندازى نهدامين لمشى خو ژ دستدابوون. ناله نالين وان و نيش و نازارين وان ژيهر لمشى وانى سوتى ژ گاذا (خبردهل و سيانيد) نهمان كوندكرن. دستين من دلهرين ژ ترسدا، من بو دوو زاروكان دهرى دانان. همتا گه هشتيمه وئ بريندارا ژن، همدوو زاروكان گيانى خو ژ دست دان، هوسا دياربوو، نمو دهرزيين ژههرى بوون، نه يين چارسهرى. بو جارا دووئ نمو كمتنه ناف گرتيان، ب حميزهرانين خو جارهما دى ژنين جوان ژيكرتن و پيش چاقين مه رويس كرن و كريتكرن، يارى ب سينگى ³⁰⁵ كچين همرهكار دكر و مه ب چاف و وان ب كاميره نمف ديمانه وينه دكرن.

نه ب دستى وئ يه و بارى وئ گران دببت. پيما (چل مليون) بى گونه هان دستين وئ دايه و دقيت بگه هينيت. همى مالا خو يا پرت و به لاف ³⁰⁶ سفرهكى كوم فه بكم. روبيارين روندكا ژ چاف، چكين خوئنى ژ دلى دهيكه خو ب راوستينيت و لنقين وئ يين قهشاقى ب گرنژينهكى ب نه سمر ل خشينيت.

images to me since I had been into such places. I had seen people being beaten, whipped, tortured, and executed. (106)³⁰⁷

Hizar, however, is not the only character in the novel who suffers from painful memories of wars, imprisonment and torture. For example, despite his attempts to repress the horrific experiences of war, Tangazar, Hizar's friend, still undergoes long periods of psychological distortions in which he refuses to see or talk to anyone. He tells Hizar:

Days and nights of continuous wars, many people were killed, many were injured and many were imprisoned... Women who were only seventeen to twenty-five-year-old were irresponsibly abused and raped. The open fields were replete with women's blood. Acid was thrown all over their bodies. On that morning I ran away thinking of the mass killing of my mother, my wife and sisters. (197)³⁰⁸

Accordingly, descriptions of the Kurdish conflict zone, like many contemporary zones of ethnic-nationalist conflict in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, resist the traditional outlines of conflict zones. Armed conflicts in the militarized Kurdish areas can be defined in relation to Giles and Hyndman's formulation of a conflict zone whereby they assert that:

Notions of what constitutes a conflict zone are similarly outdated. The idea that (feminized) civilian and (masculinized) military spaces are distinct and separate no longer holds. Civilian homes may be technically out of bounds according to rules of war, specifically the Geneva Conventions, but in practice they are often targets. Noncombatants are supposed to be safeguarded from war, with fighting duties assigned toward soldiers, yet civilians compose the vast majority of casualties in current conflicts.³⁰⁹

Unlike *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One*, which portrays the protagonist's and other characters' experiences through the Anfal campaigns and all the following wars and armed conflicts until some point after the intra-Kurdish war in 1994 and Iraqi-Kurdish reunification in 2005 (explained in the second chapter), *Runaway to Nowhere* focuses almost entirely on Nareen's experiences during the Kurdish popular Uprising and their subsequent mass-exodus. In addition to the various forms of armed conflicts affecting women depicted in *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One*, Balata's text depicts Nareen and her female friends and relatives exposed to diverse forms of oppression from the patriarchal Kurdish community such as forced marriages, domestic abuse and physical violence. Oppression and violence become more overt during Nareen's journey from Duhok, her home city,

³⁰⁷ ترس نهما، چونه ناڤ بارهگایی نهمی دا. دیوارین نهمی ههمی خۆین بوون، پارچین گوشتی مروفا بانئ وئ فه هسکیبونه، لی بومن نشتهکی سهیر نهبوو، ژبهرکوو روژانه نهم دیمهه من ب چاقین خۆ دیتن، دهمی زیندانی نهمکنجهدان، دانه بهر قامچیا، چپک و قزکین خۆینی دچونه بانئ و هه چار دیوارا

شه ف و روژ شه ر دژوار بوو، شه هید که فتن، بریندار بونه گرزیت دارا لسه ر نیک. دیل زوربون. کریارا زاینده ی دگه ل چه ندین کچ و ژنا کرن.³⁰⁸ سانسوری لسه ر هه بت. ده شتا میستان بو ده ریایی خوینا ژنان. پاشی تیزاب ب گیانی وان یی هه فده هه تا بیست وپنج بهاری کرن. هه ر ژ وئ بی سپدی نه ز ره فیم، من ههرا کوشتنه کا ب کوم بوده یک و هه قزین و خویشکین خو کر!

³⁰⁹ Giles and Hyndman, eds. *Sites of Violence*, 5.

towards the frozen Turkish borders and in the concentration camps established to contain the refugees. As people started leaving their homes fearing the possible chemical attacks by the Iraqi army, Nareen and her family had to leave on foot until they were some miles away when they came upon a truck carrying people. At this point, Nareen's life takes a new turn when she is separated, together with her six-year old brother Salih, from her parents as the kids make it into the truck while their parents do not. Realizing there is no point waiting for her parents on the roads, Nareen decides to follow the crowd along the path to the refugee camps along the Turkish border. Their way through the wilderness and mountains is a crucial test for Nareen, who suffers with her brother from cold, hunger, exhaustion, and illnesses. The narration provides many images explaining this massive ordeal:

The people walking to the Turkish border were exhausted, hopeless, and miserable. Everybody looked aged...many people were holding sick and elderly relations on their backs and were sweating under their loads. The blind and the crippled were falling down. (244)

The representation of mass-killing, displacement and suffering in the above passages resonate with striking instances and depictions of the Anfal Campaigns and the Kurdish mass-exodus in a number of Kurdish novels in Bahdinan including Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Hassan Ibrahim's *Evin u Anfal* (Aveen and Anfal, 2010) and Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep: Coming of Age in Kurdistan* (2013) written in English and published in Duhok. Mustafa's novel tracks the process of maturation of Hamko, who, like Nareen, is forced to leave university and his beloved after the Gulf War and the extinguishing of the Kurds' 1991 Uprising and join the Kurdish crowds in their escape to the refugee camps in Turkey. Like Balata and Niheli, Gharbi presents prolific and detailed descriptions of Hamko's journey toward the Turkish border and the miseries of thousands of Kurds running hopelessly for their lives with no help:

The flood of refugees into Turkey had been so sudden that no international humanitarian aid was yet available in this forgotten part of the world...no tents and no food supplies...hundreds of people died each day, especially the elderly, infants, and young children, from malnutrition, disease, and exposure.³¹⁰

Hunger, cold and sickness are, thus, some of the familiar images repeated in all the novels that portray Kurdish mass-exodus to evoke the suffering of the people on their way to escape the attacks and air raids of the Iraqi military forces. After capturing Nareen's journey towards the Turkish mountains in detail, the narrative moves to detailed descriptions of the camp itself. The camp is sprawled across the

³¹⁰ Gharbi Mustafa, *When Mountains Weep: Coming of Age in Kurdistan* (Duhok, Gharbi Mustafa, 2013), 149.

valley with nearly 200,000 tents laid out in chaotic grids to house the Kurds in their mass-exodus. Once arriving at the camp, Nareen notices that the conditions are no better than on the roads as “people were desperate with sickness and many were close to death” (178). In the camp “the smell of diarrhea has filled the air” (178). Survival and death become the controlling forces that occupy Nareen’s thoughts. We are told that “every morning the moans of women crying for their children were the first sounds heard in the camp” (184). Living these terrible images, spending days and nights in the open freezing wilderness, walking in rain and snow with her sick brother on her back, Nareen’s eyes are opened to a new recognition about life, about the world and most importantly about herself. Against the horrible images of sickness and death, we hear words such as love, strength, and survival. Nareen, who remembers Karwan telling her “life is never easy and we have to work hard to survive” (154), uses love as a way to escape her harsh reality. Like Hizar and Ako in Niheli’s text, Nareen finds in love the shelter that protects her from war and its devastating effects, and the motivation to go on. Whenever in trouble, cold, hungry, or tired, she remembers Karwan asking her to “be strong and work according to the situation and she will say to herself, I promise you Karwan I will stay strong” (138). This determination to stay strong and survive is a pivotal stage in Nareen’s as well as Hizar’s personal experiences and growth.

In addition to discussing Balata and Niheli’s attempt to develop stories that depict the developmental trajectories of female characters in relation to Felski’s definition of feminist Bildungsroman (in a following section), these texts can be appropriately studied in line with Stella Bolaki’s argument of the ‘mixed genre’ approaches used in contemporary texts from different ethnic traditions in America such as Chicano, Asian-American, African American, and Afro-Caribbean. Bolaki investigates the possibilities for which the Bildungsroman can be used to “expose the traumas of a colonial education by decolonizing the self, or to illustrate the process of coming to voice for marginalized individuals and larger groups.”³¹¹ Discussing the genre’s basic element of the process of maturation, Bolaki indicates that:

The genre’s movement from the uncertainty of youth to the power of maturity is often used to buttress Western ideas of progress and, as a result, more complex trajectories become assimilated into the familiar plot of generational conflict that the coming-of-age genre tries to resolve.³¹²

³¹¹ Stella Bolaki, *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women’s Fiction* (New York, Amsterdam, 2011), 11.

³¹² Bolaki, *Unsettling the Bildungsroman*, 12.

Most importantly, Bolaki illustrates the intersection of the coming-out story or the Bildungsroman with the 'life-writing' forms and narratives that cannot fit easily within its definition such as narratives of trauma, illness, death, marginality and enforced silence. Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* offers the notes and perceptions of a subject not only caught by forces of a destructive war that threatens her physical safety, but a female subject caught in a terribly male-defined environment. In the camp, Nareen meets and befriends a number of women whose family members share values that promote patriarchal beliefs. An important stereotypical example is Shukria whose baby dies like hundreds of other babies from cold, hunger and diseases. Two days after her baby's death, Nareen hears loud screams and the sounds of fists coming from inside Shukria's tent. It is her father-in-law, Ibrahim, beating her because she has told him that her baby's death is his fault. As a food representative, Ibrahim keeps stealing food and selling it for money. Shukria tells him to his face that he is a sinner and God is punishing their family by taking the soul of her baby. Though Shukria's husband disapproves of his father's acts, he can't stop him because in Kurdish society the older man represents the supreme authority in the family and his actions and decisions are not to be refused or even questioned.

Another important example is Mayan, Nareen's other neighbor. Missing her parents, Nareen asks Mayan whether she misses her parents too. Married for almost a year and a half, Mayan replies by saying that her mother passed away four years ago and that she hates her father so she doesn't care about him. Nareen doesn't question Mayan's judgment, knowing that her father has forced her into a sad unhealthy marriage to an old man in exchange for that man's daughter: "My stepmother is my husband's daughter. I married her father, and she married my father. I'm eighteen-years old and my husband is forty-eight. My stepmother is seventeen and my father is fifty-one" (181).

Mayan's exchange marriage, very frequent in the Kurdish society, shows to what extent such a marriage can destroy a woman's dreams of love and happy living. She describes how miserable her married life is and how "ever since the first day, any time [my husband] touches me, I think of my father. And then, I become sick and throw up" (188). Mayan, of course, doesn't consider divorce because it is traditional in exchange marriages that if she divorces, her father will have to divorce his wife as well. Nareen feels very sad and angry for Mayan and wishes there was something she could do for her. These experiences enhance Nareen's awakening and understanding of the subordinate positions of women in Kurdish society and strengthen her disapproval of such acts of oppression and inhumanity. By representing Kurdish women in such difficult moments, Balata not only endeavours to show the miseries and atrocities imposed on them, but the way they struggle to survive these situations

through bonding, coming together and supporting each other. She confirms the importance of representing detailed pictures of women going through wars, escapes, family tragedies, loss of friends and family members, and loss of love and future prospects. She also believes it is important to show how Kurdish women refuse to give up and decide to move on and make the best of what they already have while not giving up their broader goals, their concerns regarding their subjectivity and contribution to nation-building, conflict resolution and peace-preservation.³¹³

Depicting war and armed conflicts through the perspective of women, the two novels portray gender roles in times of war and displacement. By 1987, Kurdish women, who have historically been involved in the Kurdish national movement, became the direct targets of the Ba'ath military operations. The Anfal campaigns and the following events represented dangerous turning points for them as their roles were no longer restricted to the struggle to survive war and sanctions or mourn the prisoners or the dead. The complex blurring of borders between home and front in conflicted zones is well described by Giles and Hyndman who argue that throughout much of the world, where war and battlefronts used to be quite separated from people's homes, now war is increasingly waged on civilian women, men, and children:

In every militarized society, war zone, refugee camp, violence against women and men is part of a broader continuum of violence that transcends the simple diplomatic dichotomy of war and peace... While "home" was once demarcated as a "private" space beyond the purview of public responsibility, violence perpetrated at home is increasingly understood as part of broader social, political, and economic processes that are embodied in state policies, public institutions, and the global economy.³¹⁴

In the "militarized society" of Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish women were regarded as dissidents that needed to be eliminated. They were always active participants of the Kurdish national struggle against the Iraqi governments and their homes were usually transformed into battlefronts where they were exposed to direct armed conflicts. According to Giles and Hyndman, feminist analysis of gender in conflict situations addresses "the politics of social and economic disparities and explore possibilities for changing power imbalances that include gender relations."³¹⁵ Hence, through linking sites of war and peace, *Runaway to Nowhere* and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One* maintain that strategies for conflict resolution and peace-building cannot be implemented until an understanding of the gendered politics that perpetuate and administrate violence is provided.

³¹³ Balata, 17 November 2016, Personal Interview.

³¹⁴ Giles and Hyndman, *Sites of Violence*, 3-4.

³¹⁵ Giles and Hyndman, *Sites of Violence*, 4.

3.2. Nationalism and Female Participation in the Conflicted Kurdish Context

After attaining a form of national liberation, Kurdish women activists, both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, have been advocating women's social and political rights. *Runaway to Nowhere* pictures a number of women engaged in the creation of counter discourses that allow them to claim such rights and participate in post-war reconstruction projects. What collectively characterizes these women is that they have extensive political backgrounds acquired through years of political tension and armed conflicts which have strengthened their determination to contribute to processes of nation building and peace preservation. Returning home from the refugee camps at the end of the novel, Nareen and her friends realize they "will never be the same persons after all [they] have experienced" (263). Although war is over and a Kurdish safe haven is announced and even a de facto Kurdish state is being established, they realize all too well that Kurdish women, accustomed to being politically and economically subjected in both times of war and peace, need to organize against their double bind situation. Gathered together nine years after the war, Nareen describes how not only she and her friends have been able to survive the tragic wars and exodus, but also how they are helping other women in the *Kurdish Women's Center* in Duhok. The organization is directed by Nareen's friend Buhar who has spent eight years in the US, worked hard and got a PhD in sociology. Very proud of her work in the Center, Nareen tells her friends that "we help women who need help, we teach them literacy, and we help them with their legal rights, health issues, and employment" (264). Similarly, her friend Jihan works for UNICEF and seems very enthusiastic about it: "My work for UNICEF in Duhok makes me feel good. I feel I'm doing something for my children who died in the camp by helping other children" (264).

While Nareen and her friends provide a case of Kurdish women working inside Kurdistan, *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One pictures a case where a diasporic woman has become an effective part of the mechanisms of state-building and post-war reconstruction projects.³¹⁶ Hizar's case echoes Mojab and Gorman's description of Kurdish women's lives as a seamless struggle that is "not bounded to a particular location, therefore it could be simultaneously local, national, and transnational."³¹⁷ The story of her life and activism embodies the national, international, and transnational dimensions of the

³¹⁶ Kurdish Diaspora in Europe and the role played by women activists and women's organizations will be discussed in details in a separate chapter.

³¹⁷ Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman, "Dispersed Nationalism: War, Diaspora and Kurdish Women's Organizing," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3:1 (Winter, 2007)," 70.

nascent Kurdish feminist. Hizar, who becomes a public figure and works for a radio station in Washington, insists that the re-telling of her own story is a political act. Through telling her experiences of the Kurdish genocide and mass-exodus, Hizar endeavours to tell the undocumented history of the Kurdish people. When challenged by some diplomatic personalities in Washington to define Kurdish identity, Hizar requests the organization of a seminar through which she introduces the Kurds. Instead of having recourse to historical accounts, Hizar chooses to tell her own story: “Memories started flowing. Fear increased. Tears ran down her checks. One by one, all the miseries and catastrophes of her people started passing in front of her eyes” (59).³¹⁸ What is very distinct about her story is the way she connects her personal identity to the collective identity of her people, defining herself and all Kurds as Peshmerga.³¹⁹

All Kurds are Peshmerga: the teenagers, the young, the illiterate, the educated, the farmers, the workers, the women who bring our children up, the parents and everyone who has lived or even felt the physical and psychological miseries of our nation. (29)³²⁰

In conflating the personal stories of Hizar and Nareen with the collective history of the Kurdish nation, Balata and Niheli bring the subaltern (to be discussed later in the chapter) marginalized and silenced voices of the Kurds to the fore, and represent a truer history, over and against official narratives which the dominant powers have tried to deliver. Accordingly, both novels can be appropriately discussed within the growing body of testimonial narratives, also known as Testimonio, which has been developed in the last two decades in Latin America.³²¹ Defined by George Yudice, a testimonial text is:

An authentic narrative told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as a representative of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcizing and setting aright official history.³²²

³¹⁸ بیردانکا وئ پە قی ، هزرهاربون ، ترس زبده بوو، چاقین وئ بونه ده ریا روندکا ، نه و کاره سات ورویدانین ب سه رئ ملله تی وئ هاتین هه می نیک ب نیک وه کی شاشه یه کی دانه به ر چاقین خو.

³¹⁹ Peshmerga are the military forces of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 1991 the Iraqi Army has not been permitted to enter Iraqi Kurdistan and Peshmerga have been responsible for the security of the Kurdish Region. Because of their historical role in the Kurdish national liberation, Peshmerga are highly acclaimed and respected by the Kurdish nation everywhere.

³²⁰ هه می چینی ملله تی من پشمرگه نه بی جیاوازا چینیایه تی، چه پرموی، پشمرگه لاون، زه لامین پیگه هشتی نه ژبلی پیران، خوینده وار و نه خوینده وارن، جوتیار و کریکارن، نهو شیره ژنن زارو کین مه پوره ده دکهن و بو دبنه ده یک و باب، چانتکین مه دادگرن ب نان و ناف، برینن مه دهرمان دکهن

³²¹ Gugelberger and Kearney, “Voices for the Voiceless,” 7.

³²² George Yudice, “Testimonio and Postmodernism,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 18:3 (Summer, 1991), 15-31.

Thus, unlike the conventional forms of writing produced by the dominant public spheres (in this case, the Iraqi-controlled discourses) which systematically promote ideologies of subjectivity and subalternity, testimonial literature is produced by subaltern groups (the Kurdish writers) in reaction to the policies of marginalization and assimilation practiced by hegemonic powers. Testimonial literature “emerged as a backlash to the mainstream Latin American literature, it was a way to write back and correct the mainstream literature.”³²³ In so doing, testimonial literature aims at reconceptualising historiography in a way that guarantees the existence and value of the subalterns. According to George Gugelberger and Michael Kearney, “slave narratives, ethnographic life histories, and holocaust literature are each in certain ways kinds of documentary literature that amplify official histories of the subaltern peoples.”³²⁴ The idea of testimonial literature as a way of re-writing history is supported by Rodwell Makombe when he asserts that:

Official historical narratives, particularly in Third World countries have been criticized for adopting the biases and omissions of colonialist historiography. The tendency is to celebrate ‘great men’ at the expense of the ‘subaltern masses’ particularly women and children.³²⁵

In his study of Nyoka’s *I Speak to the Silent* (2004), Makombe treats the text as a testimonial novel that seeks to give a “voice to particular groups of people who have been silenced by colonialist and nationalist historiographies of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.”³²⁶ Drawing from the works of such post-colonial theorists as Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon in which colonial discourse plans to misrepresent the colonized groups as marginalized and incapable of determining their own lives and destinies, Makombe maintains that the “only way the subaltern can be reconstituted into the mainstream narrative is by deconstructing nationalist historiography.”³²⁷ Related to this is Gugelberger and Kearney’s consideration of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as the starting point of the theoretical implications of the testimonial novel: “Achebe’s novel is a damning indictment of official canonical literature as a misrepresentation of African reality by writers from the so-called centre.”³²⁸ One of the most striking features of testimonial writing is the way the speaker/protagonist “does not conceive of him/herself as extraordinary but instead as an allegory of the many, the

³²³ Coral A. Walker, “Evolution of Genres in Latin American Literature: The Birth of the Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative),” *Evolution and Literature Web Paper*, 3 (April 2011), 1.

³²⁴ Gugelberger and Kearney, “Voices for the Voiceless,” 4-5.

³²⁵ Rowell Makombe, “Breaking Silences: Voicing Subaltern Consciousness in Mtutuzeli Nyoka’s *I Speak to the Silent*,” *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, 2:2 (December 2011), 14.

³²⁶ Makombe, “Breaking Silences,” 14.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³²⁸ Gugelberger and Kearney, “Voices for the Voiceless,” 5

people.”³²⁹ Testimonial narratives seek to record not only personal accounts but document the history of a whole people who are otherwise not allowed to voice their stories. Asking “whom does testimonial writing represent?” George Yudice studies works by writers such as Elvia Alvarado, Rigoberta Menchut, and Domitila Barrios and contends that the personal testimonial story “is a shared one with the community to which [it] belongs.”³³⁰ Yudice further offers the example of Domitila Barrios who tells her interviewer that:

I don't want the story I am about to tell to be interpreted as a personal matter. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What has happened to me may have happened to hundreds of others in my country.... That's why I say that I do not want to simply tell a personal story, I want to speak of my people.³³¹

Not only *Runaway to Nowhere* and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, but most Kurdish literary and historical texts are, in the light of this discussion, testimonial forms of writing in that they seek to represent marginalised groups who have been systematically misrepresented and victimized by silences and omissions in dominant groups' historiographies. Alignment with the testimonio can also be seen in the urgent need to recover such histories. One of the most notable examples is the work of the prominent Kurdish historian Mehrdad Izady whose works and opinions on Kurdish history and historiography have challenged many previous theories about the Kurds and their history. Izady's work elucidates the tactics of omission and misrepresentation adopted by the hegemonic powers:

Reconstruction of the Kurdish history is a difficult task. It frequently involves interpolation and extrapolation among a variety of sources written neither for nor about Kurds. Middle Eastern history has all too often (although not always) been written by its hegemons, and most recently the modern nation-states. The Kurds have not been hegemons for over 800 years. The result is that Kurdish contributions to history have been ignored, or worse, appropriated by other peoples.... Any pioneering effort to reconstruct Kurdish history from fragments long buried and neglected is bound to raise questions and generate controversy, no matter how meticulous the research. This is to be expected because it challenges the status quo.³³²

Izady applauds the efforts of the contemporary Kurdish historians and their awakening to the need of retrieving their own past and preserving their own culture, and he finds it very encouraging that they are realizing the importance of historiography and “historical education at home and outside in order to replace the present demoralizing atmosphere that denigrates the Kurds and Kurdish share of Middle

³²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³³⁰ Yudice, “Testimonio and Postmodernism,” 15.

³³¹ Ibid., 15.

³³² Mehrdad Izady, “The Current State of Kurdish Historiography,” *Kurdish Life*, 16, (Fall, 1995), 5.

Eastern and human civilization.”³³³ In his attempt to reconceptualise the Kurdish history, Izady substantiates our previous discussion of testimonial writing when he adds that:

Once a Kurdish historian has overcome his fear of upsetting the status quo and survived the inevitable dismissal, if not hostility, of the traditionalist historians and advocates of neighboring ethnic groups, the history and human legacy of the Kurds will be properly understood-and ranked.³³⁴

Moreover, Hizar’s insistence that her personal story of war-related violence is representative of the Kurdish collective history is also a clear indication of the profound conflation between feminism and nationalism in the Kurdish context, as explained in the previous chapter. Her participation as a Kurdish woman in the Kurdish national struggle is evident through her experiences and active resistance during these horrific and hectic moments in the Kurdish history. Similarly, in Balata’s text, the personal and collective identities of the characters are portrayed as complementary to one another within the political context of Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s. An important manifestation of this is the Ba’ath’s violent prohibition of Nawroz, the Kurdish New Year. When the Kurdish students in Mosul University gather to celebrate Nawroz, the security men cut the electricity, not allowing the celebration to start. As Nareen shows her resentment of such oppression, Balata confirms this is not the first time:

It had happened on many other occasions when the security people bothered the Kurdish students. Sometimes the students responded with protests. Saddam’s security men arrested a large number of them in jails, and tortured them. Many students executed or killed by overly-eager torturers, never returned from the prisons. Those who came back were weak from the torture and traumatized. It was the world they lived in, the world ruled by Saddam Hussein and those before him who kept the Kurds oppressed and silent. (26)

All the characters in the novel fall victims to the wars and political struggles that permeate and affect their entire lives whether directly or indirectly. At the start of the novel, Kurdish people suffer from the UN sanctions on Iraq that resulted from Saddam Hussien’s invasion of Kuwait. Shortly after the war starts, people suffer from continuous air raids and bombings and many people are killed after a few nights of airstrikes. The political references continue through the Kurds’ Uprising against the Ba’ath regime and the subsequent mass-exodus after the failure of the Uprising. In the camp, Nareen befriends an American journalist, Emily, who asks Nareen about the life of Kurdish women and the policy of assimilation that the Kurds suffer under the fascist regime of Saddam Hussein. Nareen tells Emily that she was very young when she realized the Iraqi government was abusing the Kurds. She remembers her father coming from the tea house saying:

³³³ Mehrdad Izady, “Manifesto of the Kurdish People,” *Kurdish Life*, 20, (September, 1996), 15.

³³⁴ Mehrdad Izady, “The Current State,” 15.

The government's security men came to the tea house and told everybody there from now on, the Kurdish people were not allowed to name their children and their shops Kurdish names. Instead they must use Arabic names. And, if anybody wore Kurdish clothes outside the house, they would be jailed. (225)

The intersection between categories of the personal and the national aspects of Nareen's life is repeated throughout the novel. For example, she connects her personal aspirations to the national aspirations of the whole Kurdish nation by telling Emily that her wishes and dreams are, 'in general, a united Kurdish state—a wish that will continue to live in my heart and the hearts of millions of Kurds across the globe. And personally, I wish to find Karwan soon and get married' (233). Like Hizar, Nareen's personal experiences and life story shadow her participation as a female in the Kurdish national struggle for liberation, which in turn validates the significant interplay between Kurdish nationalism and female participation.

While Nareen receives heartfelt attention and sympathy from Emily, Hizar does not receive the same attention and sympathy from all of her audiences. For instance, a guest mockingly comments on Hizar's invitation to attend her doctoral review saying: "You [Kurds] do not have a distinct identity, how come you study for master and doctoral degrees?" (16)³³⁵ Although it is not a position she has chosen, Hizar understands her marginal situation and the difficulty of her pursuit. But she also understands the urgent need of her people to break their silence and rewrite their history by recalling memories of wars and destruction to achieve recognition and transformation. To understand Hizar's position, it is important to refer to bell hooks' opinion on marginality: "There is a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance, as location of radical openness and possibility."³³⁶

In "The Site of Memory," Morrison explains the necessity for African Americans, long regarded as marginal groups, to re-write history, confirming that it is "critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic."³³⁷ While the Kurds, as a marginalized category, were never allowed to represent their voices and participate in documenting their own history, they have recently transformed their marginality into sites of resistance, as exemplified by the many socio-political and

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هوين ديبى ناسنامهته، بومه داخارنامين ماستهر و
دكتورا دنين

³³⁶ bell hooks, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (London, Turnaround, 1991), 22.

³³⁷ Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 89-90.

cultural activities both inside and outside of Kurdistan. Hizar realizes that the history of Kurds and Kurdish struggle for liberation is a crucial part of the construction of Kurdish identity. This is the reason why she tries to assert the Kurdish people's identity through re-telling her story. Accordingly, Hizar's narrative illustrates the intertwining relationships between Kurdish history, their struggle for survival, and their resistance practices. Her narrative also manifests the way a marginalized Kurdish woman living in exile represents the dislocated Kurds' engagement in narrating their history. Produced through the memory of an individual, her story of the past represents events belonging to a collective past.

Because of this identification between the personal and collective experiences of the Kurds, Kurdish women's organizations whether inside or outside of Kurdistan have the dual characteristic of being both internationalist and nationalist, with a double focus on both national liberation for Kurds and a feminist agenda. Mojab and Gorman discuss this aspect of Kurdish feminism at length when they describe the instrumental role of a Kurdish women's radio program in Stockholm, Sweden. In an interview conducted with a number of women activists working for the radio, one woman confirms that patriarchy is reproduced within the nationalist organizations even in the diaspora and is negatively affecting gender relations in the Kurdish communities in the West. Another interviewee suggests that since "nationalism is growing in exile; we had to turn to ourselves."³³⁸ This suggestion most properly represents the case of the activism of Hizar and Nareen and her friends. Despite their marginality and the diverse social, cultural and political restrictions, these women are determined to speak against the intersectional system of oppression imposed on them in times of war and peace. As illustrated in the two novels, not only do they resist oppression and violence, they also engage in struggles for social and political justice.

3.3. Gender, History, Culture and the Reworking of Genre: The Formal Aspects of the Two Texts

In "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject," Linda Anderson contends that there exists "an almost symbiotic relationship" between feminism and autobiography. She points to the essential role played by autobiographical writing in the development of both women's awareness of their subordinate status in society and feminism as a social movement. She also explains that in the 1970s, when feminism started to flourish:

³³⁸ Mojab and Gorman, "Dispersed Nationalism," 69.

Autobiography seemed to provide a privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity, both through the reading of autobiographical writing by women...and through the production of texts which explored the female subject in franker, less constricted or more inventive way.³³⁹

Related to Anderson's argument is Felski's assertion that most contemporary feminist writings tend to work in two interrelated directions: "autobiographical, exploring women's changing perceptions of self [and] a narrative of emancipation derived from the political ideology of feminism."³⁴⁰ As texts written by women about female characters and received within the context of feminist literature, Balata and Niheli's texts partially draw on autobiographical elements to create a realist form that reflects female characters' experiences and perceptions. Felski argues that many women writers frequently choose to employ realist forms because they are "concerned with addressing urgent political issues and rewriting the story of women's lives."³⁴¹

The realist forms in Felski's discussion involve two main categories: the 'confession' novels and the novels of 'self-discovery,' both of which, according to her definition, "designate all those texts by women writers which trace a clear narrative of female emancipation through separation from a male-defined context."³⁴² Felski argues that this emerging form of narrative model provides a platform for the protagonist's resistance and survival through a refusal of the patriarchal values of the society rather than a passive submission and eventual death or defeat. She goes on to explain that the possibility of this new form is based on a successful emotional and psychological transformation of the female protagonist which she describes as:

A shift in perspective which can occur abruptly, in the form of a sudden illumination, or gradually, through a steady accumulation of insights into the structures of power governing relationships between men and women.³⁴³

Felski further divides the category of 'self-discovery' into two groups: the 'feminist Bildungsroman' and the 'novel of awakening.' While the second category will be employed and discussed in detail in the following chapter, in this chapter, I utilize the first category to examine the ways in which Balata and Niheli create realist narratives to represent the transformation of their protagonists from a state of fear, alienation and victimization to a state of conscious affirmation of female identity. In her

³³⁹ Linda Anderson, "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 119.

³⁴⁰ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 83.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁴³ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 131.

articulation of the feminist Bildungsroman, Felski asserts that although the form resembles the traditional male Bildungsroman in that it depicts the protagonist's journey from the secluded setting of home and family into the outer world, it can be distinguished in terms of both 'narrative trajectory' and 'thematic preoccupation.'³⁴⁴ Though the form retains the general patterns and features of the traditional genre, feminist Bildungsroman as a narrative of female development achieves more functions which, according to Felski are:

Biographical, assuming the existence of a coherent individual identity which constitutes the focal point of the narrative; dialectical, defining identity as a result of a complex interplay between psychological and social forces; historical, depicting identity formation as temporal process which is represented by means of a linear and chronological narrative.³⁴⁵

Characteristically, this form of fiction asserts that the protagonist's development and self-affirmation become possible only through her movement from secluded spaces into wider social spaces and more interaction with broader ideological and political structures. It is within these structures that the protagonist discovers both the former limitations imposed on her by hegemonic forces and the importance of refusing patriarchal practices that confine her socio-political roles. It is important that the processes of learning and self-affirmation of Nareen and Hizar occur in a setting characterized not only by tribal codification and patriarchal domination, but also by destructive wars that threaten their very existence. The resistance techniques they develop to survive war and armed conflicts are depicted alongside the trajectories of growth and subjectivity. These techniques are represented in the novels through various steps— their forced migration, education, resistance to patriarchal codes, and eventual activism. These forms of female awareness and growth technically assist Balata and Niheli in first, giving a form of authority to the protagonists noticeable primarily in their depiction as focal characters³⁴⁶ and second, in tracking the protagonists' developmental processes. Accordingly, it becomes understandable to locate their texts within the forms of self-writing or autobiographically-structured accounts such as the Bildungsroman albeit with modifications and reconfigurations.

As their lives are turned upside down, Nareen and Hizar learn how to accept social responsibility and defy the limitations imposed on them by politicizing questions of gender, violence, the documentation of history and female community. Although the various experiences they undergo are painful and difficult, these are, in Felski's terms, "necessary steps to maturation... [Their] encounters with the

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 135.

³⁴⁶ The focal character is the one on whom the audience is meant to place the majority of their interest and attention. He or she is almost always also the protagonist of the story.

outside world help to shape and define the parameters of subjectivity.”³⁴⁷ As part of the oppressed Kurdish population, Nareen and Hizar experience wars, displacement and loss from a very young age and only become more aware of these atrocities later in life when they start going through a process of growth and development. This teleological structure is, according to Felski, one of the defining features of the feminist Bildungsroman in that it induces “an ironic distance between the perspective of narrator and protagonist.”³⁴⁸

In *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One in particular, Hizar recounts her own life history to describe the miseries through which her nation had to go. Although she is not the narrator, her perspective as a protagonist underscores her vulnerability as a Kurdish woman to the cruel atrocities of the Ba’ath authorities and the patriarchal attitudes of her own community. In *Runaway to Nowhere*, the recounting of personal stories takes a wider scope as not only Nareen but almost all the friends in Room 4 share their experiences and recount their stories of the mass-exodus which despite being horrific and painful are influential in the learning processes through which they pass.

While the novels share important features with Felski’s definition of the feminist Bildungsroman, Balata and Niheli seem to be confined by their attempts to overcome the generic limitation that characterizes almost all of the Kurdish novels produced in Bahdinan so far. Because of the notable lack of any Kurdish novelistic discourse in the Bahdinan, the emerging writers are actively engaged in the development of the formal aspects of their texts, together with the content, with the aim of introducing Kurdish culture to the genre of novel. Balata and Niheli make a particular effort to create generic variety within their novels, both to experiment with the formal heterogeneity adopted by most contemporary Kurdish writers, and to define and describe the diversity that characterizes Kurdish society and culture.

Endeavouring to put the emerging shape and form of the Kurdish modern novel to the test, Balata and Niheli’s texts combine various forms of folk arts, oral narratives, traditional songs and proverbs, and bed-time stories. Some of these are drawn from popular Kurdish literary tradition and from Kurdish folklore with distinct Kurdish traditional musical forms and imagery, as in chapter thirteen of Niheli’s text when Hizar and her family go for a picnic to the mountains and it starts raining, Hizar remembers her childhood when children used to gather and wander along the village holding a filthy scarecrow and singing:

³⁴⁷ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic*, 136.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Our toy wishes rain
It wishes a year full of rain
Full of wheat and rice
All friends and enemies shout and pray
Please, God send rain
For the needy and the poor (246)³⁴⁹

Balata pays a similar attention to the Kurdish folkloric structure and incorporates significant references to how such structures are preserved and revived generationally. For example, Nareen repeatedly recites to Salih a short story called *Zeng and Beng*, which she had learned from her grandmother. On the way to the refugee camp, while lying with her sleeping brother in the open night and hearing scary sounds like the hooting of owls and the howling of wolves, Nareen remembers the old mountain ladies from *Dindik Hinar* (The Pomegranate Seed), the traditional fairy-tale her grandmother used to recite to her. Moreover, the text includes a number of Kurdish traditional proverbs such as: “They say when a Kurd gets rich, he either kills somebody or gets a second wife,” said by Nareen to comment on her aunt’s husband, when he decides to get a second wife when he becomes able to maintain two families. Also, Balata employs the well-known proverb, “The lion could be a man or a woman” to describe the bravery of a woman Nareen meets on the way to the camp and who shows a great determination when she decides to cook and help the sick and weak people.

In her discussion of Kurdish folklore, Allison points to the role played by oral narratives in defining and enhancing Kurdish people’s culture and their national consciousness. Allison confirms that these forms are

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بیکا مه باران دڤیت
ساله کا نه رزان دڤیت
پری گه نم ودان دڤیت
هه ی یاران ونه یاران
یاخودئ توبکه یه باران
بوفه قیروهه ژاران

imbued with complex meanings for those brought up in the villages, are endowed with new layers of meaning in the modern nationalist discourse, and are also resonant for the Kurdish youth of the cities and the diaspora.³⁵⁰

Allison also confirms that Kurdish oral and folkloric discourses cannot be understood properly unless they are considered in relation to their social context. Accordingly, Balata's and Niheli's portrayal of folkloric narratives is an attempt to rewrite Kurdish culture and history from the point of view of women, confirming that these narratives express the way the Kurdish population, particularly women, lived through and survived outrageous circumstances. Folkloric and other traditional narratives also reflect these women's yearnings and nostalgic returns to past orders destroyed by years of wars and armed conflicts. The intersection of folklore and oral structures in the Kurdish novelistic discourse is discussed by Allison in her examination of Shemo's *Kurmanji Shepherd* (1935). For Allison, the complex formation of most Kurdish contemporary narratives plays a national and socio-political as well as a literary and aesthetic role:

Kurdish contemporary narratives are, for the most part, currently focused on chronicling events as a struggle against oubli [disremembering], as a way of informing non-Kurds, and, in many cases, as a part of a wider national work of memory aimed at reclaiming national history. Whether produced in the Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian or Iranian context, they are works of memory that tend to explore Kurdish identity, often with a view to achieving liberation.³⁵¹

Allison confirms that most contemporary Kurdish writers, whether writing in their own language or in the languages of the countries among which Kurdistan has been divided, namely, Arabic, Persian, or Turkish, often subordinate the emotional development of the characters to larger social, political and historical considerations. This is manifested in the employment of traditional and folkloric Kurdish narratives that have been transmitted orally and through which the writers aim to preserve and re-tell the traditional customs and values of the Kurdish people. In her discussion of *Kurmanji Shepherd*, Allison portrays a scenario of a "respected uncle sitting amongst his family recalling episodes from his life,"³⁵² to illustrate the highly episodic, conversational and anecdotal organization of the novel interwoven with folkloric and didactic details. Written almost a century later, the re-introduction of oral narratives and folkloric discourses in *Runaway to Nowhere* and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One indicates the cultural and national character of their texts.

³⁵⁰ Christine Allison, "Kurdish Oral Literature," 129.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 117.

³⁵² Ibid.

The centrality of language in nationalist ideology as one of the main tools to unite people in other terms than religion, and over a vast territory, turned oral songs and stories into resources that could serve as unified cultural heritage in one language, for one people, with one history.³⁵³

Thematically and structurally, the novels are organized in a way to characterize and describe the isolation, chaos and devastation of the lives of the characters. Balata and Niheli, moreover, endeavour to experiment with the generic heterogeneity of their texts as well as with the structure and general organizations of events. Although events are organized in a chronological linear structure, Balata plots *Runaway to Nowhere* in a circle revolving around a number of separations and reunions. The novel opens with Nareen and her four friends and ends with the same group reunited after a long separation. Again, in the refugee camp, Nareen and her brother reunite with their parents after separating on the way to the camp. Nareen also has a reunion with her friends Bafreen and Jihan in the camp. However, the novel depicts Nareen's painful separation from Karwan who dies while defending Duhok City. In addition to its circular structure, the narrative is held together by the various points of view of Nareen, her friends and parents, Karwan, and the unknown narrator by whom the story is told with a piece of information added to the overall narrative with each of these accounts. For example, we only learn about those people who left the city very early after the Uprising to villages and nearby districts through Karwan's letters to Nareen in which he describes the natural beauty of Kurdistan and the simplicity of living in a village: "The view from the village is magnificent; we are surrounded by high mountains and there is a wide river to the west with a heavy current. There are oak, mulberry, pine, and walnut trees, and orchards of apricot, plum, pomegranate, and vine trees." (102)

These descriptions are portrayed in such a way as to contrast the ugly reality of their life and the destruction brought by war and economic depression. In his letters, Karwan also describes gender roles and relations in the Kurdish villages which have shaped life in the Kurdish society for generations:

Kurdish women are the strongest and hardest working women in the world, you can see women in their fifties and sixties doing the work of women in their twenties; they bake bread, fetch water and firewood, do the washing, milk the animals, cook, and work in the fields. (102)

Furthermore, the novel is united by the consistent employment, throughout the text, of traditional Kurdish cultural practices, both to define Kurdish ways of life and preserve these practices. The novel depicts a number of these practices, starting with a detailed account of the Kurdish cuisine taking into account that the Kurdish people have historically ascribed great importance to eating:

³⁵³ Hamelink, *The Sung Home*, 50.

Eprakh [dolma] is a very classic Kurdish dish. Kurdish women stuff grape leaves, eggplants, tomatoes, onions, green peppers, and other vegetables with a mixture of raw rice, raw beef, garlic, oil, tomato paste, salt and black pepper. Then, they add water to it and cook everything together. (61)

The same chapter illustrates the ways Kurdish men and women dress, confirming that Kurdish traditional clothing is part of Kurdish heritage and an important expression of their distinct national identity. In a description of Duhok City, Balata writes, “You could see Kurdish men wearing shelo-shapik, traditional Kurdish clothes of large baggy trousers and matched tops with a colourful cummerbund wound around their waists and turbans on their heads” (70). While this example of Kurdish clothing represents male clothing, Balata represents Kurdish women’s clothing through Nareen’s aunt Amina: “She was wearing a white scarf and traditional Kurdish clothes. A green, long coat, called a Kortec, was draped over a long colourful dress (Krass)” (51). Other cultural practices depicted in the text include the ways in which Kurds celebrate special events and organize weddings and funerals. For example, we are given detailed descriptions of Aishe’s mother’s funeral and how all neighbours, men and women; participate in grieving and helping the mourners. One of these descriptions concerns the traditional lamenting songs in which a woman sings the lament, to which all the other women cry:

My heart is broken. My eyes are blind. I can’t believe that I won’t see you anymore. Oh my God, what happened to me? My home is destroyed. I won’t see my sweetheart anymore. Nights are so long. Days will never end for me. I’m so lonely in this world. (84-85)

Discussing the manner and techniques of “lamentation” after death as a social duty of importance to Kurds of all religions, Allison indicates that these songs are performed at specifically timed intervals after the death, with different performance conventions in different areas. She goes on to say:

The imagery of laments is very similar to that of other Kurdish oral poetry. The dead are described in the same terms as the beloved of the love lyrics— beautiful and desirable. The mountains, the pastures, the plains, and the plants and animals within them all have their own associations and meanings.³⁵⁴

Although Niheli is more concerned with the depiction of the wars and conflicts imposed on the Kurdish people than the impact of social norms on the lives and experiences of Kurdish women, the text, nevertheless, contains various references to the social issues and cultural practices prevalent within the Kurdish society. An important manifestation is the detailed portrayal of Kurdish marriage ceremonies when Hizar dreams of her and Ako’s wedding: “Uncle Shewket has a purple ribbon in his

³⁵⁴ Allison, “Kurdish Oral Literature,” 166.

hand to tie it to the bride's waist. Cousins are crazily dancing in circles. Kids are playing in the middle of the dance ring and the smiles and tears of the bride's mother are mixing" (227).³⁵⁵

The novels also incorporate a number of motifs which attach a symbolical significance to and provide deeper insights into the actions, the characters and the world they live in. While both stories depict young lovers antagonized by their society, love is employed as a force to protect, motivate, and empower the characters. The love between Nareen and Karwan and Hizar and Ako outlives long periods of separation, life-threatening situations, and the uncertainty of each other's place or condition. Love is portrayed as the shelter that protects them and the diversion that distracts them from the chaos and destruction that characterise their war-torn world. Moreover, love is used as a way to escape the cruel reality and provide them emotionally with a private space where they could forget and evade the horrors of genocide and ethnic cleansing. In *Runaway to Nowhere*, love plays a very important role as Nareen, who changes her university from Baghdad to Mosul only to be close to Karwan with whom she falls in love at first sight, goes through many moments of meditations into the nature and power of love. Describing the positive and constructive impact of Karwan's love on her, she tells her aunt Safê: "His love gives me confidence, strength, and a happiness I have never known before" (81). In the camp she asks Emily to look for Karwan in her walks around refugee camps along the Turkish border and tells her that: "[Karwan] is the best thing I ever had in my life. His love enabled me to survive and reach the camp. My life means nothing without him. He is my love, my best friend, my soul mate. I miss him so much" (226).

Similarly, in her repeated depictions of the devastation caused by war, Niheli emphasizes the power of love and its ability to reinforce and enhance the spirit of the characters. From the opening account of the horrible Anfal Campaigns in which thousands of Kurds are killed and thousands others are deported, love is used as a force to alleviate the characters' sufferings and sorrows. Years after the war, Hizar, who keeps struggling with an inner turbulence that has resulted from horrific experiences, is reassured over and over by Ako that love offers the possibility of a new start, a new life he wants to share with her. In a long letter Ako describes his long-lasting love for her and asks her to accept his marriage proposal. Confirming that together they can forget the painful past, Ako writes:

³⁵⁵ مامى شه وكه ت، قيراجه كا مور ده ستى دابه بين ريكا خو ل ناف وان فه دكه ت دا ل ناقته نكا بويكى گري بده ت. دوتماما له وه نديين خو فه كرينه ،
بسمام بين دخوها خورا ترش دبوين، ل به رتيكدا دله يزىن ، زاروكان ل نيفا شه هيانى ده ستين نيك گرتينه باريا دكه ن. ده يكا بويكى روندك وگرنتزين وئ

Life is a very short dream and I only find my safety in your hands. Please don't let me get lost. My beloved combatant, let's live together and heal each other's wounds. Let's carry and lessen each other's burdens. If you believe in me, I will make you the happiest living queen on earth. (240-241)³⁵⁶

Like Nareen and Karwan, Ako believes that love can act as a source of strength and determination. He writes in his letter, "Only your love pushes me forward and gives me faith in life. Your lap is the only place where I forget my sorrows and the time you are not with me my heart aches with fear" (239). Another important motif employed systematically throughout the two texts is one that concerns the historical impact of tribalism on the Kurdish society and lifeways:

Adherence to tribalism is one of the strongly extant traditions within the Kurdish society. The importance of tribalism even within urban Kurds can be seen as a root cause for many other reactionary aspects in the Kurdish community. Tribalism also explains the strong alliance within not only the nuclear family but also the extended family.³⁵⁷

In *Runaway to Nowhere*, tribalism is used as an effective cultural and ideological force capable of determining and altering the fate of the characters. Written from a feminist point of view, the novel presents varied instances in which tribalism and tribal attitudes which are highly persistent in the modern Kurdish society influence gender roles and relations by promoting patriarchal attitudes. It is important to examine Balata's presentation of the influences of the traditional tribal structure of the Kurdish society on the ways in which women are conceived and expected to behave. A significant illustration is Nareen's friend and roommate Buhar, who loses her father at a very young age in an act of blood feud that he has no association with except that his brother has killed someone from another opposing tribe. According to Kathryn Olson in her study of the impact of tribalism and traditional social norms of the Kurdish society on the people: "Tribal logic dictates that if an outside force violates your tribe in some way, you must not only seek revenge, but punish the violator in a way that signals to all other tribes that you are not to be tampered with."³⁵⁸ Buhar condemns the act of blood feud and describes it as brutal and unjust since "her uncle was living happily with his children while she was living the life of an orphan" (15). This system has dire implications for Buhar, whose whole life is changed when she is taken, together with her mother, into the care of her uncle and is constantly reminded by her uncle's wife that she should pay their kindness back by marrying their son. The blood

³⁵⁶ ژيان خه ونه زورا كورته ودووباره نابته فه، بتنى ده ست وتلنيت ته يت ماین بومن يت ٲیمن هیڤي دکه م ده ستا ژمن به رنه ده. خورا گرا من وه ره دا سه رین خوینکفه نین ویرینین هه فدوو تیمار بکه بن وبارئ گرانئ ژیانئ لسه ر ملین هه فدوو سڤک بکه بن. نه گه ر ته باوه ري ب من هه بیت کوزه لامه کم دئ ته که مه به خته وه رترین شاهژن ل ئی جیهانی.

