

An aerial photograph of a city at dusk, with a green-tinted foreground. The city is densely packed with buildings, and the sky is a mix of orange and blue. In the foreground, there is a large, green-tinted area that appears to be a rooftop or a courtyard. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CONFLICT

REDISCOVERING KURDISTAN'S CULTURES AND IDENTITIES

THE CALL OF THE CRICKET

Edited by
Joanna Bocheńska



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and Conflict

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Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities

The Call of the Cricket

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PREFACE

The twenty-first century brought an increase in global attention to the so-called Kurdish issue, which usually refers to the unsolved conflict between the Kurdish population and the officially existing states in which they live: Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The main areas of conflict are the disputed territories, called Kurdistan by the Kurds, and the right to determine the future of its inhabitants. The Kurdish identity and policy shaping the currents of the 'Kurdish issue' have become focal points for many scholars, politicians and journalists. Although it connects with the history of the conflict, this book proposes a different approach to the 'Kurdish issue'. It presents the reality of Kurdistan as a dynamic and creative space, reconsidering the cultural heritage, identities and interrelations of different ethnic and religious groups. In this way it aims to go beyond the topic of conflict, while applying a postcolonial perspective which serves as the overall theoretical framework intertwining with other specific approaches.

As suggested in our study, the long-standing conflict may perpetuate itself by reproducing narratives and interpretations that oscillate around war, combat and politics, rather than allowing a community and an area to be viewed as rich resources of different traditions and meanings that can both be helpful in solving the conflicts and simply be alluring and inspiring for others around the world. Kurdistan's cultural heritage is fascinating partly because of its centuries-long ethnic and religious diversity, but primarily due to the undying creativity and persistence of its people. So often marginalised and neglected, they have continuously overcome the obstacles of war, discrimination, isolation and poverty in order to create and reshape their cultural, social and political landscape. At the same time,

they aspire to be recognised as partners in the modern world and not only as fighters and refugees who are there to be admired for their bravery or alternatively offered shelter and compassion.

The thorough attention directed in this book to the many narratives acquired from texts or collected in field research and through many interviews and discussions reveals a wide spectrum of ideas and solutions. Starting from a basis of the preservation of languages and traditional heritage endangered by the assimilation policy of the Middle Eastern states, wars and modern ideologies, the inhabitants of Kurdistan also reinterpret its meanings. This reconsideration and reshaping is based on a selective approach to their own cultural background, which is updated according to the contemporary needs of the community. What is more, this book discusses the heritage of the Christian missionaries who were active in Kurdistan in the nineteenth century and reveals the ambiguity and diversity of that heritage in relation to the ‘Kurdish issue’.

We believe that the seven chapters dealing with these different aspects of the reality of Kurdistan will introduce this relatively lesser-known cultural heritage to the global audience and may offer new ways of seeing the long-standing conflicts. Hopefully, this book may also become an invitation to build more bridges and cooperation with those who lack a state to represent them. Maybe our attention and engagement can compensate slightly for that lack?

Kraków, Poland

Joanna Bocheńska

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our book, *Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities: The Call of the Cricket* is the result of the five-year team research project entitled *How to make a voice audible? Continuity and change of Kurdish culture and of social reality in postcolonial perspectives* (2013–2018) directed by Joanna Bocheńska, as well as of the two individual research projects by Karol Kaczorowski (*Construction of ethnic identity among young Kurdish migrants in Istanbul*) and Artur Rodziewicz (*Eros and Pearl in the Yezidi Cosmogony*). All of the grants were funded by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) in the scope of the different programmes.

First of all, we wish to express our gratitude to NCN for investing in the field of Kurdish studies. The projects were launched at the Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland) where interest in Kurdish studies was initiated a few decades ago by Leszek Dzięgiel and Andrzej Pisowicz. We are grateful to the university, and in particular to the Institute of Oriental Studies, for offering us the space for many seminars and conferences. These grants gave us all the opportunity to meet, cooperate, discuss and share the various theoretical approaches. We were able to travel frequently to Kurdistan, create the Polish-Kurdish-English online platform known as www.kurdishstudies.pl and publish the quarterly e-magazine *Fritillaria Kurdica. Bulletin of Kurdish Studies*.

However, this project wouldn't be possible without the immense help from the side of the many Kurdistan's friends and researchers who devoted their time and money to assist us. They provided us with their knowledge and contacts, fed and sheltered us generously, offering the possibility to discuss many aspects of the studied reality in a quite informal and thus much

more apt and illuminating way. Hence, this project is based not simply on ‘gathering knowledge’, but on the strong bonds of friendship that were built during these years, for which we feel very much indebted. We deeply believe that such a relationship may become a cure for ‘Orientalism’ and ‘colonialism’. It is because it enables people to immerse in the problems of others while abandoning their own indifference, distance or fear.

Taking the above-mentioned into account we wish to express special thanks to the following group of people though this list by no means can be considered complete.

First and foremost we want to express our special gratitude to Hashem Ahmadzadeh for his frequent advice, very welcome and friendly assistance as well as for providing us with many valuable contacts. The Institute of Research and Development–Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) directed by Saro Qadir became an excellent roof for our research at the very initial stage of the project. We are thankful to Bahar and Nahîd Hosseinî for their hospitality, warmth and for opening our eyes to the fascinating reality of the Iranian Kurds as well as to Farhang Muhamad for his undying enthusiasm to support Polish scholars, students and journalists. We are especially grateful to Haidar Laşkrî, Dilan Majid Rostam and the Koye University for hosting a few of our initiatives. Muhammad Gomei and Fuad A. Ommar turned extremely helpful in our exploration of Silemani and in contacting us with many interesting institutions located there. Sidqî Hirorî and Mouafaq Ruşdie introduced us into the cultural environment of Duhok.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Assyrian Church of the East
ADM	Assyrian Democratic Movement
AKP	Turkish: <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> (Justice and Development Party)
ANP	Abnaa al-Nahrain Party (The Descendants of Mesopotamia)
APP	Assyrian Patriotic Party
AUIS	American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
BDP	Turkish: <i>Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi</i> , Kurdish: <i>Partiya Aşti û Demokrasiyê</i> (Peace and Democracy Party)
ChCC	Chaldean Catholic Church
CSAPC	Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council
Day-Mer	Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre (London)
DFNS	Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Kurdish: <i>Federalîya Demokratîk a Bakurê Suryê</i>)
EKK	Kurdish: <i>Enstîtuy Kelepûrî Kurdî</i> (Kurdish Heritage Institute)
EKS	Kurdish: <i>Enstîtûya Kurdî ya Stenbolê</i> (Turkish: <i>İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü</i> , Kurdish Institute of Istanbul)
EU	European Union
GD	General Directorate
HDP	Turkish: <i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i> , Kurdish: <i>Partiya Demokratîk a Gelan</i> (People's Democratic Party)
HEP	Turkish: <i>Halkın Emek Partisi</i> (People's Labour Party)
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
ID	Iraqi Dinar
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ISDP	Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project
ISIS (Daesh)	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

KA	Kurdish Alliance
KCC	Kurdish Cultural Centre (London)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (Kurdish: <i>Partî Dîmokratî Kurdistan</i>)
KDP-I	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Kurdish: <i>Hîzbi Dêmuokratî Kurdistanî Êran</i>)
KDPS	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (Kurdish: <i>Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê li Sûriyê</i>)
KIU	Kurdistan Islamic Union (Kurdish: Yekgirtûy Îslamî Kurdistan)
KJK	Kurdish: <i>Komeley Jiyanewey Kurdistan</i> (Association for the Revival of Kurdistan)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government (Kurdish: <i>Hukumetî Herêmî Kurdistan</i>)
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Kurdish: <i>Herêmî Kurdistan</i>)
KürdKav	Turkish: <i>Kürt Kültür ve Araştırma Vakfı</i> , Kurdish: <i>Waqfa Çandî û Lêkolînî ya Kurdî</i> (Kurdish Foundation for Culture and Research)
MERA	Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs
NÇM	Kurdish: <i>Navenda Çanda Mesopotamya</i> (Turkish: <i>Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi</i> , Mesopotamia Cultural Centre)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPF	Nineveh Plain Forces
NPU	Nineveh Plain Protection Units
PJAK	Kurdish: <i>Partî Jiyanî Azadî Kurdistan</i> (Kurdistan Free Life Party)
PKK	Kurdish: <i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i> (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Kurdish: <i>Yeketî Nîştîmanî Kurdistan</i>)
PYD	Kurdish: <i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</i> (Democratic Union Party)
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces (Kurdish: <i>Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk</i>)
TİP	Turkish: <i>Türkiye İşçi Partisi</i> (Workers' Party of Turkey)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics
YDG-H	Turkish: <i>Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi</i> , Kurdish: <i>Tevgera Civanên Welatparêz Yê Şoreşger</i> (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement)
YPG	Kurdish: <i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i> (People's Protection Units)
YPJ	Kurdish: <i>Yekîneyên Parastina Jin</i> (Women's Protection Units)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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1.1 THE CALL OF THE CRICKET: WITHIN AND BEYOND POSTCOLONIALISM

The Kurds, whose population is estimated at around 40 million, constitute one of the largest ethnic groups without their own state. Unsurprisingly, their struggle for reliable legal status to protect their rights resonates with postcolonial claims demanding recognition for those who have been oppressed and marginalised. During the twenty-first century, their voice has become increasingly audible, while their fate, history and culture have started to attract the world's interest, as can be measured in the growing number of publications devoted to the Kurdish issue. Due to the difficult history and multiple traumatic experiences of Kurdistan's inhabitants, the majority of media reports and Kurdish studies are affected by the domi-

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nant combative discourse, and thus in a sense continue the conflict with, and resistance to, the discriminatory policies of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. Paradoxically, this makes other aspects of the Kurds almost invisible, implying that the only activity this community is engaged in is war and conflict. This has very serious consequences for the Kurds, because of the way it suggests that topics beyond such a theme are not as worthy of attention. The scarcity of translations of their literature, whether oral, classical or modern, adds to this, as does the difficult access to Kurdish cinema production, strengthening the well-established popular image of Kurds as warriors, nomads and refugees occupying the furthest peripheries of the modern world. Recalling an essay by Umberto Eco (1994), we may say that the Kurds play a role similar to the miserable cormorant from Shetland, which was called to star on TV only in times of disaster and catastrophe. Nobody wished to know it as a beautiful bird living in its natural environment.

The main idea of this book is to go beyond these dominant narratives that focus on wars, politics and conflicts, and explore the little-known and less popular aspects of Kurdistan's reality. As a result of a five-year research project that has applied the postcolonial perspective, this book is inevitably intertwined with such an approach. However, at the same time, the six chapters are based on diverse vistas, presenting various topics and inhabitants of Kurdistan: thus they cannot be limited to the postcolonial approach. Today, 'postcolonialism' seems to be a very wide and blurred term,

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accepted or rejected, defined or redefined in different cultural and socio-political contexts. As such, it is a starting point for discussion rather than an all-embracing framework, and forms the basis of an attempt to find a general perspective, allowing the incorporation of a variety of theories and approaches in order to scrutinise and describe the vibrant reality that has been studied.

As stressed above, the word ‘postcolonial’ is understood in this volume as involving contesting dominant narratives of different kinds, thus offering access to a multiplicity of other, less audible voices (Loomba 2015, 32). It does not imply a postcolonial era, because the Kurds are still subjected to the effects of heavy-handed colonial policies. A few examples of this are the thwarting of the results of the Kurdish independence referendum of September 25 (2017) by Iranian-backed Shi’a militias, the persecutions of Kurdish politicians and intellectuals in Turkey and Iran, or Turkey’s attack on Afrin in January 2018.

The book represents varied aspects and dimensions of postcolonial studies. While the most influential postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak propagated critical analysis of discourses of power, other scholars such as Robert Young and James C. Scott advocated empirical research to reveal inequalities and also the physical, though seemingly invisible, ways of imposing and countering domination. The topic of social research as a means of exercising power is also mentioned in this volume.

Although representing different research techniques and approaches towards postcolonial theories, all the authors are united by the belief that scrupulous, honest and in-depth research into minorities and subjugated groups is in itself the most important part of the postcolonial approach. The volume reflects various approaches to postcolonial methodologies—from critical analysis of texts, through ethnographic examinations of attitudes and practices, to the interpretive in-depth analysis of cultural narratives, supplemented by modern theoretical perspectives developed within various disciplines such as social psychology, philosophy, sociology, political science, history and cultural anthropology.

The chapters refer to Edward Said’s reflections on the marriage of knowledge and power (2003) and its role in shaping the image of the Kurds, who are still perceived by many as in need of the rule and decision-making of others. However, Said’s grasp of Orientalism is linked in this volume with other theories, such as James C. Scott’s (1990) or Cenk

Saraçoğlu's (2010) anthropological and social perspectives (Chap. 4), Benita Parry's (2002) and Neil Lazarus' (2011) view on recurrence of exclusions against others (Chap. 6), Pierre Bourdieu's (1989) symbolic violence (Chap. 3), or Pamela Young's (2006), Joseph Errington's (2008) and Homi Bhabha's (2004) takes on cultural hegemony, including the education programme, the application of the language of the subordinated group and the role of translations into it (Chap. 5). What is more, recent socio-psychological studies on the subtle forms of dehumanisation indicate that we tend to perceive the members of our in-groups as fully human, while seeing those of outgroups as less human. This results in diminished sympathy and many distorted images, especially if any relationship of power and subordination is involved (Haslam and Loughnan 2014). Hence, the dark aspects of Orientalism can today be seen as an inseparable part of our daily lives, affecting multiple relationships (Chap. 2). It seems that, in our global theatre, many of us may be granted the role of both the coloniser and the colonised, depending on the context. Accordingly, this book is not only focused on Kurdish narratives, but also brings to light the points of view of Kurdistan's other inhabitants, such as Assyrians or Yezidis, and clearly proposes that Kurdish nationalism or Islam, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan, have also been imposed on many different others (Chaps. 6 and 7). This policy, though not comparable to the violent persecutions of the Kurds by the Middle Eastern states, may also be treated as a part of colonialism. Its aim is to produce a homogenous, united voice for the Kurdish nation, in order to challenge the status quo sanctioned by the official states.

Non-Kurdish researchers from Europe presenting the reality of Kurdistan, as in this volume, also run the risk of being considered 'colonial', 'neo-colonial' or at least 'Oriental'. First of all, it is a situation that evokes the question of representation of the studied group, which was raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her well-known question *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988). We must ask which voices are allowed to speak in this volume, and if they can really represent Kurdistan's various societies. Taking into consideration that, in recent decades, the Kurds have managed to represent themselves through various media and publications, this book in no way intends to replace the variety of their voices. Rather, it seeks to offer new topics and approaches that have not been well studied until now. We focused primarily on Kurdistan today as a part of Turkey and Iraq, because in 2013, when the project was

started, they were the most accessible, vibrant and influential areas of Kurdistan regarding cultural developments. However, although to a lesser extent, the Iranian and Syrian parts of Kurdistan, as well as the Kurdish diaspora and the reality of Yezidis living in the South Caucasus, were also covered by our research. Our book is very much based on the field research and the many in-depth interviews we conducted, and strives to represent the inhabitants of Kurdistan in their own voices, where possible.

We are aware, though, that our interpretation of the studied reality may not be found so innocent everywhere. It can be easily called ‘colonial’ by the representatives of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq who support their governments’ point of view and treat any mention of Kurdistan as a fully foreign enterprise started by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which envisaged the establishment of an independent Kurdistan and meant the partition of territory which was believed to belong exclusively to Arab or Turkish majorities. Such an understanding of the Kurdish case is still widespread, in Turkey for example, where its conservative government often points to it. In February 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan labelled the Kurds in Syria as ‘collaborators of post-modern crusades’ who need to be eradicated (Postmodern Haçlı Seferi 2018). This clearly shows the very diverse and often instrumental understanding of what is ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’, so that it can even justify attack or genocide under the name of defence. Such an approach is not totally alien to the Kurds, from whom we often heard that the European interest in Kurdistan’s minorities instead of the Kurdish (and Muslim) majority is a remnant of colonial thinking and policy. Acknowledging the intersectional differences in experience and perception of colonialism (as minorities are also heterogeneous groups that include members taking profit from exploitation or exploiting other minorities) is one of the key observations of postcolonial theory (Loomba 2015). Contemporary paradoxical understandings and contradictory usage of the term ‘postcolonial’ indicate the term’s vagueness; however, the one thing that all these contradictory approaches have in common seems to be the application of victimisation. Elisabeth Anker (2012, 12) identified the fascination with victimisation as one of postcolonialism’s weaker points. All the subjects want to be associated with the victims of colonial policy of different kinds, while, naturally, nobody wants to play the role of oppressor. It is not just because the oppressor is associated with symbolic evil and ugliness, simi-

lar to the dragon from the Kurdish fairy tales, but also, as highlighted by Eco's cormorant, it is being a victim which puts people in the limelight and makes the world discover and talk about them (1994, 88). One could provocatively ask if it is not a global lack of interest, knowledge and skills to deal with other aspects of Kurdish reality that fuels the Kurdish separatism which frightens Turkey, Iraq, Syria or Iran so much. If possessing their own state is the only chance to be recognised as a subject of the modern world with whom others may cooperate on an equal basis, it goes without saying that Kurds should fight to achieve it. However, what would happen if the Kurdish cultural, social and political activities, recognised as Kurdish, and not as Iranian, Turkish or Arabic, became invited and visible in the many global platforms? Would it not help the neighbours of the Kurds to recognise Kurdish creativity and assets and invite them to build modernity together without the need to eradicate the Kurdishness that is seen as so troublesome? Instead, focusing on victimhood, wars and conflicts results in a very distracted and dehumanised image, which impacts the Kurds both directly and through their self-image, as they start to conceive of themselves exclusively within such a framework. As a comparison, according to many authors the Polish historical struggle for independence and recognition was fruitful, not only as a result of resistance to the oppressors, but equally because it entailed Polish participation and contribution in the world's cultural or scientific heritage, allowing Poland to cure itself of the deeply entrenched conviction of being a constant victim, subject to the oppressive policy of others—though this is something which Poland has still not fully accomplished.

Taking the abovementioned into account, this volume aims to take inspiration from some of the Polish experience in dealing with the Kurdish issue and, in this way, avoid the possible accusations of 'European colonialism'. It entails, among other things, a departure from focusing only on Kurdish suffering and combat and from romanticising such a struggle along with the Kurdish national movement. Instead, Chaps. 2 and 3, by Joanna Bocheńska and Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, are focused on the ways the Kurds build and develop their modern cultural and social activities through literary and cinema narratives and cultural institutions when drawing resourcefully from both their pre-modern works and multiple modern inspirations. An important part of this process lies in paying attention more widely towards other, non-Kurdish (and non-Muslim), communities. Chapter 4, by Karol Kaczorowski, concentrates on the Kurdish migrants' practice of countering

‘othering’ from the Turkish majority in Istanbul. Chapter 5, by Marcin Rzepka, examines the allegedly ‘oriental’ perspective of Protestant missionaries in the context of Bible translations into the Kurdish language in the nineteenth century, which also engaged the Armenian community. It shows that the missionaries did not just deform the image of the Kurds but also managed to portray them in a quite sensitive way. Finally, the book offers a space for the voices of the minorities living in Kurdistan, their grasp of identity and interrelations with the Kurds. Chapter 6, by Krzysztof Lalik, is focused on the formation of the modern Chaldo-Assyrian identity and the role of their relations with the Kurds in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Chapter 7, by Artur Rodziewicz, explores the way the Yezidis have defined their identity using oral religious texts. He challenges the concept of their Kurdishness, suggesting rather that the Yezidis are a community whose identity is based on the *sur* (mystery), which still has meaning for many of them. Furthermore, both chapters shed some light on the ways Kurdish and Muslim identities have been imposed on non-Kurdish groups. In this context, Kurdish nationalism, as well as Islam, may be viewed as a part of the colonial domino effect, with the Kurdish majority exercising power over weaker groups, while subjected to mistreatment by other even bigger communities such as Arabs in Iraq. This suggests, as stressed by Loomba (2015) and Said (2003), that any victim is not totally free from the danger of becoming an oppressor and should be sensitive and aware of this problem. This issue is very much present in modern Kurdish literature.

What is more, in the idea of the ‘call of the cricket’, borrowed from the poem ‘*Feryad*’ (‘The Scream’) by the legendary poet from Iranian Kurdistan, Jîla Hosseîni [Huseynî] (2006, 57), the postcolonial approach shines through many other aspects of this book, elevating the role of a certain aesthetic and policy of simplicity. In her poem, Hosseîni compared the voices of the *saz* and the cricket. The *saz* is a popular instrument in the Middle East and can be easily associated with the cultures of the established states which it often represents. The poet praised the cricket’s stubborn effort to play even though deafened by the *saz*. In this way she suggests that even the subdued voice is better than silence or abandoning the country. Hosseîni’s metaphor evokes many interesting associations. The cricket may symbolise the Kurdish culture suppressed by the official states’ narratives and its voice resonates with the intentions of the representatives of Kurdish cultural institutions. Their aim is to ‘become owners of their culture threatened by colonial methods’, ‘to save it from extinction’ and ‘to make it visible in the public space’ (see Chap. 3). Although the cricket’s

voice seems to lack the courtly ornamentation, style and potential of the *saz*, it does not give up, as if believing that at the end of the day it will win people's hearts with its simple, powerful beauty. This call for simplicity and for appreciating the unassuming aspects of life and human interrelations permeates many Kurdish works of art and social actions, although it is often suppressed by other ideological approaches to artistic creation popular among the Kurds, such as Kurdish nationalism (Iraqi Kurdistan) or Marxism (Turkey). We see this simplicity in the main character from one of Bakhtiyar Ali's novels, discussed in Chap. 2, who is called Little Xendan and who is confronted with her exalted sister Perwane, who seeks the idealised land of love that is so distant from average people. Seywan Saecedian's sculptures, meanwhile, have an impact on us precisely due to their simple, almost naïve forms, so rooted in his intimate contact and observation of nature. Appreciating the rustic aspect of the Kurdish world, which is often contrasted with the huge and alien metropolis of colonisers, is emphasised by the representatives of cultural institutions in Chap. 3 and the Kurdish migrants in Istanbul in Chap. 4. This pursuit of unassuming beauty, requiring both some knowledge of Kurdish cultural context and the patient skills of contemplation, seems to be the Kurdish response to the 'colonial' or 'imperial' dreams of becoming glorious, great, important and laudable. As emphasised by Ali in his novel, such a dream should be substituted for a kind of imagination that could attend to the needs and feelings of others.

We deeply believe that it is through the means of Kurdish cultural and social activities, and by advancing the world's skills to receive and understand it, that the Kurdish voice may become more audible and Kurdish political demands may be better understood and recognised.

1.2 TRANSCRIPTION AND GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

In this book we have applied a rather complicated strategy of transcription for the names and geographical locations involved, which aims to appreciate the multiplicity of languages and forms of transcription used by the Kurdistan's inhabitants, as well as to allow the reader to find their names and publications. Taking into account that, since 1932, the Kurds have possessed their own version of the Latin script invented by Celadet Ali Bedirxan, we decided to write most of their names following this alphabet, a convention based on proposals by Hashem Ahmadzadeh in his book *Nation and Novel. A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative* (2003, 3). Polish and Turkish names have been written following their respective Latin alphabets. In the case of the few Turkish names of Kurds who have

Picture 1.1 In the workshop of Seywan Saeedian, Diyarbekir, 2015, by J. Bocheńska



abandoned the typically Turkish letters, we follow this pattern. However, we abandon this convention for the English transliteration of those Kurdish names that are widely known through English sources. Similarly, we follow the common English transliterations of Aramaic, Arabic, Persian or Russian names and surnames. Yezidi names were written in English transliteration as well. In this case, the decision was based on the Yezidis' own choice, revealed in publications and in consultation with the authors.

Regarding the names of geographical locations, we took the decision regarding each name independently. Sometimes we use a slightly simplified Kurdish version of the names (e.g. Hawler or Silemani) without using the Kurdish diacritical marks (i.e. Hawlêr, Silêmanî). In the case of Hawler or Diyarbekir, which are also widely known as Erbil or Amed, we applied the two names interchangeably, in a similar way to how they are used by Kurdistan's inhabitants. For many other locations we selected the most popular English transliterations (for instance, Halabja or Sinjar).

1.3 KURDISTAN AND ITS INHABITANTS

1.3.1 *Land, People and Religious Traditions*

Kurdistan—the land of the Kurds—is today divided between four Middle Eastern states: Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Its borders are rather indistinct and outline a territory of between 200 and 500 km². The most recognisable element of Kurdistan’s landscape are its mountains, which feature widely in Kurdish folklore and multiple proverbs, including the well-known saying that the mountains are the only friends of the Kurds. The main mountains are those of the Zagros range, running north-west to south-east along the Iranian, Turkish and Iraqi borders. The north-western part of Kurdistan, within Turkey, is shaped by the ridge of the Taurus Mountains. The Dicle (Tigris), Firat (Euphrat), Little and Great Zap rivers, as well as the two great salt lakes of Van and Urmia add to the picturesqueness of the area. If not for the conflicts, isolation and ecological devastation resulting from many governmental projects (such as the multiple dams built on the Dicle, Firat and Zap rivers by Turkey and Iran or the gradual destruction of Urmia Lake’s ecosystem caused by many factors), Kurdistan might have been a touristic pearl enjoyed by many, not least its inhabitants.

Although the name Kurdistan has been forbidden in recent times in countries such as Turkey, it does not have exclusively modern connotations. It was widely used in the past by Kurdish chroniclers such as Şerefxan Bedlîsî or Mestûrey Ardalan, as well as Seljuk, Ottoman or Persian rulers to indicate the land inhabited by the Kurds. However, the area each meant by Kurdistan varied, encompassing quite different territories and it cannot be totally identified with the map shown on multiple online portals and networks today. The origin of the ethnonym *Kurds* is not certain, and in the past might have referred to different social, not necessarily ethnic, groups such as nomads (McDowall 2007, 9) or shepherds called *kurd* (*īg*) in the Middle Persian (Gacek 2004). On the other hand, the ancient texts mention people called *Kardak* or *Karda*. The Greek historian Xenophon, who passed through this land, talked about *Karduchoi* in his *Anabasis* (III 5, 16–17), which suggests that there might have been a distinct ethnic group using the name, similar to today’s Kurds. There is, however, little doubt that the Kurdish language belongs to the group of Western Iranian languages and thus the Kurds are most probably descendants of the various Iranian tribes that moved to this area around the second millennium



Picture 1.2 Hasankayf, the historical site that has been destroyed by Turkey in order to build the Ilisu dam on Dicle river, 2017, by A. Rodziewicz

BC. In time, they intermingled with many of the other groups inhabiting or invading the region. The definition of the Kurdish language is far from clear cut and therefore may cover different dialects. While the ‘Kurdishness’ of *Kurmanji* and *Sorani* is rather widely accepted, the categorisation of dialects such as *Zazaki*, *Gurani (Hawrami)*, *Kelhori*, *Luri* or *Laki* is still disputable and often overshadowed by ideological discussions (Haig and Öpengin 2014). Until the beginning of the twentieth century the Kurds consisted mostly of a tribal community of nomads, whose culture was based on oral traditions rather than written texts. Today, the Kurdish population in the Middle East is usually estimated at between 20 and 40 million people, with the addition of the communities that migrated to Western Europe, America or Russia in the twentieth century.

Apart from the Kurds, Kurdistan has been inhabited by many different ethnic groups such as Armenians, Chaldo-Assyrians, Jews, Turkmens and Arabs. Many of them became assimilated within Kurdish culture. The inhabitants, including the Kurds themselves, differ in regard to their religious beliefs, for example, constituting the rich pattern of customs and

thoughts which today underlies and inspires Kurdistan's modern artistic and intellectual production. Also, the beliefs that are still present in Kurdistan bear the marks of many ancient religious systems, such as Indo-Iranian or Mesopotamian and Anatolian cults, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Judaism or Hellenistic traditions (Kreyenbroek 1996).

The majority of Kurds follow Sunni Islam, which distinguishes them from Persians and links them with their Turk and Arab neighbours. The Kurdish Shia minority (the so-called Faily Kurds) live primarily in the Kermanshah, Ilam and Luristan provinces of Iran and in Diyala governorate in Iraq. The Kurdish Sunni majority are adherents of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence (*mezheb*), unlike the Turks and Arabs who belong instead to the Hanafi school. Though minor at first glance, this difference has appeared to play a role in forming the sense of a distinct Kurdish identity, especially taking into account the significance of the religious schools (*medresa*) that were centres of Kurdish language teaching, the popular Sufi brotherhoods and the late nineteenth-century Kurdish Islamic revivalism represented, for example, by Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri (d. 1883) (Soleimani 2016) and then by Said Nursi (1877–1960). The main Sufi brotherhoods that have been active in Kurdistan are the Qadiri and the Naqshbandi orders. The latter developed in the early nineteenth century, partly at the expense of Qadiriyya, due to changes to the hereditary system of bestowing the sheikh certificate (*ijaza*), with it becoming a more democratic one based on the merits and skills of the disciples (van Bruinessen 1999). Sheikhs from both orders and their clans were involved in the rise of the modern Kurdish nationalist movement and then in the emergence of Kurdistan's political parties, with the Barzinji, Barzani and Talabani families playing key roles in today's Iraqi Kurdistan.

Apart from Islam, three main heterodox groups that were formed on the basis of the Islamic Sufi tradition and on numerous other earlier cults should be mentioned: the Alevi, Yezidi and Ahle Haqq (called also Kakais in Iraq).¹ These three religious groups share some characteristics, but differ regarding specific issues. The Yezidis are today mostly Kurmanji Kurdish speakers and therefore more likely associated with the Kurds, which, as shown in the seventh chapter of this book, may be misleading. The Alevi and Ahle Haqq, however, do not consist exclusively of ethnic Kurds, incorporating others such as Turkmans, Azeris, Lurs or Persians. The main trait that links these communities together is the oral character of their religious tradition, passed down from generation to generation within certain families. Another connecting element is the way the

cosmogonies of the Ahle Haqq and Yezidis link the creation of the world with an image of a white immaculate pearl or the Heptad of Angels that emerged soon after. The Alevi, Yezidi and Ahle Haqq also share a belief in reincarnation and in God's earthly manifestations, including in the spiritual leaders who appear in different epochs to show the right path to their followers (Kreyenbroek 1996). Accordingly, their concept of time entails both linear developments and circular repetitions and might be called spiral. Often attacked by orthodox Muslims, these religious minorities have hidden in different mountain areas such as Hakkari and Sinjar (Yezidis) Hawraman (Ahle Haqq), or Dersim province (Alevis). Since the nineteenth century, persecutions and wars have driven many of them, especially the Yezidis, out of the Middle East.

Kurdistan's Christians consist of mostly Armenians and Syriac Christians, belonging to various churches. Up to the genocide of 1915, the north-west of Kurdistan (today's Turkey) was largely inhabited by the Armenians, whose images and stories are still present in Kurdish folklore, proving the quite close relationship between these two communities. The Assyrians, described by many Christian missionaries as quite bellicose tribes, were located mainly in Hakkari mountains, towns such as Mardin, Midyat or Nisebin, or around Urmia Lake, and seemed to be more often in conflict with the Kurds. Today, they are still present in many Kurdish towns, for example in Erbil (Hawler), dwelling in a large quarter called Ankawa.

1.3.2 *Pre-Modern History*

For centuries, Kurdistan was the intersection of diverse Western and Eastern influences. In the seventh century, the region was conquered by Arab armies, who brought Islam into Kurdistan. In the following centuries, it was also invaded by Seljuks, Mongols and Ottomans. As a result, many of the invaders settled in the area and, in time, became assimilated. The aim of Kurdish princes and tribal leaders was to maintain equilibrium between their submission to powerful centres such as Baghdad, Istanbul or Isfahan and exercising independence in their hereditary territorial domains. Kurdish warriors took part in multiple wars and battles supporting the Islamic armies. At the same time, they harshly competed with each other, producing a country riven by internal divisions rather than controlled by any stable administrative network. Along with the growing impact of the Ottoman and Persian empires in the sixteenth century,



Picture 1.3 The town of Midyat, 2017, by A. Rodziewicz

which treated Kurdistan as a peripheral but strategic area, the rivalry of the princes became even more apparent as they allied almost interchangeably with both Sunni sultans and Shia shahs. As stressed by McDowall (2007) the border established between the two empires after the battle of Chaldiran (1514) not only partitioned Kurdistan, but at the same time created a long-term stability that offered the Kurdish princes and sheikhs new opportunities for alliances, support, refuge and trade.

The nineteenth century brought changes and new challenges. The period of Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire resulted in increasing demands for centralisation of the state and the incorporation of its peripheries. On the other hand, the growing impact of foreign Christian monarchies such as Russia, France or Britain was noted by Kurdish leaders, who perceived them with suspicion and fear. Around 1843, one of them, Prince Bedirxan of Botan, undertook the first attempt to ease the feudal bonds connecting him with the Ottomans and to seek independence for his duchy. At the same time, he suppressed the Assyrian Christians in the Hakkari region, implying their links with foreign powers. His uprising was crushed by the Ottoman army in 1847. As a result, the Kurdish principalities were

replaced by centrally appointed governors and thus the power of tribal leaders was substantially limited. This led to the reorganisation of Kurdish society and its leadership was passed to the religious sheikhs, who possessed both charismatic potency and warrior skills. Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nihiri was one example. In 1880 he managed to mobilise around 20,000 men against the shah, yet was abandoned by his followers, captured by the Ottomans and exiled to Istanbul and Hijaz. Though many of his followers were focused on the spoils rather than independence, Ubeydullah himself many times emphasised the distinct nature of the Kurds in comparison to Turks and Persians and thus can be probably considered one of the precursors of the Kurdish national idea, viewing it, however, in a close relationship with Islam (Soleimani 2016).

The threshold of the twentieth century saw the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, mostly among those Kurdish intellectuals gathered in Istanbul and inspired by their own culture, as well as by Ottoman, Turkish and Armenian national movements. Their activity ranged from editing journals such as *Kurdistan* (1898) or *Rojî Kurd* (1912), to establishing organisations and institutions such as *Kürt Teavün ve Terraki Cemiyeti* (The Kurdish Committee of Cooperation and Progress 1908) (Alakom 1998, 96–104). The First World War, in which the Ottoman Empire allied with the Central Powers, and the impact of the Young Turks policy, shattered the multi-ethnic country, leading to many tragic outcomes. In 1915 Armenians, the Kurds' closest neighbours, were massacred as the result of the Young Turks' orders. The genocide aimed at avoiding the danger of Armenian support for the Russians and of the establishment of an Armenian state. Many Kurds became the genocide's executors, although those who offered help and rescue, especially for children, should also be remembered.

The Treaty of Sèvres (1920) at the conclusion of the First World War envisaged the establishing of an independent Kurdistan, awaking Kurdish hopes for their own country. However, the project was never implemented. The new Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk managed to overcome the Greek and French army and proclaimed the birth of a new state in 1923, incorporating the north-western part of Kurdistan into the Republic of Turkey. France and Great Britain shared their territorial gains based on Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, designing Syria and Iraq as new countries under the French and British mandate. This new deal did not care about the Kurds, who were treated as erratic and primitive tribes and nomads and ended up divided between four countries, the borders of which were no longer so permeable and rewarding. Not surprisingly then,

these twentieth-century divisions continue to be contested today, by Kurdish politicians, intellectuals and many average people who perceive them as a continuation of colonial policy and the dismissal of the Kurdish will. This resistance finds its contemporary expression in the nomenclature used by the Kurds to describe the four parts of their partitioned homeland, which are referred to, not by the prism of the state they belong to, but rather through the four cardinal directions: *Başûr* (South) for Iraqi Kurdistan, *Rojava* (West) for Syrian Kurdistan, *Bakur* (North) for Turkey's part and *Rojhilat* (East) for Iranian Kurdistan. *Rojava* is the most widely known of these names due to its brave defence of Kobane and other Kurdish cantons in Syria from the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, or Daesh) in 2014. In this book, and especially in the three initial chapters that are focused on the Kurds, this terminology is followed interchangeably with other more recognisable names such as, for instance, 'Northern Kurdistan' or 'South Eastern Anatolia'. Such an approach corresponds with the postcolonial perspective and aims to familiarise the reader with the Kurdish point of view, which was, until recently almost totally suppressed by the narratives of the existing states. What is more, the Kurdish names of the cardinal directions gain a more metaphorical and subtle meaning, evoking the picture of an 'imagined land' from the fairy tales that, for centuries, were told in this area. This seems quite suitable for a book that intends to make the little-known Kurdish culture closer, not only to Kurdish readers, but to all. Finally, as will be revealed in the following chapters dealing with Chaldeans, Assyrians and Yezidis the name Kurdistan started to be applied by the ethnic and religious minorities of Iraqi Kurdistan, which was especially visible on the eve of the independence referendum of 2017, in order to indicate their belonging to a certain territory but not to the Kurdish ethnic group. The term *Kurdistanî* should be thus treated as the response of these minorities to Kurdish national ambitions, and indirectly suggests reshaping the national idea towards a territorial and thus more inclusive concept of a nation which may embrace different others without imposing Kurdishness on them.

1.3.3 *Bakur (Northern Kurdistan). Kurds in Turkey*

The estimated Kurdish population in Turkey is 15–20 million. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the new modern Republic of Turkey in 1923, the existence of which was sanctioned by the Treaty of Lausanne, the situation of the Kurds changed radically. They

were no longer recognised as a part of the Muslim *umma* that formed the ruling *millet* of the Ottoman Empire. The identity of the new republic was built on the new premises expressed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in his ‘six arrows’ political programme. Two of the ‘arrows’, nationalism, and secularism, became especially pernicious for the Kurds. The nationalism of the republic was defined according to primordial and cultural lines, giving priority to the Turkish majority, which should have ‘Turkified’ the other, non-Turkish, groups (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu 2014, 8). Accordingly, it left no space for other identities and the Turkish language became the only official language of the state. In 1924 the use of Kurdish in schools and other public domains was prohibited, along with the ban on Kurdish clothing and music (Yildiz 2005, 15). Secularism resulted in outlawing the traditional religious schools, and their Kurdish language teaching has never been recreated within the new system of education.

The Kurdish resistance to the reforms soon took the form of uprisings. The Sheikh Said revolt erupted in 1925, engaging different parts of Kurdish society, including tribal and religious leaders, former Ottoman army officers and intellectuals. The following rebellion took place between 1927 and 1930 on the slope of the Mount Ararat, and the region of Dersim revolted in 1938. In all cases Ankara imposed harsh measures to suppress the Kurdish resistance, including martial law, forced displacement, mass killings and further restrictions on Kurdish culture (2005, 15–16).

The rising political activism of the Kurds in the 1960s was connected to a number of factors including the new, more liberal, constitution adopted in 1960 and the emergence of the new educated Kurdish urban class, which started to express its demands through both cultural and political actions of a mostly leftist profile. The spate of new political and cultural magazines and books related to Kurdish subject is a good example (Gunes 2012, 53). Initially, the Kurds stressed the underdevelopment of the ‘Eastern provinces’ and tried to cooperate with other left-wing organisations in Turkey such as the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP). However, gradually, as an outcome of disenchantment with the Turkish parties, which were not willing to recognise the Kurdish national demands, as well as of a political atmosphere that culminated in the military coup of 1971, the Kurdish movement established a set of new organisations that specified their goals in terms of national struggle (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu, 4–5). The military coup of 1980 and the restrictive constitution of 1982 brought new repressions, causing many activists to leave the country for Europe and radicalising those Kurdish people who remained. As a result,

the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK), founded in 1978, took up the armed struggle against the Turkish state by attacking the Turkish military posts of Şemdinli and Erüh in 1984 and calling for the establishment of an independent socialist Kurdish republic. Since then, though with different intensities and ceasefires, violent conflict has kept shattering the reality of Turkey, leading to the death of more than 45,000 people, the destruction of villages by the Turkish army and the forceful displacement of around 4 million Kurds (2014, 1).

In the 1990s, a new Kurdish political party called *Halkın Emek Partisi* (People's Labour Party, HEP) emerged, calling for the peaceful resolution of the violent conflict and recognition of Kurdish rights in Turkey. In 1993, for the first time, a few Kurdish candidates were elected to the Turkish parliament. However, the party has been perceived by the Turkish state as the political wing of the PKK and has often been banned on the grounds of it promoting separatism and endangering the unitary system of the republic. It has been recreated constantly under different names, dealing cleverly with the high 10% threshold that prevented the movement from entering parliament. By appointing so-called independent candidates, the party managed to overcome the threshold in the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections. The 2015 June elections brought the *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP) historic success in the form of 13% of the votes and enabled it to enter parliament as the recognised opposition. Meanwhile the Kurdish movement redefined its political programme by drawing from Murray Bookchin rather than Marx, calling for radical democracy and not independence (Akkaya and Jongerden 2014).

On the other hand, the Turkish political scene has undergone important changes too. In 2002 the populist pro-Islam *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) first won the parliamentary elections. Focused initially on joining the European Union, the government implemented some reforms aimed at improving democratic standards and liberalising the public sphere. Although the Kurds benefited from them, neither of the new laws provided a long-term solution to the Kurdish question. They instead proposed cosmetic changes such as allowing Kurdish publications and private courses in the Kurdish language (2005), opening the first public channel of television in Kurdish language (TRT6, 2008/2009) or allowing a few university departments dealing with Kurdish language and culture (since 2010). At the same time, the oppression of the legal Kurdish opposition continued and the peace process collapsed totally in Summer 2015, leading to the reignition of the

war, the brutal pacification of Kurdish towns by Turkish army, new waves of repression and forced migration. Not being able to abandon his plans to install a presidential system, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pursued the idea of a new constitution, which was accepted in the 2017 referendum allowing for the implementation of substantially more authoritarian rule. Crackdowns on the opposition and the free media networks, especially after the failed *coup d'état* of July 2016, as well as the offensive on the Kurdish canton in Syria (2018), proves that Turkey has gradually transformed into a dictatorship guided by an increasingly chauvinistic discourse. Unfortunately, the Kurds are the main group to pay the price of these gloomy developments.

1.3.4 *Başur (Southern Kurdistan). Kurds in Iraq*

Southern Kurdistan refers to the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan but is also applied in reference to the officially autonomous part called *Herêmi Kurdistan* (The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, KRI) governed by *Hukumetî Herêmi Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG). The administration of the KRI covers a territory of four governorates: Erbil, Duhok, Silemani and Halabja,² though so-called disputed territories, including areas of Sinjar, Tel Afar, the Nineveh Plain, Kirkuk and Khaneqin, are also claimed by the KRG as belonging to Southern Kurdistan, that is to say the land in Iraq with prevailing compact Kurdish population (Barkey 2009, 12–15; Natali 2010, 106–108). The population of the KRI is estimated as much as 5.8 million (2018), around 17% of the Iraqi population, and comprises both a Kurdish majority and ethnic minorities such as Chaldo-Assyrians, Turkmen, Yezidis, Kakais, Arabs and Armenians.

Some Kurdish chieftains sought autonomy or even independence in the 1920s, but all these attempts were quelled by the British, who exercised a mandate in Iraq until 1932. Nevertheless, the tribal leaders' rule was gradually transferred into self-governance, increasingly inspired by Kurdish nationalism. It bore fruit in the subsequent foundation of the *Partî Dîmokratî Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP) of Mela Mustafa Barzani in 1946, and the *Yeketî Nîştîmanî Kurdistan* (the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK) of Jalal Talabani in 1975, two organisations that would for years dominate the Kurdish political scene in Başur (McDowall 287–344).

Consecutive Iraqi regimes either sought Kurds' support, granting them some rights and autonomous promises, or endeavoured to subdue them by force. The 1960s uprising of Mela Mustafa Barzani resulted in extensive autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan in 1970, but this was annulled five years later, along with the coercive implementation of Arabisation of Bašur's northern outskirts (Yildiz 2004, 52–53). That policy, ordered by Saddam Hussein, found its culmination in the *Anfal* genocide (1987–1988) that cost the lives of as many as 182,000 Kurds (van Bruinessen 1994, 172–176). During the first Gulf War in 1991 the Kurds resumed their armed struggle for autonomy, which was swiftly defeated by the Iraqi army. The subsequent exodus of over a million Kurds to Turkey and Iran with a resulting humanitarian crisis attracted the attention of the United Nations, which issued the key resolution No. 688, and led to the creation of the no-fly zone over part of Southern Kurdistan. This paved the way for the establishment of territorial autonomy in the KRI, in 1992. The first free elections to the Kurdish parliament took place on 19 May 1992. Although in the mid-1990s the region was mangled by an internal war between KDP and PUK, after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 by the US-led coalition, both parties managed to create a unified government (KRG) in 2006. Mesud Barzani, Mustafa's son, the leader of KDP, was elected the president of the KRI, and Jalal Talabani became the president of Iraq. From that time a swift development of KRI, particularly on an economic level, was set into motion. It attracted a host of foreign investors, especially from Turkey, with special attention paid by the KRG to the oil sector (Yildiz 2004, 34–50; Natali 2010, 84–102). However, the progress of the KRI was curbed after 2013 owing to the protracted disagreements between Baghdad and KRG, mostly over disputed territories, budget and oil revenues sharing, as well as due to the emergence of ISIS, which put the KRI in serious jeopardy of invasion in August 2014. Nevertheless, a joint Kurdish-Iraqi forces operation, launched in autumn 2016, brought about the liberation of most territories controlled by Daesh in Iraq.

The KRI's autonomous bodies are acknowledged by the Iraqi Constitution, approved in 2005, while a solution regarding disputed areas was supposed to be found by the end of 2007 through a local referendum (Article 140). Yet the Iraqi government, dominated by Shi'a Arab parties, has never agreed to hold this poll, afraid of losing the oil-rich Kirkuk region. Likewise, it opposed the referendum on Kurdistan's independence, held on 25 September 2017, not only in the KRI, but also in



Picture 1.4 The city of Silemani, 2015, by J. Bocheńska

disputed areas, which revealed support of over 92% of voters for an independent Kurdistan. The ensuing takeover of Kirkuk by Iraqi troops, in October 2017, deserted by peshmerga fighters and thousands of Kurdish families, increased tensions in the KRG's relations with Baghdad, and aggravated an internal political crisis in Başur that brought President Mesud Barzani's resignation from his post.

1.3.5 Rojhilat (Eastern Kurdistan). Kurds in Iran

After the First World War, the political and cultural life of the Kurds living in Iran was shaped by official Iranian state policy and the government's pressure to integrate various ethnic minorities, whether under nationalism and its different forms introduced during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) or under the banner of Islam in the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1979. The estimated number of the Kurds over four Iranian provinces: Kurdistan, Western Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Ilam and communities in Khorasan ranges from 7 to 9 million. They constitute approximately 12–15%

of the total population of the country. During the twentieth century they experienced marginalisation and persecutions, limited recognition and quasi-independence.

After 1918, Iran was politically unstable, affected by border discussions and the intrusion of foreign powers into domestic policy. The situation facilitated the separatist Kurdish movement led by Ismail Aga Simko, from the *Şikak* tribe. His aspirations found some support from the British authorities. Although the movement is often considered a huge step in forming Kurdish nationalism, Simko's revolt was predominantly tribally-oriented. It led to confrontation with the Assyrians living in the Urmia plain, as well as with other tribes. Finally, he was defeated by the Iranian army, modernised at that time by Reza Khan, and in 1930 Simko was killed. The period of Simko's rule in part of north-western Iran brought cultural development for the Kurds. The most significant seems to be a journal published in Urmia in 1919–1926 entitled *Rojî Kurd*, which is often considered a first official use of the Kurdish language in Iran (Vali 2011, 13). Reza Shah Pahlavi, enthroned in 1925, was able to break the Kurdish tribal system and undermine the traditional forms of authority by persecution, dislocation and resettling of the Kurds. They were forcedly integrated with the new administrative system and the new state's economy.

Following the changes caused by the outbreak of the Second World War and abdication of Reza Pahlavi in 1941, the Kurds formulated a modern idea of ethnolinguistic nationhood. Mahabad (the name was introduced in the 1920s) became the centre of their political and cultural activism at that time. In September 1942, the political party of pan-Kurdish orientation called *Komeley Jiyanevey Kurdistan* (Association for the Revival of Kurdistan, KJK) was established, and soon inspired the Kurds to intensify their efforts and to formulate political goals. The party used the journal *Nîştiman* (Homeland) as its press organ. The articles published in it included a number of articles articulating the main demands of the Kurds: recognition of their linguistic and social rights and the necessity of autonomy. During the war, the Kurds supported by the Soviets, who occupied the northern part of Iran and made the idea of self-governing autonomy real. In 1945, a well-known Kurdish leader, Qazi Mohammed, was appointed president of KJK party. He, however, soon dissolved it, and established a new party, known today as *Hîzbî Dêmuokratî Kurdistanî Êran* (The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, KDP-I). The party revealed a serious political programme of independence, emphasising the right to learn the Kurdish language and the need to unite the people living in

Kurdistan. At a meeting attended by the party leadership, Kurdish tribal chiefs, Soviet Red Army officers and Mela Mustafa Barzani from Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurds proclaimed the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. It took place on the 22 January 1946, and Qazi Mohammed was elected the president of the new republic.

The Republic of Mahabad was unquestionably the most spectacular political achievement of the Kurds in Iran. However, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran and a strong military response by the Iranian government, the republic collapsed. In 1947 Qazi Mohammad was executed and KDP-I outlawed. From that time the Kurdish movement in Iran was overshadowed by more successful developments in Iraq. Thus, for a while, Iraq became a safe haven for politicians from KDP-I. In June 1971, during the third conference of the party in Koye, Abdulrahman Ghasemlou was elected secretary general.

After the Islamic revolution, the Kurds sought an opportunity to govern in Kurdistan independently. In early 1979 the KDP-I announced the Kurdish programme of autonomy in Iran (Koochi-Kamali 2003, 172). However, the Kurdish demands were rejected by Ayatollah Khomeini and the hostile response of the Iranian government led the Kurds to open conflict with the Islamic Republic of Iran, strengthened by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. The end of the war brought the Kurdish leaders to the negotiation table with the Iranian state. Ghasemlou was informed that Tehran was willing to talk. However, just after Khomeini's death in 1989 he was murdered by the regime in his apartment in Vienna. In 1992 another Kurdish political leader, Sadeq Sharafkandi, along with three other Kurds, was murdered in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin. All of this indicates the hostile policy of Iran towards the Kurds at the time.

With the beginning of the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) the situation of the Kurds changed for the better. The new president appointed a Kurd, Abdollah Ramazanzadeh, as the first Governor General of Iranian Kurdistan (Yildiz and Taysi 2007, 44). In Tehran in 2000 the Kurdish centre was established which aimed for cultural production. A dual identity, both Kurdish and Iranian, was promoted. The Kurdish hopes to develop their cultural autonomy were smashed, however, by the next president, Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013). In fact, the presidential elections in 2005 were boycotted by the Kurds (Yildiz and Taysi 2007, 45). In 2004 a new political party was created *Partî Jîyanî Azadî Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Free Life Party, PJAK) which is considered to be the Iranian branch of the PKK. Sporadic fighting between PJAK and the Iranian army



Picture 1.5 The village near Saqez, 2017, by J. Bocheńska

continues up to the present day. The leader of the party, Mustafa Hijri, insists that Iran should be transformed into a federal democratic state. Under the presidency of Hasan Rouhani (from 2013) the region inhabited by the Kurds has remained one of the most undeveloped in Iran.

1.3.6 Rojava (Western Kurdistan). Kurds in Syria

Northern areas of Syria (Western Kurdistan) were part of the Ottoman Empire until 1922. One of the regions of northern Syria, now also a canton of modern-day Rojava, bears the name Jazira connecting it with the *Cizîra Botan* principality (having centre in the contemporary Cizre province of Turkey). Some estimates from the second decade of the twenty-first century imply that there are 1.5–2.5 million Kurds living within the borders of Syria (MRG 2011; Darke 2010; CIA 2018). During the Ottoman period, some Kurdish tribes from Anatolia were resettled into these lands. Kurdish tribal leaders benefitted from the state administration allowing their governance over certain regions until the mid-nineteenth

century. After the First World War, the establishment of Syria under French mandate (lasting from 1920 to 1946) gave Kurds hope for self-governance. Syrian cities became the place of migration of Kurds escaping persecution in the newly established Republic of Turkey. During the French colonial period, many influential Kurdish journals were published, including *Hawar* (in English: *The Cry*, printed between 1932 and 1945). Celadet Ali Bedirxan (1893–1951), a prominent intellectual coming from a renowned Kurdish family (who earlier lived in Istanbul), was the editor in chief of that journal and creator of the Kurdish Latin alphabet. Bedirxan was also the author of a book on the grammar of the Kurmanji dialect (Tejel 2009, 38–53).

After the end of the French mandate and establishment of the Syrian Republic, Kurdish activism was initially not restrained. This changed after the proclamation of *Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê li Sûriyê* (The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, KDPS) led by Osman Sabri and Daham Miro. The organisation was officially illegal, and its persecution intensified after Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic (1958–1960). Since the formation of the union and its constitution, the state was recognised as an Arab country. Kurdish activists were arrested and often tortured. Many of them disappeared in undisclosed circumstances and their fate is still unknown. The census of Syria in 1962 pointed to the dominance of the Kurdish population in the Jazira region. The state policy since the 1960s was to strip Kurds of their citizenship and, since the 1970s, resettle them to the southern parts of the country while settling Arab citizens in Kurdish regions. Any symbols connected to Kurdish nationalism were also forbidden (Tejel 2009, 53–69).

During the protests of the Arab Spring, beginning in 2011, some Kurds were reluctant to join predominantly Arabic opposition, as they did not feel support from them earlier, during the 2004 riots which started after an incident on a football match in Qamişlo. During the demonstrations, Syrian forces were reported to have shot crowds, and to have tortured arrested Kurds (Tejel 2009, 108–13). Despite these differences, Kurds did play an important role in the Arab Spring protests, which was visible, among other cases, in 2012, when a Kurd, Abdulbaset Sieda, was elected as the leader of the Istanbul-based coalition of Syrian opposition, the Syrian National Council. In the wake of the Syrian Civil War, the Kurdish Supreme Committee was formed, a coalition of leftist *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (the Democratic Union Party, PYD) and of the Kurdish National Council aligned with the pro-Barzani KDP. The PYD, however, domi-

nated the coalition and by establishing *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (People's Protection Units, YPG) led the operations intended to take control of the lands inhabited by Kurds in northern Syria. In 2012, the autonomous region of Rojava was proclaimed, containing three cantons (Afrin, Kobane and Jazira). Democratic Confederalism (based on imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's writings) was chosen as the political system of the autonomous region. Rojava gained global public attention in 2014 owing to its defence of the town of Kobane against ISIS. The defence, led by the YPG, was often portrayed in international media as heroic act of defiance against a radical Islamist force which at the time had rapidly gained power in lands within both the Syrian and Iraqi borders. The same year was also marked by the involvement of the YPG in the rescue of Yazidis in the Sinjar mountains (which are within the Iraqi borders). In January and February of 2016, during a conference in Afrin, the Şehba region was incorporated into Rojava, with a regional assembly established in March of that year. During the same month, autonomy was proclaimed under the name *Federalîya Demokratîk a Bakurê Suryê* (Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, DFNS, Rojava). At the same time the term *Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk* (Syrian Democratic Forces, SDF) chosen in 2015 to depict alliance of militias of various ethnic groups—led primarily by the YPG—gained popularity (Küçük and Özselçuk 2016; Schmidinger 2018). SDF took part in most of the important offensives against ISIS, including the Raqqa campaign organised between 2016 and 2017. The rise in political power of Kurds in Syria has been, however, continuously regarded as threat for security and political stability by authorities of Turkey, which in January 2018 led to the offensive of Turkish forces against Afrin canton.

1.3.7 *Kurds and Yazidis in the South Caucasus*

An exact figure of the Kurdish and Yazidi population in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan is difficult to determine. This results from the politicisation of their existence, and depends on the definitions of the terms 'Kurd' and 'Yezidi'. In the censuses, from tsarist times until today, the Kurds and the Yazidis were sometimes treated as the same, and sometimes as separate groups. In Soviet times, in the official Yazidis' documents in the column 'nationality', they were described as 'Yezidi', but at the same time, before the collapse of the USSR, the Yazidis were commonly referred to as 'Yezidi-Kurds'. That was accepted then, but now most Yazidis disagree with such an identification and consider themselves a separate nation.

The oldest Kurdish traces in Transcaucasia may be related to the *Kardouchoi* mentioned by Xenophon, who are sometimes considered the ancestors of the Kurds. These traces date back at least to the times of the Shaddadids, who ruled between the Kur and Araxes rivers from 951 to 1074, and the Rawwadid dynasty (the ancestors of Saladin). Many Kurdish tribes migrated to the territories of Armenia and Karabakh as a result of the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. Most of the Yezidis, in turn, did not come to the South Caucasus directly from their historical lands in northern Mesopotamia. They are instead, descendants of tribes inhabiting the eastern borderlands of the Ottoman Empire, from which they migrated to Armenia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some of them then went to Georgia. The first Yezidis however, could have come to Georgia as early as in the twelfth century along with one of the Kurdish tribes. A second Yezidi migration took place in the second half of the eighteenth century when they asked the king of Eastern Georgia, Heraclius II, for protection against Muslims (Macharadze 1968, 1989). At the end of the nineteenth century, South Caucasus, previously under Persian rule, was conquered by the Russians. Their victorious wars against the Ottoman Empire in 1828–1829 and 1877–1878 resulted in a large migration of Yezidis fleeing from persecution by the Turkish and Kurdish Muslims, which lasted until 1921, when the Bolsheviks took over the whole Caucasus. As a result of the tensions after the Armenian genocides of 1895 and 1915, many Armenian Kurds fleeing the revenge of the Armenians escaped to today's Azerbaijan.

According to the first Russian census of 1897, and based on the linguistic criterion, which treated all Kurdish-speaking inhabitants of Russia as one group, in the territory of Russia there were 125,640,021 people, 99,949 of whom recognised Kurdish as their native language, and 99,761 of whom lived in Transcaucasia (Kavkazskiy kalendar na 1910 god (n.d.)). In turn, according to census of 1926, in the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic there were 52,173 Kurds and 14,522 Yezidis.

During Soviet times, Kurdish was officially recognised as one of the USSR's languages. In 1921, the first Kurdish alphabet (based on Armenian and then on Cyrillic script) was devised. Access to education was given to both Kurds and Yezidis. This resulted in the development of their literature and even in Kurdish theatre, but was also used to spread communist ideas among them, which led to atheisation and persecutions of the clergy.