³⁵⁷ Lolav M. Hassan and Dilan N. Abdulqadir, "Cultural and Political References in Qasham Ali Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere*," *Journal of the University of Duhok*, 16:2 (2014), 7.

³⁵⁸ Olson, "Like Sun and Water," 196.

feud has not only affected Buhar but also her mother, who has been obligated to stay unmarried and raise her daughter “because children are the property of the male’s side of the family. These are not court laws, but mountains laws, honour laws” (15).

The other significant illustration of the persistence of tribalism and tribal politics is the common practice of honour-killing which is closely related to the act of blood feud since women symbolize the family or tribe’s honour. Should a woman violate her tribe’s honour code by appearing impure, she must be punished to maintain the family’s reputation. Olson is helpful again when she says that “the basis for determining which behaviours are considered honourable or dishonourable lies within tribal culture, and the tribe (*ashirat*) is the basis for social and political unity in Iraqi Kurdistan.”³⁵⁹ She also confirms that “honour killings and other forms of gender violence are symptoms of the persistence of tribal justice mechanisms and a culture that values tribal honour more than the life of a woman.”³⁶⁰ Balata writes about this negative social aspect of the Kurdish society through narrating the family history of Nareen’s mother, Besna, whose mother, Fatima, was killed by her own father and brothers because she refused to marry her cousin and eloped with Ahmad and married him. Although Fatima pleaded for her life, her father told her “I have to kill you, you dishonoured me and your brothers and your whole family. If I don’t kill you, your sisters might follow in your steps” (56). Fearing the same fate, Ahmad ran away and was never seen again and Besna, still a baby, was first adopted by a neighbour family and was taken four years later by Ahmad’s brother.

While *Runaway to Nowhere* is more concerned with the cultural and social dimensions of Kurdish tribal values and norms, *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One focuses on the impact of tribalism on Kurdish nationalism and national struggle for independence. Although this aspect of Kurdish tribalism has been discussed in the second chapter, it is helpful to remember that the interplay between Kurdish tribalism and nationalism varies as to how influential the tribal nature of most Kurdish movements has been in the evolution and success of these movements. It is significant that tribalism has been described as both “a political, military, social and cultural organization whose members shares a common identity and demonstrates mental solidarity,”³⁶¹ as well as “a political, military, social and cultural system and a framework of identity and solidarity that exists even in so-called

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 190.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 189

³⁶¹ Amarilyo, “The Dual Relationship,” 64.

“modern societies.”³⁶² Describing the mutual effect of Kurdish tribalism and nationalism, Eli Amariyo asserts that there are two opposing approaches to this relationship: The first approach argues that tribalism is the “backbone” of Kurdish nationalism in that most national Kurdish leaders descend from tribes and use tribal power and allegiance in strengthening the national movement. Defying this, the second approach confirms that tribalism had historically been and still is a major obstacle to Kurdish nationalism because of the growing rivalry and antagonism over political and economic privileges and the central government’s exploitation of this division.

Amarilyo’s argument is very helpful in illuminating Niheli’s position which advocates the disadvantageous influences of the tribal structure of Kurdish society on the national movements and the Kurdish cultural and political system. Hizar disapproves of the growing role of the tribal nature of Kurdish society in hindering the transparency and reliability of such democratic processes as the elections of Kurdish parliament as well as the councils of Kurdish governorates:

In the past years, voting and elections were conducted to liberate Kurdistan, but today they are only used as a means to gain tribal power and allegiances. Oh, oh our mentality. Tribalism has become a fence of graphene. We will never get rid of it. (216)³⁶³

The novel also reflects on the confining impact of tribalism and traditional manners on gender roles and Kurdish women’s position in society. Shavin disapproves of the ways in which women in Kurdistan are viewed as mere sex objects. She tells Hizar:

I mean that the rigid social mores and structures have given superiority and authority to men... Middle Eastern women are still unable to educate themselves... They don’t even recognize their rights and duties. (170)³⁶⁴

The persistence of tribalism in the Kurdish society today is mostly based on the fact that the original loyalties of the Kurds are to the family and the tribe and to tribal leaders (the Aghas), and that in most Kurdish areas tribal mores are still very much respected. Additionally, these tribal leaders demand strong religious loyalties since they are also mostly sheikhs, religious titles they acquire through schools of Quranic and Islamic laws (Sharia’). In the novel, the blind loyalty of much of the Kurdish population to the tribal chieftains (Aghas) is strongly disapproved: “All those Aghas have many

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³

هه لیژارتن و ده نگدانین سالیان به ری ژبو رزگاریا کوردستانی بوون و بین نه فرو بو شوهره تی و عه شیره تی نه.

³⁶⁴

مه ره ما من داب ونه ریت و هزرین ژه نگی زه لام بی کریه ده پتینشخه ر و ده سته لاتدار هه تا بو نفتی و خوشیا زاینده بی. و ژلایه کئی دی فه ژنن روژ هه لاتی هه تا نوکه ژي نه شیاپنه خو ره وشه نبیربکه ن. خولپسه را هینشتا ماف و نه رکین خو ژیکجودانا که ن.

ignorant people from their tribes behind them. They do what the Agha tells them without thinking” (117).

By representing the Kurdish cultural norms and traditions, especially when they concern women’s lives, through an experimentation of style, structure and organization, *Balata* and *Niheli* are both participating in the emerging body of contemporary Kurdish novels in Bahdinan and politicizing Kurdish women’s lives that are shattered as a consequence of constant wars in an attempt to create a platform through which to enable them to be better participants in the cultural and socio-political spheres. Accordingly, the two novels indicate that the processes of resisting war-violence and re-creating identity can only be achieved through perpetrating women’s active involvement in the social and political public spheres.

3.4. Kurdish Women Creating Counter Discourses and Mechanisms of Resistance in their Doubly-Bound World

By giving a specific attention to violence, *Balata* and *Niheli* explore the implications of different forms of State and domestic violence, such as military confrontation, destructive military campaigns like Anfal, forced migration, imprisonment, physical and sexual torture, and honour killings. Engaging in arguments of gender politics, they aim at providing a platform for Kurdish women activists and academics to come together to discuss and exchange ideas and experiences. In their novels, they publicize and politicize the reality faced by Kurdish women and build a platform upon which an effective action can be constructed. In other words, they aim to create counter discourses and depict the ways women act for change and achieve resilience and subjectivity.

This section argues that in order to challenge marginalization and to develop a possible socio-political participation for women in the Kurdish society, *Balata* and *Niheli* need to conflate political feminist theories and literary discourses in order to create spaces through which to advance a political feminist representation of their characters’ experiences. Through close textual readings, this section studies the functions of writing/telling of personal experiences as well as women bonding as political acts as oppositional ideologies that seek to challenge and transform the existing reality of ethnic, sex, and class oppression.

Observing the importance of collective organization for feminist agency, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean demonstrate that “women of color, accustomed to being politically subjected according to their racial and ethnic identities, in addition to their gender, understood too well the importance of

thinking and acting collectively, not individually.”³⁶⁵ Landry and MacLean’s argument is also applicable to Kurdish women, who have been allowed very limited influence within the social and political spheres. Similarly, in advocating women’s independence, Massoud Dryaz argues “entering in a collective action provokes the challenging of gender power structures, which eventually strengthen the position of women in public spaces.”³⁶⁶ Throughout their history, Kurdish pro-feminist organizations have acted to generate a gender-specific identity through forming and developing an awareness of the importance of community and solidarity among women based on the commonality of their oppression. McDonald illustrates that Kurdish women share “a collective social history of disempowerment, exploitation and subordination, extending to the present.”³⁶⁷ Kurdish feminist organizations have been struggling, to use Felski’s words, “to convince the society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims [and] challenge the existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique.”³⁶⁸ Relatedly, Kurdish women’s collective action in times of conflict is the clearest manifestation of the validity of a Kurdish feminist counter-public sphere (to be discussed further in Chapter Five) and their ability to influence social, political and economic hegemonic discourses— feminist counter-public spheres that originate from women’s own experiences of oppression and their collective action of resistance.

A notable trend in the studies of Kurdish women’s political struggles is their tendency to focus on macro-structural organized forms of resistance such as women’s participation in national liberation movements, anti-war struggles, movements related to the political, cultural, and economic rights of women, or struggles around domestic violence. However, feminist struggle is not merely confined to acts of mobilization and organized movements. Questions of political consciousness, personal transformation, self-definition, subjectivity and identity-construction also need to take a central attention within the studies of Kurdish feminist discourses. In this section, I argue that through the simple acts of re-telling and re-writing personal narratives of oppression, Kurdish women assume a politicized oppositional identity and express an ability to make a change in conflicted contexts. To do this, I make use of Mohanty’s analysis of writing as a significant tool for historical documentation and an active mode for recalling and recording experience and resistance:

³⁶⁵ Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, *Materialist Feminisms* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 110.

³⁶⁶ Massoud Sharifi Dryaz, “Women and nationalism: How women activists are changing the Kurdish conflict,” (December, 2016), 5.

³⁶⁷ McDonald, “Kurdish Women and Self-determination,” 141.

³⁶⁸ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic*, 168.

One of the most significant aspects of writing against the grain...is the invention of spaces, texts, and images for encoding the history of resistance. Thus, history and memory are woven through numerous genres: fictional texts, oral history, poetry, as well as testimonial narratives not just what counts as scholarly or academic historiography.³⁶⁹

Characteristically, Mohanty suggests that the current proliferation of Third World women's texts is based on their testifying and bearing witness to acts of silencing by hegemonic powers. More important to the purpose of this section is Mohanty's description of the mechanisms of writing: "the point is not just to record one's history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recoded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immediately significant."³⁷⁰

In this sense, Balata and Niheli portray images of women's resistance through the creation of feminist political standpoints and the redefinition of possibilities for Kurdish women's political action through re-writing history. In *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One, memory is, as we have seen, the main structural aspect in the novel through the portrayal of numerous flash backs and stream of consciousness. The construction of Hizar's story works at two levels: We as readers build up the narrative from the given fragments which occur at two different time zones (past, present); we also read through the character's own memories, flashbacks and moments of stream of consciousness. Although action is set at a point after 2006 when a de facto Kurdish state has been constructed and unification between the Kurdish and the Iraqi governments has been established, Hizar's memories constantly take us back to events happening in the 1980s. The novel pays a particular attention to Hizar's subjectivity, putting forward disturbing events that have had a strong psychological impact on her. At certain points, the emphasis shifts away from the destructive mechanisms of war to focus on specific personal moments reflecting the characters' feelings and thoughts. This shift of emphasis is revealed in the way Niheli deals directly with known historical events within the novel's time span such as the drop of support the US promised the rebellions during the Uprising, the contribution of the Kurdish collaborators in the Uprising, the Kurdish civil war and the extracting campaigns of the mass graves. There are repeated references to the US encouragement of the Iraqi people to rebel against the regime of Saddam Hussein. Although opinions vary as to how much responsibility for the rebellion lies with the Americans, the question has occupied many studies that deal with the Uprising. Hizar tells the political personalities in Washington that

³⁶⁹ Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," 35-36.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

after dropping your support, you left us [the Kurds] to an unknown destiny. After abandoning us, Saddam Hussien's offensive spirits increased and people feared he would eliminate them and use chemical weapons again as his army spread its rocket launchers across Gare and Chilmeran mountains. (127-28)³⁷¹

The novel also repeatedly refers to the Kurdish civil war (called "the killing of brothers" by the Kurds) which has either been completely ignored or received very little attention in studies of modern Kurdish history and the emergent discipline of Kurdish studies. Despite the establishment of a de facto Kurdish state and the 1992 elections, disputes between KDP and PUK soon resulted in a civil war that extended from 1994 to 1998. The Kurdish civil war not only weakened the already troubled Kurdish government by splitting into two separate governments creating a political antagonism that extends to the present day, but caused the death and deportation of many Kurds:

The KDP estimated that 58,000 of its supporters had been expelled from PUK-controlled regions from October 1996 to October 1997. The PUK says 49,000 of its supporters were expelled from KDP-controlled regions from August 1996 to December 1997.³⁷²

Several reasons for the breakout of the civil war have been proposed. Gunter, for example, maintains that the war was first triggered by a dispute over the income from taxes at the Ibrahim Khalil border passage.³⁷³ According to Yaniv Voller, the fighting:

Witnessed the continuation of brutality and bloodshed, with cases of unlawful and deliberate detention of combatants, executions without trials, and even the killing of civilian protesters and political activists as condemned by Amnesty International.³⁷⁴

The heaviest cost of the war concerned the external support that the parties sought to overcome one another which came from Syria, Iran, PKK, and even the forces of Saddam Hussein. These external interferences would have massive political and regional impacts on KRG that would extend for years after the end of the war. Describing it as a suicidal war, Hizar tells a number of friends that "disputes grew bigger and bigger. The country was falling apart. Control points and border checks were closed. Seats and posts became enemies...The Kurdish family was destroyed" (142).³⁷⁵ Not being at all proud of it, she tells the diplomats in Washington that:

³⁷¹ پشستی هه‌مه‌ ده‌ست ژ سه‌ر هه‌ل‌دانا کوردستانێ به‌ردای، هه‌مه‌ نه‌م بو چاره‌نهیسه‌کێ نه‌دیار ب رێک‌رین ، پشستی له‌ شکه‌ ری بریارا ته‌ بجه‌ کری ، خه‌ لکی کر جاره‌ کا دي د ئ بارانین کیمیا و فه‌ نا و مه‌ رگی بارن ، ژبه‌ و کوو رژی ئه‌مێ کوچک و ته‌ لارین خول چیاپی "گاره‌ و چلمیران" دانان.

³⁷² John Pike, "Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)," *Globalsecurity.org*. 2013.

³⁷³ Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq*, 10.

³⁷⁴ Voller, "From Rebellion to De Facto Statehood," 166.

³⁷⁵ ناکوکی که‌ ته‌ دناشبه‌ را واندا. هه‌ ر ئیکی به‌ ررک بولایی خوقه‌ کیشا. هه‌ ی هه‌ واره‌ نه‌ ف ملله‌ ته‌ ژ ئێک هاته‌ ده‌ ر، خال وده‌ رگه‌ هین سنوري هاته‌

Every day, the civil war sent home tens of martyrs and injured Peshmerga, putting tens of mothers, sisters and wives into deep sorrows and tears. The country fell into severe economic hardships. People were starving...fathers were forced to sell their young daughters for dowries. Students left schools and joined the fighting for very low wages. (148-49)³⁷⁶

The Kurdish civil war, however, not only marked the beginning of a new armed conflict and a phase of lawlessness and poverty; it also had a massive impact on gender roles and sexual politics in KRG. Rhetorically, Niheli associates the civil war with the notable increase of honour crimes conducted against Kurdish women. This explains the reason why Hizar mentions violence against women as part of the violations that occurred during the Kurdish civil war: "Looking at the big numbers of killed women in Kurdistan, Hizar's mind could not take it any more...there must be something wrong...this is a clear violation of human rights...it is against the laws of the world" (150-51). In "No Safe Haven: Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan", Mojab contends that during the 1990s:

There was a sharp increase in the number of Kurdish women who were killed by the male members of their families and relatives. Some of the women abused by the Iraqi army during the genocidal campaigns of the late 1980s returned to Kurdistan; there were reports of mistreatment and even killing of these women. Honor killing and self-immolation were, however, most prevalent. The dead bodies of women were found in the streets and on the roads. The frequency of these murders was unprecedented.³⁷⁷

Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One also documents the feelings of Kurdish people towards the collaboration of Kurds with the Ba'ath party against their own people before 1991. Though some of these collaborators played influential roles in the Kurdish Uprising, their former work for the Ba'athist institutions was never forgotten. These numerous Kurdish paramilitary forces that had been armed by the central governments to fight the Kurdish insurgents were considered traitors to the Kurdish national cause and were mockingly called 'Jash' (donkey foal). According to Bruinessen, these forces:

Were mostly recruited from among the large tribes, and operated under their own tribal chieftains. The tribal jash had no political motivations, and several had in the past repeatedly changed sides from the government to the insurgents and vice versa. At times, there were silent informal agreements between them and the peshmerga to avoid each other; at other occasions they engaged in fierce fights.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ بئى كاريى چ سنور بو برسئ نههبلان. باب نهچاربوون فرشتهمين سئزدهبهارى ب دهنه ب نمخت، فيرخوازين همزمكار بينقيسين خو شكندن، پمرونك سونن، دهست دان چهكزن گران و هملگرتن، شمريين خو كوژى بئ روزانه گيانئ پتر ژ بيست شهيد و برينداران دبرنه بم دمرگهين مالين وان، روندكين دهيك و خوئيشك و همقزيبين دلسوتى د چاقاندا نئخسيريون و خمم ل ستوبئ وانقه دبوونه گلواز. وهلات كهته د كولب و خهلايين دژوار.

³⁷⁷ Shahrzad Mojab, "No Safe Haven: Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan" in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 2004), 119-120.

³⁷⁸ Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 40.

absolute otherness, and thus to provide a framework within which a gendered identity can be meaningfully located.”³⁸¹

Runway to Nowhere shows that unity between the characters’ psyches and the social world strengthens both their individual identities and their communal awareness and presents different stages of community through which Nareen goes realizing that women’s interdependence is the key to resistance and self-determination: “Kurdish women are always affectionate to each other. They help each other and make friendships with one another very easily despite differences in age, education, and tribe” (181). The first community she experiences is with her four friends in the university. Their friendship is based on mutual love and co-operation as they listen to each other and give advice whenever needed. Against the horrible news of the war, Balata sets the moments of love and intimacy in room 4 they call Paradise: “They gathered to sit around the oil heater together one last time. Thinking quietly, they each felt their emotions and thoughts storming in their minds the way rain hit a tree” (39).

In the refugee camp and despite her terrible conditions, Nareen looks for her friends and manages to meet both Bafreen and Jihan. Nareen meets Jihan in the camp clinic where Nareen volunteers to work as an interpreter after finding her parents. Nareen learns that Jihan’s sons are very sick with diarrhea and they are not likely to make it. Nareen goes to visit them in their tent and is shocked to learn that her sons have both died. Nareen feels very sad as she watches Jihan “screaming and beating her head and chest...she tried to kiss and calm her, but the burn in Jihan’s heart was too painful...Jihan was jumping and beating her chest inside the tent and nobody could stop her” (217-218). A few days later, Nareen goes with Bafreen to see Jihan who now looks like an old lady; “with her back bent and her eyes red and swollen” (222). Living these painful moments, the friends “hugged and put their heads together and cried for a long time” (222). Though they cannot change the horrible reality, Nareen and friends realize that survival and determination are only achieved through solidarity and interdependence.

Nareen experiences the most important level of community in the refugee camp. When she first arrives, Nareen feels very helpless amid the massive crowd of people and the grids of tents. The first help she receives is from an elderly lady called Sinam who takes Nareen in for some days, offers her

³⁸¹ Ibid.

food, listens to the story of her parents and looks after her sick brother. She even asks her son and some other men to set a tent for Nareen and help her get registered for a share of food and blankets. Later, Nareen realizes that life in the camp will not be easy as she watches her neighbors engaging in activities that she cannot do by herself: “lighting fires, cooking, fetching water, and bringing wood from the mountains” (174). Mayan and Shukria comfort her and help her by making “a hearth... gave her some wood... a cup, and a small teakettle” (181). Later, Nareen finds out that each one of her new neighbors has a long story of oppression and marginalization as Mayan tells her: “I always wanted to find a trustful woman to confide in. I have so much pain and sorrow in my heart a mountain wouldn’t be able to bear it. This will be the first time I have ever opened my heart to someone” (185). Again, although their collective actions do not change the painful reality of life in the camp, Nareen and her new friends create counter-discourses through which they resist this reality. They realize that solidarity between women is instrumental in recognizing the experiences of women and their shared commitment to struggle against oppression and injustice in times of war and peace.

In congruity with Felski’s articulation of the resolution of contemporary feminist realist narratives, *Runaway to Nowhere* and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One do not provide the simplistic closure of either death or marriage, but rather end with a relative ‘autonomy of ideological change’ and freedom to explore questions of identity and subjectivity in a ‘space’ beyond cultural and socio-political confinements. *Runaway to Nowhere* ends with an emphasis on the necessity of solidarity as part of women’s political organization and gendered identity. In the epilogue, we are told that Nareen and her friends have all finished their university studies and are working for humanitarian and women’s organizations. Their activism is a reflection of both their common political war-torn background and their nascent determination to change that background. The story ends by telling us how after the establishment of the no-fly zone in the north of Iraq, people were allowed to return to ‘a Saddam-free Kurdistan.’ Nareen, like all the Kurdish people in the refugee camps, thinks it is “too good to be true” (233). With six other families, Nareen’s family rents a truck and starts their journey back to their “beautiful city Duhok” (239). Nareen comes back from death, from loss, from nowhere, understanding the importance of communal interdependence for women. Though she finds out that Karwan has been killed defending the city against the Iraqi army, and she, for some time, succumbs to tears and sadness, and even considers ideas of suicide, she, nevertheless, remembers the promise she has made and decides to go on. She decides to stay unmarried and dedicate her life to working for women’s rights and endeavour to improve her society which used to be one of Karwan’s wishes. The

In their concern with the representation of violence against Kurdish women in Iraq, novelists in Bahdinan pay a particular attention to the oppression and discrimination practiced as part of the Kurdish cultural and traditional ideology. While in the First Gulf War (1990) or the Kurdish Civil War (1994-1998), most casualties in Iraqi Kurdistan have been civilians, in the post-conflict Kurdish society, a tribal-like ideology dominated as Kurds endeavoured to find new ways to prevent further destruction and protect themselves against outside forces. During this period, a continuum of violence prevailed with women being the most common recipients of this violence. As gender roles started to become re-traditionalized and tribal attitudes gained more influence, Kurdish women were forced into marginal positions and lost their voice and identity. This chapter discusses different cases of Kurdish women's subjugation and marginalisation and explores the processes of coming to voice of these women and their attempts to resist violence and to destroy forced negative images and identities by breaking imposed silences through speaking up and telling stories of violence. The chapter focuses on the second phase of the three-moment periodizing model developed in Chapter One to divide the representation of women in relation to recent Kurdish history, for the purpose of this thesis, into three phases: women and war-time violence, women and post-conflict violence, and women and terrorism-related violence.

While the previous chapter examined the ways in which Kurdish women suffered from increased levels of violence in the contexts of wars and migrations, this chapter is concerned with the various forms and layers of violence imposed on Kurdish women by the tribal and patriarchal norms within the post-conflict Kurdish society of Iraqi Kurdistan as well as political and governmental personalities in State-sponsored institutions. Sabri Silevani's *Mariama: Kiçe-Jinek ji Zemanek Di* (Mariama: A Woman from Another Time, 2007) and Tahsin Navishki's *Tavge* (Tavge, 2011) reflect this phase of Kurdish history through the depiction of Kurdish women's exposure to different levels of male, community and State-related violence and their attempts to resist imposed marginalization and to create spaces both to subvert oppressive socio-political structures and achieve subjectivity and self-esteem. Additionally, they examine the implications of constant political transitions and new social and economic orders for the lives of Kurdish women in the post-war quasi-independent Kurdish Region. The novels delineate the struggle of Kurdish women for voice and subjectivity in the hectic period following the reunification of the KDP and PUK in 2005 and the recognition of Kurdistan as a federal region with its own institutions under the new Iraqi constitution.

Mariama: A Woman from Another Time follows Mariama's tireless search for subjectivity and dignity in a society that victimizes her and silences her. Mariama, both narrator and protagonist, is raped at a very young age by an old man and spends the rest of her life paying for the aggression imposed on her. Though she has never reported the sexual assault to anyone, Mariama decides at her thirty-sixth birthday to break silence and tell her story to Nareen, her new friend. *Tavge* depicts the victimization of two young women by the misogynist ideology that predominates in post-conflict Kurdish society. The text reflects the psychological and physical abuse of Tavge, a journalist, when she decides to break silence around violence and publish the story of Zhila's sexual assault. Male-violence and State-related aggression expressed in the misogynist acts by some political and governmental personalities become indistinguishable. In both texts, women victims attempt to reclaim their agency and resist the oppression they face as well as elaborate on the importance of speaking/telling and how it represents a discourse by which women empower and resist violence. Before moving on to describe this process, it is important to explain the need for the exploration of gender roles and feminist issues by male authors in the Kurdish context.

4.1 The Female Perspective in the Bahdini Novels by Male Authors

Written by male authors, *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and *Tavge* are considered to be the first fictional representations of violence against women in the Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan.³⁸³ In the absence of a Kurdish feminist literary tradition, Kurdish male authors, writing with a sense of responsibility to their community and nation, have started to focus and experiment with feminist issues and themes in their works. Although male writers in diverse contexts have historically helped achieve women's liberation and advance feminist discourses, some of the most important contributions are those made by African American writers in that their history is one of the most violent and turbulent in terms of racial and gender struggle for freedom and equality. Collins contends that while the term Black feminist applies primarily to African American women, "both men and women can be "Black feminists" and Fredrick Douglass and W. B. Du Bois are prominent examples of Black male feminists."³⁸⁴ Throughout their work, ex-slave and abolitionist Fredrick Douglass and the historian and civil rights activist W. B. Du Bois have supported women's economic and socio-political rights. For example, in his work for the suffrage movement, Douglass asserted in the anti-slavery

³⁸³ Silevani, 10 November 2016, Personal Interview.

³⁸⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (USA: Routledge, 1991), 19.

newspaper *North Star*, published after his attendance in the First Women's Rights Convention in 1848, that:

In respect to political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man. We go farther, and express our conviction that all political rights which it is expedient for man to exercise, it is equally so for women. All that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being is equally true of women... There can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land.³⁸⁵

Writing more recently than Douglass, Du Bois' work had a significant political and economic impact on the African American thought and literary discourse in relation to women's rights. In "Black Feminist and Du Bois," Farah Jasmine Griffin indicates that: "More than any other African American thinker of his time or before, W. B. Du Bois devoted a great deal of his attention to the condition of black women specifically and distinct from black men."³⁸⁶ Unlike in the African American context, Kurdish historians, activists and authors have been more concerned with questions of Kurdish national liberation and independence than with social issues, even before the rise of nationalism early in the twentieth century. This overt emphasis on the Kurdish national struggle together with the highly conservative and tribal nature of the majority of the Kurdish regions has created a notable absence of a feminist tradition in all the spheres of Kurdish society. Accordingly, in their studies of Kurdish history, culture, art and literature, most scholars, whether Kurdish or non-Kurdish, have tended to ignore the gender dimension. Although women have always been a significant part of Kurdish history and society, they never found their way into the traditionally male-dominated literary discourses until quite late in the twentieth century when a number of authors started to investigate feminist issues and themes in their works. Their representation of women, however, has been mostly subordinated to questions of national and political struggles.

Silevani and Navishki employ feminist themes as central to the understanding of Kurdish women's personal and political motivations to break silence and resist violence. In their depiction of the feelings, pains and experiences of physically and psychologically abused women, Silevani and Navishki show a profound interest in women as individuals and in their communal, national and international rights and in the necessity of resisting and eradicating violence. By concentrating on the inner lives of Mariama and Tavge, the writers are concerned with the evolving image of the Kurdish woman, her subjectivity, and the recreation of her distinct identity. In his review of Silevani's text, Omar Dilsoz delineates the ways in which the novel contributes to the advancement of the

³⁸⁵ National Park Service: Women's Rights: <http://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/frederick-douglass.htm>

³⁸⁶ Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Black Feminist and Du Bois," *ANNALS, AAPSS*, 568 (March, 2000), 29.

contemporary Kurdish novelist discourse in terms of the ways it represents the sufferings and conflicts of Kurdish women. Arguing that the text depicts Mariama's resistance to the various national, political and religious ideologies that confine Kurdish women into inferior positions and enhance violence practiced against them, Dilsoz adds that

Sabri Silevani's social critique is concerned with the female's fight for existence and Middle Eastern traditional expectations of women. His novel offers an alternative ideology by which women and their agency should be viewed and in which violence needs to be eliminated.³⁸⁷

In representing Mariama's encounters with different men, each with a different background and ideological outlook, the novel situates Kurdish men and women's perceptions of each other, which are mostly troubled and infused with a legacy of authoritative and patriarchal attitudes, in a critical tension. Kirmanj, the only sympathetic and supportive male character in the novel, is portrayed as an exception, especially in his care and respect for women. For example, in her description of Kirmanj's un-gendered attitudes, Mariama confirms that unlike most Kurdish men, Kirmanj uses the word 'human' not 'man' to refer to himself. Similarly, in *Tavge Aram* is described as a 'hero' by Tavge: "My Aram, the most daring hero, always ready to offer help faster than Prophet Solomon's jinn."³⁸⁸ Most male characters in the two novels, however, provide clear gendered examples in showing little or no attention to women's influences and roles in society. These male characters also suggest the misread, conflicted, and even irreconcilable relationship between men and women. The representation of these male characters furthermore confirms the writers' outlook that humans need to be liberated before countries and that in a society where women are marginalized and viewed as properties and sex objects, the men in their lives will remain primitive and morbid.

Although their texts are not devoid of questions of Kurdish national struggle and identity, Silevani and Navishki, unlike the mainstream Kurdish male authors in Bahdinan, write from a feminist perspective by focusing on feminist themes of particular importance to Kurdish women. This, however, is not to say that these two texts are exceptional cases in the contemporary Bahdini novelistic discourse. Almost all Kurdish novels contain at least a reference, at some point, to the ever present reality and threat of sexual and physical violence exerted against Kurdish women. For example, Taha Naji's *Ew Aşê Derav*

³⁸⁷ Omar Dilsoz, *Mariama Sabri Silêvaney Qunaşeke Nu ye d Romana Kurdis da* (Sabri Silevani's Mariama: A New Phase in the Modern Kurdish Novel), Sabri Silevani: Writer and Novelist, (December/۲۰۱۲), <http://silevani.webnode.com/#!>

³⁸⁸ Tahsin Navishki, *Tavge* (Hawler: The Cultural Press, 2011), 37. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses). All English in-text quotations from this work are my own translation and will be annotated throughout the thesis with the original corresponding passages from the Kurdish (Bahdini) text.

ئارامی من میرزا محە دە هە وار و تە نگاڤیان، ژنه فریتی سلیمان پیغه مبه ر ب له زتر.

Lê Wergaray (The Mill that Changed the Water's Stream, 2002), Sidqi Hirori's *Ez u Delal* (Dalal and Me, 2007) Hassan Ibrahim's *Evin u Anfal* (Aveen and Anfal, 2010), and Tahsin Navishki's *Alê Di Yê Prê* (The Other Side of the Bridge, 2010) make various references to the sexual violence and economic discrimination experienced by Kurdish women. Reviewing these texts, however, one can hardly find substantial connections between the brutal reality of sexual and physical assault and the literary representations made by these writers. In these texts, violence and the effects it leaves on women and their self-perception are depicted as a trope or treated as just one of the many conflicts the characters go through.

Employing the female body as a focal point, Silevani and Navishki aim to break the silence imposed on women and represent explicit references and descriptions of sexual and physical violence practiced within the post-conflict Kurdish society. They present graphic descriptions of rape, sexual abuse, physical assaults, and state-related violations and exploitations. Their texts, examined in this chapter, offer new readings of the act of sexual abuse by paying attention to its horrific details and the way the abused women feel during and after the act. The writers, that is to say, not only bring into their novels the violence practiced against Kurdish women, but also the resultant effects as well as women's attempts to re-establish their shattered self-images. To serve this process, the writers bring various extra-textual facts and realities into their texts. These extra-textual facts include contextual aspects such as history and traditional manners and social attitudes towards gender relations and women's position in Kurdish society. Such aspects not only give the texts realist features, but also serve as identification of and an introduction to the forms and layers of violence prevailing in the post-conflict Kurdish society.

It is important that almost all Navishki's novels display such preoccupations with the representation of female characters and the depiction of feminist themes. In *Beheshta Agri* (A Hellish Heaven, 2011), his first novel written in 1999 and only published in 2011 because of its considerable length, Navishki depicts the victimization of a Kurdish woman held in a political prison of the Ba'ath regime and her later efforts to take revenge upon the man who was responsible for her imprisonment. Navishki's second novel, *Janên Sinahiyê* (Agonies of Insights, 2005) also tells of the miserable life experiences of a young innocent girl with her cruel stepmother.³⁸⁹ His two later novels, *Cavê Sitafkê* (The Eye of the Shadow, 2007), and *Pel u Xoli* (Ember and Ash, 2009) reflect the historical experiences of conflicts and wars of the Kurds in Iraq and their struggle to assert their national and cultural identity.

³⁸⁹ Navishki, 16 November 2016, Personal Interview.

Like the works of the emerging Kurdish novelists, Navishki's texts clearly manifest his preoccupation with the historical miseries and persistent struggles of the Kurdish people in Iraq and the effects extending to the present day. Navishki is a seasoned writer who has lived and witnessed many of the challenges faced by the Kurdish people in the past few decades. Born in 1968 in Navishkê, a small village in the Doski district to the north of Duhok city, Navishki started a literary career in 1986 and published his first collection of poems in 1989 in the Bahdini section of *Hawkari*, printed in Erbil, the capital city of KRG. Inspired by the miseries and turmoils of the Kurdish population in Iraq, these poems are characterized by an overt emphasis on realism and symbolism and manifest the deep influence of the socio-political situation of the Kurds in Iraq. He also published poems and short stories in a number of Kurdish periodicals in Duhok and Erbil including *Bizav* (Endeavour, 1981-1987) and *Karwan* (1983-1988). From 1994 until 2003, he worked as a reporter for the influential weekly magazine *Peyman*, (Promise) published in Duhok which he confirms had enriched his journalistic experiences and had a profound impact on his writing career.³⁹⁰ Becoming a prolific Navishki soon published a number of poetry collections, children's books and novels. His later novels, *The Other Side of the Bridge* and *Tavge*, pay particular attention to the representation of Kurdish women's experiences of violence and terrorism in the post-conflict Kurdish society. These two novels share a similar focus on gender roles and women's changing political and social positions in Kurdish society. Navishki's career as a journalist has had a major impact on his literary production, particularly novels which are marked by highly reflective and documentary styles of narration. The novels also document the impact of political and administrative corruption on the women and whole society.

Similarly, in most of his writings— novels, poems and journal articles— Silevani, born in 1972 in Zakho, demonstrates a profound interest in feminist questions and adopts a feminist perspective through the depiction of female characters and female themes. Silevani's literary career began in 1987 with the publication of various journal articles in Duhok. Due to political persecution as well as ideological conflicts within his political group, Silevani chose the path of exile and left Kurdistan in 1993 to settle in the Netherlands, where he stayed for more than a decade and came back to settle in Kurdistan in 2006.³⁹¹ Living and studying in Europe have not only provided him with a first-hand contact with Western and world literatures but have also been the main motivations for his novel-writing.³⁹² After publishing a number of poems, Silevani published his first novel, *Ava Mazin*, (The

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Huda M. Salih, trans., *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* (Duhok: Abdal Nuri, 2009), 3.

³⁹² Silevani, 10 November 2016, Personal Interview.

Great Water) in 2004 followed by *Bist Sal u Êvarek* (Twenty Years and a Night 2005), *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* (2007) and *Sifra Silevi* (Silevi's Book, 2009). Silevani also published a number of theoretical and critical studies about a number of questions related to the life and thoughts of the modern Kurdish individual in a book published in 2008 entitled *Paiza Peyvan* (Autumn of Words). Although not all his novels represent women as central characters, Silevani proclaims that in his depiction of women, especially Mariama, he has more than one message to deliver: In addition to the representation of the subservient and marginalized positions of women in the post-conflict Kurdish society, he suggests that Kurdish society as a whole needs to stop looking only at the outside form, the body of the woman and look deeper inside her.³⁹³ He aims to show everyone the reality of Kurdish women's life, suffering, resilience and determination to survive. It is a generally acknowledged fact that women in Iraqi Kurdistan are facing more than one form of violence and oppression and are doubly bound by the tyranny of the Iraqi governments and by the tribal and traditional ideologies of the Kurdish society. The novel, in the Kurdish context, can be one innovative way to give voice to silenced Kurdish women.³⁹⁴

By bringing these two works by male authors into textual dialogue with one another, the chapter addresses the processes undertaken by Kurdish women to resist the violence and oppression they experience on account of their gender and economic status. The novels speak about different interrelated types of oppressed women: the physically and psychologically abused women, the sexually violated women, and the politically marginalized women. Confronting the hypocrisy and misogyny of the Kurdish patriarchal society, these women suffer stressful situations: gendered oppression, socio-political discrimination, and confining silences. Yet, in both novels, Kurdish female characters' principal source of strength is their determination to break silence and tell stories of oppression. In this sense, the chapter considers, among others, the following points: 1) female characters' strategies to combat the various forms of violence imposed on them by the patriarchal powers in society, whether the men, the tribe, or the state; 2) the stifling or thwarting of their potential for resistance; 3) the ways to actualize their resistance and determination to speak of their oppression; and 4) the possibility of women's resilience and independence.

Despite the prevalence of male-female relations, the central issue in both novels is the survival of the individual female free from oppressive patriarchal norms. Mariama and Tavge endeavour to re-create

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

themselves through telling their own stories of violence. A key element in their characterization is their ability to explore ingenious ways by which to restore dignity and subjectivity. In this sense, the chapter not only investigates the causes and consequences of violence as represented in the novels but also asserts, based upon the novels' own conclusions, the importance of breaking silence around that violence. Central to this discussion is the historical relationship between traditional gender attitudes towards women and the increased levels of violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society discussed in detail in the second chapter. Most studies of violence against women, as was shown, view its prevalence as an extension of cultural norms and social practices. Additionally, these studies view Kurdish people as sharing a system of ideology that promotes aggressive gender attitudes and man's right to dominate and control the family and society.

4.2 Gender Aggression, Power Imbalance and Direct Acts of Violence against Women

According to Elizabeth A. Stanko, "violence involves inflicting emotional, psychological, sexual, physical and/or material damage."³⁹⁵ Discussing the ways in which women are caught by various forces in society, Stanko asserts that "being female — in spite of our many differences — has profound implications for our lives. But we are not just females: we are equally affected by our age, class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and whether we are mothers."³⁹⁶ Similarly, Siobhan Lloyd argues that violence against women "knows no boundaries of culture, age, sexual preference, body ability, class, ethnicity, or creed."³⁹⁷ Arguing that violence against women varies according to perpetrators, victims and the contexts in which violence takes place, Lloyd adds:

It is not just the behaviour itself or how it is represented which determines its categorization as violent, but the interpretation put on that behaviour by each of the parties involved— the assailant, the person against whom the violence is perpetrated, witnesses, the police, criminal justice system, and helping agencies.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Elizabeth A. Stanko, "Models of Understanding Violence Against Women," in *Violence Against Women*, ed. Susan Bewley, John Friend and Gillian Mezey, (London: RCOG Press, 1997), 13.

³⁹⁶ Stanko, "Models of Understanding Violence Against Women," 14.

³⁹⁷ Siobhan Lloyd, "Defining Violence Against Women," in *Violence Against Women*, ed. Susan Bewley, John Friend and Gillian Mezey, (London: RCOG Press, 1997), 3.

³⁹⁸ Lloyd, "Defining Violence Against Women," 5.

Lloyd, additionally, points to a report published by the United Nations in 1995 which confirms that “millions of women become victims of battering, marital rape, dowry violence, domestic murder, forced pregnancy, abortion, and sterilization.”³⁹⁹

In the post-conflict Kurdish society in Iraq, violence against women can become manifest in a variety of ways including the pre-dominant patriarchal norms of behavior, deprivation of educational and professional opportunities, domestic abuse, genital mutilation, honour-based crimes, and physical and sexual assaults. Because of the rising levels of these gendered aggressions, they are increasingly viewed as human rights violations and are currently regarded as crimes by the justice systems in Kurdistan. A careful examination of violence against women needs to be prefaced by a discussion of the various actions, attitudes, structures, and systems that perpetuate and legitimize it. Equally important is a theoretical framework that not only investigates the various forms of violence practiced against women, but also considers the interrelationship between these forms of violence and the factors contributing to its persistence. Taking these measures into account, this section explores the dominant discourses of violence which Silevani and Navishki have drawn on to make fictional representations of the causes and consequences of gendered aggression in the post-conflict Kurdish society.

Studying the causal factors of violence against women, different theories and approaches have been proposed. For example, there are theories that attribute violence to biological factors, theories that view violence as a result of social learning and others that study violence as an intrinsic part of social structure. Other theories assert that abstracting violence from its social setting and the personal characteristics of individuals do not lead to effective interpretations of violence. This is well illustrated in Lori L. Heise’s integral/ecological model which conceptualizes violence as “a phenomenon grounded in interplay among personal, situational, and socio-cultural factors.”⁴⁰⁰

Since violence against women in the Kurdish society is rooted in the tribal and traditional socio-cultural structures and in individuals’ understanding of gender politics, it is essential to consider the ways these contribute to the legalization and continuation of violence. Accordingly, in this chapter, I utilize political scientist Johan Galtung’s 1990 three-fold typological model of violence in which the personal characteristics of individuals and the political, economic, and cultural structures of a society are viewed as factors affecting the generation of gendered aggression, particularly his emphasis on the associations between the various layers of violence. In “Cultural Violence,” Galtung identifies three

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Lori L Heise, “Violence against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework,” *Women’s Studies*, 4:3 (June, 1998), 2.

interrelated forms of violence: 1) direct violence which includes acts of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, 2) structural violence which includes acts of institutionalized and state-related exploitation and oppression; and 3) cultural violence which Galtung defines as “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural forms.”⁴⁰¹ Confirming that violence studies are not only about the use of violence, but also the generation and legitimation of that use, Galtung states that permanent cultural aspects such as religion, ideology, and language contribute to the spread and continuity of direct and structural forms of violence.

Additionally, I draw on the congruity between Galtung’s typology and the feminist perspective on violence which asserts the significance of the male-dominated social structure and socialization practices associated with gender roles, power, and patriarchy as factors contributing to the persistence of violence. An important illustration of the feminist perspective on violence against women in congruence with Galtung’s view is Catia Confortini’s “Galtung, Violence, and Gender” which presents a theorization of violence based on the interrelations between gender and power. Confortini, a transnational feminist and women’s rights activist, confirms that while feminists have prolifically theorized about war and violence, forms of violence and the causes and consequences of that violence, they need to employ a theory of violence that takes into account the different forms of violence and the associations between them. Also important is Confortini’s focus on gender as a patriarchal social construct and its association with power and domination. According to her: “Issues of power and gender are essential to an undertaking of violence as a complicated process through which social relations of power are built, legitimized, reproduced, and naturalized.”⁴⁰²

Also emphasizing the interplay between gender and power, Liz Wall, a women’s rights specialist, confirms that “the perpetuation of men’s violence against women is understood to be a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.”⁴⁰³ Associating increased levels of violence against women with gender inequality, Wall proposes the implementation of a model that

⁴⁰¹ Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 27:3 (August, 1990), 891.

⁴⁰² Catia C. Confortini, “Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance,” *PEACE & CHANGE*, 31:3 (July, 2006), 356.

⁴⁰³ Liza Wall, “Gender Equality and Violence against Women- What is the Connection?” *ACSSA Research Summery, Melbourne*, (June, 2014), 1.

addresses the “influence factors at various levels— societal, community, and individual— to give greater contextual meaning to how gender inequality plays out in reality.”⁴⁰⁴

In congruity with Galtung’s typology and the feminist emphasis on gender and power, I define Silevani and Navishki’s representation of direct acts of emotional, physical, and sexual aggression as an indistinguishable part of a larger contextual framework of socio-cultural structures and state-related practices. This section will present Mariama’s, Zhila’s, and Tavge’s exposure to direct acts of violence which will later be connected to larger contexts such as the police and justice systems, religious fundamentalism, political orientations, and familial structures in the following section. Additionally, I analyze the novels’ employment of other factors related to Kurdish culture such as family structures and the societal and religious influences on family and marriage.

Exploring the power imbalance and patriarchally-inscribed gender relations, Mariama delivers harangues on the physical, sexual, and emotional violence she has experienced both in childhood and mature life. The first chapter “July the First,” opens with Mariama’s self-narration of her story and personal experiences. She starts by exhibiting the traditional patriarchal attitudes of Kurdish men and the way they view women:

How can I not tire when everything I approach turns male? Every man, without building pyramids, desires to be a pharaoh and we [women] should dance in his throne room while our dreams die alone in narrow frightening lanes. I am tired, tired of everything. ⁴⁰⁵

Through her conversation with Nareen, Mariama indicates that her life has always been dominated by fear and loneliness. She explains that fear has become a norm in her life since she is taught to fear everything: God and the Day of *Qiyamet* (Judgment), silence and loneliness, relationships and dreams. Additionally, she associates these feelings with the patriarchal ideology of her society in which women are increasingly confined in passive roles and viewed as sex objects. She tells Nareen that people in

⁴⁰⁴ Wall, “Gender Equality and Violence against Women,” 3. In its 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the United Nations General Assembly made the same link between violence and gender inequality. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2010) emphasizes gender inequality as a determinant factor in the prevention of violence against women.

⁴⁰⁵ Sabri Silevani, *Mariama: Kiçe -Jinek ji Zemanek Di* (Mariama: A Woman from Another Time) (Duhok: Hawar Press, 2007), 13. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses). All English in-text quotations from this work are my own translation and will be annotated throughout the thesis with the original corresponding passages from the Kurdish (Bahdini) text.

هەر نێرەك - بێ كو پیرامیدان ئافا بكت - دخوازت ببت فیر عهونهك و ئەم ل بهر دهر ازینكا عهرشه وى سهمایه بكن، بهلێ خهونین مه ل كۆلانی تهنگ و ترسدار تته ب دهستپهڕی ب دوماهیك بهین.

her society “only see the feminine part of a woman. They forget her soul and imprison her thoughts. They hurt her feelings and feed on her body.” (18)⁴⁰⁶

In the following three chapters of the novel, Mariama tells of her mother, Halima’s death when she was only thirteen years old and of her father’s marriage to Manjool, a widow, shortly after the funeral. The marriage, however, did not last for long as her father was killed during the First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran. We soon learn that the relationship between Mariama and Manjool has not been a good one especially after her father’s death as Manjool started directing all her hatred, anger, and revenge towards Mariama. The shock of her father’s death is so intense that Mariama falls seriously ill and is taken to the hospital by her kind neighbour Mayrê and her husband Muhammad, an old man referred to as Kabra (the Guy) in the novel. To keep her away from the crowd of the funeral, Mayrê decides to take Mariama to her house and look after her.

Mariama’s description of Kabra very early in the novel as ugly, hateful and vicious, like most men in the society, not only creates a sense of foretaste and apprehension related to this man, but also reflects the way she views men in general. She describes him as a hypocritical womanizer who pretends to be the kind caring neighbour and at the same time conspires with Manjool to exploit Mariama’s weakness and ingenuousness. Chapter five “Another Time,” depicts Mariama’s rape by Kabara the same day her father has been buried. Describing the sexual assault, Mariama draws on a dream in which she sees herself wandering in a beautiful childish and colourful garden she compares to the Garden of Eden and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon: “It was spring. The green landscape was furnished with colourful flowers. Everywhere the babble of the waterfalls mingled with the chirping of birds” (40).⁴⁰⁷ Her dream, however, stands in a profound contrast to the reality of the sexual assault she is experiencing. Whether because of her illness or her inexperienced mind, the violent act is not comprehensible to Mariama until it is over when she feels “a shiver in [her] belly” (41).⁴⁰⁸ She wakes up to see herself: “On Mayrê’s iron bed... Neither in the Gardens of Eden nor in the Babylon Hanging Gardens... But in a dark, damp and cave-like room and Kabra tightening up his belt and leaving the room” (41).⁴⁰⁹ It is

ٺهو راهاتنه كو سمردهر بيبي تنى ل گهل ميباتيا زنى بكن، بهلى گمهرى وى ماندهل دكن، هزرين وى د هيلينان ده چنگوبى دكن، هستى وى 406 دنارزين و جهستهي وى دخون

دونيا بوهار بوو، زمين كهسك و ب گولدار و كوليلكين رنگين خملاندى بوو، ل همر درهكى دهنكى شرين و خومخوما ناڤا سولاقان، ل گهل دهنكى 407 قهينا كهوان و چريوريا تهير و تمولان ب تايهت شالول و بولبولان، دهات بهيستن.

ره جفينه ك كه ته 408 زكى من

409 ل سمر تهختى ميري بي ناسنى نهز قهجنقم و خمو ژ چاقى من قهرهقى. نه فيردوسا عمدنى، نه باغين بابلى و نه مروقى سهر و بيانى، بهلى تنى شكهفتهك شههدار و كبرا، وى زى دوخينا خوه گرت و ل دهرى دا.

important that Mariama associates her sexual abuse and later exploitations by Kabra and the resultant estrangement from society she feels both to the erroneous understanding of religion by people and their traditions-bound ideology: "I never had friends though I extremely needed one. In such a conservative Islamic Middle Eastern society like ours, who dares befriending a raped girl?" (101)⁴¹⁰ She not only holds Kabra responsible for the violence exerted against her, but the whole society. She tells Nareen:

I used to think at times that only if people knew what he was doing to me, they would absolutely help me, but then I remembered that they would also condemn me. Nareen, Kabra killed me one time, whereas this society and those people calling themselves faithful and honourable murder me every day carelessly and disgracefully. (47)⁴¹¹

She adds, a page later:

Honestly Nareen, I do not fear them [people in her society]... I actually pity them. They uplift the burdens of 'Kabras' and increase the burdens of 'Mariamas.' I am female in a society that only appreciates maleness and associates female virginity and honour with a hymen that they tear themselves. (48-49)⁴¹²

By reading a few verses from the Holy Koran and performing some juggling and magic acts, Kabra hypocritically uses religion and the influence it usually inflicts on people to gratify his own desires.⁴¹³ He convinces his wife and Mariama that the latter is haunted by *Zarê Mazin*, an evil spirit which needs to be exorcised by a religiously committed sacred man like himself. He also claims that since *Zarê Mazin* has completely controlled Mariama's body, its exorcism will need more than one session. Exploiting Mariama's weakness and naivety and Manjool's co-operation, he uses these sessions to extend his sexual abuse of Mariama. The following chapter of the novel "Year Twenty One," describes both the brutality of Kabra's sexual abuse of Mariama and the pervasive consequences it inflicts on

ب راستی ژى نيز بى هيفال بووم و پيوستتيا من ب هيفالان هه بوو. بهلى ل جفاكهك ئيسلامى، روژهلالاتى و كهفته پيرست كو هيز ل گور ياساين⁴¹⁰ مرييان دژيت، كى رازى يه، يان كى دويرت هه قاليا كچكهك ژ كچينيبى هاتى ئيخستن بكت؟
هندهك جار ان نيز ل بهر دلوكوكى خوه ددم، دبيزم كو هيز كسين دلسوز ل قى وهلاتى ماينه، هه گهر پى بعسن هه ليهت بو وى ناهيلن بهلى پاشى نيز⁴¹¹ فه دجنقم: "نه خيز! نمو دئ ته شهر مزار بكن". نارين، كابر ايبى نيز جار هكئ تنى كوژتم و هيدى هيدى فيرى ژانا كوژتنى كرم. بهلى جفاك و نمو كسين كو خوه ب دلسوز و ب ناموس ل قلمم ددن، ب خه مسارى و بيغيره تيا خوه، ب ترس و دهر برينا بيواته، ههر روژ من دكوژن.

نارين، ب راستى نيز ژ وان ناترسم. بهلى دلئ من ب وان دشهوتت و جفاك ژى نهف جفاكى هه بى يه، من گه ماروو ددت، بارئ "كابر ايان" سفاك دكت⁴¹² و بارئ "مريه مايان" گران دكت. بوونه رهك مى مه، بارئ من گرانه، چونكه هه موو ب جار هكئ بهر ب نيز بوونى دچن... و پسردهبا كچينيبى بوويه پيغان بو مييونئى، بوويه مهر ج بو كچينى و دهه مه نپاكيينى.

⁴¹³ Mariama gives several examples of the way Kabra is exploiting simple people's naivety and ignorance including the way he turns milk into blood. Mariama indicates that, like others, she used to believe that he could turn milk into blood with his special powers and adds that she only came to realize that he was adding sodium bicarbonate.

her: “Kabra not only stole my virginity, he destroyed everything beautiful in my life: Dreams, ambitions, names, histories, behavior, and my relationships with society” (46).⁴¹⁴

This chapter of the novel presents the text’s most horrific and brutal scenes of sexual violence and abuse. While the act of rape has only been mentioned indirectly in the first instance, it is portrayed directly in this chapter as Silevani seeks to present a comprehensive portrait of the act and its physical and psychological effects on Mariama. Mariama’s description of the sexual violence she has experienced at such a young age brings back into her mind painful memories from which she has never recovered. The horrible images of the act have kept her from forming a healthy social life in the present time as she constantly fights to outlive their traumatic memories. Unlike the first instance of rape, when the reader needs to decipher the act of the sexual assault from the few sentences that represent it, such as “I was filled with colours” and “Kabra fastening his belt” (41), Mariama starts to delineate a visually conceivable graphic description of the violence Kabra continues to exert against her. She tells of the way Kabra commences with what she describes as ‘the rites of exorcism’ by lighting a few candles, undressing her and asking her to lay down on the white sheet he has put on the ground. She goes on to say:

I was extremely mortified. Fear and bashfulness mingled in me like electrical currents... I started shivering. I hid my breasts with one hand and tried with the other to cover my genital area. He threw me on the floor under his feet and turned me around. (51)⁴¹⁵

The more Mariama carries on with the descriptions of these moments, the more ugly and unpleasant the images of the sexual abuse become: “Afterwards, he passed his hand along my back till he reached my legs. He stood behind me and extended his hand to touch my lips, my chest, and then between my legs. Then, he threw me on the floor and turned me over” (52).⁴¹⁶ Along the portrayal of the outrageousness of Kabra’s aggression, Silevani makes numerous allusions to Mariama’s suffering both during and after the act:

Kabra imposed himself on me like a painful reality. All these years passed and I still feel besieged by him. Thinking of him still stifles me. I feel great anguish and lose my breath. Because it was

⁴¹⁴ ناخر کابرايي ئهز نه بئ پهردهيا کچينيبي ب تتئ هيلام، بهلي چو تشتي جوان د جيهانا من ده: خهون، مهراق، ناف، ديرۆك، رهفتار و رامانين جفاكي من، همموو ب جارمكي شکاندن.

ههستي ترسي و شهرمي وهك سهركين سار و گهرم گههشتن ههفدو، ئهز نه سوتم بهلي تهزيكي ئهز گرتم. ب دهستهكي من سينگي خوه نخاقت و ب⁴¹⁵ دي زي پيسيرا خوه. وهك مسنارمكي، ئهز دهافتم بهر پين خوه و ل دور خوه زفراندم. دهستي ل دووف ره کابرايي ده ستي خوه ب پشتا من وکه ماخين من هينا خوار هه تا کو گه هشتي لنگين من. چوو و ل پشت من سه کني قيجا ده ستي خوه گه ⁴¹⁶ هاند ده ف و ليقيين من، به رسينگي من، نافکا من ...وه ساد ستي خوه گه هاند موويين بنز کي من.

done to me against my will, I was not only traumatized the first time, but every time he approached me. (59)⁴¹⁷

As illustrated by the above passage, the representation of violence, whether actual or metaphorical, is consistently appended by a description of Mariama's suffering which takes a significant formal dimension throughout the novel. Suffering becomes so tangible that the reader conceives of it as a character with a material presence rather than an unspeakable sentiment. Mariama's everlasting suffering is evident both in her realization of what she has lived through and its power to command her life in the present. Just as Silevani blurs the boundaries between the actual assault by Kabra and the metaphorical aggression of her community, he conflates the actual suffering Mariama undergoes with her metaphorical battle to combat it. Mariama, who never gets free from Kabra and the physical and emotional traces of his assault, learns to suppress her suffering and survive through painting. Though most people do not even bother to comprehend, the symbolism she uses in her paintings becomes the only form of expression through which she both tells her story of oppression and alleviates her long-lasting suffering. In other words, her paintings become the embodiment of her suffering: "July the first, cracks, torn curtains, black snakes, and train smoke became the major symbols in my paintings. In some paintings all these symbols intertwine and move away from my sight" (92).⁴¹⁸ Characteristically, the persistent symbolization and figuration of Mariama's anguish and suffering highlights the devastation that sexual abuse has wrought upon her. The consequences of Kabra's sexual violence, however, transcend her eternal suffering. The violence not only results in her pregnancy and abortion because of poor nutrition and miscarriage, but also in her being deprived of education and a healthy social living. She grows up a broken secluded woman completely estranged:

How can I not be estranged when I have been deprived of many things: The fantasy of childhood, the exhilaration of adolescence, and the free talks with school mates? All that faded away after that dream of the colourful rainbow. I am viewed as a weak foreign female by my own community. (78)⁴¹⁹

كابرايى خوه ل سەر من فەرز كر و بوو راستىبهك ژاندار. چەند سال بۆرىن ژى بەلى ھىژ بەلا خوه ژ من فەناكت. گەه وەك خىومەكى، گەه ژى وەك ⁴¹⁷ شەفەستەكى پىرگى من دەھىت و من گەماروو ددت. ئەز پى دنېشم، بېھنا من مالغ دبت، خويدان من دگرت. نە تنى جارا ئىكى ئەز پى عاجز بووم بەلى ھەر جار، چونكى تىشتەك وەسا د سەرى من دە نەبوو، ل سەر دفنا من دەت نەجامدان.

"يەكئ تىرمەھى، دەرز، پەردەيىن قەتاندى، مارىن كۆرە و دووكىلا شەمەندەفرى" ببوون سىمبۆلەين سەرمەكى د كفالان دە. د ھندەك كەفالان دە، ھەموو ⁴¹⁸ سىمبۆل دوورى من دگەھشتن ھەف.

"چاوان ھاڧى نەبن و ئەم ژ گەلمەك تىشتان مەحرۇوم؟" ئەرى، وەك فانتازىيا زارۆكيبى، مەرقا ھەياما سنىلبىي و سوحبەتەين ھەقالەين خواندنگەھى دەربارى ⁴¹⁹ گوندان و خوەزايى.

An effective formal aspect maintained throughout the novel is the interplay between past and present indicated in Mariama's account of her personal experiences of almost three decades. Silevani's indisputable attention to time-conflation illustrated in the title of the novel has been discussed by a number of critics and reviewers. For example, in "Sabri Silevani and the Suffering of the Kurdish Woman," Haithem Hussein elucidates that Silevani characterizes different forms of 'timeless' violence imposed on the Kurdish women in a society holding on to oppressive traditions and mores and in which women fall victims to patriarchal attitudes and structures. He also explains that "although Silevani claims in the title that Mariama, his female protagonist, belongs to a different time, he starts the very first chapter with a specification of both time and place: first of July, Duhok City."⁴²⁰

Similar to Silevani's text, Navishki's *Tavge* depicts the relationship between gender inequality and gendered violence in the post-conflict Kurdish society. As a feminist text focusing on the violence exerted against women, *Tavge* shows that power imbalance in gender relations, the larger socio-cultural structures in the society, and the patriarchal ideologies of individuals are the main generators of violence against women. Employing a more metaphorical oblique language than Silevani, Navishki effectively evokes not only the suffering of certain individuals from gendered aggression, but also the collective suffering of the larger Kurdish community as well. His presentation of multiple levels of psychological, physical and sexual violence, with victims being both men and women, signifies the prevalence and wide occurrence of violence. Despite the dearth of details in depicting the horrific reality of sexual abuse experienced by Zhila and her son, Nazhad, the reader is given contexts through which they actively imagine the depth and severity of the traumatic experiences. In contrast, *Tavge*'s physical and emotional assaults are depicted directly using ample details that allow the experience to go beyond *Tavge* as an individual to include any person thinking about the imposition of justice and gender inequality in the Kurdish society. The use of both implicit and explicit references to violence signifies its prevalence at all social contexts. In other words, despite the notable socio-cultural and professional differences between Zhila and *Tavge*, both are victimized by the same system that legalizes and enhances their victimization.

The novel opens with Aram, a young talented artist, recalling the day he arrives in a hysterical manner to the hospital to visit his fiancé, who has been exposed to a brutal assault by three heavily veiled men. Although several months have passed since the misfortune, Aram is still unable to recover from the

⁴²⁰ Haithem Hussein, "Mariama: Sabri Silevani we Mua'nat al-Mara' al-Kurdiye," (Sabri Silevani and the Suffering of the Kurdish Woman), *Al-Jazire* <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/579c6e6e-40f2-404b-baca-69840f884802>

shock, refusing to see or talk to anyone. Confining himself to his room, he starts working in a portrait and at the same time reads from a notebook given to him by Tavge after the assault. Starting with ‘I will talk to you,’ the notebook is Tavge’s diary which not only give an account of her recent experiences, but also the whole story behind the assault. The novel, then, follows three related points of time: The current time in which Aram reads from Tavge’s diary, the time from which Tavge starts working as a journalist at *Galveen* magazine indicated in the diary, and the time after the assault in which Aram and Tavge try to recover from the traumatic assault and follow up with the police investigation to identify the assaulters. To understand Navishki’s text, the reader needs to follow the story-lines gradually as more and more of the past is revealed through Tavge’s diary and Aram’s recollections. With the story told from different points of view, Navishki emphasizes the interior experiences and feelings of his characters and articulates the psychological and physical trauma inflicted not only on specific characters but a whole community.

The first chapter of Tavge’s diary tells of the job she obtains at *Galveen* with the help and recommendation of her friend Warnas Samad. Tavge describes both her enthusiasm to work as a journalist and her disappointment at the overtly contradictory manners of Biston Baban, the chief editor of the magazine. Although he pretends to be supportive of Tavge and acclaims women’s presence in the traditionally male-dominated spheres of journalism and the media, his patriarchal attitudes soon become apparent. In his first meeting with Tavge, Baban implicitly emphasizes the superiority of men in the Kurdish society. This becomes evident when Tavge requests to put her real name on her articles: “And your father and brothers don’t mind you publishing your articles using your own name?” (17)⁴²¹ Responding to his constant implications on the Kurdish women’s inferior status and need for men’s help, Tavge tells him that men, not women, need to be empowered: “Who says you [men] are liberated so you can call for our [women’s] liberation?” (16)⁴²² Additionally, Tavge describes Baban’s restraining administration and compelling viewpoints towards independent journalism and the freedom of expression. Though he encourages Tavge to focus and write on daring social topics, he keeps modifying her writings reminding her that: “There are red lines and forbidden

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باب و برائین ته نابنه ریگر د ریبا ته ده ، توفی کارئ پیروز ب نافی خوة یئ ناشکرا بکه ی؟

کی دبژیت وه پیوان خوه رزگار کریه هه تا هوون بشن مه رزگار بکه ن؟⁴²²

topics in the society and the good journalist is one who accepts and deals professionally with the existing reality” (19).⁴²³

Despite social restrictions and Baban’s overpowering policies, Tavge becomes an influential journalist in a relatively short period of time and publishes significant topics and conducts significant journalistic investigations. Her best opportunity, however, comes when her friend Kawa advises her to pay more attention in her writings to the oppressed classes and groups in the Kurdish society. He asks her to pay a visit to the “Women and Adolescents’ Awareness and Reform Centre.” Tavge is certain that in this prison, she will meet many people silenced for years who will be ready to tell their stories. In the prison, a few days later, the chief administrator reminds Tavge that only because of his nephew’s recommendation, he will allow Tavge to meet with some prisoners. He high-handedly asserts the importance of confidentiality and adherence to the rules and policies of the prison:

I will remind you once again, no journalist has entered the prison since I first came here twelve years ago. I’ve never allowed any information out of the prison. Though there is nothing to hide in a prison of poor women and adolescents, we must not allow our secrets out. I think you understand me! (43)⁴²⁴

Although many women are willing to talk to Tavge, a remarkably calm, likeable woman in her fifties catches her attention. From her anguish and tears, Tavge realizes that the woman, called Zhila, has many painful memories and miserable experiences buried in her mind. Zhila, who expresses a desire to tell her story, first tells of her marriage, at a very young age, to Khisro, her cousin and all the horrible images of the Anfal campaign and the First Gulf War. She also tells of a man, Shewqi Achari, who harasses her before and after her marriage. Exploiting Khisro’s naivety and their serious economic hardships, Achari, through his powerful connections, finds Khisro a job as a patrol in a checkpoint at the borders far from the city where Zhila lives. Described as a double-faced manipulative villain, Achari takes Khisro’s salary as an excuse to frequently visit Zhila in her room in an old castle; now housing the displaced victims of one of the Anfal campaigns. Most significantly, she tells of the night when Achari victimized and oppressed her only to gratify his sexual desires:

From his gestures, I knew he would not leave this time before destroying my life. Before I was able to defend myself, he put the lantern off and attacked me like a wolf filling my senses with his perfume. With one hand on my mouth, he held me down. His perfume filled the air and all my

423 هنده ك سينۆرین سۆر ل هه موو دنیا یی هه نه. لی نه ز دبیز مه ته هه موو تشت ریژه بینة. رۆژ نامه ئهقیسی چالاک و خودی به هره نه وه، بشیت ب
شاره زایی سه ره ده ری دگه ل ره وشا هه یی بکه ت.

424 تو باش دزانی، نایت رۆژ نامه فان د فی واری ده، و ساسه ر بوخوه بچن، ل خیچین سۆر بده ن. ئهغه ل ده سننیککی من بو ته گۆت" لی ته نه و کر یا
تهقیای، نه یا مه فیای.

senses. I could do nothing. I only closed my eyes and the money I was holding in my hand fell to the ground. He did to me all he wanted to do. (68)⁴²⁵

As manifested in the above passage, the traces of Zhila's rape appear only in one or two sentences that reveal the existence of force and ambition. This brief sketch encourages the reader to look beyond the little information given and imagine and identify with the deep suffering that Zhila experiences. Sentences such as "attacked me like a wolf," "I only closed my eyes" and "he did to me all he wanted to do" signify both the brutality of the act of rape and Zhila's vulnerability and defenselessness. Unlike Mariama's detailed account of Kabra's sexual abuse, Zhila quickly moves to describe both the suffering and pain she experienced during and after the assault. Similar to Mariama, however, Zhila uses her sexual assault and exploitation as a standard against which she measures the resultant traumatic experiences and suffering. Zhila's suffering is compounded by her husband's accidental death at the hand of his own fellow patrol a few nights after Achari's sexual abuse. Zhila's situation gets even more complicated when she realizes her pregnancy which she compellingly assigns to her husband despite being uncertain. Exploiting his ascending social and political influence and Zhila's loneliness and her oppressive economic difficulties, Achari extends his sexual violence on her:

The vicious oppressor! After all that happened, he refused to leave me in peace. Even after moving to another house, he kept visiting me as if he was family. When my son Newzad started growing up, he preferred to come during night time. [Crying hard]... There was nothing I could do about it. (71)⁴²⁶

After attaining a significant promotion and a prominent social and political position and influence in the government, Achari disappears from Zhila's life. Zhila, however, never recovers from the painful scars and horrific memories of his sexual assaults, particularly after his re-appearance in her life more than a decade later. This is clearly manifested in her admission that she is in the prison because of Achari. Realizing that Achari who raped Zhila is the same person now known as Newzad Daryachi, the well-known governmental employee and politician who was murdered a few years ago in mysterious circumstances, Tavge asks Zhila if she has done it. At this point, Zhila refuses to continue and suggests that her son, Nazhad, who is a prisoner in the Adolescents' section of the same prison, completes the story.

ژ نشانين وى بين ژهه موو جاران دکه مباحتر، من زانى نياز او نيازو که خرابه و بې به لا ده رناکهفت! بترى نتر باخقم و ل ريکه که بترگيرى بگه 425 رييم، ل به ر له مبا ب ديوارى تير ده رز و که لشته راوه سنيا و کره نه مه ردى و ته مراند! د ناف خه ملا تبلجا قکى را، وه که گورگتکى دگه رما گوهنيله بى دا هيرش کر و دقنى من ب ده ستى ته زى دتنگير کر و بيهنا مسک و گولاقين وى بيهنا سوپه بى و شه ها خانى نه هيلان و نيدى ياره ژ دهستى من که تن و هه ر وه که نه ز به نج کریم! فيجا نزا چه وا نه ز وسا راده ستى زه نديقى بووم و نه وا قياى دگه ل من کر

نه و کافرئ نيشه للا سه رکى سه ى د ده قى ده بت، دگه ل نبليسى رابيت" هه ر به لا خوه ژ من فه نه دکر. نيکجارى نشتى نه م چوپينه خانىي خوه بى 426 نوو، هه ما بيشه رم وترس، وه که مالخوى مالى دهات! نشتى نه رادئ من فام کرى، نه و رووفى بوو " نيدى وسا بسته نه دهات، ب دورستى رووچکى وى بينت. سه د جاران جاره کى نه بايه، زانيبا يه مسوگه ر ل مال نينه" وه کى دى درتنگى شه قى دهات.

Zhila's suggestion clearly indicates that Newzad's oppression has extended to Nazhad and that he has a key role in Newzad's mysterious murder. Nazhad, now sixteen years old, tells Tavgé of the economic hardships he suffered as a child and the way he had to leave school and work as a shoeshiner on the streets. He also tells her of a man, Awni, who offered him a job as a caretaker in the house of his master, Shawqi Daryachi which he accepted immediately. Most important, Nazhad tells of his master's constant sexual advances and harassments: "He forced me into watching porn movies and insisted on teaching me how to swim suggesting that swimming is better all naked. He also constantly asked me to massage him, although it was not a part of my job" (93).⁴²⁷ Despite being brief and oblique, Navishki's glimpses of Nazhad's sexual harassment offer a complete image of the humiliation and pain endured by this young man.

By depicting the sexual violence experienced by a male character, Navishki recasts sexual politics by emphasizing that not only gender but social and economic status can be a causal factor of violence and a determinant of domination and abuse. Gender and economic status make Zhila and Nazhad vulnerable to disgrace, humiliation and exploitation. Nazhad, who admits being too confused and not comprehending Newzad's advances, confirms that Newzad deserved to die. Despite his fear and embarrassment, Nazhad explains the whole situation to his mother, Zhila who decides to put an end to all the years of oppression. Telling Nazhad of all the sexual and emotional violence imposed on her by Newzad, they decide that the only way is to kill him and revenge for their dehumanization and suffering. Although they try to plan carefully, they are both caught and charged with the murder.

4.3 Framing Gender Aggression: Institutionalized and Cultural Violence against Women

After describing all the pain, suffering and resultant loneliness and estrangement from Kabra's sexual abuse, Mariama promises Nareen to tell her of Kirmanj, the man who *really* wanted to 'rescue' her. However, before commencing with her story with Kirmanj, Mariama asks Nareen to be patient and listen to her encounter with three other men who appear in her life before Kirmanj. In a separate chapter, "The Other," Mariama describes her alienation and resentment of the constant domination of men in the Kurdish society and the ways in which the three men subjugate and oppress her. For Mariama, no matter what their names, personalities, and beliefs are, they are still representations of the same patriarchal system and products of the same violent war-torn past:

⁴²⁷ نَبْدِي نُه و دَبْرَه د ژوورقَه و نُه و فَلَلمِين هه تَكه بِيِن مَرُوف باوَه ر نَه كه ت ... و دَفِيَا مَه لَه فَانِيَا نِيَشَا مَن بَدَه ت و دَكوت رِيَس خُوشْتَرَه. و هه روه سا داخاز دَكُر وي مه ساج كه م سه ره راي هِنْدِي كو نه كاري مَن بو.

Clearly, every one of them had a distinct identity, they had three different existences, three sets of experiences, and three different names, but they were similar in their compositions and attitudes. I thought they were unique, but gradually, that thought faded away. Every one of them claimed to be the candle that would light up my dark life, but they ended up killing honesty in themselves and in me. (82)⁴²⁸

By juxtaposing these three male characters, Silevani confirms that violence against women is heavily layered by multi-dimensional forces of national discrimination, political antagonism, religious affinities, morality codes, and gender inequality. Most significantly, by portraying the ways in which Mariama is subordinated and abused by different men in different contexts, Silevani also confirms that gender norms and beliefs surrounding male domination and male superiority, created by gender power imbalance that accord men greater status, is the vital causal factor of Mariama's oppression whether in her childhood or mature life.

Also emphasizing broader contexts in which violence against women in the Kurdish society is perpetuated, Tavge's diary in Navishki's novel moves from Zhila and Nazhad's telling of the violence imposed on them and their plan to end it to the description of a threatening abduction she experiences immediately upon her departure from the prison where she has been conducting the interviews. Immediately after getting out of the building and before reaching the main road to hire a taxi, a black car stops and two huge men force her into the car, fastening her hands, and covering her face. Taken to an isolated place, Tavge can hear them arguing about what to do with her with one saying: "But the master says don't use acid the first time!" (116)⁴²⁹ Later, they start shouting at her and threatening her and before leaving her there, they take her phone, camera, purses, and notebooks and one of them tells her: "Hey, bigmouthed girl, you will not be warned the next time you try to interfere in other people's business. You will be left here a prey to beasts and wild animals" (116).⁴³⁰ From this point in the novel, Tavge's diary turns to the depiction of various instances in which she suffers from abduction, life-threatening phone calls, unfair administrative procedures, insufficient police investigations and ineffective justice decisions all of which represent the dominant culture that motivates and legitimates the perpetuation and persistence of violence.

428 وەك كۆ ديار، هەر يەكێ ژ وان ناسناقەك هەبە. سێ هەببون، سێ ئەزموون و سێ ناڤەين جودا بوون، بەلێ هەتا رادەبەكێ د بێكەهاتە و دەربرینێن خوە
و مەكەف بوون. مەن هەزر دكر كۆ ئەو تايبەتەن، نانكو نە وەك بێن دى نە، لى رۆژ بۆ رۆژێ ئەو هەزرە د سەرى مەن دە گەنى دبوو. د زولوماتا سالگارى دە
دە، دخوازتن خوە بۆ مەن بكن شەمال، بەلێ ل دوماهيیە راستى د "خوە" و "مەن" دە مراندن.
429 ما سەفیدای نە گۆتبوو

باشى تێزابى

430 هێ كچا نە زماندرێژ، هە كە تو بێن خوە هندی بە ركا خوە درێژ نە كە ی، جارا بەهێت تە هوشدارى نابت و ل قێرە دى بيبه خوارنا
حه پوانان!؟

In these representations of violence, Silevani and Navishki's texts indicate that direct acts of violence are heavily infused with both indirect structural violence by many state-sponsored institutions in the Kurdish society and cultural violence exercised mainly through people's adherence to the patriarchal ideology that dominates the post-conflict Kurdish society. Accordingly, it becomes very appropriate to define and discuss these forms of violence within a feminist framework, in which the inclusion of larger cultural and socio-political structures in the society that provide a platform for the actuation of various forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence against women is illuminated. While the previous section investigated direct acts of violence, this section focuses on identifying the contexts, the causes and the consequences of the two other layers of violence: structural and cultural violence against women. Here, it is important to return to Confortini's assertion that violence against women can be defined in terms of the kind of harm it produces. The damage structural violence exerts upon women is, according to her, both physical and emotional including

bodily and psychological integrity, basic material needs such as movement and health, classical human rights such as freedom of expression, need for mobilization, need for work, and nonmaterial needs such as solidarity and self-actualization.⁴³¹

According to William T. Hathaway, structural violence exists when "some groups, classes, genders, nationalists, etc. are assumed to have, and in fact do have, more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, classes, genders, nationalists, etc."⁴³² Hathaway asserts that this unequal distribution of benefits is rooted in the very social, political, and economic systems that govern most societies and states. Moreover, theories of structural violence explore the ways in which such systems "result in the occurrence of avoidable violence, most commonly seen as the deprivation of basic needs both material and nonmaterial."⁴³³ In an effort to eliminate direct and structural violence, KRG has adopted various approaches and disapproved of and modified a number of laws in the Iraqi Panel Code and justice system. For example, in 2008, the Kurdistan National Assembly reformed Article number 188 of the Iraqi Personal Status Code and approved of a new law that concerned the prohibition of early marriages and limiting the high rates of polygamy. KRG also re-assessed a number of laws in the Iraqi criminal justice system and began new initiatives regarding gender related crimes and the imposition of penalties on the perpetrators. In 2008, moreover, KRG inaugurated an important project on honour-based violence in Kurdistan and within the Kurdish

⁴³¹ Confortini, "Galtung, Violence, and Gender," 337.

⁴³² William T. Hathaway, "Varieties of Violence: Structural, Cultural, and Direct," *Solutions-Oriented Peace Journal*, 21 (October, 2013), 1.

⁴³³ Hathaway, "Varieties of Violence," 2.

Diaspora. The project later developed into a wider government-sponsored strategy to monitor violence against women. Begikhani indicates that:

These strategies were designed to contribute to the committed democratization and modernization process currently underway in Iraqi Kurdistan, including the integration of gender issues into social and public policy.⁴³⁴

Additionally, KRG has taken major steps to provide greater administrative unity and important progress has been made in areas as diverse as gender roles, legal status, health and safety, education and employment and women’s social and political representation in the public spheres. Violations of these rights can be studied in relation to Galtung’s typology of violence, (see Table 1 below)⁴³⁵ designed to combine direct and structural acts of violence with four sets of basic needs which he affirms are “an outcome of extensive dialogues in many parts of the world”⁴³⁶ and which he articulate as: “survival needs (negation: death, mortality); well-being needs (negation: misery, morbidity); identity, meaning needs (negation: alienation); and freedom needs (negation: repression).”⁴³⁷

Table 1: A Typology of Violence

	Survival Needs	Well-being Needs	Identity Needs	Freedom Needs
Direct Violence	Killing	Maiming Siege – Sanction Misery	Decolonization Re-socialization Secondary Citizen Penetration	Repression Detention Expulsion Marginalization
Structural Violence	Exploitation A	Exploitation B	Segmentation	Fragmentation

Although *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and *Tavge* portray women who endeavour to maintain these basic needs, they are frequently confined by various ideological, cultural, and socio-political forces that contribute to the violation of these needs. Though actions in both novels are set during a time when the above mentioned needs and rights are supposed to have taken effect, the texts represent diverse cases of violations of women’s basic needs and obstructions and hindrances to the actual implementation of laws on the ground. Mariama, Tavge, Zhila, and Nazhad are all victimized by corrupt state-sponsored institutions and systems that fail to adhere and implement laws and policies. In the novels, these public spheres are mainly controlled by dishonest unjust persons who sacrifice the powerless people to gratify their personal needs and interests.

⁴³⁴ Nazand Begikhani, et al. “Honour-Based Violence (HBV) and Honour-Based Killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish Diaspora in the UK,” *Final Report*, (November, 2010), 9.

⁴³⁵ Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 292.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

It is important that, as far as women are concerned, many postcolonial states in the Middle East have failed to fulfil their promises of peace, prosperity and gender equality during processes of nation-building. Notwithstanding the end of civil wars and political conflicts as well as ethno-sectarian strife, women in most Middle Eastern countries continue to suffer growing levels and forms of gender-based violence as evidenced by various UN and NGO reports and studies. In most of these countries, the attainment of gender equality and the democratization of gender relations are further hindered by the prevailing patriarchal cultures and misogynist perspectives of social systems and national parties. Despite their attempts to resist the status quo both on the individual and organizational level, most Middle Eastern women living in the ruins of civil societies, continue to bring gender discrimination and violence into light overshadowed by decades of national oppression.

An important example is Darfur Region in western Sudan, in which war-related gender violence including rape, sexual humiliation, and female abduction continue to be perpetrated on high scales. According to a Human Rights Watch report, “over 200 women and girls in Darfur were raped over three days in a widespread, organised and systematic attack by Sudanese government forces.”⁴³⁸ Despite the end of war and later endeavours by the government such as the amendment of section 149 of its Criminal Act in 1991 to criminalize the act of rape as well as the deployment of several women police investigators to West Darfur by the Minister of the Interior to investigate the cases of sexual violence, women in Darfur face growing levels of gender oppression. The failure of the nascent government, national parties and political groups to eradicate gender-based-violence is emphasized alongside the representation of Darfur women in the contemporary Sudanese novel depicting the persistent conflicts in the region.

Based on the testimonies of Halima Bashir, a survivor of the horrors of the war in Darfur, the memoir, *Tears of the Desert: A Memoir of Survival in Darfur* written by Halima Bashir and co-authored by Damien Lewis tells of Halima’s difficult growth within a close knit family whose members share a strictly patriarchal culture in an Arab dominated society where black Africans are despised and discriminated on grounds of their ethnicity. Halima gives vivid descriptions of her experiences of pain and humiliation during her circumcision at the age of eight. Trying to understand the reasons for undergoing such a horrible experience, her grandmother describes the act as part of the great Zaghawa tribe tradition and that she needs to “be brave girl, you are a Zaghawa! Cry and the children will laugh

⁴³⁸ Rose Troup Buchanan, “Mass rape in Darfur: Sudanese army blamed for multiple attacks on women,” <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mass-rape-in-darfur-sudanese-army-blamed-for-multiple-attacks-on-women-10039536.html>

at you! Be brave!”⁴³⁹ Most important, Halima tells of violence and destruction brought on the Africans in Darfur: “villages are razed to the ground by helicopter gunships and Arab horsemen, women and young schoolgirls raped by the Janjaweed [and] the armed militias of the Sudanese government.”⁴⁴⁰ Following the eruption of the armed conflicts in 2003 between the Sudanese military and the Janjaweed and rebel groups, high levels of rape of women in Darfur were reported. In the novel, Halima describes the horrible suffering she has witnessed as she loses her father and many family members and is exposed to gang rape by the government soldiers.

Although Halima survives death and sexual violence and flees to Britain, the memories of these experiences continue to haunt her, causing psychological troubles and sleep disorders. Similarly, and despite the end of the civil war and armed conflicts, women in Darfur are still exposed to exploitation and abuse as the governmental and political bodies fail to address and eliminate these acts or even punish their perpetrators. This is well manifested in the last parts of the novel as Halima, who studies medicine and gains a reputation as a doctor comes to contact with various victims of sexual oppression violently gang-raped in the government supported attacks in northern Darfur. She realizes that the Sudanese government and national parties are not taking required measures to reduce violence against women in Darfur.

The representation of gender based violence in Kurdistan necessitates the description of similar hegemonic corrupted actors contributing to the enhancement of women’s exploitation and abuse. In *Tavge*, Shawqi Daryachi (Newzad Achari), Biston Baban and Colonel Worya, the chief administrator of the prison, exemplify structural violence through their exploitations of public positions and practicing corrupt and dishonest administrative strategies and executive policies. It is important that the text pays a particular attention to the physical and material details in the presentation of these characters as indication of their luxurious life-style as opposed to other characters. In the first chapter of her diary, Tavge gives detailed descriptions of Baban’s office and behavior: “On the very good-looking sofa, he [Baban] sat down in front of me and I noticed the top quality tools and stuff on the luxurious table behind the big tableau that said Biston Baban Girdezoni” (15).⁴⁴¹ Again in her first

⁴³⁹ Halima Bashir and Damien Lewis, *Tears of the Desert: A Memoir of Survival in Darfur* (Canada: One World/Ballantine, 2008), 45.

⁴⁴⁰ Rose Troup Buchanan, “Mass Rape in Darfur: Sudanese Army Blamed for Multiple Attacks on Women,” *Independent*, (February, 2015), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mass-rape-in-darfur-sudanese-army-blamed-for-multiple-attacks-on-women-10039536.html>

⁴⁴¹ ل سه ر قه نه بئ به ره ژه نگیڼ ده وله مه ندان لئ ديار دکن ل هه مبه ر من روونشت و که لوبه لئڼ وي بين ميزه يا نه ندازه کفان تژي بشت نافي وي بي ل سه ر تابلويه کي نغيسي (سه رنفيسکار_ بيستون بابان گرده زوني).

meeting with the women and adolescents' prison chief administrator, colonel Worya, Tavge describes his office, his arrogant attitudes and the luxurious way he is dressed when she writes: "Wearing top brand shoes and suit, the chief administrator confirmed that if it was not for the sake of Fraidon, his nephew, he would never allow her in the prison" (42).⁴⁴² Similarly, Nazhad gives a picturesque illustration of Shawqi Daryachi's spacious house and luxurious life style. He tells Tavge that it was the first time for him to get inside such a place which was: "Very much larger than most governmental buildings and built according to newest engineering standards and best kinds of brick and marble. The house had an impressive garden and a zoo that were like the ones you see on TV" (84-85).⁴⁴³ The text's employment of these repetitive descriptive details indicates the ways such persons, being paid very high wages, use their positions in the government and influence in political parties only to serve their own interests. Using their influence, these dishonest persons manipulate the legal, legislative and constitutive systems to reward or punish, to prohibit or admit according to their personal judgments.

The text complicates this pattern by introducing the unresponsive attitudes and gender bias of such systems as the police, the court and criminal justice from which victims (mostly women) often receive unfair judgements and decisions. In order to elaborate on this discriminatory perspective of the justice system, Navishki presents a number of cases in which police investigations and court charges are executed. This, however, is not to say that Zhila and Nazhad should not be charged for the murder of Shawqi Daryachi to which they admit, the critique is on the way the court discriminates against them since the murdered person is the 'barpirs,' the well-known governmental and public figure. Though we are never told the details of how the police and justice system disfavor Zhila and Nazhad, it can be easily concluded that they never had a fair prosecution and trial since the real circumstances of Newzad's murder are not accurately and transparently revealed. This is clearly indicated by Tavge's surprise to learn that Achari, the murdered 'barpirs', is the same Shawqi Daryachi who has abused and oppressed Zhila and Nazhad. The clearest reflection of the court's inequitable judicial and legal proceedings in Zhila and Nazhad's case is their enthusiasm to seek attention and justice through journalism and media. Although speaking to the press may not affect the court's decision, both are ready to break silence around social and political aggression and tell the true story behind their imprisonment. Turning to the media to tell the truth, Zhila and Nazhad are, in a sense, exposing some of the causes and the consequences of the prevalence of structural state-sponsored aggression. Their

442 و د بایمباغا چه فت ره ننگ ل سه ر قاتنی نیلی و کراسی نه سمانی گریډای خه بتی و ب سه ره ژانندنقه، بو مه دیار کر هه که ژ بتر خاترا خوارزایی (فه ره بدونی) نه بایه وی نه دهیلا ج ده زگه هین راگه هاندنی بهینه دناقه ندینه. وی

443 گه هشتنه ناقاهیبیه ک ژ گه له ک ناقاهیبین ده زگه هین میری مه زنترا! نه ندازا ناقا کرنا زره ناقاهیبی ب نووترین جورین قه رمیدی و مه رمه ری خه ناگریبین وی بین زل، به ره ف سهره خوه فه کیشان! ملاندی

case exemplifies Hathaway's characterization of structural violence as a consequence of the social and political favoritism between different groups in society. Also related to this is Hathaway's description of structural violence as the

injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for the many, stunting everyone's ability to develop their full humanity. By privileging some classes, ethnicities, genders, and nationalities over others, it institutionalizes unequal opportunities for education, resources, and respect. Structural violence forms the very basis of capitalism, patriarchy, and any dominator system.⁴⁴⁴

Another illustration of structural violence is Baban's hesitation and reservation about Tavge's abduction the same day she interviews Zhila and Nazhad. Not only does he blame *her* for challenging the existing reality, but he refuses to offer Tavge any formal co-operation against the abductors except for a letter of condemnation published in the magazine. He tells Zhila, "we will inform all security and police institutions about the abduction and declare our denunciation without publishing the reportage [Zhila's interview] because you no longer have evidences and record tapes" (124).⁴⁴⁵ Baban, however, is not the only one who behaves indifferently, when Tavge reports the incident to the police, they show little enthusiasm to follow the case although they try to look very attentive and cooperative.

It is important that Navishki's representation of direct and structural violence against Kurdish women is embedded with yet a third layer, the cultural violence, which allows and validates the other two layers. This section of the chapter emphasizes Galtung's identification of cultural violence as a system that legitimizes men's superiority and women's inferiority. Most prominent within the structures of cultural violence is the system of patriarchy defined as: "A force embodied in cultural violence, insofar as certain patterns legitimize the domination of men over women; and indirect violence, insofar as men, rather than women, commit the vast majority of directly violent acts."⁴⁴⁶ Employing Galtung's emphasis on patriarchy as a system that provides justification and legitimacy to the use of violence and the focus on gender within feminist scholarship on violence against women, I will examine the ways in which ideologies of nationalism, political and religious orientations and social traditional structures imbed the inevitability and righteousness of violence into people's attitudes and behavior as represented in Silevani's *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time*.

⁴⁴⁴ Hathaway, "Varieties of Violence," 1.

⁴⁴⁵ به یامی ره فاندتا ته، دئی به لافکه یین و هه موو لایه نین به یوه ندیدار، دئی ب کیشه یی ناگه هدار که یین به س ته چ ده لیلین گومانیر نه ماینه بی ریبورتا
ئی به لافکه یین. ژ

⁴⁴⁶ Confortini, "Galtung, Violence, and Gender," 340.

Silevani's novel demonstrates many of these permanent aspects of Kurdish culture within which direct violence such as the sexual, physical and emotional abuse of Mariama are practiced. As mentioned before, Mariama tells of three men that appear in her life after Kabra with each one exemplifying a distinct ideology and distinct background. However, all share the same patriarchal belief in men's superiority and domination. In chapter ten, "The Revolutionist," Mariama introduces a man she meets in the first gallery she participates in and for which she wins the first place. Described as a revolutionist by Mariama, Hazhar has spent most of his life in the mountains as a Peshmerga fighting for the liberation of Kurdistan. In her description of Hazhar's intriguing character to Nareen, Mariama asserts her puzzlement at his unsettled attitudes towards life, his past and their relationship: "His experiences in the mountains have affected negatively on his behavior and mentality. Clinging to the psychology of a fighter, he used to turn everything into a target" (86).⁴⁴⁷ She describes her confusion and inability to understand his attitude as he behaves like a sensitive artist and gentle lover at certain times and turns to "a fighter searching for some caves and enemies" (86),⁴⁴⁸ at other times. Mariama tells Nareen of the night in which she realized Hazhar's patriarchal way of thinking and patronizing attitudes towards her:

Like an agha snobbishly fondling a loyal servant, he embraced me with one arm and unwillingly put his cheek against mine. I thought he would kiss me warmly after that long separation. His coldness frightened me. I felt like a scarecrow shaking in the wind of doubts and questions. He sat down on the sofa like a Sultan proudly seating himself in his throne and told me to sit down on the ground at his feet like a slave girl. (88-89)⁴⁴⁹

Mariama, however, is most shocked when he, while gently touching her face and body, tells her pompously, an old proverb from the Turkish culture that says "money is to be spent, an enemy is to be killed and a woman is to be fucked" (89).⁴⁵⁰ Hearing this, Mariama leaves him and decides never to look back since "many Mariamas were running ahead of [her]: Mariama the orphan, the artist, the heartbroken lover, and the imprisoned Kurd" (89).⁴⁵¹ As a Peshmerga with a long history of fighting

⁴⁴⁷ ئەزموونا ههژاری ل چیان ههتا رادهیهکی باری وی گران کر بوو، کار تیکر نهک نهرینی ل رهفتار و مانتالیتا وی کر بوو. پسیکلۆژییا وی وهک یا شورشقان لی هاتیوو، نانکو: ههت تشتی بگۆری نارمانجی دکت. مروۆفی وهک شه رفانه ک ل شکهفتهک یان نهیارهک دگه رت دمن د ⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁹ ب ترخانین ناغایهکی دهمی کو نافرینی ل بهردهستکین خوه دکت، ب ملهک خوه نهز ل ههمبیزی خوه یی سار گرتم و نالهکا خوه ب یامن فه نووساند. من ههز دکر نهو نهیا من ماچی بکت، یان لیفتین من بگرت، چونکی دهستینک بوو و پیندقی من ب هیز و ناقهندی ههبوو. ل سهر قهههپهیا سور، وهک سۆلتانهک خوه دی میراتهک دیرۆکی، خوه ل سهر عهرشی خوه تهه عاند. ئەز ل کێلهکا وی روونشتی بووم.

⁴⁵⁰ ب سهلیقهیهک تووژ و ناخفتنهک سهیر شهفا مه - یا کو گهرهکه تابهت بت - تیک دا، گۆت: ئەتاتۆرک دبیژت: پاره بو معزاختنی یه، نهیار بو کوژنتی یه و ژن زی تنی بو گانی یه."

within the Kurdish national movement for liberation, Hazhar represents the traditionally antagonized interplay between Kurdish nationalism and women's status in society, as explained in a previous chapter. While historically playing an active role in the Kurdish national struggle, women have always been marginalized and confined into passive and submissive positions. Although Hazhar's distorted psychology is, in a sense, one reason for his relations with Mariama, it is clear that his prominent stature within the national movement as a military force has influenced his perception of gender roles and relations.

The text, thus, asserts that Kurdish nationalism as an ideological entity often enhances violence against women by accrediting men with power and domination over women. The text also indicates that belief in men's superiority and women's subservience which is very prevalent within nationalist institutions has extended to the political parties and many members of these parties. This is exemplified in chapter eleven, "The Infidel," where Mariama presents Islam, the man who appears in her life two years after she breaks with Hazhar. Again, in a gallery she holds to exhibit her twenty-four paintings, Mariama meets with a man who shows a particular interest in the way she uses cold and gloomy colours and symbols in her paintings and asks her permission to publish a critical evaluation of them in the newspaper he works for. Though Mariama loses his business card, she goes to the newspaper where he works to thank him after reading the article he has written about her art, entitled 'The Train Smoke,' referring to the train smoke that appears very frequently in her paintings. Meeting her in the newspaper offices, Islam invites her for what he calls 'an artistic dinner,' where he describes his alliance with radical anthropology and expresses a great support and sympathy for the poor and their well-being: "I wish there was something I could do to provide them with basic needs, help improve their state on all levels and secure good jobs and happy living for them" (103).⁴⁵² In this first meeting, Mariama also learns that he has been an active member of the communist political party in Duhok for years, that he has read a lot, travelled widely and held many courses and meetings to promote communist ideology, but has earned nothing in return. He tells Mariama:

Due to a long demanding political struggle, I look much older than I really am. On paper, I have done a lot but no practical gains can be mentioned. People kept succeeding and I kept promoting principles which left me poor and unknown after sixteen years of constant work and exhaustion. I

⁴⁵² دلی من - پچا مایی - ب چینا همژاران قهیه، ب شهف و روژ هزرا وان دکم. ئەز باوەر دکم کو ئەز ل سەر مەرەقین وان، ل سەر پەیدا کرنا پیندقیین وان بێن روژانه، هەروەسا ل سەر خورتکرنا کارین و نالافان ژێ ژ بو پینشکەفتنا وان ژ هەموو نالییان قه گەلەک رژد و خەمخوهرم.

was imprisoned and tortured many times before and after the Uprising but it was never acknowledged even by my own comrades. (102-103)⁴⁵³

Their relationship intensifies in a relatively short time and Mariama, despite all the painful experiences with Kabra and Hazhar, feels “love as great as an ocean running down [her] dry body” (104).⁴⁵⁴ In a three months period, they meet very frequently and spend many nights talking on the phone which Mariama defines as “a way to make up for their physical thirst and fly to reach their desires and freedom” (105).⁴⁵⁵ In one of these nights, however, Mariama encounters the pervasive force of patriarchal belief in a society where a woman is defined through her body rather than her character. When Mariama disapproves of the idea of having sex from behind confirming that she will not feel her femininity, he gets very angry and hysterically insults her. Mariama, who is deeply surprised by his reaction, tells Nareen that: “It is true he did not call me a whore and say no one would marry you... [Or] You are an old maid imposing yourself on men... [But] You want me to make love to you in the front and force me into marrying you” (106).⁴⁵⁶ She tells Nareen, “I have ever since wondered what he might have said if he had known I was a raped girl?” (107)⁴⁵⁷

While chapters ten and eleven focus on the nationalist and political ideologies of the Kurds as the spaces where traditional and patriarchal norms and beliefs affect gender roles and relations, chapter twelve extends the text’s representation of these aspects to include the religious tendencies of some groups and their impacts on marriage and family structure in the Kurdish society. In this chapter “The Mullah,” Silevani reinforces his argument of the structural and cultural aspects of the Kurdish society that legalize women’s inferiority by chronicling Mariama’s encounters with Shaima’ and her brother Haji Hawar. This chapter starts with Mariama reflecting on the six-year period she spends with desperation and separation from people, the community and the places in which she used to meet with Islam. She also tells of the serious decline in her economic state and her turn to writing articles for some magazines to earn some money. Realizing the importance of economic prosperity as a form of empowerment and independence for a woman with few skills in the trading and marketing domains,

٤٥٣ وەك كۆ تو دینی ، پۆرا من نیکەك سپی بوویە و هەموو ژێ ژ قەهرین سیاسەتی دە. تەبۆری، ئەز ژێ وەك پیرانیی گەلەکی دزانم، بەلێ پراکتیک کیم، گەلەك کیم. چونکی پتره ژ شانزده سالان و ئەز هەول ددم لی هەیهات. خەلك هەموو بوو حزبی و ب کێز خوه هات، بەلێ ئەز ژ یا خوه قەهەبوم تنی چونکی من باوهری ب پرهنسییان هینا. تو دزانی وان پرهنسییان چ هینان سەری من.