In Azerbaijan, Kurds were assimilated (in the official documents instead of 'Kurd' the term 'Azeri' was inscribed), which resulted in a danger of



Picture 1.6 Yezidi cemetery at the foot of Mount Aragats, 2017, Armenia, by A. Rodziewicz

losing their Kurdish identity. The highest number of Kurds lived in Kurdistan Uyezd, where the Bolsheviks established a Kurdish Autonomous Province (1923–1929) known as the ‘Red Kurdistan’, almost entirely inhabited by Kurds. Its capital was Lachin, next to Susha, in the Nagorno-Karabakh district.

As the result of the communist repressions, in 1937 and 1944, thousands of Kurds were forcibly deported from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan and Siberia. After the collapse of the USSR, when Transcaucasian republics regained independence, subsequent migrations and displacements of the Kurds from Armenia and Nakhichevan occurred. They were associated with the 1988–1994 conflict with Azerbaijan about Nagorno-Karabakh and the subordination of this territory to Armenia. As a result, almost all Muslim Kurds were forced to leave Armenia. In May 2001, the Armenian parliament adopted a law founding a new language called *Êzdîkî*, which was associated with the recognition of the Yezidis as a separate nation. Only the Muslim Kurds were officially considered to be Kurds from that point.

The vast majority of the Kurdish Kurmanji-speaking population in the South Caucasus consists of the Yezidis, especially those living in Armenia and Georgia. According to the Georgian census of 2014, Georgia was inhabited by 12,200 Yezidis (Kurds were not mentioned), of whom, the confession of ‘Yezidism’ was declared by 8600. According to the Armenian census of 2015, there were 35,308 Yezidis and 2162 Kurds in Armenia. The Armenian Yezidis live mainly in the villages, while the Georgian ones in Tbilisi, where they have their own temple. The Armenian and Georgian diaspora may also be proud of the first Yezidi Kurdologists (Celîls’ family, Lamara Pashayeva, Kerim Ankosi, Kerim Amoev) born in the first half of the twentieth century. It was also in Armenia where the first Kurdish Kurmanji novel, *Şivanê Kurd (The Kurdish Shepherd)* by Erebê Şemo was published in 1927.

1.3.8 *Kurdish Diaspora*

The Kurdish diaspora is one of the largest stateless diasporas in the world. It is considered the most politically active and expressive group of migrants among the non-European communities living in the European Union (EU).

Just as it is difficult to determine the number of the Kurds living in the Middle East, it is also difficult to determine the exact size of the Kurdish diaspora. Most often, it is assumed that more than a million Kurds live in the diaspora, and most of its members live in Europe. According to conservative estimates, the Kurdish population in Europe is about 850,000 people, living in Western European countries including Germany, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands. Of these countries, the largest Kurdish population lives in Germany, with around 650,000 people (*The Kurdish Population 2016*). In giving numbers though, one must be cautious. The adopted statistics are unreliable, firstly because the Kurds very often have Turkish citizenship or other native states, which makes them ‘invisible’ in the statistics. Secondly, there are thousands of illegal Kurdish immigrants in Europe who do not have identity documents (Wahlbeck 2012). To compare, according to the 2010 census, there were 63,818 Kurds and Yezidis in Russia (*Vserossiyskaya Perepis’ Naselenya Rossiyskoy Imperii 1897 [Russian population census 1897] (1905)*). The 2013 American census defined the number of those speaking Kurdish at home in US as 17,020 (see US Census Bureau 2009–2013).

The emergence of the diaspora is the result of Kurdish migration flows, which were carried out within three dominant waves, starting from the

second half of the twentieth century. The first wave came in the second half of the 1950s. At that time, it involved a small number of students and intellectuals, politically involved young men from the middle-class urban community, mainly from Iraq and Syria. The second wave that started in the 1960s and lasted until the end of the 1970s was a large wave of labour migration of Kurds from Turkey mainly to Germany, similar to other so-called guest workers. In turn, the third wave of Kurdish migration, which began in the second half of the 1970s, and took place especially in the 1980s and 1990s, was of political refugees applying for asylum in Germany, France and Austria. It was a by-product of conflicts between Kurdish communities and the Middle Eastern states, such as the revolt of Iraqi Kurds against the Ba'ath regime, Saddam Hussein's persecutions of the Kurds in the 1980s, the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and its aftermaths, the 1980 coup d'état and the civil war in Turkey, or the Gulf War in 1991 (Ayata 2011).

The natural consequence of the successive waves of Kurdish migration was the institutionalisation of the diaspora through the process of creating organisations in Europe. Early organisations established by students and workers focused mainly on representing the Kurdish community in host countries, as well as social and living issues. With time, they began to add cultural aspects to their programmes, and after 1980 they took on a political character. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kurdish organisations dealing with human rights began to emerge. It is also worth noting that the majority of diasporic organisations were created by Kurds from Turkey. This is due to their superiority in numbers in the diaspora, because about 85% of its members come from Turkey. Refugees from Iraq are behind them.

The nature of Kurdish activism within the diaspora, which for many years existed under the banner of the PKK, developed into pluralistic activism. The diaspora today has a much more heterogeneous character than the 1990s, and it is difficult to classify the main divisions that appear within its framework. Fragmentation of the diaspora is always to some extent a reflection of political, ideological, religious or regional divisions in the home country. Institutions often mirror political, social and religious fragmentation in the immigrant community, tensions, prejudices and rivalry between the Kurdish groups themselves, as well as between them and the organisations representing Turks and Arabs (Baser 2013). Despite differences and divisions, in most important events and situations, especially those taking place in Kurdistan, various groups cooper-

ate with each other and undertake joint solidarity actions. The forms of action that are used at the supranational level are: the strategies of protest and propaganda, organising mass demonstrations, sitting protests and hunger strikes (Baser 2011). The most spectacular recent event (2018) involved mass protests in different European cities organised in support of the Afrin canton attacked by the Turkish army in January 2018. Although political, social and economic structures remain fragmented, groups form ad hoc alliances to achieve the same goals. The main methods of cooperation also include running numerous social campaigns in the media and writing petitions about important events, institutions or people. Such initiatives have been extremely popular for many years. Among them have been campaigns related to the Ilisu Dam Project and the rescue of the historical site of Hasankeyf in the province of Batman in North Kurdistan (1998–2005), campaigns against the criminalisation of the Kurdish community and anti-terrorism laws established in the USA and in Europe in 2000 and 2001, and both campaigns and petitions calling for the release of Abdullah Öcalan and aid for the Syrian town of Kobane, besieged by ISIS (2015). The Kurdish diaspora uses forms of activity appropriate for social movements, civil society organisations and lobby groups. Kurdish activity at the level of the European Union is mainly focused on active lobbying of political decision-makers and a number of institutions, including the European Parliament, the European Commission or the European Court of Justice. Also, the annual Kurdish Conferences organised in the European Parliament since 2004 serves the purpose of promoting knowledge about the so-called Kurdish question. The Kurdish associations with headquarters in Brussels and Strasbourg have special merits in this area. The diaspora naturally also uses complementary tools to implement its supranational policy, such as maintaining its own media, including websites and television stations, publishing, and organising scientific and cultural events, including festivals and national holidays.

NOTES

1. There is also a group called Shabaks living around Mosul. Many of their beliefs overlap with those of Ahle Haqq.
2. The Halabja governorate was separated in 2014 from Silemani province and embraces three districts: Byara, Khumral and Sirwan.

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CHAPTER 2

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

Joanna Bocheńska

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

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

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

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

Mehmet Dicle (2010, 82).

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

content of Kurdish narratives both exceptional and interesting. Finally, as emphasised in the above quotation from Mehmet Dicle, is it not the moment of recognising the beauty of others which makes our cruelty senseless, shameful and regrettable? If this is even partially true, more attention should be paid to the artistic production of the Kurds, instead of the constant focus on the wars and conflicts they engage in.

Based on a variety of theoretical approaches, this chapter is also rooted in the Central European experience of commenting on literary or cinema narratives that played a role in the relatively bloodless overthrow of the twentieth-century regimes in this part of the world. As stressed by the Italian specialist on Polish literature Francesco M. Cataluccio, the literature of Central Europe often replaced philosophy (1991, 6), offering a more trustworthy understanding of many abstract ideas and of the surrounding reality, especially in times of turmoil with the changes that shook this area. What is more, by seeking dialogue with the outside world, literary and cinema narratives became helpful in confronting the Western shape of modernity and the many alluring, complicated notions that emerged as an effect of the West's different historical and social experiences. Imported into Central and Eastern Europe as slogans, they frequently had the form of caricatures. This is shown by Krzysztof Kieślowski in the movie *Three Colours: White* (1993). For Karol, the inhabitant of a small Polish town of the 1990s, equality meant nothing more than taking revenge on his French wife for betraying him. This was his way of proving himself 'equal' to the Western world. The moral imagination developed by narratives and discussions, evoked by stories, helps people to better grasp the sense of modern transformation and adjust it to their own social context. Although Central and Eastern Europe is not entirely comparable with the Middle East, following some of its experiences in reading and commenting on literature, and thus directing attention to the ethical aspects of modern Kurdish narratives, might be helpful in grasping the more intimate changes that Kurdish society is undergoing.

Traditional and modern texts are defined in this chapter in relation to the understanding of honour that they represent. Accordingly, modern Kurdish literature is perceived not only through the prism of its form, but also according to the kind of moral imagination it offers. The chapter specifically follows Hashem Ahmadzadeh's approach in using literature written in the Kurdish language (in dialects including Kurmanji and Sorani),

by Kurdish authors from all four parts of Kurdistan, living both in Kurdistan and abroad (2003, 127–138). However, at the same time, we should not forget that there are many literary works written by the Kurds in other dialects (e.g. Zazaki), Arabic, Persian, Turkish or English languages. In case of the traditional texts, I will refer to the most iconic works representing the Kurdish world, created, not only in Kurdish (oral and classical narratives), but also in Persian (chronicles). These offer an insight into the understanding of honour. What is more, I have chosen narratives that did not show the impact of modern ideas such as nationalism or secularism when they were produced. Regarding the two films I am going to compare (*Yol* and *Marooned in Iraq*) the language of performance could not be the main criterion for two reasons: first, the cinema's poetics is based on images rather than words. Second, taking into account the difficult political reality of Turkey in the 1980s, when *Yol* was made, the film could not employ the Kurdish language. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged by the Kurds as one of the most impressive Kurdish movies. Unfortunately, due to the aims of this chapter, there is insufficient space for a history of Kurdish literature and cinema, their social and political background or the biographies of the writers and directors. Along with the literary texts, I will refer to interviews and discussions on honour, literature and cinema that I conducted and organised in Kurdistan and abroad.

2.2 HONOUR AND DIGNITY: THE ABILITY TO RISK AND HONOUR HUMAN LIFE

Whereas recognition of the *inherent dignity* of every human is the unquestionable foundation of human rights, repeated in many official documents, there is no simple answer to the brief question of what dignity is. The notion is like a mysterious goddess that all inhabitants of the globe are asked to praise. Yet, as stressed by Elisabeth Anker (2012, 4), it is mostly the violation of human dignity and rights that makes us all invoke the notion and take up measures to prevent the fall of the goddess, or, if necessary, to reassemble her. Dignity is often zealously defined as a birth-right (Hicks 2011, 4), a fundamental right to be respected (Appiah 2010, 177), or a feature bestowed on humans by God (John Paul II [Jan Paweł II] 1995, 70; Kamali 2007, 1). However, it seems an alluring fiction, and a construct of our modern times (Anker, 1) that we are all invited to

participate in for the sake of our moral and physical wellbeing. Centuries ago, human dignity was not a binding norm even in Europe, which boastfully considers itself the mother of human rights. As stressed by Lynn Hunt, in the same year when Rousseau introduced his 'rights of man' (1762), convicts in France were still broken on the wheel (2008, 71) and it took Europeans a great deal of time to imagine and digest what these rights were about and how could they be embodied in their everyday life. Indeed, it is still an ongoing process. This extended period of time, and the role of modern culture and narratives in promoting reflection on a dignified human being, are today lost from sight and thus neglected by many who treat dignity as a given and almost everlasting element of the European or American order.

The modern idea of dignity developed gradually over centuries, evolving from high rank or social status associated with an aristocratic or bureaucratic elite towards a more democratic concept embracing different others, especially after the advent of the Renaissance, humanism and the Enlightenment project. It became more salient after the Second World War and its unimaginable atrocities, and found its direct expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Środa 1993). Detailed analysis of the history of the term is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it is important to underscore that, even though dignity has been called inalienable and crucial for our presence and future in the modern era, its contemporary meaning refers to something different than it did in the past, and is still in flux. One may argue that it has followed a similar trajectory to the concept of a nation. Recalling Smith and Gellner's debate on the roots of nationalism (1995), we may either claim that dignity developed from something already existing, or suggest that it is a completely new concept inherent to exclusively modern discourses. The question remains, however: how can we enjoy its beauty rather than lament over its scattered pieces? Today, this issue is very much linked to postcolonial studies, with their attention to the dark dimension of the European powers' self-assured redemptive mission towards the many 'backward' others, which was obviously based on an entrenched dehumanisation and a desire to exert power over others while exploiting them economically. Postcolonial studies have exposed the limits of the unquestionably Eurocentric vision of the dignified human being. Therefore, this also poses a question of how others will respond to the ideas of dignity and human rights. According to Elisabeth Anker (2012), the global failure of human

rights has been caused, not only by their diverse, often very opportunistic, interpretation, but also by their own nature, which conceals ambivalence towards embodiment and promotes a blurred image of a human whose always integrated body is held worthy of respect and unconsciously associated with the inventor of the concept: the white man and his culture. Anker focused on what she called ‘liberal human rights discourses’ and rejected dignity as a symbol of such discourses (181). However, I would argue that such frameworks cannot hijack the concept of dignity, which can incorporate other, more incarnated, visions of the human and humaneness. First, however, I wish to differentiate between honour and dignity, suggesting that, although they belong to the same family of words related to bestowing and enjoying respect, these notions are endowed with different characteristics and engaged in different roles in our modern times. Nevertheless, following Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010) and Anthony Cunningham (2013) I wish to suggest that honour is inseparable from our modern vision of human flourishing and that it cannot be limited to the representation of the past. Therefore, the question is not whether honour can be replaced by dignity, but rather how these two concepts can successfully interact for the sake of our wellbeing. As I will show in the following sections, this issue is very acute for the Kurds, since the traditional sense of honour is not something forgotten but constitutes the modern reality; all the more so considering the difficult political reality forcing the Kurds to resist the violence of Middle Eastern states.

This seems a good moment to mention a development that has gradually come into being in the Kurdish language. The traditional meaning of honour is usually expressed by two words: *şeref* and *namûs*, the senses of which overlap; nevertheless the word *namûs* is one that specifically appears when referring to women’s chastity, for example in the context of honour killings (*cinayeta namûsê*). Both *şeref* and *namûs* are loanwords in the Kurdish language and are applied in Arabic, Persian and Turkish too. *Namûs* comes from the Greek word *nomos* meaning ‘law’, ‘convention’ or ‘custom’ (Doğan 2016, 83). The word *şeref* has Arabic origins, where it means ‘honourable’, ‘noble’ or ‘notable’. The word *şeref* was also the title of the descendants of the prophet (Baranov 1970, 504). According to my research, the term ‘dignity’ is translated into Kurdish with the help of many different words, such as *rûmet*, *şeref*, *xîret*, *xurmet*, *nîrx*, *serberzî*, *hêjahî/hêjatî*, *rêzdarî*, *payebilind*, *keramet*, *zanîna qedr*, *qîmet*, *waqar*, *giranbuha*, *şanazî*, *serbilindî*, *adeten*, *şiko*, *şikomendî*, *şikodarî*, *şayestey rêzlênan*, *berêzî*, and *şan*. Therefore, it should be evident that the modern

word ‘dignity’ does not have a fixed meaning in Kurdish. Nevertheless, there are a few words which occur more frequently in this context, which are *rûmet* in Kurmanji Kurdish and *şiko*, *şikodarî*, *şikomendî* or *keramet* in Sorani Kurdish. However, the words applied in Sorani seem less fixed than the Kurmanji *rûmet*.

According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, honour and desire for respect are still the driving forces behind many of our decisions and activities. However, while our desire to be honourable remains constant, our understanding of honour changes considerably according to time and space. Appiah suggests that there might be different kinds of honour and that dignity is one of them. The types of honour are conditioned by the forms of respect. Following Stephen Darwall, Appiah distinguishes between ‘appraisal respect’ and ‘recognition respect’ (2010, 13). While appraisal respect means being evaluated according to a standard, so that being honourable usually involves a sense of doing better than others in terms of meeting that standard, recognition respect is defined as evaluating facts about someone positively. The first type of honour is competitive, implies comparisons and, in modern times, has become associated with professional development and ‘esteem’. It requires the person of honour to care, not only about being respected, but about being worthy of respect (16). This implies both social and personal assessments, as well as a sense of candour. The second type of respect and honour is related to knowledge or awareness about others that is not gradable and that results in the emergence of ‘honour peers’. These honour peers are identified as a group of equals who share a certain characteristic. Both types of respect can overlap and thus our understanding of honour must consist of both recognition and appraisal respect (14). Hence, the code of honour depicted in Kurdish historical chronicles by Şerefxanê Bedlîsî (1596–1597) and Mestûrey Ardalan (1847) implied recognising the fact of Kurdish nobility, connected with belonging to famous families, clans and the wider community of Muslims. However, this recognised nobility was not enough and required constant competitiveness in valour, which, in turn, defined the mechanism of social evaluation and promotion among the honour peers. This resulted in the emerging hierarchies of the traditional world and this hierarchical aspect of honour is often confronted by the more modern concepts of the equality and dignity of all human beings (Appiah 2010, 131; Bayefsky 2013, 810; Lindner 2007, 10).

Honour had, and still has, its place in particular societies, creating bonds of respect between an individual and a group of people who share

the same honour codes. This relational aspect of honour results in the emergence of '*honour worlds*' which have much in common with the identity shared by people. Thus, as stressed many times by Appiah (2005, 2010), identity cannot be separated from the ethical dimension of our lives, because the fact of 'who I am' often preconditions 'what I owe to others' (2010, xiii/xiv). The relational context of honour was also highlighted by Alasdair MacIntyre in his description of virtues in 'heroical societies' (1996, 228). Importantly for our inquiry, MacIntyre pointed to courage and faithfulness as two main virtues animating the traditional sense of honour. As we will see further in analysing the classical and oral Kurdish narratives, courage was absolutely crucial for the Kurds; therefore, I prefer to call their pre-modern type of social structure 'heroic' rather than simply 'traditional'. For MacIntyre, courage in heroic societies was not simply a noble virtue of an individual. Human life was fragile, exposed to constant danger of death in one of multiple battles or duels, with no instruments to protect it. Thus, being brave informed others that one was a reliable partner with whom to form the alliances needed to protect a group; hence, it had a deeply social and political meaning (229). This is most probably the reason why Şerefxanê Bedlîsî and Mestûrey Ardalan often depicted Kurdish princes by indicating their valour, even though the events that ensued suggested sometimes that the valour of some of these nobles could be questioned. It was unthinkable for the Kurdish chroniclers to present the Kurds as anything but brave people, especially given that both texts were written in the Persian language and addressed to the wider Muslim audience. Apparently, the fact of being brave constituted a code of political correctness.

What is more, according to MacIntyre, courage was often presented as an ability to face certain patterns of danger, and not simply a single danger (233). These patterns were embodied and visualised in the narratives that served the purpose of moral education, helping people to understand their place in society and what they owed to others (226). Being brave in a heroic society meant that one was ready to die for something (usually in the name of a clan, noble prince or faith). The lack of this ability resulted in 'being a scornful coward' and was equal to being expelled from the honourable, protected, community. A coward was not recognised as someone worthy of respect and life; to use contemporary language, they were not considered a real human. At the same time, a solution had to be found in this scheme of honour for those, such as women, who could not

be brave in those terms, simply because they lacked the physical strength. This is one of the reasons why faithfulness and chastity became other crucial values underscored in numerous Kurdish traditional texts. Of course, this was also linked to the women's reproductive capacities, because the existence and honour of a clan was unthinkable without control over its bloodlines, which conditioned economic relations (e.g. through access to pastures distributed within a clan) and was often considered a source of physical strength, courage and thus nobility. At the same time, it is clear from the chronicles that alliances between princes were changeable rather than constant. Hence, we may suppose that faithfulness was often compromised and negotiated in case of men (not women). Finally, when a man was not the strongest and his ability to perform brave acts was naturally limited he was encouraged to resort to the power of the mind. Being wise and smart enough to face danger and save the family honour is therefore often a feature of the youngest brothers in the many Kurdish fairy tales. There were also Kurdish religious scholars, sheikhs and Sufis (who should be identified not only with Islam but also with Alevi, Yezidi and Ahle Haqq traditions) who were highly respected¹ because of their knowledge and spiritual gifts (*keramet*), and this group represented a distinct interpretation of honour, which I will show as crucial for the development of the modern idea of dignity in the Kurdish context.

That said, we should return to dignity, considering what other systems of values it started to promote. The well-known Kantian definition suggests that dignity recognises the inherent, equal value of every 'human being (and with him every rational being)' who 'is a purpose in itself', that 'can never be used merely as a means by anyone (not even God)' (Kant 2002, 167). What is more, a human being is the subject of the moral law, because 'this moral law is based on the autonomy of his will' (167). In this way, it brings into focus an individual, their will and duties and, according to some, creates an opposition between the traditional and modern worlds. In this context, honour may be understood as a collective shield for families, clans, or nations, as opposed to dignity, which gives priority to individuals (Bayefsky, 810–811; Lindner, 3). Following the scheme related to the forms of respect, Appiah defined dignity as a form of recognition respect which gives proper weight to some important facts about people, namely 'that human beings have the capacity for creating lives of significance; that we can suffer, love, create; that we need food, shelter and recognition by others' (2010, 129). Dignity, then, is not something one must

earn through brave acts or any other skills. Nevertheless, according to Appiah, it is still something one may lose if one fails to ‘live up to one’s own humanity’ (131). This assumption unavoidably suggests that dignity relies on another term, which is humanity or humanness. Being abstract and general, this notion is exposed to many dangers such as dehumanisation, which, as revealed by contemporary psychological research, is quite common and indicates that we tend to deny or ascribe less humanness to members of outgroups (Haslam and Loughnan 2014). Being stripped of their humanness, others become less dignified and thus are likely to be neglected or eliminated more easily. The most popular modern term which enables such a policy is the word ‘terrorist’, which is widely applied and usually refers to someone who threatens our life, humanness and social order and therefore must be removed from the world of humans at any price. The reasons standing behind terrorists’ actions are not always discussed, which is usually justified by their ‘inhumanness’. Thus, like cowards in the traditional world, any terrorist is not considered an equal enemy with whom one can negotiate. Hence, any kind of measure can be taken against them.

Secondly, the negative assumption of not being able to live up to one’s own humanity, added to the Kantian and liberal stress on reason and free will, makes for a self-determined creature who needs to be properly educated and disciplined before they can be deemed dignified, and also creates friction in our modern world. According to Elisabeth Anker (17), the idea of liberal human rights is built upon the split between body and reason, privileging the latter over the former. What follows is the favouring of reason, abstract thinking and the egotistical self, accompanied by a diminishing role for emotions, corporeal perceptions and the interdependence of human beings. As shown by Anker, modernisation built upon such a project has given way to many contemporary exclusions and atrocities, especially when we take into account the zeal for enlightening the ‘backward cultures’ of both colonialists and many Middle Eastern intellectuals representing the modern system of education. It is worth noting that these tensions are well known to Eastern European intellectuals, who were exposed to such a challenge somewhat earlier. The famous Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky spent much of his life proving, by means of his literary output, that human reason is not a trustworthy basis for ethics. Instead, he promoted an idea of God-inspired love, but, not surprisingly, identified it only within the Orthodox Christian tradition, advocating the civilising mission to be conducted by Russia.² Needless to say, this vision also fos-

tered a conviction of the Russian culture's superiority and gave birth to a form of colonialism imposed on multiple others.³ Therefore, Anker's accusations addressed to the Western liberal tradition, though justifiable to a great extent, seem one-sided and require a more thorough consideration, especially in light of recent studies on the subtle forms of dehumanisation which will be discussed in one of the following sections.

That said, two important questions arise regarding the definition of human dignity. How shall we approach those who fail to 'live up to our own humanity'? Or those, for example our children, who for a number of reasons do not share with us the particular definition of a human being as the 'reasonable end in itself' yet sometimes still desire to be a part of our world? These questions bother many activists who deal with problems such as honour killings (Lindner, 1).

According to Donna Hicks, dignity should not be limited to bestowing or denying respect. It is a birthright that 'brings about our full acceptance of the miracle of existence' (2011, 116). One cannot lose it even if one violates one's own or others' dignity. Hicks separates the agent and their acts, stressing that dignity belongs to the agent regardless of their acts and that 'treating people badly because they have done something wrong only perpetuates the cycle of indignity' (5). Paul Ricoeur (2004, 461) in his well-known chapter on forgiveness, also distinguishes between the agent and their acts, suggesting that 'this intimate dissociation signifies that the capacity of commitment belonging to the moral subject is not exhausted by its various inscriptions in the affairs of the world. This dissociation expresses an act of faith, a credit addressed to the resources of self-regeneration' (490). Applying Ricoeur's and Hicks' reflections we can propose that, while the actions of a human can be judged and rejected as improper or inhuman, the human being cannot be deprived of dignity simply because they are taking part in the difficult process of living, which always entails moral choices, along with the risk of guilt, faults and mistakes. This approach appreciates the fact of living and suggests that a human being is not entirely in possession of their life but essentially receives it for safekeeping and thus is obliged to take care of it. Contrary to the members of heroic societies, the modern person is equipped with many instruments that allow them to do so. The question of whether there is any creator, defined as God or nature, remains only secondary and allows for diverse interpretations. Also, the many contemporary movements struggling for the rights of animals and nature indicate that we tend

to acknowledge 'life' with its biological context as the main principle and thus need to widen the club of beings entitled to rights and protection.

Applying Appiah's definition of dignity, Anker's reservations regarding the limits of dignity's liberal framework as well as Ricoeur's and Hicks' distinction between agent and actions, we can assume that modern dignity *recognises the miracle of life*, with its corporeal biological framework and a rather uncertain future in heaven or hell. While it gives priority to human life, it does not exclude other living creatures from their share of dignity. What is more, such an idea of dignity relies, not just on the notion of humanity, but rather, upon our ability to love. It is not only because of the gloomy inevitability of death, but also thanks to our potential to love that we realise the value and vulnerability of life (Nussbaum 1990, 261–285) and thus learn to appreciate it. Such a definition is by no means the solution to all ethical problems; rather, it is the beginning of a new set of them. Nevertheless, it brings human life into focus, calling for care and attention towards it, which is a new phenomenon compared to the world based on the idea that one should be always faithful or ready to die for something in order not to lose honour. This does not of course mean that the inhabitants of the traditional world all followed such prescriptions, but rather suggests that, in the traditional world, life was not yet recognised as a value. In other words, it was not depicted as important in the traditional narratives.⁴

This provides us with an operational scheme to deal with the two systems of bestowing importance. While an honour-based system relies on the virtues of courage and faithfulness (it is thanks to my courage that I can remain faithful to something and thus earn my honour), dignity recognises the value of life and promotes love (it is due to my ability to love that I can grasp the vulnerability of life and *feel*, not only speculate, about it). In the following sections, I will show that the elevation and reinterpretation of the meaning of love and appreciating life with its corporeal and mortal framework is one of the most important aspects of Kurdish contemporary literary and cinematic narratives, which try to enrich and modify the system inherited from their ancestors. At the same time, however, due to the constant need to resist the violent and discriminatory policies of the states the Kurds live in, a tragic paradox becomes apparent. It lies in the simultaneous conflict and alliance between the honourable readiness to die and the inherent value of life, which is to be protected within the concept of dignity. Strictly speaking, in the process of the ethical and aesthetical evolution that has taken place since the modern Kurdish culture was born around the beginning of the twentieth century, it has started to suggest more and more

fervently that the thing one should stay bravely faithful to is human dignity, as contrasted with previous loyalties (clans, religion or even the idea of a Kurdish nation when limited to the interests of particular political groups). Yet even dignity cannot be totally separated from the question of how one should live and what one owes to others in a particular historical, social and cultural context. In this way, Kurdish literature and cinema should be treated as inseparable from the Kurdish national movement, and fills it not only with ideological (Ahmadzadeh 2003; Galip 2015) but, increasingly, new ethical content. It is worth noting that, for Smith (1999, 133) the nationalist idea glorified and promoted the eternal existence of a nation as so-called secular salvation calling for sacrifice in the name of the nation and for future generations, not God. This is seen in the symbolism of women in Kurdish narratives associated with God in the classical texts, and with Kurdistan in modern literature. Thus, we may say that nationalism invented the idea of an earthly paradise and drew attention to human life. Yet, the life of a human was initially a kind of by-product, still there to be sacrificed for the sake of a nation and its eternal existence. Gradually, however, attention was directed towards humanity and life in a more universal sense, even approaching the globe as the 'living planet'. These changes are visible in modern Kurdish narratives but also in the wider social context, as illustrated by the slogan popular among the Kurds from Bakur and Rojava: *Jin, jîyan, azadî* (Woman, life, freedom) or the Diyarbekir statue of love. Not accidentally, the word 'woman' is associated this time with life and not only with freedom for the Kurdish people.

However, in the reality of war and conflict, valuing life is constantly challenged, because it is associated with cowardice and submission to discriminatory policies (they seek an easy life and are not ready to die)⁵ while being ready to die for the Kurdish nation draws from the well-known traditional reservoir of meanings and is more likely to be preserved.⁶ This proves that dignity cannot be separated from honour; however, elevating the value of life poses the difficult question of whether one has the right to kill or send others to be killed in an often unequal fight. Hence, promoting dignity fosters the emergence of non-violent forms of resistance and the reinterpretation of the traditional sense of honour, which becomes subject to reflection rather than simply being inherited as an unchangeable practice.

Finally, as highlighted by Lindner (5) dignity mirrors universalistic aspirations to overcome the purely local point of view and look at our human reality 'from above', appreciating other living creatures. This ability to grasp a more universal context of human existence, acknowledging that

Picture 2.1 The statue of love (inscription in Turkish language), Diyarbekir 2013, by J. Bocheńska



there are others who share with us the miracle of life though they think and act differently, might be termed, after Appiah, the widening of the honour world, which he showed to be crucial for ending some inhuman honour practices such as foot-binding in China. It was not simply Christian missionaries who inspired the Chinese to end the notorious foot-binding, but rather the Chinese intellectuals who responded to the new code of behaviour brought by the missionaries and managed to find solutions within their own culture. What is more, the missionaries regarded the Chinese intellectuals as part of their honour world (2010, 88) and therefore, instead of imposing their own ideas, fostered the Chinese people's confidence in their own resources and capacities. Having this in mind, we should ask how the vital links between the multiple local contexts and the perspective from above can be established and thus enable people to participate in the richer and more colourful space of the universal. Notably, the idea of bringing films and texts created in different languages by representatives of

those outside the European or American tradition to the area of common interest has been fervently promoted by postcolonial thinkers such as Hamid Dabashi (2007, 2015) or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2012). The foundation for dignity, defined as recognising the value of life, is no longer the privilege of the Western world, which continuously wages wars under the ‘save humanity’ mission as if possessing the exclusive right to the vision of a dignified human. What we need is also not an ecstasy over the abstract space above, which will nullify all differences and particularities, miraculously dissolving in the English language spoken by all, but—as emphasised by Anker in her idea of ‘globalization from below’ (224)—the construction of a new equilibrium between the local and the universal. In the sections that follow, I will show that the modern Kurdish culture has developed its own understanding of dignity, rooting it in its cultural background. Furthermore, it seeks links with the universal through intertextuality, the tendency to blur some aspects of the represented world and application of symbolic elements that are not purely Kurdish. These aspirations must be appreciated, given space and taken care of by all of us, but especially by the Kurds’ neighbours: Turks, Arabs and Persians.

2.3 PERCEIVING HUMANITY: LITERARY AND CINEMA NARRATIVES AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION

If the value of human life is to be appreciated and taken care of within the concept of dignity, one has to be able to imagine what it actually means, yet life and dignity are still abstract terms. As mentioned before, the old system of honour also offered multiple narratives to help people grasp what was required from them in the society they lived in. According to Appiah, any moral revolution has to involve transformation in moral behaviour and not only in sentiments (2010, xi). Hence, changing the content of narratives cannot yet be perceived as real moral change. Nevertheless, it is significant, because it produces a new moral imagination, which Rudolf Steiner says bridges the gap to abstract notions with our perceptual capacities (2000, 80). Therefore, it individualises the idea of dignity in a particular social and cultural context, allowing people to use their own resources instead of only importing foreign terms and meanings. Furthermore, it offers the audience a visual example of how to behave in certain situations for, according to Albert Bandura (2007, 50) we learn primarily by observations and symbols. Finally, it helps in spreading the change of sentiments and therefore encourages people to join the new moral club.

Lynn Hunt has suggested that the role of literary narratives was substantial in inoculating and promoting the sense of sympathy in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and America, through what she defined as the process of ‘imaginative identification allowing us to feel the pain of others’ (2008, 65). At the same time, however, Europeans produced multiple representations of the many ‘less dignified’ others which were very useful in convincing the wider public that what these others needed was to obey to the rules of the Europeans (Said 2003). This paradox can be explained in the scope of theories on the subtle forms of dehumanisation, which propose that we tend to deny the members of the outgroup their uniquely human potential. This results in a lower level of trust and compassion towards them, especially if any relation of power is involved (Haslam and Loughnan 2014). Hence, when Europeans worked out their model of dignity in the scope of their new-born national cultures, they denied dignity to those who did not represent this model. All others were to be educated and remodelled before they could be respected enough to be invited into the club of humans.⁷ The right to do so was widely accepted, while the potential of local cultures was usually rejected as primitive or barbarian (Memmi 2003, 150–156). Therefore, one can agree with Martha Nussbaum (2013, 262) that what we need in our global world is a widening of our naturally narrow sense of sympathy and compassion in a way that is able to challenge our deeply entrenched disgust, but also other forms of subconscious distancing and rejection of others, such as the subtle forms of dehumanisation. The narratives of those who we tend to perceive as others or enemies can be of assistance.

Nussbaum (1990, 24) claimed that literature should be considered a part of philosophical and ethical inquiry. It aligns with the question of ‘how one should live’ rather than putting forward any ready answers, and thus stimulates doubts and pondering instead of certainty. Hence, what we learn by the means of literary or cinema narratives is not the ready model of how to behave, but rather a set of possibilities or questions that we can recall in certain circumstances. While modern Kurdish literature and cinema grew in the shadow of the nationalist movement, initially the works reflected ideology rather than evoking any questions or doubts. As we will see in the case of Rehîm Qazî’s [Rehîmê Qazî] *Pêşmerge*, it offered a guide on how to become a national hero and did not pose any doubts. Yet the black and white picture of the world has been gradually substituted by more complex literary food for thought.

Nussbaum (1990, 66) also suggests that literary narratives train our perception by giving priority to particular people and situations rather than to abstract rules. Although Nussbaum focuses on literature, her approach is fully applicable to cinema, which is the most mimetic of all arts and trains our perception through meaningfully ordered images (Arijon 2011, 16). On the other hand, as stressed by Martin Lefebvre (1999), what one remembers from a film implies the work of imagination even though the film represents reality. The spectator appropriates certain film frames and sounds that bring out ‘new mental images’ which then become ‘integrated into a network of memory as a result of a symbolic process’ (480). Perceptual skills, so important for valuable reasoning, also become developed and deepened. This is certainly true of modern Kurdish literature and cinema, while traditional narratives such as the widespread fairy tales represent patterns of actions and types of characters. Moreover, the moral imagination provided by reading or watching showcases many inner and external contexts embedded in particular situations (Nussbaum 1990, 66) and thus teaches us to grasp the complexity of reality, which is crucial for the proper understanding of the very intricate Kurdish puzzle, consisting of multiple elements. The ‘embodied existence’, perception, harnessed and refined by literature and art, was also advocated by Anker, who followed Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in her analysis of novelistic discourses’ approach to human rights. She highlighted that corporeal experience is composed of ‘vital intensities that facilitate the self’s involvement with the surrounding lifeworld. Within such an ontology of the subject, mind and body are not divorced or antagonists but instead collaborate to foster not only individual selfhood but also communal belonging’ (48). That said, moral imagination must be perceived as bridging not only the gap between the mind and bodily perceptions,⁸ but also between the individual and the social context in which they sit, which is salient for any identity project. Furthermore, as highlighted by Leonidas Donskis, moral imagination is crucial for any construction of the symbolic social space, because it brings together elements of reality that tend to be separated within modern discourses, such as tradition and innovation, logic and emotion, control and openness. Thus, the moral imagination resembles a battlefield where antagonistic visions of the world, opposite tendencies within the human conscious and adverse models of culture clash and both represent and interpret the social reality (2015, 16). These clashes of meaning appear in Kurdish texts, having roots in the rich reservoir of opposing images presented in such sources as the Quran or the classical Kurdish poem *Mem and Zîn* by Ehmedê Xanî (Resûl 2007, 295).

Another advantage of literature emphasised by Nussbaum, and equally applicable to cinema narratives, is its emotional aspect. Nussbaum (1990, 41) claimed that ‘emotions are closely linked to beliefs in such a way that the modification of beliefs brings about the modification of emotions’. To be overcome by emotions does not necessarily mean losing contact with reality, but may mean discovering reality by using other tools (261). The empathy we have for the character we are reading about is always based on our beliefs, which can be reconsidered by the process of reading. Therefore, emotions engaged in reading or watching become an important cognitive tool and must be paid attention to. This is well exposed in Kurdish literature’s gradually unfolding attempt to show and study the anti-hero instead of the hero, as well as in the application of the image of Satan, which plays diverse roles in contemporary narratives.

Finally, Kurdish literature or cinema cannot be simply perceived as a deliberate action, designed to incarnate the meaning of dignity. Each literary or cinema creation draws from observations, experiences, intuitions or intertextual inspirations. Many writers and filmmakers do not like to analyse or interpret the content of their works, leaving it to the audience. However, it is clear from my numerous discussions with those authors I have had the honour to meet that they perceive their works as something paramount not only for developing Kurdish identity, but for improving the ethical and aesthetic aspects of life. Silêman Demir⁹ told me that Kurdish narratives are important to soften and reconsider the military culture of Turkey. Sherzad Hassan¹⁰ claimed that Kurdish literature should be associated with Eros battling with Thanatos over the fate of the Middle East. Mehmed Dicle (2015) defined his goals as discovering and conveying the cultural codes hidden in the Kurdish collective subconscious, thus saving them from oblivion. Yet, he added¹¹ that this process is never a passive repeating of the codes, but rather entails changes. A similar attitude to literary creation was expressed by Ronî War.¹² Jan Dost,¹³ and Eta Nehayi¹⁴ suggested that modern literature is crucial for developing the new consciousness and for making people more tolerant towards each other. Also, Bakhtiyar Ali’s elaborate novel *Ġazalmus û Baxekani Xeyal* (*Ghazalmus and the Imaginary Gardens*, 2007) offers us both literary and theoretical debates on the role of imagination in the moral life, which I will refer to in the following sections. All this inevitably suggests that the ethical context of Kurdish narratives should be taken into account when discussing Kurdish identity, its place and role in the modern Middle East.

2.4 THE DISCREET HARM OF DEHUMANISATION: WHY DO WE NEED THE VOICE OF KURDISH CULTURE TO BE MORE AUDIBLE?

As stressed above, human dignity, although claimed as inherent and inalienable, should at the same time be seen as a malleable construct of our modern world. We must, however, discuss the danger of this, which is linked to the fact that human dignity is often closely connected to a certain understanding and image of humanness. Humanity and dignity are constructs expressed in a language within certain social and cultural contexts. At the same time, we are not so keen to see the humanness of others and often do not treat them as equally dignified. As already mentioned above, recent socio-psychological studies have indicated that we tend to subtly dehumanise the members of outgroups, to deny them uniquely human potential. In other words, we often see the members of our in-group as fully human, and the members of the outgroup as less human (Leyens et al. 2007).

This dehumanisation is generally defined as ‘divesting someone of human qualities’. Until recently, it was related to wars and conflicts, and often entailed genocide and other criminal practices planned by a regime in order to annihilate the unwanted groups. Kelman defined this process ‘as a perception of victims that weakens the victimizers’ normal restraints on violent behaviour’ (Kelman 1976, cited by Haslam and Loughnan 2014, 401). However, as shown by socio-psychological research, dehumanisation may have, not only blatant, but also subtle forms, such as infra-humanisation (divesting of secondary emotions)¹⁵ (Leyens et al. 2000, 2003, 2007), mechanistic dehumanisation (divesting of human nature) (Haslam 2006), dementalisation (depriving subjects of the capacity of thought) (Kozak et al. 2006) or displaying them as lacking human potential (Tarnowska et al. 2012). It often happens involuntarily and imperceptibly between groups and individuals; hence it is pernicious and not easily detectable. Moreover, it does not require intergroup conflict to take place (Leyens et al. 2007, 151). The gravity of this phenomenon is visible in reduced empathy and pro-social behaviour, an increase in antisocial behaviour, and in distorted moral judgements regarding others (Haslam and Loughnan 2014, 414–416; Bilewicz 2012, 211–213). What is more, Nick Haslam and Steve Loughnan (2014, 403) suggested that there might be different contents for the concepts behind dehumanisation practices. Infra-humanisation or dementalisation rely on a comparison between

animals and humans, usually evaluated in favour of the humans, their intelligence and thus supremacy, while mechanistic dehumanisation implies a comparison between humans and inanimate objects (such as machines or robots) and thus suggests the denial of emotional warmth or vitality. Therefore, Anker's criticisms regarding liberal human rights should be seen as related to infra-humanisation or dementalisation. It does not, however, take into account that there might be different bases for dehumanisation, discrimination and disenfranchisement that are simply rooted in the various patterns of cultures and visions of humanity that we have been educated in.

What is also interesting is that the process of denying secondary emotions, infra-humanisation, happens not only in the case of positive secondary emotions (for instance love and sensitivity) but also in the case of negative ones (shame or indignation). In other words, the members of the outgroup are perceived as less prone to more complex good and more complex evil. Thus, it is clear that others are repelled precisely because of their not being 'complex' or 'sophisticated' enough. The understanding of this complexity is always heavily linked to our particular social and cultural imagination. What is more, people tend to see their cultural and social constructs as everlasting and obvious. We live inside our own worlds, reproducing their meanings, which are of course rooted in the languages we speak, and communicating with our in-group. At the same time, we are highly reluctant to see the 'dignified and sophisticated' aspects of the representatives of other cultures, whose imaginary lives we usually have limited access to because of not knowing their language and cultural contexts. According to Jacques-Philippe Leyens (Leyens et al. 2000) humanness is mostly perceived in relation to three basic elements: intelligence (or reason), language (or communication) and sentiments (i.e. secondary emotions). In this respect, the role of narratives, which provide us with an insight into the inner worlds of others, including their thoughts, sentiments and moral choices, becomes more visible and important. As stressed by Lawrence Hinman (2007, 17) it is precisely this access to the inner life of others that is the foundation of moral life.

To sum up and bring the reflection on dehumanisation into the context discussed in this chapter, the Kurds are mostly introduced to others through the prism of the 'Kurdish issue' of the conflicts and wars, but only rarely as possessing any interesting culture and something to contribute to our global cultural heritage. This is responsible for their entrenched dehumanisation and results in denying both their dignity and their right to

self-determination. The responsibility for this situation does not rest solely with the policies of Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq or the Kurds. If we look around and check the number of academic institutions involved in Kurdish studies and foreign researchers knowing the Kurdish language we have to admit that the problem is wider. Even when they are studied, the Kurds are often depersonalised, perceived as *the Kurds*, whose individual properties and characteristics are not worthy to be distinguished and discussed. Therefore, reading Kurdish literary and cinema narratives through the prism of moral imagination can enable us to gain better insights into both the ‘Kurdish humanness’ and also the social and cultural reality the Kurds live in.

2.5 BRAVE HERO AND FAITHFUL WOMAN: THE TRADITIONAL KURDISH CODES OF HONOUR

If we could ask Şerefxanê Bedlîsî [Bidlisi], the first Kurdish chronicler, his thoughts about using the value of life as the basis for a new type of honour, we would probably get an answer that this is a system for cowards and no honourable Kurdish princes could follow it. Recalling the various stories regarding the origin of the Kurds, Bedlîsî states that, according to one of them, the name ‘Kurd’ originated from the limitless courage they were known for (1967, 83; 1994, 28; 2007, 101).¹⁶ Describing the Kurds, Bedlîsî stresses that they are proud, generous and brave (1967, 84; 2007, 102). Moreover they cannot accept scrounging and begging for help and therefore came to be known as robbers instead (1967, 84; 2007, 102). What is more, Bedlîsî quotes an old proverb stating that ‘those who tend to discuss the results of their own deeds cannot be considered brave’ whereas the Kurds, being afraid of the label ‘coward’, avoid discussing the possible consequences of their actions (1967, 84; 2007, 102). The same characteristic is repeated a few centuries later in one of the stories collected and translated into French by Mela Mehmûdê Bayazîdî and August Kościeszka-Żaba [Jaba] (1860). Their story directly informs us that when the Kurds want to gain something, they do not care about their own life, or even about the lives of their children (Bayazîdî 2010b, 66; Bayazîdî and Kościeszka-Żaba 2015, 52). Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, courage is very often ascribed to particular Kurdish nobles within the text of Bedlîsî’s chronicle. For example, talking about Mîr Şeref’s victory over the army of *Kızılbaş*, Bedlîsî highlights that it happened thanks to the

bravery of the Kurds, who overcame greater numbers of enemies because of their courage. By quoting from the Quran, he also indicates that courage comes from God and assists even the small (1967, 185; 2007, 220). This way, he links the heroic system with Islam. It is clear that, in Bedlîsî time, being brave was a very serious norm in Kurdistan, which had an impact on very different dimensions of life. It meant being ready to die, but also not even thinking about the consequences of one's own deeds. What is more, the book is literally called *The Book of Honour* (*Şerefname*), which is definitely not only linked to Bedlîsî's own name (*Şeref*), but to the main idea of the chronicle,¹⁷ which—as emphasised by the author himself—is to register and describe the greatest Kurdish ruling families, with their deeds (1967, 78; 2007, 91) and thus to expose their *şeref*. The honour described by Bedlîsî was conditioned by recognition respect and thus connected to belonging to certain families who were known to possess special valour. The valour was not only granted by such belonging but had to be earned and confirmed through deeds, which is an aspect that can be discussed with regard to appraisal respect. It was often, though not exclusively, connected to the courage of princes. Nevertheless, Bedlîsî's *Şerefname*, and thus the understanding of honour, was widened by the author and became related to writing a book. As stressed by Bedlîsî knowing history offers valuable lessons, experiences and hints (1967, 76; 2007, 87–88). Paradoxically, though, Bedlîsî did not identify himself totally with the honour codes he described. He discussed the consequences of one's own deeds and became critical about the boundless pride of the Kurds. By quoting from another historian, Bedlîsî stressed that discussing past events is of value, because, among other reasons, when great people face difficult problems, by reading history they become more reasonable and recover tranquillity. Knowing history fosters the ability to differentiate between truth and falsehood. What is more, reading about the past events reminds rulers about the power of God, so that they do not become too proud or too self-confident (1967, 76; 2007, 88). In other words, Bedlîsî promoted history as knowledge, which was seen by him as useful and noble at the same time. For Bedlîsî, writing a book about Kurdish affairs, and thus showing the Kurds as knowledgeable, was also a source of honour. This was especially true with that book being written in Persian, so that the book was addressed to the wider public of the Muslim world. Obviously, the world Bedlîsî aspired to as a chronicler and educated person posed slightly different requirements regarding honour, which could be associated with today's esteem. As a member of a noble family, his

honour peers consisted of other Kurdish princes and Muslims; however, as a chronicler, he aspired to a world where family membership and courage gave way to knowledge. However, he tried to unite these competing areas by acclaiming both the greatness of princess and the value of knowing history. Therefore, we may presume that he paved the way for a wider understanding of honour than that prevailing in the reality he described. He wanted the knowledge of history to become honourable among the Kurds. As I will show further, the same path, though in a quite different way, was followed by the Kurdish classical poet Ehmedê Xanî, almost a century later.

The chronicle by the female chronicler Mestûrey Ardalan, written around 1847 and discussing the history of the duchy of Ardalan, also confirms the role of courage, which is ascribed frequently to rulers. Mestûre highlighted the role of many different virtues too, such as generosity, mercy, knowledge, the ability to unite differences and make wolves coexist with sheep (Kurdistani [Mestûrey Ardalan] 1990, 52, 117). Interestingly, courage was totally denied to the Yezidi tribe of Bilbas, who were definitely not treated as equal enemies: their men and women were to be totally annihilated in fighting (69). Therefore we may presume that possession of this virtue must have been linked to Islam. Bedlîsî considered it to be bestowed by God, and thus the Yezidis fell outside the respected world and could be killed more easily. Being brave was also crucial to being promoted on the social scale, for instance to becoming accepted as a husband by the shah's sister. Mestûrey Ardalan quotes an amusing story about Ahmad Khan, the son of the Kurdish prince Xalu-Khan, who grew in power and became independent from both the Ottoman sultan and the Persian shah. According to Mestûre, instead of fighting the powerful prince, Shah Abbas I was encouraged by his advisors to establish friendly relations with him. As described by Mestûre, it happened precisely because the Kurds were depicted as very brave and the shah simply gave up fighting with them (62–63). Ahmad Khan was sent by his father to Shah Abbas, who had him married to his own sister. Nevertheless, the noble princess was not yet aware of Ahmad Khan's valour and refused to sleep with him. Therefore, Shah Abbas arranged a show during which Ahmad Khan had to overcome a lion, which he managed without difficulty. This had a great impact on the princess, who accepted her husband immediately (65).

Both the oral and classical literary traditions provide us with multiple examples of these brave acts. Tacdîn, from the folk story *Meme Alan* (transformed by Ehmedê Xanî into his *Mem and Zin*), is ready to die for

his friend Mem. He does not hesitate to set a fire under his own home to free his friend from oppression. He is a symbol of friendship, faithfulness and courage. The Kurdish Khan Goldenhands from the legend of *Dimdim* (which has been retold in many versions and dialects in Kurdistan (Jalilov [Calil] 1967, 27–39)) becomes the friend of the Shah precisely because of his courage. When the Shah realises he is brave, he no longer allows him to herd horses for a living. The Khan, however, does not accept being dependent on the Shah, builds his own castle of Dimdim and fights bravely until the end, choosing death instead of submission, when the Shah's army besieges him. The Khan also selects his people based on valour, the cowards being killed (1967, 172). Brave characters prevail in numerous fairy tales told by traditional storytellers until the second half of the twentieth century. Mirza Mahmud, from the fairy tale *Şarûrbilbil*,¹⁸ chooses the most dangerous road to find the singing nightingale for his father, though his two brothers prefer a comfortable life in a town. This fact renders them less honourable from the very beginning, which is confirmed by their further envy against Mirza Mahmud, leading them to abandon him in a well. Importantly, Mirza is warned about their bad intentions by one of the female characters, but he bravely chooses the risk of being betrayed rather than accuse his own brothers. According to Mela Mehmûdê Bayazîdî, the Kurds are brave when fighting and they are ready to die when defending their homes (1963, 14; 2010a, 44). An interesting story about Kurdish courage was told by Hassan Arfa, the Persian general struggling with the Kurdish leader Simko (1921). When some of Persian soldiers were captured by Simko's fighters, one of the officers was asked to show Simko the mechanism of the machine-guns they had collected. While explaining the details, the officer suddenly turned his gun towards Simko. This daring pleased Simko so much that he released the soldiers, handing a gold Turkish lira to each of them (Arfa 1966, 60). Even into modern times, courage, though accompanied by other virtues such as generosity and hospitality, constituted the unquestionable foundation for the honourable man, as depicted in various narratives. It was a reason to be proud, but not necessarily faithful, because such things as changing alliances, killing one's closest relatives in order to gain power and not being able to submit to someone were all outlined by Bedlîsî, Xanî and Ardalan. Faithfulness was, however, required for women's honour, called *namûs*. Women, whose lives were usually not marked by brave acts on the battlefield, were considered less important than men and therefore their lives could be taken away more easily, especially if any of them were caught being unfaithful.

According to Bedlîsî, the life of a girl could be given to mute the spiral of revenge between two families. It was the equivalent of a horse, or a few sheep (1967, 88; 2007, 106). In the nineteenth century, Bayazîdî stressed that, if a woman was caught being unfaithful, she was killed regardless if she was a wife, mother, daughter or sister. Even women were keen to kill other woman for such a crime. Bayazîdî compared this with the fact that the Kurds were generally not eager to kill their enemies and used to let them go free (1963, 15; 2010a, 46). In the collection of stories recorded by him and Kościeszka-Żaba, we find two interesting stories connected to women's faithfulness. Story number 26 of their collection recounts the killing of an unfaithful wife by Çinar Aga, which is acclaimed as a 'brave act' and honoured by the pasha, who promotes Aga to a better position and gives him an expensive gift (2010b, 98–100; 2015, 88–90). The 19th story tells us about the courage of Cergo's wife, Guzel Xatûn, who, when assaulted by a malicious and lustful servant of her husband, managed to kill him and did not lose her chastity. This made her famous and praised for courage. She even earned the prestigious name of 'lion-like' (Bayazîdî 2010b, 85–87; Bayazîdî and Kościeszka-Żaba 2015, 74–76). Another example of a brave woman is Çilkezî, from a story recorded from the traditional version told by the Celîls family in 1972. Obviously it was a story created by the Yezidis, because the Yezidi customs are mentioned as 'ours' in the text. Çilkezî is a unique example of a woman character who searches for her lost love and faces danger like many male characters. Nevertheless, it is not fighting dragons but keeping her chastity which is her main task in the tale. It is clear from the fairy tale that she will not be able to regain her lost love if she loses that chastity. Therefore, she does not hesitate to cheat and kill men who try to 'get married' or 'become her husband' that is to sleep with her. Finally, she has to prove her chastity in front of her husband when, dressed as the king of a country, she is ordering other men whom she met and escaped from to tell their stories and confirm that they did not sleep with her. Xanzad, one of the women characters from the novel *Gulî Şoran (The Flower of Şoran)* (Nehayi 1998) by Eta Nehayi, a writer from Rojhilat, comes to the conclusion that, in Kurdish society, *namûs* is the main and only aspect of women's value (2012, 73). This type of honour is still incredibly important for many Kurdish women. In order to explain the meaning and importance of *namûs*, I was once told a story by a Kurdish woman from Iranian Kurdistan, whom I call Estêra here,¹⁹ and who was married to a Kurdish man in Bakur. She told me that '*namûs* is everything' and that 'it is even more important than the life of one's own

children'. To illustrate what she meant, she recalled a story that was often repeated to her by the Kurdish women from Serdeşt, which was her home town. The husband of a woman was gone, fighting as a peshmerga during one of the conflicts, and she remained with her small son. A friend of her husband was in love with her but she did not answer his feelings, being faithful to her husband. The man decided to cheat her by telling her that he was going to take her to her husband in the mountains. She took her son and they set out on a journey. On the way the man said that he was going 'to marry her' and if she didn't agree he would kill her son. The woman refused to give up and the man killed her son. Then, in order 'not to get married' she started to fight with him and managed to kill him. She became an example of a truly faithful and brave woman and stories were made about her in the region exposing the proper behaviour of a wife and woman.²⁰

The above-mentioned understandings of *şeref* and *namûs* are still binding norms for many inhabitants of Kurdistan and the Middle East. *Şeref* is connected, not only with the greatness of one's own family, but in the contemporary reality has become the shield for the Kurdish nation (Alinia 2013, 55). As we could see from the above examples, *şeref* has been mostly linked to physical strength and masculinity because they were helpful in defending the Kurdish people from threats from outside. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that it is not the only possible context for this honour, as Şerefxanê Bedlîsî showed the Kurds as honourable by means of their knowledge too. In this scheme of honour, the man's duty is to fight in the name of national identity and homeland (58), while women should keep their chastity because they are often associated with the image of a country, its beauty and purity (Galip 2015, 174–179; Alinia, 58). Female fighters, such as the YPJ²¹ members or women's peshmerga units²² can be easily linked to the above-mentioned image of a brave woman, who challenges her own physical weakness and, by becoming brave, is able to gain more respect in the society. Chastity is, however, still the unspoken norm, even for lion-like women. Women who lose chastity, even as the result of rape, for example, in the recent case of ISIS attacks, are no longer considered worthy of respect or life because, according to the honour system, they bring shame and damage on the whole family. This approach, though considerably challenged in recent years, still seeks to justify the notorious honour killings and unfortunately it has made the ISIS deliberate-rape war plan possible.²³ It could not have been conceived of if a woman's life were considered more important than her chastity.

It is clear from the above-mentioned narratives that, according to the traditional moral system, corporeal life on earth was not yet valued in itself, and thus could not be honoured and protected in the way we expect within the concept of human rights. There are new narratives, though, that can offer another perception and interpretation of the world and a new sense of honour, which we called dignity. The society may be of course forced to accept new norms, for example by changing the law to punish perpetrators of honour killing, but this process could be made less painful, more acceptable and more effective if the change is seen as an inseparable part of Kurdish culture. Instead, the new norm is often perceived as ‘foreign’ and thus a suspicious requirement that cannot be treated as worthy of respect. Paradoxically, although the notorious honour killings in Kurdish society have been frequently discussed by researchers, activists and journalists (Mojab and Abdo 2004; Szabołowski 2010; Hardi 2013; Begikhani et al. 2015; Doğan 2016), the narratives that stand behind these norms, as well as the modern works that could provide the society with the moral imagination to foster new choices, constantly avoid attention. It is probably because culturalisation of this crime is considered incorrect and dangerous. Linking honour crimes to culture may result in both excusing murders and stigmatising the Kurdish people as ‘backward’ (Alinia, 4; Begikhani et al., 31).²⁴ Nevertheless, though it goes without saying that crimes in the name of honour are a part of a more complicated political and social order, I would argue that there are also Kurdish narratives that can assist the moral transformation and, therefore, culture cannot be neglected or rejected here. Notably, Mino Alinia underscored that, while some of the perpetrators of honour killings in Iraqi Kurdistan were not aware of the change of law, they were aware of the stories of other men who did it (77). One of the perpetrators interviewed by Alinia claimed that he had to kill his sister ‘because he couldn’t see another alternative’ (78), which clearly shows that he couldn’t imagine any other possible solution. Solely banning or condemning such crimes might be futile if we cannot provide people with a new moral imagination to be applied in their particular social and cultural reality. Not being able to imagine themselves as ‘honourable’ by making different choices in life, people will not be likely to abandon or modify their traditional norms. All the narratives I have mentioned above are today deemed important for the Kurdish cultural heritage, which is often perceived as endangered by the assimilation policy of the four Middle Eastern countries; and therefore the moral content they offer escapes criticism and is taken on board as ‘significant’ too.