٤٥٤

تەمەت ناڤا ئەقیانوسەکی عشق بەردا کلەخی من یی زو ها

455 مە قەیدین خوه شکاندن و ل سەر باسکین خورسکین خوه فرین هەتا کو گەهشتین نازادیی راسته نەگۆت: "تو قەحبەیهکی و کەس ته بو خوه نایت"، نه گۆت ژێ تو قەهیرەکچی و مایه ب سەر گۆهی خودانان ده"، بەلێ گۆت: "تو حمز دکی کو 456 ئەز ژ پێشینی ره بهیم ته، دا تووش بيم و ل دوماهییی بو من بەینی؟! " ئەز دبیژم نیسانی کۆمەنیست نەدزانی ئەز ژ کچینی هاتمه نێخستن. ژ هینگی وەرە ئەز پرسیری ژ خوه دکم: " پا هەگەر زانییا دا چ بیژت من؟" 457

Mariama tells of a sewing project she wishes to set up with the help of Shaima', the daughter of a rich neighbour family who, like Mariama believes in the importance of women's economic independence. Despite her family's very committed and rigid religious beliefs, Shaima' convinces her brother, Hawar to help them with the project. Haji Hawar's offer exceeds their expectations when he decides to fund a store of Kurdish clothes. Though Hawar agrees that they run the store, they cannot work as sellers.

Mariama goes on to tell of Haji Hawar's serious commitment to Islamic sharia' that has always dictated his attitude and behavior: "Whenever he saw me, he would turn his face away and with the excuse of ablution, he never shook hands with me. His manners made me feel impure. He asked Shaima' more than once to advise me to wear a scarf" (115).⁴⁵⁸ Despite Mariama's cautious manners and respect for his beliefs, she finds it difficult to adopt his fundamentalist viewpoints regarding life, humanity and life after death which are highly cultivated by Islamic teachings and Sunnah. What irritates Mariama the most about Hawar's attitude is the way he overpowers her and tries to 'convert' her and constantly "treats [her] as a female" (118).⁴⁵⁹ As their relationship develops, his attitudes start to change and Mariama is, once again, convinced that there is someone for her; someone who will love her the way she is. Again, Mariama is confronted with the strict ideology and notion of women's subordinate position which she confirms is based on social and cultural assumptions rather than true Islamic doctrine. In one of her conversations with Hawar, Mariama questions him regarding what would be the greatest sin from his point of view, to which he replies: "Mariama, in my opinion, the greatest sin is adultery and forbidden sexual relations" (120).⁴⁶⁰ This, according to Mariama, is a clear indication of the failure of their relationship before it actually starts. Though she learns that Hawar gets seriously ill from her disappearance, Mariama renounces her partnership with Shaima' and goes back to her previous state of solitude and despair.

It is important that in the Kurdish context, these structural aspects— nationalism, political struggles, and religious affinities — are intricately woven together and with larger cultural aspects, including the tribal ideology of the Kurdish people, that have shaped women's status in society. The interplay between these various institutions is an important factor in causing and enhancing the different layers

⁴⁵⁸ چ گافا ئەز ددیتم، بەری خوە ژ من وەردگێرا و ب هێجەتا دەستتەقێژێن ئەدەهات دەستی من. هەستەك ل نك من دئاواند، كو ئەز نەجسم. پتر ژ جارەكی گۆتوو شەیمانێ بلا مریەما دەرسۆكی بكت سەری خوە.

ل هەر جاری وەكو یوونەرەكا مئ سەرەدەری ل گەل من دكر. ⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁶⁰ مریەما، گونە ه ل نك من ئە وه ، كو كه سه ك زنايي بكت.

and forms of violence against women. In Galtung's discussion, as mentioned before, it is cultural violence that legitimizes direct and structural acts of violence. Galtung also indicates:

One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable... Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent.⁴⁶¹

It is this manipulation of morals and realities that causes and promotes violence against Tavge in Navishki's text. While Tavge's administrator, Baban, refuses to take any official measures concerning her abduction, police investigations prove insufficient and ineffective too. Although it is not said directly in the text, the frequent life-threatening text messages and phone calls that Tavge receives is a clear indication of the police's limited proceedings. In more than one place in her diary, Tavge reflects on the unresponsive attitude of the police:

I went to the police station and asked for any updates concerning my case, but I felt that the police are only cheering me. It was clear they were pretending to be very attentive and told me to be patient and wait for the investigations and said that my right would not be lost. (132-133)⁴⁶²

It is also important that Tavge connects the passive role played by the police to the obviously unconcerned measures taken by Baban regarding the case and her position as a journalist in Galveen. He tells Tavge:

You should have known that no journalist can go independently and cross those red lines. I made this clear to you right from the beginning. You did what you wanted not what we asked you to... From today on, we consider your case closed. Concerning your prison interviews, we don't consider investigations that have no clear evidences. (133-134)⁴⁶³

When Tavge learns a few days later that she is fired from her post in *Gelvin* and is no longer holding any official relation to the magazine, she accuses Baban and his magazine of being corrupt and mercenary. She also tells Baban that she is not afraid of these people or their threats and that she will not give up on the truth and is determined to publish Zhila's story in another magazine or newspaper. Tavge becomes more certain about Baban's involvement when she receives a text message, a few days later, saying, "Listen, girl. If you think about publishing any information about the prison in any press

⁴⁶¹ Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 292.

⁴⁶² و ٺٺو چوويٺه بٺگه هي ٻوليٺسان و مه داخوازييا ٺيٺانينين نوو ڙي ڪرن. ٺيڏي ٺه ز وسا تيگه هشتم، ٻوليس يو مه ب دهگي خوش دڪه ن و وسا ٺه شڪرا دڪه ن ڪو بي ڇه مي ڙ باده ڪا من دڃون، ب تني بيٺنا خواه فره ه بڪه ن، دئ گه هنه ٺه نجامين باش و مافي وي به رزه نابت.

⁴⁶³ ما تو نراني جهين وسال به ر روڙنامه ڦانان هيلين سورن و نابت لي بده ن؟! ڙ ٺه ڦرو ويڦه، ٺيڏي ٺه ڦ باده ڪه ل ده ف مه ب خواه حسابڪه گرتييه! هه ر مزاره ڪي روڙنامه ڦاني، نه مازه ريٽورتاڙي به لگه بين گومانبر ٺب ڦين!

institution, you will face what you cannot imagine” (138).⁴⁶⁴ In their last visit to the police station, Tavge and Aram inform the officer that there must be some hidden powers behind the inefficient investigating processes. They also point out that they will “take the case into higher measures and ask for justice from other institutions” (142).⁴⁶⁵

At this point in the novel, Tavge’s diary stops in an abrupt way, indicating her death, which comes as a surprise to everyone, given that the burns resulting from the assault only affected her face and she has been recovering in a very notable way. Despite Aram’s requests to take her to the hospital and examine her body, she is buried with no further investigations. Never believing her death to be natural, Aram spends some time blaming the police and Tavge’s family.

Accordingly, the texts indicate that while Mariama and Tavge fall victims to direct acts of gender aggression, these acts are legalized and maintained by other larger forces. How this may happen is explained by Galtung’s discussion of the ways in which these three layers of violence function and reinforce each other. According to him:

Direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a 'permanence' remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture.⁴⁶⁶

Galtung’s work is not only effective in the study of violence against women and the diverse forms and layers within which it is usually practiced, but also in the development of mechanisms to eliminate violence by providing insights into the study of peace in relation to violence. This is where Galtung’s typological model is most related to feminist perspectives in that it addresses, though in an indirect way, the power imbalance in gender roles and relations between men and women mostly defined in relation to the system of patriarchy. Almost all cases of violence and exploitation in the two novels are caused more by power imbalance as a facet of patriarchy than any other system of oppression. In other words, despite the considerable variations among these cases of violence, belief in women’s vulnerability and inferiority has contributed to the initiation and persistence of violence. This is well illustrated by bell hooks’ affirmation that ‘sexism’ more than any other form of domination, “directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in that most intimate context—home—and in that most intimate sphere of relations—family.”⁴⁶⁷ With this belief in

⁴⁶⁴ هَمَّ كَجِي، هَمَّر بِيَّزَانِيْنَه ك بَه يُوَه نَدِي ب مَزَارِيْقَه هَه بَت، تَو ل دَه زَكَايَه ك رَاگَه هَانْدَنِيْ بَه لَأْفِيكَه ي، دِي يَا نَه دِيْتِي بِيْنِي
⁴⁶⁵ نَه م نَه چَارَن، نِيْدِي بَادَه كَا خَوَه بَقَه گُوَهِيْزِيْنَه جَهَه ك دِي

⁴⁶⁶ Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 294.

⁴⁶⁷ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 21.

the power of sexism, which she characterizes as discrimination against women based on their gender and status in society, hooks argues that eradication of patriarchal oppression and domination should come first on feminist agendas because

it insists on the eradication of exploitation and oppression in the family context and in all other intimate relationships. It is that political movement which most radically addresses the person—the personal—citing the need for transformation of self, of relationships, so that we might be better able to act in a revolutionary manner, challenging and resisting domination, transforming the world outside the self.⁴⁶⁸

hooks' position is reiterated in Confortini's feminist examination of Galtung's typological model of violence when she confirms that: "Only the elimination of violence at all levels can lead to true peace."⁴⁶⁹ Highlighting the various layers of violence against women, Confortini demonstrates that within the continuum of violence, "spaces can be and have been created in all situations for the subversion of the unequal social structure and the establishment of potentially transformative relationships."⁴⁷⁰

Despite all the sexual, physical, and psychological violence they experience and the growing mechanisms by which they are enforced into marginal and restricting positions concerning this violence, Mariama and Tavge endeavour to break imposed silences and create spaces from which to fight violence and achieve subjectivity and self-affirmation.

4.4 Women Awakening and Searching for Subjectivity through Breaking Silence around Violence

By silence, here, I mean not telling stories of violence and abuse, not reporting them to anyone or asking for help and having to suffer alone. In the Kurdish society, with its multiple patriarchal structures, abused women choose to remain silent for a variety of reasons including the shame of disgrace and humiliation, fear of retaliation, and vulnerability to further violence. Breaking silence around violence requires effective intervention and prevention plans and actions on the individual, societal, and community levels. Imposing silence and invisibility on violence and violated women has historically contributed to the prevalence and continuity of violent acts. *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and *Tavge* depict two levels of silence: silence on the part of abused women, usually defined as imposed or as their only option and silence on the part of community and State-related

⁴⁶⁸ hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist*, 21.

⁴⁶⁹ Confortini, "Galtung, Violence, and Gender," 335.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 349.

institutions. The novels, additionally, bring into question abused women's awareness of their marginalization and inferiority and the way they struggle to break silence and tell stories of violence as a mechanism of empowerment.

It is important that both novels indicate the importance of drawing attention to the suffering of Kurdish women as part of the Iraqi population torn by years of wars and political conflicts over power and sovereignty and the silence that has historically characterized these conflicts. In their discussion of the ways in which long periods of militarization and war have contributed to the growth of a culture of silence in Guatemala, Blacklock and Crosby argue that silence has been used as a strategy to subvert voices and resistance. They further explain that: "Silencing as a means of oppression and domination inserted fear and distrust into social relations, causing their fragmentation and polarization and the tearing of the Guatemalan social fabric."⁴⁷¹

Despite the significant geographical and contextual differences, similar silencing practices have been employed to promote cultural and political oppression in Iraq. Because of the atrocious policies of most of the Iraqi governments, a reticence has been enjoined upon such permanent aspects of expression including media, art, language, and identity. Due to the persistent socio-political and economic unsettlements, silence has become a prominent feature in most artistic and literary discourses, especially when they concern women's issues which are in most cases allowed a very little representation. Under the Ba'ath regime, in particular, women suffered not only from racist and sexist ideologies, but also from a historical muteness that contributed to the continuity of sexual, physical and psychological violence. In its 2003 fact sheet, the Office of International Women's Issues, Washington DC indicates that throughout the rule of the Ba'athists, Iraqi women were exposed to systematic acts of beheading, rape, torture, and murder. The fact sheet relates the persistence of these aggressive acts to the regime's atrocious policy of imposing silence:

In 1979, immediately upon coming to power, Saddam Hussein silenced all political opposition in Iraq... Since then, his regime has systematically executed, imprisoned, raped, terrorized, and repressed the Iraqi people... [It] has silenced the voices of Iraqi women, along with Iraqi men, through violence and intimidation.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Cathy Blacklock and Alison Crosby, "The Sounds of Silence: Feminist Research across Time in Guatemala," in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 2004), 45.

⁴⁷² Office of International Women's Issues, Washington, DC, "Iraqi Women Under Saddam's Regime: A Population Silenced," *Women in Iraq Fact Sheet*, (March, 2003).

Against hopes and expectations, the elimination of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 resulted in higher exposure to violence as women in the post-war context faced a state of lawlessness and chaos and increased rates of male aggression promoted during the conflict. Describing the post-conflict Iraqi society as 'extremely violent and insecure,' Al-Ali confirms that Iraqi women "are subjected to increased harassment and abductions, as well as sexual abuse and rape... [They are] silenced or marginalized from formal peace initiatives, political transitions and reconstruction efforts."⁴⁷³ Mojab indicates that despite the disastrous effects of wars and political conflicts, women challenged the status quo individually and through organizations: "This resistance is increasingly visible in the formation of women's groups, the publication of journals, and protest campaigns such as marches, vigils, and demonstrations, especially in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan."⁴⁷⁴

Following the 1991 Kurdish Uprising as a reaction to the historical silencing and relegation of the Kurds, women's organizations and shelters sprang up in KRG making several significant advances regarding women's national and political participation and their voice is heard both within KRG and the central government in Baghdad. Today, women's organizations in Kurdistan are actively promoting women's rights through efforts to reform traditional and tribal gender beliefs and norms, to eliminate political antagonism and to challenge religious fundamentalism. They are also working to increase media attention to women's sexual, physical and psychological abuse especially the prevalent exercise of honour-killing by addressing the silence that has traditionally surrounded these forms of violence. To further break that silence, these organizations are establishing powerful connections with Kurdish and non-Kurdish international women's organizations in the Diaspora and are creating significant platforms for the advancement of Kurdish women's rights both inside and outside Kurdistan. For example, in Britain, *Kurdish Women's Rights Watch* and the *Middle East Centre for Women's Rights* focus, among other issues, on: "Exploring how constructions of female sexuality and its associations with masculinity and honour determine the subordinate positions of women in Kurdish communities."⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Al-Ali, "Iraqi Women and Gender Relations," 742.

⁴⁷⁴ Mojab, "Conflicting Loyalties," 146.

⁴⁷⁵ Aisha K Gill, et al. "Honour-Based Violence in Kurdish Communities," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35 (2012), 82. In this article, Gill addresses the impact of Kurdish traditional gender norms and family honour codes on increased levels of violence against women, Begikhani, Gill and other notable women's rights activists confirm, in a report prepared in 2010 for KRG and other agencies working on honour-based violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK, that: "In order to understand honour-based violence, it needs to be considered alongside both other forms of gender-based domestic violence and specific social and cultural contexts" (Begikhani, 2010, 15). The report, as part of a wider scheme by KRG to eradicate violence against women, is an important step for Kurdish women in terms of consciousness-raising and social

As reflections of and reactions against these events, *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and *Tavge* give voice to women who are culturally and socio-politically expected to be underprivileged and silenced. In so doing, the novels describe these women's awakening to their marginalization and unsettled self-perception. Most significantly, the novels depict Mariama and Tavge's search for subjectivity through a separation from and response to the Kurdish patriarchal society. Accordingly, both novels can be studied in relation to Felski's 'novel of awakening,' in which the conceptualization of female self-definition and identity is "initiated through an abrupt revulsion of female protagonists' interior feelings and personal experiences."⁴⁷⁶

As explained in the previous chapter, Felski has generated the concept of 'self-discovery' to identify texts that depict processes of women's emancipation through separation from a male-defined context. While Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* and Niheli's *Hizar and Vicissitudes of Life, Part One* were examined in relation to the feminist Bildungsroman as articulated and defined by Felski, in this chapter, I employ the second category in Felski's discussion, namely, the 'novel of awakening' to describe the formal properties of Silevani and Navishki's texts and investigate the narrative tools through which they make a feminist sense of representation to depict violence against women in the post-conflict Kurdish society. According to Felski, "the novel of awakening is grounded in a moral or aesthetic revulsion against the very nature of contemporary social reality, which is perceived of as alienating and debased."⁴⁷⁷ Felski also adds:

Some form of symbolic or literal departure from society is the precondition for the attainment of a meaningful identity, which requires a radical rupture with the heroine's past history and with established modes of perception.⁴⁷⁸

Mariama: A Woman from Another Time and *Tavge* portray rape, partner abuse, sexual and physical assaults, threats of murder, abduction, mutilation, and State-sponsored exploitations and violations as some forms of the violence practiced against Kurdish women in the post-conflict period. Because of the painful nature of these acts, the two protagonists repress their memories in an attempt to forget a horrific history and efface its deep scars. This repression causes a disassociation from society and a fragmentation of identity. The most dangerous effect of violence is, however, its negative impact on

and political awareness. The report associates the continuity of violence in Kurdistan, despite all intervention and prevention plans to both the popular culture that relegates women to inferior positions and the legacy of wars and militarization imposed on the Kurdish people.

⁴⁷⁶ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 142.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

the characters’ sense of self and both novels contain multiple examples of self-alienation and detachment from society. Agreeing with Felski’s definition, Mariama and Tavge display an extreme sense of estrangement and disconnection from environments and choose to abandon their previous lives. Mariama, for example, is so alienated that she no longer understands herself or her surroundings:

How can I understand my “self” if I don’t even know that self? How can I identify my hopes and dreams? How can I know other people when each person calls me a different name, deals with me in a different manner, and condemn me for the same crime? (74-75)⁴⁷⁹

Throughout the text, Mariama displays a shattered and damaged self-image as a result of repeated sexual, physical and emotional violations. Describing her distorted relations to society and the confused perceptions of identity she experiences, she declares that “the stronger sex has killed in me my sense of belonging” (12).⁴⁸⁰ She also indicates the negative image by which she has been perceived by the men in her life:

Sadly, the Peshmerga with the rifle [Hazhar] did not see the nationalist woman in me, the drunken Infidel [Islam] did not see the atheist woman in me, and the Mullah with the rosary [Hawar] did not see the pious woman in me. (75)⁴⁸¹

Like Mariama, Tavge displays a disintegrated sense of self after the traumatic events she goes through: the life-threatening phone calls and text messages, the painful memories of the physical assault and the scars left on her face from the burns of acid all affect not only her self-perception but also her interactions with other people. This is well manifested in her transformation from an active journalist to a secluded and withdrawn woman who constantly hides away from people:

Wearing a black ‘abaya’ that covered her body from top to bottom and the thick veil that completely hid her face, Tavge refused to go to the park with Aram. She refused to be seen by people and wanted to be all alone. (54)⁴⁸²

Tavge’s physical deformity and the aggression and violence she experiences when she decides to stand against the patriarchal ideology and gendered norms of her society result in a shattered self-perception and social life. Although the break between self and society is depicted as absolute, Mariama and Tavge both start searching for their subjectivity and female identity in new contexts by breaking

⁴⁷⁹ هه‌گەر مرۆڤ د خوه نه‌گه‌هت چاوا دئ، خوه ناس کت؛ هه‌گەر خوه ناسنه‌کت چاوا دئ، خه‌م و خوه‌زیکین خوه ناس کت؟ چاوان دئ، غه‌یری خوه ناس کت؟ چاوان نه‌ز خوه ناس بکم و هه‌ر ئێک ب نا‌قه‌کی گازی من دکت، ب ئاوایه‌کی سه‌رده‌ریه‌ی ل گه‌ل من دکت، ب زمانه‌کی ل گه‌ل من ددت و دستینه‌ی و ب گونه‌هه‌کی من دادگه‌ه دکت؟

⁴⁸⁰ چونکی توخمی نیر هه‌قینی هه‌ستی هه‌قیونی ل نک من نه‌هه‌یله‌یه
مخابن: نه‌ پێشمه‌رگه‌یه‌ی خوه‌دانێ برنۆیه‌ی نه‌زا کورده‌یه‌یه‌ر ناسکره‌، نه‌ گاوری خوه‌دانێ پێکی نه‌زا مولده‌ ناسکره‌، نه‌ ژێ مه‌لایێ خوه‌دانێ تزیببان نه‌زا ⁴⁸¹
باوه‌ردار ناسکره‌.

ب عه‌ بایه‌ که ره‌ له‌ شێ خوه‌ دابوش کر و سه‌ر و جاقه‌یت خوه‌ شارته‌یه‌. تا‌فگه‌ به‌ی د قیا به‌مینته‌ ب تنی و نه‌ د قیا به‌جیته‌ نا‌ف خه‌ لکی. ⁴⁸²

silence and telling stories of violence. The first step in their breaking of the silence imposed on them is reflecting on their inner feelings and experiences. The texts depict this process as an awakening to a self that is damaged by male violence. In Felski's discussion, not all 'self-discovery' texts trace a journey outward as in the feminist Bildungsroman, but may project an inward one, taking the form of an abrupt self-consciousness: "Feminist fiction points outward and forward, into social activity and political emancipation, but also backward and inward, into myth, spirituality, and the transformation of subjective consciousness."⁴⁸³ The novel of awakening presents the journey undertaken by the protagonist as an "individual and interior one which puts her in touch with a lost sense of self."⁴⁸⁴ In their interactions with the outside world, Mariama and Tavge encounter horrific male violence which only results in their alienation. Consequently, the novels describe their journey inside into interior experiences of sexual, physical and psychological violence in an attempt to revive a repressed sense of self and subvert the negative imposed identity. To do so, they need to revive memories and experiences they have worked hard to repress for a long time, especially in the case of Mariama. The novels, additionally, present their journeys inside as an indication of a desire for identification with and integration into a larger social context in an attempt to articulate a new self-definition and achieve subjectivity and identity.

In the novels, breaking silence and acknowledging a repressed female identity is undertaken by the protagonists who expose layers of silence that have historically threatened and suppressed Kurdish women's voices. Their 'speaking' is indicated indirectly through artistic and linguistic expressions — Mariama's paintings and Tavge's journalistic careers — and directly through speaking of the violence imposed on them. This self-conscious creation of spaces conforms to Confortini's argument that "when women create spaces within a potentially or actually exploitative system, they carve out opportunities and come to see their work as empowerment and emancipation."⁴⁸⁵ In this sense, speaking /writing for Mariama and Tavge becomes a political act and a precondition for a process of resistance, struggle and affirmation. Related to this is Cora Kaplan's argument of speaking and writing as significant contexts to create a "position within culture where women could, without impediment, exist as speaking subjects."⁴⁸⁶ Kaplan views speaking and writing as necessary for women's autonomy

⁴⁸³ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 128.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Confortini, "Galtung, Violence, and Gender," 349.

⁴⁸⁶ Cora Kaplan, "Speaking/Writing/Feminism," in *Feminisms*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42.

and subjectivity and effective methods to fight the historical silence that surrounds women's inferiority.

Asserting that silence in the Kurdish society is deepened by the absence of both a common or officially accepted language and a coherent cultural perspective, Mariama describes it as "an illness in which all people are infected with and asserts that "an individual in our community is not in a position to express what lies in the heart since there is no vital language to talk with" (8).⁴⁸⁷ For Mariama, however, the predicament not only lies in the absence of local language, as opposed to officially legislated language, which used to be forbidden by law in the formal and literary domains for years and has, thus, lost much of its essence and force, but also in the absence of faithful listeners. Articulating the fear, solitude, and 'tonguelessness' she has suffered from, she tells Nareen:

What can I do about violence and abuse when, except for you and these paintings, no one has ever tried to listen to me? I no more need sympathy. As a result of all the pains, the unheard complaints, and the many secrets in my life, my happiness flies, like an injured dove, and falls again under dirty shoes. (16)⁴⁸⁸

A dominant trope utilized from the first instance of sexual abuse and throughout the novel is the way violence in all its forms is associated with silence. Though we are not told whether or not Mariama has been threatened to keep silent about Kabra's sexual abuse, she is too "shy and troubled" to speak or report it to any one: "I wished to speak, say something, I wished to explode like a volcano, but I was stopped by a lump in my throat" (42).⁴⁸⁹ This association is substantiated by Mariama's constant description of the negative way Kurdish women are viewed and judged. This silence refers to the second level of the indifference and muteness of the community and State-related institutions which have further enhanced women's subjugation: "For long years, women have been treated as mules which bad men ride and good ones load and drive. Those in between the two groups choose to shut their mouths" (19).⁴⁹⁰ She forges links, in another passage, between her oppression and people's neglectful attitudes: "I longed for a rightful court where rights are fairly reserved. But they sentenced me without a trial, without witnesses or defence. For twenty-three years, I have been suffering and

487 تاكه كه سهی مه نكارت ب كورتی و پوختی پهیاما خوه راگه هینت چونکی هیژ زمانهك ساز نینه ب تاییهت زمانی ههقیهقینی

بهلی نهم چ بكم ههگهر ژبلی ته و فان كهفالین هونهری، من گوهدارهك ژ خوه باشتر نهیدیتب. بلا كهس دلی خوه ب من نه سوژینت ژ بهر كو 488 من نهنتی خهمن، فهمایی، گاز ندهینن بی گوه، نهینی و تاییهتمهندی نه، وهلی د ناقههرا فان و وان ده خوشییا من وهك كو ترهك گیز و بریندار ل سهرمایهینی ساهییا ناسمانی من دفرت بهری كو ل نافا حهرییا پینلاقین وان خوه فهقوتت.

489 من خوازت نهم بناخقم، تشتهکی بیژم، بهلی زهنگهلو را من وهك فۆلکانهکی پهقی و نیدی من كهس ل دهردۆرا خوه نهیدت.

بهلی سهاله هان سهاله و ژنی وهكو ماکه رهکی دببنن، خرابی وان لی سوپار دبت و قهنجی وان باری خوه لی دکت و ل بهره هیکا خوه دهازۆت، و بیلایهینی 490 وان ژی دخوازت دهقی وئ لغاف بکت.

living in pain silently” (20).⁴⁹¹ Accordingly, the two interrelated levels of silence by the abused women and the community and state reinforce each other and enhance the historical oppression of Kurdish women.

Navishki’s text depicts similar layers of silence and invisibility that surround the female characters and the characters’ resistance and attempts to break them. Although Tavge’s journalistic career is a clear indication of her desire to seek justice and equality, the first attempt to break silence and report violence is made by Zhila. Zhila experiences direct violence at the hands of Shawqi Daryachi, structural violence represented by the ineffective police investigations and unfair justice system, and cultural violence represented by the unsympathetic attitudes of the community. Zhila starts her interview with Tavge by criticizing the neglectful attitudes of the justice system which multiply the silencing and marginalization of Kurdish women. Male-violence and patriarchal discrimination thicken the silence in Zhila’s life whose need for secrecy concerning the violence she experiences is reinforced by both the power imbalance perceived as a gender norm in the Kurdish society and by her economic difficulties. The silence and imposed invisibility she suffers from are compounded by the indifferent attitudes of her community which become evident after the death of her husband, when she is left alone, which makes her even more vulnerable to Achari’s constant sexual advances. Realizing Achari’s insensitivity and power, she decides to put an end to his exploitation and oppression, which eventually extend to her son, by cooperating in the planning of his murder. Associating her victimization with the state of lawlessness prevalent in the Kurdish society, she relates, “Do you want me to speak in front of the corrupt judges who are like dolls controlled by invisible forces? I am ready to talk” (50).⁴⁹²

Though Tavge initially disagrees with Zhila, she comes to realize the persistent absence of law and order when she is exposed to an assault because of her involvement in the murder case that concerns Shawqi Daryachi. Like Zhila’s, her victimization is part of the patriarchal context in which the victimized not the victimizer is blamed for violence. When she reports her abduction and threatening phone calls to Baban, he only responds by blaming her: “How do you interfere in the prison’s

مرادا من بوو كو دادگهههك تهفاه ساز بكن دا ههركهس بگههت مافهت خوه، بملی وان موهلهت نهذا: بی بملگه، بی شاهد و مافی بهرهفانیی نهز دادگهه ⁴⁹¹ کرم و سزایی من نهو بوو، کو ههس کهسی بکارت ژپه فه بمیزت، ژ من برهفت. بیست و سئ ساله و نهزا نالهبار ل بهر دلئ خوه ددم، و گومانی د پئ فیا ههبوونا خوه ده دکم.

business... no journalist is ever allowed to write about such a place... You did this to yourself” (124).⁴⁹³ Her older brother, similarly, blames her for her overt enthusiasm and search for truth and challenging the existing reality: “I told you tens of times to beware and keep cautious... Don’t challenge powers bigger than yourself... Here you are... Now let *Galveen* and your artist Aram rescue you from all this” (129).⁴⁹⁴ Abused psychologically and physically, Tavge expresses her unspeakable experiences of abduction and assaults in writing first through journalism and then the diary she writes and hands to Aram before her death. It is through her writings that Tavge names and thereby resists the muteness that envelops gendered oppression and the patriarchal codes that condemn Kurdish women. With a belief in the power of the written word, Tavge resorts to writing both as a way to escape her mental contortion and the psychological disorder she experiences after the assault and as a means through which to break silence around violence. Even before the assault, she displays a strong belief in the role of writing and the media illustrated by the way she encourages Zhila to tell her story and let the world hear: “Open your heart to me... I will make your voice heard everywhere, in New York, Vienna and the whole world. Someone will surely hear it” (56).⁴⁹⁵

Writing and its aesthetic qualities inspired by emotion and expression equip the victimized Tavge and help her to express her broken feelings and shattered self-image and eventually function as a form of empowerment. Shortly after being terrorized, Tavge transforms into a damaged and psychologically-troubled woman who, in her own words, can neither sleep nor rest, and only reflects on her “misshapen face, shrinking eyes, and burned and deformed skin, almost like a scary witch” (26).⁴⁹⁶ By re-writing Zhila’s story, the assault, and the way she felt about it, she finds a way to both release emotions and viewpoints suppressed by fear and a sense of fault and to achieve justice through telling truths. Her diary becomes a weapon through which she resists the persistent political and administrative corruption in the Kurdish society. Moreover, her diary is an attempt to subvert the negative image and submissive view imposed on the Kurdish women.

تو باش دزانی، نابت روژنامه فان د فی واری ده، و سا سه ربوخه ب چن، ل خبیچین سور بده ن. نه فه ل ده سنتیکی من بو ته گوت لی ته نه و کر یا ته ⁴⁹³ فیای نه یا مه فیای.

نھا نه فه نه وه یا من دگوته ته: تاڤگه خاتون، ل به ر خوه راوه سته و هندی به رکا بابی خوه بی خوه دریز بکه، نه م ب خوه دکرمینه! ته دگوت: نه ⁴⁹⁴ شیرا خه سینم! دی فیجا هرکی، ئیدی بلا کوفارا (گه لفین) و مه لفین و نارامی ته بی هونه رمه ند ته رزگار بکه ن! دی

⁴⁹⁵ نه ز دی ناخفتنن ته گه هینمه نیویورکی، فییننایی و سه رانسه ری جیهانی به لکی بهین ته رزگار بکه ن.

دیمی وی بوویه تشابه ته ک گوژیشک و چا فکین وی وه کی میوژین نیکه لی بریچوک بووین، ب گریقه خوه هاقیتی و ده فی وی بی ذ ته رزی نالیونی ⁴⁹⁶ نیفسوتی هاته به ر چا فان و بیرا بیره فیین دائیرا وی دکر نه قاره مانین چیروکین ئی نغاندن، هاته به ر چاقان.

Similarly, Mariama's compulsion to painting becomes the only outlet to release the immense oppression she has faced. Her paintings and the exhibitions she holds help in expressing her creativeness and improve her social and psychological state. Additionally, her constant attempts to study and improve her social and economic conditions highlight the ability of abused women to find alternatives through which to survive. Her paintings, in this sense, are representations of the sexual and emotional violence she experiences of which she can never speak without being exposed to further exploitation and punishment. She associates her need for painting to her community's indifference towards violence against women: "No one answered me when, in loneliness, my paintings were dressed in white like dead corpses and my chest entombed pains and sorrows? It is at such times that my silence and imperfections become a language" (65). She also adds: "People, snakes, threads, headstones of the dead, train smoke, all become alive... Each [painting] turned into a friend; they talked to me and I talked to them one by one" (111). After more than two decades of imposed reticence, Mariama expresses her need to 'unfold' her story and "lay all her cards on the table" (12).⁴⁹⁷ While Mariama's 'telling' is important because of its awakening quality and self-expression ability, it is also worthwhile to note the impact of Nareen's cultural background on Mariama because of the long time she has spent in Europe. Nareen, who only makes a few comments and participations through the whole text, shows a great sympathy and identification with Mariama and even acclaims her determination to survive her oppressive circumstances with which she awakens parts in Mariama suppressed by male-violence: "Pardon me Nareen. I need your patience for I have no one else. Life is cold and dark and I have too many pages to burn. I don't want to show them to anyone except you" (73). Telling is a cathartic act of self-expression and spiritual validation for Mariama who is muted by the patriarchal ideology of her society. The scene which solidifies Mariama's new awakening most powerfully is when she says:

The world wars, the cold war, the Gulf wars and the Anfal campaigns all ended, but I am still fighting the rigid traditional cultural codes of my community. I will prove to Manjool, Kabra and the three knights that they have chosen death and I have chosen life. (124)⁴⁹⁸

It is important that, as the clearest indication of Mariama's awakening and self-validation, this scene coincides with her determination to improve her economic status. In other words, Mariama's spiritual and economic awakenings are highly tied to one another. She realizes the importance of economic

د ئى كاغە زىت خوه ته فان كفش كم.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁸ جه نڭين جيهانى، جه نڭى سار، جه نڭى كه نداڤى يى نىكى و ئوبه راسيونىن نه نفالان هه موو ب دوماهيك هاتن، به لى جه نڭى من ل گه ل به رمايكنن
بيس هنز به رده وامه. نه ز چه زدكم بو مه نجولئ و كابرابي و هه رسئ سوارئن بئ به يره ق ل به ر ده رگه هئ كه لها مريه مايئ بسه لمينم كو وان مرن
هلبزارت لئ من زيان هلبزارت.

independence as a crucial component of women's empowerment. She endeavours to create a space through which both to challenge the passive roles attributed to her as a female and recognize the potentialities long forbidden by patriarchal codes.

As an alternative to her suppressed creativity, Mariama resorts to the traditionally female craft of designing and sewing clothes. Aware of her situation, the raped, violated, abused but never defeated Mariama tries to stand up for herself and resist her fate as a powerless woman in a male-dominated world. She realizes the importance of working and earning money: "The best way for a woman to get freedom is having an independent business because when a woman gets economic independence, she can change many things in her life" (114).⁴⁹⁹ Thus, the novel uses painting and trading to focus on the reconstruction of the female-self and give Mariama an opportunity for existence and subjectivity. The notion of women's economic independence is re-imagined and re-examined throughout the novel. Mariama's awareness of her weak and vulnerable status as a resource-less woman is an important step which helps in her movement towards a greater awareness of her self-definition. This awareness reinforces her journey towards becoming a woman who finally masters the courage to stand up to abusive men and the excessive patriarchal norms and judgments in the Kurdish society. Accordingly, the text emphasizes economic discrimination alongside gender discrimination as forces enhancing violence against Kurdish women and depicts the importance of resisting both forces in order to reach self-definition.

In her acclaimed *The Color Purple* (1982), the American novelist and activist Alice Walker portrays a similar preoccupation with the significance of women's financial independence as a measure to their empowerment and resilience. The novel presents many female characters facing a difficult choice between fighting male violence and discrimination (and in most cases ending up even more ill-treated) or completely submitting to their domination. After years of physical and psychological abuse by her step-father and later her husband, Celie, the protagonist, decides to stand up for herself, understanding that self-determination for abused and subservient women like her involves female solidarity and economic independence. According to Zainab Musir and Kadhim Jawad, by supporting and educating Celie, "Shug's singing career provides Celie with the material support and domestic shelter she needs when she finally breaks from Mr. ___ [her husband] and enables her to discover her own creativity in

باشترین چارهسەری ژ بو نازادبوونا وئ - وهکو ژن - کاره. لئ کارهک سهربخوه چونکی ههگەر ژن ژ نالیین نابوری فه سهربخوه بوو هینگن گهلمهک 499
دگوهۆرن. تشت

sewing pants.”⁵⁰⁰ They add that, Shug, who has experienced violence and discrimination based on her gender and race has come to understand the importance of women coming together to fight discriminatory forces and hence, “invests her time, money and love to help her friend to define herself and be financially independent.”⁵⁰¹ Moreover, the acts of sewing and quilting, together with the act of writing diaries in the form of letters addressed to God and different characters, are employed in the book to symbolize Celie’s development and personal identity- building as well as women’s bonding together to resist violence and abuse. With the support and help of her female friends, Celie develops a business, “Folkspants Unlimited” both to express her creativity and sewing abilities kept suppressed for years and a potential of economic success and independence.

Although Silevani’s female protagonist endeavours to utilize similar potentials to develop a business as an outlet for the social and gender tensions and the sexual, emotional and psychological abuse that characterize her life, she soon realizes that in her strictly coded Kurdish society, the establishment of an independent and prosperous character is almost impossible. However, despite being forced to give up her clothing project, Mariama becomes aware of the methods through which to embody her true self as she grows from a shy broken girl to a woman who has the confidence to stand up and eventually attain the power for self-defence. When Nareen asks her, looking back, how she will describe her life, Mariama answers that at the end, “I reached a state of freedom... I was able to reconstruct Mariama the human. I am still proud of my wounds even though will never heal” (133).⁵⁰²

Like Mariama, by re-writing her life and experiences as viewed from different angles by different people including her mother, her brother, and her manager’s outlooks, Tavge returns to her past experiences, measures her responses, and eventually manages to unify her identity in one notebook. As she does so, she comes to terms with her growing disillusionment with the patriarchal gender norms prevalent in her society, the trauma of psychological and physical assaults, professional anxieties and the tensions of social and familial hierarchies. Aram’s painting, which functions as a completion of what Tavge started, is a significant indication of the effectiveness of her writing. Aram draws Tavge’s face at the same time as he reads her diary and the experiences she has undergone. In the final chapter of the book, Aram not only finishes reading the diary but also completes his painting, which delineates

⁵⁰⁰ Zainab Musir and Kadhim Jawad, “Women’s Friendship in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*,” *The Professor*, 203 (2012), 33-34.

⁵⁰¹ Musir and Jawad, “Women’s Friendship,” 33-34.

د وان سالنن قيرۆسييايى ده من شيا ئەز مريهمايا مروث ناڤا بكم هرچهنده دم بۆ دهمى دههرفى. راسته، كو ئەز بريندارم و برينا من ساريژ نابت، بەلى ئەز^{٥٠٢} شانازيبيى پى ديم.

a young woman trying to liberate herself from snakes, witches, strong winds, and dark caves. We are, however, not told whether Aram is going to report the diary which he is sure provides various pieces of evidence and information about her death/murder. The story closes with Aram and his friend Rizgar reflecting on the painting and relating it to Tavge's story and the way it has ended. Just like Tavge's death is left unresolved, the novel ends with no resolution and is kept open to different possibilities.

Similarly, *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* is left unresolved, as Mariama, despite her struggle for affirmation and subjectivity, fails to find the man she has been looking for throughout the book. Yet, in the final chapter, "Mohammad Mahdi,"⁵⁰³ Mariama has one final episode to relate to Nareen. In this chapter, Mariama tells of her encounter with Kirmanj, a photographer she gets to know when she decides to apply for a passport in order to travel to Europe. She starts the chapter by reflecting on her horrific encounters with the men in her life and all the violence they imposed on her and the way she decided to escape confirming that: "There is no place for me in this country. I feel like a foreigner and people, especially men, treat me like a foreigner. It is better for me to be a foreigner in a foreign country and spend what is left of my life alone far from here" (126).⁵⁰⁴ Mariama tells of her visits to Kirmanj's photographic studio and his inspiring descriptions of the years he has spent in Sweden. Though Kirmanj obtained asylum a few months after arriving in Sweden, and tried to learn Swedish, and attended a few courses to improve his skills in photography, he has decided to return to Kurdistan because of his never-ending feelings of alienation. What attracts Mariama most are Kirmanj's compassionate and sensitive personality, and his identification and sympathy with the Kurdish women and the oppression that has historically threatened their existence in Kurdistan. Their growing relationship makes Mariama change her mind about traveling abroad and feel love again despite all the bitterness and frustration in her life. Starting, in one of their meetings, with "Mariama, I love but..." Mariama notices that he is about to break some terrible news to her and she feels frightened that he might have heard about her past:

It was the time of frankness; time of revelations and admissions. It was time to ask for forgiveness from the past and the future. I never felt that frightened because I never knew the real value of love and life before. I was afraid that despite being very different, Kirmanj is like, Kabra, Hazhar, Islam

⁵⁰³ Refers to Mohammad Al-Mahdi who is believed to be the ultimate saviour of humankind and who will emerge with Isa (Jesus Christ) in order to fulfill their mission of bringing peace and justice to the world.

⁵⁰⁴ ئەز گە هشتەم باوە ریبێن کۆ تێتی کە سێ من بە لێ نێدی جەیی من ژێ ل ڤی وە لاتی نە نایە. مادام کۆ هە ر ئەز بیانی مە و وە ک بیانی سە رە دە ریل ل گە ل من دکن ب تاییه تی رە گە زێ دی. هە ما بلا ل وە لاته ک دی ل ناف خە لکه ک دی بێم بیانی و سالیین تە مە نێ خوە یێ مایین دوور بقە دینم

and Hawar, he is a Middle Eastern man and is similarly restricted by the Kurdish social patriarchal attitudes. (134)⁵⁰⁵

Contrary to Mariama's expectations, Kirmanj is nothing like the other men she has known. He tells Mariama that: "I love you with all my life and pains. I know your whole story. I know about your parents' death, your step mother's conspiracy with Mohammadê Mayrê, and about the three Mujahedeen who returned from their invasions empty-handed" (135).⁵⁰⁶ He adds that he has forgiven her for everything and is happy to marry her and spend the rest of his life with her but "[he] cannot get married because he has been wounded during the Kurdish civil war in the genital area and is no longer a 'proper' man" (135).⁵⁰⁷ The novel closes with Nareen asking Mariama about what happened later, to which Mariama only replies by repeating her question, "and then what Nareen?" indicating her uncertainty and the text's openness, like *Tavge's*, to many different resolutions.

Mariama's, Zhila's, and Tavge's revelations of their interior experiences and feelings conform to Felski's definition of the novel of awakening as a sub-division of self-discovery texts in which the protagonist seeks to achieve the dual goal of self-affirmation and social integration. Felski explains that her discussion of such texts confirms their twofold function:

On the one hand, a desire for integration and participation within a larger social and public community as a means of overcoming a condition of marginalization and powerlessness, on the other, an insistence upon a qualitative difference of cultural perspective as a means of articulating a radical challenge to dominant values and institutions.⁵⁰⁸

Despite their remarkable congruity to Felski's argument, the texts' conclusions slightly deviate from the definition of the self-discovery novels in that the novels are left open and unresolved. While by the end of the novels *Mariama* and *Tavge* do not seem to have achieved much, represented by *Tavge's* death and *Mariama's* failure to find settlement with the man she has been searching for, as novels of self-discovery, the texts retain a generally optimistic belief in the possibility of female development. Against all the social and cultural restrictions and patriarchal gender norms, *Mariama* and *Tavge*, disregarding any final resolution, are portrayed as women in a continuous fight for resistance and

505 دهم دهمی لخواه موكرهاتنى بوو، دهمى دانپندانى بوو، دهمى لئيبورينى ژ روژى و كئيلكا ده مى و داهاتوويى بوو. چو جارمك و لك وئ روژى نهز نهذتر سيام ژ بهر كو چو جار و لك وئ روژى من بوهايى نهفين و ژيانى نهذرانى. نهغه ژى زه لامهك روژههلاتى به و كو مههمدى مبيرى، ههزارى پيشمهركه، نيسلامى كومانيسست و هاوارى نيسلامى. ل دهستينكى و دوماهيكى نهغه ژى ديلى جفاكى خوه به و نهشيتت چو بو ته بكت.

506 مه ريه ما من! نهز ب هه موو ژان و ژيانا خوه چه شته دكه م نهز ته دنياسم. هزر نه كه كو نهز چيروكا ته ب ته مامى نزانم نا جان. نهز دزانم كه نكي ته چه ليمايى كراسى خوه گوهورى و كه نكي بابى ته ديوالى برياردا بگه هت وئ و ژنبابا ته مه نجولئ ب تنى بهيلت. نهز دزانم ژى كا كه نكي مه داىكا چه مدئ مه يرئ "زه لام" كر سينونيمه ك بو "چه يوانه ك درنده" نهز دزانم ژى كا چاوان هه رسن موجهدين دي ژ غه زويى ده ستقالا زفرين.

507 نهز نه شيم ته مه هر بكم چونكي نهز ب كير ته ناهيم. نهز برندارم ... دشه رى براكوژين ده گووله به كئ ژ بيسيرا من گرت و رها ميترائين قه تاند.

⁵⁰⁸ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 150.

survival. Both actively respond to traditional forces, demand justice, break silence and speak up, and endeavour to reconstruct the passive shattered images and self-perceptions caused by violence and abuse.

Chapter Five

Kurdish Women and Terrorism-Related Violence in Tahsin Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* and Sindis Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two

“To every woman who has become a victim of the twentieth-first century clash of civilizations.”⁵⁰⁹

This chapter's epigraph is a line from Tahsin Navishki's dedication of his novel *Alê Di Yê Prê* (The Other Side of the Bridge, 2010), which depicts the horrific experiences of a woman, Rawshan, and her daughter, Khisar, during their abduction by a terrorist group. The novel powerfully explores the effects of terrorist captivity on the women's family and whole community. Navishki's dedication, which projects a sense of threat but also of solidarity, becomes a thread that runs through the whole text. The importance of this emotional appeal is that it draws upon what the post-conflict Kurdish society has endured and suffered during this period, in which the Kurds' historical, linguistic, traditional, cultural and religious identities have become, once again, a source of conflict with the rest of Iraqi society, but this time complicated and amplified by criminal and terrorist activities.

Although the resemblance of Navishki's dedication to the political scientist Samuel Huntington's theory of the 'clash of civilizations'⁵¹⁰ may be noted, it is essential to mention that Navishki's employment of the concept has no connection to Huntington's theory.⁵¹¹ A substantial feature in

⁵⁰⁹ Tahsin Navishki, *The Other Side of the Bridge* (Duhok: The Kurdish Writers Union Press, 2010), 3. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses). All English in-text quotations from this work are my own translation and will be annotated throughout the thesis with the original corresponding passages from the Kurdish (Bahdini) text.

هه رژنه كا بوويه قوربانا هه فرکيا شارستانیین سه دئ بیست و ئیکێ

⁵¹⁰ Huntington first proposed the theory in 1992 in a lecture he presented at the American Enterprise Institute and later expanded into a book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in 1996. In an article published in 1993 that addresses the same thesis, Huntington predicted that in the post-Cold War era, the historical, linguistic, traditional, cultural and religious identities of people would become the main source of conflict. He said: "It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in the new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principle conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations" (Huntington, 1993, 22). Huntington explains that unlike most political ideologies and regimes, cultural and religious differences and diversities, as products of long centuries, are more fundamental and are not likely to disappear soon. These differences, according to him, "have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts" (Ibid., 25). Another significant reason for Huntington's prediction is the growing interaction between people and communities of different civilizations and identities. Such exchanges, he confirms, "intensify civilization consciousness and awareness of differences between civilization and commonalities within civilizations" (Ibid.).