As can be understood from these examples, both *şeref* and *namûs* draw from stories and the wide imaginary space, therefore requiring a more complex approach to enrich heroic culture with a new moral imagination. At the same time, traditional honour cannot be rejected because we still need its courage, that can enable people to make moral choices which are often not supported or even mocked by the majority of those who surround them.

2.6 GOD-LOVE IDEA

We have already discussed a few examples of Kurdish traditional narratives that illustrate the meaning of honour, courage and faithfulness. The time has come to look for the meaning of love, which also has deep roots in Kurdish culture and today is applied as a main building block of the modern vision of a dignified human being. The motive of romantic love, especially the tragic one, pervades the multiple Kurdish songs and interestingly their themes are not devoid of vivid eroticism (Bocheńska 2011, 66). In the Yezidi religious texts, love is presented as the main power of God, responsible for creating the diverse world out of a white, immaculate pearl (Kreyenbroek 2005, 67; Rodziewicz 2014). Love is mentioned in the Quran and the love of God constitutes a crucial topic in the Muslim Sufi tradition.²⁵ The many poems by Kurmanji, Sorani or Gorani Kurdish classical poets such as Melayê Cezîrî (1570–1640), Feqê Teyran (1590–1660), Ehmedê Xanî (1650–1707), Nalî (1800–1856), Salim (1800–1866), Kurdî (1803–1849),²⁶ Mehwi (1830–1909), Besarani (1641–1702) Mewlewî (1806–1882) emphasise the lover's longing for the Beloved, that is God, who is often, though not exclusively, represented by the figure of a woman. These poems are suffused with pain, yearning and the sense of being unfulfilled. However, a special place on this list belongs to the iconic poem *Mem and Zîn* by Ehmedê Xanî (1694), which focuses, not only on the mystical devotion of the Sufi, but also on the ethical aspect of love and the ability to forgive, which the poet ascribes to both God and human. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the twentieth century *Mem and Zîn* started to be discussed with regard to Kurdish nationalism (Şakelî 1996; van Bruinessen 2003) and other dimensions of this work, especially those linked to the mystical context, were often hidden from sight and neglected. To some extent, this poem has been infantilised in its contemporary reception. Although it is true that it tells the story of the unhappy

lovers Mem and Zîn who, because of the intrigues of the malicious Bekir, are not allowed to get married and thus step on the mystical path, their love story serves as a pretext to tell the reader about many other issues. In spite of that, Xanî's work is often referred to as a 'romance', 'mystical romance', 'tragic love story', or the 'Kurdish Romeo and Juliet' and the unprepared reader will receive it as such, not being able to trace other meanings. However, what is most compelling in Ehmedê Xanî's poem is his wide concept of love, which is linked to the idea of a loving and forgiving God. Although, to Xanî, human life was definitely not the 'end in itself' and should be sacrificed in the name of the mystical reunion with God, the understanding of love that it offers is certainly one that provides meaning for the contemporary idea of dignity. Similar to Şerefhan Bedlîsî, Xanî wrote his work in order to show the Kurds as knowledgeable. This time he did it, however, in Kurdish (Kurmanji dialect) and, what is more, we learn from the introduction that he wanted to show the Kurds as 'not devoid of the ability to love' (2005, 172). This is very interesting information, because it clearly proposes that being able to love was very important for Xanî and that it was linked to a special kind of honour, which differed from the understanding of honour we have previously discussed. Love, mercy and forgiveness are presented by Xanî as the main instruments of God, and humans may share in them when they are able to love and forgive. We are told about God's limitless mercy towards His friends and enemies (610) and, being inspired by God's love, Zîn, the main female character, was able to ask for mercy for Bekir, the malicious advisor of the prince, who was the reason for her misery and the death of her beloved Mem (578–582). We may even suppose, as I have in one of my articles, that Bekir was in fact the personified Satan in the story, and this way Xanî followed a long tradition of Muslim thinkers seeking redemption for Satan (Bocheńska 2016a). He did it, however, not in the scope of any theoretical discourse but by personifying Satan and embodying evil in a particular Kurdish context, creating a powerful example of the literary moral imagination. He showed Satan as God's envoy who is a part of God's plan, and suggested love that the man is not able to imagine and conceive of. According to Xanî, the real aim of humans was to unite with God in the hereafter and therefore the single human life was not yet deemed worthy of respect in the poem. Nevertheless, the poet portrayed the beauty of life by offering the multiple detailed descriptions of a number of customs, including the wedding night of Sîtî and Tacdîn, the other pair of characters whose love finds fulfilment (2005, 337–345). Even if the

alluring eroticism of this scene should be related to the mystical context, symbolising the future reunion with God, its realism definitely adds to the overall enchantment over the physical aspect of life which permeates *Mem and Zin*. Xanî emphasised the meaning of love, and the ability to love, not only one's friends, but also one's enemies, as one of the most important virtues. Interestingly, contrary to Tacdîn who is the epitome of a brave and decisive man, Mem is portrayed as a rather apathetic figure who is not willing to take any action. He thinks and dreams a lot, yet is not devoid of honour. As I will show further, this type of character is developed within modern narratives. Moreover, the idea of loving one's enemies deserves attention, fostering an attempt to consider and understand their actions. It is well exposed by Xanî in the case of both Prince Zeynedîn and his malicious advisor, Bekir. They are both portrayed as the source of evil for Botan, but the reasons for their actions are shown and they are not simply condemned. This is crucial for acknowledging human dignity, even in cases where we consider someone's actions improper, wrong or disgusting. What is more, although Tacdîn kills Bekir, his deeds are not presented by Xanî as proper but, rather, as committed out of despair and he is among those who are described as in need of the forgiveness of God in the hereafter. As mentioned before, both Mestûrey Ardalan and Mela Mehmûdê Bayazîdî, in their nineteenth-century writing, emphasised the importance of mercy, and the ability of the Kurds and their rulers to forgive their enemies was deemed to be something worth stressing. This means that mercy and forgiveness were part of the Kurdish traditional culture, and even of their political reality. Therefore the idea of loving one's enemies and thus creating narratives to understand them should be considered a very important resource in order to build the modern meaning of dignity and widen the traditional honour world. Nevertheless, we should not forget that there were cases, such as with the Yezidis, where people were not considered equal enemies because they were neither part of the Muslim *umma*, nor even of the community of the book encompassing Jews and Christians. They thus fell outside the area covered by mercy and understanding. For Xanî, in his work *Eqîdeya Îmanê (The Profession of Faith, 1683)*, it was clear that those deserving to be saved from eternal hell were Muslims (2008, 145). Thus, conceiving of dignity in a broad sense will require a major change and widening of the honour world by inviting non-Muslims to the club of those who are respected because of being humans. In the coming sections I will show how this change took place in Kurdish literature.

2.7 HONOURABLE NATIONAL STRUGGLE: REHÎM QAZÎ'S *PÊŞMERGE* AS A LITERARY ATTEMPT TO REDEFINE HONOUR WITH REGARD TO THE KURDISH NATION

Along with the emergence of modern Kurdish literature in the twentieth century, the newly imagined Kurdish community has been crafted in support of the Kurdish national idea (Ahmadzadeh 2003, 2013; Bocheńska 2011; Galip 2015). *Pêşmerge (Partisans)*²⁷ by Rehîm Qazî was the first modern novel published in Sorani Kurdish, in 1961²⁸ (Ahmadzadeh 2003, 175), and paid attention to those who were engaged in the national struggle. In Qazî's novel (2007), the two noble village boys Pîrût and Şêrko, who become peshmerga, are confronted with bad landlords, Qerenî and Mîna Agas, who symbolise all possible misfortunes. The landlords are described as greedy, cruel and lustful. Qerenî Aga collaborates with Iranian gendarmes against Kurdish peshmerga and Mîna Aga rapes Şêrko's sister Mîrût, who commits suicide shortly after that. Although filled with interesting details regarding Kurdish villages and peshmerga fighters' lives, from an ethical point of view this novel represents a very flat, black and white picture of good peshmerga and bad landlords and in this regard recalls fairy tales rather than contemporary literature. Mîna Aga is even directly compared to the bloodthirsty dragon (45). The national struggle is identified with moral good and killing in the name of such a struggle is not perceived as something wrong. Killing Mîna Aga brings pleasure for both Şêrko and Pîrût. It is presented as a fully justified act of revenge (77–79). Mîrût's suicide is portrayed as the only thing that may come to the mind of the noble Kurdish girl who cares for her family honour more than her own life. Her life, in turn, can only become 'unbearably bitter' after her *namûs* had been spoiled (52). Şêrko and Pîrût inscribe their wish for revenge on Mîna Aga into the national struggle. Thus, it is clear that although Qazî's novel calls for national revolution in the name of modern Kurdistan, in fact it regurgitates the traditional vision of the world, divided between heroes and dragons, members of the Kurdish in-group and its enemies. Like dragons in fairy tales, enemies must be totally annihilated. There is no reliable truth standing behind them that one may want to listen to. They are entirely bad creatures with no hope for any transformation. At the very beginning of the novel Qerenî Aga suggests that Kurmanj (as he calls the Kurds) cannot consider themselves humans in front of their agha (25); he dehumanises them. However, at the same time the landlord is also dehumanised within the novel when called a bloodthirsty dragon

(45). The message is clear: the landlords and the feudal system they represent cannot be respected; they are no longer honourable. In Qazî's novel we are confronted with honour serving the purpose of the new-born nation. It becomes the shield of the nation, which is a significant difference compared to a society where only members of the noble families, landlords, or sheikhs were worthy of respect. The same motives may be discovered in the prose of other early writers and poets, such as Şakir Fattah, İbrahim Ahmad, Muxarram Muhammad Amîn or Maruf Barzînî (Xaznadar 1967, 190–198). However, we cannot yet speak about dignity that would be able to recognise the value of human life, encompassing even enemies or 'disgusting creatures'.

2.8 LOVE AS SYMPATHY AND ATTENTION TOWARDS OTHERS: PAVING THE WAY FOR MODERN MORAL IMAGINATION

Discussing dignity, Donna Hicks suggests that the understanding of love that is useful in acknowledging one's dignity is closely connected to the sort of attention we pay to other human beings. She even declares that 'love is attention' (2011, 117). Modern Kurdish literature has developed new forms of attention and love towards characters that were unknown to traditional texts. We have already mentioned that love was deeply seated in the traditional Kurdish narratives, both oral and classical. It was mostly portrayed as erotic and romantic affection, or as mystical devotion. However, along with the modern narratives, a new, wider understanding of love has emerged in Kurdish literature. It initially became linked to patriotism and love for Kurdish homeland. Accordingly, Kurdistan was often portrayed as a beloved woman (Galip, 174–179). We may presume that it took the place given to God in many classical poems. Nevertheless, in time, Kurdish literature came to offer attention and sympathy towards people in what, following Lynn Hunt, can be called 'the process of imaginative identification allowing to feel the pain of others', thus starting to obtain a more moral meaning. Importantly, these changes came into being as aesthetic transformations. According to Nussbaum (1990) it is thanks to aesthetics that ethical questions become more sublime and apt. As a result, psychological and philosophical portraits of Kurdish characters and their interrelations have become more multidimensional and richer. Furthermore, this process has been accompanied by more focus on social problems. Therefore, the meaning of love expands beyond erotic affec-

tion, mystical devotion or patriotism. It elevates the universal value of human life, paving the way for a modern understanding of dignity.

This process is well illustrated in the prose of the famous Kurdish Sorani writer from Başur, Bakhtiyar Ali, who discusses it by the means of elaborate dialogues and monologues, for which he is sometimes criticised by Kurdish literary critics and readers. I would, however, argue that these philosophical digressions are crucial to better understand the ethical dimension of Ali's novels, and that they do not necessarily violate their aesthetic. Taking the above-mentioned into account, I wish to start my overview of modern Kurdish literature with the two novels by Bakhtiyar Ali, which in my opinion offer us not only an imaginary framework for dignity but also a solid theoretical background for a discussion of the ethical transformation.

In *Êwarey Perwane (The Moths' Evening, 1998)* the character Little Xendan is chosen to narrate the story, although it seems that it is her sister, Perwane, who deserves to become the protagonist of the novel (2012). Perwane belongs to a group of exalted artists, the inhabitants of *Eşqistan*, which is the Land of Love, who rebel against the authority of the religious people and establish a place for young intellectuals who believe in the power of love. Perwane and her friend Midya are killed by religious fanatics one winter evening when many moths and butterflies gather. Perwane, incidentally, means 'moth' and as a popular Kurdish name for a girl, it evokes the subtle beauty of moths and butterflies,²⁹ but also of the classical Sufi poetry widespread in Kurdistan in the past and still read and enjoyed by many. In this classical poetry, moths and their fatal attraction to light, represented in the form of the moth flying to and burning in the flame of a candle, symbolised the spiritual love of a Sufi towards God and his desire to unite with the Almighty. According to Annemarie Schimmel moths or butterflies symbolising the soul have been known from ancient Greece. The story of moth burning in the flame was first told in Arabic by the martyr-mystic Hallaj (858–922) in *Kitab al-tawasin* and the moths occurring in the Quran were the symbols of the confused souls (2013, 61). Also, as highlighted by Schimmel, many ancient tales spoke of 'people killed by the cruelty of political or religious fanatics who appeared again in the forms of butterflies' (61).

Ali's Perwane decides to follow the 'mysterious light of love (*eşq*)', which is confronted with the 'black tunnel of life' (2012, 22) that is the reality of a small town in Kurdistan exposed to the brutality of both the

religious fanatics and the Iraqi army. Perwane declares herself to be different than all other people (23) and decides to seek refuge in *Eşqistan*, a land inhabited by people similar to her. However, in twentieth-century Kurdistan, *Eşqistan*'s inhabitants consist of young artists and intellectuals rather than Sufis. The word *sofi* is associated with the followers of the traditional form of Islam, who intend to prevent any new vision of life from entering Kurdistan. They are represented mostly by a woman, Xendan and Perwane's aunt, who is constantly hunting for any signs of Satan to combat. Being Xendan's beloved sister, Perwane becomes the focal point of the story. Nevertheless, it is Xendan's loving attention to others which allows us to see the tragic perplexity of both sides of the conflict: the blind religious fanaticism and the egotistical escapism of artists, who burn or are burned as the mystical moths (*perwane*) following the light. The *Land of Love* gains a symbolic meaning, which can be interpreted in many different ways. It refers to the Kurdish Islamic mystical tradition where Kurdish contemporary literature has one of its roots and transforms the Sufi into the modern artist.³⁰ Furthermore, it elevates the meaning of love in the modern context, linking mystical devotion with artistic creation. One of the characters even calls love a new religion (180). At the same time, the novel becomes a critique addressed to Kurdish artists and intellectuals, their egotism, escapism and naivety in the name of exalted love that is so far from average people.³¹ This exalted love results in utopianism rather than a better world being built. However, Bakhtiyar Ali portrays the *Eşqistan*'s inhabitants as 'tragic' but not 'stupid' figures. From their many monologues and endless discussions we may understand that they are aware of the sad limits of their religion of love. In spite of that, Ali invents the narration that arises over religious fanaticism and artistic exaltation. Xendan's love is different from that of the artists. Called 'little' by the writer, she is neither an eloquent speaker nor a talented sculptor. Instead, her 'little love and attention' are centred on other people becoming less spectacular but more perceptive. She gives priority to the feelings, thoughts and deeds of others, contrary to any kind of ideological or artistic sacrifice that the religious fanatics and the *Eşqistan* inhabitants represent. Xendan is not a hero-type. She is not brave and self-confident enough to escape with her sister Perwane to *Eşqistan*. She becomes trapped between the two realities, but paradoxically, this allows her to see more. Compared with Qazî's *Pêşmerge*, *Êwarey Perwane* is richer in portraying the ethical dimension of competing groups of people. We do not see the black and white vision of bad and good but, rather, a tragic image of people who are over-

whelmed by fanatical beliefs, modern ideas, their will to change the society or the simple dream of a better world. They all live within self-created illusions, which is perfectly highlighted by the aesthetic of magical realism applied in the book. We see honour and religion as shields of the traditional world, which does not hesitate to kill in order to maintain its position. Xendan's narration, although more sympathetic to *Eşqistan's* inhabitants, does not dehumanise their opponents. Even if they are painted as overwhelmed by fanaticism, at the same time their psychological portraits gain more complexity by the help of aesthetical nuances. For example when Xendan (2011, 34) tells us about her father's fury after Perwane's disappearance, we learn that he destroys the house but also that he cries at the same time. What is more, her father's cry is described as 'the most curious thing in her life' (34). This helps us to see him as a tragic and not simply 'barbaric' or 'fanatical' creature. Xendan's narration and loving attention rise over the competing factions, elevating the value of human life contrary to any kind of ideological sacrifice and thus offering a dignified portrait of others. Choosing Xendan as a guide and narrator for his novel, Ali calls for the reinterpretation of love, suggesting that we should make it less sacred and exalted and more focused on others and on human life.³² The same understanding of love is directly defined in his novel *Gazalnuş û Baxekani Xeyal (Ghazalnuş and the Imaginary Gardens, 2007, 2016)*³³ where we learn that:

very few people experience the moment they fall in love – not in the simple human sense of “being in love”, when you suddenly feel in thrall to another human being and are unable to do without them or to stop thinking about them, nor in the religious or Sufi sense of love as a profound relationship with the Creator, but rather in the sense of a great force that makes people care for others, makes them aware of a profound connection to all life and makes them weep for other human beings, whoever or wherever they may be; in the sense that we fall in love with human suffering and love others because they suffer, because they are eternal victims and forever alone in their suffering. (2007, 133; 2016, 119)

It is Bahman-Ghazalnuş,³⁴ the protagonist of the novel, along with his few friends, who is endowed with such a capacity to be able to create the imaginary gardens where such love may find its place. Contrary to the inhabitants of *Eşqistan*, Ghazalnuş and his friends are not confronted with religious fanatics but with the modern capitalist elite of a city, represented

by different barons. By the means of poetry and art, along with his friends, Ghazalnu creates imaginary gardens in the city that may be entered through secret gates by those sensitive creatures who are able to see them. Although the city very much resembles Southern Kurdistan's locations such as Hawler (Erbil) or Silemani, which have been undergoing major changes in recent decades, it may be in fact associated with many other places of the world. The European title of 'baron' applied in Sorani Kurdish certainly draws from non-Kurdish contexts and universalises the story told in this novel. This is one example of how Kurdish authors contribute to the universal space, establishing a new equilibrium between the local and the global. The Baron of Imagination (or Jewahir Serfiraz) is the main figure among the barons bearing a literary resemblance to the Grand Inquisitor from the *Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky. His resort is imagination. He wishes to cooperate with Ghazalnu in order to build the dream city. He wants imagination to become an instrument of power, offering a new earthly paradise for people where some of them may find beauty, rest and peace while others will have to be eliminated. However, Ghazalnu strongly opposes such a role for imagination. He suggests that what the baron is talking about is a dream: 'You have dreams, and I have imagination.³⁵ It's the biggest difference that could divide any two creatures' (2007, 384; 2016, 339). What is more, according to Ghazalnu: 'Those endowed with an imagination don't run away from this world. They think about the fate of all its creatures. They worry even about the flowers and the ants' (2007, 384; 2016, 339). Contrary to that, 'the world's dictators, its cruel rulers and emperors all had dreams (...). The most dangerous thing that can happen is for imagination to be transformed into dreams' (2007, 384; 2016, 339). 'The imagination of each person is tied to his or her soul and existence. It's not something that can merge with a big dream' (2007, 385; 2016, 340). What is defined here in a very precise way is the form of imagination that we called 'moral' in this chapter. Its role is to attend to other people and other 'lively creatures', which is in contrast to both escapism and the desire to impose one's own vision of beauty and happiness on others. In this context, the dream may be related to the colonial thinking of any king, politician, scientist or artist, whereas imagination emerges as a fully postcolonial capacity.³⁶ It does not search for pride and glory but rather remains attached to the often sad and disenchanting reality. Ghazalnu declares that his paradise 'lies in his unsuccessful and failed loves' and that 'it is behind the gates of the gardens he must head towards' (2007, 386; 2016, 341). Whereas the inhabitants of the *Esgistan* seemed

more attached to dreams, Ghazalrus is an artist who learns a lot from Xendan in order to develop his imagination. He is not even a poet himself but mostly keeps reading the *ghazals* of his father and thus exposes the talent of someone else. Moreover, we learn that what Ghazalrus and his friends are collecting and writing down in their big book are stories about death. They gather information about the people who were murdered, girls who were forced to burn themselves, victims of the civil war and those who drowned in the sea when seeking refuge in Europe (2007, 375; 2016, 333). The beautiful imaginary gardens also serve as a cemetery for the discovered bodies of people killed in the city. Nevertheless, even Ghazalrus has to confront the very ambiguous dimension of his love when he becomes familiar with Chinese Youth (or Murad Jamil), who boldly suggests that he is Ghazalrus' 'real side' (2007, 406; 2016, 357). Being the local heart-breaker, Chinese Youth is very much attached to the corporeal dimension of love, accusing Ghazalrus of simple cowardice: 'You are nothing but a cowardly lover. (...) I am the one who needs those *ghazals*, so that I can read them to the girls and women who fall in love with me. You talk about the fantastical aspect of love, but I am the one who is living its real aspect. I am the part of you that you have stifled. You can't cope with the real side of love' (2007, 407; 2016, 359). These two figures reflect what Anker called the split between body and soul (or reason). Whereas she related this problem mostly to Plato, Kant, Descartes and the European intellectual tradition (17), we may detect the same break in the Middle Eastern and Muslim heritage even if it is not just reason, but rather the spirit or soul which is often described as enslaved by the body. In the introduction to *Mem and Zin*, Ehmedê Xani claimed that spirit was united with the body by force. Mem and Zin abandoned their earthly desires for the sake of pure spirit and reunion with God. However, the origin of this split seems to lie deeper, not even in the Platonic, but rather the Orphic, tradition and its concept of body as a 'tomb of the soul' (Guthrie 1993, 156–157).

The Chinese Youth's allegations have a strong impact on Ghazalrus even if he rejects the vision of love reduced to corporeal desires, which he calls 'the Western law of love' as opposed to the Eastern Sufi tradition linking love with pain (2007, 408–409; 2016, 359–360). Although this distinction can hardly be justified and has the markings of simple Orientalism, it helps Ghazalrus to defend his attitude to love, perceived always as something serious, sad and painful. On the contrary, Chinese Youth declares that 'love isn't mystical, immortal, profound and complex thing that

should hang around your neck like a rope until death. Love's easier than that. It's the mingling of two souls, you see. Love makes human beings each other's friends, not each other's slaves' (2007, 409; 2016, 360). In this way, Chinese Youth undermines the certainty of Ghazalus' beliefs and points out that his concept of love may result in nothing but slavery. The dialogue between the two recalls another Kurdish work—*Gotinên gunehkar* (*Sinful Words*,³⁷ first published in 2007, 2008) by Hesenê Metê—where the Kurmanji Kurdish author from Bakur drew a portrait of God, implying that He created man for himself in order to be loved and admired by someone. Such a portrait of God can be easily associated with Orientalism and the colonial relationship described by Said (Bocheńska 2013a). Helîm Yûsiv from Rojava, in his short story cycle entitled *Mem bê Zîn* (*Mem without Zin*, 2003) also demystified the image of 'immortal lovers' by exhibiting the more mundane, prosaic and thus humane aspects of love.

Thanks to Chinese Youth, Ghazalus is able to grasp his 'complex' and 'profound', but at the same time very asexual and thus inhuman, relationship with Trifa Yabahri, whom he probably truly loves. He also feels responsible for finding and burying the body of Chinese Youth, who is murdered by barons along with his beloved Baran. However, it is not Ghazalus but the Real Magellan³⁸ who—as if following the meaning of his name—makes the real discovery and crosses the border of body and soul when falling in love with Afsana. He betrays 'the whole of his strange past, in which there had been no bridges between body and soul' (2007, 273; 2016, 243) and is able to experience what he had believed, that 'love is something neither the soul nor body can achieve alone, the one thing in which both dangerous forces within a human being should fuse completely. In the act of love, unless the body enters the soul's game, the souls will be lost and unable to come together. If the soul doesn't enter the body's game, the bodies become disenchanting and begin to grow apart (...) The body must speak first so that the souls can build bridges and draw closer to one another' (2007, 274; 2016, 243–244). More than that, he comes to the conclusion that 'the biggest enemies of the soul are people who hate the body' (2007, 274; 2016, 244). We are then allowed to see, and delight in, the erotic scene between Real Magellan and Afsana.

Finally, we learn from Ghazalus' father's letter that 'love is an immense honour' (2007, 136; 2016, 122) and 'nothing, no matter how great or infinite, can rival it in serenity' (2007, 136; 2016, 122). Furthermore 'it is the one thing made by man alone, the one thing in which Devil has no hand. Nor is God its starting point. God himself is beloved, and the truly

beloved does not create love. God is love's subject, not its creator' and 'the power of love is the sole barometer of humanness, one greater than all the rest' (2007, 136; 2016, 122). Behram, the protagonist of Metê's *Sinful Words*, is also inspired by his love to the earthly Demora, gradually distancing himself from both God and Satan, rejecting their vision of the egotistic love (Bocheńska 2013a) and proclaiming 'without shame and fear' that he loves human Demora more than God (2008, 174). Although 'this immense honour' is not called dignity by Ali, we can easily connect it with the understanding of dignity that has been described in the previous sections of this chapter.

This discussion reverberates with the anthropological study by J. Andrew Bush (2016), who focused on the way a Kurdish man from Silemani, called Newzad in his paper, applied Mahwî and Narî's couplets to deal with his moral problems. As highlighted by Bush: 'Newzad drew on love poetry and mystical language to express a kind of moral striving when he explained how "God becomes a lover, a lover becomes God."' What is more, according to Newzad, 'the availability of these concepts and expressions comes from life in this world', 'from the shifting and failing of human relations' (85). Newzad's approach bears some resemblance to the Xanî's introduction to *Mem and Zîn*, where the poet called God both *maşûq* (Beloved) and *aşiq* (Lover) (Xanî, 116) and cunningly approached the Almighty, suggesting that He should be willing to love and forgive (Bocheńska 2016a, 46).³⁹ Newzad elevated the role of love but, contrary to Ali and Metê, and in line with Xanî, saw God as capable of becoming the lover and not only the beloved. All these examples show that, for these Kurdish authors there is no necessity for what Jacek Filek called 'the murder of God' by Nietzsche (2001, 291). Instead of proudly proclaiming God's death, one may follow Newzad and invite God into a new, more equal and reciprocal relationship. This new pattern of relations between God and humans becomes significant for any reckoning.

2.9 HOW DO WE LOVE SATAN AND 'OTHERS'? KURDISH LITERATURE'S ATTENTION TO ANTI-HEROES, ENEMIES AND NON-MUSLIMS

We have already said that, by reaching out to opponents and by portraying them with more attention and aesthetic care, Kurdish literature has started to widen the imaginary world of honour, paving the way for a modern

understanding of dignity. In this section, I wish to focus on works that pay special attention to those perceived as weak, enemies, Satanic or disgusting. I suggest that this topic represents a unique dimension in the Kurdish literary context because of being inspired by the Sufi, Yezidi or Ahle Haqq religious traditions.

As we know, the Yezidis, and sometimes also the Ahle Haqq (van Bruinessen 2014), were called devil worshippers by their orthodox Muslim neighbours. This was one of the reasons they were seen as especially disgusting and persecuted more than other religious minorities. The label originated from the orthodox Muslims' misinterpretation of the figure of Tawûsî Melek, the Peacock Angel praised by the Yezidis. According to the Yezidis, Tawûsî Melek refused to subordinate himself to God's order and he did not bow to Adam. Therefore he could be easily associated with Satan in the Muslim and Christian traditions. However, the interpretation of this act by the Yezidis is different than that by the Orthodox Muslims and Christians which is why they usually consider Tawûsî Melek ontologically distinct from Satan. According to the Yezidis' belief, the refusal came from Tawûsî Melek's faithfulness to God, and not because of his pride (Omarkhali 2005, 51).⁴⁰ In other words, God recognised the good and not the evil in him, thus entrusting him with power over the world. Contemporary Kurdish authors interpret the figure of Satan as if following these Yezidi beliefs. They explore the Satanic figures as well as the dark sides of the human soul and manage to both raise doubts and shed new light on the common understanding of what is good and honourable in Kurdish society. This practice is especially visible in the works of Hesenê Metê, who often focused on Satan-like figures. In the novel *Gotinên gunehkar* (*Sinful Words*, 2008) mentioned above, the protagonist Behram is initially presented as a faithful Muslim living in the town of E. He praises God and is afraid of Satan. However, after befriending strange villagers called Lûlû and Geştîna, who do not allow him to kill a black snake (associated with Satan in Muslim and Christian traditions but at the same time being the obvious Yezidi symbol shown at the entrance to the Laliş sanctuary)⁴¹ and take him to the mountains, Behram's doubts rise. He falls in love with Demora, Lûlû and Geştîna's daughter, and, after her mysterious disappearance, decides to travel to Satan (called Ahriman or Great Lord in the novel) in order to learn how to find her. The trip takes place at night and reminds us of the miraculous night journey of the prophet Muhammad who travelled to meet with God and learn the truth from him. This time it is Ahriman who reveals his truth to Behram, suggesting that God cre-



Picture 2.2 The entrance to the Yezidi sanctuary of Sheikh Adi in Laliş, by A. Rodziewicz

ated the man to exercise superiority over someone. Nevertheless, as already stressed above, Bahram chooses to love Demora more than God and the Great Lord.

In his novella *Tofan* (The Storm, 2000) Metê revives the Satanic figure of Bekir from Ehmedê Xani's *Mem and Zin*, who was considered responsible for all the miseries of the two lovers. Metê invents Xani's testimony, according to which Bekir (or Beko) should re-emerge on earth each 303 years. We learn from the testimony that there were moral reasons standing behind Xani's request: he wanted people to learn something thanks to Bekir (41). After rising from his grave in Cizira (in Northern Kurdistan), Bekir realises that many things have changed. Cizira is a gloomy city destroyed by war and people use the name Bekir (or Beko) to accuse each other of treachery and different crimes. Even Bekir, who was considered the master of gossip and rumours, is shocked by the bad language and swearing people use against each other. According to Bekir, the main thing that has been forgotten in Cizira is the ability to love (70). He idealises the past and returns to his grave in the hope that after another

303 years he will not be forced to see Kurdistan in this way. Obviously, the Satan-like Bekir is evoked by Metê to indicate this significant lack and elevate the meaning of love for everyday human relations. Therefore he becomes the symbol of good rather than evil. The same lack of love and sympathy is often expressed in other narratives by women. Dayê Gulê from Eta Nehayi's *Gulî Şoran (The Flower of Şoran)* addresses his revolutionary son by saying 'O wretches, you all hate each other' (103). Equally, Xanzad, who at the beginning of the novel feels that women's value is reduced to *namûs*, after discovering her own love towards the brother of her husband, is not only embarrassed and frightened. She also realises that people 'do not understand of love' and that words related to love 'were blackened in human brains' (121). Kajal Ahmad, in her poem 'The N's of Negative' (2016, 68) lists the lack of love, and especially the inability of men to love instead of dying, killing, sleeping and scorning (69), as one of their most important problems. What is more, she suggests that death is easier than the difficult task of befriending life (68).

In his short story *Şepal* (2009), Metê focuses on one of the infamous Kurdish village guards (*korucu* in Turkish) working for the Turkish state against the Kurdish guerrillas and considered 'traitors' by many representatives of Kurdish society.⁴² He applies mixed types of narration, with both the first person narrative and the present tense third person narrative, which is comparable to a play. This allows the reader to both see the perspective of a 'traitor', be immersed in his thoughts and emotions, and to acquire distance to him. Therefore, in a very short text, he manages to present the tragic paradox of a man called Demodin. Being a Kurdish village guard working for the Turkish state, Demodin is portrayed as an empathetic figure who pays attention to the problems of others, for example of his Kurdish fellow Sadûn (Metê 2009, 41–42). His relationship with the Turkish sergeant Durmuş is characterised by both admiration and distance, and sheds important light on the ambiguous colonial relations between Turks and Kurds. Demodin is contrasted with the Kurdish guerrillas, who are shown acting in a precipitant and thoughtless way, not respecting the points of view of other Kurds (42). He instead follows the hints of an old Kurd who insists that being Kurdish requires treating all guests well, even enemies (42). Yet he exposes a subconscious distance to the Turks when implying, in a very amusing way, that the Turkish state's representatives are not even able to raise a dog because, when fed by them, the dog may lose its honour (39). By means of his provocative short story, Metê showed ethics as inseparable from the national identity. Thus, we

may see that being a Kurd became linked to a certain moral choice regarding enemies, a choice that, as emphasised in the previous sections, could be associated with tradition too. On the other hand, however, Metê did not praise the figure of the Kurdish village guard, but rather suggested that the moral choices of people who became *korucus* should be thoroughly analysed. Similarly to the role of Beko from *Tofan*, the stories of the village guards may be helpful in understanding the failures of the Kurdish national movement and can serve as a good lesson. It is worth nothing that Metê's lesson is not a direct hint or instruction but rather a subtle voice, audible for those who are able to attend to all characters presented in the story.⁴³ Comparing Metê's Demodin with the landlords from Rehîm Qazî's *Pêşmerge*, we may realise how aesthetically and ethically successful the journey of Kurdish literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been.

Another example of the anti-hero, whose aim is to expose the dark side of the human soul and discuss the meaning of freedom, is the protagonist of Firat Cewerî's novel *Ezê yekî bikujim* (*I Will Kill Someone*, 2008), which may be considered a modern Kurdish update of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Like Dostoyevsky, Cewerî wished to explore the borders of human freedom. The main character of the novel is presented as an anonymous inhabitant of a contemporary Kurdish city in Turkey, which we can assume is Diyarbakir, but its realistic context is blurred, allowing more universal interpretation. We learn something about Cewerî's protagonist at the beginning and then more is revealed gradually and sparingly. He spent 15 years in a hard Turkish prison due to his involvement in the Kurdish opposition movement, possibly in the 1980s or 1990s. He decided to cut all links with his family, friends and the city's contemporary reality, which he despised. One day, his inner voice orders him to kill somebody. He sets out from home wandering in the big city to find somebody to kill. It is, however, not clear whether his love for evil is the conviction of absolute freedom, a wish to emulate God or quite the contrary: to follow God's orders (2008, 21–22). However, it seems that Cewerî's character desires to become equal to God, who is described as the one who 'kills so many people every day' (21). That is why killing seems a test of freedom, an extreme manifestation of his free choice. Being the most important Kurdish desire, exposed and praised in many texts, for example in Şêrko Bêkes' famous poem *Cudayî* (Separation, written in 1988; 2006, 736), freedom is usually evaluated as positive and desirable. Cewerî definitely brings it down, showing that being free also means being free to do

evil. As with the character from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Cewerî's protagonist loves his own malice and evil and, until meeting a woman, Diana, has no will to change. He sees his own ill will as a fully justified element of the world's order. Meeting Diana brings hope to his dark and sorrowful life. Thus again in Cewerî's novel, love to human being becomes elevated as the main reason to seek any good, even though its character is hit by a car shortly afterwards and has no chance to experience the change. In the novel freedom is presented as gaining meaning only along with love.⁴⁴ The same relationship between the two was presented in Kemal Burkay's poem 'Evin' ('Love', 1995, 10).

Another novelty in Kurdish literature is the presentation of passive figures, who are reluctant to take part in the national fight. They remind us of Mem from Xanî's *Mem and Zin*, who, contrary to his friend Tacdîn, was reluctant to act in a decisive way. Badin—the main character of Jan Dost's novel *Mijabad* (first published in 2004, 2012)—seems trapped between his own desire to become a writer and a sense of duty forcing him to take an active part in the historical events related to the establishment of the Mahabad Republic (1945–1946). He is a man of many doubts, preferring to take part in a love affair than in war; nevertheless he finally joins the peshmergas (2012). Badin has a lot in common with Memduh Selim, the historical figure, one of the founders of the national Kurdish organisation *Xoybûn* (Self-determination) as depicted by Mehmed Uzun from Bakur, in his *Siya Evinê* (*The Shadow of Love*, first published in 1989, 2000). Memduh Selim decides to serve his homeland instead of achieving personal happiness with his beloved; nevertheless in a letter to his friend he presents his choice as tragic and not the only right one (2000, 242–243) and thus exposes what Martha Nussbaum called the non-commensurability of valuable things (Nussbaum 1999, 106–124). Another example is Darinê Darjo from Hesenê Metê's short story *Ês* (*The Pain*, first published in 1998, 2000), who is an unsuccessful writer who never manages to write anything. He is overwhelmed by artistic impotence due to his relatives' insistence that he should write elaborate novels in order to get fame and money. Everyone wants to be proud of him (2000, 28). Art is understood as a source of family or even national honour. Darinê Darjo strongly opposes the idea that people who don't write anything are stupid (53) and thus diminishes the enlightening zeal. We realise that, in such a context, producing literature simply replaces the necessity of brave acts from the traditional system of honour (where one needs to prove one's value by doing something special) but has still little in common with modern dignity, or

with the simple ethical and aesthetic desire to say something in the best possible form (27). All the above-mentioned figures do not, in fact, reject the idea of national struggle, but rather suggest that it should obtain a new moral quality and be based on a sense of responsibility towards other people and not only on the simple desire to possess an independent state.

While discussing many social and ethical problems of Kurdish society, Kurdish literature pays considerably less attention to Kurdish neighbours representing states that are often perceived as enemies, that is Turks, Arabs or Persians. They are, instead, looming on the horizon as with Sergeant Durmuş from Metê's short story. In her poem 'Let Baghdad Come to Halabja' (2016) Kajal Ahmad stressed that Arabs should come to Kurdistan and feel ashamed of the tragedy of the Kurdish people caused by Saddam Hussein and his soldiers. She straightforwardly opposed the idea that the town of Halabja, the symbol of the Kurdish genocide of 1988 and its martyrs, should knock on Arab doors seeking any understanding for the Kurdish case (61). In the novel *Gava ku masî tî dibin* (*When Fish Gets Thirsty*, 2008) by Helîm Yûsiv, we encounter the pilot of an aeroplane dropping bombs on a Kurdish village. Masî, the protagonist of the novel, is a guerrilla and witnesses this attack on a Kurdish village, during which a small boy is killed. He suggests that, had the boy had a chance to become a pilot, he could have made another choice in his life than the pilot who killed him (2008, 77–78). Masî imagines the pilot and wonders if 'they know that we all have beloved ones, mothers or children? If he couldn't imagine his mother while killing the two women busy with washing clothes? If he knew that one of them had told to her child: I will just wash it and return' (78). This short passage refers to both the abstract 'them' and to the concrete pilot and mirrors perfectly the mechanism of dehumanisation, which involves weakening the victimisers' normal restraints on violent behaviour and is responsible for the lack of compassion and interest towards the Kurds among many representatives of the Turkish, Arab or Iran societies. Nevertheless, we are also not allowed to attend to the soldier through such glasses. He remains somewhere very far on the horizon.

The situation changes, however, in Mehmed Uzun's novel *Ronî Mîna Evîne, Tarî Mîna Mirinê* (*Light Like Love Darkness Like Death*, 2002a), where we are told about Baz, a Turkish officer of Kurdish origin who is engaged in fighting the guerrillas. Baz (which means 'falcon' in Kurdish) was a small child when he was found by a Turkish soldier after all other members of his family were killed by the Turkish army. He was raised as a

Turk. He became a devoted soldier and undertook the fight against the enemies, that is, the guerrillas. Baz is confronted with a young girl, Kevok ('pigeon' in Kurdish), who decided to follow her boyfriend and joined the guerrillas. She is captured by Baz's soldiers, who make her give away her fellows, and thus, Kevok becomes responsible for their death. Distressed by her own weakness and betrayal she ceases to speak to anyone. Kevok is then placed into Baz's flat. Her silent presence brings changes to his life. Living side by side with 'the terrorist', Baz gradually acknowledges her humanness. Simultaneously, he becomes bored with his job and starts to ask himself increasingly difficult questions about own ethnic origin and the actions he has committed throughout his life. Finally, he realises that the only thing he cares about is the wellbeing of the ex-guerrilla. Baz's love for Kevok forces him to reconsider the state's policy and he undergoes a deep moral change. Both individuals try to escape from the country, but are caught and subsequently, Baz is executed. Uzun successfully shows that, in the reality of the regime and violence, no one can remain innocent, neither Baz, who, as the devoted adherent of the Turkish state policy, commits a huge number of crimes, nor gentle Kevok, who fails to be brave and strong and betrays her friends. This way, Uzun challenges both the glory of the Turkish state and the heroic image of the guerrillas. Moreover, by depicting the Turkish officer as being of Kurdish origin he avoids the accusatory tone and points out the need to start any moral transformation or decolonisation from oneself.

Mehmet Dicle, in his short story *Du Kanî* (*Two Springs* 2013) also confronts the idea of the Turkish soldier and the Kurdish guerrilla. We get to know them through the two interweaving first-person narratives, which create a sense of emotional or even physical similarity (for example both characters happen to see and describe the same man, a shepherd who informs the Turkish army about the guerrilla's hiding place). At the same time, the situation of both is incomparable. While the guerrilla is alone, struggling to survive in a cave, 66 fellows are accompanying the Turkish soldier. After both characters kill each other in the fight it is the body of Kurdish guerrilla which is despised by other soldiers. Nevertheless, by some very apt comparisons with nature (the storm, the giant-like mountains) Dicle manages to show the fear, doubts and reluctance of the Turkish soldier to take part in the military action. The Turk from Dicle's short story is equipped with feelings and reflections. He is a human being with whom one may try to establish a dialogue. Other examples of this approach include the film *Gitmek. My Marlon and Brando* by Hüseyin

Karabey (2007), where a Turkish woman falls in love with the Kurdish actor and fighter from South Kurdistan and decides to seek him in the mountains. As a result she abandons Istanbul and travels to Kurdistan. In the novel *Misextî (Exile)* by Adil Zozanî (2009), meanwhile, a Turkish commander undergoes a deep moral change after being captured by the guerrillas. Interestingly, it happens due to the strong emotional impact of a story told him by one of the Kurdish fighters. The commander goes so far as to become a lawyer working for the Kurds and acknowledging 'the existence of Kurdistan as a separate entity' (Galip 2015, 139).

Finally, Kurdish authors use many non-Muslim characters in their works and thus encourage the readers to see them as equal creatures, with whom one may seek to establish new, modern relations based on dignity rather than on religious or sectarian divisions. In his historical novel *Hawara Dicleyê (The Call of the Tigris River, 2002b, 2003)*, Mehmed Uzun introduces his protagonist and narrator, Biro, as a descendant of the Yezidis. The novel takes us to the Kurdish province of Botan under the rule of Prince Bedirxan (1820–1847). Biro witnesses the dramatic events of the Bedirxan uprising, the collapse of which brought an end to the quasi-independent Kurdish principalities. Initially, Bedirxan's troops attacked and massacred the Christians, but soon after, the Kurds were smashed by the Ottoman army. The novel evidently aims to creating a version of history suitable for the Kurdish imagined community; nevertheless its thematic scope definitely exceeds the national context and also reminds the reader about the shameful moments of Bedirxan's uprising. The structure of the novel is based on intertwining epic and lyrical pieces, an approach which also resembles the Yezidi religious heritage, consisting of religious hymns and epic stories. Together they offer a concept of a spiral of time consisting of both circular (mystical) and linear (historical) time, representing both continuity and change (Omarkhali and Rezania 2009, 335–346). In Uzun's novel the spiral concept of time is related to the two different models of cognition, which are based on analytical and intuitive understanding of the world. It mirrors Uzun's inspiration from both Western literature and the domestic tradition (Bocheńska 2014b, 145). However, the most compelling element of the Uzun's work seems to be his attempt to widen the traditionally Muslim honour world by inviting others to the respected club of dignified humans. It employs the symbols of rainbow and peacock and advocates acknowledging unity in diversity (Uzun 2002b, 2003, 61; Bocheńska 2014b, 133–134). Biro is the Kurdish shortened version of the name Ibrahim and obviously refers to the prophet

Ibrahim, considered the father of the three religions and often referred to in the Yezidi texts as well (Spät 2010, 369–373). He travels to the Yezidi sanctuary in Laliş and decides to stay there for a while. He wishes to discover and understand his Yezidi roots but at the same time he is not keen to stay in Laliş forever. He does not want to be a follower of a single religion, but seeks the contemporary common sense of all of them. His understanding of eternity, though rooted in the mystical tradition, is not associated neither with God, nor with the Kurdish nation. It is identified with life, perceived as the ‘eternal tree from which leaves blossom and fall’ (133). What is more, it is the human consciousness and sensitivity that ‘blow among times and epochs’ (133). Biro possesses the unique ability to hear different voices, not only human, but of the Dicle river, or silence which adds to the polyphony of the novel. Apart from Biro’s Yezidi origin we encounter his beloved Assyrian Ester (called Stêr—that is ‘star’ in Kurdish—by Biro), his Armenian protector and wise man Mam Sefo, along with his two children, who are Biro’s closest friends, and the old Jewish woman Amojîna Reşe, who takes care of Stêr during her illness. In contrast, the Muslim majority is represented by the opportunist Heme, dominated by greediness and the desire to exercise power over others. This way Uzun, who himself was of a Muslim background, challenged the honour world of Muslims, pointing to its colonialist aspect and demanding attention and recognition of other, non-Muslim communities. His novel creates a new honour world which encompasses human beings rather than only the representatives of certain religions or nations.

It is worth adding that the idea of settling accounts with the difficult past and examining atrocities committed by Muslims on non-Muslims is especially visible in relation to the Armenian genocide (1915) with the Turkish, and to a lesser degree Kurdish, responsibility in the events. The literary topic of the Armenian genocide was most probably initiated in Turkey by Yaşar Kemal, a Kurdish-born author writing in the Turkish language (Rohat 1992, 42–43) and developed widely in the modern Kurdish literature of the last decades (Çelik and Öpengin 2016; Galip 2016). Today, this process is gradually impacting on the image of Kurdistan as a home for diverse groups and has the potential to strengthen the recognition of others, who until not long ago fell beyond the established honour world.

2.10 WHAT TO DO WITH AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE? PROMOTING NEW MORAL CHOICES IN THE FILMS *YOL*⁴⁵ AND *MAROONED IN IRAQ*

Following two famous cinematic narratives, in this section I want to show the ethical change which is taking place in Kurdish society regarding the approach to unfaithful women. Both films can be called road movies, both were made by the famous Kurdish directors Yılmaz Güney and Bahman Ghobadi, both are often discussed as representing Kurdish identity and resistance against the state oppression of Turkey, Iraq and Iran.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, their ethical content relating to the question of honour and dignity has not yet been analysed in detail. I would suggest that both films are closely interrelated and that *Marooned in Iraq* is actually a continuation of the subject approached by Güney in 1981 in one of *Yol*'s episodes. Bahman Ghobadi emulates Güney's movie when filming the final scene of his film⁴⁷ and offers a more decisive stance over the sensitive issue, proclaiming that the border drawn by the traditional sense of honour must be crossed if the Kurds are to be liberated from oppression. I will also refer to a discussion regarding the second film that I undertook with the students of Koye University in April 2015.

Yol (The Way, 1981) was directed by Şerif Gören based on detailed instructions from Güney, who was imprisoned and could not make the film himself (Köksal 2016, 136). It won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1982. The film tells the story of five men who are given five days' leave from prison and travel to their homes. Güney showed that Turkey in the early 1980s was little more than a prison itself with the Kurdish question lying at the core of its problems. However, I want to focus on the two episodes from the film which refer to the sensitive issue of honour undermining its traditional glamour: when Mehmet and Seyit travel to meet their wives and children. Their stories seem more interconnected than the three other episodes. They meet during the journey and share their perspectives over the difficult issues they need to face at home.

Seyit learns that, when he was in prison, his wife abandoned their son and was caught being unfaithful by her family, which, following the traditional code of honour, sentenced her to death. However, they considered him the right person to execute the sentence so they locked her away, waiting for Seyit to come. Zine⁴⁸ has been kept with animals since that point and she is described by her family as 'dirty', 'devil', or 'dog', not deserving any pity, only death. We can easily identify this description as a

blatant form of dehumanisation that allows the mistreatment of Zine. However, Seyit confesses to Mehmet that ‘there is a pity in one corner and hatred in the other corner of his heart’ so we see him as doubtful and not entirely attached to the honour code followed by Zine’s family. This internal battle will accompany him until the end, shaping his indecisiveness regarding the fate of his wife. On the other hand, Mehmet is returning to a faithful wife (Emine)⁴⁹ and their children, who are under the pressure of the wife’s family (father and brothers). They accuse Mehmed of being a ‘scornful coward’, that is of being guilty of the death of Emine’s brother, whom he failed to help. In a talk with his old friend, Mehmet confesses that he was scared and did not act in the required manner, causing the death of Emine’s brother. In showing one of the main characters as ‘a coward’ but still worthy of being the main character of a story, Güney directly undermined the ethics prevailing in the traditional narratives, where cowards were only worthy to be killed and forgotten about. Nevertheless, in the course of the events we learn that Mehmet is not only a coward. He is brave enough to confess his guilt in front of his wife and her family. Emine’s brothers and father do not recognise it, however, as an act of courage, do not accept his repentance and almost kill him. It is Emine, acting in the name of love and forgiveness, who decides to flee with her husband, in spite of what he did and in spite of her family’s will. However, both Mehmet and Emine are shot to death by one of Emine’s brothers when trying to escape by train.

Seyit goes to the mountainous village where his wife and son are waiting for him. On the way he has to kill his horse, which is not able to go further through the snow. He does so out of pity for the animal in order not to allow wolves to eat the horse alive. However, this only serves to foreshadow the difficult decision relating to his wife, given Şerefhanê Bedlîsî’s account regarding the value of a woman’s life in the sixteenth century as equivalent to a horse. It is a symbol that Seyit is still attached to the same code of rules. Zine’s relatives encourage Seyit to ‘use his anger and hatred’ and kill the woman, solving the problem once and for all. His small son is also convinced that his mother is ‘dirty’ and therefore does not deserve anything but death. Nevertheless Seyit does not want to kill Zine; he pushes the responsibility to God suggesting that ‘Allah will punish her’. We know that his reluctance to kill is not a simple lack of courage but rather the result of a strong battle inside him. He speaks to Zine but is not interested in any of the reasons behind her actions; neither has he the will to forgive her. There are, however, two motives that indicate Seyit’s strong

attachment to Zine and a possible wish to find another solution. The first is an image of a flute that he used to play as a young man, which deeply moved Zine and formed the beginning of their love. It reappears in many memories of both Seyit and his wife. The second is the wedding ring on Zine's finger, which seems to confirm her attachment to her husband in spite of her alleged treachery. It is often focused on, deepening the doubts regarding her 'bad action'. After her death, when he returns to prison, Seyit is not able to take the ring off his finger and bursts into tears.

Not having much time to spend in the village he quickly decides to take his son and wife back to the small town where they can wait until he is released from prison. They have to cross the mountains covered with snow. Unlike her husband and son Zine is not prepared to survive such a journey. After spending months in the dark shed with animals she is malnourished and weak. She is given only light clothes which are not suitable for the cold. Lost in his thoughts, Seyit seems not to be aware of the problem. Obviously he wants to show his wife disregard or even punish her for what she did. Along with his son, he moves quickly forward, leaving Zine behind. Seyit does not listen to Zine's call and returns to her only after his son's request. The boy suggests that, since the father decided to take Zine and not to kill her, he should be ready to help her. Seyit takes Zine on his back and keeps listening to her pleas to be forgiven, though he remains indifferent to them. His attitude changes only when Zine loses consciousness, as if it is only then that Seyit realises that she may really die. The fragility of life, along with the fear of losing someone he loves, causes him to start to battle for Zine's life. It is on the threshold of death when his suppressed love makes him realise the value of life and fight to save it. The battle is lost and Zine is brought to the town dead. Seyit regrets his indecisiveness when recalling Mehmet's words about his wife and children's ability to 'love him in spite of everything'. We see him crying in the train, while returning to the Turkish prison. In Güneç's film the Kurdish man is not yet able to forgive or even to avoid punishing his unfaithful wife. Yet he regrets his actions and we see them as an 'incapacity' and not a 'value' which is a significant difference compared to many traditional narratives. Similarly to the many literary texts that we have discussed above, the change is shown through the prism of life's finite span and thanks to the elevation of the value of love, which is directly mentioned and presented, not as simple affection but rather as a moral capacity inspiring the right choices in life. However, the change is too weak to occur and flourish in a country dominated by violence. It is a fragile voice, but it has been born.

Marooned in Iraq (2002) seems like a continuation and update of this episode from Güneý's film. Although the story told by Bahman Ghobadi is also embedded in the difficult history of the Kurds—we are told about Saddam's attack with chemical weapons on the Kurdish towns and villages in Iraqi Kurdistan—the central topic of the film is the main character Mirza's search for his unfaithful wife Henare. The story draws both from those Kurdish fairy tales where a perfect, brave hero searches for a perfect (always faithful) princess, and from road movies which are often used to present a process of transformation. This time, however, it is not only Mirza who sets out on a journey. He insists his sons, Audeh and Berat, go with him, although they very much oppose the idea of searching for Henare, who escaped with Mirza's best friend to Iraq and 'spoiled the family honour'. We learn that Mirza, who lives in the Iranian part of Kurdistan, received a message from Henare, who is a refugee in Iranian Kurdistan after Saddam's attack. He declares that he has to find her because 'she needs him' but he is not sure if there was any message from Henare because the letter that she allegedly wrote to him is never found. Mirza searches for it among other female refugees, who tell him about the difficult situation of Henare, encouraging him to find and help her. Interestingly, Mirza, who is already an old man, does not listen to other men, who mock him, and allows himself to be guided by women's voices, subtly admonishing one of his son when asking him 'what do you know about love'. Thus, from the very beginning we see him as challenging the traditional meaning of honour but also as reinterpreting the sense of love, which becomes, for him, something more than simple affection. What is more, Ghobadi shows us that Mirza is not alone and that there are plenty of others, mostly women, representing another approach to Henare's issue, encouraging him to go further. Mirza's sons are also very different from Seyit and Mehmet's families in Güneý's film. They are not bloodthirsty dragons, keen to take revenge to clear the family honour. They are portrayed as rather lazy figures, who are not willing to undertake any challenge and keep invoking honour simply to avoid the rather dangerous journey towards the Iranian-Iraqi border. Furthermore, the formula of the film, balanced between drama and comedy, provides a slightly different—more positive—perspective towards the possible change. As stressed by Appiah when talking about the end of the duel in nineteenth-century Europe, the practice became not only condemned but also ridiculed by people and the press (2010, 38–40). The same tactic seems to be applied by Bahman Ghobadi, who in many scenes of the film ridicules traditional norms of Kurdish masculinity and

honour. For example, he shows the Iranian policemen, after being robbed of their clothes, jumping in mud in their underwear. More than that, this time we are allowed to see a reason standing behind Henere's decision to escape from Mirza. As a gifted singer, she wanted to perform, which was not allowed for women in Iran. Not being able to give up her talent, Henare escaped with Seyed,⁵⁰ Mirza's best friend, in order to sing in Iraqi Kurdistan where it was permitted. In Ghobadi's movie, a woman is no longer a passive object of men's action as Zine was for Güney. She is entitled to talent, passion and free choices in life. After many adventures, Mirza reaches the refugee camp located on the Iraqi side of the border. He learns that, although Henare is not there, everyone is waiting for him to bury the body of his friend Seyed, Henare's husband. Mirza speaks with a woman sitting by Seyed's frozen body who is allegedly Seyed's sister, but who we may suppose is Henare. She cannot be recognised because her voice has changed as a result of the chemical attack and she covers her face, not allowing Mirza to see her. She stresses that both Henare and Seyed wanted to see him because they still 'considered him a friend'. These words do not contain any repentance and Mirza is not willing to receive any. The question of forgiveness is omitted here, although we understand that Mirza is open to it after making such a long journey. Notably, as stressed by Hicks, forgiveness is not always a condition for reconciliation. It happens that it may be passed by for the sake of something 'equally powerful', that is 'honouring each other's dignity' (2011, 185) and thus fostering understanding of the sometimes complicated choices of others. Subsequently, we learn that Henare does not need his help for herself but for her small daughter, born out of her marriage with Seyed. The name of the girl is Sinur, which means border, and has a very symbolic meaning in the film. Though the girl is visible evidence of Henare's unfaithfulness and of the pain she caused to Mirza, he takes Sinur on his back and sets out on a dangerous journey through mountains covered with snow. The scene is an obvious 'quotation' from Güney's *Yol* and updates his gloomy story, showing, in a more strenuous way, that the life of a human is worth battling for regardless of the traditional norms that previously guided human choices. We understand that Mirza does not act in the name of past affection towards Henare. The sense of love which is exposed here instead affirms the value of life and responsibility for the child, being worthy of love and care. Mirza's sons Audeh and Berat discover a similar sense of love during the journey. Berat falls in love with a woman who has a beautiful voice. He declares that 'women also can sing' and instead of immediately getting married, he

decides to follow the woman to assist her in finding the body of her brother, killed by Saddam's troops. Audeh, who was initially seeking another wife to bring him the desired son, changes his mind and decides to adopt two boys from an orphanage. Interestingly, it happens after he has been reprimanded by a young woman from the refugee camp who accuses him of making 'so many women unhappy'. The film ends when Mirza crosses the border (*sinur*), marked by barbed wire, with the small girl (Sinur) on his back. In Ghobadi's film the barbed wire is not only a symbol of Kurdish enslavement at the hands of their enemies. Rather, he indicates the need to reinterpret and reimagine the traditional code of honour; otherwise, no real freedom is possible. However, by the means of his powerful images, Ghobadi declares that it is the same Kurdish culture which can provide a reliable treatment for the problem. Mirza is not foreign; he is not a Christian missionary or Western-looking activist using the many complicated terms of human rights. Dressed in the Kurdish traditional costume and respected as a master of Kurdish music, he becomes the best proponent of change. The transformation is perceived as an inseparable part of the Kurdish culture which, as shown by Ghobadi, offers resources to solve the problems. Traditional honour is not abolished, and we do not learn that Henare's behaviour was praiseworthy. What we learn instead is that there may be something more important than the traditional sense of honour, which is human life and the need to love and care for it. However, similarly to the characters from the fairy tales, Mirza still needs courage to overcome his many obstacles, and thus we may realise that the honour code cannot be abandoned. What Ghobadi does is to offer a new imaginative framework for courage, which is now linked to totally different moral choices. This way, Ghobadi enriches the traditional system of honour, creating a new space for the dignified human being, worthy of respect.

In April 2015, after screening the film, I asked Kurdish students from Koye University (Başur) about the reasons behind Mirza's decision to find Henare. I mostly received answers that 'he still loved her' or that 'he wanted to help her', but one young man told me that 'initially Mirza wanted to kill Henare and only afterwards he changed his mind'. This suggests that Mirza's attitude and choices, though vividly portrayed by Ghobadi from the very beginning of the film, are not obvious and understandable even for the Kurdish youth, and in order to be exposed need to be discussed too. At the end of our session, I asked the students to vote on whether Mirza is a man of honour, and some of them were reluctant to answer, though the majority decided that Mirza is definitely 'a man of honour'. The students were ini-

tially very surprised that I wanted to discuss this very sensitive issue and not ‘the difficult situation of the Kurdish nation in the Middle East’ which is unfortunately the dominant framework in which both films and literary works are analysed, not allowing their strong ethical content to be revealed. Both films provide a new picture of humanity, and thus a new moral imagination is offered to inspire people choices. Mehmet is presented as both coward and brave man. We are allowed to listen to his thoughts and emotions and get an insight into his inner world to try to understand him. In this way, the disgusting coward is humanised in the eyes of the Kurdish audience. Seyit is trapped between the old customs and a possible new moral choice regarding his wife. After Zine’s death he regrets his indecisiveness, which opens the way to a new understanding of morality in the Kurdish context. Guided by women’s voices, Mirza follows his heart and crosses the border of old customs and slavery. He manages it, however, only thanks to a deep understanding and respect towards his own culture which definitely boosts confidence and attention towards it. It is worth adding that, the new approach to women’s *namûs*, touching the problem of honour killing, is present in multiple Kurdish literary texts, such as the short story *Kevoka Spî* (*White Pigeon* (n. d.)) by Firat Cewerî or the novel *Jîn* (*The Woman*) by Rewas Ahmad (2004). In the novel *Ġazalînus û Baxekani Xeyal* Bakhtiyar Ali very provocatively presents Afsana, the beloved of the Real Magellan, as an unfaithful wife betraying her husband, to whom she was married unwillingly. The author celebrates the betrayal precisely in order to undermine the traditional norms in the name of love and dignity (2007, 271–275; 2016, 242–243). Meanwhile, in her poem ‘*Pêkêk le gel Ariman da*’ (‘The Goblet with Ahriman’), the Kurdish poet Nahîd Hosseini (2014, 85) calls on Ahriman’s assistance in order to break ‘the bottle of traditional honour’ and affirms the role of love contradicting the ‘norms of Adams’.

2.11 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have focused on the ethical aspects of Kurdish literature, suggesting that modern narratives, both in literary works and movies, build and develop, not only the Kurdish identity, but a new moral imagination, which serves as an important framework for the modern concept of dignity. Defined as a type of honour which recognises the miracle of life, dignity has been distinguished from average forms of respect and honour and elevated as a kind of modern goddess, animating the sense of human rights. However, the traditional sense of honour, based on courage and

faithfulness, may still be an important impulse animating the search for good and moral transformation, provided that it is matched with dignity. On the other hand, the sense of dignity cannot be limited to the abstract definition, but should entail its embodied appearance, which is best presented in stories and by the different artistic tools, in multiple languages and through many cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, let us not forget that works of art can be interpreted in various, sometimes contradictory ways, or that their content may be used to fit the needs of different 'barons'. Furthermore, they typically reach a very limited group of recipients. To repeat Spivak 'a plea for aesthetic education can hope for no more than a coterie audience'. Yet, we 'make this plea because we cannot do otherwise' (21), because this struggle still engages our honour. Therefore, this chapter keeps arguing that narratives, especially those created in non-European languages, should be given more attention. They can become a vital source of inspiration, and not only for the society which gave birth to them. As stressed in the text, the postulated 'globality from below' requires a new equilibrium to be established between the universal and the local. Inviting Kurdish stories to be a part of our common heritage certainly addresses this need. We need this moral imagination more than ever before. Following Bakhtiyar Ali we may perceive it as the postcolonial instrument to deal with the surrounding world. It is thanks to the stories that we happen to give up certainty and attend to others with more sympathy, questions and trust.

As shown in this study, recognising the value of life in Kurdish literature and cinema comes by exposing life's finitude, but first of all thanks to the elevation and reinterpretation of the meaning of love, which gradually encompasses not only the bright and glorious but also the weak and shameful aspects of human nature. Whereas love was deeply seated in the traditional Kurdish texts, its modern sense is not entirely identical to the past meaning. After being acclaimed as the patriotic affection for Kurdistan, love began to animate a more universal attention towards human beings. Honour has followed a similar trajectory. After acknowledging the national fight, it gradually turned towards human life, transforming itself into modern dignity. This ongoing process has been accompanied by a deepening of the aesthetic, psychological and philosophical aspects of the texts visible in depicting the characters, in their dialogues and monologues, and finally, in the structure of narratives. Moreover, new characters emerged, who, as with Little Xendan from Bakhtiyar's *Êwarey Perwane* distanced themselves, not only from the brave readiness to die which dominated the traditional Kurdish world, but also from the dimension of love originating in the classical

Muslim texts. What they offered, instead, was the ‘simple’ attention towards others and the surrounding world that resulted in enhancing the aesthetic and ethical quality of the literary works. Kurdish literary or cinema progress cannot be thus reduced to the aesthetic or professional development but should be perceived in ethical terms as well. The Kurdish portrait of dignity attracts our attention and gains uniqueness because of the traditional and classical background which it remodels and harnesses to build the new quality. It is, therefore, superficial to concentrate exclusively on the contemporary social or political context of Kurdish prose, poetry or cinema. The interpretation of Kurdish works instead requires vast knowledge and sensitivity towards their metaphorical and intertextual meanings. Thanks to their stories and images, the Kurds, who are mostly referred to as fighters and refugees engaged in nothing but war, may be presented as thoughtful human beings who seek an answer to how one should live in difficult circumstances. They are not simply attached to their ‘backward culture’ but transform it, showing us its potential and beauty. Thus the works significantly contribute to our grasp of the Kurdish humanness, identity and resistance, but also to our modern understanding of honour and dignity. Finally, the ethical change exposed in Kurdish narratives widens the honour world by inviting non-Muslims and non-Kurdish characters to the plot and emphasising the worthiness of the colourful Kurdistan. Let us hope that the world and, especially, the Kurds’ neighbours, manage to discover the Kurds not only through the prism of the constant conflicts, threat and ‘backwardness’, but rather through Kurdish creativity and the significant potential of their culture. Maybe it is by ‘honouring the dignity’ of the Kurds and thus paying more attention to the subtle voice of their stories that their neighbours can become more open to seeking solutions to the long-lasting conflict.

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NOTES

1. They were respected only within their own group of followers and not by orthodox Muslims, who often perceived the members of such sects as heretics deserving less respect than Christians and Jews.
2. See Dostoyevsky’s letter to N. Strakhov (1869), after Ryszard Przybylski (1971, 398) ‘Fyodor Dostojewski’.

3. Russian colonialism cannot, of course, be reduced to this pattern. Since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Russians redefined their identity many times, perceiving themselves as European, Asian or Eurasian (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010). The latter proved to be fruitful, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when it became necessary to integrate other, non-Russian, groups into the Soviet State and then into the Russian Federation. The modern Russian Eurasian focus is associated with autocracy, order and paternalism, which are contrasted to the ‘irresponsible’ (Putin 2017) offer of the Western democracies. Accordingly, Russian involvement is often portrayed as preserving the local order and cultures. For example, in the English summary to her book on Kurdish khanates in Khorasan, Olga Ivanovna Zhigalina says ‘The author also highlights the difference between British and Russian colonial practices. Russia left the traditional historical usages of the Kurdish khanates intact, abstaining from interfering in the long-established macrostructure. (...) The British invasion of the Kurdish khanates of Khorasan, on the contrary, accelerated the disintegration of Kurdish tribal alliances’ (Zhigalina 2002, 246). The same approach reverberates in President Vladimir Putin’s grasp on the contemporary Russian mission. For instance, in one of his speeches, Putin (2017) criticised the engagement of ‘some countries’ in Middle Eastern affairs by indicating that their foreign model of development was unsuccessful whereas the Russian one, based on respect towards others and their cultures bears fruits and is much more propitious. This directly proposes that democracy is foreign and unattainable for many others whose culture is ‘different’.
4. A good illustration of how the value of life became inscribed into the traditional religious discourse is *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)* by John Paul II (1995) in which he presented the value of life as absolutely inseparable from Christianity. He quoted from the Bible, pointing to its many pieces and offering an interpretation that elevated the value of human life. However, it is hard to accept that such an interpretation of the religious texts was always inherent to Christianity, or obvious and widespread among Christians. In such a case there would have been no need to write *Evangelium Vitae*.
5. One such example is the events after the Kurdish referendum of 2017 and the widespread Kurdish reactions to the withdrawal of the Kurdish peshmerga from Kirkuk in October 2017. This happened under the threat of overwhelming Iraqi army and Shia militia forces. Although the move was explained by the commander Cafer Sêx Mustafa as reasonable and aimed at not wasting peshmergas’ lives in an unequal fight (2017), many people called it a betrayal. Also the agreement between some representatives of PUK and the Iraqi army on which the withdrawal was based was perceived by many as ‘treason’.

6. In one of the interviews on the eve of the referendum, the president of the KRI, Mesud Barzani (2017), said that ‘we [the Kurds -JB] would prefer to die of starvation than to live under the oppression and occupation of others. If this decision is made by referendum and the reaction is to isolate us, let our people die.’
7. However, we should not forget the atrocities committed in Europe, especially during the World War II, which were designed not to remodel but simply to annihilate those who were not seen as proper humans.
8. It is important to add that body and spirit were also separated in the Middle Eastern Sufi tradition. In the introduction to *Mem and Zin*, Ehmedê Xanî insisted that spirit was united with body by force, on God’s order (2005, 120). In Rumi’s *Masnavi-ye Ma’navi* we read that ‘the reed-flute’s sound is fire, not human breath’ (2006, 7) and that only the ‘Beloved lives, the lover is a corpse’ (9). The motive of the soul, which frees itself from the corpse, is exposed, among others, in Farid ud-din Attar’s allegory of the birds in *The Conference of the Birds* or in his *Elaahi-naama (The Book of God)*.
9. Personal interview with the writer, Örebro, Sweden, April 2009.
10. Personal interview with the writer, Silemani, May 2014.
11. Personal interview with the writer, Istanbul, July 2017.
12. Personal interview with the writer, Mardin, July 2015.
13. Personal communication with the writer, email, October 2017.
14. Personal interview with the writer, Sine (Sanandaj), July 2017.
15. Secondary emotions such as shame, indignation and love appear later in life and are linked to the process of education. This is in contrast to primary emotions, which we share with animals. They depend on other social variables, such as the development of morality or cognitive capacities. They are considered culturally specific, and may differ between cultures. Furthermore, they are cognitive constructions, which means that they relate to internal rather than external appraisals. In other words, they rely on ‘the interpretation of the situation’, and not only on ‘the situation itself’ (Demoulin et al. 2004, 75).
16. Bedlîsî does not provide any etymology of the word Kurd that would explain its origin from ‘brave’. However, it seems that the word in question is the Persian ‘gord’ (گورد), the transcription of which is very close to the word ‘Kurd’ (کرد). According to Dehkhodā’s dictionary (1341(1969), 164), the Persian ‘gord’ means height, glory, or brave, courageous, and combative. The letter گ, not existing in the Arabic alphabet, was sometimes not reflected in Persian writing either. Nevertheless, according to the phonetic rules of the Iranian languages, the initial ‘g’ cannot become ‘k’ in Persian or Kurdish and therefore it is highly unlikely that the word Kurd originated from ‘gord’, even if there were some exceptions to this rule that came into being under the influence of the script such as the New Persian word ‘keyhān’ originating from the Middle Persian ‘gēhān’ (world).

17. Namely its four books devoted to the rulers of Kurdistan, whereas there is also an annalistic part on Ottoman and Safavid history.
18. Based on the version I received from Prof. Calilê Calil from the Celils' family archive in Eichgraben in 2010.
19. Personal interview with Estêra, July 2013.
20. The story told by Estêra may be a variation of the folk tale *Eşkwetî Gewerê* (The Cave of Gewer), which was broadcasted by Radio Mahabad as a radio play around 40 years ago. For this information and the story I am very grateful to Prof. Jafer Sheyholislami. According to the version of the tale written on the request of Sheyholislami by Salah Payanyani, the young woman, called Gewer, a wife of the landowner, travels with her two infants to another village where her parents live. She is accompanied by a servant who brings her the news of her father's illness so she sets out to visit him. When it starts snowing they decide to take refuge in the nearest cave. However, the servant soon reveals that he wants to rape her and threatens to kill Gewer's elder son if she does not comply. She rejects his demands and the servant cuts the child's head off. Then, he threatens her that he will kill her other child. Meanwhile Gewer realises that she has a knife in her pocket so she agrees to his demand thinking that at a convenient moment she can grab the knife and kill him. That's exactly what happens. She manages to kill the servant and remains in a cave until her brother Reşid finally finds her. Gewer declares that what happened is 'not a problem' because her 'conscience remained clean and the heart calm' as befits a proper Kurdish girl.
21. YPJ—*Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* (Women's Protection Units)—are a part of Rojava forces widely known as YPG.
22. Women peshmerga are a part of the Kurdish peshmerga forces based in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan, which today may represent KDP, KDP-I and PUK.
23. See: Nazand Begikhani 2014. 'Sexual Violence as a War Strategy in Iraq'.
24. The examples of such culturalisation and stigmatisation are numerous. In her book *Honour Killing. Stories of Men Who Killed*, Ayse Onal (2008), a Turkish journalist, presented these crimes as an inseparable part of the Kurds' backward culture. We cannot learn from this book about the Kurdish struggle to bring an end to these crimes, nor about the Turkish state's violent policy against the Kurds, which benefits from preserving the sense of their 'backwardness'. In his book *As Strong as the Mountains. A Kurdish Cultural Journey* (2007) Robert L. Brenneman presented the honour killings as an inseparable part of Kurdish culture and morality and many times confronted such values with the Western ones stressing the obvious differences.

25. See, for example, the 178 chapter of *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Openings) by Ibn Arabi (1165–1241).
26. I provide the dates after Mehmed Uzun's *Kürt Edebiyatına Giriş* (*Introduction to Kurdish Literature*) (2004). However, Marûf Xaznedar gives different dates regarding the life of the poets: Nalî (1800–1856), Salim (1805–1869) and Kurdi (1812–1850) (1967, 36).
27. The word *pêşmerge* is used especially in Sorani Kurdish and literally means 'in front of the death', which is also an example of honouring the Kurdish people's readiness to die for their homeland.
28. The first Kurdish Kurmanji novel is considered to be *Sivanê Kurd* (*Kurdish Shepherd*) by Erebe Semo (Arab Shamilov in Russian) published in 1927 in Armenian SSR.
29. Hashem Ahmadzadeh, in his article entitled 'Magic realism in the novels of a Kurdish writer Bakhtiyar Ali' (2011) translated the word *perwane* as 'butterfly' (291). I would, however, argue that his translation does not fit well because it hides the mystical context that the word *perwane* (translated as moth) contains. The Sharezoor dictionary of Sorani Kurdish translates it as 'moth' (Qazzaz 2000) and it was the word *perwane* that was widely used in Persian and Kurdish classical poetry. Though the meaning of *perwane* may also be the 'butterfly', I think that the English 'moth' is more appropriate in the context of Bakhtiyar Ali's novel.
30. The mystical image of a Sufi or prophetic religious leader was merged with the modern artist in other Kurdish contemporary works such as the film *Nîwmanj* (Half Moon) by Bahman Ghobadi (2006) or the novel *Mîrname* by Jan Dost (2008). In Ghobadi's film we are confronted with Memo, the musician, who is called *baba* that is father by the members of his musical band. The word *baba* cannot refer to the family bonds between him and other musicians, as many of them are older than he is. It rather suggests a mystical relationship where *baba* or *dede* was often the title of a spiritual leader. Ghobadi makes this connection stronger by showing the traditional mystical brotherhood that Memo visits on his way to Iraqi Kurdistan (see Bocheńska 2013b). *Mîrname* by Jan Dost, the Kurdish writer from Rojava, presents the life of Ehmêdê Xanî and the Kurdish classical poet is portrayed not only as a mullah or Sufi but also as a philosopher and statesman resembling the modern artist more than an inhabitant of the traditional world.
31. To compare, in *Labîrenta Cînan* (Labyrinth of Jinns, 1994) written in the Kurmanji dialect, Hesenê Metê depicted the gradual fall of an idealistic teacher, Kevanot, who dreams of changing 'backward' villagers. Contrary to *Eşqîstan*'s inhabitants he is not exalted and distant from average people but becomes their close friend. The problem is that they simply do not want to change, being very attached to their lifestyle and customs. Finally, after spending some time in the village, it is Kevanot who gives up his ideas

and values, starts to behave like other villagers and finally goes mad. This way, by showing the triumph of the irrational side of human nature, Metê undermined the belief in the power of reason and education.

32. The role of Xendan may be compared to the role of Yadgar in Eta Nehayî's novel *Gulî Şoran* (The Şoran Flower). In *Gulî Şoran*, the voice of Yadgar emerges at the end of the novel, bringing a new perspective to the whole story. Yadgar is the son of Las, a Kurdish revolutionist who sacrificed his life for the national struggle. In order to do so, he abandoned his wife Xanzad and their small son. After a few years, Xanzad learned that he had died. Subsequently she and his brother Ferxo entered a love relationship that ended in their marriage which was strongly condemned by Las and Ferxo's mother, Diya Gulê, who never believed in Las' death. She perceived Xanzad and Ferxo's relationship as dishonourable and drove the couple from her home. After many years Las unexpectedly returned. In spite of her love towards Las, his mother displayed uneasiness and coldness towards him (12, 145). It seemed unthinkable for her that after such dishonour within her family Las would be able to stay with them. After a few days spent at home Las shared her views and left. It was, however, his son Yadgar, who decided that he need to see his father (155) and after receiving the news of his departure asked his grandmother the simple question 'why' (168). Determined to see his father he followed him to the village. Nevertheless, Las died before his son was able to see him. The last chapter of the novel, narrated from the point of view of Yadgar who pays attention to others, to how they feel and dither, allows us to see the tragedy of people being trapped by the cruel code of honour. Confronted with Las' death and Yadgar's grief we are able to see the value of Las' life which is elevated over honour but also over the national struggle linked to it.
33. I refer to both the original Sorani Kurdish text (2007) and its English translation (2016) published under the modified title 'I stared at the night of the city'. All translations from this novel here were by Kareem Abdulrahman and come from this edition.
34. The name Ghazalnus (Ġazalnus) means 'the one who writes *ghazals*' that is, the classical form of love and Sufi poetry widespread in the Muslim Middle East. Ali uses double names for many of his characters, which may be associated with the Sufi differentiation between *batin* (inner, hidden) and *zahir* (exterior, apparent) aspects of the world. In the case of Ali's novel one of the names counts for the plot exposing its apparent elements, whereas the second name conceals a characteristic that is crucial to grasping the metaphorical meaning of the text. For instance Ghazalnus is an obvious name for the poet but one may wonder if the name Bahman does not pay tribute to the famous director from Rojhilat, Bahman Ghobadi, the master of Kurdish images. Yet, by the means of the *ghazals*, Ghazalnus creates powerful images, not only poetry.

35. Ali uses the words *xewn* for dream and *xeyal* for imagination. Interestingly, the word *xeyal* has important roots in the Sufi tradition. Stepaniants (2009) discusses the term in relation to Rumi's poetry indicating that the term *alem-i-xeyal*, 'the world of images' was usually ascribed to Ibn Arabi, and Rumi borrowed it (146). According to Stepaniants, the word *xeyal* referred to the ability of creating images and ideas in one's own mind but also to the individual and collective images and ideas that were not simply a product of human imagination but according to Sufis emerged from the *alem-i-xeyal* that was independent from human mind (146–147). Such a world of images was hierarchical and spread from simple images of the earthly life towards the more sophisticated ones that were reachable to those who followed the Sufi path of spiritual development. The Sufi world of images bears resemblance to Plato's theory of ideas or, as emphasised by Rodziewicz (2012, 219) Plato's 'soul of the world' which determined the physical forms. The concept of the ideal spiritual world that emanates shaping the imperfect material one is also represented in Plotinus' *Enneads*, which were partially known to the Muslim world as *Theologia Aristotelis*.
36. Not accidentally the Baron of Imagination's second name, Jewahir Serfiraz, consists of the words *jewher* and *serfiraz* meaning *jewel* and *pride*.
37. The book was translated into English as *Sinful Words* and published in 2017.
38. The second name applied in the novel for the Real Magellan is Zuhdi Shazaman, which is also a meaningful combination of words. It elevates this figure and his understanding of love. While Zuhdi is an Arabic name meaning 'ascetic' or 'devoted to God', Shazaman can be translated as 'the king of our times'.
39. To compare, in the 178 chapter of *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* Ibn Arabi (2010, 14) suggested that the words *işq* and *aşiq* cannot refer to God because they imply being wrapped in love or being overwhelmed by it. To him the word *aşiq* originates from *aşaqqa* meaning convolulus and is not of Quranic origin. See also: Maurice Gloton (2000), 'The Quranic Inspirations of Ibn Arabi's Vocabulary of Love – Etymological links and Doctrinal Development'.
40. There are, however, Yezidis who do not consider this story true but rather invented by non-Yezidis under the influence of Muslim Sufi tradition where this motive was present too. According to the Yezidi concept, evil does not exist and God has no opponent, so talking about Satan loses meaning and is incompatible with the fundamental order of the world.
41. The snake becomes a symbol of good in the novel *Gava ku Masî Tî Dibin* (*When Fish Gets Thirsty*) by Helîm Yûsiv. It is even one of the characters of the novel entitled to narrate the story and he directly compares itself to good (2008, 34) and love (33, 34). The novel was published in English translation in 2016.

42. *Korucu* (or *qoriçi* in Kurdish) is the Turkish word that stems from the verb *korumak*, which means to guard/protect. The system of *korucus* was established by the Republic of Turkey in Kurdistan in the 1980s and its aim was to rule and divide the Kurdish society (Yildiz 2005, 17).
43. See more: Bocheńska (2016b), In search of moral imagination that tells us 'who the Kurds are'.
44. For more, see Bocheńska (2014a).
45. I refer to the film by its Turkish title, because it is used worldwide in different articles rather than any translation.
46. See, for example, the collection of articles *Kürt Sineması Yurtsuzluk ve Ölüm* edited by Müjde Arslan (2009).
47. There are of course many other similar scenes in Ghobadi's movies, portraying Kurdish characters going through the snow in the mountains. I would argue that they were an inspiration taken from both Güney's film, which was screened in Iran in 1980 and from the local context of the Kurdish town of Bane in Iranian Kurdistan, where Ghobadi was born and where he started his career as a filmmaker. I often heard from many Kurds that the march through the snow in Güney's film is the most impressive scene in Kurdish cinema, which means it might have had an impact on the young Ghobadi too. Nevertheless, I think that in *Marooned in Iraq* Ghobadi referred to this particular scene, its meaning and not only the poetics.
48. In Turkish and Kurdish the Arabic word *zina* has the meaning of adultery. As witnessed by the author, the name Zina or Zine tends to be given to prostitutes by the Kurds.
49. In contrast, the name Emine comes from *emin*, which is also an Arabic loanword used in both Turkish and Kurdish and having a sense of being *faithful, reliable, sure about*.
50. The name Sayed chosen for Henare's husband, although it sounds a bit different in Sorani Kurdish, is most probably not accidental and refers to the figure from Güney's film, strengthening the intertextual context between both films.

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The Socio-Political Role of Modern Kurdish Cultural Institutions

Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Kurdish cultural institutions have always attracted my attention when visiting Kurdistan and led me to consider neo-institutional theory. Both the core idea of neo-institutionalism, that organisations are deeply embedded in social and political environments, and its pivotal theoretical construct—‘an organisational field’ that cannot be determined a priori but must be defined on the basis of empirical investigation¹—are applicable here.

The aim of this chapter is to distinguish and examine the participants of organisational fields of modern Kurdish cultural institutions in Turkey and Iraq—the main focus here—and to a lesser extent in Iran and the European diaspora. It attempts to analyse the mechanisms of the connections between them. The topics considered will include the degree of field structuration in Bakur and Başur, the so-called general issues around which the Kurdish cultural institutions function, the type of processes

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occurring in the fields, and their level of intensity. The chapter will identify coercive, normative or mimetic influences—the so-called isomorphism—in the context of postcolonial studies that draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts (1984, 1989, 1990, 1992). An attempt is made to compare similarities and differences and to assess the condition of the Kurdish cultural sector.

On the whole, institutions with the adjective ‘cultural’ are not unlike institutions in other activity fields. According to institutionalist approaches, cultural institutions, like other institutions, do not follow the logic of efficiency in economic and bureaucratic terms; rather, they act in accordance with other forms of rationalities than economist rationality: they behave on the basis of logics inherent in institutional history, values, culture and tradition. These are rules, routines, norms, moral consensus, identity and shared meanings, which suggests that organisational practices and structures are often either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs, and conventions built into the wider environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

A salient feature of institutions is their existence as objective and external structures towards social actors and the fact of their relatively permanency, which means that to be named institutions they must function for a longer period of time² (Berger and Luckman 1966). The second aspect is important to understanding how cultural institutions behave and act to reproduce themselves and to secure sustainable conditions for future existence. Survival is a driving force for all institutions; since they are dependent on the social environment for their continued existence, they must constantly prove that they are satisfying some societal need and meeting aims, expectations and functions that are not met by other institutions. They must meet needs and offer services that are so specific that they can be distinguished from the offers of other institutions (Kangas and Vestheim 2010). It is only by fulfilling their aims³ that they can legitimise their existence. Institutions are, of course, also affected by changes in their environments. In open political and economic systems, where cultural institutions are exposed to competition from other institutions and organisations (public or private), the struggle for reproduction and self-subsistence is always at stake.

The level of analysis in neo-institutional research—the meso level—is the category of the organisational field.⁴ The term can mean a community of disparate organisations that constitutes a recognised area of institutional

life, including: key suppliers; producers; resource and product consumers; regulatory agencies; overseers; advisors; and other organisations that produce similar services or products and engage in common activities subject to similar reputational and regulatory pressures (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The field idea illustrates the importance of connectedness, structural equivalence and the debate arena where competing interests negotiate the interpretation of what they each consider as key issues (Hoffman 1999). Fields bring together various constituents with both ‘a common meaning system’ and ‘general issues’, as described by Richard Scott (1995) or Melissa Wooten and Andrew J. Hoffman (2017), and disparate purposes that impose a coercive, normative or mimetic influence on the whole community (Pawlak 2013).

The virtually unknown sets of Kurdish cultural organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life of Kurdish cultural activities beyond theoretical threads is based on materials collected in the field research. The in-depth interviews with local actors were conducted ad hoc between 2013 and 2017 by Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, Joanna Bocheńska and Karol Kaczorowski in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, the United Kingdom and Belgium.

3.2 IDENTIFYING KURDISH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Kurdish organisations operating in the field of culture are not a new phenomenon, so they bear signs of permanence and social rooting. The first such entities were established by the Kurds, like other nations of the Ottoman Empire, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Legal Kurdish associations dealing with culture, language and education were founded and functioned in the Ottoman Empire on the wave of modernisation and social and political change brought about by Tanzimat and the early Young Ottomans and Young Turks Movement reforms. The emergence and free development of *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan), *Kürdistan Nesri Maarif Cemiyeti* (the Society for the Propagation of Kurdish Education) or *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) or *Kürd Kadınlar Teali Cemiyeti* (the Union for the Development of Kurdish Women) were, however, hampered for many decades by repressive policies implemented after the establishment of the regional countries formed after World War I (Özoğlu 2004; Alakom 1998).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) the present-day institutionalised cultural sector and management of cultural resources is of relatively recent origin. The development of widely understood culture and associated institutions started to be possible at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Iraqi Kurds began to create a de facto independent political entity. The Kurdish administration had shown an interest in the field from its outset, with the adopted Law no. 11 of 1992 that set the long-term goals and codified the establishment of the first Kurdish Ministry of Culture in the autonomous region. For many years, however, Kurdistan has been subjected to social and cultural isolation from the rest of Iraq and the world, its political and economic situation has been far from stable, and in effect culture is not now recognised as a key domain of public intervention. The budget of the Ministry of Culture and Youth is tiny—approximately 1% of the regional budget or less, probably as a result of economic stagnation and budget cuts.⁵ In recent years, despite the fiscal obstacles and security crises resulting from both the war with ISIS and the misunderstandings between the KRG and the central government, there is a noticeable growth of the cultural institution sector⁶ and artistic communities, operating both within and outside the formal infrastructure.

In Turkey, the AKP government carried out a series of reforms between 2002 and 2015, which were the consequence of many years of Kurdish struggle for their rights and also of Turkey's aspirations for EU membership. As a result, the cultural organisations of minorities, including the Kurds, have gained some freedom of action for the first time in the history of the Republic of Turkey. Packages of legislative reforms introduced after 2005, then under the so-called 'Kurdish Opening' (2009) and 'peace process' in 2013–2015 in Turkey, have allowed the Kurds to experience their own language and culture in the public sphere; despite their incomplete and half-hearted character, these reforms have reaped a harvest in terms of artistic activity. Kurdish associations and foundations have had problems with the use of the adjective 'Kurdish' in the name, and they often faced malevolence on the part of Turkish authorities and bureaucracies. Nevertheless, it is hard to miss the fact that they have become an undisputed element of the cultural landscape of Turkey, even if recent years have brought the general collapse of the peace process and recurrence of hostility towards the Kurds. Kurdish culture and its institutional environment have been focused in two distinct and evident centres, namely

Istanbul and Diyarbekir (Amed). Istanbul, the metropolis and multicultural centre inhabited by a large Kurdish community, has remained a relatively safe haven and a place suitable for cultural and artistic initiatives. In turn, Diyarbekir—the informal capital of Northern Kurdistan or Bakur—is a city and a province that was almost continuously managed by the Kurdish municipal authorities from the 1990s until 2016. They have worked deliberately for the protection and development of Kurdish culture and in effect this has been a place of lively cultural activity. In both centres and in smaller towns, the Kurds have organised their own cultural and artistic space by working in Kurdish institutions and implementing their own cultural policy.

In Rojhilat and Iran, one can observe many cultural institutions in cities and towns with significant Kurdish population like Mahabad, Bane, Sine (Sanandaj), Serdeşt or Tehran and Khorasan. Compared to Turkey and Istanbul, Tehran is not a leading centre of cultural activity for the Kurds. The role of *Korî Kurdanî Taran* (the Kurdish Institute of Tehran) was described rather as ‘supportive’ for migrants to assist them in maintaining their identity and language. It was Sine, Rojhilat in general or Iraqi Kurdistan that were indicated as ‘real’ centres of Kurdish culture. The roots of the activities can be traced to the period of Mohammad Khatami’s presidency (1997–2005) and his policy of openness to the cultural mosaic of Iran minorities. The respondents stressed the young character of Kurdish cultural activity, which for years has been overshadowed by the political one that was considered more serious and significant by many Kurds. Indeed, despite their officially registered cultural profile, organisations have broader, sometimes unexpected goals and carry out multitask activities. In addition to the typical cultural and artistic activities, such as implementing theatrical, film, vocal, painting and literary projects and supporting artists, commemoration of important historical events and outstanding Kurdish figures or conducting courses of Kurdish music and language, they work to motivate Kurdish people, to get them out of a passive lifestyle through sport, ecology or charity. However, in the Iranian reality any signal of connection with a political party may consequently threaten the organisation with closure, and the border between cultural and political activity is very vague and not specified by Iranian law. A cultural organisation can easily be accused of terrorist activities or ties to political parties and conspiring to break up the state. Therefore, there are no such overt relationships between the two environments.

The diaspora's cultural institutions located in major European cities are also rarely concentrated on purely cultural goals. The non-profit Kurdish organisations focus on lobbying for Kurdish issues in political and academic terms, allowing or supporting Kurdish immigrants to adapt to the conditions of life in the West, and integrating the community around cultural events and linguistic and cultural education.

3.3 ORGANISATIONAL FIELD IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

The key supplier in the organisational field of Kurdish cultural activities in the KRI is the Ministry of Culture and Youth in the KRG and in the broader political system. In administrative terms, the sphere of the key suppliers' activity is based on a dual model on central and local level. It is divided between the two separate ministries: the Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity. Kurdish authorities, following common practice in the Middle East, situate the Department of Antiquities under the Ministry of Tourism. The underlying logic behind this model is the assumption that the Ministry of Tourism is better positioned to generate revenue, primarily through the development of tourism and foreign investment in archaeological sites in Kurdistan. However, as experts note, such configuration raises serious reservations because the inherent priorities of tourism are not necessarily aligned with those of museums and archaeology, and in some respects the priorities of one are at odds with the other (Gibson 2009).

Both ministries manage subordinate structures called General Directorates (GD) in each province in Kurdistan, that is, Duhok, Hawler (Erbil), Silemani and Halabja, with Directorates of Antiquities reporting to the Department of Antiquities and Directorates of Culture and Youth to the relevant ministry. The entities have some coordinative and autonomous competences in setting long-term plans and allocating financial resources in which they seem more influential than the ministries itself. Each provincial office comprises various sectoral and local directorates (e.g. the Directorate of Folklore and Kurdish Identity or the Directorate for Theatre in Hawler).

In a broader socio-political context, the Ministry of Culture and Youth has limited strategic leverage,⁷ even in comparison to provincial GDs, mainly because the cultural sector is not perceived as crucial by the Kurdish Council of Ministers, especially in the current political climate. Nevertheless, the Ministry is an essential point of reference for all institu-

tions because all cultural bodies in Başur operate under a government licence (*mole*) and some of them are on the state list for central budgeting. This public funding system for cultural institutions is inefficient, for two main reasons. First, there are other budget expenditures considered to be much more significant and urgent, such as education and health care, and these are given priority over culture. The second reason is prevalence of misunderstandings between the central government in Baghdad and the KRG on resource distribution, and delays in approving the central budget. This situation obviously poses many problems and prevents the institutions from operating smoothly. It impedes the efforts of individual institutions to plan strategically and discourages management from seeking creative ways of revitalising their institutions, not to mention covering basic overhead, salaries and pre-approved projects. Given the structure, the cultural institutions in particular have no financial autonomy in determining the allocation of their resources.

For many public institutions, the central budget is not the only source of maintenance. Cultural institutions are encouraged by the Kurdish authorities to seek extra-budgetary funding from sources outside the government. Subsidies are therefore provided by political parties, private sponsors and foreign—mainly diaspora—sources. Modern fundraising is a relatively new concept in Kurdistan, but private patronage is definitely not a new phenomenon in the region. It can be even considered the oldest form of financing, practised by Kurdish rulers like Bedirxan and Babanzade in the nineteenth century. Today, important sponsors include the wife of former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Hero Khan, Taha Resul, Faruk Mela Mustafa and Mela Baxtiyar. They sponsor book publications, exhibitions, seminars, festivals and film productions, and establish their own associations such as the *Dezgay Roşenbîrî Cemal Êrfan* (the Cemal Êrfan Institute of Culture, further the Cemal Êrfan Institute – Taha Resul) and support the development of Kurdish studies abroad. The popularity of private patronage among the Kurds in Başur is also visible in the diaspora. In Poland, it was launched by Ziyad Raouf, the businessman and KRG representative, who has organised and supported numerous art exhibitions, seminars and smaller cultural events. The existing funding structure, of course, binds institutions to a specific source of income and a range of interests.

The KRG in general and its politicians and administrators in particular declare a modern, supportive attitude towards the cultural sector, and express a high degree of fondness for the arts; as a principle they do not interfere in private involvement with the arts. Kawa Mahmoud Shakir, the former Minister of Culture and Youth in the KRI underlined that ‘culture should

not be subjected to political influence' and that 'the main basis of the cultural policy implemented by KRG is ensuring freedom of cultural expression',⁸ specifying that the statements refer to the relationship between the political authority and intellectuals. According to him, such an arrangement that relies on the use of art and culture for the benefit of people staying in power—known from the Iraqi historical experience and frequently encountered in the Middle Eastern countries—is a denial of the independence which is a constitutive feature of each cultural creativity. However, throughout history, those in power have always used the arts for their own purposes (Vuyk 2010).

The KRG politicians' declarations look different when contrasted with the opinions of the artists themselves. According to Seywan Saeedian, the Kurdish sculptor, performer and photographer from, Rojhilat who lived in Başur for a certain period of time, the Iraqi Kurdish authorities and organisations have neither the will nor the ideas to support the development of culture in Kurdistan. Their structure is *de facto* more tribal than modern; it follows that the support is distributed based on nepotism and not the quality of works.⁹ Also, Ako Khama Khurshid, the young Kurdish filmmaker from Silemani who moved to London to make movies, affirmed that there is still no serious strategy of Kurdish authorities to develop cinema in Kurdistan. Being a filmmaker is not considered a profession, and film projects cannot qualify for any systematic financial support but rather are sponsored by authors. Yet he also underlined some positive changes, such as the opening of the first film department at the University of Suleymaniya in 2016.¹⁰

This criticism is reflected in some noticeable phenomena. The Ministry of Culture and Youth seems to perform mostly tasks of representation and coordination, and the actual decision-making processes and executive power are located in the governorates whose policy arenas are dominated by the main political parties, the KDP and the PUK. One can say about the diffusion of central power and bi-centralisation that decisions are being made by the two parties, not by the supposedly neutral administration. At the centre of public attention and final decision-making are political leaders like, until recently, Mesud Barzani and Jalal Talabani,¹¹ and their fellows. The rival centres are characterised by neo-tribal networks that have undermined the hierarchical administration of the KRG. These networks have a long history in Kurdistan and are still organising societal life despite the newly developed institutions, and they reach into the administrative, corporate and civil spheres and profit from patronage, interdependencies and nepotism.

Naturally, cultural institutions and artists also belong to and operate inside this system, and the network stretches into the art market, and thus can implicitly affect decisions regarding which artists or works of art deserve

government support and what is being sponsored through wealthy businessmen and collectors. Thus, the cultural sphere transmission presents a powerful tool, a medium for ruling elites to demonstrate and legitimise their power and convey its narrative. This is the case with nationalist symbolism, which enjoys high visibility in Kurdistan. The artists use the narratives of national identity, unity of the people, the value of freedom and attachment to land, which legitimises and glorifies the peshmerga, their leaders' heroism and the struggle for Kurdish independence. They elevate the significance of the same people who now make up the political establishment and hold key governmental functions and *ipso facto* contribute to the underlying consolidation of power. It is also manifested in aesthetic choices. Subjects of art which are funded are the history of the KDP in Duhok and Hawler and the achievements of the PUK in Silemani (Brennert 2015).

The cultural preferences are a ground for a sort of competition between the two parties, which is tangible in giant architectural designs. The PUK project is a Roman style amphitheatre that has been constructed in Silemani's Hawary Şar Park. This newly-built open-air theatre is a part of a project to boost cultural events in the city. According to its designers, it will provide a platform for festivals similar to those held in Jordan and Tunisia, organised artistic events and a showcase for Kurdish culture, all of which will attract tourists (NRTTV 2017; Architettura Italiana 2014). There are also serious plans from the KDP to create a Kurdistan Museum¹² in the historic heart of Erbil at the base of the ancient Citadel or Qalat, which will be the first major cultural institution to present the Kurdish heritage to the world. This project is being designed by starchitect Daniel Libeskind (Studio Libeskind 2016). However, the uncertain political future of the KRI after the independence referendum in 2017 and the Iraqi-Iranian intervention does not suggest early implementation.

At the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, next to the key suppliers, processes of systemic top-down politicisation and architectural approaches, other participants of the organisational field are found. These are museums, theatres, publishing houses and art galleries. They operate in the form of public, semi-private and private organisations that are directly subordinate to or loosely connected to the ministries. Many of them emerge from similar organisational and administrative environments and face comparable challenges and development paths. Further regulatory agencies in the KRI are presented by the general public; that is, the resource and product consumers.

Despite a sometimes very modern structure and appearance, some cultural institutions in the KRI reflect the old organisational model prevalent

throughout the Middle East, wherein, for instance, museums are perceived primarily as buildings housing objects. Most are currently focusing on cataloguing and the conservation of their collections. As a consequence, these entities are rarely seen as vibrant meeting places between the general public, experts, artefacts and ideas. There are also numerous neglected areas, or areas that are not fully exploited. These include cooperating and sharing information and resources, both domestic and international, that could help in the more professional functioning and integrity of the whole environment. Other widespread and burdensome issues are the lack of competence, the weak level of training and expertise, and not using existing and available human resources. Appointments are based on standing within the above-mentioned neo-tribal network and on political or personal affiliation rather than merit; they are uncontested due to the political distribution of territory silently recognising the autonomy of governance of the other party.

On the everyday agenda, there are the difficulties with the ongoing Ba'ath party legislation; however, some of the interlocutors point out the gradual development of cultural legislation in Başur, citing an example of the draft of a copyright law. Some of the institutions, mainly governmental, have their own legal departments which are responsible for drawing up various types of contract or issuing regulations in selected areas such as instructions or prohibitions in the sphere of the protection of cultural heritage. Transparent procedures for competitions and tenders are also being implemented by the Erbil General Directorate for Culture and Art, the Directorate for Antiquities and the Directorate for Theatre.

The creation of the cultural institutions whose representatives were interviewed was in many cases a bottom-up initiative, not merely an idea imposed by the authorities. This is the case with *Enstîtoy Kelepûrî Kurdî* (the Kurdish Heritage Institute, EKK) in Silemani, run by the well-known Iranian-Kurdish folk singer Mazhar Khaleghi. Shortly after the 2003 US-led war in Iraq, he turned to private donors for help and today the EKK and the *Binkey Jîn bo Bûjandinewey Kelepûrî, Belgenamey û Rojnamewanî Kurdî* (the Institute of Life for Revitalisation of Heritage, Documentation and Journalism, hereafter the *Jîn* Institute) are among the bodies struggling to safeguard Kurdish culture and identity.¹³ It is difficult nowadays to talk about the existence of civil society in Başur, which seems to be at the formative stage. It is clear, however, that there are intellectual elites in Kurdish cities who, through their activities, are trying to stimulate this process. They undertake tasks in different fields going beyond the original goals of their institutions; for instance, they do not

just publish books, but extend their activities to other areas of culture such as fine arts (*Dezgay Çap û Pexşî Serdem*—the Serdem Publishing Institute) or cinema (*Cemal İrfan* Institute). At the same time, among the people involved in the cultural sphere there is predominantly a sense that pioneering tasks are being performed. In the interviews, the pioneering or innovation in undertakings is highlighted in the context of catching up after delays in the field of culture and being a narrow élite aware of the need to develop culture. As the director of the Duhok Gallery, Silêman Elî, explains:

we need some time in our society to understand that art is connected with everyday life. We have money, cars, but there is still a shortage of exhibitions' recipients. People do not understand what they are for. Creating art in Kurdistan requires a lot of time and work, but we are not pessimistic. We find this activity meaningful.¹⁴

Despite many obstacles, whilst resources are thinly spread, and many institutions, artists, cultural activities and events are unfunded, the lack of public support in some ways seems to feed the energies of artists and their



Picture 3.1 Duhok Gallery, 2014, by J. Bocheńska

practices. There are now expanding circles and self-organised groups involved in cultural activities, often responding to urgent cultural and social questions, especially in large cities. One can see dynamic, artist-led initiatives where artists have experimented with new modes of expression including land art, technology, intervention and activist-based practices, performance and installation (Mitchelson 2009). There is a thriving artistic community in Silemani, sometimes considered Başur's 'capital of culture'.¹⁵ The city is a vivid artistic hub where many cultural events have taken place, including the annual European Union Film Festival, book fairs and literary festivals of *Binkey Ronakbirî Gelawêj* (the *Gelawêj* Cultural Institute). Although the drastic reduction in the public budget for the cultural sector in recent years has reduced the number of large events, it has not had much impact on small and medium-sized events. This is largely due to artists, writers and intellectuals contributing their work and time in shows and undertakings on a voluntary basis.¹⁶

One of the more perceptible processes in the Kurdish cultural institutions' organisational field is gradually reaching out to the international community and promoting Kurdish art abroad. Admittedly, so far the cooperation with cultural institutions outside of Kurdistan, mainly from European and Middle Eastern countries (and cultural diplomacy more broadly) cannot be considered really advanced. It is usually based on ad hoc cultural exchange, particularly during different kind of festivals, contemporary art exhibitions and invitations to individual artists, bands and intellectuals. Although, according to our interlocutors, some of its forms already exist and further attempts are being made to establish it through the Kurdish diaspora network (GD of Culture and Art in Erbil; Duhok Gallery; Directorate of Folklore and Kurdish Identity, Hawler; EKK; *Cemal Îrfan* Institute). Such initiatives include the participation of visual Kurdish artists like Azad Nanakelî, Rebwar Saeed, Walid Sîî and Cemal Penjwenî in the prestigious Venice Biennales in Italy. Noticeably, the greatest interest of foreign partners is aroused by Kurdistan archaeological heritage, where there is a cooperation with several foreign universities, research institutes, private companies and UNESCO in the field of research, excavation and renovation works. The 110,000m² Erbil Citadel, dating back nearly 6000 years, the Ottoman municipal building called *Bardakî Sera* and the Hotel Farah are the subjects of restoration and revitalisation by the Kurdish authorities in cooperation with UNESCO. The organisation also funded the Silemani Museum to support its archiving work.

There are growing contacts with other parts of Kurdistan including Bakur, Rojhilat and Rojava, for which Erbil, Silemani and Duhok are today important contact centres. To a large extent, the cooperation of KRI's cultural organisations with organisations from other parts of Kurdistan consists of financial support from the former or co-organisation of cultural events or the exchange of materials. It often takes the form of informal contacts, although attempts have been made to formalise it, for example by signing legal agreements as in the case of institutions from Diyarbekir. Representatives of many institutions stress the need to present artists and works from all four parts of Kurdistan.

3.4 ORGANISATIONAL FIELD IN NORTH KURDISTAN

It is not easy to identify and define individual actors or a recognised area of institutional life in the organisational field in Bakur, due to its alternative character to the Turkish state, not always seen as legal. It seems that institutions that reach the Kurdish community most effectively have existed for many years and take the role of state institutions in the field of culture and so should be considered the 'key suppliers'. This category includes: the Diyarbekir Municipality Council and all subordinate cultural institutions; the *Navenda Çanda Mesopotamya* (Tur. *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*—the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre, NÇM); *Sentera Çandê ya Dicle-Firatê* (Tur.: *Dicle-Firat Kültür Merkezi*—the Dicle-Firat Cultural Centre hereafter Dicle-Firat Centre); and *Enstîtûya Kurdî ya Stenbolê* (tur: *İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü*—the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul,¹⁷ EKS).¹⁸ Other field participants are smaller organisations, the recipients of cultural production and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a regulatory and oversight agency.

Activity by Kurdish cultural organisations in Turkey, mainly functioning within the third sector,¹⁹ are regulated by several legal acts. This includes the provisions of the Constitution of 1982, the Civil Code, the Law on Associations of 2004 and the Foundation Law of 2008. Out of the available legal forms, Kurdish cultural organisations choose activity both in the form of foundations²⁰ and associations.²¹ Between 2005 and 2015, the new legislation improved the situation of Kurdish organisations. So far, typical actions taken by state institutions have included raids by the security services, confiscation of cassettes, plates and other storage media, suppression of publications, interruption of events and arrests. Organisations have been obliged to inform local authorities about the dates of the general meetings

and to invite representatives of the authorities. Although there are many bureaucratic obstacles, they have differed from the conventional coercive methods used in previous years. For example, the association's activities might be subject to scrutiny by the Ministry of the Interior, but the institution has to be informed about it at least 24 hours in advance. Nonetheless, there have still been problems with the official registration of the institution under the Kurdish name or using the Kurdish term in Turkish. Therefore, some organisations, for example the EKS, have operated in official documentation as legal entities (NGOs or companies) with completely different names from their real ones.

Most Kurdish cultural organisations are based on a small administrative staff, which usually boils down to two or three permanent posts. People dealing with organising seminars, providing Kurdish language lessons, distributing information posters or maintaining web pages are usually volunteers and receive no payment. Their activity, as the Kurds themselves emphasise, is possible thanks to the enthusiasm of amateurs, a network of friends, and sympathisers loosely associated with these institutions and supporting them financially. Their distinguishing feature is that they are formed and based on Western patterns, seek cooperation with European organisations and use the latest media tools. In addition to having their own websites, they are present on Facebook and Twitter, run their own radio stations and publish periodicals. They also produce long-term development plans, seek foreign funds to run their activities, develop various projects, and attempt to gain interest from foreign institutions.

One cannot fail to see that Kurdish culture and organisations and cultural institutions have inseparable links with Kurdish political activity. Trends in this field aiming to put culture to the service of ideology have long been set by the PKK. Until recently, the creation of a culture-oriented organisation without a link to a political organisation was a difficult thing to imagine in the Kurdish environment. This kind of phenomenon, which is linked to the shattering of the monopoly of the PKK in the cultural sphere and the introduction of polyphonies in the Kurdish movement, is a new and still rare quality. The Kurdish diaspora has contributed greatly to this tendency, and some other local environments, for example the *Nûbihar* Association based on the modern Islamic movement, have emphasised the need for dialogue with others. Promoting the value of diversity fosters cooperation and mutual understanding among various and often ideologically diverse groups. This way the Diyarbakir City Council, formed by the left-wing HDP, cooperates with the religiously

profiled *Nûbihar*. Other organisations, such as *Wegfa Çandî û Lêkolîni ya Kurdî* (The Kurdish Foundation for Culture and Research, Tur: *Kürt Kültür ve Araştırma Vakfı*, known as KürdKav) and the *Grûba Xebateya Vateyî* (the Vate Group) also stress the diversity of world views, which to them means a firm rejection of PKK ideology.

The Kurdish movement associated with the PKK since the early 1990s developed its own cultural policy and activity within the NÇM. Goals set up in Istanbul in 1991 focused on ‘the protection of culture, art, history and language of the colonised Mesopotamia people’ and the reconstruction of the ‘destroyed’ and ‘Turkified’ national culture. The *Rewşen* (*Enlightenment*) journal published by NÇM since 1992 has underscored the importance of folk art in building national identity and called for the rediscovery of Kurdish folklore, which was marginalised and devoid of any significance for the Turkish occupiers (Scalbert-Yücel 2009, 12). The NÇM and the movement associated with it also talked about the need to create a new culture of guerrilla warfare. At a cultural conference in November 1992, the then Director of the NÇM, İbrahim Gürbüz, formulated a programme based on a call to combine culture and art with the revolution and to create using democratic, socialist and nationalist form and content (2009, 7).

The slogan of ‘school of revolution and rebellion’ became less important over time, and artistic and cultural issues were promoted. In parallel with the political goals, the founders of the NÇM, including prominent Kurdish intellectuals Musa Anter, Ali Temel, Feqi Huseyn Sağınç and the renowned Turkish sociologist and Kurdish defender İsmail Beşikçi, set themselves the goal of bringing together Kurdish artists, gathering the achievements of Kurdish culture and disseminating them among the Kurds. These assumptions are now the main focus of the institution’s activities. The NÇM focuses on music and dance, educates professional artists (musicians, instrumentalists, vocalists and dancers) and is a place of artistic creation. At the headquarters of the organisation there is a stage, a cinema room and a studio called *Kom Muzik*. The NÇM has branches in Izmir, Adana and Amed. It also cooperates with the EKS.²²

For many years, the only centre of creative work and high culture for the Kurds was Istanbul. With limited resources (due to the state of emergency before the early 2000s), the south-east of Turkey was less visible and conducted less prestigious activity, such as the collection of folklore. But over time also in the informal capital of Bakur, Diyarbakir, a new Kurdish cultural centre emerged. The pro-Kurdish local authorities and local cultural

organisations have used the transformation of cultural policy in Turkey to fight for cultural rights and recognition of the Kurdish identity by the central government. Pro-Kurdish political forces (currently known as the HDP or BDP) have, since 1999, won a majority in the local elections in a few provinces, and gained opportunity to exercise their authority. The electoral victory of the Kurdish political parties led to the transfer of ‘activists to the office’ (Watts 2010) and put the city council in the space between the state and the Kurdish nationalist movement. It is possible to talk about ‘activists in the office’ officially clustered in the Turkish administration but having tight relations with other local and central representatives of the state.

Zeynep Gambetti points out that:

the sheer weight of the municipality as a state institution that forcefully opens up a space for Kurdish culture and identity largely surpasses the narrow limits of everyday subversion because it furnishes subversion with agency, vision and coordination. (Gambetti 2009, 100)

Part of this coordinated intra-state coup comes from the city council’s ‘symbolic policy’, defined by Nicole Watts as ‘the use of representation – narratives, symbols and spectacles – to maintain or transform a power-based relationship.’ The functioning of the board controlled by the pro-Kurdish party is more or less loosely organised around the HDP (BDP) and the PKK (programmes, cultural centres, journals and political parties) which operate as a network of ideologies and actions. Actors in this Kurdish network may also act in a contradictory manner (Watts 2006, 136).

Thus, Kurdish cultural policy at the local level in Diyarbakir has been in existence for more than a decade. Formally, the Diyarbakir authorities operated under a five-year strategic plan written by the City Council and the Department of Culture and Tourism. For cultural purposes, they spent 3.5–4% of the total local budget, which they largely allocated to numerous cultural institutions. These include *Konservatuvara Aram Tigran* (Tur.: *Aram Tigran Konservatuvarı*—the Aram Tigran Conservatoire), *Navenda Çand û Hunerê ya Cigerxwîn* (Tur.: *Cigerxwîn Gençlik ve Kültür Merkezi*),²³ the Municipal Diyarbakir Theatre, the Diyarbakir City Museum, the Archaeological Museum and the Sümer Park Cultural and Sport Complex, consisting of a large art gallery and the Mehmed Uzun Library.

In the period of relative liberalisation between 2005 and 2015, these institutions conducted extensive cooperation with Kurdish organisations and institutions of culture and science, including in the KRI and abroad. The partner cities of the Kurdish capital were Duhok, Las Vegas, Nashville and Hanover and the employees of these institutions cooperated with artists, teachers and intellectuals from Austria, France and Armenia.²⁴ Important relationships link them also with other local cultural centres, the Dicle-Firat Centre or *Nûbihar*, and the EKS, the NÇM and the Institute of Living Languages at the Artuklu University in Mardin.

Even in situations of greater freedom, the state used methods to reduce the effect of the actions taken by the local Diyarbakir administration, by implementing an alternative and competitive cultural policy for the Kurdish city council. An example of Ankara's policy was to create a centre called the Dicle Culture and Art Centre and Youth Academy (Tur: *Dicle Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi ve Gençlik Akademisi*) next to the Sümer Park Complex. The name Dicle, referring to the name of the Tigris river, is used in Kurdish and Turkish and is commonly associated with Kurdish organisations. Thus, it is clear that the aim of the Turkish institution was to mislead potential Kurdish recipients. This kind of competition and the greater budget of the state institutions—in the opinion of Kurdish officials—is a great challenge for local authorities, who have a lot of expenses for infrastructure and other basic needs.²⁵

The creation and renewal of Kurdish culture and tradition, at the crossroads of various initiatives undertaken in Turkey by pro-Kurdish quasi-governmental and non-governmental entities, seems to be an advanced process, albeit far from fulfilling the needs and reaching the stage of stabilisation. It signifies a transition from loose, uncoordinated and unofficial activities to the formal institutionalisation of the Kurdish heritage in Turkey.

3.5 GENERAL ISSUES

The cultural institutions in Kurdistan and in the diaspora have worked out some distinct general issues around which they operate. Some of the foreground issues are present in their activities with a greater or lesser intensity regardless of their geographical or political location. However, they offer their own specificity.

3.5.1 *Revival of Language*

Revival of the Kurdish language seems to be the main element of the more general revival of Kurdish culture. Language and its revitalisation is a central issue taken directly or indirectly by all Kurdish cultural organisations without exception. However, in the KRI this has become part of the official education system and therefore it does not constitute such an acute question for cultural institutions compared to other parts of Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora.

In Bakur, the Kurmanji and Zazaki dialects of the Kurdish language could not develop for decades because of severe restrictions imposed by the Republic of Turkey, unlike the case with the Sorani or Badini dialects during the British mandate in Iraq or even in Iran, where the private use of Kurdish was never forbidden or punished. The scope of the pro-Kurdish language activity of cultural institutions depends on the subject matter, which includes music, dance, cinema, theatre and visual arts. The reason for this is the widespread lack of knowledge of their mother tongue among Kurds, which is undoubtedly the result of the assimilation policy pursued by the Turkish authorities. The ambitious task of revival is especially difficult to meet, mainly because of the modest amount of written Kurdish culture, and thus few original sources of the past that can be applied. In general, in Bakur the inability to use the Kurdish language creates a big problem for attracting the public, or to put it differently, the recipients of Kurdish cultural production. For instance, events devoted to Kurdish topics have to be conducted in two languages; Kurdish and Turkish. Thus, for several years, Kurdish intellectuals in the forums of cultural organisations have been debating the necessity of disseminating Kurdish, and at the same time conducting literary, journalistic and publishing activities for this purpose. To prepare the Kurds for being conscious participants in their own culture, organisations offer a wide range of language courses to enable them to communicate in their mother tongue.