⁵¹¹ Navishki, 16 November 2016, Personal Interview.

Huntington's model is that it focuses on the civilizational conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims which are enhanced by such factors as "the Islamic Resurgence and demographic explosion in Islam, coupled with the values of Western universalism—that is, the view that all civilizations should adopt Western values—that infuriate Islamic fundamentalists."⁵¹² Huntington glosses his prediction of the clash of civilizations with several explanations including the growing globalization as a result of increasing interactions between different parts of the world which have contributed to an awareness of differences and commonalities within civilizations and the ancientness of historical, linguistic, cultural, and most importantly, religious distinctions among civilizations. Most important, Huntington refers to the developed and prosperous state of Western countries compared to non-Western ones: "A West at the peak of its power confronts non-Western countries that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways."⁵¹³ Thus, although upon reading Navishki's dedication one might think of Huntington's theory, the contexts addressed are entirely different as Navishki is only concerned with the historical, cultural, traditional, socio-political and religious differences between Kurdish and non-Kurdish groups in Iraq.

Sindis Niheli's *Hizar Di Werçerxana Da*, *Bergê Dwê* (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part Two, 2014) opens with a similar prediction of conflict. One character remarks early in the text that: "In the nearest future, many incidents will happen and the Kurds will fall into deep and serious troubles and miseries."⁵¹⁴ It is this period of foretaste of future prospects experienced by the Kurdish people of Iraq, and the hectic period immediately following that form the primary focus of this chapter. This phase of the recent Kurdish history in Iraq is characterized by a significant lack of security, unconcealed inter-ethnic and sectarian hatred and conflict, most prominently between the Shiite and Sunni Arabs, and extensive political struggles both between the central government in Baghdad and KRG and within KRG itself. All these conditions serve as a fertile ground for the formation and growth of criminal and terrorist ideology.

This restless period of Iraq's recent history represents the third phase of the three-moment periodizing chronological model developed in Chapter One to explore the representation of Kurdish women and

⁵¹² Samuel P Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3 (Summer, 1993): 25.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Sindis Niheli, *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two (Duhok: The Press of Duhok Governorate, 2014), 10. (All further references to this work will be cited in the text by page number in parentheses). All English in-text quotations from this work are my own translation and will be annotated throughout the thesis with the original corresponding passages from the Kurdish (Bahdini) text.

لێ ب نانه هیا خودی باشه روزه ك نيزيك دى ب چاڤين خو بينى، دى گه له ك نشت روبده ن و كورد دى كه ڤنه ناتاف و گرفتاريين مه زن.

the violence imposed on them. After discussing Kurdish women's suffering from growing levels of violence in the contexts of war and post-conflict, this chapter examines the diverse structures and actors through which Kurdish women are exposed to various levels of violence from terrorist activities and operations. Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* and Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two concentrate on the current phase of Kurdish history in which KRG is involved in an intricate political dispute and a violent war against ISIS, one of the most brutal militant groups in the history of terrorism.

A principal argument proposed by Navishki and Niheli, which will be developed and discussed thoroughly in the following sections, is the perilous interplay between growing levels of embedded corruption within the Kurdish social and political spheres and the perpetuation of criminal and terrorist activities. Equally important is the argument concerning the social and political empowerment of Kurdish women as an influential strategy to combat gender violence and counter extremist and terrorist ideologies. Implying that there is a relationship between the treatment of women in society and the perpetuation of gender and terrorist-related violence, the texts emphasize the importance of attaining gender equality and women's rights as measures of peace preservation and conflict resolution. The texts, moreover, confirm that women's activism and participation in the public spheres contribute to the elimination of political, social, and professional discrimination against Kurdish women and greater social harmony.

In addition to Navishki and Niheli's texts, this chapter pays particular attention to the journalist and Yazidi rights activist Khidher Domle's *Al-Maut al-Aswed: Ma'asi Nisa' al-Yazidiye fi Qabdet Da'esh* (The Black Death: Tragedies of Ezidy Women in the Grip of ISIS, 2015). Written in Arabic and published in Duhok, the book chronicles the barbarous atrocities imposed on the Yazidi women during their capture by ISIS and their systematic transportation between different points in the areas under ISIS control in Iraq and Syria. The book represents Domle's efforts from September 2014, shortly after the invasion of Sinjar,⁵¹⁵ where the majority of the victims come from, to document the experiences of the women surviving genocide and ISIS. As a Yazidi himself, Domle confirms the need to write and report the atrocities and crimes practiced against these women who were treated like sex slaves and spoils of war. Domle's work, though not a novel, is very illuminative here given that it is the very first

⁵¹⁵ Also called Shingal, is a town in Sinjar District, Nineveh Province in Iraq. In August 2014, Sinjar and the neighbouring towns were attacked by ISIS. The ISIS invasion of Sinjar caused the death of 2,000-5,000 Yazidis that represent the majority of the inhabitants of these areas.

detailed and informative record of first-hand descriptions of the genocidal campaigns by ISIS against the Yazidi minority in Iraq.

Reading these three texts, selected from two different but related literary genres, namely fiction and documentary journalism, allows us to analyse compelling representations of Kurdish history and national identity in relation to women's position in society, in the context of war and terrorism. In so doing, the chapter explores the ways in which these texts document gender violence, violations of human rights and dignity, and the resultant conditions of persisting fear, war, occupation and terrorism. Drawing heavily on Iraqi and Kurdish recent experiences, and commenting on a range of contemporary and historical events that have led to the current complicated situation, the texts illuminate the complex current material conditions of life and society in the Kurdish Region in Iraq. The texts pay particular attention to the ways in which differences in people's historical, cultural, and religious identities and ideologies become causal factors of conflict and terrorism. The darkness and cruelty, as well as the aggressive offenses included in the texts, unveil the violence and terror that threaten the lives of Kurdish people and particularly women today.

Close readings of the texts indicate significant processes of investigation, research and study that have obviously preceded the writing of the texts, which helps explain and justify the writers' employment of realist and journalistic forms. The adoption of journalistic and documentary styles throughout the texts, though most especially in Domle's *The Black Death*, has demanded significant research work and a heavy reliance on clear factual details in an attempt to record historical events and their effects on women in a convincing way. The books present a range of images that picture women in brutal conditions: The abducted and imprisoned woman, the physically and sexually abused woman, and the intellectual and active, but confined woman. The voices of various Kurdish women as they describe their lives under the inhuman and painful conditions suggest the devastation and struggle of the Kurdish society as part of the battle for power in Iraq as a whole. The female perspectives included in the texts express the immense human costs of political disputes, occupation and terrorism.

Like the works tackled in the previous two chapters, the texts selected here not only portray acts of destruction and violence exerted against Kurdish women, but also the various ideologies and creeds behind such aggressive acts. In so doing, the texts confirm that the plight of Kurdish women and the plight of a whole nation become inseparable as the forces that have historically threatened the region are threatening women's existence. Their encounters with violence and terror are depicted as an

inevitable consequence of certain troubled political, cultural, and ideological conjunctions. The current war imposed on Kurdish people and the rest of Iraq is an indication of the blurring of boundaries between the home and war front, particularly in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by the al-Qaeda terrorist group. Although this aspect of the war in KRG has been discussed briefly in Chapter Three, it receives further attention here given the growing numbers of civilian casualties and the increased confrontation of the private/public, national/international, combatant/civilian spaces and how such conflicts are directly influencing Kurdish literary production. The turn to civilian casualties and terrorist battlefronts is confirmed by Giles and Hyndman:

Noncombatants are supposed to be safeguarded from war, with fighting duties assigned to armed soldiers, yet civilians compose the vast majority of casualties in current conflicts. Whereas most casualties at the turn of the nineteenth century occurred among soldiers at the battlefield, civilian deaths and injuries constituted 60 to 80 percent of casualties at the end of the twentieth century.⁵¹⁶

This argument is even more applicable, taking into consideration the war on terror, also known as the Global War on terrorism waged by the USA against al-Qaeda and other related terrorist organizations after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The war on terror in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and the various operations conducted in other countries, is characterized more than anything by the ever growing number of civilian casualties reaching as high as over 90 per cent of the deaths. The selected texts assert that boundaries of war fronts and militarized zones are steadily affected by cultural, economic, political, and religious ideologies which shape identities and civilizations. It is indicated in this chapter that because wars occur within the boundaries of states with high levels of civilian casualties, gender has become a highly significant aspect in the current conflicts. Giles and Hyndman's introduction confirms this:

The incorporation of civilians into contemporary conflicts has been a highly gendered practice. It has occurred on the finest spatial scale: that of the human body, a site always marked by relations of gender, class, nation, race, caste, religion, and geographical location.⁵¹⁷

Emphasizing gender relations and roles in the context of war and terrorism, the chapter employs a feminist perspective to analyze acts of brutal assaults, abduction, rape, and murder in relation to human body (in this case a female body). In addition to the depiction of the various forms of control and domination exerted within and by a patriarchal Kurdish society, the texts selected here present the violated female body as a site where ideological conflicts take place as women are captured, raped,

⁵¹⁶ Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, "Introduction: Gender and Conflict in a Global Context," in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 2004), 5.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

tortured, and murdered. In *The Other Side of the Bridge*, Navishki presents graphic descriptions of the brutalized female body and gives a range of images whereby it is regarded as a site upon which acts of absolute atrocity, revenge and hatred are practiced. With more concentration on the actors and ideologies leading to conflict, Niheli's novel presents a number of instances whereby women suffer tremendous horror and brutality both on domestic and international levels. These descriptions reach unimaginable levels in Domle's *The Black Death*, where actual acts of genocide attacks, gendered abduction, and mass rape are described by the victims themselves.

By problematizing the traditionally intricate questions of gender equality, the politicization of women's rights and experiences and their participation in the processes of conflict resolution and peace preservation as represented in the novels, the chapter indicates that women's empowerment against terrorist ideology and attacks as depicted in Navishki and Niheli's novels is an effective aspect of the war on terror. Before turning to the question of how fiction and documentary interventions are caught up in these historical processes, and before proceeding to investigate the ways in which the texts depict the victimization of women by the various forces of terrorism and political and ideological conflicts, it is necessary to analyze the impact of gender inequality on the enforcement and systematization of terrorist acts and to present theoretical and conceptual understandings of the phenomenon of terrorism.

5.1. Connections between Gender Equality and Terrorism-Related Violence

Since September 11, 2001 when the terrorist group al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden bombed the twin towers (The World Trade Centre) in New York, terrorism, as a term, concept and act has received a wide attention in the media, the religious and socio-political domains and academic scholarship. What becomes clear from the bulk of literature on terrorism is that not all countries experience the same level and lethality of terrorist attacks.⁵¹⁸ Exploring the various conditions, practices, and attitudes that evoke terrorism, this chapter emphasizes the impact of these actors on the Kurdish women in the contexts of both peace and war. By employing gender as a central variable of analysis, the chapter adopts a feminist perspective to scrutinize the texts chosen here and the ways in which they investigate gender equality, women's vulnerability to violence and their empowerment as

⁵¹⁸ Important examples include *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* (2007) by Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives and Issues* (2013) by Gus Martin and *Terrorism, War and International Law: The Legality of the Use of Force Against Afghanistan* (2016) by Myra Williamson.

counterterrorist measures. Looking at gender relations and women's position in society as predictors of terrorism provides insights into the relationship between gender equality and terrorism.

The present section argues that gender equality has an immense impact on the degree and growth of terrorism which a society experiences. In other words, the way women are viewed and treated has an effective impact on the levels of terrorism they are likely to suffer. In this context, Aneela Salman, whose research concerns political violence, gender and security and terrorism issues, posits that:

Outcomes of gender equality measured in terms of educational attainment, level of economic participation, and parliamentary representation have a significant and consistently negative impact on both domestic and transnational terrorism.⁵¹⁹

Accordingly, as manifested above, the level of gender equality in a certain country determines whether or not that country is likely to experience violence and terrorism. Before exploring these measures in further detail, however, it is important to illustrate some of the definitional and conceptual issues surrounding the meaning and hypothesis of terrorism, which is confirmed to be a difficult task, given that what counts as a terrorist act in one country may be viewed as an act of legitimate defense or resistance in another. This is manifested in "Terrorism: Concepts, Causes, and Conflict Resolution" by William Cunningham Jr.:

This topic is very subjective and it largely depends on an individual's perceptions and experiences that determine what they think about it. One may relate to the victim or one may relate to the perpetrator, particularly if the perpetrator is from one's own ethno-national, religious, or ideological group.⁵²⁰

Cunningham, whose work focuses on terrorism and counterterrorism within the framework of conflict analysis and resolution, attributes the 'definitional confusion' over the topic to the different institutional perspectives and disciplinary frameworks employed in its study. He argues that almost all definitions and typologies of terrorism revolve around three basic questions: "1) what elements constitute terrorist acts? 2) What perpetrates terrorist acts? And 3) Why do they use terrorism as a tactic or strategy?"⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ Aneela Salman, "Green houses for terrorism: measuring the impact of gender equality attitudes and outcomes as deterrents of terrorism," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 39:4 (March, 2015), 282.

⁵²⁰ William G. Cunningham, Jr. "Terrorism Definitions and Typologies," in *Terrorism: Concepts, Causes, and Conflict Resolution*, ed. R. Scott Moore, (USA: Advanced Systems and Concepts Office Defense Threat Reduction Agency: 2003), 5.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

The definitions and theorizations of terrorist acts studied in this chapter are based on the contexts in which they are perpetrated and represented in the selected texts. Since these contexts are not the same, I will attempt to define the phenomenon of terrorism and employ theoretical frameworks for the violence it produces in each text in separate sections and in a chronological order. The texts, nevertheless, will be occasionally brought into textual dialogue with one another to explore the processes of both women's victimization by terrorist forces and their empowerment against the violence it perpetuates. Additionally, since the causal factors and consequences of terrorism in both texts are the same, textual analysis and comparison are also very illuminative. The advantage of this approach is that the contextual readings of the terrorist activities in each section rationalize, predict, and result in the terrorist activities in the following section. The examination of the terrorist acts and the violence these activities cause in each section is accompanied by descriptions of the impact on women and their position in society.⁵²²

Related to the discussion of terrorist acts in the thesis as represented in the two novels is Stephen Sloan's argument that the definition of terrorism depends on whether it is considered to be a criminal act or a form of warfare. While in the first instance, the focus needs to be on enforcing law and

⁵²² Despite the awkwardly problematic and fluid nature of terrorism, most studies agree that the level and lethality of the phenomenon in a country depend on a number of factors: the economic and social prosperity, population growth and size, the degree of ethno-national and religious tolerance, the political and cultural compatibility, and the country's internal and external military stability. The 2003 and 2006 National Strategies for Combating Terrorism provides illustration of what the US administration and foreign policy regard as possible causes and predictors of terrorism. Conditions such as poverty, corruption, religious conflicts and ethnic strife are viewed as opportunities for terrorists to exploit as well as use to justify their actions. The documents explain that terrorism springs from such factors as political alienation, grievances, subcultures of conspiracy and misinformation, and an ideology that justifies human rights violations. Remedying these conditions is, according to the strategies, the required measures for counter-terrorism. In its data collection, the Global Terrorism Dataset, GTD establishes several criteria for the definition of an act as terrorist: The act must be intentional, must entail violence or the threat of violence, and must be perpetrated by non-state actors. In their introduction of the GTD, Lafree and Dugan confirm that the act must be: "[a]imed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal ... there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (audiences) than the immediate victims [and] the action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities" (Lafree and Dugan, 2007, 188). Various institutions and scholars have endeavoured to formulate definitions of terrorism depending on their approach and understanding. For example, the US Department of Defense Definition of Terrorism defines it as: The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inoculate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological. (Joint Chiefs of Staff DOD 2008, 552). http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/134833_dodi_2016.pdf. The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism signed at Cairo in 1998 defines terrorism as: Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement or collective criminal agenda, causing terror among people and causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty, or security in danger, or aiming to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupy or seize them, or aiming to jeopardise a national resource. (Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior and the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice, 1998, 2). https://www.unodc.org/tldb/pdf/conv_arab_terrorism.en.pdf

collecting evidence to deal with legal frameworks, a military approach needs to be implemented in the second instance. In either case, Sloan confirms that “terrorism has evolved over time, but its political, religious, and ideological goals have practically never changed.”⁵²³ Sloan asserts that in order to develop a working definition of terrorism, it needs to be examined in relation to other forms of violent conflicts such as riots, guerrilla wars, and insurgencies. There are many examples in which movements initially identified as political have come to generate civil wars and violent insurgencies and also conduct extremist terrorist operations such as those undertaken by the Taliban and Boko Haram.

This analysis also applies to the rising levels of violent conflict and terrorism in Iraq, one of the countries currently experiencing both domestic and transnational terrorism. An extensive literature by both Iraqis and non-Iraqis has been dedicated to the emergence and growth of terrorism in Iraq. These studies proclaim that Iraq’s hectic history of the Sunni-Shiite sectarian and Arab-Kurdish ethnic conflicts is a significant factor in the rise of terrorist acts. Another reason is Iraq’s involvement in many internal conflicts and regional wars which have caused conflicted loyalties and serious ideological, political, and economic separatisms. Almost all scholarship on terrorism in Iraq confirms that the US war on terror and involvement in Iraq since 2003 was a turning point in the history of terrorism in Iraq and the region. An important dimension of this is the way various ideas of rightful defense and resistance have come to dominate the political and ideological motivations for many of the emerging groups that initially claimed an opposition to the US presence in Iraq.⁵²⁴ This impact of US foreign policy is confirmed by Ali Jasim in “Reasons of the Emergence of Terrorism in Iraq,” where he explains that the perilous security vacuum caused by the departure of the American forces is a major factor in the escalation of the terrorist activities. He confirms that “the US withdrawal from Iraq has made tons of weapons accessible to the public and left Iraq’s borders open to many terrorist groups

⁵²³ Stephen Sloan, *Terrorism: The Present Threat in Context* (USA: Berg, 2006), 20.

⁵²⁴ The clearest manifestation of the effect of US presence in Iraq and its relationship to the perpetuation and spread of terrorism is the Jama’at al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad that was established at the outset of the American arrival into Iraq and later contributed to the inception of ISIS as will be explained further in a following section. In “Terrorism in Iraq: A Study in the Actual Reasons,” Dunia Jawad divides the factors predicting the expansion of the terrorist groups and later serving the creation of ISIS into two categories: Internal and external. On the internal level, Jawad refers to the inefficient role of the social agencies which are not working effectively, according to her, to reduce terrorist ideology and combat terrorism. By social agencies, she means “such institutions as the family, schools and universities, worship houses, the media, the political parties and the organizations of civil society” (Jawad, 2011, 134). Jawad also refers the psychological incentives and criminal orientations of individuals to resort to terrorist action. This phenomenon reached dangerous rates when many prisoners were set free during the deteriorating security conditions since 2003. On the external level, Jawad criticizes the negative role played by the neighboring states which consider the American presence in Iraq as a direct threat to their own security and sovereignty.

and organizations.”⁵²⁵ Jasim also argues that many Middle Eastern states, particularly the neighboring countries, have been contributing to the promotion of the terrorist groups and organizations. They do so, according to Jasim, by funding these groups and facilitating their movement across their lands and borders.

Despite the significant body of work on terrorism, counterterrorism and international security, the relationship between gender equality and prevalence of terrorist actions is still understudied or overlooked. As is being asserted by emerging feminist theoretical studies, that gender is playing an ever growing role in world politics, conflict resolution, peace preservation and the feminine/masculine dichotomy of wars and national movements. For example, Valerie M. Hudson et al. maintain that economic and socio-political differences between men and women are the root causes of gender inequality and violence associated with national and international security. They observe a central correlation between levels of economic and political welfare and gender equality and a state’s stability. They assert:

States characterized by norms of gender and ethnic inequality as well as human rights abuses are more likely to become involved in militarized interstate disputes and in violent interstate disputes, to be the aggressors during international disputes, and to rely on force when involved in an international dispute.⁵²⁶

Addressing the same correlation between gender equality and terrorism, Salman indicates that physical, political, and economic violence against women is an influential predictor of both interstate and international behavior. She demonstrates that “increased gender equality in the society, judged by women’s participation in economic, social, and political spheres, would result in less and fewer militarized disputes at an international level.”⁵²⁷ For Salman, women’s political power and impact on a state’s policy and security are important instruments for combatting terrorism.

It becomes clear from these studies that gender equality goes far beyond such issues as social justice and women’s immediate social and political positions. Gender equality, as confirmed by these feminist studies of war and terrorism, is associated with important questions of interstate security and state-level discrimination against women. Asserting that feminist perspectives on terrorism vary and

⁵²⁵ Ali Jasim, *Esbab Nisha’t al-Irhab fi al-Iraq* (Reasons of the Emergence of Terrorism in Iraq) *Sutuur: An Electronic Journal*, (November, 2013), 1.

⁵²⁶ Valerie M. Hudson, et al. “The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States,” *International Security*, 33:3 (Winter, 2008-2009), 30.

⁵²⁷ Aneela Salman, “Impact of Gender Inequality and Religion on How States Experience Terrorism” (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2005), 10.

diverge, Laura Sjoberg, a feminist and scholar in international relations and security, explains that “what they share is being inspired by various observations of gender subordination in global politics.”⁵²⁸ Sjoberg also underpins the necessity of considering ‘gender dynamics’ of terrorist activities and ‘interrogating’ gender relations in their studies of terrorist organizations.

While these studies do not address the situation in Iraq in a specific way, their discussions accurately describe the way extremist and terrorist ideologies are enhanced by gender inequality and the economic and socio-political subordination of Iraqi women. In Iraq, the relationship between gender equality and terrorism is manifested through the tremendous impact of terrorism-related violence on women represented in almost all feminist studies of gender and violence in Iraq. The on-going ethno-sectarian conflicts, the state of lawlessness and insecurity and the raising levels of violence and terrorism in Iraq, particularly since 2003, have immensely impacted, in Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt’s words, “on the ability to sustain women’s activism in Iraq. Women activists in south and central Iraq perceive the on-going violence as the biggest obstacle to their work.”⁵²⁹ The writers indicate that gender politics in the Iraqi society has been constrained by various structures including political groups that dominate the central government and the groups that have been formed to oppose American occupation. These structures, they confirm, “have each targeted women and gender relations through measures ranging between legislation and the use of physical violence as part of their political projects to gain authority.”⁵³⁰ It is also indicated that women's lack of empowerment enhances the ways women experience violence and insecurity.

Though the creation of the safe haven in the north of Iraq in 1991 has provided a better opportunity for Kurdish women’s participation in the economic and socio-political spheres, gender equality in Kurdistan, as in the rest of Iraq, is still a heated issue on the agenda of Kurdish feminist activities. Associations between gender equality and terrorist-related violence in Kurdish society are yet to be thoroughly explored and tested as the phenomenon is quite recent. However, the existing body of research demonstrates that the escalation of gender violence and unsettled gender relations are significant factors in the prediction of terrorism. Even when they were still largely unaffected by terrorist violence, Kurdish women had been experiencing horrific acts of gender-violence, torture, abductions, and killings both during wars and in post-war contexts. Recent feminist scholarship also indicates Kurdish women’s experiences of violent extremism and acts of terrorism.

⁵²⁸ Laura Sjoberg, “Feminist Interrogations of Terrorism/Terrorism Studies,” *International Relations*, 23:1 (2009), 69.

⁵²⁹ Al-Ali and Pratt, “Women's Organizing,” 10.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

5.2. The Unveiling of the Dark Inside: Women as Direct Victims of Terrorism in Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge*

Published in 2010, only four years before the invasion of Mosul by ISIS in the 10th of June 2014, Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* depicts the effects of a traumatized mind and visualizes the impact of terrorist-related violence on Kurdish society, family and most importantly, women. The novel represents the experiences of abduction, sexual violence, torture, and killing and the effects these acts leave on the Kurdish women. With a focus on these atrocities, the text represents the threatening interaction between gender violence, crime, corruption and terrorism on the Kurdish society and the future of Iraq.

One of the main arguments in the text is that acknowledging the relationship between crime, corruption and terrorism is essential for the understanding of the perpetuation and persistence of terrorist activities and the creation of effective measures to combat terrorism. Accordingly, the explication of Navishki's treatment of terrorism requires a conceptual approach that links these three phenomena and suggests that to achieve peace and justice all three need to be eliminated. Despite the significant differences in the theoretical approaches and methodologies employed in the various studies of both domestic and international terrorism, all indicate that terrorism is not the by-product of a sudden incident, but an outcome of long established political, cultural, and religious conflicts. The studies, moreover, link the perpetuation of terrorist activities to the escalation of interstate violence, organized crimes, and political and administrative corruption.

In "The Unholy Trinity: Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Terrorism," Louise I. Shelley explains that countries where crime groups and corrupt politicians operate are safe havens for terrorists and terrorist actions. In her discussion of the connection between the raising levels of crime and corruption and the political and economic conditions in a society, Shelley confirms that: "New transnational crime groups thrive in the chaos of war and enduring conflicts. They have no interest in the endurance of the state; rather, their profits are made by destabilizing the state and its structures."⁵³¹ Accordingly, Shelley argues that crime, corruption, and terrorism should be treated as components of the same system. In his review of Shelley's most recent book, *Dirty Entanglement: Corruption, Crime and Terrorism*, Martin Longman emphasizes similar connections explaining that "taking advantage of criminal behaviour, including official corruption is the primary way that terrorist organizations sustain

⁵³¹ Louise I. Shelley, "The Unholy Trinity: Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Terrorism," *Broum Journal of World Affairs*, 11:2 (Winter/Spring, 2005), 104.

themselves and pay for their violent activities.”⁵³² Navishki’s novel opens at some point when Mosul and the rest of Iraq, excluding KRG in the north, are immensely affected by high rates of corruption and terrorist activities. The escalation of violence, as will be demonstrated, is the outcome of a state of lawlessness, insecurity, and the deterioration of political and economic conditions. The significance of these settings— Duhok and Mosul during the second half of the 2000s— lies in the different states of order and security between the two cities at the time of the narrative. While Duhok, as a governorate in KRG, has been conflict-free since the end of the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Mosul has been suffering from a serious lack of security: Car explosions, bombings of improvised explosive devices, attacks on American troops, gendered abductions and assaults against civilians. These activities are adopted as part of the terrorists’ program to exert intimidation, chaos, and insecurity within the Iraqi society. In addition to the persistent disputes between the different ethnic and religious denominations, the period witnessed the creation of many secret criminal and terrorist groups in Mosul and other Iraqi cities.

While cities and borders in many literary and artistic representations reflect the feelings and experiences of individuals and communities and their cultural values and practices, in *The Other Side of the Bridge*, they have an additional function: They function as dividing lines between life and death and safety and danger. This division is supported by the title of the novel where the presence of a bridge threatens the characters’ lives. The bridge in the title refers to the big bridge that splits one side of the city of Mosul into a safe and peaceful east and a conflict-torn west where crime, violence and terrorist activities prevail. In the text cities, borders, and bridges not only signify human identities and intentions but also identify different social, economic, and political processes. Accordingly, places not only define the novel’s physical dimensions, but also affect the modes of characterization by impacting characters’ states of mind and perceptions. By so doing, the text is attaching historical as well as spatial importance to cities such as Mosul, Duhok, various streets, buildings and even border checkpoints. The importance of these places lies in the way they identify, recognize, and allocate meaning to characters’ experiences and emotions.

The text provides a range of moments when characters relate their fears, interior feelings, and states of mind to different places. For example, in her first visit to Mosul to consult a doctor for her sick daughter Khisar, Rawshan pays a particular attention to descriptions of streets, buildings and check

⁵³² Martin Longman, “Terrorism, Crime, and Corruption,” *Washington Monthly: Political Animal Blog*, (January 2015), 1. <http://washingtonmonthly.com/2015/01/14/terrorism-crime-and-corruption/>

points which for her represent borders between safety in her home city (Duhok) and insecurity in a mysterious foreign city (Mosul): “We passed the last checkpoint and arrived into the entrance of the city. A thick dark smoke completely covered the sky and the sounds of blasts and explosions overcame the noise of cars” (128).⁵³³ The text further extends these connections by attaching significant personal and historical meanings to places and certain details that define these places. Rawshan feels distressed to see the Iraqi flag waving on top of many buildings and remembers her family members (father, brothers, and cousins) who were killed during the Anfal operations twenty years before under the same flag. Rawshan’s distress and fear intensify when she arrives in the city and gets close to the bridge about which she has heard fearful accounts of violence. Though Mosul has more than one bridge built over the Tigris,⁵³⁴ most attention in the novel is appropriated to the big bridge (also known as the Fifth Bridge) that links the right and left coasts of the city. Despite Rawshan’s worries over the terrible political conflicts, the prevailing state of lawlessness and the terrorist activities, she is assured by her friend that they are safe as long as they stay away from the other side of the bridge. Describing her first arrival into Mosul, Rawshan says:

It was only a few minutes inside the city when we heard a loud sound of bomb explosions. We were shocked and terrified, but my friend confirmed that no explosions happen on the safe side of the bridge... I heard Khisar murmuring: God keep us away from the other side. (129-130)⁵³⁵

Told mainly by an unknown narrator, the narration occasionally moves to other characters, especially Rawshan, who tells the story of the abduction via a tape she leaves before committing suicide by burning herself, a few days after coming home. The novel adopts two interrelated storylines: First, Khunav’s constant efforts to find answers to the mysterious abduction of her mother and sister during the eleven days of their disappearance. Rawshan’s tape plays a significant role not only in providing factual details, identities, locations, and even names that help in the police investigations, but also in providing a pictorial record of Rawshan and Khisar’s horrific experiences in the grip of terrorists. This first story converges into the second story in which the effects of gender violence, institutionalized corruption, and terrorism on Kurdish society are described. Employing this two-way emphasis, the text follows two connected narrative threads: The first concerns the victimization of Rawshan and Khisar

⁵³³ نه م ل زالگه ها داوین ده رباژبووین وگه هشتینه سه رن باژیری نه سماتی وی دووکیله کاره ش داگیرکری و گورمین و حنگینی دا سه ر ده ترومیلان نگین

⁵³⁴ Tigris is the eastern member of the two great rivers that define Mesopotamia. The river stems from the Anatolian plateau in Turkey and goes through Syria near Qamishli and enters the Iraqi lands through Fish Khabour. The river meets the Euphrates in the south of Iraq and together form Shatt al-Arab.

⁵³⁵ هه موو نه م سه د منتره کان نه نه چووین ده نگی بومیه کن جرفه ک به ردامه و ره په ره پا دلنی مه ژسه دئ بوراند و سوراتی و زه راتی ب دیمین مه ره به ردان! لی هه فالامه کره چینه و ب وئریقه گوت: هندی نه م ل فی ره خنی پری بین ، قه ت نه ترسن.

by terrorism and the second thread follows the corrupted attitudes of some government officials whose exploitive and dishonest actions contribute to the perpetuation and reinforcement of criminal and terrorist activities. The convergence of these two storylines serves the primary argument of the novel in which the relationship between corruption and terrorist acts is seen as central.

Chapter one of the novel, “Why, How, When, and ... ???!!!!,” opens with Khasti, Khunav’s father “looking exactly the way a *berpirs*, a high official in the government of the seventeen years old Kurdish Region, looks,” excitedly talking and dining with a few guests visiting to mourn the death of his wife only a week ago. In the other room, a few women are comforting Khunav and asking her tens of questions about the way her mother died: “How come Rawshan burnt herself? Why didn’t you take her to a doctor or a psychiatrist before she does it? Couldn’t she recognize the driver? How did you let her take that innocent girl with her?” (5-6)⁵³⁶ Khunav tries to provide some answers for the mourners’ questions although she does not know much of what has happened herself. She describes the way Rawshan was brought home by an Arab man after disappearing for more than ten days and how she was no longer the active spirited woman that she used to be. She also explains that despite her and the whole family’s insistence, Rawshan never spoke of the abduction or reported any details to the police.

As the story unfolds, melancholy and grief become constant sentiments that many of the characters experience. They grieve for the death of family members, they grieve for the love that does not survive, and they grieve for opportunities lost and for the deterioration of familial and social relations. In portraying it as an almost tangible entity, Navishki contemplates the nature and source of grief: What causes grief? What does it do to people? How is it experienced? And how does it change the way people think of and perceive each other? For example, while Khunav never stops grieving for her deceased mother and lost sister, her father soon decides to move on with his life and starts looking for a new wife. And while society respects and identifies with Khunav’s grief, they despise her father’s reaction and consider him unfaithful, especially Khunav, who insists that he should have waited at least a year before falling in love with a new woman. Most important, while for Khunav grief becomes a source of power to seek truth and justice and solve the mystery of her mother and sister’s abduction, Rawshan seems to be too burdened to live with it. In other words, each has a different way to reflect and express the pain and sorrows they are feeling. With a bewildered look on her face, the grieving Khunav tells of the day her mother decided to end her grief and life:

536 چه وا ره وشه نئى خو سوت؟ بوچي به ري خوه ب سوژت هه وه نه دبره دختوره كئى نه فسي؟ باشه ما وه نه دزاني كيژ شوڤيره د گه ل چووين؟
هون چا وا دهئيلن كچا كچين د گه ل خوه بيته ناف وان گاورن؟

I watched as she finished her prayers, read a few verses from the holy Quran and raised her two hands to supplicate... Then, she got out of the room and in a few minutes we smelled something burning... We heard the neighbours knocking very hard on the front door of the house after seeing a fire... When they put out the fire, we were shocked to see the burnt body of my mother. (9-10)⁵³⁷

With a confused and scared look on her face and tears in her eyes, Khunav goes on to say: “We could never believe that my mother, the fifty years old, wise, educated and committed woman, the women’s rights activist and author of tens of books on women’s rights, would simply do it” (9).⁵³⁸ As manifested by these two passages, the horrific experiences and painful remembrance of terrorist-related violence are too intense even for a strong experienced woman like Rawshan. Rawshan’s decision to commit suicide is a clear manifestation of how stressful and hostile terrorism is, and the text provides various moments of the psychological impacts that terrorism leaves on the characters, whether directly affected or indirectly. The text illustrates that this impact goes far beyond the direct targets to include those related to victims, in this case Khunav, who retains a constant sense of confusion and mourning. The depiction of Khunav as a central character is very precise as all her thoughts, fears, and responses are detailed. In her disapproval of her father’s careless attitudes, Khunav problematizes the social and familial relations in Kurdish society. Throughout the text, she critiques Khasti’s indifference and lack of concern about the progress of the police investigations in the abduction case. Responding to Khunav’s persistent urges and questions, he says:

It is pointless. In this country, when you disappear, it is as though you were never born... I have been following the case for two months... The officer says they can’t get the terrorists with the victim dead. They are right. She shouldn’t have burnt herself. She should have reported to the police, so we can claim justice. (14)⁵³⁹

Though Khasti’s position, here, is reasonable— Rawshan should have reported and spoken to the police— we learn later that he has neither been a loving husband nor a caring father. Described as irresponsible and selfish, Khasti has never tended to Khisar’s illness, which has been the reason for their going to Mosul. Moreover, Khasti’s keenness to marry Mayaset makes Khunav believe he has been in a relationship with her even before Rawshan’s death. Throughout the novel, Khunav’s responses to Rawshan’s death and Khisar’s loss are juxtaposed to Khasti’s indifference and inaction.

من دیت دو نقیژ کرن و بوو نمه نما وئ و قورئان خاند... پاشی ده ستین خو سه رنه فراز کرن ... ده رکه فت و گه له ک پیقه نه چوو ده من بیهنا سوتنی⁵³⁷ دفین مه دای! دوئ گافی دا مه بهیست ب هه وارکی ده نکئ ده روکی هات و تژی ژور ده نکین بلند بوون! نه م ژي ل دووف ده نکي ب هه وارکی ده ل رکه تین و ناگرئ ب سه رشو پیقه! هه تا ده روجیرانا ناگر فه مراندي و ده روک فه کري نه م هند بینین نه و زره ژن بوویه قورمه که کن ره شی جه رمی سه ران خولوله دکه ت.

مه هزرا مرنا خو مه هزرا هندی نه کر دایکا پینجی سالی بسلمان تیگه هشتی و نفیسه را برتووکین برسا مافی ژنی دکن دئ وه سا ب سانه هی⁵³⁸ وئ کت یا کري.

ته نا گه ه ژئ نینه. نه فه نژیکی دوو هه یقانه نه ز پیقه هه ر دبیزن نه م نه شین ب مرنا بی زورداری لی هاتییه کرن. ب گه هینه تاوانباران. نه و ژي⁵³⁹ دهه فن دئ بلا خو نه سوتبایه. چووبایه شکایه تا خو کربایه. دا نوکه نه م شیبابین گزانده بی ژده ستهه لاتی بکه ی.

While Khunav is emotionally devastated by the tragic events and endeavours to help the police investigations, Khasti is eagerly engaged with the arrangements of his marriage, which Khunav describes as an early decision that is going to arouse people's contempt as she tells Kivan, her university colleague and lover: "What do you think he would have done if he did not marry my mother after a long love story? Oh, what would people think of us? We still don't know who our enemies are. It is only two months and he is doing all this" (19).⁵⁴⁰ Despite Kivan's attempts to console her, Khunav is repeatedly haunted by the painful images of her mother's tragic death and also frustrated by her father's irresponsible behavior. She tells Kivan that she has "heard about the psychological breakdowns of traumatized people, but never thought [she] would suffer them [herself]" (23).⁵⁴¹ Navishki's portrayal of Khunav reflects an emotional sophistication that goes beyond the usual grief of a daughter for her deceased mother and lost sister. Khunav shows an extraordinary determination to resolve the unanswered incident of abduction and spends all her days searching for support from the humanitarian agencies and women's rights organizations of which her mother used to be a very active member. Her determination is set in a profound contrast to Khasti's careless behavior as he completely abandons the case in less than two months.

Khasti's plans to marry Mayaset, however, soon fail because of her extended family's disapproval and her cousins' direct threats. Chapter five of the novel represents the aggressive armed assault of her cousins in her house to force her to leave Khasti. Mayaset, a rich unmarried woman in her mid-forties, lives alone with her mother, Siti, after the death of her father many years before. Though no one in the family had been willing to marry her, they had always disapproved of her marriage outside the family so as not to share her family name and fortune with a stranger. Adhering to conventional and tribal ideology, her cousins perceive of her as a mere property with no rights of free choice or self-determination. Their disapproval is compounded by the realization of the love relation between her and Khasti. Describing the assault, the narrator explains:

One of them put a gun on her [Maayaset's] forehead and the other put his hand on her mother's mouth... The big man clasped Mayaset's hair and threw her on the sofa beside her terrified mother... He told her to stop meeting Khasti or they will kill them both. (34)⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ باشه هه که وي ب عشق و نه فيني دايکا من نه هينابايه. پا دا چ که ت؟! وه ي هه واره. خه لکه ک دئ مه ب لومه يان خوت. دئ وئ چکن ده نه مه. ⁵⁴⁰ هيشتا نه م نزانين نه يارين مه بين دورست کينه و نه بووينه دو مه ه وه غه ر کري و في کاري بکت؟

⁵⁴¹ ده مي خه لکي به حسي فه جنقنين کاره ساتان دکر من هزر نه دکر نه ز ژي روژه کئ دئ بمه قاره مانا فان جوره فه جنقنيان!
⁵⁴² خودانئ ره شه قاتا خيخيچ بالا ده بانجئ کر و کره د جيھنيکا وئ را و زه لامئ دي ده ستئ خو ب ده في فه نا... داويئ زه لامئ ب هيژ پرچا وئ ژ پشتئ
 فه کنيشا و ب سه ر دايکئ دا هافيت و گه فين وي هارتر لئ هاتن: نه فه نه م چووين. سوزبت ژ نه فرو ويقه نه م بزانيں هوون بين د تکتشلقين ژي نيلا ته برئن که له خان ل شيفا سه ري ل هندافي ته بزفرن.

Despite his primary focus on the violence imposed on Kurdish women by criminal and terrorist activities, Navishki retains a substantial interest in the historical subordination of Kurdish women by the patriarchal ideologies and controlling attitudes of the Kurdish men. Navishki elaborates this theme throughout the text by problematizing Kurdish women's struggle for recognition and agency in a society where women's rights and roles are confined by customary and tribally codified systems. He maintains that the violence practiced against Kurdish women by these structures is not less dangerous or effective than the violence resulting from the criminal and terrorist activities, and the mysterious murder of Mayaset a few days later is a clear manifestation of this danger. While gender-based violence in Kurdish society has been extensively discussed in the previous two chapters, Navishki's treatment of gender violence both completes and expands it by the introduction of direct acts of gender abuse and honour killing. Though it is not confirmed in the text, everyone is almost certain that the murderers are Mayaset's cousins. It is also important that most characters regard her death as a rational consequence of her affair with Khasti even though they intended to marry. Moreover, no police investigations or judicial pursuits are detailed, emphasizing that the act of honour killing is a prevailing and recurring occurrence and that most cases go without punishment. According to Olson, honour killing is one of the negative measures that 'hold Kurdistan back' and hinders the advancement of women's positions in the social and political domains. She confirms that:

What makes women's rights laws difficult to implement in Kurdistan are not competing militias attempting to impose Islamic law on the population in bids for control as in southern Iraq, but a deeply rooted patriarchal cultural and tribal tendencies brought back to life after the creation of the safe haven.⁵⁴³

By introducing the prevailing culture of honour killing in Kurdistan, Navishki endeavours to show that in the Kurdish society, the family reputation and women's positions are, to a great extent, based on their honour, which further contributes to high levels of gender-based violence including honour killing. In accordance with Olson's argument, the text demonstrates that a combination of gender violence and terrorist-related violence today restricts women's roles and threatens their safety. Honour killing and other forms of physical and sexual violence are being perpetrated despite KRG's measures to address and eliminate them: "Unfortunately, both the KDP and PUK have still not done enough to enforce their new laws prohibiting honour killings by meeting out sever punishments for those guilty of this horrendous crimes."⁵⁴⁴ In the text, the inability of the Kurdish government to eliminate gender

⁵⁴³ Olson, "Like Sun and Water, 188.

⁵⁴⁴ Brown and Romano, "Women in Post-Saddam Iraq," 57.

violence despite prominent efforts is depicted in relation to the lingering traditional and patriarchal attitudes towards Kurdish women:

Today, like yesterday, some people are still prisoners of fanciful religious and tribal ideologies. Though they live in the third millennium, they still treat Kurdish women like those ancient beasts who used to bury their daughters alive. (84-85)⁵⁴⁵

Navishki's position in the text is manifested in the above passage which confirms the perils of leaving the perpetrators of gender violence unpunished. Complicating this situation, the text depicts Khasti's feelings of insecurity and attempts to seek protection and help, particularly after the murder of Mayaset. He does so by going to Jamshid Qalghani, a high ranking military official, who plans to send Khasti to Europe with an official delegation where Mayaset's cousins cannot reach them and Khasti readily agrees. Khasti's self-seeking plans to escape and save himself are set in contrast to Khunav's resolute efforts to follow police investigations and search for clues about her mother and sister's abduction. The novel's fourteenth chapter delineates Khunav's finding, in Rawshan's study, of a piece of paper that is addressed to 'anyone reading this' and explains the reasons for recording the entire story and experiences of the abduction on a tape rather than telling them directly:

I couldn't describe what I have been through in the few past days. I will try to put into words a few sparks of the fire inside my heart, not to get a revenge for myself but to show the truth so that no one else becomes a victim of their [the terrorists'] erroneous creed like me and my daughter Khisar. (101)⁵⁴⁶

The novel depicts three different interconnected journeys that the main characters (Rawshan, Khasti and Khunav) undertake. As a main theme within the narration, the journey on which each character embarks incorporates his/her experiences, emotional pressures, and psychological states. Whether planning to or forced into taking them, and whether they are physical or emotional, these journeys follow circular routes which signify the characters' victimization by the very system or structure they attempt to change, fight, or escape. Equally important is the fact that Rawshan's journey to Mosul and Khasti's journey to Europe directly impact upon and shape Khunav's emotional journey, her quest to seek justice for her family.

In her journey, Rawshan experiences suffering, fear, and pain. Her journey is not only physical, but also mental as she describes all the terror, bitterness, and feelings of infuriation she has experienced in

⁵⁴⁵ نه فرۆکه ژى وه کي دوهي هنده ک هزر ژه نگي هيشتا نيخسيريڻ خه پال و نه فسانه بين ديني و گوپالى عه شيره تى سه ره ده ريئ وه ک وه حش و دورنده بين به رى ده مئ کچين خوه ساخ دکرنه دين ناخيفه. نه قرو ل هزارا سيين دژيت دکن!

⁵⁴⁶ هندی نه ز هاتمی من نه شيبا فان ناخفتنان ل چه ند روژين ده رباژبووي بو هه ر که سه کي بيژم و ناگرئ فولکانا دلئ خوه ژيره فالابکم. نه ژبو هندی دا تولا من ل هوقين نه لندا ديروکئ بهيته فه کرن دبت بترژبه ر هندی بت دا هنده ک راستييا ن به رچاقکم و که سئ دي د دووف من و خوسارا جانه مه رگ را نه بته ژ قوربانين راستيا روويئ فان هوقين خوه ب خه ملا ريبازه کا ژئ د زربه هه ر خه ملاندي.

the grip of the terrorists. Despite her troubled psychology and unsettled emotions, Rawshan's account, recorded on the tape, is very precise and detailed and entirely changes the course of the police investigations. Taking the tape to the police, Khunav, Kivan and the police officers start listening to Rawshan's voice telling the story from the very beginning. Chapter seventeen chronicles Rawshan and Khisar's first visit to Mosul to seek medical treatment for Khisar's cancerous tumor after completely losing faith in the hospitals in Kurdistan. She goes with her friend Gulizar, who has been taking her sick son there for a year. Amongst the factual information and details that Rawshan provides, she gives precisely accurate descriptions of the taxi driver whom she finds very suspect: "I grew very suspicious when I noticed the many mirrors hanging out everywhere inside the car, particularly the one right behind the gear" (127).⁵⁴⁷ With Khisar responding well to the doctor's treatment, Rawshan decides to take her for the second appointment. However, Rawshan's worries grow when she learns that her friend has gone to Mosul with some relatives and she and Khisar will have to go there alone. She feels initially relieved to find the same driver at the station. Her account of the second visit gives precise information on all the locations, names and other details she comes across, together with feelings of anxiety and apprehension.

Her feelings begin to make sense when the driver takes a different road, claiming that an explosion has caused a serious traffic jam and closed most streets. The more the man drives west, the more Rawshan's fears grow, especially when he drives toward the other side of the bridge, claiming that he should get some fuel from his usual seller. Entering the dirt track toward the woods, Rawshan realizes they are being taken:

The car doors were opened wide and a number of heavily armed and veiled men put their guns on our heads and their hands over our mouths and tied our hands. In less than fifteen minutes, these twenty-first century Neanderthals drove us very fast in a smelly filthy car. (154)⁵⁴⁸

The terrifying images depicted in the passage above continue through the twentieth chapter which gives a panoramic portrayal of the brutal atrocities that Rawshan and Khisar experience in the stronghold of the terrorists. Though they experience ruthless acts of intimidations, dehumanization and verbal and physical violations, Rawshan's account concentrates on the abusive acts of sexual violence exerted against them. Rawshan describes the first few moments in the terrorists' secret location as

حه مه ر كرنا ده شبول و ره خين ترومبيلی ب خوديکين مينا چاڤکين کاميران ناشوپا من وننه دکر گومانا من ب دينداريا وي بتر ب هيز نيخست. نه مازه ⁵⁴⁷ بشتي من خوديکال بشت گيري داناي و به رن وئ دايه کوشين ريفينگان ديتي.