The ESK was founded in 1992 in an effort to restore the vitality and prominent position of the language. The institute has conducted linguistic research, published *Zend* magazine focused on language issues, defined language norms, published dictionaries, translated, and offered expert knowledge. It has also conducted systematic language courses in more than 30 branches throughout Turkey (most of which are in the Kurmanji dialect, but also in Zazaki and Sorani) using textbooks developed by philologists. It has also published classics of Kurdish literature. In total, around 200 publications on language, history and folklore have been issued.²⁶



Picture 3.2 The Kurdish Institute of Istanbul, 2013, by J. Bocheńska

Similar activities in Istanbul and Bakur are also run by recognised institutions such as the NÇM, the İsmail Beşikçi Foundation (Tur.: *İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı*), Kürt-Kav or *Nûbihar*. The changes in Turkey regarding Kurdish language have also resulted in an increase in the number of people writing and reading in Zazaki. The Vate Group (an organisation established in 1996 in Stockholm and in 2003 in Istanbul) is an interesting example of an association of people who use the Zazaki dialect and identify themselves with the Kurdish cultural revival. The aim of this institution is

to develop knowledge about the Zaza and ‘the Kurdish idea’, especially among ‘those who are not convinced about their Kurdish background’.²⁷

The Municipal Council of Diyarbakir has also been committed to the task of language revival, organising conferences on Kurdish literature and language. The first was launched by the Council in 2003 and attracted a lot of interest. For the first time in their history, Kurdish intellectuals in Turkey publicly discussed their native literature. During the Diyarbakir conference in 2011, through a general vote, a decision was made to establish equal status for all dialects of the Kurdish language. The decision to abandon the creation of one literary language for so-called multilingualism (*pirzimanî*) and the consent to the parallel existence of various dialects was circulated in writing and addressed to various Kurdish institutions, including political parties. The Municipal Council gave special prizes to authors writing in Kurdish, and now offers curricula for people to use.²⁸

Language issues are also similarly important for institutional actors in Iran and the Kurdish diaspora, albeit for other reasons. In Iran, there is a wide range of Kurdish language courses in its diverse dialects in Rojhilat and Tehran, offered by such institutions as *Aşitî: Binkey Geşey Ferhengê Bane* (Peace: Cultural Development Foundation of Bane or simply *Ferhengê Aşitî*—The Culture of Peace), *Fêrgey Zimanî Kurdî Raja* (Raja School of Kurdish) in Sine or The Kurdish Institute of Tehran; these courses are well attended.²⁹ A lot of emphasis is placed on writing and reading; thanks to the similarity of the Persian and Kurdish alphabets, it is possible to learn this skill within two months.³⁰ In Tehran, organisations are encouraging language skills among Kurdish emigrants and children from mixed marriages, maintaining language knowledge.³¹ Qaşang Abdulla, a Kurdish language teacher from the Kurdish Cultural Centre (KCC) in London, stressed that providing Kurdish youth with Kurdish language education is extremely important in the UK diaspora, because many parents do not speak with their children in Kurdish at home. They focus on English, believing that it is more important and can help children to get better jobs in the future. However, according to Abdulla, not knowing their mother tongue well does hamper the children’s ability to learn another language. Kurdish lessons were also launched by Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey. At the same time, both organisations and also the Day-Mer (Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre) provide English language and other supplementary courses to help people, especially the young, integrate better into society.³²

The language revitalisation efforts are clearly reflected in the emergence of a large number of Kurdish publishing houses throughout Kurdistan. In Turkey and Bakur, one can mention the Avesta, Lîs, Nûbihar, Ava, Perî, Hîva, Ar, Belkî, Ronahî or Peywend publishing houses. In Rojhilat the Mang Publishing House established in Bane is designed to popularise the idea of books in Kurdish.³³ The Huner project in Rojava's Qamişlo seeks to save the Kurdish languages from extinction (AFP 2017). A large-scale publishing and translation activity correlated with the creation of libraries and archives is noticeable in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq in the work of private institutes and publishing houses such as Cemal Êrfan, Serdem, Gelawêj, Endeşe, Spîrêz, Aras or Mukriyanî. It offers Kurdish literature, including works of classical and modern literature, scientific literature, political science, anthropology, philosophy, religion, history and art, with particular emphasis on neighbouring countries and the widely understood West and Russia, to familiarise the Kurdish audience with them. They translate, publish and collect books in many languages besides Kurdish Sorani, mainly Arabic, Persian, English, French and Turkish.³⁴ A permanent element of activity is the regular organisation of book fairs in Erbil, Silemani, Diyarbekir and Qamişlo (Al-Monitor 2017). In Bane in Rojhilat, Mang Publishing organised the first exhibition of Kurdish books in July 2017 to promote the idea of reading in Kurdish.

3.5.2 *Restoration of Heritage*

The whole cultural environment in Kurdistan is committed to transformation, from the past traumatic decades and systematic underdevelopment to the twenty-first century's policy of revitalisation of Kurdish cultural resources. For many institutions in Iraq, but also to a great extent in Turkey and Iran, their primary mission is to explore, collect, revive, protect and develop their own heritage. For the needs of this chapter, the definition of heritage as 'a contemporary product shaped from history' is used (Harvey 2001, 20; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 20). In almost all interviews with local representatives from the cultural sector there appears concern about the continuity of culture, which is treated as one of the most precious assets for the vitality of the Kurdish nation. Past culture is perceived as a value in relation to the present and the future. According to the director of EKK, Mazhar Khaleghi:

culture is a great and the most basic force that can protect Kurds and their identity despite the five-hundred-year division between the Ottoman and Persian Empire and later between countries such as Turkey, Syria and Iraq [and Iran] [...]. All these invaders sought to annihilate the Kurds by destroying their culture and tried to prevent the Kurds from having their own language, traditions, organisation, costumes, names [...].³⁵

Their underlying goal is to save it for future generations so that they could perpetually draw from it. This is the most spectacular general issue for almost all the cultural institutions that were studied.³⁶

In Başur, the respectful attitude towards the past and to heritage is expressed by focusing mainly on the cataloguing and conservation of museum collections, the preservation and exploration of archaeological sites, the renovation of antique monuments, and the archiving of old documents, manuscripts, photos and video. Audio media is often digitalised, collecting and publishing works of the most eminent writers and thinkers, creators of Kurdish literature and journalism such as Tofiq Wehbî, Emin Zekî and Pîremêrd, and also broadening the knowledge about folklore. Folklore is widely understood as a live oral tradition, music, dance, equestrian art, costumes, handicraft and also everyday objects. The Silemani *Jîn* Institute was created to collect and archive documents dedicated to Kurds and Kurdistan in all possible languages, at times buying or getting copies of such documents from various foreign libraries. The Hawler Antiquities Directorate seeks to protect ancient monuments and conduct research and excavations in this regard. The Directorate for Folklore and Identity (Hawler) seeks to revitalise the multifaceted folk heritage. Respect for the past is perhaps even greater because, as Rauf Begard, the president of the Serdem Institute, stresses:

for many centuries the Kurds were a society of highlanders, living from hunting, animal husbandry or armed robbery and did not care about the past. Thus, this legacy which has survived to our times is relatively modest and therefore more valuable.³⁷

An attempt to revive the lost art and traditional skills of weaving and handicrafts that are being retaught to a younger generation of Kurds in the Kurdish Textile Museum located in the Erbil citadel is part of this trend (Fatah 2014). Others are the initiatives of remastering old and damaged vinyl records of long-dead Kurdish folk singers from across greater

Kurdistan by the EKK in Silemani, and the *Jîn* Institute archive's collection and preservation of written sources including old Kurdish manuscripts. According to the originators, it serves as a Kurdish testament that can contribute to the Kurdish heritage of the Middle East. The archive contains newspaper clippings about Kurds, poetry or foreign-authors books on Kurds (Goudsouzian 2016a).

Revitalisation of Kurdish culture and traditions has brought tangible results in Bakur, as demonstrated by the project to protect and restore the art of *dengbêjs*³⁸ that is considered the 'heart' and 'treasure' of Kurdish culture. *Dengbêjs* are the traditional singers or, in a wider sense, professional storytellers, who have been present in Kurdistan for centuries, singing in small towns and villages on the occasion of everyday celebrations such as weddings and the birth of children. Their artistry has survived despite the prohibitions and hardships. Also, the Kurdish approach to the art of *dengbêjs* has changed considerably in recent decades. After being perceived as the backward representatives of the tribal culture by the many Kurdish activists linked to the PKK, the role of *dengbêjs* started to be recognised as an important part of the 'Kurdish tradition and heritage'. Even so, according to Hamelink and Hanifi (2014, 38) this framework still bears the marks of self-Orientalism because the words 'oral', 'tradition' and 'heritage' are 'charged with ideas about backwardness and underdevelopment'. However, in her research (2014, 2016) she ignored the way the Kurdish creations of *dengbêjs* have been adopted by modern Kurdish literature (e.g. in works and essays by Mehmed Uzun or Mehmet Dicle), which differs from the dominating popular discourse elevating the role of progress that is often contrasted with the 'backward Kurdish past'.

The project titled *Dengbêj û Kevneşopiya Dengbêjiyê* ('*Dengbêjs* and their tradition') implemented in 2007 by the Diyarbakir municipal authorities together with the Dicle-Firat Centre, was among the projects financed under the European Union Cultural Rights Promotion Programme in Turkey, based on the rhetoric of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. It was aimed at 'promoting and enriching the daily use of non-Turkish languages and dialects' in parallel with other projects concerning the culture and language of Roma, Circassians, Bosnians and Georgians. It was also placed within the attempt to institutionalise multiculturalism in Turkey. The project was divided into two parts. The first, financed by the EU funds, was devoted to the development of a written anthology of *dengbêjs* songs and the organisation of two concerts in Istanbul and Diyarbakir. The second, funded solely by the council, was dedicated to the

establishment of *Mala Dengbêjan* (the Dengbêj House). Both sections of the project were performed at the same time. The house was opened on May 2007 (on the first day of the 7th Festival of Art and Culture in Diyarbakir), while the book and CD anthology were ready for concerts six months later (Scalbert-Yücel 2009; Antolojiya Dengbêjan 2007, 2011). The Dengbêj House was created as an institutional result of the project under the auspices of the Kurdish authorities. However, the earliest step on the way to ‘bring the centuries-old tradition back to life; in an institutional form has been made by the Dicle-Firat Centre’.³⁹

Although when compared to other EU-funded initiatives this was a small project, conceptually it was an important one. It left behind an institutional trace in the form of a permanent site for Kurdish folk art and was the first ever officially published book in the Kurdish language with state participation. For the first time in history, a Turkish ministry engaged in a project aimed at supporting Kurdish culture and language. Even though the actual involvement of state institutions in the implementation of the project was minimal, it was of great symbolic value.

3.5.3 *Promoting Cultural Production in Urban and Rural Spaces*

In parallel with the focus on the past, many of the activities of the Kurdish cultural institutions are profiled as modern, adding to the complexity of the cultural fabric of present-day Kurdistan. Local Kurdish authorities carry out projects of varying scale and scope that promote native culture and cultural heritage. With the end of the state of emergency in Bakur in the early 2000s, they began to introduce alternative narratives into the domain of cultural production belonging to the Turkish state institutions. Paraphrasing the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, this may be characterised as a natural order for any new form of political power that introduces its own way of producing cultural narrative and policy (Butler 2013, 85). It seems that the local authorities are using the political, legal and administrative capacities in Turkey and the sphere of culture in a way that brings about the goals and realisation of the values that stand behind the Kurdish national programme. The main goal of their cultural policy, as its authors explain, is ‘to be the owner of one’s own culture’, which was threatened by colonial methods for almost 90 years, and ‘to save it from extinction’. The way to achieve this is to make it visible and live in the public space by publishing literature in Kurdish, setting up their own cultural institutions, and organising their own cultural events.⁴⁰

One of the important initiatives is organising of Kurdish arts and culture festivals. The first Festival of Culture and Art was organised in Diyarbekir in 2001 (Güvenç 2011). The festival movement developed very dynamically and gave rise to more mature forms of artistic activity. At present, the city authorities provide space for the development of specialised theatre, music, film and literary festivals, and for extensive celebration of Newroz. Similar events organised by other municipal councils are based on the model developed in Diyarbekir. Festivals are justified and recognised as the main tool of the development, democratisation, discovery and promotion of multiculturalism in the region, which was a part of the rhetoric of multiculturalism promoted for many years by the EU and UNESCO. The events often host artists and groups from all parts of Kurdistan and neighbouring countries and in the cases of oral production (dramas, films or songs) are open to different dialects of Kurdish, and Persian, Turkish and Arabic languages.

Promotion of Kurdish cultural production in the public space via art, including street festivals, is particularly important for many Kurdish institutions operating in Başur, Rojhilat, Rojava and within the diaspora; for example the Directorate of Folklore and Kurdish Identity in Hawler, Kurdish Institute of Tehran, the organising committee of the Theatre Festival in Qamişlo, or the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, which periodically organise so-called ‘days of Kurdish culture’ in cooperation with the municipal authorities.

In the KRI, there are many cultural open-air events that are distinguished by conspicuous national and political features. They are a manifestation of the current cultural policy pursued by the regional Ministry of Culture contained in Law No. 11. Its provisions assume promotion of ‘Kurdish cultural originality’, which goes hand in hand with promotion of ‘the ideals of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement and its democratic aims’. These political legacies have resulted in extensive public support for events or initiatives concerned with glorifying the struggle for independence and its heroes. The most popular example is Newroz, which remembers the overcoming of the evil prince Zuhaq by the brave smith Kawa. There are many other events commemorating heroism along with the suffering of the Kurdish nation. These are initiatives elevating the memory of the Halabja and Anfal genocide that are visible in many artistic projects; for instance, installations, drawings and paintings by Osman Ahmed or the Halabja monument. Another example is the *Mozexaney Emne Sureke* (the Red Security Service Museum) which was established in the ex-prison in Silemani. Most popular modern artefacts include expressive paintings executed in plain realism, such as the sculpture of Mastûrey Ardalán by the Iranian-Kurdish artist Hadî Ziaoddinî

in Sami Abdurrahman Park in Erbil. Most of the recognised art in Kurdistan nowadays deals with historic themes and frequently adopts nationalist symbolism inspired by mountains, land, country and war.

In the urban space in Iranian Kurdistan, we also find similar artefacts which are under the influence of socialist realism straight from the USSR. These are sculptures of poets such as the monument to Mastûrey Ardalan in Sine, Hêmin and Hejar in Mahabad, or the monument of the Kurdish mountain climber in Bane.



Picture 3.3 Mastûrey Ardalan, the Kurdish poet and chronicler, sculpture by Hadî Ziaoddinî, Sine 2017, by J. Bocheńska

The profound nationalist factor pervades almost every aspect of Kurdish cultural life and has the legal framework to construct and consolidate public identity and patriotic attitudes. Nationalism can be seen as an instrumentalisation of the sphere of culture. One can even perceive it as a process that implemented a Ba'athist spirit. In the political situation of the Kurds in Iraq this is even quite understandable, because it primarily serves as a driver of Kurdish solidarity and supports the creation of a new reality that was previously banned. However, it was fiercely criticised by the Kurdish artists themselves. For Seywan Saedian, such an approach has nothing to do with the real artistic quality and thus, to him, the 'true spirit of the Kurdish people' remains hidden.⁴¹ Imposing Kurdish nationalism on non-Kurdish inhabitants such as Assyrians or Turkmens, though not comparable with the assimilationist attitude of the neighbouring states towards the Kurds, can be related to Bourdieu's symbolic violence and termed a 'colonial' rather than 'postcolonial' policy.

For the city authorities of Diyarbekir, the urban space and architecture are especially important. Proof of this are places like the House of Dengbêş located in the historical building in the centre of Amed. Another example was the Sümer Park Gallery founded in the Sümer Holding Complex, where previously carpets were made. The Diyarbekir City Walls built of basalt blocks were converted into a space where visitors were able to contemplate the selected representatives of the region's rich archaeology in the Archaeological Museum. However, not all architectural decisions made by the Kurdish council were considered by the Kurds to be right. Barış Seyitvan, the former director of the Sümer Park Gallery, criticised the modernisation approach and especially the 'mindless imitation of the Western solutions'. He gave an example of the excessive use of glass in modernising the buildings, which he found completely unsuitable for the hot continental climate of south-eastern Anatolia and deforming the style of Amed's urban space. He stressed that the construction of the skylight in the gallery, widespread in European galleries, is not suitable for Diyarbekir due to the harsh sun that disturbs the reception of paintings. As stated by Seyitvan, 'it was done because, someone saw that there was such in the Louvre'.⁴²

With the intention of raising the young generation, the city council also created cultural centres in the villages. This is part of the effort to equalise opportunities between the city and the provinces. The point is, as Barış Seyitvan explained 'so that living in the village would not be a fault but value'. It seems all the more important because in Turkey, Kurdish culture and language have been perceived as something inferior and primitive, and



Picture 3.4 Sümer Park Gallery, 2015, by J. Bocheńska

abandoned for the sake of the modern Turkish culture. As stressed by Mela İbrahim Xelîlê Amedî, the interpreter of Said Nursi's works (*Nûbîhar*), Kurdish culture should be related to 'nature', 'folk', 'village', 'highland', 'Eastern' or 'indigenous' values understood as attachment to Islamic faith, modesty, generosity and hospitality. He contrasted it with the modern Turkish, urban and metropolitan culture⁴³; in other words, the urbanisation processes was understood as imposing a foreign culture on Kurdish immigrants flowing into the cities.⁴⁴ In the face of current changes in pejorative associations with the village, the Kurdish people have begun to convince themselves of their own culture and see 'Kurdishness' as an attractive offer. However, according to Seyitvan, there are still significant social groups that show no interest in the cultural field and do not have any sense of its value. This is the case of the most affluent members of society, even in Amed, who are still difficult to persuade to support and sponsor the cultural sphere.⁴⁵

Special attention to the urban space and correlation with the past is also visible in a relatively new factor in some towns in Başur, namely in the context of the renewed battle for cultural identity. According to some intellectuals, the uniqueness of Silemani is in danger as war and economic hardships result in changes in political priority and demographics; and also

because of the recent ‘modernisation frenzy’ as local developers rushed to build big supermarkets and skyscrapers that disturbed Silemani’s urban past, including old traditional buildings made of mud brick or grand white *malkandy* or *sherkoosh* stone. The influx of Kurds fleeing persecution from surrounding villages over the decades, and the unceasing waves of internally displaced people from war-torn Iraqi provinces means there are fewer residents today who know about the significant history of the city, and the preservation of heritage sites is a distant thing for them. Some native inhabitants who are aware of the threat, like Sadiq Saleh and Ako Ğarib, express their willingness to struggle to save their culture as a part of their identity against socio-political apathy and indifference. This has resulted in initiatives carried out by artists, historians and cultural workers to save several dozen sites in the city from demolition or decay (Goudsouzian 2016b).

In Erbil and in the whole province, the task of looking after the restoration and adaptation of old buildings is being carried out by the Directorate of Antiquity, which has had some success in this area, such as the renewal of the old military barracks building in Makhmur. Representatives of this institution, however, emphasise the threats resulting from the extremely rapid expansion of the city and the inability to control all archaeological sites. The Directorate is unable to examine from 3000 to 4000 construction sites at the same time, due to staff shortages or lack of information about new construction projects. It cannot keep up and does not reach many places. Also, some irregularities or unlawful actions can be detected, like theft from excavations and smuggling artefacts abroad.⁴⁶

3.5.4 *Giving Voice to Minorities*

The observable area around which the efforts of the institution’s creators are concentrated is cooperation with, and care for, the culture of minorities and refugees living in Kurdistan. This is manifested in the activities of the large Laliş Centre in Duhok *Desteya Bilind a Pêgehê Laliş Yê Remşembirî û Komelayetî Duhok* (the High Committee of Laliş Cultural and Social Centre Duhok or Laliş Centre), which is maintained by the authorities of the KRI. Another example is the EKK in Silemani, where archiving and dissemination projects are being implemented for various minorities including Alevis, Yezidis and Ahle Haqq; or the GD of Culture and Art in Erbil, which supports Syrian dance and poetry groups in refugee camps. There is also *Türkmen Evi* (the Turkmen House) in Erbil, which collects and displays artefacts of Turkmen culture and publishes Turkmen books and magazines.⁴⁷



Picture 3.5 The Turkmen House, Erbil 2015 by J. Bocheńska

To maintain good relations between minorities in the multicultural society and to sensitise people to all sorts of social problems through culture and arts is also one of the major tasks in the KRG cultural policy agenda of targeting social cohesion. The Ministry of Culture and Youth ensures that it is working on mechanisms for promoting cultural diversity, reviving the heritage of minorities and organising public cultural events dedicated to exchange of Kurdish, Turkmen, Arab, Syrian, Chaldeans and Assyrian cultures. A flagship example of its activities in this respect are folk festivals such as the popular folklore festival in the Christian Ankawa district organised by the GD of Assyrian culture of the Ministry of Culture and Youth. It also publishes several magazines in the fields of arts, cinema, women, children and folklore, edited in Kurdish, Turkmen and Syriac. The problems of prejudice against others and social and human rights issues like the generation gap, exclusion of women or forced migration are central for the majority of performances at the Hawler International Theatre Festival, organised annually by the Youth's Theatre Department at the Ministry of Culture and the Network for Cultural Redevelopment in Iraq since 2011. However, the representatives of minorities do not rec-

ognise the results of this policy as sufficient; they are sceptical towards it, assessing it even in terms of bribery to change their identity in favour of Kurdishness or support a certain party. This is especially visible in the case of the Yezidis, who are often very reluctant to be called Kurds, even though they may speak the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language. However, at the same time they can benefit from it, for example using budgetary funding for their own cultural projects.

Representatives of Kurdish cultural institutions in Turkey also declare far-reaching openness to the so-called others, including Assyrians, Bosnians, Circassians, Roma and Arabs, stressing the contrast with the policy of the Republic of Turkey. The value of the world's colourfulness is definitely emphasised by the representatives of many institutions, including the leftist NÇM, municipality institutions or *Nûbihar*. The latter cultivates the Islamic tradition and pays attention to the cultural heritage of Christians or Yezidis which is visible in the *Nûbihar* magazine. As Barış Seyitvan explains, in a project aimed at affirming differences and multiplicity, 'the point is for people to be able to meet within their cultures without giving them up'.⁴⁸

Especially noteworthy are the initiatives undertaken with Armenia, a country with which Turkey has not yet fully established diplomatic relations. The Kurds belong to one of the important groups in Turkey, which is today a catalyst for contact between Turkey and Armenia. This, of course, is connected to remembering the events of 1915, which Turkey still does not want to recognise as genocide. The Kurds were, to a great extent, the executioners of the Young Turks' plan for the extermination of Armenians and, to a much lesser extent, its victims (the Yezidis). It is worth remembering, however, that many Kurdish families gave shelter to Armenians in those tragic years, and today, Kurdish intellectuals, writers and artists demand commemoration of the Armenians (Çelik and Öpengin 2016; Galip 2016). An example is the exhibition organised in 2012 at the Sümer Park Gallery entitled *Li Ameda Kevin Dewlemendiya Çandî* (Cultural Diversity of the Former Diyarbekir). Under this name, old photographs of Armenians who once inhabited the city were presented. The exhibition was organised in cooperation with the organisation Armenian Youth (as part of the project Save Armenian Photograph Archives).⁴⁹

3.5.5 Gender Equality

The equally important idea that is visible in the cultural institutions' functioning is gender equality, as underlined by many in Kurdistan and the diaspora. In Iraqi Kurdistan, there are initiatives that aim to raise awareness of the

problems which have resulted from the Kurdish patriarchy that deprives women of personal autonomy and violates their basic rights. The Ministry of Culture assists women's issues by sponsoring or organising conferences, seminars and cultural events related to violence against women and to general gender equality. It also makes efforts to encourage women's self-expression and participation in cultural activities by offering them financial and organisational support. Particularly important tools in this field of activity are screenings and film festivals such as the 'Movie Day' to celebrate the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 'No to Violence Film Festival' that was part of the KRG's campaign called 'From Peace Within the Family to Peace Within Society' in 2012.

Equality between men and women, according to many Kurdish intellectuals, is an integral part of Kurdish culture and often is a point of contention or ideological war being fought with Islamic extremists. A good example of the activities seeking to create a wide discussion of feminist issues was a one-day conference entitled 'Kurdish Woman on the Frontline: Between Victimhood, Representation, Political Participation and the Fight Against Terrorism' organised by Nazand Begikhani, a well-known academic and advisor on women's issues to KRG, with the support of Mela Baxtiyar, one of the main politicians from the PUK. For the first time, the conference was included in the programme of the popular *Gelawêj* festival in Silemani in November 2015. It emphasised the extreme vulnerability of women during war and conflict and highlighted the difficulties for the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities in dealing with many problems such as the rape of women conducted on a mass scale by ISIS fighters and the children born as a result. The role of Kurdish women in the history of the national Kurdish struggle and contemporary women's engagement in the YPJ and female peshmerga units were also highlighted and the image of women in Kurdish contemporary culture and the role of women poets' literary messages were discussed. The conference was accompanied by a photo exhibition by Yezidi girls who took pictures of Yezidis in a refugee camp.⁵⁰ However, the Tawar Hall of Silemani, where the conference took place, was filled mostly with men, which may symbolically reflect a wider problem of female participation. Despite raising the topic and many developments in the field, evidence suggests that the status of women has not witnessed similar, dynamic improvements. Reports and studies of arranged marriages, rape, domestic violence, honour killings, female genital mutilation and self-immolation are still widespread throughout the many conservative areas.

The issue of gender equality is particularly strongly exposed in Bakur and Rojava. Remembrance of female PKK or YPG fighters like Zilan, Arin Mirkan or other ‘Lions of Rojava’ is part of many holidays and festivals, and the symbol of women is reflected in the popular slogan *Jin, jîyan, azadî* (‘Woman, life, freedom’) promoted by left-wing circles in paintings and posters in Kurdistan. The principle of parity is also observed in many Kurdish organisations and at the top of power. Women have been and are copresidents of the HDP, the BDP and the PYD and mayors of the Kurdish local authorities; women make up 40% of the members of any civil society or governing body in Rojava. Similarly, all administrative organs, economic projects and civil society organisations are required to have male and female cochairs.

Women’s topics appear in different cultural events such as the exhibition titled ‘Kurdistan’ organised in 2015 in Diyarbakir by the Sümer Park Gallery. In this exhibition, in which 250 artists from different parts of Kurdistan took part, one of them presented women wearing the veil with tied hands. It was a symbolic representation of the sale of Yazidi women in bazaars by ISIS militants.⁵¹ However, the depiction found negative resonance in Turkish society and the conservative newspapers stressed that it was an insult to the feelings of religious women who wear the veil.

There are also many environments in the Kurdish community, such as *Nûbihar*, which have a more traditional approach to women’s status. They point to the worse situation of women in the West who are forced to take up a profession and criticise gender movements for slavishly using Western patterns and their inability to exploit the potential of Kurdish culture for the purpose of gender equality. As a counterbalance, however, it is important to highlight the role of many Kurdish women who often combine their feminist engagement and gender studies with artistic activity including Nazand Begikhani, Mahabad Qaradaghi, Choman Hardi, Nahid Hosseini, Houzan Mahmud, Ciwan Baxtiyar, Narin Yüklér. Also, the institutions in Rojhilat, Bane, Serdeşt, Piranşar and Sine strongly emphasise the need for gender equality and working on women’s issues, who are especially ill-treated by the sharia-based Iranian law.

3.5.6 *Cultural Education*

Finally, the special attention of Kurdish cultural institutions is applied to the issue of raising interest in the cultural sphere by diverse forms of cultural education of children. The driving force is bringing up a new generation of

the Kurds in their own culture and convincing them to have lively contact with it. There is a conviction that the development of art and culture in Kurdistan is conditioned by the education of the ‘mature recipient’, who will be able to understand this art, and the circle of wealthy art connoisseurs willingly supporting talented artists and cultural undertakings.

Ensuring contact with culture and its atmosphere from childhood is a key issue in the process of creating positive change in this area, headed by institutions established by and functioning under the aegis of the municipal council of Diyarbekir, that is the Dicle-Firat Centre, the Aram Tigran Conservatoire and the Cigerxwîn Centre. The activities of these institutions, such as educating children in the fields of music, singing and dancing, or enabling them to participate in a symphony orchestra, seek to bring up future creators of Kurdish music. Children have the opportunity to watch an adaptation of *Mem û Zîn*, the classical Kurdish poem by Ehmedê Xanî (1694), which does not exist in the state education system and thus many children can only get to know this work in this way. They are transported as an organised group to visual art exhibitions and this persuades their parents that native culture is valuable and tangible.

Raising the level of knowledge about Kurdish culture, its value and especially the importance of young people’s creativity and participation in cultural life is widely recognised by many institutions in KRI. They were highlighted by Sidqî Salah (the *Jîn* Institute), Nader B. Mohammad (the Antiquity Administrator in Erbil) and Hewa Suaad Hamawandî and Ahmed Salar (the Directorate of Theatre). Law No. 11 directs particular concern to the cultural education of the youngest, for example by encouraging a literary, artistic, scientific and sporting youth and directs establishing a TV station and a news agency (Stansfield 2003, 205–206). Connecting the spheres of culture and youth in the ministerial entity (previously ‘Culture and Sport’) indicates the desire to use cultural policy instruments for the education of the younger generation. According to representatives of the Ministry, it carries out activities that focus on encouraging and educating members of society to be conscious, tolerant and modern citizens.⁵²

This noble idea, though, does not find much reflection in practice. The area of cultural education in Başur is largely neglected. Few organisations have regular educational activities that raise the value of cultural heritage and explain the importance of art. For some of the institutions, the activity in this field is very important, such as the Directorate for Antiquity, the *Jîn* Institute and the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

(AUIS), but for many others the target group is considered secondary (Duhok Gallery) mainly due to limited staff resources and financial constraints. Generally, it seems that a reduced amount of attention has been applied to public programmes like educational projects, visitor services, workshops, panel discussions.

Instead of implementing a holistic educational programme, the Ministry of Culture and Youth has assumed the role of architect for hard infrastructure projects in the cultural sector designed especially for the young generation. It plans to build youth centres, including swimming pools and sports grounds for basketball, volleyball and football, and theatres or stages for different artistic activities. An important aspect of these undertakings is the plan to build dozens of libraries in towns in Kurdistan and cinemas in the new residential complexes and shopping centres. In parallel, the Ministry wants to undertake the construction of cultural institutes, also known as ‘cultural cities’, in each city of Kurdistan which would include a cinema, theatre, gallery, library and café.⁵³

A particularly interesting series of cases are the cultural institutions created by the Kurds in Iran, which go beyond the commonly understood cultural education. They engage in developing sporting skills by, for instance, establishing climbing, football or chess clubs, and social and ecological awareness by promoting urban culture, taking care of the greenery in the city and other places that are worthy of care. Some of these activities are of an innovative nature, introducing new behaviours that are not rooted in Kurdish culture such as projects to regulate traffic in Bane. A notable aspect of their functioning is activities for the vulnerable or socially excluded. This includes the help for the blind, tutoring for poor students so that they can get to university and establishment of libraries in villages. Support for students may also include the provision of books and other teaching materials, something undertaken for example by Mukriyan Publishing which provides free books. They have also initiated meetings of intellectuals from different parts of Kurdistan to assist them in networking. A distinctive element that is not so visible in other parts of Kurdistan is the development of awareness of human rights, including specific actions responding to the Iranian political reality, such as ‘repurchasing’ young people sentenced to death.⁵⁴ Teaching Kurdish, musical skills and dancing is often focused on the young, not only in Kurdistan but also those in Tehran, London and Brussels.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

Identification of the participants in the organisational fields of Kurdish cultural institutions is necessarily incomplete, as it depends on the possibility of collecting empirical materials and other practical reasons such as the blurred demarcation between public and private institutions and determining key and subsidiary institutions in terms of cultural production, for example when independent institutions replace state organisations. Nevertheless, it seems that the most active and influential have been identified. The same applies to the recognition of the 'general issues' around which they focus their attention. These include: revitalising language and heritage; promoting cultural production in urban and rural spaces; highlighting the issues of minorities; and gender equality. Obviously, they meet the current socio-political needs generated by the Kurdish community.

The relatively young organisational fields in Bakur and Başur are structured and bear the features of durability. One can see here the development of mutual awareness, a gradual increase in the amount of interaction between organisations in the field, an upsurge in the information load and the emergence of hierarchy coalitions. However, these are not yet well defined. Kurdish cultural institutions are subject to many processes that appear to be understood in a classical way. Isomorphic or homogenisation forces emerge which lead the organisations to become more similar to each another.

Normative processes associated with professionalisation are still weak, despite examples of outstanding efforts based on individual personalities. In general, there is a lack of work on standards, procedures, laws, competent supervision, consultancy and holistic programmes, for instance in the field of planning the cultural education on art. It appears that programming in the sphere of culture for the Kurds is at an early stage of development, whereas there is widespread awareness of the need to attract, acquire and educate a responsive recipient. Poor participation in cultural production prevails, except for theatre productions and poetry readings where, according to many interlocutors, there is noticeable progress in increasing the audience.

Mimetic processes resulting from standard responses to uncertainty and the imitation of familiar organisational and production standards among native institutions are revealed in the effect of Western solutions. Local institutions, artists and professionals in the cultural sector strive for building opportunities in Bakur, Başur and Rojhilat to explore contemporary Western or, to

a much lesser degree, Russian culture. Western currents and phenomena of art and modernity reach Kurdistan and are adopted in various, sometimes innovative ways. This creates the vibrant amalgam of present-day reality.

Pressures exerted on cultural organisations by other organisations⁵⁵ upon which they are dependent occur in different ways in Kurdistan. The coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence in the Kurdish cultural sector results mainly from the performance of the higher political institutions or groups such as overriding Turkish or Iranian state institutions (cultural ministries) and the Ministries of Culture and Youth in the KRG, KDP, PUK or PKK that impose administrative, financial and programmatic subordination (both formal and informal), using culture as a powerful medium for their purposes. This dominant process overlaps with postcolonial reflection. The Kurdish organisational fields can be perceived as centres of contestation, ‘fields of struggles’ or ‘arenas of power relations’ borrowed from Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’, indicating that the state has a privileged place in competition for a valid and generally binding vision of the social world. This ‘monopoly on common sense’ is based on the dominance of official, universally accepted language and official knowledge and discourse. Symbolic violence takes place in the education system and the legal system, but also in the education of aesthetic tastes and ‘making’ the sense of beauty (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). There is a lot of dichotomy and antagonism that underlies the ambivalent, symbiotic relationship between diverse entities as if between neo-tribal structures and artists, cultural elites brought up under the influence of conservative or more modern patterns, and between the Turkish institutions and the Kurdish city council in Diyarbakir. There are also strategies and tactics to avoid pressures and make alternate claims for legitimacy that sometimes rely on niche-status and uniqueness within the institutional landscape.

Finally, treating the Kurdish cultural institutions’ organisational field as a relational space, where the essence is its ability to serve as the meeting place and opportunity for organisations to involve themselves with one another, we can find a creative and promising, but also turbulent, platform for realising their objectives.

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NOTES

1. The concept of ‘organisational field’ was introduced by Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (1983, 147–60).
2. There is no fixed answer as to how long such a time period should be. To decide whether a certain form of organised activity is an institution or not can only be judged by history. It is evident that there are no standard answers here because different times and different societies have disparate opinions on how long time it takes to establish an institution.
3. The aims may change but usually that happens only slowly.
4. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) drew on Bourdieu’s conception of a field, elaborated by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), emphasising both the relational and cultural aspects of membership.
5. Personal interview with Kawa Mahmoud Shakir, Hawler, July 2013.
6. It is impossible to specify a number of cultural institutions in the Kurdistan Region because there are no central records of them.
7. Until 2013, the Ministry of Culture was headed by the representatives of the Communist Party. The thesis does not apply to the Department of Antiquities because of its narrow specialisation and expert nature.
8. Interview with K.M. Shakir, Hawler, July 2013.
9. Personal communication with Seywan Saedian, November 2017.
10. Personal communication with Ako Khama Khurshid, November 2017.
11. Barzani resigned from his post and Talabani died in October 2017.
12. In 1998 the Ministry of Culture allocated land and a budget and engaged an architect to establish a Museum of Modern Art. For numerous reasons, the project was postponed. The establishment of a such a museum would celebrate and promote modern artistic activity in Kurdistan and signal to the world the Kurdish people’s recognition that contemporary art and artistic output is a seminal part of Kurdish culture.
13. Personal Interview with Mazhar Khaleghi, Silemani, May 2014.
14. Personal Interview with Silêman Elî, Duhok 2014.
15. In 2012, Silemani was appointed by the Kurdish parliament as ‘the cultural capital’ of Iraqi Kurdistan. Founded in 1784 by Kurdish prince Ibrahim Pasha Baban to reflect the values of freedom and multiculturalism, Silemani’s residents have been at the forefront of the campaign to promote the use of the Kurdish language since the late nineteenth century. Before then, the language of the learned man was Persian, Arabic or Ottoman Turkish. Since its foundation, Silemani has produced many intellectuals, poets, writers, thinkers and important artists and has quite a cosmopolitan spirit.
16. Records at the local Directorate for Culture and Art show that there were 372 different cultural events organised in 2015 (Hassan 2016).

17. Despite the closure of the Institute in 2016, according to reliable sources, its activity is continued in the same building in the form of a newly established institute called *Komeleya Lêkolînên Kurdî*. It undertakes a much smaller activity, focusing mainly on Kurdish lessons, but it still functions.
18. Some of these institutions are more widely known under their Turkish names, therefore we used them.
19. Some Kurdish cultural organisations were registered as commercial or service companies due to the fact that the court refused applications for their registration in the form of non-governmental organisations.
20. According to the 2008 foundation law, foundations are asset-based units established by at least one person: an individual or legal entity, that set as their main goal activities for the common good or public good. The main bodies of the foundation are an executive council and a board of management. The foundation does not work on the principle of membership, but it may have a board of founders. See: Bocheńska and Kurpiewska-Korbut (2015).
21. According to the definition contained in the Law on Associations of 2004, an association is a legal entity established by at least seven persons or legal entities, gathering knowledge and combining efforts to achieve common goals not forbidden by law, excluding those based on sharing profits. See: Bocheńska and Kurpiewska-Korbut (2015).
22. Personal Interview with Genim, a member of the band Koma Çiya, a worker of NÇM, Istanbul, June 2013.
23. The Cigerxwîn Centre's Kurdish and Turkish names are not identical. It was translated into English after the Kurdish name. The Aram Tigran Conservatoire and the Cigerxwîn Centre were shut down by the Turkish authorities in 2016 and the Sümer Park Complex was taken over by the central administration.
24. Personal Interview with Cevahir Sadak Düzgün, Deputy Director of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Municipal Council of Diyarbakir and Osman Baydemir, the Mayor of Diyarbakir, Diyarbakir, Mardin, July 2013.
25. Interview with C.S. Düzgün, Diyarbakir, July 2013.
26. Personal Interview with director Zana Farqîni, Istanbul, June 2013.
27. Personal Interview with Deniz Gündüz, Istanbul, June 2013.
28. Interview with D. Gündüz.
29. Interviews from Iran remain anonymous. Personal Interview at Fergey Zimanî Kurdî Raja, July 2017.
30. Personal Interview at Ferhengî Aşitî, July 2017.
31. Personal Interview at Korî Kurdanî Taran, July 2017.
32. Personal Interview with Qaşang Abdulla and Miran Hassan (KCC), Ibrahim Yahli (Kurdish Community Centre), and Taylan Sahbaz (Day-Mer), London, July 2016.

33. Personal Interview, Bane, July 2017.
34. Personal Interview with Sidqî Salah, Silemani, May 2014.
35. Interview with M. Khaleghi, Silemani, May 2014.
36. See: the chapter two on the modern Kurdish literature inspirations from the past.
37. Personal Interview with Rauf Begard, Silemani, May 2014.
38. The word *dengbêj* comes from Kurdish from the word *deng*, meaning the voice and the present tense topic of the verb *gotin* which is *bêjin*.
39. The organisation was established in 2003 as a branch of NÇM.
40. Interview with C.S. Düzgün and O. Baydemir, Mardin, Diyarbekir July 2013.
41. Personal communication with Seywan Saeedian, November 2017.
42. Personal interview with Bariş Seyitvan, Diyarbekir 2015.
43. Personal interview with Mela İbrahim Xelilê Amedî, Diyarbekir 2015.
44. This approach also reverberates in the study on Kurdish migrants by Karol Kaczorowski presented in the following chapter.
45. Interview with B. Seyitvan, Diyarbekir 2015.
46. Personal Interview with Director Nader B. Mohammad, Hawler, April 2014.
47. Personal Interview with Himan Ramzi, November 2015.
48. Interview with B. Seyitvan, 2015.
49. According to information leaflet about the exhibition, Sümer Parkı Gallery, Diyarbekir 2012.
50. This project was supported by UNICEF, Research and Development Organisation (RDO), Z Company and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
51. Interview with B. Seyitvan, 2015.
52. Interview with K.M. Shakir, Hawler, July 2013.
53. Interview with K.M. Shakir, Hawler, July 2013.
54. There is an option to pay a certain sum of money in the case of young people so that the death sentence is not carried out. Usually it is a high amount which the family cannot afford, and thus organisations help to collect it.
55. It is hard to see any direct pressure (cultural expectations) from the public, the society within which organisations function.

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Countering Othering: Social Negotiations of Identity Among New Kurdish Migrants in Istanbul

Karol Kaczorowski

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Istanbul is not the most obvious Kurdish political and cultural centre; nor is it perceived as directly connected with Kurdistan. Even so, it has great significance for Kurds (especially from the northern part of their homeland), as many Kurdish organisations have been active in the city from the end of the nineteenth century until today. Istanbul is not only a destination for migrants seeking to improve their economic situation, it is also an influential scene for cultural, educational and political exchanges of thought.

It is believed that the first Kurds lived in the city during the times of the Byzantine Empire (Alakom 1998, 19–21; Pirbal 2008). The first Kurdish organisations in Turkey were created in Istanbul, and over the years it has hosted the headquarters of many Kurdish cultural societies

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and newspapers (Alakom 1998, 9–91). It has even been suggested that the largest urban Kurdish community in the world lives in Istanbul (*The Economist* 2005), and the metropolis has been called ‘the biggest Kurdish city’ for years (Alakom 1998, 9–19). Such an observation has been confirmed by quantitative migration studies, such as Rüstem Erkan’s in 2009 (TimeTurk 2010). Calculations of the Kurdish population in Istanbul estimate their number to be between two and four million (Ağirdir 2008).

While Istanbul has the image of a place of enormous opportunities—among not only Kurds but also many people around the world—it is also characterised by high economic inequalities. As in many other global metropolises (Sassen 2005; Hannerz 1980) the city is both a dynamic environment for entrepreneurship and cultural activities and also a demanding place to live, which can be illustrated by the existence of numerous shantytowns within its borders. Newly arrived migrants often find living in Istanbul to be a way to improve their standards of life but also a process of perpetual difficulties and challenges, which leads to damaging traditional ties with their hometowns and traditional values. This negative side of the city has been portrayed since at least the 1950s in Turkish films, novels and even visual arts (Akpınar 2015). Kurds coming to Istanbul benefit from vibrant social circles and educational opportunities, but also are subject to economic exploitation and struggles to cope in the new environment. Those who migrate from smaller towns in Northern Kurdistan are especially challenged by the new situation, where Turks are the dominant group, not only in the political dimension, but also the cultural one. Everyday life surrounded by other ethnic groups than those present in Kurdistan—of whom Turks represent the majority—often means facing Turkish nationalism and negative views of Kurds. Such encounters may be even more challenging due to the support of immediate ties (e.g. with family or close neighbours) often being unavailable for migrants who have left their close ones behind. In this aspect, Istanbul can also be treated as the source of a constant struggle with discrimination for many Kurds.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse young Kurdish migrants’ perceptions and practices of countering the negative recognition and presumptions concerning Kurds among other inhabitants of the city. These practices show how Kurdish migrants negotiate their identity and act on its dispositions, interpreted both on the individual and social levels. At the beginning of the chapter, I mention the significance of Istanbul for Kurds

in Turkey and propose a typology of internal migration waves in the country. The main parts of the chapter are devoted to the everyday practices and perceptions connected with the Kurds' reactions towards stigmatisation and othering, and their various dimensions.

The chapter is based on the results of research conducted among young adult Kurdish migrants in Istanbul. The main part of the study consisted of 52 interviews, conducted in 2014 and 2015, during fieldwork in the city. Additional interviews took place during the time of the field research with representatives of seven Kurdish cultural and social institutions operating in Istanbul, and there was one group interview with five conservative young Kurdish women. Most of the respondents were Sunni Muslims and Kurmanji dialect speakers (three respondents' native language was Zazaki). The youngest respondent was a 19-year-old college student; the oldest ones were 35 years old. Of 52 interviews, eight were conducted with women. Most of the respondents were college students of middle-class origin, while approximately 20% of respondents were working class.¹

The findings show how Kurdish migrants perceive and counter the dominant culture; thus the study aims to depict a part of their indigenous voice, which is an important topic in postcolonial studies (Spivak 1988; Said 1978, 2000). The results of my study are also described with reference to the works of scholars who were inspired by, and positioned their research within, postcolonial and critical research: political anthropologist James C. Scott (1985) and sociologist Cenk Saraçoğlu (2010).

4.2 ISTANBUL AS A KURDISH CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CENTRE

Istanbul has hosted numerous influential Kurdish intellectuals, politicians and artists. It was, notably, a home and a place of practice for the Kurdish Ottoman diplomat İdrîs Bitlisî. Bitlisî is most known from his work on the history of Ottoman Empire, *Heşt Beheşt* (Eight Paradises or Eight Glories), however in his diplomatic work under the rule of Sultan Selim I (1512–1520) he was also a successful negotiator with Kurdish tribes (Özoğlu 2004, 47–51). Other distinguished Kurdish personalities included the religious leader Said Nursî (1877–1960), and Celadet Ali Bedirxan, a politician, writer and editor of *Hawar* magazine, which he later published in Damascus and in which he popularised the Latin alpha-

bet for the Kurdish language in 1932. The city was also home to Kurdish poets who wrote in the Sorani Kurdish language, including Hacî Qadirî Koyî (1817–1897) and Pîremêrd (1867–1950).

From the beginning of the Second Constitutional Period in 1908 until the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923, several Kurdish societies operated in the city aiming to integrate elites, while promoting the Kurdish language, culture, history and political views. Alakom (1998, 95) categorises them into intellectual communities, nationalist organisations, periodicals and women's organisations. Of the associations, two played a very important role in the development of Kurdish nationalist thought: the Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan (*Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) and the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti*).

As highlighted in the previous chapter, many contemporary cultural institutions, such as the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (NÇM) and the İsmail Beşikçi Foundation (in Turkish: *İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı*), were first established in the city and only later opened branches in Northern Kurdistan. NÇM was the pioneering institution that paved the way for others. NÇM was officially formed in 1991, after the law forbidding publication in Kurdish was rescinded. Many Kurdish publishing houses (the biggest one being Avesta), journals and media outlets print works including textbooks and dictionaries in Istanbul and distribute them in the country using the city as a base. It can, therefore, be argued that Kurdish culture is also transmitted from Istanbul to the other parts of Turkey (including Bakur). It can be argued that the largest urban Kurdish community in the world lives in Istanbul (*The Economist* 2005)². The metropolis has been called 'the biggest Kurdish city' for years; the term probably first appeared in the late 1990s and became popular around the turn of the twenty-first century (Alakom 1998, 9–19).

The city of Istanbul is, however, different from Northern Kurdistan due to the dominant role of Turkish culture. This dominance can be understood both in its quantitative and symbolic aspects (Mucha 1999, 27–31). The norms and values of the dominant ethnic and religious groups (Turks and Hanafi Muslims) are taken for granted and perceived as cultural universals in a Durkheimian sense. This hierarchy was underlined by my respondents when they described Istanbul in contrast to Kurdish regions, where collectively practised traditions can be fulfilled, and religious observance is kept in accordance with the Shafi'i school of Islam, to which the majority of Kurds adhere.

Istanbul has also played the role of a city providing shelter and economic opportunities for those internal refugees who escaped south-eastern regions during the 1990s due to the war between the Turkish army and the PKK. In fact, most of my respondents associated Istanbul with being the destination of massive forced migrations of Kurds during the 1980s and 1990s. Having this in mind, the respondents repeated the description of Istanbul as ‘the biggest Kurdish city’. This visible demographic aspect of the city was connected by the respondents with its quantitative importance for Kurds. Estimations from the first decade of the twenty-first century point to between two and four million Kurds living in Istanbul (Ağrıdır 2008). The population of the city in 2016 exceeded 14 million (TurkStat 2016). Such a vast Kurdish community in the city was seen as an advantage by the respondents, allowing new acquaintances, productive political and cultural discussions and mutual support not available to the same extent in other metropolises outside the Southeast (for instance Izmir or Ankara). Moreover, being a centre of migration, Istanbul is a scene of cultural exchange, not only between Kurds and Turkish citizens of other ethnic backgrounds, but also between Kurds from different regions of Northern Kurdistan. This was also underlined by some of my respondents, who pointed to the long-lasting role of the city as a heterogeneous place nurturing Kurdish intelligentsia and hosting migrants from all parts of Northern Kurdistan. As Istanbul is a migration centre for Northern Kurds but also generally for the inhabitants of Turkey, it is important to explore the different waves of internal migration in the country since its establishment in 1923.

4.3 WAVES OF INTERNAL MIGRATIONS IN TURKEY AND THEIR IMPACT ON KURDS

Most Kurdish migration within Turkey has—as pointed out by Mino Alinia (2008, 80)—been involuntary. Resettlement was part of a policy aimed towards gaining control of remote and relatively hard to control areas, even before the establishment of the Turkish Republic based on nationalistic principles (Ayata 2008). Emigration took part after the first Kurdish uprisings, notably after the Ararat (*Agiri*), rebellion (1927) which was led by *Xoybûn*, a political organisation formed in Syrian (Western) Kurdistan (Tejel 2009, 4). Internal deportations were the result of Sheikh Said’s (1925) revolt and one of the reasons for the Dersim rebellion of 1937, which was bloodily suppressed. Since the beginning of the Turkish

Republic this region has been treated as the cradle of subversive ideas and movements that the authorities believe can be overcome only through intensive resettlement and military intervention. The reaction of the Turkish army left an estimated 10% of the Dersim population dead (including women and children), while thousands of houses and livestock were burnt (van Bruinessen 1994).

Apart from the state of emergency in Dersim, the following two decades brought relatively peaceful development in the country which included a rise in voluntary migration in Turkey. As rural-urban migration intensified in the 1950s, many Kurds migrated to cities due to changes in the traditional approaches to production in their villages; these changes occurred owing to the modernisation of cultivation, land reforms by the government and previous resettlement conducted by the authorities (Romano 2006, 111–112). In David Romano's (2006, 112) opinion, urban migration and participation in the socio-economic life of influential Middle-Eastern cities allowed the creation of a Kurdish bourgeoisie and the emergence of a new, well-educated and politicised class among them. Owing to the emergence of this new class, along with relative democratisation and the opening of a political sphere after the post-1960 coup constitution, several Kurdish associations and movements flourished throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Özcan 2006, 75; Romano 2006, 47). However, after every military coup (on 27 May 1960, 12 March 1971 and 12 September 1980), Kurdish societies were targeted with arrests and bans. This suppression led many activists to emigrate, especially after the 1980 coup, which effectively left only the PKK on the Kurdish political scene. As the result of the tense political atmosphere after the 1980 coup, groups of Yezidis living in Turkey emigrated abroad (Kreyenbroek 2009, 33–38).

The expulsion of thousands of Kurdish villagers was part of a counter-insurgency war doctrine by the Turkish authorities during the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, as the remote countryside in the Southeast was perceived by the military and authorities as a hotspot of guerrilla warfare training. The resettlement plan envisioned eliminating the PKK from rural areas of the Southeast by gaining intelligence and local insights as a result of spatial control, led by military operations and the formation of a paramilitary 'village guard'. This initial way of fighting the PKK included evictions, imprisonment without trial, village burnings, executions, and the destruction of households and livestock (Jongerden 2007, 43–44; Göç-Der 2008). In 1984, Turgut Özal modified the Village Act (*Koy Kanunu*) to enable the hiring of Temporary and Voluntary Village Guards (*Geçici ve*

Gönüllü Köy Korucuları). As well as instigating internal conflicts between Kurds, this also created a dilemma in which villagers were often forced to decide whether they wanted to join the government service or leave their homeland. Moreover, providing help to either village guards or guerrillas was often punished by the other side of the conflict (Jongerden 2007, 79).

The government of Turkey eventually ceased military operations in the Southeast and abandoned its policy of forced resettlement at the end of the 1990s, largely as a result of capturing the PKK's leader in 1999. The state of emergency was lifted in Northern Kurdistan in 2002. Despite the gradual improvement of safety and living conditions in the Kurdish inhabited regions of Turkey, the outward migration rate from them still grew. Considering this tendency, one can argue that most of the young Kurds who changed their place of living between 2002 and 2015 were relatively voluntary migrants, moving more because of their economic and educational needs than because of the immediate physical danger which had been a dominant push factor earlier. Instead, they changed their residence to pursue educational and economic possibilities unavailable to them in Bakur. Some also pointed to the desire to experience a more international atmosphere in Istanbul allowing inspirations from the West, which is often perceived as 'more developed'.

Following existing studies of migrations in Turkey (Gezici and Keskin 2005; Filiztekin and Gökhan 2008; Gedik 1996; Çoban 2013) and the observations outlined above, I would like to propose a typology of internal migration waves in Turkey consisting of (1) economic migrations connected with industrialisation from the 1950s until the late 1970s, (2) waves of forced migration during the last two decades of the twentieth century and (3) a new wave of voluntary migration in the twenty-first century (Kaczorowski 2016a). It is, however, important to add that there is a high possibility of a return to forced migration after a renewal of the conflict between the state and the PKK in 2015, and expulsions connected with the aftermath of the coup attempt in 2016.

My research, for which partial findings are presented in this chapter, concentrated on the 'new Kurdish migration' which took place after the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the lifting of a state of emergency in south-eastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan). Most of the respondents came to Istanbul in the period 2002–2015. While relatively more voluntary (or less insecurity driven, as many theorists point that no migration is completely dependent on the migrating individual, or voluntary) spatial mobility in Turkey happened before and after this period (taking into account the potential forced migration wave after 2015), this time frame can be recognised as special, in contrast to the dominant role of

forced migration in the 1980s and 1990s, to the return of displacements after breakup of the peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK, and to the renewal of military operations in the Southeast of Turkey.

The drastic consequences of periods of forced displacement and general tragic history of Kurds in the twentieth century are reasons why scholars studying this ethnic group often emphasise that Kurdish migrations have been mostly involuntary (Alinia 2008; Koivunen 2002). Moreover, many analyses cover only the forced migrations of the late twentieth century, such as the last migration wave of Kurds in Turkey (O'Connor 2015; Ahmetbeyzade 2007), while, in fact the out-migration rates from Kurdish inhabited regions of the country have risen after the end of state of emergency in 2002. I argue that this new wave of migration took place in conditions unavailable before to the Kurds, owing to the relative improvement of the Kurdish situation in the country (which can be seen mostly as the result of the AKP government's reforms aimed at integration with the European Union) and a period of economic prosperity (which was not experienced in all the regions to the same extent but was mirrored in very positive economic indicators for the whole country). My respondents have taken into account these changes, underlining, however, that in their opinion the state's repressive policy towards Kurds still continues. All the respondents were also heavily influenced by various aspects of the period of military conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army. Consequently it can be argued that the period of 2002–2015 was relatively more stable in the political sphere, which was more inclusive for Kurdish initiatives and created an open legal and social atmosphere that allowed for the vibrant self-organisation and public activity of Kurdish civil society.³

Unfortunately, with the failure of the peace process and a return to armed conflict with the PKK, along with the devastating results of curfews in the Southeast, it can be argued that this change in the Turkish political landscape will result in a wave of forced migration, mostly consisting of people escaping from demolished districts of Kurdish inhabited cities and from villages affected by military operations. Moreover, the emergency state imposed on the whole country in the aftermath of the coup attempt will also affect the rising atmosphere of insecurity in Turkey, which will again stimulate the wave of forced migration. This can also be suggested on a theoretical basis, as most Turkish and international scholars of migration point to military and physical conflict as a crucial factor influencing migration (Gezici and Keskin 2005; Filiztekin and Gökhan 2008, 6–7; Sirkeci 2009; Akarca and Tansel 2015).

The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey estimated at the end of April 2016 that 1.5 million people had been affected by curfews. Since the

announcement of the first such curfew, from 15 August 2015 until 20 April 2016, Turkish operations against YDG-H⁴ have led to 338 civilian deaths (including 30 elders, 69 women and 78 children). Moreover, 93 people who died during the curfews were not identified, as they were buried immediately. Kurdish activists have pointed to the destruction of 5000 houses, while the Turkish Ministry of Health calculated that, by March 2016, 355,000 people had been forcibly internally displaced (Rudaw 2016). In December 2015, Human Rights Watch published a report presenting statements from people in the areas under curfew. The organisation underscored the need for the Turkish army to reduce its excessive use of force, as well as to thoroughly examine civilian deaths. Amnesty International also called on the authorities to stop the collective punishment of inhabitants in the Southeast (HRW 2015; Kaczorowski 2016b). The excessive use of force by the Turkish authorities was also noted in the reports prepared by a more conservative Muslim organisation, Mazlumder (2016).

The Turkish armed operations, ending in the destruction of whole neighbourhoods in Kurdish inhabited cities—including in the historical Sur district of Diyarbakir (Amed)—have brought calls from many commentators to recognise them as *urbicide*, or the deliberate destruction of a targeted group's social urban space. French geographer Matthieu Gosse, in an article published in *La Revue Urbanités*, underlined not only the physical but also the symbolic indicators of such a process: Turkish nationalistic slogans on the walls of many buildings, covering the historic city walls with a giant Turkish flag, closing and damaging The *Dengbêj* House (which preserved and revived Kurdish oral traditions), occupation of the municipal museum by the army and the damage to the rich Christian heritage in the city (both by gunfire and racist inscriptions), which was often supported by the HDP ruled municipality, as in the cases of the Syriac church of the Virgin Mary, Chaldean Church in March Petyun and Armenian Catholic Church (Gosse 2016).