مه هند ديت هه رسن ده روکين ترومبيلی بوونه تاق و ژ هه موو ره خان کومه کا چه کدارين ب تنن چاڤين وان دناف کولافين ره ش دا زيک دکه ن ⁵⁴⁸ ژورکه تن و ده بانجه کرنه دسه رين مه ره و ده ستين خواه ب ده فه مه فه نان وچاڤ و ده ف و ده ستين مه گریدان ! نيزيک چاريکه ک ده ب مزيری مه هه ستير نياندرتالين سه دي بيست ونيکی نه م ب رومبيله کا دي يا بيهنا کيفکوي ژ ئ دهات دگه ل له زاتيا برووسي دچت راره فاندين.

terrifying and shocking: “Like a cold pack of wolves that suddenly find a terrified sheep and its sick lamb in a desert, they attacked us leaving nothing sacred in our bodies” (166).⁵⁴⁹ Quickly after being raped, Rawshan and Khisar are put inside an elevator and are taken down into deep corridors and rooms where their clothes are torn off, leaving them completely naked, “like the day we were first born” (166).⁵⁵⁰ It is important that Rawshan alludes to and compares the sexual abuse exerted against them to the systematic acts of rape and sexual assaults practiced during the Bosnian War (1992-1995). During this war, rape, as a mechanism of terror and intimidation, was practiced as part of a process of ethnic cleansing. Being one of the most violent conflicts in Europe, this war was characterized by high levels of sexual and physical violence practiced against women: “Rape and murders occurred not only in special camps and detention centers but in villages as troops entered them ... The women were raped frequently while the men were killed.”⁵⁵¹ In a dark room, the petrified and traumatized Rawshan and Khisar are told not to scream or they will be thrown onto broken glass bottles implanted into the floor. Because Khisar does not understand Arabic, she continues to scream and in reaction is thrown brutally several times onto the broken bottles where she is left bleeding to death.

Rawshan moves on to describe a short disgusting man, possibly a senior commander, who stares at her body and decides she is fit for the Emir— the leader of the terrorist cell— and should be prepared and taken to his room. In her short journey to Emir’s room, Rawshan encounters a range of scenes that terrify her: A naked woman being severely whipped by two terrorists, a man being electrocuted and several men and women being set on fire. Seeing these spectacles, Rawshan feels she is a character in some story about the afterlife. Navishki makes a subtle elaboration of Rawshan’s being taken to the Emir’s room and her encounter with scenes of torture and abuse of different men and women by skillfully alluding to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* (1320). In the story, Dante undertakes a journey through hell in order to be admitted into Paradise. In his journey, Dante encounters various images of torture and imposition of pain and torment. Extending this allusion, Navishki refers to Israa and Mi’raj⁵⁵², the physical and spiritual journey by Prophet Mohammad in which he ascends to heaven and

⁵⁴⁹ مینا ره فده یا گورگین به فر لی باری و میهه کا قه رموکی و به رخه کا وئ یا نه ساخ ل جولستانی که تینه ده ستان وه سا بیبه ختین بییمان نه م قه کرین و چو سینورین بیروز هه ر ل وئیرئ دلاشین مه نه هیلان. باچه
⁵⁵⁰ وه کی وئ روزئ نه م لی کرین ده می بو جارا نکئی ل به ر ده همه ننن داکنن خوه کریه گری!

⁵⁵¹ Lori Poloni-Strawdinger and Candice D. Ortvals, *Terrorism and Violent Conflict: Women’s Agency, Leadership, and Responses* (USA: Springer-Verlag New York, 2013), 19.

⁵⁵² In the Islamic doctrine, Israa and Mi’raj are considered very significant events that happened after the Da’wah (See Footnote 59) and before Hegira (the Muslim migration from Makkah to Medina) around the year 621 in the Islamic Calendar. Israa and Mi’raj refer to the two parts of the spiritual and physical journey of Prophet Muhammad in one night from al-Haram Mosque in Makkah to al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and then his ascension to the heavens. In this Journey, Allah enabled his Prophet to see many of His wondrous creations, different Prophets located in different heavens

comes across various scenes from heaven and hell. The part of the journey that Navishki alludes to is the Mi'raj and specifically the scenes of sinners being tormented for the sins they have committed during their time on earth.

By directly referring to the journeys in *The Divine Comedy* and Israa and Mi'raj in his depiction of Rawshan's experiences, Navishki endeavours to enrich his exposition and description of the brutality of terrorist acts against women. To do so, Navishki alludes to established familiar images of mystical and scriptural power that help readers to estimate and judge the danger and apprehension of these events. The allusions made to works and experiences with similar themes already communicated, moreover, add beauty to his language. Navishki's allusions to Israa and Mi'raj and *The Divine Comedy* add a form of universality to the acts of terrorism practiced against Rawshan and Khisar. By so doing, Navishki creates a web of emotional and actual associations with the outer bigger world to signify the international features of terrorism and its victimization of women.

In her illustrative account of this victimization, Rawshan concentrates more than any other atrocity on the brutal sexual violence that she experiences at the hands of the terrorists. Though the text does not express it directly, from Rawshan and Khisar's experiences, the undirected and unplanned operations of these groups become evident. In other words, the random selections of victims indicate the criminal motives of these groups rather than identified grievances or systematic religious or political ideologies. In his discussion of these emerging terrorist groups, Mark Mazzetti explains that these are "a new class of self-generating cells inspired by al-Qaeda's leadership but without any connection to Osama bin Laden or his top lieutenants."⁵⁵³ Though many of these secret terrorist cells and groups have been established in reaction to the American presence in Iraq and initially claimed to have liberating political purposes, as explained in the previous section, the activities of these groups are characterized by highly offensive and criminal incentives.

The activities of these groups are, moreover, predetermined by certain cultural, religious, and political factors. In her account, Rawshan makes a range of references to the historical and political differences

(according to Sunnah, heavens are in different Tabaqat 'layers' and the Prophets are not located all in one layer), Angels, Iblis (the primary devil in Islam), people being tormented for the sins they have committed on earth, and most important the Throne (A'rsh) and then heard the Kalam (speech) of Allah. Among many other issues, the Kalam included the obligation of the five prayers and that a good deed would be written for the person who intends to do a good deed, even if he did not do it. The blasphemers in Makkah completely denied this miracle when they heard it the next day, although the Prophet provided ample evidence, such as descriptions of al-Aqsa Mosque, which he had never seen before, and of a group of merchants he met on his way back.

⁵⁵³ Mark Mazzetti, "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Worsens Terrorism Threat," *The New York Times: Middle East*, (September, 2006), 3.

and conflicts between her home city, Duhok, as a Kurdish city, and Mosul as a non-Kurdish city. By foregrounding these differences that have historically divided the population of Iraq, Navishki indicates that these are significant predictors of violence and terrorism. Despite the substantial contextual and conceptual differences, this aspect of the text reminds us of Huntington's theory of the 'clash of civilizations,' explained at the opening of the chapter where the impact of historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences as motivators of criminal and terrorist motives, particularly in the Post-Cold war era, were underlined. Rawshan, for example, refers to the Anfal campaigns appropriated under the same flag gloriously waving everywhere in Mosul. She also confirms the linguistic differences between Kurdish and Arabic which are the main reason for Khisar's death because she does not understand the Arabic-speaking terrorists' instructions and threats.

Navishki's insistence on describing the terrorists as the 'Neanderthals of the twentieth-first century,' a phrase that is repeated more than once in the texts, further manifests the conflicts occurring in a civilized age characterized by prominent technological and communicational developments: "These terrorists, living outside the reality of the humanity deal with women and the whole society according to some false ideologies and attitudes" (85).⁵⁵⁴ Then, Rawshan describes the way her exhausted and brutally abused body was left inside the Emir's room. The Emir, a relatively clean and good looking man compared to the other terrorists, starts to check every inch of her naked, almost lifeless body threatening her to stay quiet, or "you will face the same destiny as your daughter" (173).⁵⁵⁵ Continuing her disturbingly rigorous account of the violence and atrocities she experiences in the grip of the terrorist group, Rawshan adds: "He threw me furiously on the bed and attacked me like a wild horse doing to me what Khasti did on our first night. From the clock on the wall, I knew that he kept feeding on my body until morning" (173-174).⁵⁵⁶ Taken to another room, Rawshan experiences another occurrence of sexual violence. She says: "As far as I can recall, I was raped successively by seven men. After that I don't know what happened to me until I felt myself inside a big iron bin and a kind Arab man wrapping me with his bisht (abaya)" (174).⁵⁵⁷

تیرۆرستین دەرفە ی واقعی شۆرە شاتە کە لوژی دژین ئە فڕووە ب ناڤی هەندە کە هزرین گە نی و بناغە نە بی د گە ل ژن و تە فایا جفاکی دکن⁵⁵⁴
 د ئ دە رسا کچا تە وە رگرتی ل بە ر دە وات بت.⁵⁵⁵
 فێتمە سە ر تە ختی خوری بە رین نە عامان و ژتە رزئ گوهدریژە ک حە مشە ری بی بیابانی هیرش کرە من و ئە وا خواستی ل شە فا بوو کینی هینایە⁵⁵⁶
 ئە ز بلند کرم و ها رئ من وی ئە و سە ر ئ من نینا گۆرە ی دە مژمیرا ب دیواری ژوریفە هە لاویستی هە تا سبیدە ئ د کە لە خن من چە ری. سە
 هندی ئە و زە بانین من دبێنن هە کە ئە ز سە هوا نە بم من یا گە ه ژخو هە بو هە تا هە فت نە فە ران ژ ی من هە ستینکر د کە لە خن من چە رین.⁵⁵⁷
 بشتی هینگێ ئیدی نزا چ ل من هات و من هەند خو دەیت ئە ز د و ئ شکه فتا ناسنیفە دناف گلێشی دا ونە و جامیر ل هەنداف سە ر ئ منە و کورکی خو دا من
 و روویی خو ژمن وە رگرت.

While Rawshan's physical journey in Mosul ends when the kind old man brings her back home, her journey of spiritual and emotional torture never ends as she is continuously haunted by the painful images and memories of degradation and violence. It is significant that both journeys end very tragically for her as the first leaves her psychologically and emotionally broken and the second completely ends her life. The description of Rawshan's journey via the tape she has left before committing suicide is accompanied by the portrayal of Khasti's journey to Europe to escape the threats of Mayaset's cousins. Shortly after arriving in Europe, Khasti realizes Qalghani's plans to get rid of him and the many secrets of dirty business Khasti has facilitated for him. The text provides many examples of Qalghani's hypocritical personality and dishonest behavior and the way he manipulates people and exploits his official position in the government for personal gain. To insure Khasti's inability to return to Kurdistan, Qalghani convinces Khasti to destroy his Iraqi passport and ask for asylum and falsely promises to pay for all the formalities required. In one of Khasti's moments of anger, there are certain revelations: "I understand how he has registered tens of water wells, car parks, car companies and big fuel stations under unreal names, but how will he manage to register islands in foreign countries? Take as much as you can. It is your turn" (71-72).⁵⁵⁸ Manifested in this passage is the way Qalghani has manipulated government resources to his private advantage which Navishki problematizes to highlight, critique, and disapprove of the prevalent phenomenon of corruption in KRG. In the text, Qalghani's embedded corruption serves to exemplify the ways many officeholders in the Kurdish political and economic spheres indulge in secret illegal transactions and deals, exchanging power and privileges and exploiting laws and relationships to reinforce private businesses and trade deals. The text expands on the danger of corruption in all its categories and forms by directly connecting it to the perpetuation and enhancement of criminal and terrorist activities. Throughout the course of the police investigations of Rawshan's abduction case (as will be shown in a later section), Qalghani's mysterious and inescapable interferences validate this connection. Also, realising Qalghani's false promises and his abandonment, Khasti becomes determined to avenge himself and show the reality of Qalghani's corruption by publishing the details of his frauds and drug and other secret transactions through a website. Soon, news spreads all through the city. Khunav and Kivan hear the news from the librarian in the Department of Economics in the University of Duhok where they study:

نەز تێد گە ھم وێ چە و اب دە ھان بیری نافی و کومیانی و پارکین ترومیلا و پانزینخانین مە زن تومارکری ل سە ر ناڤین وە ھمی بە لی چە و⁵⁵⁸ گزیرتە ل وە لاتین بیانی تومارکرینە؟ ھندی بشی ببە روژ روژا تە بە.

Yesterday, I read Qalghani's transgressions on the internet. Not only is his law degree a forgery, but he has also registered tens of properties and businesses under real and unreal names. Even his sexual scandals with the foreign servants working in his house are detailed. If all this true, he should be hanged a thousand times. (184)⁵⁵⁹

These accusations, however, are quickly denied and refuted and all efforts are made to define Qalghani as the loyal nationalist who has spent his life working for the Kurdish national cause. Moreover, only a few days after the dissemination of this news, Khasti is brutally stabbed to death in a camp for immigrants. Pirot tells Kivan via internet chatting that they have reported two unknown Kurdish men who have arrived only three days before the crime and have disappeared on the same day Khasti has been killed. His death adds more pains and sorrows to Khunav's burdens and she starts with the help of Kivan and his father to raise funds and asks for official support to recover his corpse and bury him in Kurdistan. As will be explained in a following section, Khunav's journey, though not physical, is marked by an unshaken determination to seek justice for her family. The episode in which Khunav attempts to coordinate with both the police and provide them with information and with the women's organizations and other humanitarian and social agencies in order to get official support, is a clear manifestation of her energetic desire for justice to be achieved.

5.3. Kurdish Women Encountering a New War in *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two

The cycle of violence and terrorism in Iraq— explosions, random killings, detentions, abductions, and gender violence— has been evolving and expanding dramatically since 2003. The frequency and menace with which these activities are perpetrated have taken a completely new turn since the invasion of Mosul and other parts of Iraq by ISIS in June 2014. While Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* depicts the former context of terrorist activities practiced by secret, mainly unconnected terrorist groups and cells, Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two concentrates on the later context in which the notorious ISIS wages a war claiming economic, religious, and political authority over the Muslim world. Niheli's novel is a brilliant attempt to show the anatomy of the organization, its atrocities, the fear and chaos it is causing and the havoc it is wreaking on the lives of Kurdish people, particularly women.

دوهي من ده نڱ و باسڼن څه لځاني ل سه ر نه نترنڼنڼي خاندن. نه به س باوه رنما وي ياسايڼ نه يا دروسته به لي وي ب ده هان خاني و کار ل سه ر 559 دروست و نه دروست تومارکړينه. هه تا ده نڱ و باسڼن به يوه نديين وي بين سينکسي دڼه ل کار به ده ستين بياني ژي هاتينه به لاف کرن. هه که ناقين نه څه راست بت دڅيت بهڼته څه ندقاندن.

Set in the same geographical context as part one (discussed in Chapter Three), part two portrays the same characters involved in a new war that is directly targeting their homes. Though considerably shorter than part one, the second part continues and resumes Hizar's experiences depicted in the first book and completes both the narrative left open by the end of part one and the circle of the vicissitudes through which Hizar goes. In an interview with *Waar* (Country) daily newspaper published in Duhok, Niheli explains these vicissitudes:

The novels picture Hizar moving through four historical stages: Anfal and Halabje, the Uprising and the mass-exodus, the civil war and the liberation of Iraq in 2003, and the endless political and administrative corruption.⁵⁶⁰

This chronological order of events in both parts demonstrates most obviously Niheli's methodical concern to bear witness to the tragic history of the Kurdish people and their constant struggle for independence. This partly explains the realist documentary form of the novel in which Niheli endeavours to retrieve the 'true' history of the Kurdish nation. The narrative relies, to a great extent, on verifiable factual details to record a history long buried and marginalized by the hegemonic powers. Both parts, in this sense, function as testimonies of the ways in which Kurdish people in Iraq have suffered from repeated national and cultural identity crises and systematic acts of genocide.

One of the most striking features of testimonial writing (discussed in some detail in Chapter Three) is the way the speaker/protagonist "does not conceive him/herself as extraordinary but, instead as an allegory of the many, the people."⁵⁶¹ In this sense, it can be argued that Hizar's story is also the story of her people: Hizar's experiences of oppression, resistance, and activism reflect the Kurdish historical struggle for national independence. In other words, as we witness the misfortunes of Hizar and her family and friends, we also witness the hardships of the Kurdish people. Niheli's text conflates the violent personal history of Hizar and the collective history of her nation, which is a major defining feature of much Kurdish literary texts. Ahmetbeyzade explains the ways in which Kurdish writers include history and factual details in their narratives:

Narrativizing violent Kurdish history in light of their individual and collective experiences and resistance serves as an empowering tool to claim their political and social identities, traditions, differences, and the Mother Soil.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Badal Gaberki, *Hozanvana Genc bu Waar: Mn Hizar wek Jinek b Hêz d Diroka Kurdi da Wêne krye* (The Young Novelist to Waar: I Have Portrayed Hizar as the Brave Women in the Kurdish History) *Waar Daily Newspaper*, 1257 (February, 2015), 11.

⁵⁶¹ Yudice, "Testimonio and Postmodernism," 15.

⁵⁶² Ahmetbeyzade, "Struggling to Be Kurdish," 49.

The interplay between the personal and the communal is most obviously demonstrated in the way Niheli connects between the two parts of the novel. While the narrative follows the life and personal experiences of Hizar, it confirms that Hizar is a representative of her people. The first part closes with Hizar identifying herself as a Kurd while engaged in a defense for the right of the Kurds to establish an independent state: "I am a Kurd. A Kurd. An independent Kurdistan is my right... Why should my country be called Iraqi Kurdistan? Why is an independent Kurdish state still considered a red line?" (272-273) Part two opens with a similar concern of Hizar with her nation:

Oh, Kurdistan. We are dreamers and we know our hopes. The shadows of yesterday will not last longer. We live in today and tomorrow is smiling on us... The ruins of years of struggles, martyrs, Anfal, loss, injustice and oppression should stimulate the national feelings in all politicians. (9)⁵⁶³

As manifested in the above quotation, Hizar's experiences through the different phases of history manifest the experiences of a whole nation torn by years of wars and oppression. In light of this discussion, Niheli's novels, as testimonial forms of writing, seek not only to represent Hizar's experiences of violence and oppression but the history of the Kurdish people. Throughout the book, the tragic events of Kurdish history shape the turning points in her life and the life of those around her.

Another way by which Niheli connects the second part with the first one is the effective utilization of imagery in both parts. For example, while the image of 'rivers of blood,' explained in the third chapter, is not employed, the second part of the novel makes many references to blood images. Images like 'the blood of the innocents,' 'my people's blood is flooding,' and 'drinking young men's blood like wine,' repeatedly appear in the text to exemplify the tragic experiences of the Kurdish people with war and terrorism. Like Part One, Part Two creates various visual representations and mental images of these repeated atrocious experiences as they come to affect characters' memories and dreams even when they end. The use of imagery, in this case, serves to make these experiences as palpably realistic as possible, while at the same time conveying a sense of the cyclical nature of all the characters' lives and experiences.

The first few pages of the text chronicle the deteriorating conditions of KRG following the political disputes with the central government in Baghdad. The narrative makes various revelations on the political and economic difficulties of the Kurdish people as a result of the disputes with Baghdad over oil and gas exports, revenue distribution, and the inter-Kurdish conflicts over the presidential elections

ناخ .. ناخ وه لانت! سبیه را نیغاریا دوهی زیده تر دریز نابیت، د نه فرویا خو دا دذین و ستیده هیا سوباهی گه شه و بو مه دکه نیت، ده مه جادده یا ⁵⁶³ ری باری دووگیانیا خو دانیت و زاروکه کی نوی ژ دایک ببیت، فه ریژا دیروکا به رخودان و شه هید و نه نفال و ده ربه ده ری و ته به سه ری و بوویه مالویرانی و خولیه سه ری بووبنه هیقینی و ژدانی و دقیت وژدانا بارتیزانان ژ ی ب لعینین.

and other political disagreements. For example, the narrative refers to the way these disputes have disastrously affected the integrity and unity of the Kurdish government: “The three pillars of compatibility, sharing and agreement are destroyed” (27).⁵⁶⁴ It also refers to the growing levels of corruption and the resulting impact on the economic position of the country: “The emergence of sectarian conflicts and the persistent corruption have weakened the economy and turned our dreams into nightmares” (27).⁵⁶⁵ The more the narrative unfolds, the more Niheli scrutinizes the impacts of the political disputes and the degrading economic conditions in KRG:

We are suffering one crisis after another, from the cut-off of wages to a shortage in fuel and the dearth of electrical power. The doors of prisons are opened. The smell of treason and corruption is burning noses. The criminals are still killing infants and raping women. (41)⁵⁶⁶

The testimony of Niheli’s text, I argue, is not only a testament to historical incidents and socio-political conflicts, but also to the traumatic consequences of these structures. While testimony is essentially perceived of as historical, it can also serve a psychological function in that it registers the trauma of these occurrences. Accordingly, Niheli’s interest in history becomes double-edged: Firstly, an interest in the horrific events of both past and present and secondly, an interest in the power of history and its memories to haunt and traumatize individuals.

The characterization of Hizar, Ako, and Tangezar demonstrates this double-edged interest as for them history and its consequences are never over. The clearest manifestation is Hizar’s sleep disorder and frequent nightmares. Repeated images of her family drowning, water turning into blood, and soldiers completely dressed in black killing infants keep haunting her dreams and intensifying the pressure and anxiety she constantly feels. In the very opening pages, she remembers one of her dreams in which she sees:

هه رسی ستوینین (سازان و ههقیشکی و ریککه فتن) بیستانی ده ولتا قانونی هه ژباين و شکه ستین.

۵۶۴

شوره شین تایفه گه ری و سه ربه خویی به رده وام سه ره لهه ن، دزی و خوبه ریسیی ژ یر خانه یا نابوری لاوازکری یه، مروف خه ونا⁵⁶⁵ نابین، خه ون نه ماینه خه ون هند بوینه کابوس.

قتیرانی دال دویف قتیرانی ژ موجه برینی بو نه مانا به نزی، ناگه هین هزر دقه برانتهکی دا بکه بن قه برانتهکا دی خول سینگی مه د⁵⁶⁶ هه لافیت، نه چارین قه برانا نیکی ژ ببرا خو ببه بن و چاره سه ری بو یا ددویفدا ببین، کاره ب هاته برین، ده رگه هین زیندانی فاشت قه بوون، ببهنا گه نی یا خیانه ت و گه نده لپی دفن سو ژانن. کوره مارین ره ش ژ گوشتی زاروکین ساقا و قهخوارنا خوینا گه نجان و سورکرنا ده همه نین ژ نان تیر نه بوینه.

A bearded young man grasping my long black hair strongly like a wolf. My father's weapons and pleadings were all useless. Though I started to fight back, my spitting and curses did not work. I tried to kill myself but saw the sky falling down on us. (16)⁵⁶⁷

A few pages later, the same fearful images are repeated in another dream:

We were inside a stronghold, tied, and the noises of the waves echoed inside our bodies and heads. The strong winds and splashes of water destroyed the ship in the middle of the sea and the waves and savage beasts of the sea swallowed my family. (51)⁵⁶⁸

The problem with Hizar's repeated dreams is the way they affect her daily life and the horrific and painful memories they bring back to life even though she tries her best to bury them deep inside her mind. Most important, the repetitive and cyclical nature of Hizar's experiences (which is also a significant feature of Kurdish history) impedes her ability to forget an oppressive past and live in a vigorous present.

Though Niheli employs a linear mode of narration, which is firmly fixed in 1986-2014 as a base for both parts of the novel, with frequent occasions of reminiscence and flashbacks, the characters' pasts strongly intermix into and traumatize their present. Though such horrific experiences as the Anfal, Halabje, the Kurdish mass-exodus, and civil war are over, characters are still troubled by the unsettled economic and political atmosphere. The cycle that started with Anfal in the first part continues to hover, in the second part, over the persisting political conflicts and the epidemic phenomenon of corruption prevalent in Iraqi and Kurdish society, factors which are obviously contributing to the perpetration and enhancement of violence and terrorism.

Although predominantly an attempt to show the notorious atrocities of ISIS, the novel portrays these political conflicts and corruption as a central force in the plot. If novels can make arguments, this one argues for the centrality of intra-Iraqi and intra-Kurdish conflicts and corruption in perpetuating terrorism. Throughout the text, connections are made between the as yet undetermined destiny of the Kurdish people, including the effects of the current war with ISIS, and the embedded corruption practiced by many officials in the Kurdish government and political parties. The novel opens with a conversation between Hizar and Tangezar discussing these connections:

567 کوری گنج مینا گورگه کی ده ستی خول پرچا من یا ههشا دریز ددا، لاقه لاق و چه کی بابی من بی وه جیون، نه ز و نه و دکه قتیبه د چه په ری شه 567 ری دا، تف و نه فرته و سپنگ قوتانا من د بی مغابیون و من بزاقا کوشتنا خو دکر و نه سمان ب سه ر مه دا هات.

568 دناف شه ره نیخه کا توند و دذوار دا بوو، پیلین هه فرکی و نازریانی د هناف و میشکان دا ده نگه ددان، توفان و باروقا پاپورا وی یا د نیقا ده ریایی دا شکاندی، پیلین ناقی که س و کار و نیزیکن وی دناف خو دا وه ریچان و داعویران.

The destiny of the Kurdish nation cannot be guaranteed by the political parties because their attitudes have always been conflated with their private interests. The tragic history should not repeat itself. The castles of corruption should be demolished. (10)⁵⁶⁹

The novel examines various characters' perspectives on politics by depicting their lucid preoccupations and commentaries on the political ideologies of the Kurdish political groups. In more than one place, the text acts like a comprehensive and systematic exposé of these views by bringing to light the way the political bodies have failed to sacrifice their private projects for the general good: "How many of us [politicians] are ready to leave high official positions and become honest patriots and find jobs outside the political realms?" (38)⁵⁷⁰ Delivering such thoughtful comments, different characters that represent different political parties make explicit and intentional references to the cyclical character of the history of Kurdish politics. For example, Hiwa, an outspoken journalist, predicts an imminent collision with the central government in Baghdad and fears that the events of the failure of the Kurdish-Arab agreement in 1975 will be repeated:

I am thirty-six years old now and all I have seen is my people running away. Instead of a compassionate rain, iron and chemical weapons have always fallen on them. As far as I remember, I have heard the saying 'Kurds and Arabs are brothers.' Yet I still don't know who their parents are? (37)⁵⁷¹

Hiwa's thirty-sixth birthday celebration, which turns to a long heated debate on history and politics, demonstrates the way politics dominate the daily life of the Kurdish people. Although a small group, his guests represent more than one political party and their different opinions concerning the Kurdish internal administration and international relations reflect the historical disputes between the different Kurdish political groups. Niheli's conclusions regarding the future of Kurdish politics are expressed through the characterization of Ako. All through both parts of the novel, his behavior and attitudes reflect the political conditions of Kurdistan. He is described as a visionary nationalist who vigorously struggles for Kurdish rights and identity and advocates Kurdish political independence. He is endowed with stereotypical characteristics of a Peshmerga: physical strength, braveness, military prowess and perpetual loyalty to the Kurdish cause. As part of the Kurdish population in Iraq, Ako has experienced oppression, escape, hunger and homelessness and has lost many members of his family during the Anfal campaigns. As a Peshmerga, he has participated in wars and insurgencies against the Ba'ath regime and has continuously suffered the horrific impacts of these wars. Like Tangazar who suffers a

گره نتيكرنا چاره نفیسی ب ده ستین پارتین سیاسی ناهینه قه بویلكرن ژبه ركو هه می هه لویستین وان د زنجیرکری نه ب به رژه وه ندیین وان قه، نیدی 569 ب دووباره کرنا دیروکا تراژیدی با مه زه ری ناهینه خاپاندن، که لها گه نده لستای دی هیته ژناقیرن.

چه ند ژمه به ره فن خو فالاکه ن ژپارتیزانیی و بین نیشتمانیه روه ر و ده رفه ی بازنی پارتیزانیی کاریکه ی؟ 570
نه فه ژیی من بوونه سیه و پینج سال و تشتی من دیتی هه رده م خه لکی وی یی ب ره قی قه، ل جهی بارینا بارانا دلوقانیی ناسن و کیمیا ل نه سمائی 571
دباریت، هندی من قام کری دبیزن (کورد و عه رقب برانه) لی نزام دایک و بابین وان کی نه؟ وی

temporary nervous breakdown in the first part of the novel (discussed in Chapter Three), Ako undergoes a state of temporary alteration in which he transforms from a loving and caring husband to a cruel abusive man.

The first part of the novel (examined in Chapter Three), describes Ako's limitless love and commitment for Hizar, his participation in her project of national activism, his support throughout her doctoral studies and his co-operation in her family issues and difficulties. He tells Hizar: "I want to be the first on the stage that day. To be the first one to congratulate you on your PhD. To kiss your forehead and take pride in you" (253).⁵⁷² Their love is consistently associated with the horrors of war and death as well as described as a safe haven from these horrors:

When the winds and storms of life exhaust me, your love becomes the only source of strength and determination. My life is not complete without you and I am waiting for you to complete it. Without you my life is like hell. From the first time I held you firmly to my chest, the mountains of pain have been demolished. (239)⁵⁷³

Though in the second part, which opens almost six years after the action of the first part, Ako has been killed six months ago during the Kurdish war against ISIS, similar moments of love and passion continue to appear through Hizar's recollections of their days together. Her memories, however, are occasionally disrupted by instances of Ako's tangled emotions and psychological disintegration following the political upheaval immediately preceding the ISIS invasion of Iraq. Because of the growing confrontations between the Kurdish political parties and the persistent disputes with the central government, a state of frustration, fear, and despair dominated Kurdish people's lives. Having spent most of his life struggling for the Kurdish cause, Ako becomes bewildered and stressed-out, not only in his career as an activist, but also in his relationship with Hizar and Rasti. Though Hizar initially identifies with his dread and anxiety, she soon finds his aggressive and abusive attitudes hard to deal with and asks for divorce. In the court, Ako justifies Hizar's decision to sue him for divorce:

My lord, I have been drinking a lot... I have beaten my wife and son and thrown them out of the house in the rain and snow... I have doubted her morals even though I know how pure she is... We have wandered the streets of Washington and Moscow together, eaten and drunk together, slept in

دقیقت نه ز نیکه م که س بم بهیمه سه ر ده پی شانوی ده می نامه یا خو یا دکتورایی وه ردگری، پیروزبایا ته دکه م، پیش چاقین هه می جیهانی نه نیا 572 ماچی بکه م، سه ری خو ب ته بلند بکه م. ته

هه رده می باروڤه و بابیه لیسکین ژیان من بیزار دکه ن، بتنی فیانا ته هیزا به خشینه ره و بو ژیان بارگای دیمه فه، نه گه ر ژیان من بی ته مه رگه 573 سات ژی نه بیت. بزانه یا نیف نیفه یه و نیفا مایی ب هیفا ته یه، هیفی دکه م من پی تمام بکه، ژیان بی ته دوزه خه، ب نومینم تو ب بیه نه ز، هه ر ژ وی روزا تو گه له ک پرسایی و من تو ب سینگی خوڤه گفاشتی. هه می چیا بیت خه ما هه رفتینه و ته نه ز بی ژ نه خوشی یا دادقوتایم.

the same room and had feelings for each other, but she has never shown an unprincipled behavior. (91-92)⁵⁷⁴

Though Ako's violent behavior is not justified in the text, it is described as a resultant state of the disintegration of Kurdish politics, which Hizar clearly admits: "Politics have made the gap between us as wide as the distance between the earth and the sky" (87).⁵⁷⁵ By describing politics as a force that control and disfigure Kurdish people's experiences of peace and stability and incite insurgencies and violence, the novel is directly relating the internal political disintegration to the later invasion of ISIS. To be more precise, Niheli's *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, like Nivishki's novel, proposes a nexus between growing levels of violence, political corruption, and terrorism. In Niheli's text, corruption is expounded as an omnipresent power that initiates the malfunctioning of the governmental and administrative systems, causes lawlessness and disorder and leads to society's disability: "Corruption and injustice are poisonous and infectious viruses" (37).⁵⁷⁶ It is conceptualized as embedded in the social, economic, religious, and most importantly political spheres in the Kurdish society through the authorization of such acts as fraud, graft, and exploitations of official positions and power. This aspect is highly generalized in the text: "Kurdish people have become very self-conceited... They have forgotten years of fear and hunger. They are fighting over posts and chairs, over women, over villas on top of high hills and over fenced pieces of land" (37).⁵⁷⁷

It is significant that corruption within the different sectors of the Kurdish public sphere is connected to the political conflict within the Kurdish government to which substantial attention is devoted throughout the text. Like Jamshid Qalghani in *The Other Side of the Bridge*, Shawqi Deryachi in *Tavge*, Hazhar, the Peshmarga in *Mariama; A Woman From Another Time* and many other characters in the novels tackled so far in this thesis, the male characters of Niheli's novel are dominated by the figure of the corrupt 'berpirs' who misuses public office for his private gains. The text depicts corruption not as an exception but as institutionalized; a norm tolerated and acknowledged by many people in the society. By not distinguishing between individual and systematic corruption, these novels endeavour to indicate the existence and extent of corruption in Kurdish society. The texts, moreover,

⁵⁷⁴ دادوه ری هیژا، نه ز شه رابا نستانى فه دخووم، بقرده وام من هه قزينا خو و كورى خود نيشاندن و ده ردنخستنه به ر به فر و بارانا بينين نه ف جيهانه هه ر ژ كوردستانى هه تا واشنتون و موسكو مه بهوست بهوست نيكفه نيكفه داينه و ل سه ر سفره كى خارى يه و فه خارى يه و د ژوره كى دا نكستينه و مه هه ست و نه ستين دلداريى بو نيك هه بوون خو نيك جار زى وي ژ خوه نه گرت ب ناوريه كا بيهنا ميياتي لى دهيت به رى خو بده ت من هند دعره ت نه فسا خوه و هند زى ژ ناييندارى يا خوه.

⁵⁷⁵ سياسه تى مه ودابى دنابقه را من و ته دا كرىه دويراتيا نه رد و نه سمنا.

⁵⁷⁶ گه نده لى و بى دادى قايروسه كى فه گر و ژه هراوي به...

گه لى كورد پى د سه رپنخودا چوويه و وى مه غرور دببیت، ترس و برس، خه بات و ده سئكه قتی ب سالاد ده سئقه دهیت، ژبير دكه ن و نه م بين ماینه ⁵⁷⁷ بده ف و ليقين نيكفه ژبو پوست و كورسيك و باقين بينن زنان، قیلابين سه ربن گرین بلند و بده دونتم فه د سيمه كرى و مساتحه كرى.

problematize the high levels of corruption by detailing the ways in which policies and roles are formulated and decisions are made within the public sphere.

Equally significant is the way the above mentioned texts address the significant impacts of corruption on the life of Kurdish women and their various roles and positions in the society. The novels examine the relationship between corruption and gender equality through depicting the ways in which men exploit their power and authority to affect women's access to the public sphere and affect their social status and sexually exploit them. Zhila, Tavage, Mariama, Khunav and Nareen (Hizar's friend) all suffer from the growing levels of corruption as demonstrated by their continuing low social and economic status in spite of dreams of national uplift, and by their lack of political empowerment and representation. *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two pays particular attention to the ways corruption disproportionately has an impact upon women's professional roles and their victimization by the cruel system of power relations. Though never named, the corrupted figure of the unnamed *berpîrs* (referred to as Sayda⁵⁷⁸ in the novel) is described as a man who violates bureaucratic procedures, official policies and laws to attain personal interests and desires. Sayda, a high official in the government, exploits Nareen's need for work, particularly after the death of her father. Realizing the difficulty of confronting him, Hizar decides to convince Nareen and her mother about the danger of staying with Sayda:

I am really worried for this girl. It is two years now and I am still trying to be patient about the behaviour of this rotten Sayda with this innocent teenager. I feel it my duty to rescue her... He is very wicked and immoral; drinking the father's blood and feeding on the daughter's body... I have to convince Nareen to stop working in his office. (29-30)⁵⁷⁹

Nareen's obvious vulnerability to exploitation by Sayda compounds the subordination and discrimination already imposed on her as a woman marginalized by Kurdish patriarchal society. Hizar's disapproval of Sayda's behaviour and her constant attempts to warn Nareen are an indication of the importance of empowering women through conscious raising, combatting corruption and improving women's socio-economic and political positions. Hizar's preoccupation with Nareen's work for the corrupt Sayda emphasises the way corruption impedes the fulfillment of gender equality and women's participation in the public sphere. Moreover, by obstructing social, economic, and political progress, corruption contributes to higher levels of gender and terror-related violence.

⁵⁷⁸ Sayda is a common word in the Kurdish slang language. It is derived from the Arabic word Said meaning mister.

⁵⁷⁹ نه ز هه ست ب تیکچوونا ده روونئ خو دکه م و نه فه دوو ساله بیهنا خو فره دکه م و خو رازی دکه م ل سه ر ره فتارین فی مروفی گه نی دگه ل سنیلئ. دگه ل نارینئ به مه هه فال ب چ ریکا هه ی و وی ژ فی کورتماری بده مه پاش. فی

Niheli's novel explores the same nexus between corruption, criminal motives and terrorist-related violence that is thoroughly invoked in Navishki's text. Shelley's work, which proposes the same connection, can be usefully applied to help conceptualize the creation of the terrorist groups and cells in Iraq, some of which affiliated later with ISIS. Such an affiliation has been accelerated, as is shown in the text, by the long history of hectic cultural, religious, and political conflicts in Iraq:

Because the crime groups and terrorist organizations do not possess long-term strategies or a long-term political horizon, neither the criminals nor the terrorists need fear ineffective and corrupt law enforcement regimes in conflict regions.⁵⁸⁰

A further significant explanation for the prevalence of criminal and terrorist groups in conflict-torn Iraqi society is the absence of solid security systems and political integration that prevent their emergence or suppress their growth. As explained in the previous section, the omnipresence of corruption within the public sphere advances the criminal and terrorist operations through facilitating the creation of organized crime groups which are likely to forge alliances with both domestic and international terrorist groups. However, since Niheli's text explores the impact on the Kurdish community, particularly women, of terrorist activities perpetrated by ISIS, an infamous group that is rapidly expanding in power and resources and threatening the whole region, other factors and circumstances need to be considered in the study and theorization of the violence it exerts. In other words, the existence of criminal groups and political corruption, though very illuminating, cannot be employed exclusively in the conceptualization and explanation of the success of ISIS terrorist activities. The cultural and social structure of Iraq including the contradictions between the rural and urban areas, the national divisions, and Iraq's long regional wars are some of the conditions discussed in most of the scholarship on the emergence of ISIS in Iraq. An important element in the theorization of the ISIS ideology is the personal grievances of some individuals and communities to react against repressive regimes they aspire to change. While local grievances can be directly associated with domestic terrorism, the coming of ISIS has made all the difference in the heated atmosphere of Iraqi political and religious disputes, and led to the emergence of international terrorism, represented by ISIS.

Involving a detailed documentary analysis of the recent powerful emergence of ISIS, Niheli's novel describes, almost halfway through the text, the advances of the militant organization benefiting from the on-going civil war in Syria and transferring recruits and resources to Iraq from their positions in

⁵⁸⁰ Shelley, "The Unholy Trinity," 101.

the bordering cities and towns there. The narrator also describes the easy submission and capitulation by the Iraqi military which obviously facilitated the advances of the jihadists. In a surprisingly short time, ISIS was able to seize control over Mosul and the surrounding towns and districts. As part of their program to exert chaos, lawlessness and sectarian hatred, ISIS soon freed thousands of prisoners, destroyed important religious monuments and shrines and archaeological sites and threatened civilians. The text chronicles these events: “They destroyed the city’s many mausoleums of Prophets and the statues of religious and sacred persons. They seized the army’s weaponry and resources. They oppressed and threatened the life of civilians” (42-43).⁵⁸¹ Such images of violence and destruction appear through the rest of the book as Niheli attempts to reflect on and report the severity and cruelty of the ISIS violation of human rights. Upon its first entrance into Mosul, ISIS issued the ‘City Document,’ a constitution which demanded the immediate departure of Christians and Shabak Shiites from Mosul or they would face conversion or death. In the *Iraqi Women Journalists Forum* held in 2015, Suha Auda explains that:

The organization executed large numbers of women and men. It carried out a massive campaign, arresting dozens of women who were taken to Daesh ‘Sharia Court’... Eight or nine mass graves have so far been found inside and outside Mosul... Currently, Daesh carries out its executions in the streets and public markets; they are filmed and openly disseminated on social media.⁵⁸²

In *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, the ISIS broadcasting of these atrocities is depicted as part of the psychological war that the group is fighting alongside the physical war they have waged on land. Footage of tortures, beheadings, mutilations, and combustion of terrified people is disseminated around the world and particularly amongst the Kurdish population of Iraq, who were most directly affected. The Kurdish writer Arsalan Rahman emphasizes the importance of military media, war correspondents, and expertise in the strategies of psychological war against ISIS:

ISIS has successfully implemented the tactics of psychological war as well as new technological sciences in communicating its messages and propaganda. They have also successfully occupied the thinking and mind-set of the population and effectively used it for their advantage.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ مه زارگه هین ئیغه مبه را په قانندن، ته بکه رین مروقتین ئیروز شکلندن، ده ستی خو دانال سه ر چه ک و تانک و جه بلخانین.

⁵⁸² Suha Auda, “The Mosul Crisis: its Roots, Daesh’s Terrorist Practices, and their Impact on Women” *ICSSI Editor*, (June, 2015), 2.

⁵⁸³ Arsalan Rahman, *Sherê Deroni Da’esh u Rengdanewey le Midyay Kurdi da* (The Psychological War: Daesh and its Reflection in the Kurdish Media) (Hawler: Rozhhalat Press, 2015), 124.

Acknowledging the psychological effects of their atrocities, the narrator of *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, in a similar manner to a war reporter, highlights the significant role of civilians in challenging this influence and supporting the Peshmerga in the fight against ISIS:

The Peshmerga are fighting with a steadfast loyalty. They are becoming ever more organized and united and growing in number like glittering stars in the sky. With very simple weaponry and equipment but a great courage and determination, they are going to defeat ISIS and prevent them from entering our territories. (45)⁵⁸⁴

Additionally, the narrator stresses the importance of effacing the psychological effects of ISIS atrocities and helping the Peshmerga. Sharing a similar sentiment, Rahman urges “supporting the Peshmerga forces in their fight against ISIS by enduring and challenging the psychological impact of their notorious war” (204). The text elaborates on the manipulative attitudes of ISIS towards the Kurds, first announcing they would not approach the Kurdish regions, and later making a sudden incursion into Kurdistan. Despite their initial claim, ISIS soon attacked the Kurdish territories, overrunning the unprepared Kurdish forces in such towns as Sinjar, Makhmour, and Gwer, only fifteen miles from Erbil, the capital city. The fear generated by this swift incursion is palpable in *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two:

The black soldiers approached the Kurdish land and confidently announced they would pray for Eid in Sinjar, the land of struggle and resistance. People in the very city I live in started preparing for an escape when the threats became very close. (44)⁵⁸⁵

Though ISIS has been perpetrating numerous atrocities in the cities and towns they have entered, Sinjar witnessed the perpetuation of the most notorious operations. The report of the Holocaust Museum, based on the research of Naomi Kikoler, the deputy director of the museum, asserts that thousands Yazidis have been killed, detained, or run away to Mount Sinjar where they were besieged for weeks by militants. Though the report maintains that ISIS have executed crimes against humanity and war crimes against Christians, Turkmen, Shabaks, and other minorities, only the Yazidis faced systematic acts of genocide. In addition to killing thousands of Yazidis, Kikoler explains in the report that during her trip to northern Iraq in 2015 she witnessed genocidal acts at first hand:

We heard harrowing accounts of displacement, forced conversion, rape, torture, kidnapping and murder. We saw first-hand traumatic consequences of those atrocities and of mass

⁵⁸⁴ پێشمه رگی قه هره مان و جانفیدا هیزه کا ئیکگرتی به و ریکخستی به و هژماره کا زوره مینا ستیرین نه سمانا پر و گه شه و ب چه کی کیم و وره و که له ژانین به رز دی وان که نه برمویت و هه لکیشن و ناهیلان دوژمن کولکین خوه ل سه ر هه ستی و کولوخین شه هیدین مه ناقا بکه ن.

⁵⁸⁵ سه ربازین ره ش هیدی هیدی خو نیزیکی ده قه ره رین کوردی کر و راگه هاند کو د جه ژناره مه زانی دا دی نقیژا جه ژنی ل شنگالی واری به رخوه دانئ که ن، نهال فی باژیری نه ز نوکه لی دژیم ژی خو ناماده کربوو بو ره قئ.

displacement... We saw angst born from the uprooting of religious practices, the erosion of identity, and the tearing apart of communities.⁵⁸⁶

Unlike most tragic events in Kurdish history, the bloody rampage of Sinjar met with great resonance in the media as well as worldwide political forums. The notorious acts of destroying complete villages such as Kocho village⁵⁸⁷, the killing and enslaving of thousands of men and women, and the raping and sexual abuse of hundreds of girls and women were shocking to the whole world, who witnessed the events on news broadcasts, TV screens, and social media networks. Reporting these atrocities only a week after they occurred, Vian Dakheel, the only Yazidi female MP, addressed the Iraqi Parliament and urged them to immediate action. Despite the parliamentary Speaker's repeated requests to confine her remarks to the matter of her original statement, Dakheel insisted on making a highly emotional plea:

Mr Speaker, until now 500 Yazidi men have been slaughtered. Mr Speaker, our women are being taken as slaves and being sold in the slave market. Please, brothers... There is now a campaign of genocide being waged on the Yazidi constitute... Brothers! Away from all political disputes, we need humanitarian solidarity.⁵⁸⁸

Dakheel's plea, "Brothers! I speak in the name of humanity. Save us. Save us!" headed news and press bulletins around the world. Her speech provoked the Iraqi Parliament to send humanitarian airdrops for the thousands of escapees besieged on Mount Sinjar and to support those who had run away to safer areas. Dakheel's speech, which was filled with pain and horror and quickly spread via social media, not only drew worldwide attention to the Yazidi plight, but also generated an international humanitarian effort and military support: "President Obama claimed her emotional plea influenced his decision to allow US forces to take part in the air operations."⁵⁸⁹ Dakheel's fervent explanation of the miserable conditions of the Yazidis is reflected in *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two through Hizar's contemplation of the way Kurdish history is repeating itself. The memories of the misery and violence she has experienced under the Ba'ath regime are brought to life again because of the ISIS attacks as Hizar encounters familiar images of the destruction of a nation she has worked all her life to defend. As these images and memories are brought back to life in Hizar's mind, it becomes as if she is

⁵⁸⁶ Naomi Kikoler, "Our Generation is Gone: The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa," *Imon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, (November, 2015), 2.

⁵⁸⁷ A small village in Sinjar, Kocho witnessed the most brutal acts of genocide by ISIS. According to many news sites, only 200 of its 1700 Yazidi inhabitants survived.

⁵⁸⁸ YouTube, "Iraqi Yazidi MP Breaks Down in Parliament: ISIL is Exterminating my People," (August 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdIE1s6yhY>

⁵⁸⁹ Abigail Haworth, "Vian Dakheel: Iraq's only female Yazidi MP on the battle to save her people," *The Guardian* (February, 2015), 3.

living the same violence represented in the images she sees on TV of the Kurdish people on Mount Sinjar:

The smell of dead bodies and the fading cries of those who have survived are making the high mountain a silent cemetery. The poverty, nakedness and hunger, the messiness of the hair and the dryness of the faces of those besieged on the mountain with no water or food are heartbreaking images. The human tragedy, the innocent victims and the new wave of immigrants that is splitting parents and their children is repeated. The winds of death that crush the hopes and wishes of children and youths are blowing again. (47)⁵⁹⁰

It is important that Niheli includes the image of the mountain as the Kurdish people's only savior from annihilation and death. Throughout history, mountains have not only been a geographical but also a symbolic feature of Kurdish life. Mountains have always played a great and decisive role in shaping the Kurdish national movements and struggles for liberation. Against the propositions and views of many anti-Kurdish adversaries, who have historically endeavoured to describe the Kurds as being uncivilized inhabitants of mountains, the Kurds have always prided themselves on inhabiting mountainous areas. Given the dominantly rural nature of Kurdish life and the highly mountainous character of the land, mountains such as *Judi* and *Ararat* have become a highly symbolic part of Kurdish culture and folklore. From the oldest Kurdish literary traces, whether songs, epic poems, lyric poems, fables or proverbs, mountains have been associated with strength, resistance, unity and freedom. They have also become associated with stillness, continuity, eternity and 'Kurdewarî,' which refers both to the regions where the Kurds live, and where their language, with its different dialects, habits, and customs, prevails. For example, in almost all of his work, Khani (1650–1707) associates the survival of the Kurdish people with mountains. In *Mem û Zîn* (Mem and Zin, 1692) Khani prides himself on being an inhabitant of the mountains:⁵⁹¹

I am a Kurd, a mountaineer and a frontiersman

[Recorded] some of the tales of Kurdewarî

590 بیهنا له شێ مریان، گری و خه مان چبایی به رز و بلند کر به گورستانه کا بی ده نگ، هه ژاری و رووسی و پێخاسی و فه فه قزیا پرچی مروقان، چرمسینا دیمێ وان بی نیرگری بی بی ناف و نان و تراژیدیا مروقابه تی و قوربانین سه رمه دی و پاکیی و مشه ختیبونی ده بک و جه گه ر ژیکهتکرن، بیلن پاروقین مرنی جرایین هیفی و نومیدان فه مراندن.