The symbolic aspects of a return to the persecution of Kurdish movements in Turkey were also connected with the police raids beginning in late July 2015. The vast majority of them were aimed at the PKK, and not ISIS. During the arrests, many Kurdish activists were accused of collaboration with the PKK, which meant that the sole voice calling for a halt to the excessive use of force in operations in the Southeast was persecuted by the authorities. Scholars from many universities across Turkey, and from abroad, who signed the petition 'academics for peace', faced public defamation and criminal charges. They were called 'helpers of terrorists' and 'traitors', while their names were also published in pro-governmental newspapers with

derogatory connotations. Most of the signatories from Turkey faced charges, while some were fired or forced to leave their university posts.

Although a drastically worsening sense of security in Northern Kurdistan, and generally in Turkey after 2015, has led to a new wave of forced migration, it can be argued that the period of relative stability and blossoming of Kurdish civil society during the years 2002–2015 allowed for the development of new, peaceful ways of self-expression connected with Kurdish culture, and allowed for the education of a new generation of young Kurds, who might soon be as influential as the generation who received their education in the 1960s. While in the realm of politics such hypotheses remain to be verified, with regard to Kurdish art and literature one can point to new themes with growing popularity among the Kurds in Turkey. A similar change in respect of ethics expressed through Kurdish art was described in the Chap. 2 by Joanna Bocheńska. The many perceptions of stigmatisation and forms of countering mentioned and analysed in the following parts of this chapter did not originate during the new wave of voluntary migration in the twenty-first century. Many of them, in fact, characterise *both* forced and relatively more voluntary Kurdish migrants. It can however, be argued that the atmosphere and development of Kurdish organisations and art in the period of voluntary migration stimulated discussion and provided new opportunities for young Kurds to counter discrimination towards them in the country.

4.4 KURDISH IDENTITIES IN TURKEY AND ‘OTHERING’

Due to the political, economic, religious, linguistic and local cultural differences expressed in groups called *memleket*, one cannot state that there is a single Kurdish identity in Turkey or in Northern Kurdistan. Such diversity was underlined in social theory by, among others, Nira Yuval-Davis (2010), who advocated studying identity and belonging in an intersectional way, paying attention to a given respondent’s position on several different axes of power. This advice follows the recognition of intersectionality in postcolonial and critical theory (Wallaschek 2015). Yuval-Davis’ perspective served as an inspiration for the study described in this chapter. However, despite the various discrepancies in interpreting what it means to be Kurdish, in Turkey there is a prevalent, common-sense, essentialist understanding of Kurdishness, connected with biologically understood ancestry, language and land (whether defined as East, Southeast or Kurdistan). In public debates in the country, there is also an established notion of ‘Kurdish identity’ as a self-identification and set of values connected with shared language and history.

This concept is also often associated with leftist political thought as, since the 1960s (or even from the beginning of the twentieth century) the political expression of Kurdishness has been primarily manifested by leftist movements (with some more conservative organisations). To this day, public manifestation of Kurdish identity or sole cultural or scientific examination of topics connected with Kurds are mainly perceived by Turkish public opinion as connected with leftist politics and the often violent struggle for separation from the Turkish state. The prevalence of such connotations of Kurdish identity may to some extent explain the dominance of leftist sympathies among the respondents of many social studies connected with Kurdish culture. More conservative Kurds often prefer to express their culture and identity through other means than political participation and may also perceive other aspects of their identity as more important in the public sphere (e.g. being a Muslim, coming from certain *memleket*, being a Turkish citizen).

While interviews during my fieldwork with Kurdish migrants and conversations with people of different ethnic background confirmed this initial, common-sense, essentialist understanding of Kurdishness, the interpretations of values and dispositions embedded in being a Kurd varied widely. Common themes regarding the perception of Kurdish identity included respect for family, hospitality, and feeling an affinity to nature (especially present in Bakur). Many respondents also added interest in the history of the Kurdish people as an important trait and requirement of being Kurdish. For more conservative Kurds, leftist activism was connected with a kind of discrimination, as the Kurdish left was perceived as having a negative approach to Islam and more religious Kurds. The PKK was also mentioned by several respondents as an organisation which excludes conservative people and does not tolerate dissent towards the main political line of its leaders. Conservative Kurdish women who took part in a group interview for my study expressed that they felt unwelcomed by the secularist Kurdish left. On the other hand, participants of leftist political backgrounds (the majority of my research sample) praised the richness of Kurdish traditions but also criticised aspects of traditional hierarchies connected with domination of landlords, *aghas*, religious authorities, sheikhs and tribal feuds. Respondents sympathetic to the political left also mentioned their perception of the policy of the current AKP government as aiming to 'Sunnify and Turkify everyone'. More conservative respondents focused more on nationalistic policies in Turkish history as a source of ethnic discrimination and conflict. Nonetheless, both conservative and leftist respondents similarly defined the situation of

Kurds as oppressed by the state and advocated for more cultural freedoms, including respect for the native Kurdish language. All the respondents of my study also underlined the manifestations of this oppression in everyday life. Thus, they meant that stigmatisation of Kurds is not limited to the state, its policy and official representatives but is perpetrated on a daily basis by other inhabitants of the country. In this regard, many respondents called the approach of other citizens towards Kurds ‘othering’ (Turkish—*ötekileştirilme*).

Cenk Saraçoğlu (2010, 20–26) studied attitudes among middle-class inhabitants of Izmir (the third biggest city in Turkey, located on the Aegean coast) towards Kurdish migrants, and came to the conclusion that they are subjected to *exclusive recognition*. By this, he meant that Kurds are recognised as a different (relatively homogenous) group, contrary to the official ideology and policies of the state, which at least until the end of the twentieth century denied the existence of Kurds as a separate ethnic and cultural group. This recognition is achieved, according to Saraçoğlu, after encounters with Kurdish migrants. Discourses used with this process exclude Kurds from other groups by associating negative stereotypes with them and affect this ethnic group exclusively, as other urban minorities of significant proportions (e.g. Circassians,⁵ Bosnians, Albanians and Georgians) are not distinguished from the rest of society. Saraçoğlu (2010, 10–18, 25–26) also noted that this topic cannot be analysed within the framework of ethnic conflict as, throughout the years, there was no developed, open animosity between Turkish and Kurdish people. Moreover, according to him, the tendencies in Turkish public opinion’s approaches to the PKK were characterised for years by associating the organisation with foreign influence and only recently have Kurds in Turkey come to be generally perceived as PKK supporters.

Saraçoğlu (2010, 21–24) listed five general stigmas attached to Kurdish migrants in Izmir, that they are (1) ignorant and cultureless; (2) benefit scroungers; (3) disrupters of urban life; (4) invaders and (5) separatists. My respondents mainly mentioned the first and fifth types of stereotypes against Kurds. Some also pointed to the pejorative use of the word *kıro* (adopted from Kurdish *kur*, meaning ‘son’) to stigmatise migrants who allegedly publicly behave in inappropriate ways or are cultureless and backward. This phenomenon was also mentioned in earlier studies (see, Grabolle-Çeliker 2010, 225–228; Mutluer 2012, 138–145). The stigma of ignorance was also connected with a stereotype of Kurds being rebellious and not respecting any kind of power (Göral 2016).

In the narratives of interviewed migrants, Kurds were connected with suffering and discrimination experienced both throughout history and contemporarily, from the hand of dominant groups in the countries where they live. Lack of their own state and alienation from dominant groups were connected with this perceived suffering. This was expressed, among others, by a woman who was studying and working in healthcare at the same time:

None of us were born as if we had the option of choosing our race. But being Kurdish means to me oppression. My Kurdish side was oppressed, my Kurdish side was tortured, my Kurdish side was assimilated. I was criticised for being Kurdish. I have always experienced all these things because of the Kurdish side. I was othered because I am a Kurd. When 'Kurd' comes to my mind, all these pains come to mind, what I lived through appears in front of my eyes. (R12, around 28 years old, from Konya⁶)

Othering and being treated as a second-class citizen because of being Kurdish are both mentioned in the quote above and were experiences that were often underlined by the respondents, being seen by them as something connected to Kurdishness in Turkey. A few respondents also pointed out that some Kurds cannot hide that they are different because of their accent in speaking Turkish and slightly darker skin colour. Thus the process of being identified as Kurdish was also understood by the respondents as (at least partially) as beyond the individual's choice. This aspect of ethnic boundaries being partially imposed by political elites and other groups (in this case the Turkish majority and Turkish state) was emphasised by Steve Fenton (2010, 190–213) and Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993, 28–33).

The participants in my study also emphasised a tendency to resist injustice as a typical trait of Kurds because of their history of being subjected to it. This was explicitly stressed by one woman studying economics:

In fact I think being a Kurd means always fighting with something [or someone – KK] with people who misunderstand you, who are against you, with people who are constantly trying to fight you and with people who are trying to harm you. (R21, 21 years old, from Maraş)

Specifically, Kurdish identity and culture were connected by the respondents with hospitality, respect for family and performing collective commemorations. Traditional symbols of Kurdish culture (that is: the colours of the flag, language, land of Kurdistan) and more modern ones (usually

connected with political activity, certain politicians, musicians and leftist activists), were especially emphasised when speaking about practices connected with being Kurdish. While explaining their own understanding of Kurdishness, the respondents often emphasised that every ethnic group (or race or nation) had their own customs and language, but what differs with Kurds is the history of being persecuted and resisting this persecution. This was also admitted by those participants who did not want the topic of identity to be associated mainly with oppression:

In my opinion Kurdishness is not... attaching victimisation to Kurdishness, looking at it as being oppressed... it is not it. But being Kurdish in a way means: when you are a Kurd, if you agree to it or not, you face this resistance... being Kurdish is perceived like having a front against you. I say it to everyone. This is also connected to statelessness. Being Kurdish has meant facing various massacres for centuries. You live with this historical weight. In a way, it means living always with the hope of freedom, living with utopia... hopes like that. Perhaps being Kurdish means living with the hope of having a state. Being a Kurd is synonymous with surviving, it means fighting in all areas of life. These are the things that distinguish Kurds from other ethnic groups. (R3, around 32 years old, from Hakkari)

Perception of an overemphasis on the victimisation of Kurds (but at the same time the difficulty of not mentioning tragic history) and a need for continuous work on a positive approach to Kurdish heritage is also present in contemporary Kurdish literature. It is a theme mentioned, among others, by Mehmet Dicle, who represents a new generation of Kurdish writers in Turkey (Dicle 2015a; Bocheńska 2016).

Many interviewees stressed that coming from a particular ethnic or national group (or being born into a particular religious tradition) was not an important factor for them in judging people and socialising with them. This might be connected with the general tendency towards universalism among both leftist and conservative Kurdish activists. A negative view of nationalism might also be rooted in the leftist political views characterising most of my respondents. They often emphasised their more universal and multicultural view by pointing out that it was not relevant for them that those who suffered were Kurdish, but it mattered that people were hurt. The view of Kurds as a group who have suffered discrimination because of state policies can be treated as intersectional, as it was expressed by respondents of different economic and political backgrounds regardless of gender. During the group interview with young conservative Kurdish women,

it was pointed out that race and ethnicity have no meaning in Islam, but Kurds were described as oppressed people, who generally were hospitable and sincere. This corresponds to the leftist participants' views of Kurds and Kurdish culture. Both groups emphasised their negative attitude towards nationalists. The views of the conservative women are compatible with widespread discourse among religious Kurds in Turkey, in which the political history of the republic is interpreted as oppression of Kurds alongside conservative citizens. Kemalist policies were blamed for unjust governance by both the leftists and religious participants in my study. These two groups, however, differed in some of their evaluations of the current situation in the country and in their attitudes towards the political representation of Kurds. Turkish nationalism and Kemalist policies were understood by the respondents in a similar way to Ernest Gellner's (1983) general remarks on nationalism. Nationalism, in this approach, is spread and sustained by centralised policies aiming at both political and cultural homogenisation. These policies are imposed by the state, among other ways, through the educational system. Being Kurdish in this context includes a disposition to resist this homogenisation through self-consciousness and public actions (such as stressing being Kurdish, speaking Kurdish, political participation).

Following the observations of Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), it can be underlined that space is composed both by spatial features and social relations. Relations with other groups—mainly Turks and representatives of the Turkish state—form an important part of Kurdish migrants' perceptions of Istanbul and affect their construction of social space. Such encounters also show the interactional character of their identity performances (emphasised by, among others, Anselm Strauss and Nira Yuval-Davis), which means that they significantly modify invoked narrations and practices connected to identity. The city is also a space which furnishes conditions that enable the imposition of power (Amin and Thrift 2002).

Cenk Saraçoğlu's (2010) study involves the stereotyping of Kurdish migrants by 'native' inhabitants of Izmir. Calling this phenomenon 'exclusive recognition', he argued that inhabitants of Turkish cities affected by neo-liberal urban transformations associate negative traits with Kurdish migrants, while not noticing other minorities or their wider cultural context. This recognition is achieved through applying discriminatory discourses in everyday encounters with them (Saraçoğlu 2010, 10–18, 25–26). Therefore, everyday urban practices can lead to new ways of stigmatising groups or reproducing dominating discourses. The phenomenon

analysed by Saraçoğlu as *exclusive recognition* coincides with my respondents' descriptions of their experience in relations with Turks and representatives of the Turkish state. They have been largely affected by othering and discrimination in these relations.

The respondents underlined that they do not judge people on their ethnic, national or religious background. Moreover, they stated that they had Turkish friends, and some participants even had Turkish wives. Generally, however, the majority of the young Kurdish migrants admitted that their closest friends were Kurds, as it was very difficult to be understood by Turks and to feel comfortable and totally sincere around them. This can be illustrated by two quotes: the first from a migrant from Mardin who teaches mathematics and the second from a student working in healthcare, who came to Istanbul with her parents:

We also have Turkish friends but we are not as close as with Kurds. You cannot speak with them as freely and cannot trust them as much as Kurds. With them, when somehow Kurdishness comes up, you have to talk politics. Their perspective is very different to our perspective, and because of that we are trying to spend time with our Kurdish friends with whom we agree more, are more relaxed and can speak more freely. (R3, around 32 years old, from Mardin)

Because the Kurds understand me better. I also have Turkish friends but we cannot understand each other. With their cultures and their thoughts, they do not understand me. When I try to tell them anything about the Kurds, they think I'm racist, or when I say 'you made such a mistake, you excluded us' they understand it as racism. (R12, around 28 years old, from Konya)

As described in the quotes above, many respondents felt obliged to speak up about their ethnic background in situations when discriminatory terms were used regarding Kurds in their social surroundings (for instance: at university, at work, or on the bus). Such a sense of duty to one's identity shows the effect of certain interactions on the performance of identity. As many respondents admitted that normally during their everyday life they do not emphasise that they are Kurds so much, it can be argued that interactions in which Kurds are stigmatised stimulate this emphasis on a Kurdish background and the formulation of identity in more political terms. Therefore, such interactions provoke the shift from implicit and more primordial understanding of identity into civic codes of identity that are manifested in public testimonies of certain political weight.⁷ This can be illustrated by statements from a respondent working in a customs office and from an employee of a telecommunication company:

That is to say, those who are cut off already have a meaning for us but in normal things... in a normal social life of course we do not emphasise it, for example as a political attitude we always get even against the enemies, against the system, I mean anyway our goal is [for them – KK] to accept other races. (R42, 26 years old, from Ağrı)

That is: during arguments in the workplace, people do not know that you are Kurdish and they speak with prejudice against the Kurds. And then you say 'I am a Kurd' and then you amaze them and they are surprised. There have been so many cases when I had to emphasise it. In the simplest example: on the bus, we are going with my friend from Samatya, there was an accident. We didn't know the people in the accident; we looked outside at the front of the bus. Someone sitting in front of us said 'These are the Kurds.' I said: 'How do you know that they are Kurds? I am also the Kurd' and this moment he immediately stopped speaking. We feel [the need to underline Kurdishness – KK], I mean we also have to emphasise it. (R27, 30 years old, from Kars)

The reason for stigmatisation of Kurds by Turks in proximity to them, according to my respondents, was mostly a lack of knowledge about the difficult history of Kurds in Turkey, which results in having opposite attitudes to this topic. Repeating stereotypes of Kurds as backward, terrorists and criminals (Saraçoğlu 2010, 21–24) was also associated with that image of them being presented in the media. Turkish nationalistic ideology was however also blamed for this lack of understanding of Kurdish problems:

When I first came here, as a little boy, I loved my country though we went through bad times there. But I knew this: the soldiers act wrongly. And I came here to realise that people here do not know at all what happened there. There was no change, but I am a little more informed about what they think about us. (R31, around 23 years old, from Mardin)

Because these days of fear remain in the past I try to express it as much as I can. It is because people on the opposite side do not know who the Kurds are and what happened, well they listen to the television et cetera or hear it from the bush telegraph that... all the bad things, for example they say that they [Kurds – KK] are murderers et cetera, but... for example that say they are ignorant et cetera but the situation is the opposite, I think the situation is quite the opposite I think. Actually those who are on the opposite side do not know anything because they did not read and they try to act on hearsay. I have seen both Kurdistan and this place so I think I have knowledge from both sides. (R47, around 20 years old, from Şırnak)

This lack of knowledge can be attributed to stigmatisation in media, Turkish nationalistic ideology and sometimes pure ignorance. According to my respondents, it contributes to the othering of Kurds (including migrants in Istanbul):

When you say 'I am a Kurd' or when you say 'I am not a Turk' immediately they start to other you, they start to despise you, they start to see you as the other. (...) How can you be friends with them? I mean when they know that you are Kurd, that you don't think as they do, or when they see that you are one of those who admits and protects his Kurdish identity and underlines it, people immediately start to other you, see you as an animal which is to be feared, see you as a scary horde. (R1, 27 years old, from Batman)

The behaviour of other inhabitants of Istanbul towards Kurds can be analysed as stigmatisation, othering or subtle forms of dehumanisation. Processes of dehumanisation, as mentioned in Chap. 2 of this volume, are treated as a widespread feature of in-group/outgroup relations. According to the participants, speaking publicly in Kurdish or about Kurdish matters is also frowned upon by other people in Istanbul (both in public spaces and in the social surroundings of the respondents). Negative recognition as a stranger was felt by most of the respondents in situations when they did not express their ethnic, cultural or political background. Stigmatisation by other inhabitants of Istanbul and representatives of various institutions (such as: schools, universities, companies, scholarship committees) often occurred, however, only after hearing the geographical origin of a participant or hearing his different accent. In some cases, this feeling of othering and the potential negative consequences of people noticing their Kurdish origin led the participants in my study to hide their ethnic identity. This was particularly reported by the respondents in situations where they were surrounded by Turkish nationalists, applying for a job, or trying to find a place to rent. The first of these situations was often connected with a feeling of immediate danger from Turkish nationalist groups. Some interviewees (especially those who were previously active in Kurdish student associations) mentioned that they were attacked by what they called *fascists*. One respondent, a 25-year-old graduate in economics, admitted that he felt the need to hide his Kurdish identity in order to receive a scholarship (Kaczorowski 2017).

Such examples of the exclusion of Kurds, based on the assumption that people in south-eastern provinces are Kurds, corresponds to Saraçoğlu's remarks on recognition despite the official position of a lack of minorities

and of both the legal unity and equality of citizens. Although the respondents stressed that other groups (e.g. non-Muslims, Armenians, Laz) were also discriminated against, they described stereotypes that targeted only Kurds. Moreover, other minorities were not connected in Turkish public opinion with a specific area of the country, and therefore could not be immediately recognised and alienated.

While participants in my study generally did not see a fundamental change in state policies (as the Turkish state⁸ was almost invariably referred to as the biggest obstacle in cultivating their Kurdishness), however, they often admitted that the situation was better in the sense that there was more freedom in publicly claiming Kurdish identity and culture now that there was no official ban on it. Some respondents also observed that Turks had started to understand Kurds better after being persecuted themselves by the state during the Gezi Park protests. One of the respondents (R36, 24 years old, from Şırnak) pointed to the role of the internet and social media in bringing about a perceived increase in knowledge about the situation of Kurds among the Turks. Many of the interviewees stressed that reconciliation between the groups is the only way to continue their future relations.⁹

The respondents also expressed solidarity with other minorities in Turkey, emphasising that discrimination in the country did not affect just them.¹⁰ In particular, participants in my study identified the contemporary situation of refugees from Syria with the earlier troubles of Kurdish forced-migrants. The sympathy for current refugees in Istanbul and elsewhere was underlined by one respondent, who, aside from studying, working in healthcare and being active in various Kurdish organisations, took photographs as a hobby:

My photos are also about children and women who have migrated. Mostly Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen; people who flee from the war in Syria. They are the biggest victims. They are in the streets. We need to understand them, there are people lying on the street, there are women. The heaviest burden is on their shoulders. I see children without shoes, I feel sorry that people are very insensitive to this. (R12, around 28 years old, from Konya)

The factors perceived by the participants as crucial to maintaining Kurdish identity were connected with their public self-identification and the Kurdish language. Emphasis was placed on speaking in Kurdish, learning it, listening to music with Kurdish lyrics and reading poetry and literature

written in Kurdish. Even those participants who did not know the language well admitted that they were trying to listen and understand the music and recordings of traditional Kurdish bards, *dengbêj*. Pursuing an interest in the language was described as an important part of resisting assimilation. An earlier quoted participant, who worked in healthcare and at the same time was involved in publishing a journal on Kurdish literature, described his attitude to the language (and also reading, writing and discussing the literature) this way:

Because I am intensely interested in the Kurdish language, I mean, if there was no problem with subsistence, I would devote all of my time to reading and writing. Because I spend a big part of the day in my workplace, I spend the rest of the time on it [reading and writing – KK]. Mainly I spend the time... when I am at home, I read a book on the internet or in a library or in my room; I spend time reading a book. (R1, 27 years old, from Batman)

Participants expressed being influenced both by classic and contemporary Kurdish writers and poets. The most frequently mentioned were Ehmedê Xanî (1650–1707), Melayê Cizîrî (1570–1640), Feqiyê Teyran (1590–1660), Cigerxwîn (1903–1984), Musa Anter (1920–1992) and Mehmed Uzun (1953–2007).¹¹ Many respondents stated that they tried to read in Kurdish, and improved their knowledge on the language either by participating in courses (for instance: those organised by the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul, EKS) or searching for information about it.

Engaging in activities connected with Kurdish language and culture, a practice frequently mentioned in my interviews, was however described by numerous participants as something which required time and effort. This requirement is often very hard to meet for Kurdish migrants busy struggling to survive economically. Participants who stressed such stances would often underline that they tried to do whatever they could to maintain their sense of belonging as Kurds. Such an approach could be illustrated by a quote from a participant in my study who was working in a telecommunication company:

This, of course, requires special effort. We are so busy with trying to live that we cannot make an effort. The most special effort is to try to go a bit further and try to read a bit more. We cannot do anything more. (R21, 30 years old, from Kars)

Apart from five respondents engaged in publishing journals, three were leading courses in Kurdish language (two in Kurmanji and one in the Zazaki dialect). They taught voluntarily (with no charge) and defined this activity

as especially dear to them. One woman, who taught at the same time as working in healthcare and studying, stressed that the most important affiliation to her was being a member of the ESK. She underlined that conducting classes on the Kurdish language made her feel that she was doing something good and influential, even though her group was a small one:

This institute [EKS – KK] is the most valuable thing that Istanbul has given me. I study in Istanbul University, this is also important for me but the most valuable thing in my life was to study in this institution and to give classes in a different institution. It was very important for me and for my family. After taking something from them I wanted to add something for others. This is my mother tongue, I received education on it. Maybe I will teach it only to a few people but when I look at the eyes of those students during the time of the classes I feel good in my conscience. When our eyes meet, I feel very peaceful and happy. (R12, around 28 years old, from Konya)

This interviewee stressed at the same time that, living in Istanbul, she was able both to learn and teach the language, and she especially appreciated this fact. Indeed, the majority of the respondents mentioned the presence of opportunities to deepen their knowledge about Kurdish culture. Speaking in Kurdish was not necessarily connected with organised activities; the participants enumerated everyday situations when they used the Kurdish language and felt that they were maintaining their identity by doing so: writing text messages on their mobiles, participating in discussions on social media, or spending time with friends and family. One of the respondents stated that he felt especially satisfied in situations when he could speak Kurdish with patients in the hospital where he worked:

I have some Kurdish patients and no one else can speak Kurdish with me [in the hospital – KK]. We make Kurdish jokes, we joke and the patient is more comfortable. The patients recover faster and feel better when you speak in their language with them. (R2, 25 years old, from Diyarbakir)

The role of humour was also emphasised by another participant who considered it to be one of the reasons why Kurdish language allowed Kurds to express themselves better:

The unique characteristic of Kurdish language is that our humour has developed in our region where we live. So I prefer Kurdish language more. (R14, 21 years old, from Bitlis)

Kurds often point out that many Kurdish concepts found in tales sung by *dengbêjs* and jokes cannot be fully translated to another language, such as Turkish. Thus it can be argued that some aspects of identity and culture developed in Northern Kurdistan can be fully expressed only through the Kurdish language. This stance was also put forward by Barış Seyitvan, the Director of Sümer Park Gallery in Diyarbakir, who emphasised the untranslatable character of many Kurdish phrases and also stressed the importance of using the Kurdish language in art, including visual arts, films and music, as this demonstrates that Kurdish culture is rich and can interact with world-class creations. Work on Kurdish dubbing for animated series, which I observed in the EKS, can be treated as an embodiment of such sentiments. Some participants in my study pointed out that, because their education was received in the Turkish language, they could not express themselves properly as their mother tongue was not used in this context (e.g. R45, 31 years old, from Mardin).

4.5 VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS

Although the above analysis of perceptions connected to othering and reactions aimed at countering them has concentrated mainly on micro-social everyday interactions, it is important to point out that such understandings and practices occur on various social levels and are not solely limited to the realm of everyday life. This is because stigmatisation and dehumanisation happen on all social levels and are expressed in various forms (Goffman 1967; Leyens et al. 2007). In fact, many Kurds in Istanbul (including my respondents) admit experiencing discrimination only after mentioning the place of their birth or a district of the city where they live. Such discrimination in regard to current place of residence can be illustrated by the public image of the Tarlabası neighbourhood. Tarlabası¹² is located just to the south of Tarlabası Avenue, a road parallel to the central street of the city—Istiklal Avenue—and connected with Taksim Square (in the Beyoğlu district). Despite its central location, the area has for years been regarded by other inhabitants of Istanbul and the media as a cradle of poverty and crime. These stereotypes contribute to the social exclusion of residents of Tarlabası and reduce their opportunities to change their economic situation for the better (Yılmaz 2008; Mutluer 2012, 138–144; Ülgen 2013, 75–79; Alan 2008).

The responses of Kurdish migrants in Istanbul towards stereotyping find their fruition in organisational activities, private and public celebrations and in art. *Halay* dances performed in everyday dwelling spaces, such as

the squares in each district of the city, can serve as an example of socially inclusive Kurdish cultural practices, introducing them in the public sphere. Dancers participating in such activities often invite people who pass by to join in, regardless of their gender, ethnic or class background. Modern interpretations of Kurdish folk music often accompany such activities, which usually do not have explicit political connotations. The Kurdish character of these performances can however be distinguished by types of *halays* specific to regions of Northern Kurdistan and the use of Kurdish as the language of singing in the accompaniment.

Spatial practices connected to Kurdish culture and aimed at translating it to other groups (thus enabling the rejection of stereotypes) often concern gathering and leisure places such as teahouses and cafes. The most common features of cafés connected with Kurdish identity and culture are the availability of *kaçak çay*—a Ceylon tea which traditionally used to be smuggled to Turkey through its southern borders—rather than the Turkish tea cultivated near the Black Sea. Cafés often contain references in their names and internal decoration to leftist ideology or Zoroastrian mythology and Medes. The name of the café might also be a word in languages other than Turkish, such as Zazaki.¹³ Such places can have portraits of important Kurdish figures on the walls (e.g. Ehmedê Xanî or a more contemporary artist—Ahmet Kaya), but often are distinct on the outside from other cafés by exhibiting more subtle references to Zoroastrian symbolism or myths common both to Kurds and Persian culture.¹⁴ Such themes underline the Indo-European origin of Kurds, their geographical and cultural connection to the heritage of Mesopotamia and the perception of the ancient Medes as their ancestors (Galip 2015, 16–20). At the same time, these more subtle invocations of Kurdish identity can be treated as elements of Kurdish subversive micro-politics in James C. Scott's (1985) sense, as they cannot be easily forbidden by authorities as symbols of separatism. Such bans did, however, affect more definite Kurdish symbols throughout the years of the Turkish Republic, affecting the public usage of Kurdish national colours and those letters of the Kurdish alphabet absent in the Turkish one.¹⁵ Contemporary cafés in Istanbul which want to be associated with Kurdish identity are, in fact, not easily discernible from their Turkish counterparts by an outsider at first sight. They are, however, distinct in their concentration of people of Kurdish backgrounds and leftist political views.

Although the presence of Kurdish migrants in the city means that *kaçak çay* has come to be served in many cafés in tourist parts of Istanbul, distinctly Kurdish places also often sell or make available books concerning

the history and culture of the Kurds, in both Turkish and Kurdish (including its various dialects). Such places gather Kurdish students, members of leftist student associations, artists and intelligentsia, but also attract migrants who are workers or entrepreneurs. During my fieldwork I also met people in Kurdish cafés belonging to other minorities in Turkey, for example Armenians or Laz.¹⁶ Some of these places also organise concerts of Kurdish music from different parts of Kurdistan and recitations of Kurdish poetry. They serve as important places allowing for meeting new friends and searching for potential help in getting accustomed to the city. One of the respondents, who co-managed one such café in Şirinevler, especially emphasised their role in allowing Kurdish cultural expression in a city dominated by Turkish ideology and Western influences:

Because Kurds in Istanbul... I mean there is a hegemonic culture in the entertainment sector. Wherever you go, there is a Turkish hegemonic culture, wherever you go, there is Turkish music or music in English, or there is foreign music. For example, whenever you go, to the governmental offices... stop... to the metrobüs, to the metro, to work, there is Turkish language, but when there are such places [as the café he co-runs – KK], when people come, they feel as if they went to their hometown, to region, to the Kurdistan. (R45, 31 years old, from Mardin)

This interviewee did not, however, want to be regarded as a nationalist and emphasised the openness of the places for people of other ethnicities and nationalities, citing Armenians and Laz as other minorities which also often visit it. This is a common theme among Kurds in Istanbul, who stress that, by creating a space for their own practices. They are countering the ban imposed by Turkish nationalism and in a way representing other minorities which are pressed to assimilate into Turkish culture and the religion of Sunni Islam.

There are at least three popular Kurdish cafés in the central area of the city often referred to as Taksim, which denotes not only Taksim Square itself but also Istiklal Avenue and various smaller streets attached to it. Because there are three autonomous cantons of Rojava (Afrin, Kobani and Jazira), some of my respondents referred to the location of these three cafés as ‘the triangle of three cantons of Rojava’. This reference (which I did not hear from the owners, who are independent of each other) represents a symbolic construction of space. By using the circumstantial location of the cafés and attaching a new political and ethnic meaning to it, the respondents wanted to express their own *representations of space*, to use

Lefebvre's term (1991, 38–40). This was done in the time when Rojava had become an important symbol for Kurds in Turkey of the possibility of achieving autonomy and establishing a new kind of rule: Democratic Confederalism (Biehl 2014). This example of Kurdish construction of space can be also treated as an element of micro-politics as, by calling the cafés the 'cantons of Rojava', the participants in my study attach to this part of central Istanbul a symbolic meaning connoting Kurdish political activity in Syria.

Another important dimension of identity negotiation by Kurdish migrants in Istanbul results in arguably more tangible effects: their art. As mentioned earlier, the identity negotiations or tactics of countering othering are also practised by Kurds in Istanbul through art. Kurds in Istanbul express their worldviews through such artistic endeavours as visual arts, theatrical plays, cinematography, music, and literature. Such attempts offer positive meanings and values connected with Kurdish culture, and are therefore present not only in the everyday practices of Kurds which could be described as folk traditions, but also within the elitist tradition of Kurdish intelligentsia, by intellectuals, activists or people of power with the intent of serving as a core for Kurdish identity. The respondents' stories underline the importance of expressing Kurdishness through both oral and written language, indicating their respect for literature. It is therefore important to mention attempts at countering the othering of Kurds in this form of art. One can also trace attempts at countering the stereotyping of Kurds in Kurdish literature, encompassing both authors aiming at creating universal art praising high culture and ones without such aspirations.

Themes connected with the recognition of Kurdish heritage and its reinterpretations are also represented by the young generation of Kurdish writers in Turkey, among whom new Kurdish migrants, educated in Turkish cities in the twenty-first century, play an important role. This group consists of authors co-creating and publishing in literary journals (i.e. *Jehr*, *Tîroj*, *Zarema–rexne û teorî* and *Wêje û Rexne*)¹⁷ but also authors like Mehmet Dicle. Dicle was born in a village in Diyarbakır province and migrated to Istanbul in order to study geography (Bocheńska 2016, 4–7). In '*Kuça Fîlan*' ('The Street of Christians'), he takes on the need for a shift from traditional obedience, with a lack of sensitivity to the suffering of others, to a deeper reflection on the surrounding world and empathy for other creatures. The story also discusses the problem of Kurdish participation in the Armenian Genocide of 1915, and issues connected with remembering this guilt in contemporary times (Dicle 2010, 77–84; Bocheńska 2016,

11–15). Dicle's short stories express the importance of moral awareness and sensitivity for the suffering of members of other groups (for instance in the Kurdish context, Armenians, Turks) (Dicle 2005, 2015b; Bocheńska 2016, 15–18). Young Kurdish migrants in Istanbul often embrace these topics and literature through participation in student societies, informal discussions, meetings in Kurdish cafés, and the promotion of new releases. The availability of Kurdish literature in certain bookstores and cafés, and the fact that many Kurdish publications are published in the city, make it much easier to contribute to Kurdish literary life in Istanbul.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

Istanbul has played the role of one of the most important economic and cultural centres in Turkey and was also for years a popular destination for migration, including Kurds from Northern Kurdistan. Despite its historical role as the place where the first Kurdish organisations within the borders of Turkey were established, the city is generally recognised by Kurds as the place of residence of many fellow members of their ethnic group who earlier escaped violent conflict or extreme poverty. Istanbul is, however, also an intensive place of cultural and ideological exchange. While it can be argued that most Kurdish migrations in Turkey since the proclamation of the Republic were forced, it may be valuable to also study relatively more voluntary migrants, especially those forming a part of the new wave of migration which took place from 2002 to 2015. Although many reactions towards discrimination cannot be associated with a specific wave of migration or a group characterised by given social class or geographical origin, the period of relative stability enabled Kurds to organise themselves and create new ways of expressing their culture and identity.

The young Kurdish migrants interviewed expressed feelings of othering relating to the negative recognition of Kurds in public spaces. They repeatedly stated that instances where stereotypes regarding Kurds were expressed around them encouraged them to publicly self-identify with their ethnic group and attempt to explain their worldview. The general activities listed by the respondents to maintain Kurdish identity were: cultivating local traditions (e.g. weddings, *halay* dances), having respect for family and nature, and practices connected with use of the Kurdish language. The stereotyping of Kurds is also countered through art, and the respondents described photography, music, theatre and literature as means of explaining to other groups the richness of the Kurdish heritage but also the universality of their problems and needs. Thus, such attempts

represent a struggle for the recognition of Kurdish dignity. The themes of universalisation focus on self-identification with other minority groups, the perfection of language, and negotiations with traditional hierarchies and values, and can be described as new expressions of Kurdish identity, presented both in art and everyday life.

Kurdish identity is also realised during encounters with other groups, including the dominant one, the Turks. While a lack of prejudice against Turks was stated by almost all respondents, most admitted that it was difficult for them to act freely in front of Turks and be understood by them. This was connected by the participants with different views on Kurdish history, originating from stereotypes spread by the authorities and mainstream media. The majority of respondents experienced discrimination from other inhabitants of the city in ways that resemble the phenomenon of *exclusive recognition* analysed by Cenk Saraçoğlu. The specificity of this form of stigmatisation lies in immediate othering of Kurds when they are recognised as such, leading to their exclusion, despite the official ideology of the state treating every Turkish citizen as the same with equal rights. Moreover, such othering does not affect other minorities to the same degree: they can be undifferentiated from other inhabitants of the city. My respondents' stories show that even geographical origin or a different accent can lead to exclusion, perpetrated by friends, strangers or representatives of official institutions and the Turkish authorities. In some instances, feelings of insecurity created by the presence of a discriminatory environment forced the respondents to hide their ethnic identity. The othering of Kurds was also described in relation to situations when Kurds are excluded without any intention on their part to distinguish themselves from other members of society. Thus, the respondents felt both pressure to assimilate to the dominant Turkish culture (experienced especially after migration) and also negative recognition. The interviewed Kurdish migrants often pointed to the need for equal relations between the various cultural groups inhabiting Turkey and the right to be recognised as equal citizens owing to the participation of the Kurds in the War of Independence. Their lack of legal recognition and history of persecution were treated by most participants as reasons for defining the state as the biggest obstacle in cultivating Kurdish identity in Istanbul.

Approaches for countering othering and negotiating identity cannot, however, be limited to organisational activities, art and disputes with other groups. For many Kurds, what seem at first sight to be less influential, everyday practices limited to their micro-social scope are highly important for maintaining their ethnic identity. Simply drinking a special kind of tea or not drinking alcohol were defined by some of my respondents as important

features of being Kurdish. Writing mobile messages in Kurdish or making jokes in this language can also serve as examples of micro-scale activities that cultivate ethnic identity. Such practices can be described using James C. Scott's concept of *micro-politics*. Scott (1985, 1990) emphasised that seemingly private practices of everyday life connected with countering the dominant culture can lead to macro-social cultural change.

The tragic events after the collapse of the peace process (Turkish *çözüm süreci*: solution process) in 2015 and the further deterioration of the democracy in the country following the coup attempt of 2016 may create a large-scale wave of forced migration in the country in future, also affecting Kurds who experienced the return of intensive military operations in the regions they inhabited. Such tragic experiences may lead to other expressions of discontent regarding discrimination and persecution (for example those involving physical struggle), and their full repercussions remain to be analysed. However, one can argue that impulses initiated by the period of intensive development of Kurdish civil society, allowing new ways of cultivation, education and public proclamation of Kurdish culture will have long-lasting effects on Kurdish society in Turkey and Northern Kurdistan. Furthermore, I would argue that it is highly possible that new elites educated between 2002 and 2015 may, in the near future, make an impact on Kurdish culture as influential as the generation educated in the 1960s, described by David Romano as crucial for shaping Kurdish politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Such effects remain to be seen. This chapter has aimed to show some contemporary examples of practices countering the othering of Kurds popular among specific groups of young migrants in Stenbol (as Istanbul is called in Kurdish): 'the biggest Kurdish city in the world'.

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NOTES

1. While the main arguments regarding countering othering among Kurdish migrants are based on my research and supported by quotes from the respondents, they complement other research on topics such as youth, migration, Kurdish culture, and identity in Turkey (i.e. Grabolle-Çeliker 2010; Mutluer 2012; Göral 2016; Saraçoğlu 2010; Flader 2014; Neyzi 2001; Darıcı and Neyzi 2014).

2. See more on the role of Kurdish cultural institutions in Chap. 3 by Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut.
3. This intense activity of Kurdish civil society is visible in a work of Nurcan Baysal and Şeyhmus Diken (2015), where they are presented in interviews with many organisations in Bakur, which were founded by diverse groups ranging from far leftist to very conservative religious circles. These organisations set varied goals for themselves also (both particular and more general, more political and more cultural).
4. Turkish: Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareket, Kurdish: *Tevgera Civanên Welatparêz Yên Şoresger* (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement). A radical leftist organisation sympathising and having loose connections with the PKK.
5. Circassians are an ethnic group native to the north-western Caucasian region Circassia (located in the North of Georgia and Abkhazia). Many of Circassians migrated to Turkey as a result of the Russian invasion of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century (which in 1864 led to the Russian-Circassian War).
6. The quotes from respondents are presented in a manner that shows the number of the respondent, his or her age and home region. Additional information regarding quoted respondents is usually provided before the quote.
7. While the expressive equipment (using Erving Goffman's term) or communication techniques of Kurds during the protests or public posts on social media are highly influenced by language of leftist political thought (mainly HDP and youth organisations supporting it), interactions with fellow Turks who express different views on Kurds prompt different codes of expressing Kurdish identity and invoke attempts at translating and explaining the respondent's views on the matter. Similar situations stimulating more individual narrations on Kurdish cultural and political heritage can occur in more private and homely surroundings (e.g. in a discussion with friends in a café). For analysis of ways of using social media by Kurds in Turkey, see Costa (2016).
8. Apart from negative attitudes towards the state, many respondents emphasised that they did not feel a sense of belonging to it because of its atrocities against the Kurds and because of the continuous second-class treatment of this group. Some respondents, however, admitted that when Turkish nationalists defined Kurds as alien to the country and treated Kurdish migrants as invaders they were wrong, as many Kurds (including the ancestors of some respondents) fought in the war for Turkish independence and by law should be treated equally.
9. The topic of difficulties in mutual understanding between youths from different regions in Turkey (and most notably Turks and Kurds) was explored in the findings of the oral history project *Gençler Anlatıyor* (Young People Speak Out) led by Leyla Neyzi (Darıcı and Neyzi 2014).

10. Only one respondent mentioned the animosity of other ethnic minorities towards the Kurds. He described the Laz living in Beykoz as ‘hating Kurds’ (R38, 26 years old, from Diyarbekir), however some other participants stated that many Laz come to Kurdish cafés and support them. There is also a Laz café in Istanbul, which is the frequent meeting place of leftist Kurds. Attitudes of other minorities to Kurds vary, as many minorities coming in earlier migrations from the Balkans and Caucasus, described by the term *mühacir* (i.e. Macedonians, Circassians and Chechens) were engaged in Turkish nationalism, and even participated in ruling the country in the 1990s (van Bruinessen 1997, 6–7).
11. For more information on Kurdish literature, see, for example, Ahmadzadeh (2003), Bocheńska (2011), Galip (2015).
12. The area informally referred to as the Tarlabası neighbourhood actually consists of six official neighbourhoods: Kalyoncu Kulluğu, Çukur, Bülbül, Bostan, Kamer Hatun and Şehit Muhtar (Yılmaz 2006, 209–210).
13. Although the cafés are publicly known in Istanbul, I do not cite them here by name, in order to maintain their confidentiality, for instance, if someone wanted to use the results of this study against their owners and customers.
14. Apart from symbols connected to Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Yazidism and characters included in Shahnameh, Kurdish organisations and cafés may also refer to the myth of Shahmaran, a ‘serpent queen’ who is often depicted with a human head and snake features below the waist. This myth is common in central and southern parts of Turkey but also in Iran and Iraq (Nicolaus 2011).
15. The letters ‘w’, ‘q’ and ‘x’ were banned until 2013 (Geerdink 2014). Their usage still sparks controversy and may result in charges of separatism.
16. The Laz people are a South Caucasian ethnic group native to the regions of Georgia and Turkey located on the coast of the Black Sea. Their language belongs to the Kartvelian group of languages (which also includes Georgian). While the Laz are sometimes described as a sub-division of Georgian ethnic group, majority of them reside in Turkey (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2001).
17. Both these journals were started in Diyarbekir, however many of their authors and coeditors reside in Istanbul, and the journals are also printed in this city (see also Kulturname 2014; Edebiyat Haber 2014).

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Translation, Power and Domination: The Postcolonial Explorations of the Bible in the Kurdish Context

Marcin Rzepka

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first days of May 1823, Henry Leeves, an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society residing in Constantinople, wrote a letter to the society's headquarters in London to suggest the translation of the Bible into Kurdish. Undoubtedly, it was the first time the Bible Society had been aware of any need for a translation into that language. Having no proper knowledge about the Kurdish language or the people who used it, Leeves believed that the many members of the Chaldean Church living in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire did not know any language but Kurdish and wanted to obtain a Bible in a language they spoke. The nineteenth-century translation of the Bible into

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Kurdish started with miscalculations, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the people, languages and cultures involved. It seems obvious from this that the history of the Kurdish Bible translation should not be reduced merely to linguistic matters, as it raises questions concerning the textual representation of Kurdish-speaking communities, the cultural functions of translation, and relations with the imperial, colonial—or more general—European and American institutions such as the schools and printing houses scattered among the various ethnic and religious groups living in Ottoman Turkey and Qajar Persia.

This chapter, by focusing on the Bible translations addressed to the Kurdish-speaking communities, offers analysis of the quite different translation projects undertaken by missionaries from various organisations. These include the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Basel Mission and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which collaborated with the American Bible Society in the field of translation. The material presented in this chapter is organised in chronological order, to examine three distinct attempts to translate the Bible into Kurdish, in context. For this, a vast collection of missionary literature, including some archival sources, needs to be navigated, in order to systematise the knowledge that was produced by missionaries in relation to translation issues. The sources that we can rely on while studying the Bible translations have their own shared context: they were all produced by missionaries who aimed to spread the Christian faith and produce Christian converts. Thus, while reconstructing the idea and process of translation, we cannot avoid the problem of the categorisation of languages and cultures within missionary literature. The evaluation and presentation of other cultures by missionaries, including the Kurds, always took place in the context of that missionary culture, which gave superiority to print rather than to oral tradition. It proved an important aspect of the Bible translations into Kurdish and the dissemination of the printed books among the people living in Kurdistan. On the most elementary level, however, the history of the Kurdish Bible translations is a part of the history of the Kurdish-speaking Christians, the Armeno-Kurdish societies of the region and, finally, the Kurds themselves.¹

5.2 MISSIONARY NARRATIONS AND THE BIBLE IN KURDISH: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Bible translations into Kurdish initiated by Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century seem to be important for several reasons. Firstly, there is the value of missionary narratives depicting the changes, transformations and developments of communities using the Kurdish language. The missionary writings are often the only sources preserving ‘voices’ from communities that have already disappeared. Secondly, they constitute a kind of reservoir of knowledge and a way to understand how the Kurds were perceived in the nineteenth century and how their image changed during the course of that century. Thirdly, they relate to the transfer of technology, especially the printing press, which was introduced by missionaries. The problem of reactions and attitudes towards the translation or, more generally, towards the printed texts among the Kurds, is also worth considering.

The peculiarity of the sources (missionary notes, letters, reports) used for analysis should be emphasised once more. They were produced by missionaries and, to some extent, *for* missionaries. An ideal missionary was transformed into a scholar translating ‘God’s word’ into a vernacular language. The idea of translation was rooted in the belief that the printed Bible was a tool to transform and change whole societies. Thus, the production of knowledge, of which translation was a part, is visible, along with its relationships with authorities and power.

Generally, the history of the Christian missions is written in the twenty-first century through the prism of postcolonial studies. Studies are focused on mechanisms of control, domination and cultural hegemony, as well as on the representation of others. However, postcolonial history is not just a history of the colonised people, but a more general approach to studying and writing history (Majumdar 2010, 152). The postcolonial approach requires a new reading of the missionary narratives, or rather, a rereading to find counter-narratives belonging to unrepresented subjects. The problem is that the missionary archives offer materials produced in the dominant language, whether English or another European language. What is more, the strong links between the missionaries and the colonial powers’ administrations made them representatives of hegemonic, dominant cultures operating through the language as a symbolic power. The symbolic appropriation of a language of the subordinated others, as in the missions, is often a starting point to discuss cultural hegemony (Errington 2008). Pamela Young, in her article on the Protestant colleges in the Middle East, emphasised the English

language and its role in ‘hegemonic international educational programming’ (Young 2006, 202) in a missionary practice. The Kurdish voices in the missionary texts are presented in English, with all that entails.

Missionary archives clearly show the Christian perspective, along with how the Kurdish language, Kurdish-speaking Christians and Kurds were categorised and evaluated. Thus, Said’s concept of Orientalism seems to be easily adapted for studies of Christian missions, making it impossible to avoid questions concerning the production of knowledge, or rather ‘creation of knowledge to subordinate the people of the East’. However, contrary to Said, who made no distinction between various missionary agencies (Said 1985, 100) this new approach should take into account differences between missionary institutions, as well as the missionaries themselves. The missionary institutions involved multidimensional relationships, including relations of power between the centres and provincial missionary stations. Among the missionaries, there were also intergenerational tensions that occurred between those who were born on missions and their fathers. In addition to that, there is the important problem of the indigenous Protestant communities and their attitudes towards the missionaries. Research on the Protestant missions could not, therefore, be easily reduced to the conceptual frames prescribed by Orientalism. The process of indigenisation of the Protestant faith among the people living in Kurdistan and the reproduction of Protestant values among them evoked hybrid identifications. Missionary language can be colonising and decolonising at the same time. It is colonising in the sense that it comprises voices and opinions which exist only in and through the missionary narratives. It is decolonising through the multiplication of texts and their deconstruction, and in the refutation of earlier descriptions of peoples and cultures. The problem of the Bible translation into Kurdish is a good example of the changing character of missionary writings and evidence of the progressive nature of missionary knowledge in the nineteenth century.

The Kurdish Bible translations are definitely a part of the history of the Kurdish-speaking communities,² but such a history should be considered a cultural history: ‘history from the viewpoint of the motives and meanings that individual and collective historical agents from the past gave to whatever they were doing and to the context in which they operated.’ (Arcangeli 2012, 16). The translation processes contained deliberations and considerations, motives and senses, efforts and failures, making each translation a space of negotiation, and far from neutral. Thus, translation itself is involved in colonial relations and as a term, figure or metaphor has

a high position in postcolonial studies. Bible translation is no exception. Homi Bhabha stressed that, in the Indian context, the Bible was perceived as an English book (Bhabha 2004, 154). In such categorisations, the Bible lost its religious meaning and became a cultural sign. Moreover, the Bible has been extensively researched through the postcolonial perspective (Sugirtharajah 2004) which has led researchers to form a concept of the postcolonial hermeneutics of the Bible.

In the context of Kurdistan, we can observe the coming of the Bible as a material object, a product that involved people in a certain set of cultural practices, including writing and reading. With the 'Kurdish Bible' we should underline at least two aspects: a cultural history of the text and the cultural practices it created. The Bible was an instrument in the hand of a missionary but also, at the same time, it was used by the Kurdish-speaking communities as an emancipating text, enhancing their self-awareness and self-determination. The Bible in Kurdish was the first printed and widely circulated text, and so guaranteed a kind of cultural autonomy³ for the Kurdish-speaking Christians. Later, in the twentieth century, the Kurdish Bible translation has been perceived as a cultural text by the Kurds. The idea of translation involves both domination and resistance.

The Protestant college described by Pamela Young as a 'hegemonic institution' could be categorised differently, as an emancipated place for marginalised communities. This is exactly the case for the Kurdish-speaking Christians, to whom the Bible translation was addressed first. It leads us to an assumption that the Bible translation into Kurdish was at first ambiguous, but later became interiorised by the Kurdish-speaking Armenians, and, finally, came to be regarded as a cultural text by the Kurds.

5.3 BIBLE TRANSLATION AS 'A TRAVELLING IDEA': FROM CONSTANTINOPLE TO TABRIZ

The first steps to translate and print the Bible into Kurdish were undertaken by the British and Foreign Bible Society (hereafter BFBS). It was also the first attempt to recognise and identify 'the imagined readers' of such a book. The work was initially supervised by Henry Leeves, who came to Constantinople in January 1821 to organise missionary work among the Christians living in the city. His primary goal was to collect existing translations of the biblical texts written in the different languages used by Christians, in order to evaluate them and decide whether new, modern and more suitable ones were needed. He received enquiries and

petitions written by patriarchs, bishops and clergy from the Syriac and Armenian Churches (Canton 1904, 8), becoming aware of both their requirements and the complex ethnolinguistic situation of the Eastern Christians. When Leeves decided to begin translating the Bible into Kurdish, he was focused predominantly on the Chaldean Church, having been previously informed by a Chaldean bishop named Shevris⁴ about a significant group of Chaldeans using Kurdish. Bishop Shevris was consecrated by Patriarch Mar Eliyah XIII, who resided in Alqush. During his jurisdiction, the Chaldeans were negotiating a reunion with the Roman Catholic Church, as the previous one had been broken by the patriarch Mar Shimun XIII. The Church of England was also interested in establishing formal ties with the Chaldean Church (TNA. FO 78/2698). Shevris, who was a consecrated bishop, was to take a post in Siirt (Sêrt) (Dwight and Smith 1833, 189–190).⁵ As a Chaldean bishop, he paid some visits to Rome. Returning from one of his trips, he stayed for a while in Constantinople, where he came into contact with Henry Leeves. He successfully persuaded Leeves of the need for a Bible translation for a number of Chaldeans speaking Kurdish in the region between Siirt and Urmia in Persia. Following Leeves' recommendations, the BFBS employed the bishop to take responsibility for, and manage, the translation. The good collaboration between the bishop and the society lasted until 1826. However, in the missionary press and reports, we can find rather critical opinions concerning the bishop's work and his qualifications to complete it (Dwight and Smith 1833, 189–190; Canton 1904, 12). To understand the criticism of Shevris' work, we should place it in the broader context of Protestant missionary activity in Kurdistan, taking into account the process of collecting and disseminating knowledge on languages and peoples, in this case the Kurdish language. The task of a representative of the Bible society was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data concerning a language, the language's users, and texts produced in the language. It was an initial measure to make a prognosis regarding future translation projects. Leeves was experienced in such work, but had no information on the Kurdish language. In a letter to Robert Pinkerton, he expressed his concerns regarding the Kurdish translation. He was not sure whether the choice to translate the Bible into Kurdish while the Chaldeans spoke Arabic was the right decision (BFBSA. BSA/DI/2, Leeves to Pinkerton, 10 May 1823). He also confessed that he had no proper knowledge of the Kurdish language and its usage. Nevertheless, he recommended Shevris for the work and BFBS paid him 50 pounds per year (BFBSA. BSA/DI/2,

Leeves to Pinkerton, 23 May 1823). The bishop, who was officially employed by the Bible society from August 1823, set out for Tabriz, where he was due to begin work on the translation. After his arrival in Persia, he contacted the British officials residing at the court of Prince Abbas Mirza, the son of Persian ruler Fath Ali Shah. It seems to be important to underline the reverence that Prince Abbas Mirza gained among the missionaries, who portrayed him as a reformer and a person interested in the Bible translations (Martyn 1837, vol. 1, 399). Taking into account the intellectual ferment in the Persian court and the shah's policy towards the Kurds (McDowall 2000, 68) we may assume that the proposal to work in Kurdish was welcomed. The position of the British at the court was relatively high and might have influenced Shevris' position too, as he was employed by the BFBS. While in Persia he maintained contact with Sir Henry Willock, *chargé d'affaires* in Tehran, and John Cormick, a medical doctor at the court of Abbas Mirza in Tabriz. Cormick married an Armenian woman (Wright 2001, 55) which allows us to suggest that he may have had, at least, a basic knowledge of the Eastern Christian traditions.

In Tabriz, Shevris made an effort to organise the translation. It is not entirely clear what language he used while he was in Persia. With the local notables he communicated in Arabic. However, his knowledge of the Kurdish language appears to have been limited. It is a paradox that the decision to translate the Bible into Kurdish was undertaken by representatives of a Bible society who did not know the language, and the person employed as a translator had insufficient knowledge to do so. Of course, it was a common and, in fact, commendable practice of the Bible society to recruit a native speaker among the local population as an advisor and assistant in translation. The case of Shevris as a 'Kurdish interpreter' seems to be exceptional. We see that the Bible society neither appointed any language consultant nor verified information conveyed by Shevris to make a critical assessment of the translation's progress. Arguably, Leeves counted on the report of Benjamin Barker, an agent of the Bible society in the Levant with whom he had previously worked, to shed some light on language issues. Barker tried, in 1823, to gather information about the Kurdish language, the Kurds and the Chaldeans, but this proved to be insufficient. Leeves trusted Shevris completely.

Shevris travelled around Tabriz and made some expeditions into the Kurdish region to find a translator, but this turned out to be quite complicated. He required that a translator, beside his knowledge of the Kurdish language, should be a member of the Chaldean Church (BFBSA. BSA/

DI/2, Leeves to Platt, 23 November 1824), which added to the scale of the difficulties. In May 1825, Shevris invited two Chaldean priests to Tabriz, whom he engaged in the work of translation. The real work started in the middle of 1825. A year later, Leeves, after receiving correspondence from Tabriz, informed the BFBS that the work on translation was flourishing. At the beginning of 1827 he included the manuscripts of the Gospels translated into Kurdish that he had obtained with a message sent to the society's librarian Thomas B. Platt (BFBSA. BSA/DI/2, Leeves to Pinkerton, 8 February 1827). Leeves sent 11 parts of the translated text to London in total, each consisting of 16 pages. The Kurdish text was written in Arabic script but probably some copies were also prepared in Syriac script, as we know that Shevris was planning to prepare the text for the Chaldean Church. Harrison Dwight and Eli Smith, the American missionaries who travelled extensively in the north-western part of Persia in the 1820s searching for a suitable place to set up a missionary base, made inquiries as to Shevris' activity during their stay in Tabriz. They confirmed that the Kurdish translation was written in Syriac script, but claimed that the letters were adopted with mistakes (Dwight and Smith 1833, 189–190).

The report of the American missionaries, criticising Shevris' work, is significant, as it was written a few years after the work on the Kurdish translation had been completed, and the information they conveyed was gathered in Tabriz. The missionaries could have heard from the British officials who admitted that Bishop Shevris was reluctant to carry out the order. More information can be found in the narrative of Joseph Wolff. Wolff was an eccentric Anglican missionary and traveller, who made excursions around the Middle East during the second decade of the nineteenth century. During his stay in Tabriz, he expressed similar concerns to the Americans' negative opinion about the work of the bishop (Wolff 1829, 221). It is hard to believe that these missionaries could all really read the Kurdish text, though. What, therefore, was the reason for their criticism? The translation was based on an Arabic version of the Bible (BFBSA. BSA/DI/2, Leeves to Pinkerton, 8 February 1827) and, relying on information from the reports of the BFBS, we have acknowledged that Kurdish scholars participated in the translation process (Report British and Foreign Bible Society 1827, XLIII). The suggestion that the Kurdish scholars took part in the project could be explained in the context of Abbas Mirza's policy and official state attitudes towards the Kurds, which aimed at including Kurdish sheikhs within the state administration (McDowall 2000, 68). We should remember also that the text was addressed to

Kurdish-speaking Christians. Thus, the statement by Shevris that the Chaldeans living around Urmia were speaking Kurdish should be verified. Such a community was probably living instead around the Wan lake. In Urmia and Tabriz it was easier to find a Muslim consultant rather than a Kurdish-speaking Christian. We also know the name of one of the assistants. He was a Kurdish mullah from Urmia: Mohammad (Blincoe 1998, 237). However, a short fragment of a translation was published in *The Bible of Every Land* (1848, 69) with information that it was translated into a Kurdish dialect from the Hakkari region.