⁵⁹¹ Although aspects of Khani's *Mem and Zin* have been described with some detail earlier in the thesis, it is important to reiterate here that scholarly views concerning the poem's genre and form vary considerably. While most scholars, including Martin van Bruinessen (2003), Kamal Mirawdeli (2013) and Erik Novak (2006), emphasize its embodiment of the Kurdish national cause and the Kurds' struggle for national sovereignty, and insist on describing it as a Kurdish national epic, others such as Kamiran Barwari (2007) and Zheger Hassan (2013) describe it as a Sufi philosophical romance and underline its portrayal of notions of Sufism and Islamic creed.

Stamp it with your kind-heartedness

Listen to it with ears of fairness⁵⁹²

Here, Khani is not only defining himself as a mountainous Kurd but is also associating his and his folks' bravery with the mountainous nature of the Kurdish land, which has made it impossible for their enemies to eliminate them, despite long violent conflicts and wars. In *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, Niheli employs the old proverb 'the Kurds have no friends but the mountains' to describe the way Kurdish people have always confided in the power of mountains to protect and save them from enemies. Such confidence proves credible, taking into consideration the role of mountains in the survival of the Kurdish people in the different phases of their history—the age of Kurdish chiefdoms or principalities during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, the various conflicts throughout the Ottoman rule during the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, the British mandate and the modern ethno-national struggle against and within successive Iraqi governments.

Today Kurdish mountains still retain their importance. During the Sinjar massacre, nearly 50,000 inhabitants of the city and district of Sinjar, the majority being Yazidis, fled ISIS and climbed Mount Sinjar, surrounded by militants. Spending weeks on the mountains, Iraqi military helicopters and other countries' planes started dropping food and water for the refugees, who were only saved with the help of the Peshmerga and other allied military forces. The narrative of *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, describes these details, comparing the situation to the events of the 'al-Hashir,' the Day of Judgement: "The Kurds have no friends but the mountains. Again, with their generosity and height, greatness and strength, the mountains hosted them [the Yazidis] in their silent laps" (46).⁵⁹³

Similar to Navishki's allusions to *Israa and M'iraj* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Niheli, who uses a language loaded with historical and religious associations, alludes to familiar events to represent the violence and mass destruction caused by ISIS attacks. She compares the ISIS atrocities to the notorious acts of some savage armies led by blood-thirsty leaders from the crusades onwards:

⁵⁹² Kamal Mirawdeli, "Mem û Zîn Analytical Study: Khani's Theory of Kurdish Nationalism," *The Kurdistan Tribune* (April, 2013), 3.

⁵⁹³ "کوردان چ دوست نینن ژبلی چیا"، جاره کا دی چیا مه ردینی و بلنداهی و مه زناهی و هیزا خو بو پی به خشین و ب سه ر بلندی نه و دباوه شا خو یا ننگ دا میهفانکرن. خوب خوینا بی گونه هان. بی ده

Similar to the campaigns of the crusades, Hulegu, Qarun and Hitler, who had no faith; no sense of belongingness, and no consciousness, the immoral caliphate led his army and broke all the laws of holy books to bring pain and horror with their black flags. (45)⁵⁹⁴

Here Niheli is using a religious language, lamenting the lack of proper religion and morality among self-professed Islamic fighters/political Islamists. Niheli widens her employment of these allusions by connecting the terrorist acts of ISIS to those of the Taliban, a similar Islamic fundamentalist political movement. Despite contextual and ideological differences, both groups have been waging violent insurgencies to enforce certain versions of Islam that are antithetical to the beliefs of most Muslims around the world.⁵⁹⁵ By referring to the well-communicated acts of the infamous Taliban, Niheli endeavours both to describe the intensity and extent of the violence ISIS is unleashing upon the Kurdish population and to revive the ideas and meanings associated with the cruel activities of the Taliban. In her reference to the Taliban, Niheli specifies the common policy of ideological imposition practiced by the two groups by portraying their fanatical interpretation of the Islamic Sharia in which such prohibited, or only conditionally permitted, institutions or acts such as polygamy, gender violence, theft, burglary, and killing, are re-interpreted according to their version of Islamic law:

In their march, they [ISIS] brought into practice the culture of invasion and the Jihad experiences of the Taliban in which men should grow beards, quit smoking and stick to Islam and women should wear hijab... Seizing others' possessions and multiple marriages are halal for them. (46)⁵⁹⁶

Here, Hizar's contemplation of the tragic events of Sinjar invigorates her memories of the experiences of Anfal, Halabje, the Uprising and the following upheaval in which she witnessed the destruction of her village and the death of her father and many other family members. After detailing the way ISIS has terrorized the Kurdish people in Sinjar and other towns, the text moves to explain the psychological impact of these acts on Hizar. Her troubled psychology is translated through a nightmare:

In the middle of a stormy sea, [Hizar] tried to reach for her son 'Rasti,' but a huge bird grabbed his messy hair with its sharp claws that were covered with blood... She noticed many similar birds

⁵⁹⁴ داگیرکه ران خه لیفی بی نامویس و فره نگ و ده جال و هولاکو و قارون و هیتله ران ده ردکه فت و زه بانین دوزه خی بی دین و ده ولت و وژدان یاساین به رتوکی نه رد و نه سممان بنئیکرن ، نالاین خو بین ره ش بین دگه ل خو خه م و نه خوشی نینان ده فه ری.

⁵⁹⁵ C. J Knight, *Terrorism and the Rise of ISIS: Origin of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (USA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 75.

⁵⁹⁶ پراکتیزکرنا جفاکی عه ره بی و که لتوری غه زوا و جیهادی و نه زمونا تالیبانی ژئ دخاست، کو تیدا (زه لام ریهین خو به رده ن و جگارا نه موسلمانان تی ل سه ر بهیته سه پاندن، ژن پیچی راکه ن، شه ریهه تین وان ل سه ر خلکئی دی یه و هه ر نشت بو وان حه لاله (تالانکران و کیشن، نکاحی..)

feeding on headless corpses and heads without corpses... The birds took her father's liver out of his ribs and her uncle Shawket's eyes out of his head. (51)⁵⁹⁷

Hizar's preoccupation with the recurring tragic events of her family and nation is a clear manifestation of the cyclical and repetitive character of Kurdish history, as previously explained. While the first part of *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, concentrated on Hizar's active participation on an international level in the Kurdish national struggle for independence, the second part of the novel depicts Hizar as more concerned with political and historical discussions in smaller circles inside Kurdistan. Most of these discussions emphasize the reasons for the prolonged political conflicts between the various Kurdish political groups and the corrupt and unsuccessful policies of many politicians. As will be confirmed in the following section, in many of these discussions, Hizar stresses the necessity of avoiding the mistakes of the past and the importance of enlightening the new generation and providing women with better educational and professional opportunities as strategies to resist violence and terrorism.

5.4. The Empowerment of Kurdish Women to Resist Terrorism-Related Violence

In addition to being extremely notorious and brutal, the ISIS attacks on Sinjar and the other parts of Iraq are characterized by the exertion of outrageous acts of gender violence. While *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two, does not chronicle the specific experiences of the Yazidi women in captivity, it does address the sexual violence imposed on them:

The Yazidis are victimized by ISIS. The black soldiers are eating the red flesh of infants and drinking young men's blood like wine. They are breaking the bones of old people and beheading tough men. They are raping girls and abusing women. (47)⁵⁹⁸

Vivid imagery is deployed to delineate ISIS practices of sexual violence and gendered abductions as part of their strategies to spread fear and chaos in Sinjar and the rest of Kurdistan. Although Hizar is not physically affected by the atrocities of ISIS in Sinjar, as she had been involved in the previous incidents such as the Anfal and the 1991 exodus, her contemplations serve to bring to the fore the horrific reality of the experiences of Kurdish women in the grip of ISIS. Additionally, Ako's death

⁵⁹⁷ دڤیت خو ب کورئ خو "راستی" را بگه هینیت ل به ر لیفا ناڤی، ب نه مئەلەفانیا خو چاخه ک ژ دارستانا به روی و مازی بری، ده ستی خو دریزکره کورئ خو، بالنده بی که له خان چه نگین خویین تیژ و ب خویین ل پرچا وی یا قذافذ دان، وینه بین هه فدژ خو ل به ر ته کین چاقین وی د هه لاقیدن، بالنده بین که له خان ل مروڤین بی سه ر و سه رین بی مروڤ د کومن و نکلی خو ب خوینا سور یا ره نگکری و میلاکین بابی دناڤ به راسیان دا ده ر نینان و چاقین مامی وی شتوکه تی ژ فوڤلکا نینانده ر.

کوردين ره سه ن بیت بووینه کوردين ره به ن، سه ربازين ره ش گوستی زاروکین ساڤا دخون، خوینا گه نجان دکه نه مه ی ب سه ردا دکه ن، هه ⁵⁹⁸ پیرا شکاند، زه لام سه رژیکرن، ده همه نا کچا سورکر و ناموبس ژنان هه رماند. ستی

during the war against ISIS further signifies the extent and scope of ISIS's destruction of Kurdistan, which extends beyond the areas directly affected.

Upon their first ingress to Mosul, ISIS imposed severe restrictions on women, demanding them to “wear niqab— full face veil, gloves and full body cloaks. They are also required to always have an accompanying male guardian when travelling outside the home.”⁵⁹⁹ ISIS issued a decree that compelled people to offer their unmarried women to participate in ‘jihad by sex’ as part of their duty to their ‘brotherly mujahidin.’⁶⁰⁰ In his discussion of the ISIS restrictions on women's dress code, movement, and sex regulations, particularly women of the non-Muslim minorities, Knight refers to the circulation of pamphlets to all ISIS soldiers containing guidelines according to which:

The soldiers were permitted to claim girls hailing from these non-Muslim communities and have sex with them. These soldiers were allowed to trade the girls they claimed with the other soldiers so long as they have not impregnated them.⁶⁰¹

Knight refers to the plight of hundreds of Yazidi women captured by ISIS and exposed to sexual torture: “Continuous rape and systematic abuse have been constant in the lives of these women in the last few months.”⁶⁰² Knight goes on to say that the pamphlets included guidelines giving “permission to soldiers to beat the women slaves to discipline them.”⁶⁰³

Also exploring the ‘tragedies of Yazidi women in the grip of ISIS’ as the title explains, Kidhir Domle's *The Black Death* is one of the very first contributions to the literature on the notorious transgressions of ISIS against the Yazidi community. Based on interviews with many male and female witnesses and victims, Domle's book chronicles detailed and thorough accounts by the Yazidi girls and women who fled ISIS and some of those still held by them who managed to talk to him on the phone. Their accounts describe such atrocities as forced marriages, forced conversion, forced labour, rape in captivity, and endurance of physical, emotional and psychological abuse. For example, after escaping ISIS, Sana'a, a twenty-six-year old Yazidi girl, describes the way she and two other girls were used as servants and forced into labour as well as sex slavery by five men. Sana'a tells of all the sexual violence and physical torture imposed on them. She tells Domle:

⁵⁹⁹ “ISIS restrictions on women causing fear, resentment in Iraq and Syria,” *The Jerusalem Post, The Middle East*, (February, 2015), <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Islamic-State-restrictions-on-women-causing-fear-resentment-in-Iraq-and-Syria-391281>

⁶⁰⁰ “Muslim Terrorists in Iraq Issued A Decree Ordering All Families to Send Their Unmarried Women,” (June, 2014), <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/bloggers/3171111/posts>

⁶⁰¹ Knight, *Terrorism and the Rise of ISIS*, 78.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*,

What do you think our life was like in a house with five cruel men sharing a hunger for women and would spend nights to gratify their sexual needs? They were beasts dressed up like humans. They shared a common belief in the worthlessness of the Yazidi women.⁶⁰⁴

The sexual violence imposed on Sana'a is repeated throughout the book, in which Domle endeavours to provide a comprehensive survey of the violence and dehumanization exerted against the Yazidi women in the different locations they were transported to in Iraq and Syria. In all these locations, the Yazidi girls and women are exposed to perpetual acts of torture, humiliation, and belittlement of their religious beliefs. Another form of dehumanization described by many of Domle's interviewees is the way they were regularly sold like slaves, and usually more than once. Asman, nineteen years old tells Domle: "I was sold more than three times. Each time I was sold for cheaper prices than the time before. I was kept in a big house in Mosul with another girl. Each night the man detaining us would choose one of us to spend the night with."⁶⁰⁵ In their objectification of the Yazidi girls and women, ISIS men not only sold them for cheap prices to each other, but also gave them as presents. A girl tells Domle:

Every night, armed men would enter the hall where we were held and choose those they wished... We never saw these girls again and when we dared to ask about them, we were told that they have been given as presents to foreign leaders.⁶⁰⁶

Another form by which ISIS abused and exploited Yazidi girls and women was by forcing them into converting to Islam. Sayran, who tells of her repeated attempts to run away from ISIS, describes the way the man detaining her would beat her and claim to reform her: "I want to help you become a human being... So you can go to heaven. I want you to become a good believer and you try to escape and stay a 'kafire,' a disbeliever."⁶⁰⁷ Forced conversion into Islam, which is against all the standards of proper Islamic Da'wah⁶⁰⁸ (the invitation of people to Islam), is misapplied by the ISIS men who, in the words of Shakib, a nine year old boy:

⁶⁰⁴ Khidher Domle, *Al-Maut al-Aswed: Ma'asi Nisa' al-Yazidiye fi Qabdet Da'esh* (The Black Death: Tragedies of Ezidy Women in the Grip of ISIS), (Duhok: Khani Press, 2015), 51.

⁶⁰⁵ Domle, *The Black Death*, 85.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁰⁸ Da'wah refers to the process of preaching of Islam or put more simply to the invitation of people to Islam. Da'wah can be implemented by either an appointed religious worker or any regular Muslim. During the early stages of Islamic Da'wah, Prophet Mohammad sent men (known as Da'iya) to different tribes, inviting them to convert to Islam, and in some cases the tribes requested Da'iyas to instruct them in Islamic Sharia and Quranic teachings.

Would force us into learning Quran... Every time I made a mistake, the man teaching us would beat me ten to twenty times with a hard plastic stick... Sometimes, he would put us in the cement for long hours under the burning sun of summer.⁶⁰⁹

Domle explains that the boys in the grip of ISIS are not only forced into acquiring the ISIS version of Islamic Sharia and Quranic teachings, but also forced into using weapons, learning how to shoot and making explosives. The mechanisms of reformation, alteration, and conversion imposed on the Yazidis held by ISIS intensified their suffering and pain over the loss of family members, destruction of their community's infrastructure and violations of human rights. In many of their accounts, the women, men and children talking to Domle reported repeated attempts of suicide to put an end to their miseries under ISIS. This measure has been particularly favored by women who have preferred to die rather than bring shame on their families. Mouse poison, pesticides, and medical pills were deliberately taken by these girls, who, if they survived such attempts, were punished severely by ISIS.

Domle concludes his book with a reflection (which he suggests will form the substance of the sequel to this book) on the significance of embracing and accepting survivors and supporting them morally and psychologically. In the final chapter, Domle approves of the role played by Yazidi families, communities and the Yazidi marja' (religious leaders) in broadcasting their concern. He explains that the Baba Sheikh, the Yazidi spiritual leader, has filed an official statement with the UN envoy confirming the support and sympathy of the Yazidi community for their daughters. Domle also praises the contributions of both Kurdish and non-Kurdish humanitarian and feminist agencies that are providing medical care and socio-psychological support to the survivors, and developing measures to track and restore those who are still in captivity.

Unlike Domle's book, Niheli's novel does not present thorough investigations of the psychological impact of the ISIS atrocities on women; the book is more concerned with the socio-economic and political empowerment of women as a measure to counter gender and terrorist-related violence. Though this theme has been explored in some detail in the first part of the novel, in Part Two, Hizar is allocated more responsibilities and is depicted as committed to being a university lecturer and a loving mother. By allocating her with these responsibilities, Niheli's message becomes twofold: First, empowering women is important in combating violence and terrorism; second, empowering women helps in educating and preparing the new generation so that the mistakes of the past will not be

⁶⁰⁹ Domle, *The Black Death*, 109.

repeated. Towards the middle, the text takes a didactic form in which Hizar attempts to enlighten her son Rasti. She tells him:

My dear son, your fate is the same as your mother's. We [Kurds] don't live a proper childhood... Today, I will be your teacher and give you some advice. Someday, I will die and you will be left alone to continue your life. You need to look into my eyes and listen carefully. I want you to bring the recorder and record what I have to say to you. (63)⁶¹⁰

Hizar's lesson problematizes three significant pillars of Kurdish life: Religion, politics, and gender relations, which she confirms have been generating long-standing confusion and disputes within the various Kurdish social and political groups. She opens her discussion with Rasti by advising him to understand the true essence of Islam and avoid the various emerging and suspect religious forms of jurisprudence and specious new laws whether those delivered by such fundamentalist and extremist groups as ISIS or by the political parties that misuse religion for mere personal interests: "Like all other religions, Islam is flawless. It calls for tolerance and good deeds... Don't build understandings of religion on the political parties' interpretations because these are based on their private interests and purposes" (64-65).⁶¹¹ Hizar's thoughtful views on religion are validated by the misapplication of Islamic legislation which has become a major reason for the spread of extremist and fanatical ideologies. She associates the correct understanding of religion with the formation of an upstanding personality and conscience and the accomplishment of principled politics. She tells Rasti:

If you are to get a political position one day, your guidance should be your own human values and beliefs not some corrupted laws drafted by humans... Don't follow politicians blindly because politics impacts upon people's faith. Try not to destroy others' faith in you too. (68-69)⁶¹²

Hizar's advice for Rasti expresses her well-informed standpoints regarding what would make successful leaders in the future who, according to her, should be "pioneering, intelligent, and ingenious" (71).⁶¹³ According to her "successful leaders should have the potential to liberate oppressed people like us and teach people how to love their nation" (71).⁶¹⁴ In her lesson for Rasti, Hizar is also

لاوی من قه ده را ته و ده یکا ته وه کی نیک بوویه، وه ختی نه م کورد ژدایکبووین نه زاروکبووین و نه نه خری بووین، نه ز نه قرو وه کی ماموستا یا ⁶¹⁰ ته دئ وانه کا شیره تا ده مه ته ژبه رکو دبیت سوباهی مه رگی من گوری ته ببیت و تو دئ ژیانئ به رده وام که ی، دقیت به ری خو بده یه ناف چاقین من و خو شویم نه که ی و باش گوهداریا من بکه و دئ هه ره ریکوردئ بینه دا ده نگئ من و خو تومار بکه ی.

نیسلام ژئ وه کی هه ر هه می نایینن دی نایینن راسته قینه و پاقره و نایینن بیکفه ژیانئ یه و داکوکی ل کارین باش دکه ت. چ جارا نایینی د چاقین ⁶¹¹ مروفا دا نه بینه و ره فتارین وان نه که پیقه ر بو خودئ نیاسینا وان ژبه رکو پارت و گروئین نیسلاما سیاسی پتريا وان ب کریارین خو دژی نیسلاما دروست و راسته قینه و بنتی بو هنده ک بهر ژه وه ند و مه ره مین خو بین که سوکی کار دکه ن.

⁶¹² نهگه ر دسته لاته ک که قته ده هستی ته دا، یاسایا ته بلا یا مروفا یه تی بیت نه ک ره شنقیسا مروفا بیت. نه به بوياخچی و بیلافا سیاسه تمه دارا بوياخ ته که، سیاسه ت باوه ری ژ مروفا دستینیت و خوشباوه ری یا ته بلا نه بیته نه که ری بی باوه ریا خه لکی بو ته.

سه رکده ، هزرمه ند و بیرتیژن، تشتی ژ کویر و هویر و دویر دبینن و دخوین. ⁶¹³

⁶¹⁴ گه لین وه کی مه و ژ تاریا نه زانین و سته می زگار دکه ن، هه ستا نه ته وایه تی هه ر ژ زاروکینی د میشکی مروفا دا د چین.

concerned with the growing levels of gender violence which she describes as an inevitable consequence of Kurdish tribal norms and values and patriarchal ideologies. To eliminate this persistent phenomenon from the Kurdish society, Hizar emphasizes the importance of educating the new generation about more equal gender relations and women's significant role and participation:

Women and men complete each other. They should share and co-ordinate with each other. No one is perfect and we should learn how to deal with each other... (A household is a small country and a country is a big household). If you lead the small household properly, you will be successful in the big one too. (67-68)⁶¹⁵

Hizar's opinions on issues of particular importance to the stability and continuity of Kurdish society reflect her intellectualism, which she endeavours to hand over to her son who represents the new generation and the future of Kurdistan. Accordingly, by depicting Hizar as a successful teacher and responsible mother, Niheli emphasizes the importance of providing educational and professional opportunities for women so that they can make better contributions both to households and nations. The novel confirms that supporting women's rights and empowerment can be instrumental in combating ideologies of gender violence that promote criminal motives and terrorist activities. In guarding and protecting their children from exposure to extremist and fanatical ideology and by enabling them to be better office holders, politicians, and social workers in addition to their roles as wives and mothers, women become effective 'counter-terrorists' and contributors in processes of rehabilitation, violence elimination and peace preservation. Women's empowerment, therefore, has become a prominent measure in most women-centered Kurdish literary production and the socio-political scholarship that has accompanied it, and in the current studies of peace preservation, elimination of gender violence and counter-terrorism.

Although there may have been no clear and direct influence, an important comparison for understanding the Kurdish situation is the African American context, in which women have been joining together to demand social and political equality and the recognition of the historical impact of racism and sexism on their social status. It is important to note that, according to most Black feminist scholars, Black women's resistance and activism have been structured along two interrelated dimensions: The definition of Black women's oppression as an interlocking system of class, race, and sex oppression, and the exploitation of Black women's resilience and determination to fight oppressive structures. Accordingly, recent Black feminist activities have been developing the tradition of

ژن و زه لام ته مامکه ر و هاریکارین نیکن و هه ر مروفتکی کومه کا کیماسیان ل ده ف هه نه و بتنی خودی یه بی بی کیماسی و دقیت نه م وه کی⁶¹⁵
مروفتین ناقتجی ره فتاری دگه ل بابته تی هه ستیار و جوری بکه یه.

individual and group activism to influence social and political changes. According to Collins, this tradition consists of: “Actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing structures of oppression... [And] the struggle for institutional transformation— namely, these efforts to change existing structures of oppression.”⁶¹⁶ In her discussion of the ways in which these two layers of activism and empowerment challenge and undermine oppressive structures, Collins adds: “All individual and group action that directly challenges the legal and customary rules governing African American women’s subordination can be seen as part of the struggle for institutional transformation.”⁶¹⁷ Collins refers to women’s participation in “civil rights organizations, labour unions, feminist groups, boycotts, and revolts”⁶¹⁸ as a few examples of the dimensions through which to empower women and guarantee their active roles within the public sphere. In the African American literary discourse, women’s empowerment has been closely associated with ideas of women’s interdependence and collective action. Themes such as sisterhood, female friendship, and community permeate the literary works of pioneering African American women writers. For example, Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* presents numerous situations in which Lorde manifests and anticipates black women’s need for empowerment and oppositional institutions and other forms of a feminist counter-public sphere from which they can ‘think and act collectively:’

We tried to build a community of sorts where we could, at the very least, survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile to us; we talked endlessly about how best to create that mutual support which twenty years later was being discussed in the women’s movement as A brand new concept.⁶¹⁹

The feminist movement, challenging the male-dominated political structures and patriarchal beliefs and practices, became an important form of resistance and oppositionality since its first emergence in the late nineteenth century, but most especially since the 1970s. Black feminist thought indicates the way women have historically survived oppression through developing mutual love and support. Lorde keeps returning to this theme of ‘bonding together’ throughout the body of her work, confirming that it is the only way to fight and resist the patriarchal and racist values of any society as she explains that “traditionally, Black women have always bonded together in support of each other, however uneasily and in the face of whatever other allegiances which militated against that bonding. We have banded

⁶¹⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 141-142.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (New York: Crossing Press, 1982), 170.

together with each other for wisdom and strength and support.”⁶²⁰ Throughout *Sister Outsider*, Lorde emphasizes women’s coming together and collective action as a form of empowerment:

When Black women in this country come together to examine our sources of strength and support, and to recognize our common social, cultural, emotional, and political interests, it is a development which can only contribute to the power of the Black community as a whole. It can certainly never diminish it. For it is through the coming together of self-actualized individuals, female and male, that any real advances can be made. The old sexual power relationships based on a dominant/subordinate model between unequals have not served us as a people, nor as individuals.⁶²¹

Today, Kurdish women’s rights organizations and advocates are undertaking a range of procedures to increase gender equality and women’s participation in social structures, enhance their representation within political powers and processes of decision-making, and support their roles in providing peace, security and reconciliation. Accomplishing these measures will also help in combating terrorism and violent extremism as manifested by the ‘National Conference on Empowering Women to Address the Impact of Terrorism’ conference held in Erbil which called for new economic, professional and educational opportunities. Organized by the UN mission in co-operation with the Kurdish Region women’s organizations and al-Amal foundation, the conference resulted in an official statement that included twelve recommendations which confirmed the importance of empowering women against gender and terrorist related violence. According to the Kurdish journalist Fuad Othman, the conference recommended “a number of programmes to support peace, tolerance and national reconciliation as well as combating extremist and terrorist ideologies.”⁶²² The conference, moreover, suggested making the 5th of August the national day for the elimination of violence in conflict.

Felski’s category of feminist counter-public sphere is employed in this chapter to theorize the existence of Kurdish women’s creation of oppositional spaces to provide the mechanisms by which women act collectively to resist discrimination within a society dominated by patriarchal gender politics. Although the concept has been briefly discussed in Chapter One, it is vital here to mention that feminist counter-public sphere, as employed by Felski, is basically drawn from the bourgeois public sphere originally theorized by the German sociologist and critical theorist Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Changes in the Public Sphere*, referring to a “historically determined formation which emerges from the specific conditions of late seventeenth- and eighteenth century society.”⁶²³ Felski

⁶²⁰ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), 49.

⁶²¹ Lorde, *Sister*, 49.

⁶²² Fuad Othman, “Erbil: Conference on Empowering Women to Address the Impact of Terrorism,” *PUK Media* (August, 2015), 1.

⁶²³ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic*, 165.

adds that the main participants of the public-sphere are “male-property owners and the enlightened aristocracy.”⁶²⁴ Believing that economic, political and social action should be controlled and perpetuated by the public sphere, the dominant groups, accordingly started to exploit the marginal groups and assume their inferiority and even, in some contexts, their complete exclusion. The marginalized groups, as defined in Cathy Cohen (1999), are groups with a “deficiency in the economic, political, and social resources used to guarantee rights and privileges assumed by dominant group members.”⁶²⁵

The marginal groups, also called ‘counter-public’ or ‘subaltern’ are basically differentiated from the public sphere as elucidated in Catherine R. Squires’ *Rethinking the Black Public Sphere*, by a number of “group characteristics or identities such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, race or nationality.”⁶²⁶ The marginal groups, further illustrated by Cohen, exist within a “societal framework in which one or more of their primary identities has come to signal inherent inferiority.”⁶²⁷ Squires goes on to identify the agenda for the marginal groups by showing that they are mainly “people of color, women, homosexuals, religious minorities, and immigrant groups.”⁶²⁸ These groups have created counter-public spheres in “reaction to the exclusionary politics of the dominant public sphere.” Political struggles and the emergence of new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s inspired a number of theorists to propose the formation of counter-public spheres, that is, marginal positions as possible sites of oppositionality to the values of their highly racial, capitalist male-defined societies.

African American feminists and theorists have demonstrated that Habermas’s concept of the public sphere is both exclusionary and hegemonic and they have, in Squires’ terms, “taken the stance that there are multiple spheres rather than just one.”⁶²⁹ She further asserts that not only is there the dominant public sphere, but there are the “subaltern counter publics that are populated by historically oppressed groups such as women and African American that have been excluded from the dominant public sphere.”⁶³⁰ Similarly, pointing out that Habermas’s conception of the public sphere as a group of political institutions which facilitate the ability of people to discuss politics provides a working

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 165.

⁶²⁵ Cathy J Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1999), 23.

⁶²⁶ Catherine R. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Sphere,” *Communication Theory*, 12:4 (November, 2002), 446.

⁶²⁷ Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness*, 25.

⁶²⁸ Squires, 446.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 446-468.

sample to consider types of political institutions needed in the black community, Micheal C. Dawson confirms the importance of a black counterpublic as a possible setting that represents “the challenges to patriarchal norms and the need for silenced voices to be heard.”⁶³¹ According to Dawson, the “expulsion of African American at the end of the nineteenth century from official spheres of the public discourse and decision-making,”⁶³² led to an increase in the activities of many black counterpublics such as: “The Negro Women’s Club Movements, the journals, meetings and activities of the fledgling civil right organizations, the small but active literary cycles among Black academics and the Black church.”⁶³³

The feminist public sphere presents a critique of social, political, and cultural values from the point of view of women as a marginalized group within society and “constitutes a discursive arena which disseminates its arguments outward through such public communications as books, journals, the mass-media, and the education system.”⁶³⁴ Realising the political limitations of modernism, feminist literary theory suggests possible positions as effective sites, even if marginal, for oppositional political aesthetics within society. Defining the link between literature and feminism, Felski argues that “a feminist literary theory is dependent upon a feminist social theory, which can relate texts to changing ideological structures as they affect women as social subjects.”⁶³⁵

Thus, most recent studies of feminist public spheres agree that feminist discourse originates from women’s experiences of oppression. Such claims are rightfully the case in Kurdish feminist movements. Throughout history, Kurdish pro-feminist movements have acted to generate a gender-specific identity through forming and developing a conscious of community and solidarity among women and have challenged, to use Felski’s terms, “to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims, challenge existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique.”⁶³⁶ Given this fact, developing a Kurdish feminist counter-public sphere which can facilitate the ability of Kurdish women to freely discuss political and cultural issues of significance regarding their positions as members of society can posit their struggle for gender equality and self-

⁶³¹ Michael C. Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics,” *Public Culture*, 7:1 (September, 1994), 195-223.

⁶³² Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?” 200.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic*, 167.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

determination in a more official form. Formulating such criteria for a Kurdish feminist public sphere is indeed worthy both theoretically and practically since such feminist institutions do exist nowadays in the Kurdish society.

Themes of women's empowerment and coming together appear throughout Navishki's *The Other Side of the Bridge* in the figure of Warkhaz, Rawshan's friend and colleague in the Kurdish women's organization where she used to work. Soon after Rawshan's death, Warkhaz, as the director of the organization, pays a formal tribute to Rawshan's influential role in the organization and promises to help capture the terrorists by going to the media and aiding the police investigation. She even helps to raise funds and officially urges the authorities to help and bring back Khasti's corpse to Kurdistan.

Navishki's most important manifestation of women's active role and participation is Khunav's persistence in following and aiding the police investigation and gathering as much official support as possible to help capture the terrorists. This not only reflects Khunav's desire to avenge her mother and sister, but also echoes Rawshan's activism within the Kurdish women's rights organizations and her desire to show the reality of the extremists' ideology and incentives for terrorism. Throughout the text, Khunav manifests an unshakable resolution to seek justice for her family despite the intense suffering and emotional agony that she constantly feels. Grief and suffering make Khunav stronger and more determined to find answers and to help the government mechanisms that seek to punish the terrorists. It is important that such strength, courage and determination are possessed by a woman, not a man, in a society where women are assigned passive and submissive roles.

Like Hizar, Khunav refuses to give up and passively accept society's definitions of her and her 'journey,' demonstrating that empowering women with education and social recognition can be a significant measure in combating violence and terrorism. As mentioned in the second section of this chapter, Khunav's journey, though shaped by Rawshan's and Khasti's physical journeys, is an emotional inner journey which not only results in a better sense of self but also in the fulfillment of justice for her family. The journey that Khunav undertakes exemplifies the way women's empowerment can be influential in processes of challenging social restrictions and patriarchal ideologies that reinforce violence as well as in countering extremism and terrorism. After listening to Rashawan's account through the tape brought to them by Khunav, the police are able to gather enough information on the identities and locations of the terrorists, which help in arresting them. The driver, called Newaf Shawees Ziyad, admits co-operating in the abduction not only of Rawshan and Khisar

but also of other men and women. However, Ziyad and the other terrorists arrested with him, manage to break out from prison, which the police officer in charge of the investigation implicitly connects to a phone call and a visit by Qalghany only a few days before.

Though Khunav is able to provide the police with sufficient information about the terrorist group through the tape and other notes and messages left by Rawshan and to raise enough funds and official support to transport her father's corpse back to Kurdistan, her suffering and grief do not end. Kivan's family shares a similar traditional belief about marriage as Mayaset's and they believe that a girl with such a family history as Khunav will destroy their well-known and much-respected family name. Despite Kivan's persistent or repeated attempts to convince his family, they refuse his marriage to Khunav, claiming that it is socially inappropriate. Even Kivan's father, Judge Baiz, who initially sympathizes with Khunav and plays a major role in capturing the terrorists and helping bring Khasti's corpse back to Kurdistan expresses patriarchal attitudes and disapproves of their marriage. In reaction to his family's decision, Kivan travels abroad without even telling Khunav. By the end of the novel Khunav not only grieves the loss of her family but also of her love, which too becomes a victim of unchanging and unequal social norms and values in Kurdish society.

Like the concluding pages of Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere*, Silevani's *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* and *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part One studied in the previous chapters, both *Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Part Two and *The Other Side of the Bridge* end with an incomplete or equivocal resolution. Questions concerning the future of Hizar and Khunav are left unanswered at the end of novel; is there evidence to indicate that they will continue in their struggle to prove that Kurdish women are not merely 'sex objects' and the Kurdish land is not a 'piece of fabric to be sewed together', or are we supposed to fall into the trap of patriarchal traditions and emerging newly violent forces? The concluding paragraphs of both these novels, while emphasizing their activism and influential roles in the familial, social and political spheres, at the same time stress women's vulnerability to both traditional and terrorist-related gender-specific violence.

Conclusion

The trees are stunted and half dead
like those they mined and those unwed
forced into holes the half blind hid

their grandmother within the cave.
How many do the airplanes have?
How many children must we give?

They chew then spit to mourn the one
who's shaded by the sentry shrub.
Who lost his legs. Who shot no guns.
Who clawed for nymphs to share like bread. (Woodcock, 2016)

The stanzas above are from a poem called *Tree*, which appears in the first part of Patrick Woodcock's poetry collection *You Can't Bury Them All*. I have quoted Woodcock's title within the title of my thesis because this sentence resonates so well with the novels I have analysed here. The first part of Woodcock's collection, from which *Tree* comes, is called *Yan Kurdistan ... Yan Naman*, meaning "Give me Kurdistan or give me death". This, too, resonates with the authors and texts that have been under discussion here. Woodcock, a Canadian poet, describes the miseries and sufferings as well as the strength and determination of the Kurdish people in the face of ceaseless oppression and enmity; a thread that runs throughout his poetry about Kurds.⁶³⁷ Woodcock has lived in Kurdistan for over two years and has profoundly engaged, in his work, with the life, landscape, and politics of the Kurds in the north of Iraq. He has written two poetry collections about Kurdish national struggle for independence, their historical, cultural, and political concerns as well as such issues as Kurdish genocide, Kurdish uprisings, and the ethnic tragedies of the Yazidis. In both his poetry collections, *You Can't Bury Them All* (2016) and *Echo God and Silent Mountains* (2015), Woodcock endeavours to construct narratives that describe the struggle of Kurdish people to:

⁶³⁷ As a constant traveller and an eager observer of cultures, Patrick Woodcock is known for his style of writing which is affectingly deep, formally sophisticated and unafraid of sentiment. *You Can't Bury Them All* is rich with vibrant descriptions and comparisons and the employment of a vivid imagery inspired by his experiences in Kurdistan. The collection also stands out for its strong use of metaphors and similes. Most important, the poems are directly linked to issues that are of a growing importance and influence in the evolving Kurdish society but remain substantially unaddressed, such as feminism and gender-based violence, as well as LGBT history and rights.

Survive the tragic failures of our humanity to their very end: everything that's buried by snow, dirt, and ash, just like everything that's buried by politics, homophobia, sexism, racism, religion; and history is resurrected, demanding to be heard and addressed.⁶³⁸

Sprinkled with references to Kurdish history, culture and geo-politics, *You Can't Bury Them All* offers a multitude of powerful and vivid imagery to help readers visualize, more descriptively and realistically than they have previously been able to do, the plight of Kurds and their sheer tenacity to withstand wars and genocide, as illustrated in the lines quoted above. In these lines, Woodcock portrays grandmothers mourning their crippled, half blind as well as dead, children after a chemical attack where no caves or shelters can provide protection.

What connects the first part of Woodcock's poetry collection, in particular his poem *Tree*, to the Kurdish national anthem that serves as epigraph to this thesis, and to the subject matter of the thesis itself, is not only the way his poetry deals with the oppression and subjugation that have historically been imposed on the Kurdish people in Iraq, but also the way it describes their resistance and determination to survive and affirm their distinct national and cultural identity. In the Kurdish national anthem, this aspect is clearly exemplified in the refrain at the end of each stanza, "Let no one say Kurds are dead, they are living, they live and never shall we lower our flag," depicting the dedication to and aspiration of Kurdish people for the fulfilment of Kurdish independence and freedom, as well as the Kurds' need to rewrite and assert their history and identity.

Similar depictions of discrimination against the Kurds in Iraq and calls for rewriting self and history, particularly as they concern Kurdish women, have been discussed and investigated in this thesis as central to the Iraqi Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. Throughout my study, I have recognized that Kurdish novelistic discourse has been increasingly influenced by the reality of Kurdish division among four different nation-states and is highly connected with such concepts as belonging, community and Kurdish national and socio-political identity. Hence, I have analysed these novels in the light of Jameson's concept of 'national allegory,' in which the lives and experiences of ordinary people become an inseparable part of the image and spirit of the nation. In the novels selected here, the lives of individual characters are depicted in order to express broader dimensions of the nation's existence. Keeping a feminist perspective throughout, I have argued that it is important to understand how the question of the nation has now begun to be represented from a feminist stance in such novels, in which the lives of individual Kurdish women effectively convey the experience of the Kurdish nation. The

⁶³⁸ <https://s2.netgalley.com/catalog/book/78464>

lives of Nareen, Hizar, Mariama, Tavge, Khunav and the other female characters explicitly allegorise the historical, national, and socio-political experiences of the Kurdish people. Thus, in congruity with the concept of 'national allegory,' it has been asserted that these novels in fact become meaningful only when read in relation to their historical, national and socio-political settings.

Equally important is the study of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan in relation to social realism in which living portraits and vivid representations of the socio-political conditions of the Kurdish people and their subjugation by the governments of the various sovereign states are employed by Kurdish authors in their texts. I have shown that there should be no doubt that the Kurdish novel as it has emerged so far is primarily concerned with the depiction of the history and experiences of the Kurdish people. These novelists struggle to create what they consider to be a 'real', and realist, picture of the Kurdish national struggle for identity and independence.

By situating the research arguments within an integrated body of methodological tools and conceptual frameworks associated with 'feminist criticism,' 'identity construction,' 'gender and nation,' and 'gender-based-violence,' and by linking the Kurdish literary experience to such literary contexts as Postcolonial, African American, and Third World, this thesis has attempted, through the critical and analytical investigations of a number of contemporary Kurdish novels by Bahdini authors published in Iraqi Kurdistan and its diaspora, to explore the representation of the lives and experiences of Kurdish women in Iraq since the 1980s. The study has demonstrated how novelistic fiction can most effectively portray the ways in which, in the contexts of destructive wars and persistent ethno-political disputes, Kurdish women in Iraq have been, and are, exposed to growing levels of discrimination and violence which also extend to post-conflict contexts on grounds of their ethnicity, gender, and social status.

It has been argued that recent representations of women in Bahdini novels reveal how violence against Kurdish women in Iraq take diverse forms and layers depending on the context within which it is practiced. The thesis has asserted that both war and peace represent situations in which Kurdish women face and suffer from atrocious acts of gender violence. War and armed conflicts in the Kurdish militarized zones, in particular, have turned Kurdish women into direct targets of such brutal practices as emotional and bodily abuse, mass-rape, and mass-murder as well as to various forms of domestic abuse, forced marriages, polygamy, sexual violence, and honour-killing, as shown by these writers. Notwithstanding the end of military actions, Kurdish women still suffer from increasing levels of violence resulting from the persisting culture of patriarchy and tribalism that relegates women to

inferior positions in society. Accordingly, the thesis has confirmed the way in which recent fiction exposes the way in which boundaries between civilian and militarized zones are fading, with women no longer far from fighting lines as private civilian sites are turned into war spaces.

An important aspect in the depiction of these practices is the focus on the multiplicity of the actors and structures contributing to their perpetuation and enhancement. Despite the increasing roles of Kurdish women in the Kurdish struggle for independence, Kurdish national movements and many political groups have historically worked as an obstacle to the advancement of equality in gender relations and broader socio-political equality (Fischer-Tahir, Andrea 2010, Al-Ali 2008, Brown and Romano 2006, Mojab 2001). Kurdish women's roles are also restrained by the patriarchal and tribal structures of the Kurdish society, which has traditionally enhanced the misogynist ideologies of Kurdish national and political actors. It is not a coincidence, then, that Kurdish women's literary production, which has been intimately bound up with their historical and political experiences, has been limited, to a certain degree, by continuing male-domination within Kurdish literary circles.

Given the multi-faceted and multi-layered impact of armed conflicts and patriarchal gender norms on Kurdish women as represented in the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, I have argued for an approach in the form of a three-moment periodizing chronological model that divides the novels' representation of women and the violence they experience in relation to modern Kurdish history according to three interrelated phases: women and war-related violence, women and post-conflict violence, and women and terrorism-related violence. This three-moment periodizing model is both derived from, and follows, Kurdish authors' own portrayal of the different patterns of violence practiced against Kurdish women, and the different structures and actors responsible for its perpetuation and persistence. I have offered this three-moment periodizing model as a new, and, I hope, not only useful but essential, means of understanding the emergence of new forms of feminist representation in the Bahdini novel. h

The thesis has also established that representations of violence against women in the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, studied in relation to the postcolonial and third world feminist canon have been accompanied by the depiction of women's resistance strategies and their developmental trajectories as they come both to understand their social positions and to change them. In the investigation of Kurdish women's development, a strong case has been made in the thesis for the relevance of Rita Felski's arguments about the Bildungsroman, the novel of awakening, and the feminist counter-public spheres to the emerging Kurdish novel by Bahdini authors. The relation to Felski's narrative models and

concepts is based on the way these forms can provide platforms for the protagonists' resistance and survival through a refusal of the patriarchal values of the society rather than a passive submission and eventual death or defeat, as well as a successful emotional and psychological transformation of the female protagonist. Stella Bolaki's work on the ethnic American feminist Bildungsroman emphasises how writers such as Audre Lorde go much further to trouble settled certainties of genre and form than do the white European and American feminist authors who are Felski's principal focus.

In this study, having dealt with the novels written by both male and female Bahdini authors, it has been argued that, as far as women's representation is concerned, the thesis has manifested that, for decades, Kurdish women were not able to register any significant presence in Kurdish novels, which mainly depicted Kurdish national themes that emphasized love of homeland and identity, and Kurdish aspirations for freedom and independence. Male Kurdish novelists have been analysed here alongside women writers because these particular authors have argued for foregrounding the portrayal of women and gender roles in Kurdish society, women's roles in various social institutions, and relationships between men and women. The thesis has shown that in these novels, read as mediums of representation created in a situation of violence and urgency, the author's gender is of almost no relevance. Novels by Kurdish women need to be read alongside novels by their male counterparts:

These novels, like the novels written by Kurdish men, are characterized by their major focus being on the national question. The reader of these novels immediately notices that the fortunes of the characters, even the female ones, are an effect of their being "Kurd" rather than "female." The deliberate passages in some of these novels regarding the agonies of women because of the patriarchy in Kurdish societies are mostly subordinated to the fight of Kurds for their national rights.⁶³⁹

Ahmadzadeh's comments here certainly apply to the earliest female-authored Kurdish novels. As my investigation has shown, these works exhibited little difference from those written by male novelists in that they emphasized similar national and political issues rather than feminist themes.

The thesis has shown that after the creation of the quasi-independent Kurdish state, the notable attention to freedom of expression and the prevalence of writing and publishing opportunities, feminist issues have undoubtedly begun to appear more strongly and clearly in works by both Iraqi male Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan and the emerging female novelists. A number of novels written after 1991 are characterized by the employment of feminist themes as central to the understanding of Kurdish women's personal and political aspirations to break silence and resist subjugation and

⁶³⁹ Hashem Ahmadzadeh, "The World of Kurdish Women's Novels," *Iranian Studies* 41:5 (2008): 738.

violence. These novels show a deep interest in Kurdish women as individuals and in their communal, national and international rights and in the necessity of resisting and eradicating violence. Moreover, they concentrate on the inner lives of Kurdish women and their evolving image, subjectivity, and the recreation of their distinct identity. This aspect of interiority has taken on a more powerful configuration with the emergence of novels by female Bahdini novelists, including Balata and Niheli, whose works so vividly depict the contemporary feminist issues that condition the lives and experiences of the Kurdish women in Iraq.

As far as the literary quality of the Kurdish novels in Bahdinan is concerned, the thesis has asserted that emerging Bahdini authors tend to employ simple structures, plain forms of narration and traditional stylistic and formal techniques. The role of Kurdish journalism and printing in the enhancement of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan has also been explored, especially its role during the 2000s and 2010s. During these years, significant cultural and socio-political developments started to take place in all the domains of life. Greater contact with the outside world, as well as the outstanding contributions of Kurdish writers in the diaspora, have all contributed to revolutionizing the way Kurdish literature is written, both in terms of content and form, and have introduced, for the first time, questions of ideology, philosophy and feminist thinking into Kurdish literary genres in Bahdinan.

Addressing the deficiencies in the formal properties of the Bahdini novelistic discourse in one hand and the strong implementation of subject matters and themes in the other, the thesis has confirmed that the study not only puts forward a framework for the critical and analytical reception of contemporary novels by Bahdini authors but also serve to open new spaces for the study of women's voices, experiences and activism in the novelistic discourse. This was evidenced during a meeting I had with a number of feminists currently active in KRG in which they showed their appreciation of the findings of the study especially those concerning the identification and analysis of the various actors and structures that cause and enhance violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan both in peaceful and conflicted contexts. They also displayed an interest in the ways in which different forms and layers of violence against women are represented in the Bahdini novelistic discourse. These feminists asserted that their objectives and projects as women's rights activists are reiterated in this form of literature in so far as Kurdish women's activism, resilience, and transformation are depicted as well as acts of speaking and telling stories of violence are treated as political and cathartic acts through which women attempt to bring about change. The personal stories these women tell/write/paint not only delineate a traditionally silenced and marginalized groups of women and denounce the various actors and

structures behind their subjugation, but also problematize the damaging effects of a variety of social structures and political movements.

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Appendix 1

A List of Published Novels in Bahdinan

Below is a list of published novels by Iraqi Kurdish authors in Bahdinan since the first emergence of this literary genre in the late 1980s. Kurdish titles written in Kurdish Latin alphabets are included.