The manuscript of the translation which was sent to London for revision was never printed. It was tested among native speakers and as a result the Shevris' version was considered to be completely incomprehensible. A historian of the BFBS, William Canton, noted that it was verified by the missionaries in Tabriz (Canton 1904, 12–13). At that time the city was becoming the centre of another missionary initiative, conducted by German-speaking missionaries from the Basle Mission. It should be noted here that Shevris stayed for a while in the missionary station in Shusha in the Caucasus during his trip to Tabriz (BFBSA. BSA/DI/2, Leeves to Steinkopff, 10 May 1824). The Basel Mission was the only Protestant organisation at that moment that was planning to conduct proselytising work among the Muslims in the region. Since the Persian language was used among educated Muslims, the missionaries were interested in an extension of their activity to the Persian territory. Tabriz seemed to be the best place to start. Soon, the BFBS agents noted that the missionaries from Basel could play a role in the translation project into Kurdish. Robert Pinkerton, who was aware of defects of Shevris' text and knew the context of translation from the letters he received from Leeves, decided to go to Basel in 1829 to convince the missionary board to take a risk to correct the translation, or eventually make a new one. The new initiative was significantly different from the previous one. Firstly, the new one was to address the Kurds, not the Christians. Presumably, encouragement to work upon another translation came from missionary reports depicting Kurdish scholars living in Tabriz. Although the missionaries were convinced that the translation was useless, they saw some positive aspects. Dwight and Smith suggested that the translation, as the first ever made into Kurdish, would be a useful text for missionaries willing to learn the Kurdish language in the future (Dwight and Smith 1833, 190). We should note, however, that such a statement only underlines the value of translation in regard to educational opportunities. In a sense, it reveals the

missionary idea that the translated text was a starting point for missionary work and was important for both missionaries and readers. The most visible result of the first attempt to translate the Bible into Kurdish was increased missionary concern regarding the Kurds and growing interest in their language and culture.

5.4 TRANSLATION AND KNOWLEDGE: THE MISSIONARY 'DISCOVERY' OF THE KURDS

The phenomenon of the Protestant missionary movement in the early nineteenth century manifested itself in cross-confessional initiatives (Jenkins 2000, 43–65). Representatives of the BFBS maintained contacts with the Basel Mission, which set up its activity in 1815, under the leadership of Christian T. Blumhardt. Developing missionary projects, the missionaries started organising a station in the South Caucasus to include Muslims in their missionary work (Vander Werff 1977, 100–101). In 1822, August Dietrich and Felicjan Zaremba made Shusha in the Karabakh region a centre of Protestant missionary activity. The religious structure and ethnic composition of that area required a solid knowledge of Islam, along with multiple languages and cultures. The missionary counted the Kurds in the region, revealing around 4000, a significant number (Blumhardt 1846, 174). In the Caucasus, particularly the area around Baku and Yerevan, there were also Yezidis (Canton 1904, vol. 3, 361). This might have had an impact on the idea of work among the Kurds.

From the beginning, Protestant missionary activity was based on two important aspects: education and translation (Rzepka 2016). Zaremba, who was responsible for the Bible's translation into Modern Armenian, kept good relations with the BFBS' agents. Leeves recalled him several times in his correspondence. Joseph Wolff reminded Zaremba of where he was supposed to meet Dietrich, with whom Wolff was studying in Cambridge. Wolff, though, dared to express his concern about the Kurdish translation, suggesting that a translator should know both Arabic and Persian, as well as the grammar of Syriac, before he started working with Kurdish (Wolff 1829, 220). He emphasised the importance of working with native speakers, albeit under the direction of the 'English gentlemen knowing Oriental languages' (Wolff 1829, 221). Moreover, Wolff indicated the town of Urmia as the best place to proceed with the translation. Although he knew the missionaries from Shusha, he did not mention that they were prepared for such a work; however, the BFBS did so.

In 1829, Robert Pinkerton (1780–1859) paid a visit to Basel with the intention to persuade missionaries to start work among the Kurds (Waldburger 1983, 121). The idea received approval, giving birth to a short-lived project called *Kurdenmission*, which was focused on both work among the Kurds and a Bible translation into the Kurdish language. After some consultation and discussion between Pinkerton and the board of the Basel Mission, Christian Hoernle (1804–1882) took responsibility for the new initiative. In 1832 he left Basel for Shusha, where he began learning the so-called Muslim languages: Persian and Azeri (Tatar). Soon, however, he moved to Tabriz in Persia, the city that was intended to become a centre of the Mission to the Kurds. He made some expeditions into Kurdistan, but mainly in the areas within the borders of Persia, trying to assess the difficulties, challenges and opportunities associated with the translation of the Bible into Kurdish. He was accompanied by the well-known American missionary and physician Asahel Grant. He also contacted Justin Perkins in Urmia, who organised the hospital, school and printing press among the Assyrians. Hoernle became acquainted with some noble leaders of the Assyrian Church of the East. This contact with Christians seems to be important in understanding how knowledge about the Kurds was constructed and how the Kurds were ‘discovered’ in the missionary literature.

From the early missionary writings, we know that Kurds were constantly compared with the Christians living in Kurdistan: the Assyrians and later the Armenians. They were evaluated regarding their written tradition and book culture. As a result, the Kurds were portrayed as a people without books. The missionaries shared the opinion of nineteenth-century scholars that knowledge of the textual tradition of the East was sufficient to understand the whole culture. They were focused predominantly on language. In a sense, Hoernle represented this European Orientalism. After his arrival in Persia he tried to organise the work of translation and started learning Kurdish. In 1835, he employed a local Kurd as a language consultant, and later, probably also as a teacher. However, he expected the consultant to be able to explain grammatical issues in terms he knew. When he could not, this soon discouraged the missionary from learning the Kurdish language. The real problem was the difficulty of learning a language without any ‘learning materials’, and based on wrong expectations, rather than a lack of linguistic skills. Hoernle obtained the manuscript with the Gospel in the Kurdish language that was prepared by Bishop Shevris. He tried to use it in his studies. During his journeys across

Kurdistan, he also intended to collect some information on the dialect in which it was written from the Kurds (Hoernle 1884, 37). Relying on his posthumously edited memoirs, we can partially reconstruct his struggles with the Kurdish language by analysing the process of language acquisition. When he came to Tabriz he made an effort to learn both Persian and Kurdish. Some knowledge of Persian helped him to recognise the more elementary features of Kurdish, but a lack of materials, a grammar and dictionary, constituted an insoluble problem until he discovered the grammar of the Kurdish language written by an Italian priest (Hoernle 1884, 39–40). It was *Grammatica e vocabolario della lingua kurda* by Maurizio Garzoni, published in 1787. He ordered the book from the Holy Synod Library in Moscow; however, when he received the book it turned out that the grammar was written in Italian, not in Latin, as he had previously expected. Not knowing the language, he was obliged to order another book to learn Italian. It was not the only problem he faced in trying to learn Kurdish. While travelling in Kurdistan and testifying the manuscript he noticed the great linguistic diversity among the Kurds and the lack of standardisation of the Kurdish language. After visiting the American mission in Urmia he was probably informed about the Assyrians from the Church of the East, who spoke Kurdish. This information was confirmed later, by David T. Stoddard, who noticed that the mountainous Assyrians spoke Kurdish (Stoddard 1855–1856, 1–180).

Finding too many difficulties regarding the translation into Kurdish, from linguistic diversity to social and cultural divisions among the Kurds, Hoernle decided to abandon the project. Further, he admonished missionaries against the mission among the Kurds, pointing out their superstitions and reluctance towards foreigners (Blincoe 1998, 37). He found the Kurdish Bible translation useless (Waldburger 1983, 152). Nevertheless, his work had some positive aspects. Firstly, through contact with Kurds from various regions of Kurdistan, including Bradost, Sidakan, Mardin, Hakkari and others (Fossum 1919, 7), he became aware of the scale of the dialectic diversity and linguistic self-consciousness of the Kurds. It meant that a translation should have been prepared for separate dialects, as Fossum pointed out that ‘to discover the best Kurdish among these many dialects is not an easy task. (...) it is useless to ask the Kurds as to which dialect is the best, for every Kurd claims that his own dialect is the purest and best’ (Fossum 1919, 7). Secondly, Hoernle’s idea to gain opinions on the translation from its users became a standard procedure in the translating process. Thirdly, he made it clear that the translation into Kurdish

should be based on a common and dominant dialect in a region. Years later, Ludvig Fossum, in *A Practical Kurdish Grammar*, recalled Hoernle as a translator of the Gospel of St. John into Mukri dialect, used in and around Mahabad (Fossum 1919, 7–8). It indicates that, despite the failure of the translation, it was used by missionaries and inspired them to study the issue more seriously. In fact, the folk songs, stories and tales collected by Hoernle in different regions of Kurdistan became an object of missionary interest (Edwards 1851, 122–123). Translation became a ‘travelling idea’ once more, with no proper place to plant it. It was discussed in London, Basel, Shusha and Tabriz.

In 1837, the project of the mission among the Kurds (*Kurdenmission*) was abandoned and Hoernle went to India. Justin Perkins clarified this decision by emphasising the difficulties of conducting missionary work among the Muslims in Persia (Perkins 1843, 314). Indeed, the social and political situation both in Persia and in Ottoman Turkey caused a reorientation of missionary efforts towards Middle Eastern Christians. The Kurds, however, were constantly compared with their Christian neighbours, being portrayed as rude and aggressive (TNA. FO 78/2702) and their cultural aspirations were diminished.

The idea of a Bible translation into Kurdish, first put forward by the BFBS, was held and continued by the missionaries from Basel. They aimed for the revision of the existing translation and an estimation of whether it was worth printing. Hoernle’s work proved that the translation was completely incomprehensible for most of the Kurds. Moreover, he was convinced that a translation, even if corrected, would have found few Kurdish readers, because of the low rate of literacy among the Kurds and lack of a written tradition of the Kurdish language. The first step, therefore, was to open schools for the Kurds so that they could learn writing and read their own texts. The Kurds, as Hoernle noted, were bi- or even tri-lingual, and the total number of the Kurds knowing only Kurdish was quite small. They, he argued, could read the Bible in Persian, Turkish or Arabic (Hoernle 1884, 44–45).

The problem we see in the first attempts to translate the Bible into Kurdish is related to the ambiguous situation of the Kurds, as depicted by the missionaries. Some of them were educated. A good example is a Kurdish mullah who read the translation manuscript. He understood the meaning of the text and gave advice concerning the various Kurdish dialects (Hoernle 1884, 44). However, in a predominately oral Kurdish culture the missionaries hardly found any printed texts which could help

them to interiorise cultural patterns, as they were used to doing. The problem of illiteracy was an issue, as they saw a higher rate of literacy among the Christians, the Assyrians for instance (LPL. Tait, 165) with whom they compared the Kurds constantly. Among the Assyrians or the Armenians, they found a developed culture of reading and writing focused on the Bible. Thus, it seemed possible for them to influence the Christians through the translated biblical text, contrary to the Kurds, who were perceived as ‘profoundly ignorant, being almost without readers and writers’ (Marsh 1869, 111).

Nevertheless, the missionary *Kurdenmission*, despite its abandonment in 1837, had significant consequences for the history of the Protestant missions. It was the first direct missionary activity conducted among the Kurdish community and resulted in personal contacts with the Kurds. That idea was revived in the twentieth century among the Norwegian Lutherans from the United States, resulting in the establishment of the Lutheran Oriental Mission, and a translation of the gospels into the Kurdish Mukri dialect. The work among the Kurds also revealed a need to establish schools and develop education in the Kurdish language, addressed, in the first instance to the Kurdish-speaking Christians. Indeed, establishing schools and developing literacy skills became an initial phase of the translation process generally, which resulted in cultural transformation, cultural change, the production of texts, writings and prints, and, at the same time, created a new textual awareness within communities.

5.5 THE IMPLEMENTED IDEA: BIBLE TRANSLATION FOR THE KURDISH-SPEAKING ARMENIANS

The new project of a Kurdish Bible translation was formed by American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. The Americans became active and visible in the Ottoman domain from the 1830s, establishing networks of missionary centres, schools and hospitals in a contribution to the social development of Christian communities there. They then turned their attention to the Armenians, hoping that they would take responsibility for evangelising Muslim communities. William Goodell, superintendent of the missionary press in Malta after publishing the first version of the Armeno-Turkish translation of the Bible in 1833, decided to move to Constantinople to head the Armeno-Turkish mission. He was preparing books and publications in the Turkish language, written in the Armenian script. Goodell and the missionaries who were working with him soon

realised that some of the Armenians living in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire spoke Kurdish as their native language. The missionary reports published and distributed by the Americans provided evidence of a slow but systematic growth among the Kurdish-speaking Armenian community inside the Armenian Protestant church. It seems that the group of the Kurdish-speaking Armenians became sufficiently large to warrant a new Bible translation. The plan for such a translation, contrary to Shevris' project addressed to the Kurdish-speaking Chaldeans, came from both Americans and Armenians, and the validity of the initiative was not a concern. Moreover, the mission was carried out by the Armenians for the Armenians. A well-known American missionary to the Ottoman Empire, Ernest Riggs, argued that the Armenian Protestant Churches had been conveying the missionary message to the Kurdish-speaking Armenians for many years, and that they were significant in number (Riggs 1920, 131–132). Riggs wrote his analysis devoted to the situation of the Middle East in a quite different moment, after the First World War. However, it is worth remembering his opinions concerning relations inside Armenian society, which shines a light on power relations and cultural domination inside the community. It seems that those Armenians who spoke the Armenian language constituted a kind of elite, while the Kurdish speakers inhabiting hard-to-reach and peripheral regions held more marginal positions. They were less educated and more integrated with the Muslims. Undoubtedly, language played an important role in creating a hierarchy inside this society. The Armenians who spoke Kurdish and were marginalised inside Armenian society attracted the missionary's attention, and he found a way to improve their social and cultural life by promoting education and Bible translation. Leon Arpee, a historian of Armenian Protestantism, noted that a group of Armenians around Silvan were living in great spiritual misery (Riggs 1920, 161). It is interesting that the common stereotypes that were used in regard to the Kurds were adopted to describe those Armenians who used Kurdish. The American missionaries avoided, in that sense, strict categorisation of the Kurds, underlining the importance of language in their missionary practices among the Kurdish-speaking communities. However, regarding the translation of the Bible for the Kurdish-speaking Armenians, we may presume that such a translation was undertaken by a translator who was Armenian by origin and Protestant by faith, or at least a person educated in the Protestant college. This is exactly the case of the first ever printed translation of the Gospels into Kurdish, which appeared in 1856 (Thomas 1989, 213–214).

The 1856 Gospels were composed in Kurmanji and written in the Armenian script. The text was prepared for printing by the American missionaries and the BFBS printed 3000 copies in Constantinople. The translator was an Armenian called Stephan who came from a village around Kermanshah in Iran (Darlow and Moule 1903, 892). A report of the American Bible Society from 1868 provides more details about the translator: he was an Armenian Protestant pastor who graduated from the Bebek Seminary established by Cyrus Hamlin. He was employed by the Americans working around Diyarbakir (Blincoe 1998, 237). The text was sent unedited to William Goodell from the American Board of Commissioners of the Foreign Missions for approval before it was successfully printed. This text begins the history of printed books in Kurdish.

In 1872, the whole New Testament was edited in Kurdish written in the Armenian script and printed. The previous translation of the Gospels made by Stephan was included in this edition. The text was prepared under the supervision of Isaac G. Bliss, an employee of the American Bible Society (Darlow and Moule 1903, 893). Bliss, who came to Constantinople in 1857, organised the work of the ABS in that city by establishing the new Bible House (Bliss 1866). He developed networks of Bible distribution by employing new workers and increasing sales, both in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire and beyond its borders in Persia, mostly in Tabriz (Stowe 1998, 69–70). In 1883, he informed readers of the ABS reports that, during the time he spent in Constantinople, more than a million copies of the biblical text had been distributed in 30 different languages (Bliss 1883, 3). In Constantinople alone, around 17,000 copies of the Bible or part of it were published per year. In 1868, 18,000 copies of the Bible written in Kurdish were issued (Bible Society Records 1868, 2).

The translation from 1872 was prepared in Constantinople in the printing house led by an Armenian named Hagop Boyajian who was a translator and printer, and, at the same time, a head of the Armenian Protestant community. The printed Bible reflected an idea that it should be cheap and easy to deliver. The Kurdish New Testament, however, was issued in a size of 19.5 × 13 cm and consisted of 624 pages, which, presumably, made it slightly difficult in use. Nevertheless, the networks of distribution, the very good relations between the missionary centres and also the personal contacts between workers and colporteurs facilitated the process of disseminating the text among Kurdish-speaking Armenians. Regarding the distribution of the Kurdish texts it is hard to overestimate the role played by the Euphrates College in composing materials and texts in Kurdish.

The school was founded by Crosby Howard Wheeler (1823–1896), in 1858, in Harput. From the beginning, the school developed rapidly using both the new methods and technology in its educational programmes. The report made by the British Missions' Aid Society in 1887 indicated that the area that the college was focused on was not limited just to Harput but extended to the regions of Mardin, Wan and Bitlis (Turkish Missions' Aid Society 1887, 15). The vast majority of notes and reports concerning the Kurdish-speaking Armenians produced in the second half of the nineteenth century come from the school's records. Bliss, for instance, in a report on the school's activity from its foundation to 1883, informed readers that within that period more than 40,000 Bibles (including texts in Kurdish) had been sold by the college's workers (Bliss 1883, 10). More details concerning the work among the Armeno-Kurdish population may be found in the founder's memoirs. Wheeler, reporting the missionary trip that was undertaken in 1866 to the region near Diyarbakir (Wheeler 1868, 245), argued that the region was inhabited by a large population of Kurdish-speaking Armenians. Between the lines he gave some information about an Armenian pastor who knew the Kurdish language perfectly but was worried about the Armenians who lost their language and spoke only Kurdish. In a sense, he depicted the 'linguistic hierarchy' among the Armenians. The publication of books written in the Armenian script but addressed to these marginalised Armenians who spoke just Kurdish was a remedy for their cultural isolation. Perhaps we should interpret a letter written by an Armenian pastor named Hagop from Harput to the American Bible Society in this way, in which he asked for a printing of the Bible in Kurdish for the thousands of Armenians who did not speak languages other than Kurdish (Bible Society Records 1871, 115, 179). The above-mentioned missionary expedition described by Wheeler resulted in establishing a Mission to Kurdistan, located in Harput, which cooperated with the missionary school in Maraş (Kahramanmaraş) (Arpee 1936, 161).

Analysis of Wheeler's narrative leads us to the conclusion that the population of the Kurdish-speaking Armenians living in the region east of Diyarbakir was significant. Wheeler estimated their number at 25,000. Moreover, the Kurdish language was used as a common communication tool in that area. Finally, opinions on the Kurdish language changed and it was positively valorised by those missionaries who noticed its value in spreading the Christian message. The Bible's translation into Kurdish, written in the Armenian script also showed the necessity of education. Indeed, along with the Bible, translation manuals of the Armenian language for the Kurdish-speaking Armenians were in progress.

The missionary project realised in Harput allowed it to become an intellectual centre for Armenians from the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire, including a relatively small community of Kurdish-speaking Armenians who confessed Protestantism. When, in 1891, the project of a quite new translation of the Gospel according to St. Mathew was announced, the centre made a huge contribution to finalise it, while Armenian Protestant clergy from the region, including Bedros Amirkhanian, Bedros Effendi and Kavine Aflakadian, took an active role in its publication (Thomas 1989, 213–214). The whole work was supervised by the American missionary James Barton.

The 1891 translation was original in form and concept and had nothing in common with the previous one. It was based on the original Greek and published in Constantinople in 1891. The intention was to publish it in both the Armenian and Arabic scripts, which indicates that it was probably addressed to the Muslim audience as well. In practice, the only version printed was that written in the Armenian script, which meant that it was only used by the Kurdish-speaking Armenians. James Barton, who took responsibility for translation, was elected as a head of the college in Harput in 1892. However, much earlier he was engaged in conducting educational projects in the eastern vilayets of Ottoman Turkey. As an influential missionary, he wrote with passion about the Kurds, underlining the need to study their traditions (Barton 1908, 73). His favourable attitude towards the Kurds resulted in an attempt to make a translation addressed to them; a version written in the Arabic script. A few years after issuing the version in the Armenian script, at the beginning of the twentieth century, such a text was actually prepared. Two missionaries, Alpheus Andrus and Henry Riggs, participated in an adaptation of the Arabic alphabet to the text of the Kurdish translation. The latter was associated with the Euphrates College.

Regarding Barton's work, and more generally, the activity of the centre in Harput, we may assume that it closed a certain period of Bible translations into Kurdish: one that focused on the Christian, predominantly Armenian, users, rather than their Kurdish neighbours. From the beginning of the twentieth century, we observe instead a new wave of missionary interest towards the Kurds, which would not have been possible without the socio-cultural changes that occurred among them. It was a time when more sophisticated translation projects were completed and new translations for other Kurdish dialects (Kirmashani, Mukri, Sorani) were prepared.

The lexical contents of the Kurdish Bible translations from 1872 (1856) and 1891 reflect cultural changes occurring among the users of the Kurdish language in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the translations are a remarkable testimony of linguistic and cultural choices, accompanied by a constant uncertainty over the reactions of potential readers of the text. As we know, the translated texts were addressed firstly to the Christians who were using the Kurdish language, but later to the Muslims. The translation from 1872 is a good example of linguistic ambiguity,⁶ as a number of words used in it were borrowings from the Turkish or Arabic language. The Turkish borrowings are of socio-economic meanings and correspond with everyday life, such as the word *çarşı* ‘bazar, market’ written in the Armenian script as չարշի or *alışveriş* ‘trade’ written as ալըշվերիշ. The Arabic words which connote a religious meaning are more complex, and it is worth tracing some examples of words of Quranic origin used in the translation. Among them we can find the word Allah—Ալլահ [Allah] in the composition Դուռ Ալլահ [dure Allah] ‘Son of God’. This group of ‘sacred words’ also includes ‘Holy Ghost’ Դուռ էլ զուսու [Ruh el Quds] and the Koranic version of the name of Jesus Իսա [Isa]. It is a rather unexpected usage of such words when we take into account that the translation was addressed to the Christian Armenians. It is hard to believe that the words mentioned above were used by the Armenians. In the translation made in 1891, they were removed. A good example of the words used in their place is a word for Jesus Յիսուս [Yisus] or Christ Քրիստոս [K‘ristos], with no Arabic connotations.

The translations into Kurdish from the nineteenth century were predominantly written in Kurmanji with the only exception being a version composed in Kirmashani dialect, published in New Jolfa (Isfahan) by the Henry Martyn Memorial Press in 1894 (Blincoe 1998, 242). It played a minimal role as it was an adaptation of the Persian translation made by Henry Martyn rather than an original translation. ‘The translating was done by a Persian who, though making an awkward attempt to have it in Kurdish idiom, succeeded in making it more Persian than Kurdish’ (Stead 1920, 247). It found no interest.

5.6 POWER OF TEXT: BIBLE TRANSLATION AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

The Bibles printed in the Kurdish language in the nineteenth century boosted a desire for reading. As such, the Kurdish Bible translation inspired the production of other texts in that language, stimulating the develop-

ment of the native literature. In fact, the Kurdish Bible written in the Armenian script is not the only book of this kind in the nineteenth century. Along with it, other printed texts appeared. They were mostly manuals issued for the Armenians speaking Kurdish, containing the Armenian and Kurdish texts in parallel, written in the Armenian script. One was published in New York in 1868 under the title *Դասագիրքի Քուրմանձի* *Dasagirké Kurmanci* [Manual to Kurmanji]. This text should be interpreted as a sign of the greater interest in education of the Kurdish-speaking Armenian community, and also, in a broader sense, of their interest in the Kurdish language. This initiative originated in the missionary schools attended by the Christians who spoke Kurdish. In 1867 in the Euphrates College, there were six ‘Kurdish’ students, meaning Kurdish-speaking Armenians, and one Syrian, who used the Kurdish language as a mother tongue. Wheeler was reminded of Church services during which the Christian songs were sung in all the languages spoken at the school, including Kurdish (Wheeler 1868, 215).

In the nineteenth century the idea of a Bible translation into Kurdish along with the desire to develop studies and research on the Kurds became globalised. The process was hastened by the missionary centres, schools and printing press. The translation became a starting point for other projects in the field of education. Additionally, the Bible translations seem to have influenced an idea of reforming social and ecclesiastical structures. In a broader sense, the translation required a change of mentality, to some extent replacing old and sacred languages with modern spoken ones. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Protestant initiatives to translate the Bible into vernacular languages were rejected by the leaders and hierarchs of the Eastern Churches at that time. The translation of the Sacred Books into understandable daily language caused a radical change, not only in the perception of the Bible, but also within the Church and society. The Bible was no longer a Church text, but was privatised and used by an individual for individual purposes, was commented on and criticised, accepted and rejected. To explore the Kurds’ attitudes towards the Bible we should consider relations between biblical poetry and the Kurdish poetical tradition. In a moment of missionary intuition, the missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century realised that it was possible to familiarise the Kurds with the Bible just by using poetry. In the twentieth century, however, Kurdish converts to Christianity gave a testimony of religious usage of poetry as representatives of a long Kurdish tradition that was treated the poetry as a social and cultural medium.⁷ A good example is Said Kurdistanî who, after

his conversion, remembered that ‘When I was about ten, it occurred to me that it was not right for the Kurds to pray in Arabic, and not understand what they were saying so I endeavoured to put the regular prayers into Persian poetry’ (Wilson 1943, 129). Protestant missionaries focussed on Bible translations designated the Bible as an active tool in conversion, but it should not be considered just as a religious conversion, but rather, as the cultural transformation and interiorisation of a textual tradition.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The main feature of missionary narratives seems to be the tendency to interweave historical elements with ethnographic observations, statistics with personal comments, connecting the present with biblical prophecies. The missionary texts are entirely related to the biblical message. As such, the texts produced by the missionaries revealed the missionaries’ belief in a powerful role for the printed book among even mainly illiterate people. The book constituted the relationship; formed the hierarchy. While reading such texts one may have an impression that, between the lines and perhaps unconsciously, the author tries to justify the activity that missionaries undertake. However, reading between the lines can also help us to hear the voices of the marginalised: the Kurdish-speaking Christians and, finally, the Kurds.

The biblical texts in Kurdish that emerged in the nineteenth century indicated not only the cultural changes that occurred in Kurdistan at that time, but also the multilayered relations between the Kurds and the Armenians or the Assyrians, with multifaceted linguistic and religious contacts (Chyet 1997, 219–252). At the end of the nineteenth century, the translation into Kurdish was reevaluated. The success of that work could be measured by the number of editions and projects which were to be undertaken, including the two independent translations of the Gospel of St. Matthew, printed in 1856 and 1891.

Analysis of the translations of the Bible into Kurdish in the nineteenth century should not be limited to linguistic matters; rather, they evoked cultural transformations and a process of negotiation of meanings, which introduced a set of new cultural practices. One was an individual practice of reading. The private and individual reading of the Bible was perceived as typical for Protestants, but the translated Bible in a modern language was often treated as a foreign text. Barton saying that the ‘Bible was

treated as a Protestant text' (Barton 1908, 201) expressed exactly that what was suggested by Homi Bhabha when he analysed the first appearance of the Bible in India. In Kurdistan, however, reading practices were transmitted by missionaries and adopted by native Protestants. Cheap, pocket-edition Bibles (Howsam 2002) were available for an average but educated subject of the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia. In practice, however, the Armenians were the best consumers of the missionary Bible. Undoubtedly, the most faithful readers of the Bible were the Armenian Protestants who additionally attended the missionary schools. Even so, the missionary narratives from the end of the nineteenth century indicate a changing perception of Kurdish text among the Christians and a different approach to the Kurdish language, with a positive categorisation of the Kurds within missionary narratives. Probably the most important of that kind was a missionary's confession made by Alpheus Andrus: 'I admire the Kurd because I love him. He is more moral than either Turk or Arab. The Kurds have capacities which need only opportunity for right development to make them a sturdy people' (Hall 1920, 39). Not surprisingly, therefore, that the translators who worked on the Bible in the following years were largely Kurds.

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NOTES

1. The growing interest in the history of Christian printed texts translated into Kurdish in the nineteenth century is visible among the Kurdish scholars who regard them as a part of their own cultural tradition Pirbal (1999), Serfiraz (2015, 197–216).
2. It is worth noticing that the Christian texts in Kurdish like poetry, poems and prayers were scrutinised by some scholars: Pennacchietti (1991, 169–183), Kreyenbroek (1995, 29–53).
3. The phenomenon of the translated literature is that it is treated by many as their own cultural tradition. The Bible is the best example (Tymoczko 2010, 5).

4. Shevris was portrayed in the missionary narratives many times, but often he was misidentified. He was presented as an Armenian bishop or a Roman Catholic priest belonging to the Jesuit order (Perkins 1843, 350).
5. Shevris was a metropolitan bishop in Siirt during the years 1810–1823 (Wilmshurst 2000, 95).
6. In opinion of Garnik Asatrian it was ‘a literal, nearly verbatim copy of the Western Armenian version of the Gospels, although the translators, in effect, had a mastery command of Kurdish and its vocabulary’ (Asatrian 2009, 13).
7. The good example is an Arabic-Kurdish dictionary *Nûbibara Biçûkan* composed by Ehmedê Xanî in poetic form. The dictionary was addressed to children in order to help them understand Arabic religious texts via the language they were familiar with.

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Ethnic and Religious Factors of Chaldo-Assyrian Identity in an Interface with the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan

Krzysztof Lalik

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The formation of ethnic and religious identity of Chaldo-Assyrian¹ people in Kurdistan has been incessantly influenced by the proximity of their Kurdish neighbours. Assyrian and Kurdish identities and loyalties have inevitably entailed mutual challenging, competition, conflict, detachment or cooperation. The development of Chaldo-Assyrian identity regarding their relations with the Kurds in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) after 2003 forms the major focus of analysis in this article.

The links between religion, ethnicity and nationalism have been explored by many scholars, including Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983, 1997) and John Armstrong (1982). A particularly profound analysis of this question is expounded in Anthony Smith's works (1998, 1999a, b, 2003), while extensive studies

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on mutual relations between ethnic groups were provided, among others, by Fredrik Barth and Thomas Eriksen (1993). The present analysis is primarily based on an idea of maintaining ethnic boundaries from Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth and Anthony Smith's theory of ethnosymbolism.

My main question here, while referring to the postcolonial perspective, is whether, in the ethnic and religious domains which permeate relations between Chaldo-Assyrians and the Kurds in Başur, one can observe a 'domino effect' leading to abuses of power by a former subdued *ethnie* (the Kurds) against the present-day Christian minority. One interesting issue is the feedback from the latter to the dominant ruling group in view of maintaining the ethnic boundaries of the Chaldo-Assyrian community. I will then examine how an alleged 'domino effect' contributes to a shifting ethnic boundary among Chaldo-Assyrian people in their relations with the Kurds in fields where direct references to religion and ethnicity prevail. I will focus on examining modern Chaldo-Assyrian relations with the Kurds, by applying Smith's working definition of *ethnie*, and on Barth's model of maintaining ethnic boundaries on three distinct levels: macro, median and micro. I will also refer to Smith's concept of mutual influences between nationalism, ethnicity and religion.

Barth, who did comprehensive research in some Middle Eastern countries including Iraqi Kurdistan (1959), described ethnicity as a 'realm for the non-bureaucratic drawing of boundaries to define social groups' through 'people's own experience of a cultural contrast to members of other groups' (2000, 27–30). These, more or less abstract, boundaries separate 'our' group from others, and are shaped less by objectively distinctive cultural features than by a selectively chosen cultural content of 'overt signals or signs' (e.g. language, architecture, dress, flags, emblems, festivals or myths) and 'basic values orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged' (1969, 14–16).

Barth proposed to study ethnic relations on three levels: macro, median and micro, distinguished, not because they are isolated domains in reality, but for analytical purposes, to better unveil their peculiarities and significance. The *macro-level* is the broadest dimension, as it encompasses state policies with legal order and bureaucracies 'allocating rights and impediments according to formal criteria', and ideologies articulated and imposed by the state, not least nationalism (with language policy), control and distribution of economic resources and pub-

lic information as well as ‘the arbitrary uses of force and compulsion that underpin many regimes’ (1994, 21). The *median level* uncovers processes of collectivisation and mobilisation of the group, so it embraces social activities, self-organisation in different associations, and leadership, as well as emergent ethnic ideology, rhetoric and stereotypes. This is where ‘either-or choices are imposed, and many aspects of the boundaries and dichotomies of ethnicity are fashioned. Finally, the *micro level* discloses ‘processes affecting experience and the formation of identities’ with a focus on individual self-formation, acceptance and ‘rejection of symbols and of social fellowship that are formative of the persons’ consciousness of ethnic identity’ (21). The most significant question in this context is how individual Chaldo-Assyrians perceive their ethnic identity when confronted with the Kurdish one. On this level, I will focus on comparing personal views of Chaldo-Assyrians regarding their self-identification, not only as an ethnic group, but also as a minority neighbouring a Kurdish majority. This comparison became feasible after interviewing 13 Chaldo-Assyrians, 2 women and 11 men, either directly or by phone. Generally in this chapter, the names of interviewees mentioned only by their one, first name have been altered, while those quoted by their forenames and surnames remain authentic.

While fashioning ‘a working definition of ethnicity’ and *ethnie* (ethnic community) Anthony Smith distinguishes six vital dimensions, which may vary in degree of scope, clarity and intensity: a collective name; a myth of common descent; a shared history; a distinctive shared culture; an association with a specific territory; and a sense of solidarity (1988, 22–30).² Smith’s theory further unveils a phenomenon of ethnic survival bound with myths of national mission and destiny, ‘nationalism’, defined as ‘an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential “nation”’. Nationalists, then, require the active participation of all members of the nation, enjoying ‘equal legal rights and duties’, in fulfilling the national mission, since they ‘are born into a national community with a specific task or mission to accomplish and a special destiny to traverse’ (1999a, 333). Smith finds that national myths parallel religious myths of election and destiny, despite the obvious discrepancy that religion focuses principally on eternal and extra-terrestrial salvation for all mankind, while nationalism seeks worldly felicity for a particular

nation ‘in its ancestral homeland’ (1999a, 334; 1999b, 128–135). However, both religious and national myths presume that if the community fulfils the mission it will be rewarded, usually with liberation, deliverance and high political status (1999a, 337–338). Moreover, nationalism sharpens and reinforces ethnic, cultural and social boundaries between the nation and outsiders, especially its neighbours, and its alien insiders (1999a, 336).

Notwithstanding these similarities, we should be aware of Niklas Luhmann’s point that sometimes religion may play an ambiguous role in the unity of an ethnic group, which particularly rings true in cases of confessional fragmentation across one group (Chaldo-Assyrians) or more ethnic communities where each denomination (e.g. various Syriac churches) or sect tends to solicit people regardless of their ethnicity, with confessional identity transcending ethnic affiliation, which leads to dilution or fission of a given ethnic group (Luhmann 1998, 13).

The notion of boundaries as a metaphor of cultural differences can also be found in postcolonial theories, employed to uncover Western attitudes of ‘power’, ‘domination’ and a ‘degree of a complex hegemony’ towards the Orient (Said 1978, 5). One of the aims of postcolonial studies is then to make the subaltern group’s voice audible, giving the floor to their viewpoints and ‘histories from below’, to create contrast to histories of dominant, colonial groups (Loomba 1998, 231–233). On the other hand, in-depth studies reveal that we can find not only numerous examples of rivalry, but also cooperation between dominant and subaltern groups (Young 2001). Moreover, as Parry and Lazarus discern, subaltern groups invoking nationalist rhetoric in their pursuit of liberation and independence may prompt a ‘domino effect’ by repeating in their legal, educational and social systems (often with little awareness) oppression and exclusions against other weaker social or ethnic groups, or by silencing other liberation movements and ideas, in similar ways to the treatment they previously encountered from a former colonial power (Parry 2002; Lazarus 2011).

The following analysis is based on qualitative research carried out during fieldwork through open and hidden observations, questionnaires and free surveys, in-depth and standard interviews, between 2013 and 2018, among representatives of Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians) and Kurds living in Iraqi Kurdistan, chosen using non-probability sampling methods.

6.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FORMATION OF THE CHALDO-ASSYRIANS' IDENTITY

From a historical point of view we can distinguish discrete periods of time salient for the formation of the religious and ethnic identity of Aramaic-speaking Christians. A fission of Syriac churches started in the fifth century and led, in the nineteenth century, to the emergence of four big churches in areas now covered by Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran: the Assyrian Church of the East (ACE, called Nestorians),³ the Syriac/Syrian⁴ Orthodox Church (Jacobites), the Chaldean Catholic Church (ChCC) and the Syriac Catholic Church. The latter two churches were transformed into Catholic ones in the aftermath of missions sent intermittently by Rome from the thirteenth century, and, contrary to the former two they remain in union with the Roman Catholic Church (Winkler 2003, 2; Murre-van den Berg 2007, 251). After the First World War many of them were forcibly removed from, or escaped from, Turkey to Iraq and Iran. In Iraq, the Christian population, in 1987 as much as 1.4 million, shrunk gradually during the 1990s. An immense wave of outflow began after 2004, leaving 500,000 remaining in Iraq in 2012, about 300,000 in 2015,⁵ and fewer than 250,000 Christians remained in 2017, of whom about 80% were living in the KRI and disputed areas (USCIRF 2015, 96; Reese 2017, 163).⁶ It is believed that up to 70% of Christians in Iraq now belong to the ChCC, while the rest belong to ACE, and to the Syriac Orthodox and Catholic Churches (WWM 2017).

It must be noted that, for centuries, Syriac Christian communities lived under the political and, to some extent, cultural supremacy of Muslims, mostly reigning Arabs, Turks and (locally) Kurds, as the 'People of the Book' or *dhimmi* ('people under protection'), encumbered with higher tax burdens, as *jizya*, and with various restrictions not applied to Muslims both in the private and public spheres (inflicted, e.g., by the 'Pact of Umar'), which demoted their status to virtually 'second-class' subjects (Griffith 2008, 210; Ye'or 1996, 69–140; O'Mahony 2008, 489). Under the Ottoman Empire, Christians of all religious communities were framed into the *millet* system, in which the Christian *millet* was a kind of self-governing religious and cultural entity ruled by a patriarch subject to the sultan, within which the clergy's authority was responsible for public duties such as collecting taxes and exercising justice, mostly in ecclesiastical but to some extent also civil cases. Until the nineteenth century there were only two Christian *millets*: Orthodox⁷ (*millet-i Rum*, 1453) and Armenian (1461), which held administrative superiority not only over

Armenians but also Nestorians (Kamel 1967, 212, 219). A separate *millet* for Catholics was formed in 1831 and included Syrian and Armenian Catholics, Chaldeans and Melkites (Donef 2000, 52), while one for Syrian Orthodox was formed in 1892 (Özdemir 2012, 22).

The period from the nineteenth century until the end of the First World War was critical for the process of framing the ethnic identity of Chaldo-Assyrians and their relations with the Kurds, due to the emergence of a secular intelligentsia and national sentiments among Assyrians. Regarding the collective name that distinguishes an *ethnie* from neighbouring ethnic groups, we may soon be confused by discovering, both in the past and today, multiple terms such as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Assyro-Chaldeans, Chaldo-Assyrians, Arameans, Assyro-Arameans, Assyro-Chaldean-Syriacs, Chaldo-Assyrian-Syriacs, or in different dialects of their native language—*Suryoye*, *Suryaye* or *Othuroyo*. Although nowadays people use the names more equivalently than in the past, others still cling to only one particular name. The variety of collective names derives from religious and political reasons. On the one hand, it can be accounted for by the impact of confessional diversity, with the term ‘Assyrian’ employed mostly by Nestorians, ‘Chaldean’ by adherents of the ChCC, while ‘Syrian/Syriac’ and ‘Aramean’ by Jacobites. On the other hand, complication of ethnic names has been deepened among them as a corollary, firstly, of the centuries-old prevalence of Arab power and culture in the region, and secondly, of the Ba’ath regimes in Syria and Iraq, which, through a ubiquitous campaign of Arabisation, successfully enticed many of them to either Chaldean, Syriac or Arab identification (Micheau 2008, 389–392; Murre-van den Berg 2007, 250). By contrast, leaders of Syriac Christians occasionally endeavoured to accept one compromise name in times of geopolitical turmoil, mostly to depict themselves as a larger nation/ethnic group during democratic competition and negotiations on future political solutions for their lands, as in the case of the Assyrian delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919, the Lausanne Conference in 1922–1923⁸ when the name Assyro-Chaldeans was forged, or the Chaldo-Assyrian conference held in Baghdad on 22–24 October 2003. During the latter, the representatives of Chaldean, Assyrian and Syriac communities proclaimed the unity of their nation and adopted the name ‘Chaldo-Assyrian’, reserving the appellation ‘Syriac’ to denote their language and culture (Michael 2004).

Srood Maqdasy, a Chaldo-Assyrian member of the Kurdistan Parliament from the *Abnaa al-Nahrain* Party (The Descendants of Mesopotamia, ANP), emphasised that, although both names, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian

and Chaldo-Assyrian, are proper, the latter is more popular because it is a shorter form.⁹ A Syriac writer, Dr. Saadi Al-Malih, while explaining the variety of collective names among Aramaic-speaking people, invoked the case of the Jews: 'We have one ethnicity, one nation like Jews; they have names such as Israelites, Zionists, Hebrews and they are Jews, they have four or five names¹⁰ (...) and we also have different names.'¹¹ On further questions regarding what he called his nation, he confirmed that all these different names were forged to indicate this nation's different religious beliefs, since its members switched their confessional adherence more than once:

If you need the right name it's Assyrian, but here for political reasons we apply three names together (...) In the fifteenth century nobody was Catholic in here (...) Catholic missionaries came in the eighteenth century to Mosul, Ankawa was Nestorian until 1779! How we are two different nations – Chaldean and Assyrian? We had been all Nestorians in the past and only over two hundred years ago some of us became Catholics. But does it mean that we are different nations?¹²

The question of a collective name is inextricably linked with myths of common descent that, according to Smith, are not based on facts of actual common biological descent but on a belief of having common ancestors and origins (1988, 24–25). This can also be applied to Aramaic-speaking Christians, who typically perceive themselves as descendants of the inhabitants of ancient Assyria and Babylonia. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most common terms used by missionaries to denote Aramaic-speaking communities in the Ottoman Empire were East Syrian Christians, Chaldeans, Nestorians or Jacobites. The British archaeologist Henry Layard, who discovered ancient Nineveh in mid-1840, described local Christians as 'descendants of the ancient Assyrians, and the remnant of one of the earliest Christian sects' (Layard 1850, 258). On the other hand, we find accounts that, prior to the missionaries' arrival, the local Christians from the Mosul region used to call themselves *Atoraya*, while Southgate noted in 1841 that there were Christians in Harput who 'claim their origin, being sons, as they say, of Assour (Asshur)', and were called 'Assouri' by neighbouring Armenians (Southgate 1844, 80; Murre-van den Berg 1999, 37). This undermines a quite popular supposition, that 'Assyrian' is a modern term invented by Western missionaries in the nineteenth century, and perceived as an instance of a colonial power's dominance and Orientalist influence in that

region. Instead, given Southgate's observation, it sounds more plausible that the term was adopted by the missionaries and researchers working among Eastern Christians and later spread among them, enriched by extra-national meaning. Coakley highlights that the most popular appellation employed by Anglican missionaries until 1914 was 'Syrian', which was then replaced by 'Assyrian', fostered mainly by 'secular-minded Syrians' to denote their nation comprising members of different churches (1992, 4–6).

The myth of descent from ancient Assyrians is inherently connected with a specific territory: Mesopotamia. This topic, however, will be elaborated later while probing the Chaldo-Assyrians' inhabitation in Iraq, especially in the Nineveh Plain.

A shared history refers to those events of communal experience that actuate its consolidation, and thus, generally, they are stories with positive heroes, who love their homeland and present high moral values, and usually villains are of different ethnicity (Smith 1988, 25–26). Although the respective Syriac Christian communities have had separate religious and political leaders, mostly relevant patriarchs, who have more than once competed with each other, nurturing different policies towards the governing majority, we can unequivocally indicate some periods in which they encountered similar plights, as with centuries of living under Muslim, Arab and Ottoman supremacy; Bedirxan's massacre of 1846; the genocide of 1915 (Aram. *Seyfo*—'sword'), planned and committed by Turks with the participation of Kurdish troops¹³; the 1933 massacres of Assyrians in Simele,¹⁴ near Duhok, and of 1969 in Soriya village; the process of Arabisation under the Ba'ath regime, when they were banned from using Aramaic names; or the recent persecution in Iraq and Syria by jihadist terrorist organisations like Al-Qaida or ISIS. These adversities coincided with current media transmissions and publications of books and articles on Syriac Christians, undoubtedly building their awareness of a similar and shared history.

A distinctive shared culture refers primarily to language and religion, but often also to such elements as laws, institutions, customs, folklore, architecture, arts, music, dress or food. Although there is little doubt that Chaldo-Assyrians have a distinct ethnic language, Aramaic,¹⁵ we can distinguish dialects used in Iraq, Turkey, Syria or Iran, including Western, Middle, North-eastern and South-eastern Neo-Aramaic (Yildiz 1999, 26–27). Even though we can indicate some Arabic influences on these dialects, there has not been any distinct Chaldean or Syrian language. However, due to decades of assimilation many of them forgot their native language or curtailed it to the private sphere, in favour of Arabic, Turkish or Persian.¹⁶

A palpable indication of Chaldo-Assyrians' shared culture might be the undoubted activity of their ethnic and cultural organisations, which emerged in Iraq particularly after Iraqi Government Decree 251 of 1972, and the establishment of autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1992 (Donabed 2015, 169–171).¹⁷ For many years, especially before 1991, a central role in preserving knowledge of Aramaic language was played by various Syriac churches, which ran schools and courses in their parishes not only on religion, but also on Syriac grammar and writing, as one interviewee emphasised: 'Church taught people, especially the youth and children, how to write in their language. So, this language was about to disappear as written. It was preserved only in the church'.¹⁸

A sense of ethnic solidarity is unveiled and toughened among Chaldo-Assyrians, not only during traumatic events, but also through ethnic mobilisation sharpened by national, ethnic organisations and political parties like *Khubba w-Khuyada Aturaya* (Assyrian Love and Unity), established in 1942, or the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), set up in Baghdad in 1979, which would for decades dominate the Assyrian political scene in Iraq, eclipsing the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP), formed in 1972 (Donabed 2015, 151, 155–157). At a regional parliament election in May 1992,¹⁹ both the KDP of Mesud Barzani and the PUK of Jalal Talabani obtained 50 seats, while the Christian list (ADM) got five. In the Kurdish government there were a few Christian ministers from the KDP, with Sarkis Aghajan Mamendu as Deputy Prime Minister, whereas Yonadam Kanna, the head of ADM, took the post of Minister of Public Works and Housing (Joseph 2000, 219; Stansfield 2003, 201–203).

Unlike Aramaic, the denominational division has often led to mistrust between Chaldo-Assyrians, especially on the leadership level. One Chaldo-Assyrian politician pointed out an enfeebling role that the clergy hierarchy may play in nation-building and ethnic solidarity processes: 'Some people have an interest to divide us according to church affiliations and the religious men don't help us because every bishop sees no more than his seat, and he is likely to divide us into not two or three groups, but maybe 20 groups',²⁰ which reflects Luhmann's remark on the ambiguous role of religious diversity in ethnicity.

It is quite conceivable that a sense of ethnic solidarity might be impaired by the attachment of individuals to a broader society or another ethnic group, as was the case with the Chaldo-Assyrians' cooperation with the Arabs and Kurds. Since after 1932 most of the ruling parties in Iraq tended to reign with a firm hand and all opposition parties for decades had to tackle

obstacles to acting freely and overtly. Consequently, a number of Assyrians and Chaldeans barely got involved in their own ethnic parties, but instead, turned to bigger and stronger organisations seeking equal civil rights as Iraqis in a secular state, for example the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), or the Ba'ath Party, with the most famous example being Tarik Aziz (a Chaldean with the original Aramaic name Mikhail Yuhanna) (Betts 1979, 182–188).²¹ Likewise, during Mustafa Barzani's uprising in the 1960s, many Syriac Christians joined the Kurdish peshmerga and the KDP to fight against the Ba'ath regime. Many of them would later be rewarded by the KDP with political and administrative careers in the structure of Kurdish autonomy after 1992.²² In return for Chaldo-Assyrian cooperation with the Kurds, the Iraqi government issued a prohibition in the early 1990s against Christians running liquor shops and restaurants, which induced them to emigrate to the West for economic reasons.²³ During the civil war that broke out between the KDP and the PUK in 1994, the leaders of the ADM, the Communists and the Islamic Union engaged in the peace process, making strenuous efforts to bring the two warring parties together, which was successfully completed by US diplomacy with the Washington Agreement signed by Barzani and Talabani in September 1998 (Stansfield 2003, 100).²⁴

Although one can gauge from Chaldo-Assyrian cooperation with the Kurds that the former's sense of ethnic solidarity has reduced, one need not be surprised to find that, by contrast, it has smoothed their coexistence and the careers of both Kurds and Chaldo-Assyrians in the KRI's autonomous structure. This alludes to Barth's note that stable interethnic relations are based, not only on bans of interethnic contacts, but also on a set of prescriptions 'allowing for articulation in some sectors (...) of activity', which are made and remade rather than taken for granted, which means that the number and scope of these sectors may deplete or enlarge (Barth 1969, 16).

6.3 SEEKING EQUALITY AND SAFETY: MACRO-DIMENSIONS OF CHALDO-ASSYRIAN RELATIONS WITH THE KURDS

6.3.1 *Legal and Political System Solutions*

After 2003, the Chaldo-Assyrians, like the Kurds, opted for a secular, non-Sharia state law and a federal Iraq, though the latter strived to extend their autonomous accomplishments. Although not always in agreement with

the Kurdish leadership, the Chaldo-Assyrian representatives initially generally did not contradict Kurdish ideas and demands, usually seeking cooperation with all main Iraqi political forces. The first big tests of cooperation between the main political forces in Iraq were the parliamentary elections in 2005 and the preparation of a permanent constitution. The Iraqi constitution was backed by almost 78% of Iraqis in a referendum held in 15 October 2005, with around 99% voting 'yes' in Erbil, Duhok and Silemani provinces. Both Kurdish and Christian political leaderships decided to accept the final text of the basic law, though it did not meet all their expectations (Lalik 2009, 189–194). Plenty of provisions of the document reflect deep rifts between the main political parties' visions on Iraqi statehood, legal system and culture. On the one hand, Iraq was declared a republic with a parliamentary and democratic system of government (Article 1) and a country of many nationalities, religions and sects (Article 3) where no law might contradict 'the principles of democracy' and 'basic freedoms' (Article 2.1.B, C), and even 'accusations of being an infidel (*takfir*)' were prohibited (Article 7) (Constitution of Iraq 2005). A great advance was that Christians were mentioned by their proper name, empowering them.²⁵ On the other hand, the constitution states that Iraq is 'part of the Islamic world' and 'Islam is the official religion of the State' and 'a foundation source of Legislation' and no law may 'contradicts the established provisions of Islam' (2.1).

As regards civil law, Iraqis are guaranteed freedom of religion, particularly freedom of worship, practice of religious rites and management of their religious institutions (Article 43), as well as 'freedom of thought, conscience and belief' (Article 42), and freedom 'in their commitment to their personal status according to their religion, sect, belief, or choice' (Article 41) (Constitution of Iraq 2005). However, Iraq's parliament passed two acts of law that remain in flagrant contradiction to the abovementioned points of the Iraqi constitution. Firstly, on 22 October 2016, it introduced a prohibition of the production, import and sale of alcohol and alcoholic beverages. Secondly, Article 26 of the national card law, approved in November 2016, coerced minors of non-Muslim parents to follow the religion of any parent who embraced Islam. This law is widely seen by non-Muslim minorities as an infringement of their basic and equal freedoms, assured by many articles of the Iraqi constitution. Although the ban on producing and selling alcohol has not been introduced in the KRI yet, the Kurdistan Parliament has still not been able to discuss the Iraqi national card law.²⁶

According to the Iraqi constitution, Kurdish, like Arabic, remains an official language, while the Syriac and Turkmen languages were recognised as official languages too, but only in areas where their speakers constitute a majority (Article 4.1, 4.4). Along with Armenians, they have the right to ‘educate their children in their mother tongue’ in state-owned educational institutions (Article 4.1). Equality of all Iraqi citizens before the law without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, belief or social status is stipulated by Article 14. A way to implement Article 4 of the constitution was opened on 7 January 2014, when the Iraqi parliament adopted the Official Languages Act acknowledging Syriac as an official language of Iraq, which Yonadam Kanna proudly lauded: ‘Today once again the language of Christ, the language of the ancestral, the language of Babylon and Assyria has returned to become one of the official languages, along with its sister Arabic, Kurdish and Turkmen as official languages practised by our people’ (Ankawa.com 2014).

The future of so-called disputed territories, including Kirkuk and the Nineveh Plain, was to be determined by local referenda held by the end of 2007 (Article 140), however, the deadline has been postponed several times and, consequently, Article 140 has not been implemented yet.

6.3.2 *Political Participation*

The passage of the Iraqi constitution paved the way for consecutive elections to a new permanent Iraqi parliament. In the first one, held in 31 January 2005, the Kurdistan List, also known as the Kurdistan Alliance (KA), led by the KDP and the PUK, included seven other political parties from *Yekgirtûy Îslamî Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Islamic Union, KIU) to a few socialist parties and two Christian groups: the Chaldean Democratic Union Party and Assyrian National Party. The KA obtained 75 seats in the 275-member Iraqi parliament, while the only independent Assyrian list—the Rafidain National List of ADM—managed one seat (Yonadam Kanna) (IMIE 2006). In the 2014 elections, the KDP won 25 and the PUK 21 seats, while those reserved for Christian minorities were divided between the ADM (2), the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (CSAPC) (2) and the ICP (1).

On 31 January 2005, the KRI also witnessed parallel elections to the 111-member Kurdistan Parliament, in which only the ADM stood out from the KA, whereas four Chaldo-Assyrian parties received five seats altogether. Most seats were gained by the KDP (40) and the PUK (38) with the third result being the KIU (9). After a unified KRG was formed in

May 2006, through a unification agreement between the PUK and the KDP, three Christians were found in the new cabinet: Sarkis Aghajan Mamendu as Minister for Finance and the Economy, Nimrud Baito as Minister for Tourism and George Yousif Mansour as Minister for Civil Society. In the next parliamentary elections held in the KRI in 2009, all Chaldo-Assyrian parties moved out of coalition with the KDP and the PUK and were gathered into four lists, of which the CSAPC got three and the ADM two seats. In the 2013 elections, Chaldo-Assyrian parties also retained five seats: two from the ADM, two from the CSAPC and one from the ANP.

However, the KRG was repeatedly accused of violating the results of democratic elections, as was the case with removing two Chaldo-Assyrian mayors between July and August 2017: Basim Bello of Telkaif and Faiez Abed Jahwareh of Alqush, with the latter replaced by Chaldean Lara Yousif Zara, despite the serious grassroots protests of local Christians (Catholic Herald 2017).

6.3.3 *Marked as ‘noon’: The Security Situation*

In the post-2003 clash between Sunni and Shi’a militias and various terrorist organisations, religious and ethnic minorities appeared to be the most vulnerable communities. Attacks against Christians started in late 2003, with killings, kidnappings for ransom, bombing churches and menaces. The assaults were waged for financial, religious and cultural reasons (e.g. because of selling alcohol), or to assure the ascendancy of Shi’a or Sunni Arabs in big multiethnic cities, like Baghdad, Basra or Mosul (HRW 2010, 68). According to Ano Abdoka, Christians were also targeted for propaganda reasons, as being considered by jihadists as ‘agents of the West’, and ‘to embarrass the Iraqi government internationally’, because ‘if you bomb a mosque you will only have people talking about it, maybe in Arabic countries, but if you bomb a church you give a message to Europe and USA’.²⁷

Consequently, the life of Christians in Iraq deteriorated dramatically and hundreds of thousands of them left their homes, moving either abroad to Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, or to the West, or to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which turned out to be the safest place in Iraq at that time both for minority and majority groups (HRW 2010, 70). A prominent Chaldo-Assyrian politician put the security situation down to the political stability in KRI: ‘the system here is different

than in Baghdad. Here it is just one side and the responsibility is clear. Only Barzani rules in Erbil and Duhok, and only Talabani in Silemani. (...) But in Baghdad there are many competitive groups'.²⁸

The biggest influx of Christians into the Kurdistan Region took place in summer 2014 after Sunni jihadists captured Mosul (10 June), announced a caliphate as ISIS or Daesh in 29 June 2014, and launched a fierce attack in the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar areas, inhabited mostly by non-Muslims such as Christians, Yezidis and Kakais, as well as Shabaks and Turkmen. In the seized lands, ISIS sharply distinguished Christians from Muslims by marking their houses with the Arabic letter 'noon', meaning 'Nazarite', and introduced ruthless *sharia* law that, for example, threatened the death penalty against women for not wearing a veil over their face. Contrary to the plight of *non-dhimmi* people (e.g. Yezidis or Kakais), who were usually killed or enslaved, Christians were more fortunate as they were offered four options by the jihadists: either convert to Islam, pay a *jizya* tax, leave the city, or die.²⁹ Most chose to escape, and in July and August, 2014, the KRI faced tremendous waves of several hundred thousand Internally



Picture 6.1 Baharka camp near Ankawa, A chapel under a tent in refugee camp, 2015, by K. Lalik

Displaced Persons (IDPs) from north-western Iraq, predominantly non-Muslims who sought shelter against ISIS oppression and genocide. The KRG was, in fact, the first state institution that provided the IDPs with humanitarian aid, supported by international organisations and governments. Christians were relocated mostly in refugee camps near Ankawa and Duhok, while initially a number of them were welcomed by local churches and Christian families in their houses.³⁰ They could return to their hometowns only after the Nineveh Plain had been gradually liberated between 2016 and 2017.³¹

The 2014 invasion of ISIS in the Nineveh Plain raised accusations of betrayal against Kurdish peshmerga, with suggestions that they had failed to defend Christian villages, first on 23 June and then on 6 August. Though they had repeatedly promised to do so, eventually they fled in fear. This undermined the trust of many Iraqi Christians, especially from the Nineveh Plain, regarding Kurdish soldiers and KRG policy. Therefore some of them decided to set up their own Christian militias, such as *Dwekh Namsha* (Aram.: ‘self-sacrificers’), Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU), Nineveh Plain Forces (NPF), or Babylon Brigade. All of them more or less cooperated with the Kurds, except the NPU, set up by the ADM, which was reportedly blocked by peshmerga. All these forces were designed to help the Iraqi and Kurdish soldiers in liberating the Nineveh Plain from ISIS and subsequently to ensure the protection of Christian towns and villages in that area against jihadists. On the other hand, some Chaldo-Assyrians joined the peshmerga to fight ISIS (Oehring 2017, 37–39).