Name of Author	Title of the Novel	Publication Year
Karim Jamil Biyani	<i>Deravê Teng</i> (Difficult Situation)	1988
Nafe'e Akrayi	<i>Buhjîn</i> (Assimilation)	1989
Sidqi Hirori	<i>Korê Zinarê Ser Blind</i> (The Son of the Undefeated Zinar)	1996
Sidqi Hirori	<i>Evin u Şewat</i> (Love and Fire)	1998
Mohammed Selim Sowari	<i>Buhjîn: Bergê Dwê</i> (Assimilation: Part Two)	2000
Hassan Silevani	<i>Gulistan u Şev</i> (Gulistan and Night)	2000
Anwer Mohammed Tahir	<i>Geryan Li Babê Berze</i> (Search for the Lost Father)	2000
Zharo Duhoki	<i>Bayê Pişi</i> (Of Little Value)	2001
Taha Naji	<i>Ew Aşê Derav Lê Wergaray</i> (The Mill that Changed the Water's Stream)	2002
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Dozexa Spî</i> (The White Hell)	2004
Hizirvan Abdulla	<i>Hêlên Sor</i> (Red Lines)	2004
Sabri Silevan	<i>Ava Mazin</i> (The Great Water)	2004
Hiner Saleem	<i>My Father's Rifle: A Childhood in Kurdistan</i>	2004
Tahsin Navishiki	<i>Janên Sinahiyê</i> (Agonies of Insights)	2005
Blind Mohammed	<i>Sotingeh</i> (Holocaust)	2005
Sabri Silevan	<i>Bist Sal u Êvarek</i> (Twenty Years and a Night)	2005
Muhsin Abdul-Rahman	<i>Viyan d Demekê Jandarda</i> (Love in a Painful Time)	2005
Mohammed Selim Sowari	<i>Gund</i> (Village)	2005
Ismat Mohammed Badal	<i>Dawiya Şervaneki</i> (The End of A Worrier)	2005

Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Şevên Sar</i> (Cold Nights)	2006
Kovan Sindi	<i>Rojên Êtwinê</i> (Lonely Days)	2007
Tahsin Navishki	<i>Cavê Sitafkê</i> (The Eye of the Shadow)	2007
Sabri Silevan	<i>Mariama: Kiçe-Jinek ji Zemanek Di</i> (Mariama: A Woman from Another Time)	2007
Sidqi Hirori	<i>Ez u Delal</i> (Dalal and Me)	2007
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Şevên Prag</i> (Prague's Nights)	2008
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Xeca Berlîni</i> (Berlîni Khaj)	2008
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Memo Kew Berda</i> (Memo Released the Pigeon)	2008
Tahsin Navishki	<i>Pel u Xoli</i> (Ember and Ash)	2008
Muhsin Abdul-Rahman	<i>Baxore</i> (Bakhoor)	2009
Abdul-Karim Yonis Geyrani	<i>Torin</i> (Toreen)	2009
Qasim Barwari	<i>al-Nasir al-Tai'h: al- Jiz' al-Awal</i> (The Lost Eagle: Part One)	2009
Tahsin Navishki	<i>Alê Di Yê Prê</i> (The Other Side of the Bridge)	2010
Sabri Silevan	<i>Sifra Silevi</i> (Silevi's Book)	2010
Sadiq Hamid	<i>Kimêdê Gewre</i> (The Great Kimed)	2010
Mohammed Selim Sowari	<i>Warê Rondika</i> (The Land of Tears)	2010
Qasim Barwari	<i>al-Nasir al-Tai'h: al- Jiz' al-Tani</i> (The Lost Eagle: Part Two)	2010
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Evin u Anfal</i> (Love and Anfal)	2010
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Siviltana</i> (Siviltana)	2010
Qasham Ali Balata	<i>Runaway to Nowhere</i>	2010
Qasim Barwari	<i>Burkana Hakari</i> (Hakari Volcano)	2011
Tahsin Navishki	<i>Tavge</i> (Tavge)	2011
Tahsin Navishki	<i>Beheshta Agri</i> (A Hellish Heaven)	2011

Kemal Silevani	<i>Neya Bendemanê</i> (The Pain of Waiting)	2011
Kovan Sindi	<i>Nalinên Berava</i> (The Murmurs of Defenders)	2011
Hasan Ibrahim	<i>Silav u Mêrên wê</i> (Silav and Her Husbands)	2011
Sami Sileman	<i>A'wla Seg</i> (A'wla Seg)	2011
Sami Sileman	<i>Mrgi Geranewe</i> (The Pain of Coming Back)	2011
Hizirvan Abdulla	<i>Şopên Rondikan</i> (The Waves of Tears)	2011
Anwer Mohammed Tahir	<i>Korê Safa Re'enayê</i> (Safa Re'enaye's Son)	2012
Ahmad Balayi	<i>Pêlek Ji Bayê Reş</i> (A Wave of Black Wind)	2012
Sindis Niheli	<i>Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Êkê</i> (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One)	2013
Gharbi Mustafa	<i>When the Mountains Weep: Coming of Age in Kurdistan</i>	2013
Awaz Mustafa Barwari	<i>Jivanek bo Niva Şevê</i> (A Date in Middle of Night)	2013
Sindis Niheli	<i>Hizar Di Werçerxana Da, Bergê Dwê</i> (Hizar and the Vicissitudes of Life, Part One)	2014
Gharbi Mustafa	<i>What Comes With The Dust: Goes With the Wind</i>	2016

Appendix 2

Personal Interviews with Kurdish Authors and Critics in Duhok

Below are the personal interviews I conducted as part of my thesis fieldwork in KRG with the four writers analysed in this thesis and a number of Kurdish critics and scholars currently in Duhok/KRG.

Monday 20.11.2016	11:00 am.
Dr. Kamiran Barwary	Kurdish Department/Faculty of Humanities/ University of Duhok

Question 1: As a scholar and critic, you have been working for years on different forms of Kurdish literary production. How do you describe the history of Kurdish literature?

It has been determined that the Kurdish nation is one of the oldest nations to exist in the Middle East. Historically, almost all archeologists agree that humanity has always been present in the region comprising Kurdistan today. Religiously, many surviving relics, as well as references within the Books, clearly indicate that Kurds and Kurdistan have long been of significance. Prehistoric Kurdish literature has representations of oral vernacular forms and folklore of which very few pieces are extant today. Kurdish written literature took much longer to appear, although I tend to agree that the Kurdish language shares many linguistic and morphological features with the above, and has been closely associated with Sumerian, the language of ancient Sumer, as spoken in Mesopotamia; hence, Gilgamesh, the greatest surviving work of literature, is partly written in Kurdish. This, however, has not been fully established in an academic sense, and currently remains a matter of individual assessment and investigation.

Significant traces of written Kurdish literature are seen in three main, though disparate, dialects: first, *Lori*, the dialect used by the highly prominent Baba Tahré Hamadani. Lori literature and religious writing are still flourishing and are widely employed in western Iran and eastern Iraq where the religion Yarsan or Ahl-e Haqq has been adopted. The second dialect used to write Kurdish literature is *Hawramani*, which I prefer to call *Gorani*, of which the oldest Kurdish literary traces are still extant today. An important dialect, known as *Baban* (later becoming known as *Sorani*) became one of most important literary languages through the works of Nali, Salim and Kurdi between 1800 and 1867. The first written pieces of Kurdish literature in *Kurmanji*, the third dialect used to write Kurdish literature, includes the works of Baba Rokhe Hamzani, Abo Barakaté Hakari, Hasané Hakari, and Shekh Adi,

which were written over approximately 1200 years ago. Kurdish classical literature witnessed a significant enhancement in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and a real renaissance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the valuable contributions of the respectful Feqi Teyran, Malaye Jaziri, Ahmad Khani, Saleem Hizani and other intellectuals and writers. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are marked by the significant and influential contributions of the Badir Khani family, Qadrican, Cegerkhwin, Tirezh, Osman Sabri, amongst many others, in all four parts of Kurdistan. Early modern and contemporary Kurdish literature, in all its forms, as written in Kurmanji (including Bahdini dialect) is progressing in a very notable way as you may have mentioned in your study. The same is true of Kurdish literature written in all other dialects and sub-dialects of Kurdish, though of course to different degrees. Despite the persistent diversity in the Kurdish language and in its literary production, we, as Kurds, are proud to have developed a unique cultural and literary identity in face of the many historical and political restrictions.

Question 2: Contemporary Kurdish literary productions in Iraq have undoubtedly been developed from and inspired by the classical forms of Kurdish literature, how do you define the current state of Kurdish literature focusing on the Bahdinin region?

First of all, when we say Kurdish classical literature, the term ‘classic’ here should not be confused with the concept of European classicism, that is, a literature developed following the literary models of the Roman and Greek literary traditions. Rather we must say that Kurdish literature can be divided into two distinct literary periods: ‘Old’ literature, which many scholars tend to call classical literature, and ‘New’ literature, which can easily be defined as modern and post-modern. It is also very natural to illustrate that Kurdish classical literature has been developed from Kurdish folkloric discourses and oral traditions. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century when Kurdish intellectuals and writers realised that Kurdish literature, in its classical, ‘old’ forms, could no longer express the needs and experiences of the Kurdish individual, and began to develop more uniquely Kurdish literary forms by breaking from the traditional forms that were highly influenced by the Arabic, Turkish and Persian literature. Moreover, both thematically and formalistically, new forms and genres of Kurdish literature were developed. In Bahdinin, clear traces of this transformation and modernisation can be seen in the early poetry of such poets as Bakir Begé Arizi, Husni Bamerni, Ahmad Nalbend, and later in the poetry of Anwer Mayi, Sheikh Memdough Brifkani, Sadiq Baha’ddin Amedi, amongst many others. In the seventies and eighties, Kurdish poets and writers began to develop new literary genres including artistic short stories, drama, novels and other forms of prose writing, and further introduced various forms of novelistic discourse that were completely absent from Kurdish literature in Bahdinin. For

example, we witnessed the employment of the epistolary novel for the first time in Bahdinan in Hasan Silevani's *Gulistan u Shev*, (Gulistan and the Night) as early as 1987. Kurdish journalism and printing have played a major role in enhancing these literary forms, especially after 1991 and the establishment of the KRG. In the 2000s and 2010s, following the significant cultural and socio-political developments experienced by Kurdish people in all the domains of life and highly influential contact with outside world, as well as the outstanding contributions of Kurdish writers in the diaspora, various groups of Kurdish poets and writers in the various regions of Bahdinan, including Duhok City, Amédi, Akre, Zakho and Semelé, have revolutionised the way Kurdish literature is written both in terms of content and form; they have further introduced, for the first time, questions of ideology, philosophy and thinking into Kurdish literary genres in Bahdinan. Today, through the remarkable role of Duhok and other universities, there are substantial numbers of MA and PhD theses that have investigated and directly influenced the Kurdish literary experience in Bahdinan.

Question 3: How do you describe the role and importance of the efforts of Kurdish intellectuals and writers in the Kurdish Diaspora in enhancing and enriching Kurdish literature in Bahdinan and particularly novelist discourse?

Of course, it is quite natural that one way or another, literary works do influence each other when they come into contact. Following the huge waves of Kurdish migration in the 1950s and 1960s onwards from all four parts of Kurdistan, Kurdish writers began to build bridges with different European and other Western literary experiences and started to introduce forms and styles of writing that would have otherwise have remained foreign to the Kurds. Today, you can easily feel and detect the impact of such literary schools and movements such as surrealism, expressionism, and Dadaism in the Kurdish literature in general, and in Bahdinan in particular, which are mainly attributed to this contact with the West. Hence, I describe this interrelationship between our writers inside Kurdistan and those benefitting from the development experienced by Western literatures as a highly pivotal and healthy phenomenon and as an enhancing mechanism for the development of Kurdish literature.

Question 4: What is your comment on the non-/existence, definition and literary quality of Kurdish novels in Bahdinan?

There might well be ongoing discussion and investigation into the definition and quality of Kurdish novels in Bahdinan, but I don't think we need to discuss its existence as I believe it has effectively registered and confirmed itself as a practical and determined Kurdish literary form, particularly following the 2000s, with the substantial number of Bahdini novels that were published by a growing

number of novelists. My position becomes more valid when one remembers that the first Kurdish novel appeared as early as the 1930s with the works of Arab Shemo, Ali Abdul-Rahman and Kamiran Badir Khan. Although Kurdish novels in Bahdinan only emerged as recently in the 1980s with the works of Dr. Nafi' Akreyi and Kerim Jamil Biyani, their works contained all the standard features and mechanisms of artistic novels. Although this genre is still suffering from a number of notable defects in its general structure, size, language, style and form, it is clear that our novelists are continually experimenting with new methods and techniques to improve their work, benefitting extensively from the growing movement of literary criticism and translation as well as significant scholarly studies and research. Personally, I have always stated that the novels of such individuals as Tahsin Navishki, Sabri Silevani and Hassan Ibrahim are not less in quality than any Arabic or other Middle Eastern texts.

Question 5: Do you think that Kurdish women writers in Bahdinan will find an opportunity to determine themselves as influential writers and will be able to produce significant texts?

Yes, absolutely. I believe that Kurdish women are successful in all and every domain of life. History has witnessed the participation of many Kurdish women and the great national and socio-political roles they have played. Kurdish women have become highly influential, official leaders of tribes, cities and whole principalities. Accordingly, I believe that in the following ten to fifteen years, we will see outstanding contributions and developments of many Kurdish women writers in Bahdinan.

Question 6: Finally, I would really appreciate to hear your point of view regarding the adoption of language (and the place of publication) as measures to determine the identity of a Kurdish text.

I think language cannot be a measure in this case. This, of course, is not an exclusively Kurdish issue. Such questions and debates do continue to exist in the literature of other nations including American, Russian, French and even Arabic literature. It is my position that by disregarding the language and the place of publication, any text that depicts Kurdish culture, life, experiences and ideologies can be considered a Kurdish text. I will give the example of the first Kurdish historical book, *Sharafnama*, (The Book of Honor) written in 1597 by Sharaf Khan Bidlisi (1543-1604) and published in Tabriz, one of the historical capitals of Iran. Because this book deals with such Kurdish historical phenomena as the Kurdish dynasties, the Kurdish principalities and refers to the pre-Islamic ancestors of the Kurds, Persians refuse to consider it a Persian history text, despite being written in the Persian language. The same is true of the novels of Ali Ashraf (written in Persian), Salim Barakat and Abdul-Majid Lutfi (written in Arabic), and Yashar Kemal (written in Turkish) which are all considered, even by a number

of Persian, Arabic and Turkish scholars, as Kurdish texts rather than Persian, Arabic and Turkish. Language, in the case of these texts, has only been a tool to portray the novelists' ideas and intentions rather than as an element to determine their identities or that of their works. I will also add the example of Yashar Kemal's *Look, the Euphrates is Flowing with Blood* (1997) which, although written in Turkish, is thoroughly, in bone and flesh, a novel about the Kurds and Kurdistan; hence, Turkish critics and scholars are not entirely clear about his identity and that of his works, despite his very prominent literary position today. So, it is the content of the literary text that determines its national identity, rather than its language or place of publication.

Sunday 20.11.2016

12:00 pm.

Ni'mat Niheli

Kurdish Department/Faculty of Humanities/ University of Duhok

Question 1: You've mentioned on more than one occasion that, formalistically, the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan suffers from serious drawbacks. What are your comments and notes on the form of Bahdini novel?

Yes, I believe the current incompetent form of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan can be attributed to two major issues: first, the considerable delay in the emergence of this genre in Bahdinan resulted in the absence of the novelistic tradition that is necessary for new novelists to build on. Almost all Bahdini novelists had to start from scratch and usually followed the same line as their contemporaries who themselves had already suffered from the absence of any established novelistic discourse. Second, most Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan used to be (and many are still) originally poet-playwrights, or short-story writers who are not well informed, experienced or even skilled in the art of novel writing. So, when they started to produce novels, which are technically very different from poetry and short stories, they could not develop well-structured forms or experiment with the significant literary techniques and styles that are necessary to building the world of the novel. What was more, instead of enhancing this genre, each novelist, regardless of the subject matter of their novel, followed the same line as their contemporaries in writing texts which did not serve, or even effectively contribute, to the development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. Let me add that this drawback is only formal, and I can confirm that, thematically, the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan is very rich and effective in its presentation of subjects of great importance. These subjects and themes, I will also add, are most commonly depicted and presented in a substantially skilled way. Therefore, I feel it is time for novelists in Bahdinan to educate themselves in the art of novel writing through reading up-to-date

scholarly studies on the novel and organising and attending conferences and forums that concentrate on the novel.

Question 2: What other impediments to the development of Kurdish novel in Bahdinan can you add?

The persistent lack of professionally effective and constructive movements of literary criticism and academic scholarship is a major obstacle that currently faces Kurdish novels in Bahdinan. We have novelists who have produced more than five novels with no single academic research or critical article examining or judging them. With no studies showing the strengths and weaknesses of their texts, the writer will surely go on with the same set of skills, and if we are to imagine the worst may even, in their ignorance, repeat the same weaknesses over and over again. When you read a Bahdini novel, you can easily feel the writer's limited knowledge of literary techniques and the art of constructing a text, even though the subject and themes depicted are of great value to society. Moreover, because of the rather enclosed and traditional nature of our society, our writers still consider criticism on a subjective level, and by so failing to detach themselves from their works, take criticism as an attack on their own person. This has proved a real setback for critics in Bahdinan, who either become unwilling to show the deficiencies of a certain text or concentrate only on its strong points. Accordingly, the unclear generic configuration of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan can be easily attributed to the lack of criticism and the unwillingness of our own writers to develop their writing skills, gain contact with foreign novelistic discourse and improve the literary quality of their own texts.

Question 3: How do you describe the current state of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan compared to the Kurdish novel in the Sorani-speaking areas?

Historically speaking, unlike Bahdini, Sorani dialect has been formally recognised and employed in Iraq for a number of decades. Also, the Sorani novel preceded the Bahdini novel in its emergence, which means it had gone through the processes of development and transformation before the appearance of a Bahdini text. Eventually, Kurdish writers in the Sorani-speaking areas have been able to write influential novels and introduce many novelistic sub-forms into Kurdish literature. The Sorani novelistic experience has also benefitted from the active movements of translation, literary criticism and academic scholarship that have been ongoing for decades in Sorani-speaking areas. Critics in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah have played a highly significant role in enhancing the genre of the novel and in emphasising Sorani writers and novelists such as Bakhtiyar Ali, who has become an internationally

acclaimed Kurdish novelist and whose works have been translated to more than one European language.

Question 4: I would appreciate learning your point of view concerning the question of language as a determining measure in the identification of a literary text.

I am, of course, well aware of the heated and ongoing— and in most cases confusing— debate over the subject, and have been personally involved in such discussion in a number of seminars and local conferences. I am certain that it will take a long time for these two opposing points of view to settle as the Kurdish language itself needs much time, effort and resources to establish any kind of standardisation or even unification. We have significant novels produced by influential Kurdish novelists in other languages in all the four parts of Kurdistan. I have always sided with the group that advocate a novel's content, cultural representation, subject matter, setting and the characters' identities as factors to ascertain and decide its identity, particularly novels which are most often filled with descriptions and detailed expressions that are essentially and uniquely Kurdish. Understanding and taking into account the circumstances that have historically impeded the natural evolution of Kurdish language and literature, I believe that persisting with language as a measure to define and configure the boundaries of Kurdish novelistic discourse will neither serve the development of Kurdish literature, nor that of Kurdish writers.

Question 5: To what factors do you attribute the absence of a literary tradition by Kurdish women, particularly in Bahdinan?

I think it is another long discussion, but long story short, I would say, first, the traditional and very restrictive view on the part of Kurdish culture and society regards women as part of the household, rather than as part of public life and public spheres, and that that is the foremost factor in preventing them from making more significant literary contributions. Second, Kurdish women themselves can be held responsible, at least to an extent, for not emerging and demanding or creating a recognised literary voice. If Kurdish women have historically been denied the opportunity to establish themselves in the socio-political and literary domains, today they have a golden opportunity to participate and enhance their roles. Today, hundreds of young Kurdish women are graduates of Kurdish language and literature departments, but instead of establishing themselves as writers and authors, they are content to teach the Kurdish language in schools. I believe it is time for the long-established equation to change, and such women must become part of this change. Still, however, I am sure that Kurdish women writers in

Bahdinan will manage to make influential contributions to Kurdish literature in the near future and the currently emerging women novelists are clear evidence of this transformation and progress.

Question 6: To what extent do you believe Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan have been successful in representing and showing the reality of Kurdish women's experiences in the different historical periods of Iraq's modern history?

This depends to a great extent on the attitude and outlook of the individual novelists towards women as characters in their works and the way in which they wish to present their female characters, although I don't mean to say that they have not been realistic and objective in their depiction of these characters. There are some instances in which women have been portrayed as second-class citizens, whilst in other cases they are presented as goddesses or perfect personalities. As far as the female characters such as Mariama, Nareen, Tavge and Hizar that you mentioned are concerned, I think such women have always existed in the Kurdish society and our writers are not portraying exceptional or imaginative women that can only exist in the fictional world. Because of their enthusiasm regarding the stature and socio-political roles of Kurdish women, these writers have endeavored to depict dozens of Kurdish women in different shapes and positions through one female character, which may— or, indeed, may not— be a very practical, truthful or realistic image. This is my only reservation concerning the representation of Kurdish women in the Bahdini novel.

Thursday 17.11.2016

4:30 pm.

**Qasham Ali Balata
Malta/Duhok**

Her House in

Question 1: What were the main factors behind writing your first novel, *Runaway to Nowhere*, in English rather than in the Bahdini dialect? And how will you describe the identity of your text given that it is written in English, not Kurdish?

In addition to the fact that almost all my studies and readings have always been in English, even before living in the USA, my major aim was to produce a text that would be accessible to as many readers as possible. In the USA, I began to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds and read works from different literary and writing experiences. Soon, I was surprised by the confusing and rather contradictory viewpoints that people had about the Kurds and their national cause. Hence, I became determined, more than ever, to show the whole world the reality of the Kurdish historical and socio-political situation, at least in the part of Kurdistan that I come from. I considered my good

knowledge of English as a privilege, and a significant tool to employ in my writing career. Moreover, I felt it was my responsibility to record and depict some of the miserable experiences of the Kurdish nation and the atrocities and violence imposed on it, particularly Kurdish women who remain the most common recipients of violence and oppression.

Regarding the second question, I don't think language should be used to determine the identity of a literary text. I am well aware that some Kurdish scholars consider language to be the main determinant for the inclusion and exclusion of a text within Kurdish literature, and I have been told more than once that my novel cannot be considered Kurdish literature. However, for me it is the spirit of the text, which is, the culture, the social manners and traditions represented, that should be used as measures to define a literary text.

Question 2: You talked about showing the reality of the Kurdish situation. How important is it to represent history, society and politics through literature?

Kurdish history is very rich with significant life-changing events, and it is the responsibility and duty of scholars like you, and writers like me, to record them and show them to the world so that everyone gets the real picture as it was, not as certain TV programmes would present. I am very pleased to see Kurdish writers in general and in Bahdininan in particular so much concerned with reflecting Kurdish history and socio-politics in their works. There are a number of Kurdish writers writing both in Bahdini and Sorani who have endeavored to represent the same historical period as *Runaway to Nowhere*, namely, events immediately before and during the Kurdish mass-exodus from Kurdish cities and towns in Iraq to the frozen mountains in Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan. However, very few, if any, have concentrated on the experiences and suffering of Kurdish women during such difficult situations. I have tried to show the ways Kurdish women have attempted to survive in such moments through bonding, coming together and supporting each other. I believe it is important to represent detailed pictures of women going through wars, escapes, family tragedies, loss of friends and family members, and loss of love and future. But it is also important is to show how these women refused to give up and decided to move on and make the best of what they already had while not giving up their broader goals, which concern their voice and contribution in issues such as nation-building, conflict resolution and peace-preservation. This is exactly how I depict Nareen, the protagonist, and her female friends.

Question 3: What is the importance of women bonding and coming together?

To stand alone in such difficult situations as depicted in *Runaway to Nowhere* and survive is almost a miracle. I can tell you from experience that Kurdish women easily connect and build intimate friendships and relationships. Nareen wouldn't be able to make it alone with her little brother and very limited experience in such a place as the crowded refugee camp. So, yes, it is essential for Nareen to connect with other women in the camp, as was also natural for her to form such strong friendships with her roommates.

Question 4: What about the form and narrative techniques in *Runaway to Nowhere*?

Narration in *Runaway to Nowhere* is very simple. An unknown narrator tells the main story with sub-stories being told by different characters. Because I was aiming at an audience that is generally not Kurdish, I thought it would be helpful to give a very brief introduction to the Kurds in the prologue and the events and socio-political changes following the establishment of the KRG, which was reflected through the characters' gathering nine years after coming back from the refugee camps.

Thursday 10.11.2016

4:00 pm.

**Sabri Silevani
Duhok**

Cultural Centre in the University of

Question 1: Let's start with the question of language as a measure to determine the identity of a literary text.

We all understand that language is a system, and speech is the practice of that system. Hence, language and not speech is a tool to write a literary text. Due to long years of invasion and the division of Kurdistan among different nation-states and the prohibition of the Kurdish language in these states, as well as the persistence of tribal ideologies and illiteracy in the Kurdish society and the long-lasting effects of war and destruction, Kurds have not been able to develop a unified and standard language; the Kurdish family no longer uses Kurdish to communicate. In Iraq, it was only after 1991 and the ability of Kurds to establish contact with the linguistic, literary and educational developments and the global technological revolution, that Kurds were able to at least start talk about the standardisation of the Kurdish language. As writers, we understand very well that there is no point in waiting for a unified language, and efforts should be paid at a time when the Kurds are in most need of linguistic and literary recognition and promotion. As far as my own writings are concerned, I try to use a form of

language that is accessible to as many fractions of the Kurdish population as possible, taking into account their different intellectual, educational and literary backgrounds. In my writings, I endeavour to employ a kind of language that can be described as a ‘mixed form’, which mingles more than one style and sub-dialect of Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish). For example, in my first novel *Ava Mazin* (The Great Water, 2004), I purposefully incorporated a number of words, phrases and expressions that are very common in the Sorani-speaking areas so that it becomes readable by Sorani-speakers; this is a personal choice, rather than a systematised linguistic process that is shared by a certain group of Kurdish writers.

Question 2: Are works written in Duhok read in Erbil, Sulemani and other parts of Kurdistan and vice versa?

Very rarely I believe. I can confirm, however, that since the educational, intellectual and literary levels of the inhabitants of Duhok are below the required standards, due to their long decades of official marginalisation and invisibility, they urgently need to read both local and international works.

Question 3: What do you think is the impact of the absence of an eager readership on the writing quality and production of Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan?

As I have mentioned before, readership in Bahdinan is almost absent, which I believe has resulted from a poor understanding and application of religious and tribal ideologies. Kurdish writers themselves are required to read and study more in order to be more productive. To avoid the complication of this issue, a more active movement of translation is needed, and better contact with flourishing Western writing styles should be encouraged. Personally, I always try to build such bridges by speaking and attending seminars and literary conferences in Erbil, Sulemani, Amad, and other parts of Kurdistan, and endeavour to represent the region through the literary works produced here. It is very important to connect with each other and benefit from each other’s linguistic and literary experiences and, surely, read and study each other.

Question 4: How serious is the impact of the absence of a Kurdish literary tradition on emerging writers and literary works?

The impact is direct and great. The absence of a Kurdish literary tradition is a main reason why I, and other Kurdish writers, turn to European and other Western literary schools, styles and works to build our own works on. Creativity is a culminative process, a process that Kurdish literary history and tradition lacks. It should be mentioned that Kurdish literary works have existed throughout Kurdish

history, but these classical works are not properly evaluated, studied and analysed. Classical writers and poets such as Khani, Jaziri and Koyi have not only produced literary masterpieces, but represented the questions of Sufism, theology, philosophy, ideology and nationalism that are still positively impacting upon Kurdish life and its way of thinking. Unfortunately, the disconnection between the works of these respected classical writers and our writers today has created serious gaps and missing links that we are still suffering from. Moreover, Kurdish literature has not only been poetic discourse, it has also not been collected in a proper way and hence we cannot produce an account of the whole effectively. If it wasn't for my own experience in Europe, and my direct contact with the literary movements and works produced in the West, that have opened many horizons for me, I might not have written novels.

Question 5: How do you evaluate the current situation of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan? Do you believe it is making a progress?

There is an ongoing debate over the existence and definition of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan, and I think it still has a long way to go in order to determine itself as an established literary genre. Its identity depends on how much influence it can exert on the Kurdish individual and Kurdish society; that is, how much it is read and lived. The Kurdish novel in Bahdinan is still attempting to emerge from the personal attempts of emerging writers who themselves are actively paving the way for this literary genre to flourish. Despite its short age, attempts by Kurdish writers in Bahdinan are increasing in a notable way, and are actively contributing to the development of the Kurdish novel in general.

Question 6: You are known for your heated political opinions and contributions. What is the impact of your political activism on your writings?

Given the historical, as well as the current, situation in the Kurdish politics, it is no surprise that the major focus in the Kurdish literature, in all its forms and genres, will be the political struggle of the Kurdish people for recognition and independence. It is credible to argue that the Kurdish novel cannot be separated from the long Kurdish historical and political struggles. This is explained by the focus of Kurdish writers on such questions as Kurdish resistance, their struggle for independence and statehood, the deterioration of the economic and political conditions and human rights in the region, the systematic cleansing of ethnic and national minorities and, most recently, the fight against ISIS. Although I highly encourage the portrayal of other micro-issues, such as the daily-life of the Kurdish individual and family, man/woman relationships and Kurdish women's struggle for social and political recognition and contribution, in the Kurdish novel, I have a profound respect for writers who identify

with the macro-questions mentioned above, the pain and suffering of their people, who and endeavour to reflect them in their writings. It is a very well-known phenomenon that Kurdish intellectuals and writers have always contributed to Kurdish political activism.

Question 7: Let's talk about *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time*. What was the motivation behind the representation of a female protagonist?

In fact, by focusing on the internal feelings and personal experiences of a female protagonist in *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time*, I had more than one message to present. In addition to the depiction of the subordinate and marginalised position of women in the post-conflict Kurdish society, I endeavoured to suggest that Kurdish society as a whole needs to stop looking only at the outside form, the body of the woman, and look deeper inside her. I wanted to show everyone the reality of Kurdish women's lives, suffering, resilience, and determination to survive. It is a generally acknowledged fact that women in Iraq and Kurdistan face more than one form of violence and oppression and are doubly bound by the tyranny of the Iraqi government and by the tribal and traditional ideologies of Kurdish society. I believe that the novel can be one way to give a voice to the silenced Kurdish woman.

As a man writing about a woman's feelings and pains during such experiences as rape, abortion and sexual abuse, as well as her responses to the loss of a mother, a father, a child, and a lover, I had to do very focused and detailed research about women's responses and reactions. Before writing the novel, I needed to study various experiences that are exclusive to a woman such as childbirth and motherhood, as well as her reaction to sexual exploitation and disappointment in love.

Question 8: What about language, style and literary techniques in *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time*?

Language in *Mariama: A Woman from Another Time* is purely feminist, and expresses true female attitudes and preoccupations. An important stylistic dimension in the novel is the overt employment of interactive dialogue. I have benefited immensely from reading the Western novel and its emphasis on the individual as a representative of the group.

Monday 14.11.2016

3:30 pm.

**Sindis Niheli
Zirka/Duhok**

Her House in

Question 1: What motivated you to start a literary career?

I have extensively read Kurdish poetry, short stories and novels written in both dialects of Bahdini and Sorani, and have benefited from the emerging body of criticism that endeavours to define, describe and analyse the situation of the Kurdish novel. I also feel that we, as Kurds, have numerous stories to tell and write and hence writing has become a way of telling stories that may otherwise remain untold. This is one reason why Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan have been inspired by such Kurdish historical and political incidents as the Gulf Wars, the Anfal, the mass-exodus and the Kurdish civil war, as well as the political and administrative corruption and criminal and terrorist activities. By listing these issues as themes employed in our novels, I intend to emphasise the significant role a literary career can play in Kurdish society.

Question 2: What is the impact of your personal experiences as a Kurdish woman on your novels?

You agree with me that the novel is the mirror of life, don't you? No matter how objective and realistic I attempt to be, as a writer, I cannot separate myself from my writing. Although I haven't fought on the front and in the mountains against the Ba'ath regime myself, I have always been a part of a world torn by wars, displacement and political struggle for independence. My family, like most Kurdish families, has lost more than one member because of their participation in the Kurdish national cause, has been displaced more than once, even before I was born, and has witnessed fear, hunger and persecution. Since childhood, I have been hearing stories of pain, loss, mourning and death. I think it is the responsibility of Kurdish intellectuals and writers to record and comment on these significant incidents of Kurdish history. Additionally, I am part of, and interacting with, all the existing social manners and traditions of Kurdish society. Hence, my work, like the vast majority of Kurdish literature, is a depiction of the life of the Kurdish individual at the various turning points of Kurdish history.

Question 3: How do you evaluate the current status and development of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan?

Although debate over the definition and quality of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan is still a very heated one, based on my own readings I can confirm that it is in a constant growth. Comparing Nafe' Akray's *Buhjeen* (Assimilation), the first Kurdish novel in Bahdinan written in 1989, to, let's say, Blind Mohammed's *Sotingeh* (Holocaust), written in 2007, we can see how Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan have been trying to promote both the content and form of their novels. The emerging texts are not only incorporating social and psychological issues that concern the Kurdish individual with broader

questions of Kurdish national and political struggle, but formalistically they are experimenting with modern literary techniques and styles. Unfortunately, this growth is slow given the almost complete lack of translation of literary texts into, and from, Bahdini, the very weak and impractical criticism they receive, and the lack of scholarly research on this production and unavailability of effective peer-reviewing or gate-keeping institutions to evaluate and judge the quality of the literary texts before they are published.

Question 4: How much has the absence of a literary tradition by Kurdish women impacted upon your own literary career and attempts to produce a novel?

This is a good question. We are all aware of the many hindrances that have faced women in Kurdish society. We have historically been confined by the misapplication of religion, politics and social traditions and manners. We have always been told what to do and what to avoid; what is allowed and what is considered taboo. These restrictions have eventually affected Kurdish women's access to literacy, education and literature. I am personally suffering from the unavailability of any established written literary discourse by Kurdish women. Because of this, I think the emerging Kurdish women writers in Bahdinan are facing serious impediments that will not only have impact upon the quality of their works but also their rate of production. Although it might not make a sense to you, I see an advantage in this absence: the unavailability of a literary tradition by Kurdish women motivated me to study the Arabic novel— and novels translated from different languages into Arabic— which has enhanced my understanding of literature in general and, I believe, will continue to enrich my future writing.

Question 5: Why have you portrayed a female main character? Is it because you are a woman?

Although many Kurdish novelists have attempted to portray female characters, most have preferred not to exclusively deal with the contributions, needs, desires and miseries of Kurdish women. As a Kurdish woman myself, I think I can easily identify with issues and feelings of particular importance to women, and can most truly represent them in a literary work. I have tried to show the strong personality and high morality of the Kurdish woman through Hizar, the protagonist of both parts of my only novel. She is a very respectful and reserved woman who, despite being in love with Ako and living and studying in a Western country, continues to hold to the religious and traditional manners of her Kurdish society and cares most about her reputation and image as a woman. Additionally, I have attempted to highlight Kurdish women's political role and activism in fighting the enemy during times of war, and fighting such issues as corruption, illiteracy and violence against women in the post-

conflict society. Moreover, by depicting Hizar as a committed national activist, faithful lover, loving wife and caring mother, I want to emphasise that Kurdish women may be successful in all circumstances and in all domains of life.

Question 6: I have realised that your use of characters' names is highly technical and symbolic; don't you agree with me?

That is very true, starting from Hizar herself. Hizar is a Kurdish name meaning a bride's (wedding) veil which, although being a very soft and weak fabric, is metaphorically used to protect and add to the bride's beauty and femininity. Hizar, a young inexperienced woman, manages to survive a destructive war, loss of family members and friends, homesickness, and political and administrative corruption without losing faith and determination in herself and her aspirations. Other names, such as Tengezar (a Kurdish name meaning persecuted and maltreated), symbolises the way the Kurdish nation is subject to persistent oppression and assimilation. I haven't used proper, known names to refer to places and cities because I believe the Kurdish misery and struggle for independence and statehood cannot be associated with any particular Kurdish city.

Question 7: Finally, can you describe the form of the novel?

First, I must admit that given the very recent discourse on the Kurdish novel, especially in Bahdinan, I had considerable difficulty in organising the narrative and planning the overall layout of the novel. I preferred to choose a documentary and journalistic style to write the novel. This choice has more to do with the subject matter, which revolves around a historical, political and social circle, and I believe such issues will necessitate the inclusion of long debates that may seem like TV talks or a press conferences.

Wednesday 16.11.2016

11:00 am.

Tahsin Navishki

Directory of Education/ Duhok

Question 1: Can we begin our interview with a brief talk about your literary career?

I began a literary career in 1989 with the publication of a collection of poems in the Bahdini section of a significant magazine called *Hawkari*, which was printed in Erbil between 1986 and 1990. My early poems were characterised by a clear emphasis on realism and symbolism, and were highly reflective of

the miseries and turmoil of the Kurds in Iraq as well as being deeply influenced by their socio-political situation. Then, I started to publish poems and short stories in a number of Kurdish periodicals in Duhok and Erbil, including *Bizav* (Endeavor, 1981-1987) and *Karwan* (1983-1988). From 1994-2003, I worked for the influential weekly magazine *Peyman* (Promise, 1993-2006) published in Duhok in the Bahdini dialect. My job as a reporter, and later as a journalist, had a profound impact on my writing career as I began to develop a sense of responsibility towards the Kurdish society. *Beheshta Agri* (A Heavenly Fire), the first novel that I wrote in 1999 but couldn't publish until 2011 because of its considerable length, tells of the victimisation of a Kurdish woman who is held in the political prison of the Ba'ath regime and her later efforts to take revenge upon the man responsible for her imprisonment. My second novel, *Janén Sinahiyé* (Agonies of Sights, 2005), which I consider to be my finest work so far, tells of the miserable life experiences of a young innocent girl under her cruel stepmother. My following works, including *Cavé Sitafké* (The Eye of the Shadow, 2007) *Pel u Xoli* (Ember and Ash, 2009) *Alé Di Ye Pré* (The Other Side of the Bridge, 2010) and *Tavge* 2011, also consider female characters in difficult situations exposed to different forms of physical, emotional and psychological violence.

Question 2: What motivated you to focus on female characters? Was it the lack of a novelistic discourse by Kurdish women? Was it an expression of a sense of responsibility? Or was it a combination of both reasons and others?

I believe it is the Kurdish novelist's duty and responsibility to represent the miseries and difficult circumstances through which Kurdish women, as part of Kurdish society, go through. I have depicted Kurdish women in different ages, occupations, social ranks and in different situations. The absence of Kurdish women novelists has been an additional motivation for me to represent the violence imposed on them and the way they endeavor to resist and fight back. I have been described in more than one place as being too pessimistic concerning the way I represent women since many of the female characters suffer, including Rawshan in *The Other Side of the Bridge* and Tavge in *Tavge*, who commit suicide after being exposed to unbearable levels of violence. That may be true to a great extent, but with the increasing levels of poverty, illiteracy, administrative and political corruption, and criminal and terrorist activities, and with the prolonged tribal and traditional ideologies, I cannot but be pessimistic regarding the fate of Kurdish women.

Question 3: Do you agree with me that corruption is one of the most prominent themes in *The Other Side of the Bridge* and *Tavge* and that it is directly connected to the rise of criminal and terrorist activities?

Completely agree with you. In both novels, women are direct victims of the prevalent embedded corruption within different domains in the Kurdish administration and government. After long decades of war and rebellion against oppressive Iraqi governments and authorities that Kurdish people in the post-conflict society are facing, I will say a new war, the continuous and ever-lasting clashes of the current Kurdish government and the central government in Baghdad on the one hand, and within the different sectors of the Kurdish government on the other. Instead of enhancing the roles and contributions of Kurdish women, the Kurdish administration, which is clearly male-dominated, insists on relegating and subjugating them. So, I think that corruption and the misapplication of power and authority is no less dangerous in the long-term than the attacks of such terrorist groups as ISIS.

Question 4: Let's talk briefly about Aram in *The Other Side of the Bridge*, both as a character and a main narrator.

Aram is a very faithful lover. After the death of his fiancée, Tavge, the protagonist in *Tavge*, he starts to read her diary, which becomes a major source of information about her life and inner feelings. It is through these diaries that we learn about what happened to Tavge. It's interesting that some details are new even to Aram, whose reactions and responses to these new bits of information are helpful to the reader in getting to know him. Although he couldn't save Tavge, he insists on completing her portrait that he had been starting to draw when the novel opened. The portrait represents the suffering and oppression experienced by Tavge, and Aram's own recollections of, and feelings for, her.

Question 5: What about your use of imagery and symbolism?

You may have realised my deep concern with symbolism right from the titles of the books. For example, the bridge in *The Other Side of the Bridge* symbolises the transition from safety and security to terror and death. From the opening pages of the novel, we hear characters expressing their deep fear of the other side of the bridge because of all the terrible news of kidnapping and killing they hear. Tavge's name, which is a Kurdish name meaning determination, symbolises Tavge's great will and bravery.

Question 6: Let's go a bit general and talk about the current state of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan. Where do you stand in the ongoing debate over its existence, definition and literary quality?

I believe we have a progressive process of novel-writing in Bahdinan. Our novelists do experiment with many forms and styles of novel writing, and endeavour to employ more than one technique in an

attempt to produce a substantially good-quality text. Unfortunately, our novel in Bahdinan still suffers from a practical lack of literary criticism, reviews and scholarship, which are essential in the enhancement of a literary text. I have produced seven novels, but they still haven't undergone any process of criticism, revision or assessment to highlight their strong and weak points. Compared to the Sorani novel produced in Sulaymaniyah, I can assure you that its comparative development is due to the significant processes of revision and criticism that it is experiencing. Moreover, we have not benefited from a significant process of translation, so that our novels might be read by an Arab, Turkish or a Western reader. By overcoming these impediments, I believe that the novelistic discourse in Bahdinan will move many steps forward.

Wednesday 22.11.2016

4:30 pm.

Dr. Ameen Abdul-Qadir

His Office in the Nalbend Publishing House/ Duhok

Question 1: Why are the historical, national and political subjects and questions so dominant in the Kurdish novel in Iraq?

It is important to remember that a novel is generally described as a reflection of life and a depiction of reality, the social, economic and political situation of the world intended for representation. In the Middle Eastern and postcolonial contexts, this has become even more evident, particularly when we consider the impact of the theories of the novel by such theorists as Lucien Goldmann and Georg Lukács, who have studied the sociology of the novel and the impact of politics and economics on the Western novel. Taking into consideration the divided nature of the Kurdish people and their historical struggle for national independence and political recognition, and remembering all the miserable Kurdish experiences such as the genocidal campaigns of Anfal between 1986 and 1989 and the Kurdish 1991 mass-exodus, it is no surprise that the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan is a direct portrayal of these historical moments and political attitudes and conflicts. Like many Arabic and Middle Eastern countries, such as Palestine, Lebanon and Algeria, where political conflict and rebellion prevail, Kurdish life in Iraq is itself dominated by politics and struggle over sovereignty and statehood. The Kurdish novel in Iraq has been employed as a tool to depict these tensions and represent the physical, emotional and psychological impact on the individual and the society.

Question 2: You have very recently finished your PhD thesis in the University of Exeter, in which you have partly concentrated on the impact of political conditions on the Kurdish novel both in Bahdinan and the Sorani-speaking areas. Based on your investigations and personal

research, how do you define and evaluate the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan compared to the Sorani novel?

There is no doubt that the Kurdish novel, as written in Sorani, has witnessed an impressive growth both thematically and formalistically. For example, Bakhtiyar Ali and Abdulla Seraj have been able to introduce such techniques as the metanovel and magic realism into the Kurdish novelistic discourse for the very first time. Their novels, including Ali's remarkable *The Last Pomegranate of the World*, have gained international recognition and have been translated into many European languages. In Bahdinan, due to the late emergence of the Kurdish novel and the considerably modest novelistic experience of our novelists, as well as, in most cases, their unwillingness to develop their writing techniques, the Bahdini novel has not as yet achieved the required artistic standards. Content-wise, the available Bahdini novels have revolved around similar subjects and that has negatively affected its growth. This relatively substandard state of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan compared to the novel written by Sorani writers can be attributed to several factors. First, the late establishment of universities (the Kurdish Department in the University of Duhok was established as recently as 1994), which has eventually caused a remarkable delay in the conducting of scholarly research and critical studies, as well as the founding of a wide intellectual readership, has represented a drawback in the writing and reception of emerging texts. Then, unlike the Sorani-speaking areas in which Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* (1906) was translated into Sorani in the 1940s, there has been an almost complete lack of translation of foreign texts into Bahdini. The late emergence of an effective literary criticism, periodicals, publishing houses and the media has also contributed to the late emergence and slow growth of Kurdish novelistic discourse in Bahdinan.

Question 3: As far as my own work is concerned, I face some difficulties in analysing the formal properties and structural elements of the novels I have selected for investigation in my own thesis. How much do you agree with me that Kurdish novelists in Bahdinan need to work on both content and form in order to produce better texts? And what are your evaluations regarding the content and the form of the Kurdish novel in Bahdinan?

Because our novelists in Bahdinan have never easily and regularly been able to gain access to and be influenced by significant works of prose fiction and to benefit from other peoples' novelistic experiences, either in their original languages or through translation, their writing experience is best described as a local one. And because they could only speak Arabic in addition to Kurdish, they were only able to read Arabic (mostly Iraqi) texts, which were themselves affected by political restrictions and were far from representative of modern artistic techniques. Content-wise, Bahdini novelists have

been able to touch upon and depict various significant questions with an immediate connection to the modern life of the Kurdish individual including corruption, freedom of expression, gender roles and Kurdish women's participation in public life. However, their formalistic experiences, I believe, remain limited, and they have not yet endeavored to break from traditional social realist methods of novel writing. It should, however, be stated that Bahdini novelists have successfully employed a number of structural elements, artistic techniques and literary styles such as flashback, stream of consciousness, effective dialogue and breaking the natural rhythm of time, which I believe are significant attempts.

Question 4: How helpful will it be for our writers, readers and scholars in Bahdinan to study high-standard academic books and critical works on the novelistic experiences of other nations translated into Bahdini?

Such works will be very helpful. I think the availability of translated works, both fiction and non-fiction, in Sorani is the main reason behind the better quality of the novel produced in the Sorani-speaking areas compared to the novel written in Bahdinan. If you visit libraries and bookshops in Erbil or Sulaymaniyah, you will find the works of the world's leading authors, such as the Russian Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy, the Brazilian Paulo Coelho, and the Colombian Gabriel Márquez, translated into Sorani. Novelists and readers in these cities very often read their works and are greatly influenced by them, and will even build on them. In Bahdinan, such attempts are still very limited if not completely absent. In Nalbend, our newly-opened publishing house, we have started a wave of translation of a number of texts by English, American and other writers including Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, amongst many others, into Bahdini.

Question 5: Going back to talk about your personal experiences as a PhD student in the UK, how beneficial and valuable do you find such academic scholarships to the enhancement of Kurdish literary and novelistic experience?

Sometimes, being away from your country gives you a kind of power and insight; that is, you can see, evaluate and judge many matters and questions in a wiser and more perceptive way. And, of course, studying in a country like the UK, where you have the opportunity to attend invaluable classes, seminars and conferences and get access to millions of resources in their original languages, prestigious libraries, and work with internationally acclaimed professors in different fields means you are better-equipped to produce scientific and high-quality research. Moreover, you are provided with better opportunities to circulate your own work through speaking at international conferences and getting your thesis published in prominent journals. I can say that people like me and you are, in a

sense, ambassadors or representatives whose duty is to introduce Kurdish history, politics, society, culture and literature to other people.

Question 6: How has the very limited availability of scientific research on the Kurdish literature, and in particular the novel, influenced your work throughout the years of your study?

No doubt that the work of such scholars as Hashem Ahmadzadeh has answered various questions and presented several helpful explanations and commentaries on many intricate aspects of Kurdish novelistic discourse, and has become an illuminative guidance for following researchers like you and me. However, no matter how comprehensive and detailed their work is, one or two scholars cannot give a clear and complete picture or explanation of the Kurdish novel, especially considering its divided and fragmented nature. I have suffered this dearth of output myself as I couldn't find answers for many of the questions raised in my study, and sometimes had to fill gaps depending on my own understanding, analysis and findings. Moreover, half of the growing body of research conducted in Kurdistan lacks many of the scientific requirements of scientific rigour. So, I believe the availability of such thoughtful works would enhance and facilitate our research.

Question 7: How difficult was it for you to investigate and analyse in English texts written in Kurdish rather than in English?

Honestly, it was not an easy job at all. It was not only a question of two entirely different languages but a question of different cultures and contexts, as well as different historical and intellectual backgrounds and experiences. I have always said that if these texts were translated into English, it would have saved me considerable time and effort. It has indeed been very difficult, but not impossible.