6.3.4 *Securing a Homeland: The Struggle for the Nineveh Plain*

The idea of living in a homeland, having their own land rather than living scattered in more modern cities, has been fundamental to many Chaldo-Assyrians, not only due to sentiment towards their homeland, but also for demographic reasons, which Younan Hosaya, a retired member of ADM, aptly encapsulated:

In Baghdad there were opportunities to reach high position, even nearly ministries, professors at university, and so on, but we can't have our land there to stay on our own and say “this is my land”. (...) the point of land is very important. We are Christians and it means that in thirty years our [Muslim] neighbours will have twenty or forty houses more, but ours will

be the same or shrink, because this guy goes abroad to study, other goes to Baghdad, the other won't get married. But our neighbours will have three, four, five or more children. That's why it's very important to us to have our own villages. (...) Why we are talking about the Nineveh Plain? Because it is the last place for us to live in and to have what we need in the fields of administration and culture.³²

Although many Chaldo-Assyrians deem the whole of Iraq their homeland, they underline that lands such as the Nineveh Plain, Duhok and Erbil are of particular historical meaning for them due to continual occupation by a Chaldo-Assyrian population.³³ Additionally, the Nineveh Plain contains numerous ancient Christian sites, such as the monastery of Rabban Hormizd and Mar Mattai. It is also considered a part of Ancient Mesopotamia with a well-documented Assyrian presence over the centuries, long before Christianity, for example in Nimrud and Dur-Sharrukin. It covers the north-eastern area of the Nineveh province, excluding Mosul city and consisting of three districts of Telkef (Tel Keppe), Hamdaniya (Qaraqosh, Bakhdeda), and Sheikhan, plus one sub-district of Bashique.³⁴ In 2003, this territory contained thousands of Syriac people of the biggest five Christian denominations, as well as Yezidis, Shabaks and Kurds.

In post-Saddam Iraq, the idea of creating a self-governing region for Iraqi Christians and other non-Muslim minorities was raised by various Chaldo-Assyrian circles. It was initially raised by the ADM in the final declaration at the conference of Chaldo-Assyrian community held in Baghdad on 22–24 October 2003, which stressed the need 'to designate an administrative region for our people in the Nineveh Plain with the participation of other ethnic and religious groups' (ISDP 2008, 2). Two years later, that idea was elaborated by the Assyrian Academic Society, based among the Assyrian diaspora in Chicago, as 'the Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project' (ISDP).³⁵

A similar proposal of a separate area for non-Muslim minorities in the Nineveh Plain was put forward in 2004 by Sarkis Aghajan, the then KRG Minister for Finance, by confession an Assyrian. For this purpose he helped to rebuild many Christian villages, and to fund local Chaldo-Assyrian associations in that region (e.g. the Chaldean Cultural Centre in Ankawa) that were expected to outweigh the influence of Assyrian organisations independent from the KRG and often fond of the ADM.³⁶ A main goal of building this KRG-backed patronage system was to weaken Chaldo-Assyrians' opposition to the KDP, linked mostly with the ADM, and to

win their support for KRG control over this area. The policy smoothed relations with the Christian ecclesiastical leadership, which was particularly obvious when, in August 2015, representatives of Assyrian, Orthodox and Chaldean churches from the archdioceses of Erbil, Mosul and Kirkuk announced a joint statement calling on all political parties in Kurdistan to extend the term of President Mesud Barzani (AINA 2015). Aghajan's proposal for the Nineveh Plain was only seemingly similar to the ADM's project, since it went further in asking for the establishment of autonomy in that area with an ulterior goal to attach it in the future to the KRI, still as an autonomous region. However, currently, due to demographic changes caused by ISIS attacks, the Chaldo-Assyrian community no longer forms a majority in any governorate.

Ano Abdoka, the head of the KDP office in Ankawa, deemed Aghajan's proposal (and other relevant projects of 'Chaldean Assyrian Syriac parties') very realistic. He believes that the 'Chaldean Assyrian Syriac people' now have two potential futures ahead: a Jewish or a Kurdish one. The former means that they will have to leave Iraq completely, as the Jews did after 1948, whereas the latter envisages that they will remain a part of Kurdistan's landscape and experience, as well as the dream of independent Kurdistan. According to him, the only solution for Syriac Christians not just to develop, but possibly to survive, in former Mesopotamia, is to combine their fate with Kurdistan's future and political ambitions, since Kurds are more tolerant than Arabs.³⁷

However, the 2006 US report on religious freedom stated that Christians and other minorities in the Nineveh Plain complained about confiscation of their land by the KRG without compensation, and questioned the KRI's judicial impartiality (Cromartie 2006, 10). One of the Chaldo-Assyrian politicians confirmed these allegations, saying that 'there are some powerful Kurdish people supported by KDP who control some parts of Christian people's lands' in the KRI without consent of their legal owners, and referring to KRG-backed initiatives to compound the Nineveh Plain with the KRI, bypassing the will of the local people.³⁸

On 21 January 2014, after over ten years of lobbying, the Iraqi government approved a plan to set up three new provinces in Iraq: in Fallujah, Tuz Khormato and the Nineveh Plain. The ADM believed that this governorate, remaining an administrative entity under the supremacy of the Iraqi central government, would to all intents and purposes serve as a safe haven for various vulnerable minorities such as Chaldo-Assyrians, Yezidis, Kakais

or Shabaks. Unfortunately, the assault of ISIS in the Nineveh Plain drastically disrupted and delayed the implementation of this law (BetBasoo and Kino 2014). Nevertheless, it has not prevented Iraqi Christians from making efforts in favour of that project, especially after a successful Arab-Kurdish counter-attack against ISIS in Mosul province in autumn 2016. Interestingly, regarding these attempts, President Mesud Barzani, in September 2016, forecast the creation of a ‘Christian state’ in the Nineveh Plain with a subsequent referendum, in which its inhabitants would choose their own political framework either under the rule of an independent Kurdistan, or Iraq’s central government (FIDES 2016). In March 2017, three organisations of minorities from the Nineveh Plain: the Yezidi Independent Supreme Council, the Turkmen Rescue Foundation and the American Mesopotamia Organisation, signed a declaration for the creation of a semi-autonomous entity (*Al-Rafidain* Region) that would encompass three adjacent regions: Sinjar, Tal Afar and the Nineveh Plain (Salloum 2017).³⁹

Like the Chaldo-Assyrian political parties, the leaders of Syriac churches are not in agreement over the future of the Nineveh Plain. In May 2017, three Syriac bishops, Boutros Moshe of the Syriac Catholic and Mar Nicodemus Daud Matti Sharaf and Mar Timotheos Musa al Shamany of the Syriac Orthodox Church, appealed to transform the Nineveh Plain into an autonomous area under UN protection (FIDES 2017). By contrast, the Chaldean patriarch Louis Raphael Sako remains sceptical of the idea of forming an autonomous zone, a ‘safe haven’ for Christians in Iraq. In his opinion, such a concept is one coined abroad without due consultation with the Christians who remain in Iraq. Moreover, forming a Christian ‘ghetto is especially against the Christian message, which sees us as the salt and yeast in the dough of humanity’ (Sako 2009).

Despite these discrepancies between the political organisations of Iraqi Christians, in March 2017 the heads of almost all Chaldo-Assyrian political parties in Iraq jointly appealed for the European Union to create a Nineveh Plain province, so that their inhabitants ‘are given the right to determine their own future free from the pressures of outside groups, and that they are granted their constitutional right to administer their areas and protect their lands’ (Gombacci 2017). This call was supported by several Chaldo-Assyrian parties: the ADM, the Chaldean Democratic Forum, the CSAPC, the Chaldean National Council, the Syriac Assembly Movement, the Chaldo Ashor Organisation, the APP, the Beth-Nahrain⁴⁰ Democratic Party, the ANP, and the Beth-Nahrain Patriotic Union. It was the first initiative in which the ADM came to terms with pro-KDP Christian

organisations on the future of Nineveh. This may result either in weakening the KRG policy of patronage over Christian political parties, or in taming the ADM's firm opposition to the KRG.

With regard to the Kurdish aspiration for independence, three Assyrian political parties, the ADM, the ANP and the APP opposed the referendum on Kurdistan independence, held on 25 September 2017, the more particularly as it was scheduled not only for the KRI, but also for disputed areas, including the Nineveh Plain.⁴¹

6.4 AMBIGUOUS PROXIMITY BETWEEN KURDS AND CHALDO-ASSYRIANS ON THE MEDIAN LEVEL

On this level we can distinguish a few main fields of relations between Chaldo-Assyrians and Kurds where ethnic and religious factors are thought to be salient and sensitive. These are the 'Kurdifying' of Assyrian lands, the development of Syriac education and culture, overt signs and symbols on Christian areas and their surroundings, and personal careers in executive posts in the KRI.

6.4.1 *Takeover of Chaldo-Assyrian Lands*

Many Chaldo-Assyrians accuse the KRG of expansion into their lands, both in the KRI and in the Nineveh Plain, by illegal takeover of their properties and interference in democratically elected municipal bodies (Taneja 2007, 20). It is estimated that Kurds occupy almost 130 Chaldo-Assyrian villages and farmlands, mostly in the Duhok governorate, which have been seized over last few decades, including Sarsing, Debadé, Dere, Koumaneh, Maristek, Chaqala Khtatha, Chembre Bethkeh or lands taken by KRG for the Erbil airport. The loss of these villages started during the Barzani uprising of the 1960s and continued after breaking the peace agreement for settlement in 1975, and during the *Anfal* campaign.⁴² After 1992, the autonomous Kurdish parliament ordered the return of land and properties occupied during Saddam Hussein's reign and the Kurds got their properties back. However, no solution was applied to the Christian lands until April 2015, when the Kurdistan Parliament approved Law No. 5, stipulating governmental compensation for all aggrieved landowners and prohibiting 'any kind of land occupation or changing the demographical property of any area inhabited by any minorities'.⁴³ This law was employed to compensate the Ankawa people who lost their lands in the building of Erbil Airport.

6.4.2 *Cooperation on Educational and Cultural Domains*

At the end of the 1990s, the KRG began to build a kind of patronage system over Christians' activity in KRI, which accelerated after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime, in 2003. Supervised by Sarkis Aghajan, then Minister for Finance of the KRG, it focused, firstly, on improvement of infrastructure in Christian towns in the KRI by building churches, schools, and associations, funding Syriac media like Ishtar TV or building roads. Secondly, it endowed Chaldo-Assyrian settlements in the KRI by giving them lands. Through that programme, the KRG 'started to give lands to the Christians who are originally from Ankawa and Kurdistan: from Shaklawa, Harir, Silemani and Koye', which encouraged many of them to stay in the KRI instead of emigrating.⁴⁴ As Ano Abdoka asserted, the programme of giving lands to Christians was originally 'an idea of Nechirvan and Mesud Barzani (...) [as] according to the history their family is very near to Christians and they have very good relations with the clergy'.⁴⁵ There is little doubt that the KRG patronage achieved its main goal to a large extent: to win wide endorsement for KRG policy among Syriac Christians of all denominations, as numerous clerics and lay folk of all Syriac churches participated.⁴⁶

Undoubtedly, the KRG contributed to the development of Syriac education and culture through the establishment of three general directorates: GD for Syriac Education in the Ministry of Education, GD for Syriac Culture in the Ministry for Culture and Youth, and GD for Syriac Religion in the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs (MERA).⁴⁷ After their formation in 2012, there were 55 Syriac language schools in the KRI (11 preparatory, 41 primary and 3 secondary schools), with 1153 teachers and over 10,500 pupils supplied with schoolbooks by the Ministry. The Christian religion was also taught in these schools.⁴⁸ In 2012 in the KRI there were 96 churches and 4880 mosques with almost 15,000 imams, while the MERA distributed 6000 Iraqi dinars (ID) to each Christian and Yezidi directorate, whereas the rest, 88,000 ID, went to its Islamic department.⁴⁹ One must admit that the GD for Syriac Culture, with 168 employees in 2013, performs its duties in earnest, publishing a dozen or so Syriac books every year, the quarterly cultural magazine *Banipal* and a monthly cultural newspaper *Mardutha*. Other activities include organising festivals, conferences, Syriac courses for adults, and running theatres, libraries and the Syriac Heritage Museum in Ankawa.

Other Syriac newspapers or magazines in the region include *Beth Ankawa*, *Quyaman*, *Smitha*, *Bet-Nahrain*, *Mawtwa Ammaya*, *Hizel*, *Beth Nahrain Star*, *The Star of Mesopotamia*, and *Bahra*.⁵⁰

On the other hand, we can find initiatives in the educational sector aimed at building peaceful coexistence or at least mutual understanding between Kurdistan's Muslims and Christians. An example can be seen in Duhok, where in 2004 the Chaldean bishop of Amediya diocese, Rabban Al-Qas, opened the International School of Duhok, with Church and government support. The school now provides education at secondary and high school levels, and in 2015 hosted over 250 pupils including Christians (from different Syriac churches) and Muslims (Kurds and Arabs). They were taught by 32 teachers, also a mix of Christian and Muslim. The subjects, taught usually in English and French, are the same for all pupils, including Kurdish, Arabic and Aramaic languages. The school is famous for its high educational standards and many of its graduates study abroad. Bishop Rabban opened it to let Christians live together with Muslims without fear and prejudice, 'not to isolate Christians from others (...) not to discriminate other persons'. He believes that everyone is first and foremost 'not Chaldean, Assyrian, Christian or Muslim but a human being, a person that has to give over his or her values to others, compare them with your brothers and verify in practice'.⁵¹

An interesting example of a Kurdish initiative to encourage understanding with Christians could be found in Koye. A few years ago at the local Koye University, one of the lecturers introduced a new course about non-Muslim religions like Christianity and Judaism. At the beginning he faced much resistance from part of the board, some students and their parents, who were indignant that the teacher, as they thought, wanted to 'compare Islam with other religions' or even 'promote Christianity and Judaism against Islam' or 'make the students change their religion'. They insisted that 'Islam is the best, so we don't need to know Christianity, Judaism or other religions'. However, the lecturer, who was also a Muslim, did not succumb to the pressure from the other teachers and students and contrived to open the course, persuading people that its aim was by no means to make them renounce Islam, but simply 'to let them get fair knowledge and not speculations about worldly religions'. As a result, despite the reluctance of a part of the university staff and students, the course lasted the whole academic year and afterwards many students told the lecturer that previously they had, 'little idea about what Christianity actually is',



Picture 6.2 Duhok, A statue of St. Ith Llaha near a church of his name, built around 500, 2015, by K. Lalik

and that during the course they found out many new things about other religions too.⁵² We can assume that the course about other religions helped the Muslim Kurdish students to revise their misconceptions and stereotypes about Christianity and Christians, which might be a first step towards overcoming ignorance and reaching mutual understanding with their Christian neighbours.

We can also spot other examples of looking for mutual respect between Chaldo-Assyrians and Kurds. In 2009, the Chaldean Church encouraged owners of liquor stores in Ankawa, though many of them were not only Christians, but also Yezidis, to close their shops during Ramadan. This decision was backed by local politicians, arguing that ‘because of our respect to Ramadan month and to our Muslim brothers we won’t have our stores opened for the whole of the month, respecting our Muslim friends and their faith’.⁵³ In a similar vein, since 2014 an idea has arisen among some of the Chaldo-Assyrian politicians to put up a statue of Mulla Abu Bakr Effendi in Ankawa. Mulla Effendi (1863–1942) was a prominent Kurdish Muslim cleric, politician and philosopher highly esteemed by

Ottoman, British and Iraqi authorities. During the *Seyfo* (genocide of 1915), Mulla Effendi was instructed by the Ottomans to kill all Christians in Ankawa. He did not carry out the order, explaining that they were paying *jizya*. But, as Ano Abdoka added when telling the story, they did not pay any *jizya*, so Effendi lied to the Ottomans to protect the people of Ankawa.⁵⁴

On the other hand, we can also find an example of discrimination that was laid bare in the Kurdish school curriculum, though successfully revised in the end. A member of the Kurdistan Parliament, Salim Kako, stated that in one of the schoolbooks on Islam the Christians were presented as waste that deserved to be killed. He intervened with the case to the speaker of Kurdistan's Parliament, who was totally unaware of this fact. The issue was then referred to the Minister of Education, who next day ordered the removal of the book from schools, destroying all the copies. Luckily, the case was controlled in the nick of time, 'because the teachers hadn't reached the chapter yet' (Neurink 2013). Another achievement of Salim Kako was to convince Kurdish politicians to add Assyrian and Chaldean victims to a revised law paying tribute to 'martyrs' of the Ba'ath regime.⁵⁵

6.4.3 *Overt Signs and Symbolic Boundaries*

While visiting Ankawa, Duhok, Harmota and Koye we can easily find compelling differences and similarities between what Barth calls, 'overt signals and signs', of local Christians and the Kurds, which mark their ethnic boundaries (1969, 14).

Harmota is a Chaldean village near Koye, once purely Christian but a few decades ago several Muslim Kurdish families settled there as well. In 2012 it was inhabited by 99 Christian and 27 Muslim families. At that time 40 Chaldean families lived in the town. Chaldeans both in Harmota and Koye have been deeply assimilated culturally, since they speak mostly Kurdish in everyday life, though some also speak Aramaic⁵⁶ among themselves. Moreover, they wear the same traditional clothes as their Kurdish neighbours.⁵⁷ As a senior Kurdish teacher in Koye asserted, most Kurds of Koye perceive Christian people as 'one of us', members of the same, equal local community.⁵⁸ Ankawa, in contrast, is a wealthy and modern Chaldo-Assyrian district of Erbil, hosting a plethora of foreign companies and offices. Ankawa's residents, as many as 36,000 people in 2012, are predominantly Chaldean, and generally speak three languages: Aramaic, Kurdish and Arabic, with the former used in daily life among themselves.⁵⁹

Their folk clothes, worn occasionally during holidays and in the church, resemble either original local Chaldean or Kurdish dress. Less assimilated Christian populations in the KRI are probably Assyrians living in villages and towns in Duhok province, who have largely preserved knowledge of their Aramaic language. In the town of Duhok they celebrate the *Akito* holiday (Assyrian New Year) every year on 1 April. At this time a host of Chaldo-Assyrians take part in great marches and accompanying cultural events wearing traditional Assyrian and Chaldean costumes.⁶⁰

The question of clothes worn by Christians in Kurdistan surpasses the median level and percolates into the micro one, being often connected with religious convictions and affecting women. One Chaldean student, Isabell, admitted that sometimes Muslims ask Christian ladies why they ‘do not wear veil seeing that the statue of Virgin Mary has a veil on her head’. At the same time, she added, ‘no one can oblige you to wear it here’. However, she professed that being at university or at work ‘in the middle of many different mentalities’ she didn’t want to provoke Muslims with her clothing and make them say ‘bad things’ about her.⁶¹ Another question of symbolic significance, which verges on the micro-level, was that Christians often complained that after the emergence of Daesh, some of their Kurdish neighbours and friends desisted from greeting them and their families on Christmas and Easter, although previously they used to do so.⁶²

On the other hand, when entering Ankawa, Harmota or Duhok, the Kurdish flag and photos of Mesud or Nechirvan Barzani prevail over Assyrian or Chaldean flags flapping outside buildings or over pictures of their national heroes. It is hard to say to what extent such Kurdish national symbols are exposed voluntarily or under duress, but there were some reports of coercion by Kurdish security services to do this (Hanna and Barber 2017, 56–58). Naming one street of Ankawa after Simko, a Kurdish warlord who killed the Assyrian patriarch Mar Benyamin in 1918, was another act seen as provocative.⁶³ By contrast, Christian religious pictures and signs (cross, Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus, rosary, Mar Behnam and other saints) can easily be seen in the houses, shops or cars of Christians. However, this does not disguise the fact that some territorial expansion of Muslims is taking place in the KRI through building mosques in the vicinity of the Christian area.

In Harmota in 1999, the Muslim Brotherhood built a mosque on the verge of the village in virtually one night, which was met with harsh objections from the local Christian inhabitants. They organised big

Picture 6.3 Ankawa, A statue of Virgin Mary, 2015, by K. Lalik



demonstrations in Koye against the clandestine building and tensions rapidly mounted in the city. After a few months the conflict was resolved, but only after Jalal Talabani engaged in mediation. Both sides agreed that the mosque could stay there but no additional buildings around it were allowed, including the tower, and Muslims were allowed to pray in it but without muezzin prayers.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the only Chaldean church in Koye has stood for many years closely coterminous with an adjacent mosque. On the other hand, Ankawa's southern frontier with Erbil city has recently witnessed implicit competition between Christians and Muslims. At first, the Kurdish Muslims extended a small mosque near the main street of Ankawa. Presumably in response to this, a few years later, in September 2013, Christians with the support of the Chaldean bishop funded a big statue of the Virgin Mary on the same street.⁶⁵ It is interesting that the Christians built the statue rather than a

cross, undoubtedly considered the main symbol of Christianity. Probably it was considered less provocative, since the Mother of Jesus, Mary, is commonly held in high regard among Muslims because she is frequently mentioned in the Quran and, as stressed above, is typically depicted with a veil. For centuries, public exposure of the sign of cross has been prohibited by many Muslim rulers in Islamic countries. Another example of a mosque's proximity to Christian areas in Kurdistan occurs on the southern outskirts of Duhok, where in 2012 Muslims started to build the Hejra mosque just 300 metres away from an Assyrian church of Mar Narse. Although the local Christians complained about this building project, Duhok's authorities allowed its continuation. The mosque was put up and now the faithful from both temples can not only see each other but sometime also hear their prayers, which is deemed a nuisance by local parishioners.⁶⁶

Conversely, there have been individual instances of Muslim Kurds who for religious reasons insisted on not appearing in Christian districts. One informant said that he had heard that a Muslim taxi driver in Erbil had refused to take his passenger to Ankawa because it's 'a land of infidels'. In mid-July 2013, a Kurdish ambulance driver had to take the corpse of a Christian woman from hospital in Erbil to one of the churches in Ankawa. Positive that he was forbidden (*haram*) to enter the church area, he left the deceased on the street and went away (AsiaNews 2013). There were also reports that some Kurdish truck drivers refused to deliver building materials when they found out that they were to be used to build a new church of Mary Mother of Perpetual Help in Ankawa.⁶⁷

6.4.4 *Entangled Between Kurdish Nationalism and Party Rivalry*

Unfortunately, in recent years, minorities in Kurdistan have witnessed cases of discrimination from Muslims that have not been controlled by the authorities in time. On 2 December 2011, riots broke out in Zakhō after Kurdish clerics, led by Îsmail Osman Sîndai from Rasheed Mosque, had incited people to attack stores selling alcohol during Friday prayers. The unrest soon spread and turned into furious Kurdish youth mobs plundering and burning down Chaldo-Assyrian and Yezidi-owned properties in Zakhō, Duhok and Simele, resulting in over 30 people injured and enormous damage to liquor shops, massage parlours, hotels, casinos, hair salons, cafeterias, social clubs (Nohadra Social Club and Yezidi Health

Club in Duhok)⁶⁸ and churches. Initially, the KIU was blamed for the riots, while some Kurdish students confessed that their teacher had incited them to attack churches (Alikhan and Barwari 2011). A general picture of this unrest as a clash between the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities prevailed in the media. However, since a few KIU offices were also burnt that night, and later almost 20 KIU members were detained, new suspicions arose that the responsibility for the events lay to a large extent with the KDP. These allegations were repeated by one Chaldo-Assyrian politician, who laid the blame for the whole situation on a rivalry between the mayor and the municipal head of Duhok, both from the KDP.⁶⁹ Others believed that the riots were just another sad instance of competition between the KDP and the KIU, as dozens of journalists and reporters not affiliated with the KDP had been detained by the police in Duhok and Zakho (RWB 2011; Ekurd 2011). Nonetheless, the Duhok riots showed that peaceful interreligious coexistence in Iraqi Kurdistan might be very fragile, unless the authorities enforced the law. As Amir Sharifi, the President of the Kurdish American Education Society, pointed out:

the December riots revealed that the young generation is prone to misconstrued beliefs and misconceptions about religious and spiritual differences. If a democracy is not fully and constitutionally functioning properly and institutionalized, religious radicalism is bound to grow. (Sharifi 2011)

One of the most vital fields of social activity, and one where Syriac Christians face many obstacles in the KRI, is employment. Many of them complained about two things. Firstly, the Christian refugees from outside the KRI felt most stranded, since they spoke mostly Arabic and Aramaic and had much difficulty in finding a job because all Kurdish employers require their workers to have a knowledge of Kurdish. Secondly, those who did speak Kurdish often complained that in order to get most posts in public administration, or in some private Kurdish companies, they had to become a member of the KDP.⁷⁰ However, as one Chaldo-Assyrian politician admitted, this is customary in the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan, since the main political parties in Parliament divide governmental and administrative offices between them, so that the KDP takes most of them in Erbil and Duhok provinces, the PUK in Silemani. In Kurdistan, as in the whole of Iraq, the political realm is often interlaced with the private business sector. However, the requisite of KDP membership is irrelevant to ‘jobs such as teacher, doctor, unless he strives to get an executive place’.⁷¹

Probably the most under-represented fields of work for Christians in Kurdistan are the police and security forces. Though well-paid, these posts are very rarely filled by Christians. For instance, in Erbil, capital of the KRI, there are only a few Christian policemen, assigned to the Ankawa area. A reason for this is, as one Kurdish policeman living in Erbil explained, that Christians are generally peaceful people and much prefer jobs as teachers, physicians, businessmen or in administration to jobs that involve using violence.⁷² However, one Chaldo-Assyrian politician pointed out that some principles of the Quran do not allow Muslims to accept Christians or Jews as their masters, so it might be more difficult for Muslims to obey orders from a Christian superior.⁷³ This might reflect Smith's statement that both religion and nationalism reinforce cultural and social boundaries between the nations and outsiders (1999a, 336). Although the question of religious influences is quite apparent in this case, the question of Kurdish nationalism seems more ambiguous.

The requirement to be a KDP member in the area of its dominance exists not only for Christians or other non-Kurdish minorities, but for all Kurds applying for jobs in the police, army and security services, as well as more prominent appointments in public administration.⁷⁴ Secondly, the KDP's treatment of its critics and of some Christians raises doubts about KDP's engagement in Kurdish nationalism, which may be illustrated by two examples.

The first case bears out the annual international reports in which the KRG is frequently accused of violating freedom of speech and press freedom (HRW-Iraq 2016, 27–30). Probably the most appalling example took place in 2010, when a 23-year-old Kurdish journalist and student at Salahaddin University in Erbil, Sardaş Osman wrote a series of critical articles about the KRG, accusing some high-ranking officials of corruption. He subsequently received a number of threatening phone calls telling him to stop writing about the KRG and its officials. In May 2010 he was kidnapped in front of his college and after a few days he was found dead on one of Mosul's streets. Officially, the KRG blamed Ansar al-Islam, an Islamic terrorist group, for this murder, but the police did not even try to catch the killers (CPJ 2010), which aroused suspicions that the Kurdish security forces (*asayiş*) were behind his murder.⁷⁵

Generally, Christian members of Kurdistan's police forces, though still very few, are treated and protected by the KDP as loyal members even in the case of arguments with other Kurds, as was the case in the second

example: a skirmish that arose between Christian and Kurdish young men in Ankawa. The residents of Ankawa often complain that young Kurds and Arabs visiting local bars and restaurants get drunk, make too much noise on the street in the evenings and harass Christian girls, which sometimes leads to spats with Chaldo-Assyrian boys.⁷⁶ One night in May 2017, three drunk Kurdish men, allegedly peshmerga, drove to Ankawa to visit a colleague's former girlfriend, who was Christian. On the street they cut into the path of a car of two Christian brothers, who were members of the *asayis*, and started to shout at them. In the ensuing fight the Kurds shot one Christian man in his leg. His brother returned fire and injured both Kurds. All the injured were then taken to hospital, while the Christian who had shot the peshmerga was detained. The case was passed to the court and allowed for arbitration between both sides. This led to reconciliation, with the proviso that the Christian men would pay the Kurdish side some small amount of money. Although the Christian men refused to pay the money, their relatives did it, 'just to be on the safe side', and the Kurds dropped the charges, while the two Christians were released.⁷⁷

It seems quite obvious that the ruling parties in the KRI show an attachment to Kurdish nationalism, as could be clearly observed during a campaign preceding the September referendum of 2017. At that time everyone living in areas under KRG control was more or less officially compelled to take part in the voting. As one of Chaldean women said, it was plain that 'when you are working in a place full of Kurdish people, the next day the manager at work will look at your finger and ask you why there is no ink on it. They will remember that for years'. However, she admitted that it was her choice to vote, because she was convinced that the KRG treated Christians much better than the Iraqi government.⁷⁸

A number of examples of infringement of the freedom of speech, press and civil rights of Christians and local Kurds as well, show that the KRG or, to be more precise, the KDP deems other values more important than incentivising all Kurds to actively participate in the 'national task and destiny' as people equal in their 'rights and duties' (Smith 1999a, 333). The abovementioned feud between Christian and Kurdish officers, for example, reveals that the KDP does not always draw a sharp boundary between the Kurds and other ethnic groups in compliance with the principles of nationalism. On the contrary, both examples make us likely to believe that the KDP's priority is to preserve its predominance on the political scene in its footholds, Erbil and Duhok provinces, and in order to achieve this goal

it will not flinch from the violation of various rights and freedoms of the KRI's residents, both vulnerable ethnic minorities and Kurds. According to such 'party logic', either a Chaldo-Assyrian or a Kurd might be declared officially 'an enemy' or 'a friend' of Kurdistan and the Kurdish nation. By the same token, ascribing all abuses of power of the KRG to the rise of Kurdish nationalism, as often reiterated by many Assyrian diaspora circles, sounds less plausible and may lead us to misconceive current official KRG rhetoric by paying less attention to the real political mechanisms of exercising power, which do not always coincide with it. This may reflect Barth's remark that the process of mobilisation of ethnic groups in social activity is not always an accurate and direct expression of the will or ideology of the group, but often a virtual outcome of the activity of political leaders and their striving for political careers (Barth 1969, 35).

However, the situation might be even more complicated, taking into account that in Kurdish society tribal (*aşîret*) ties are still strong, compared with Chaldo-Assyrians. Tahiri even argues that 'Kurdish political parties are an extension of tribes' (Tahiri 2007, 264). Paradoxically, under the autonomous umbrella (since 1992) the *aşîret* bonds among the Kurds in Başur were reinforced, because both competing main political parties, the KDP and the PUK, encumbered by tribal heritage, fought to have control over limited economic resources and international aid. They ensured people's allegiance to their respective ruling party by both the conditional circulation of economic goods and employing force, including torture and killings, against disloyal Kurds (Tahiri 2007, 265–272). At that time even a clerk, nurse or school teacher had to be pro-KDP or pro-PUK in the relevant areas (Kutschera 1995, 7). That tribal competition exposed the incisiveness of Bruinessen's observation that 'the Kurdish movements often found "patriots" and "traitors" among the tribal elite; the rivals of a "patriot" had often little choice but becoming "traitors"' (1999, 8). Thus, the current abuses of power by the main Kurdish ruling parties may stem, not necessarily or completely from fostering a zealous Kurdish nationalism or their resistance to democratic rules and human rights, but very plausibly from the internal encumbrance of the tribal reasoning and conduct that, as Barth noted as long ago as the 1950s, hinders Kurds by assuming 'rigid and absolute identification and loyalty to abstract categories' and impels them to follow a pattern of current power distribution (1953, 129).

6.5 BETWEEN ATTACHMENT AND DETACHMENT: CHALDO-ASSYRIAN IDENTIFICATION ON THE MICRO-LEVEL

Following Barth's guidelines, I will now focus on comparing the personal views of Chaldo-Assyrians on their self-identification, not only as an ethnic group by also as a minority neighbouring a Kurdish majority. Concerning the issue of Chaldo-Assyrian self-identification I started with question 'What society do you belong to?', and some other relevant queries, with mostly structured questions and always one option left open.⁷⁹ I requested interviewees to choose between several options, with one open option, and to grade the importance of their choice from '1' to '4'. They responded as follows:

- Isabell, age around 25, student from Erbil, by religion a member of the Chaldean Catholic Church (ChCC), gave the consecutive answers: 'I'm Christian' (1), 'I'm Chaldean' (2), 'I'm Kurdistan' (3) and 'I'm Iraqi' (4). To the question 'What is your ethnicity?' she marked just 'Chaldean'.
- Fatin, age around 24, student from Erbil, by religion a member of the ChCC, responded: Christian (1), Chaldean (2), Kurdistan (3). To 'What is your ethnicity?' he replied that he was Chaldean and Iraqi, while on another occasion he said just 'Chaldean'.
- Rovani, age almost 50, politician from Erbil, by religion a member of the Assyrian Church of the East (ACE), replied simply 'I'm Chaldo-Assyrian', which coincided with the answer about his ethnicity.
- Toma, age around 45, journalist from Erbil, by religion a member of the ChCC, gave three answers: Christian, Chaldean and Iraqi. To a further query about his ethnicity he replied 'Christian'.
- Sara, age over 23, student from Erbil, by religion a member of the ChCC, responded: Christian, Iraqi, Kurdistan and Chaldean.
- Naum, age about 45, lecturer at a university in Erbil, by religion considered himself Catholic, but by ethnicity Chaldean. He underlined, however, that in reality 'we are the same origin nation', namely all Chaldeans, Syrians and Assyrians.
- George, age around 40, lecturer at a university in Duhok, by religion a member of the ChCC, replied: Christian (1), Kurdistan (2), Iraqi (4), Assyrian (4), Chaldean (4).
- Hozai, age around 35, PhD candidate from Duhok, by religion a member of the ChCC, answered: Christian (1), Iraqi (1), Assyrian

- (2), Chaldo-Assyrian (2), Kurdistani (3), while he considered his ethnicity ‘Assyrian’.
- Isho, age over 55, politician from Erbil, by religion a member of the ACE, described his ethnicity as Chaldo-Assyrian, while not being a Kurdistani.
 - Fares, age over 55, politician from Erbil, by religion a member of the ChCC, considered himself Chaldo-Assyrian/Assyro-Chaldean, and rather Iraqi than Kurdistani.⁸⁰
 - Yousif, age around 30, politician from Erbil, by religion a member of the ChCC, regarded himself first as Kurdistani and second as Chaldo-Assyrian.⁸¹
 - Abgar, age around 50, teacher from Duhok, by religion a member of the ACE, considered himself ‘not Kurdistani’ but ‘only Assyrian’, as he thought that other names (Chaldo-Assyrian, Syriac, Chaldean) were ‘about church belonging not nationality’.⁸²
 - Paulus, age over 50, working in a cultural institution in Erbil, did not specify his religion, and regarding his ethnicity presented a quite different view from the others, saying: ‘I don’t have any problem if you call me Chaldean or Assyrian. (...) I’m Iraqi from Kurdistan of Iraq, and I don’t think about nationality, I don’t think about Chaldean, Assyrian, or Christian, or Muslim, I just think about people. It’s Marxist thinking, I’m a Marxist. People are the same’.⁸³

Interestingly, many Chaldeans who were interviewed refused to be called Assyrians, because, as far as I was able to ascertain, they conceived it in a religious way, considering ‘being an Assyrian’ akin to ‘being a member of the ACE’. From this, we can say that the amendment of the official name of the Church of the East in 1979 has only strengthened the connection between the ethnic and religious meanings of the name ‘Assyrian’. Thus many Chaldeans or Orthodox Christians distrust being named ‘Assyrian’.

In most of the aforementioned answers, a new category appeared, namely ‘Kurdistani’, which required further interrogation regarding how people comprehended this term. Their responses to the question ‘What does it mean to you to be “Kurdistani”?’ are summed up below:

- Isabell: ‘the city which protects my rights as a minority and gave me all the opportunities to live as other ethnicities’;
- Sara: ‘It means that I have been born and lived in Kurdistan and have all the rights and duties towards Kurdistan’;

- Fatin: ‘To live in freedom and have a safe place and a good leader’;
- Rovani: ‘Living within the geographical area named as Kurdistan’;
- Toma: ‘living in Iraq’;
- Naum: ‘Because Kurdistan is now a region with Kurds, Turkmen and also we as a nation inside, so all call themselves “Kurdistani”, which means “we live in the Kurdistan Region”. So, different nations but the same place’;
- George: ‘I am part of Kurdistan Region but not a Kurdish person’;
- Hozai: ‘Only in geographical terms I would consider myself Kurdistani. That is, I am living in the land of Kurdistan’;
- Fares: The term ‘Kurdistani’ he associates with the Kurdish dream of independence and meaning ‘that I’m from Kurdistan’, but personally he prefers not to use this appellation, explaining that ‘I’m proud that I’m from Iraq and I’m proud that I’m from Kurdistan. I’m proud that I’m Christian, Assyro-Chaldean (...). I’m Iraqi and I’m from Kurdistan, I’m from Erbil and it’s not a shame that I’m from Kurdistan because the UN calls this area “Kurdistan”. (...) but according to the constitution now it’s a part of Iraq’,⁸⁴
- Yousif: for him, the notion of ‘Kurdistani’ is not an ethnic but a national appellation, as it means that people can say: ‘I’m a Christian, I’m Chaldean, I’m Assyrian, I’m Syriac or Armenian but I feel that Kurdistan is my land. Being *Kurdistani* is like being American in the USA. This notion is very powerful, especially within the peshmerga families and the new generation of Christians’;⁸⁵
- Abgar: for him, Kurdistan means ‘land of Kurds’, Kurds’ place, country, ‘so, we are together and here live not only Kurds, but Assyrians, Turkmen, Arabs and others, but the historical name of this land is Mesopotamia or Iraq’.

The notion of being ‘Kurdistani’ seems to be a significant new category of collective identification for Chaldo-Assyrians. Since it is mostly associated by them with a living in a particular territory (the Kurdistan Region) rather than possessing specific ethnic, religious, or other cultural attributes, its purport is much more neutral than ethnic, national or religious appellations such as Iraqi, Kurdish, Assyrian, Chaldean, Christian or Muslim. By the same token, it might be more likely to connect Chaldo-Assyrians with the other peoples of Kurdistan, such as Kurds, Turkmen and others, and streamline their non-violent, peaceful coexistence without denying the ethnic, cultural or religious identification of minorities.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS

One can observe a continuity in the process of formation of ethnic identity among Chaldo-Assyrians, but with some significant changes that emerged more recently in post-Ba'ath Iraq within the frame of the KRI. The aftermath of these changes will either cement or impair the unity of Chaldeans and Assyrians as one ethnic group. One might be bewildered hearing the numerous different collective appellations they use to name their own ethnic group or ethnic identity. Their fragmentation is unquestionably amplified by the various church denominations and is highly visible on the political scene with over ten Chaldean and Assyrian political parties. Moreover, the KRG has fostered a quite effective policy of patronage over the Christian minority living within the KRI and disputed areas, which has attracted much support for its policies among both Chaldeans and Assyrians. This policy is being questioned by the ADM as an attempt to deepen rifts between various Christian groups, Chaldeans, Syriacs and Assyrians, and to win the endorsement of the EU and USA for Kurdistan's independence. Nevertheless, there is little room for doubt that through this policy the KRG has largely contributed to the restoration of many Christian villages, churches, educational systems and social associations, and to some extent helped to bridge the gap between Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriacs.

On the other hand, we can see that currently, after decades of separation between Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriacs, they have reverted to employing one common collective ethnic name for Aramaic-speaking people, that is to say 'Chaldo-Assyrian' or 'Chaldo-Syriac-Assyrian', with the former promoted by the ADM, and the latter by the KRG. Furthermore, when in jeopardy due to the invasion by Daesh, the various Christian groups and organisations jointly sought not only urgent humanitarian aid, but also a political solution for their communities, elaborating a plan for some kind of local self-governance in the Nineveh Plain. What is more, the recent economic crisis in the KRI has made different Chaldean and Assyrian communities more open to mutual cooperation, regardless of the KRG's powerful guidelines.

The analysis of Christians' relations with the Kurds on different levels leads to the inference that the so-called domino effect seems most evident on the macro and median levels, with the dynamic campaigns of the KRG to include the Nineveh Plain in the Kurdistan Region, the takeover of Christian lands by local KDP members or the encroachment of Kurdish and Islamic symbols into Christian areas. Although cases on the median level, like the Duhok riots of 2011, are sporadic in Başur, they have some

impact in painting a stereotypical image of Kurdish Muslims among Chaldo-Assyrians, who are afraid that similar things, as long as they are not denounced publicly, may continue or even increase in the future.

A much more optimistic image of these relations emerges after comparing the median and micro levels. There are many examples of cooperation between the Kurds and Chaldo-Assyrians, especially in the field of education, and a compelling notion of 'Kurdistani' as an emerging new category of collective identification for Chaldo-Assyrians, which seems to be the germ of a new collective identity of Kurdistan's inhabitants. As we know, among Smith's six components of ethnic groups we find a myth of common descent and also an association with a specific territory (1988, 22–30). Surely, the Kurds and Chaldo-Assyrians are more likely to find premises for shared common identity by highlighting the latter than the former. Continuity in emphasising their bonds with their homeland, namely the Kurdistan area, as one of the most important tenets of their ethnic identity might lead to the gradual formation of a shared collective identity based on territorial, not cultural, attachment, as we can see for example in the USA or Switzerland. However, this common identification might easily be inhibited by a possible increase in the impact of Islamic religious rules on the KRI's legal and public life, making Chaldo-Assyrians more reserved about sharing one communal identity with the Kurds. Moreover, to make that suggestion of a new broad collective identity more plausible, it would be advisable to get feedback from the majority of Kurds in Kurdistan, to compare their understanding of the notion of 'Kurdistani' with the Chaldo-Assyrians' ones. This, however, falls beyond the scope of this paper.

To sum up, we can say that the ethnic boundary of Chaldo-Assyrians in their interactions with the Kurds seems most rigid in fields concerning religious beliefs and customs and the relevant laws, as well as the preservation of their historical lands and habitation of their villages in the Nineveh Plain. It proves to be more susceptible to some shifting (or negotiation) in economic, educational and cultural domains, and in the search for public security and a collective identity of the people of Başur, as well as practical benefits from the political activity and personal career of individuals within the autonomous structure of the KRI.

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NOTES

1. I employ the term Chaldo-Assyrians to refer to all Syriac Christians in present-day Iraq, while Chaldeans will refer to members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, and, similarly, Assyrians, generally, to adherents of the Assyrian Church of the East, and Syriacs to members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. This question will be elaborated hereunder.
2. These six components of *ethnie* will be elaborated further while interrogating the historical development of Chaldo-Assyrian ethnic identity.
3. In 1964 the Ancient Church of the East seceded officially due to disputes over the introduction of the Gregorian calendar by the Assyrian Church of the East.
4. After 2000 both Syrian churches were officially renamed 'Syriac' to avoid association with the Syrian state and nation. However, this was applied only to the English translation, and the old English designation is still widely used by church bodies. See Roberson (2015).
5. Personal interview with Bishop Bashar Matti Warda, 25 April 2015, Erbil.
6. Interview with Bashar Warda; personal interview with Ano Abdoka, 10 July 2013.
7. Led by a Greek patriarch.
8. During these two international conferences the Assyrian leaders sought to win support of the Allies for their autonomy solutions, but neither these projects nor subsequent British promises in the 1920s yielded self-governing of Assyrians in Iraq (Joseph 2000, 107–149).
9. Personal interview with Srood Maqdasy, 23 April 2015, Erbil.
10. The fifth name can be 'Judaists'.
11. Personal interview with Saadi Al-Malih, 9 July 2013, Erbil.
12. Interview with Saadi Al-Malih.
13. The genocide of 1915 cost the lives not only of about one million Armenians, but also as many as 250,000 Syriac-speaking Christians. The estimated number of victims of *Seyfê* varies and usually ranges from 250,000 to 750,000 Assyrians; see (Khosroeva 2007; Travis 2010, 237–277, 293; TNA. FO /839/23, 1–5).
14. It must be noted that under the British mandate, and even after the Simele massacre, Chaldean and Jacobite religious notables stood aside from Assyrian nationalist aspirations, backed by the Nestorian leaders, and yearned for correct and agreeable contacts with the British and consecutive Arab governments. The Simele massacre was seen as a revenge of Kurds and Arabs for Assyrians' political and military cooperation with the British, for example within a framework of special force called 'Assyrian Levies' that remained under the British control (Donabed 2015, 230–238).

15. To be precise, 'Neo-Aramaic'.
16. Interview with Saadi Al-Malih.
17. From that time, the cultural and educational activity of Chaldo-Assyrians has significantly intensified through establishing cultural clubs, schools with Syriac language and NGOs such as the Assyrian Aid Society (1991), Chaldo-Assyrian Student and Youth Union (1991) or Assyrian Women's Union (1992) (Personal interview with Yonadam Kanna, 29 June 2013, Erbil and with Jandar Hosaya, the head of the Syriac Library in Ankawa, 9 July 2013, Erbil).
18. Interview with Srood Maqdasy.
19. These elections were held after the USA, UK and France decided to create a 'no-fly' zone above Iraqi Kurdistan, from the 36th parallel northwards, as their respond to a humanitarian crisis that arose after the failure of the Kurdish uprising of 1991 (Stansfield 2003, 29, 95–96).
20. Personal interview with Fares, 3 July 2013, Erbil.
21. In the ICP, Chaldo-Assyrians actually played an important role (e.g. in 1941, Yusuf Salman Yusuf 'Fahd' was its General Secretary), forming a considerable proportion of its members reaching up to 10% (Donabed 2015, 127).
22. Personal Interview with Ano Abdoka, 21 April 2015.
23. Interview with Fares, 2013.
24. Personal interview with Salim Kako, 1 July 2013, Erbil.
25. As one Chaldo-Assyrian politician highlighted, it was very important for Christians to be mentioned in the state law by their proper own name, not just as an opposition to the majority: 'It is the first time in history that a constitution of Islamic country recognised Christianity as an official religion. Fifty-seven Muslim countries in the world and none of them recognise that! They only distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims. But even cows are non-Muslim.' Personal interview with Isho, 30 June 2013, Erbil.
26. Personal interview with Salim Kako, 25 April 2015, Erbil.
27. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2013.
28. Interview with Yonadam Kanna.
29. Personal interview with Father Douglas Bazi, Chaldean priest, 18 April 2015, Erbil.
30. Many Christians complained that they lacked support from international donor institutions, like UNHCR, and had to rely on church aid institutions such as Aid to the Church in Need, the Assyrian Church of the East Relief Fund, the Syrian Christians for Peace, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, the Evangelical Christian Alliance Church in Lebanon and the Alliance Church of Jordan (WWM 2017).

31. Phone interview with Salim Kako, 14 January 2018.
32. Personal interview with Younan Hosaya, 29 June 2013, Erbil.
33. Some add also Baghdad and Basra as cities where huge numbers of Christians used to live before 2010. Interview with Yonadam Kanna; interview with Salim Kako, 2013.
34. Interview with Yonadam Kanna.
35. Proposals that Christians in Iraq should have an autonomous region in Iraq under international protection were set forth already after WWI and later in the 1980s and 1998 (Salloum 2013, 62–63).
36. For instance, the Assyrian Women's Union, founded in 1992 and aligned with the ADM has been contested by the Syriac Chaldean Assyrian Women's Union established in Bakhdeda in 2006 (Benjamen 2011, 17–18).
37. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2013.
38. Interview with Fares, 2013.
39. The signatories emphasised that the project was consistent with the Iraqi Constitution allowing for division of Iraq into self-governing regions, and that the area would need at least ten years of international aid and protection until local forces would be prepared to defend its borders. Iraqi minorities move forward with an autonomy plan.
40. 'Beth Nahrain' in Aram means 'House of Rivers' (i.e. the Euphrates and the Tigris).
41. Interview with Salim Kako, 2018.
42. Interview with Srood Maqdasy.
43. Interview with Srood Maqdasy.
44. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2015.
45. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2015.
46. Among other well-known Christian people working in the KDP we can find Christof 'Rebwar' Yalda, a member of the KDP politburo, the mayor of Ankawa Jalal Habib Aziz, Ano Jawah Abdoka, or Franco Hariri who was assassinated by terrorists in 2001 and after that Erbil's football stadium was renamed to pay tribute to him.
47. Interview with Saadi Al-Malih.
48. Personal interview with Nasar Khanna, director of GD for Syriac Education, 16 July 2013.
49. Personal interview with Mariwan Naqshbandi from the MERA, KRG, 2013.
50. Interview with Saadi Al-Malih; interview with Salim Kako, 2013.
51. Personal interview with Bishop Rabban Al-Qas, 4 May 2015.
52. Personal interview with Dr. Haidar Laşkrî from the Koye University, 27 April 2015, Koye.

53. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2013.
54. Interview with Ano Abdoka, 2015.
55. Interview with Salim Kako, 2015.
56. In fact, it is Neo-Aramaic, a contemporary version of ancient Aramaic.
57. Personal interview with Hawzheen Slewa, 28 April 2015. Slewa gained a PhD in Kurdish literature in 2012 and recently published a book *The History of Harmota* in Kurdish.
58. Personal interview with Abdul Xaliq Muhammad Ali, 30 April 2015, Koye.
59. Personal interview by phone with Isabell, 28 December 2017; Personal interview with Fatin, 15 July 2013; interview with Salim Kako, 2013.
60. Personal interview with Shamshadden Zaya, Deputy Secretary-General of CSAPC, 22 July 2013, Duhok.
61. Interview with Isabell, 2017.
62. Interview with Fatin, 2015; personal interview with Basil, 24 April 2015; Personal interview with George, 3 May 2015.
63. Interview with Fatin, 2015.
64. interview with Hawzheen Slewa.
65. Interview with Isabell. 2015.
66. Interview with father Abu Toma, 22 July 2013.
67. Interview with Fares, 2013; interview with Isabell, 2015.
68. Duhok is called Nohadra in Aramaic.
69. Personal interview with Fares, 24 April 2015, Erbil.
70. Interview with Fatin, 2015; interview with George.
71. Interview with Fares, 2015.
72. Personal interview with Hemin, Kurdish policeman, 20 April 2015.
73. Interview with Fares, 2015.
74. Interview with Fares, 2015.
75. Interview with Isabell, 2017.
76. Interview with Fatin, 2013.
77. Phone interview with Fatin, 29 December 2017.
78. Interview with Isabell, 2017. See also Reese (2017, 163–167).
79. Unfortunately, not all questions were answered, especially in questionnaires.
80. Interview with Fares, 2015.
81. Personal interview with Yousif, 11 July 2013.
82. Personal interview with Abgar, 5 May 2015, Duhok.
83. Personal interview with Paulus, 30 June 2013, Erbil.
84. Interview with Fares, 2015.
85. Personal interview with Yousif, 22 April 2015, Erbil.

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The Nation of the *Sur*: The Yezidi Identity Between Modern and Ancient Myth

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Are the Yezidis Kurds or a separate nation? Does the term ‘Yezidi’ denote a religion or a nationality? These questions still excite politicians and academics, who attempt to assign the Yezidis to one precise category. Until recently this kind of question seemed to belong primarily to the European worldview, where the issue of the ‘nation’ really matters. However, since the Yezidis, a small community of North Mesopotamia, became a part of the geopolitical game in the region, this issue has also become important to them. Moreover, the project of Kurdistan independence, which has been gaining momentum in recent years, has lent urgency to the issue. The Yezidis are aware of this. If the modern identity of Kurdistan’s inhabitants will be built exclusively on the concept of nationhood, encompassing those linked by blood bonds or a common culture and language, the Yezidis must ask the question: are they Kurds or not? If they are, it will be their country, but if they are not, they will remain only a drop in the Kurdish ocean.

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Therefore, it seems important to pay more attention to the voice of the Yezidi tradition on its own terms, as presented in religious hymns, written documents and statements by religious authorities. It is important to understand how Yezidis have defined their own community and its origins, as well as how they have perceived those who did not belong to it.¹ I would like also to analyse a thread that still arouses controversy among the Yezidis, and which is crucial in my opinion to understanding their self-identification. It is connected with references to Caliph Yezid ibn Mu'awiya and the pre-Islamic era.

7.2 IN THE EYES OF OTHERS

Although the main topic of this article is how the Yezidis perceive themselves, for a more complete description, I would like to present a few significant examples of how they have been described by their neighbours, non-Yezidis living in the wider region, and how this picture changed over time.² This is because, for many years, the only written perception of the Yezidis was created by others. In order to understand the manner in which they were depicted, it is worth bearing in mind the old Latin legal maxims: *Cui bono?* and *Is fecit, cui prodest*, to ask whose interest was served by such a description. Hardly ever, if at all, have the Yezidis been portrayed for their own benefit. The *corpus* of knowledge about them was produced mostly by those who desired to exercise power over them in their homeland and therefore can be discussed in relation to the postcolonial criticism of the marriage of knowledge and power, started by Said in 1978.

Centuries of the religious taboo regarding literacy made the Yezidis unable to fully express themselves in the written word.³ Their popular image and reactions towards them have thus depended on how they were portrayed in the governmental documents and literature of the empires that claimed the land where the Yezidis grazed their flocks, and very often claimed them as subjects. This situation has changed only a little today, because they still live at the crossroads of the interests of the East and the West, in Northern Mesopotamia and the South Caucasus where the regional powers clash, and where the state borders during the last centuries have constantly moved.

The way in which others describe the Yezidis can be seen as an evaluation founded on a comparison, an approach that did not end with the colonial era. The elements recognised as essential to the Yezidis were compared with the key elements of those who described them. Next, the

Yezidis were evaluated within a hierarchical reference system. Its principle was often provided by the dominant narrative consisting of the popular myths of the author's community. Myths and worldviews change, though. So, depending on who produced these reports, censuses and scientific analyses, one could imagine the Yezidis in a very variable and often contradictory ways: as Kurds, Arabs, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Christian heretics or Devil worshippers.

The very first reports on the Yezidis came from times when the religious perspective dominated. A Persian expert on religious sects, Shahrastani (d. 1153), wrote in his *Book of Sects and Creeds* about the *Yezidiyya*, a *Khariji* sub-sect consisting of the followers of Yezid ibn Unaisa (Anthony 2012, 40–41):

The Yezidis are the followers of Yezīd bn Unaisa [...]. He believed that God would send an apostle from the Persians [...] and as a result he would leave the religion of Mohammed [...] and follow the religion of the Sabians mentioned in the Koran.... (Joseph 1909a, 116–117)

By connecting them with Kharijites (lit. 'those who exit the community'), Shahrastani suggested that they were perceived as apostates by the Islamic orthodoxy. In this though, we are not sure if he means the same 'Yezidis' as those living in North Mesopotamia.

Muslim authors have generally described the Yezidis as an isolated group of mystics, who worship Umayyade Caliph Yezid ibn Mu'awiya and follow Adi ibn Musafir (d. 1162), a pious Muslim born in Syria, who, after studying in Baghdad, came to the Hakkari mountains to live an ascetic life. An Arab biographer contemporary to Adi, Abu Sa'd 'Abd al-Karim al-Sam'ani (d. 1166), in his work *Kitab al-Ansab* wrote:

A large group of them whom I met in Iraq in the mountains of Ḥulwān and in the vicinity of al-Yāzid. They lead an ascetic life in the villages of those mountains. [...] Rarely do they associate with other people. They believe in Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah and that he was righteous. (Frayha 1946, 20)

In turn, Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282), a Muslim scholar born in Erbil, stated in his biographical note on Adi that:

The *shaiikh* Adi Ibn Musafir al-Hakkari was an ascetic, celebrated for the hilliness of his life, and the founder of a religious order called after him *al-Adawia*. [...] [He] retired from the world and fixed his residence in the

mountain of the Hakkari tribe, near Mosul, where he built a cell and gained the favour of the people in that country to a degree unexampled in the history of the anchorites. (1843, 197–198)

The majority of these people were local Kurdish tribes sometimes associated with the Zoroastrian tradition, as mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Chronicon Syriacum* written by Bar Hebraeus, who also referred to ‘Sheikh Adi, whom the Kurds of the country of Mawsil hold to be a prophet’ (Bar Hebraeus 1932, 453):

In the year six hundred and two of the Arabs (A.D. 1205) a race of the Kurds who were in the mountains of Madai [near Hulwan – A.R.], and who are called Tirahaye [Tairahite], came down from the mountains, and wrought great destruction in those countries. (...) Now these mountaineers had not entered the Faith of the Muslims, but they had adopted the primitive paganism and Magianism [*mgnwšmt*]. (462)⁴

Of course, the Zoroastrian attribution does not have to be true; it could simply mean that their faith did not correspond with the main religion accepted in the area. With time the most common definition for the Yezidis established them as the ‘Devil-worshippers’. They were accused of worshipping Satan as a black dog or a peacock. An Ottoman explorer, Evliya Çelebi (b. 1611) wrote about the Yezidis that, for them, the dog is sacred, that they eat and sleep with dogs and that, when a Yezidi child is born, he drinks the milk of a black dog first (Çelebi 1896, 61–71; cf. Beausobre 1739, 613; Hyde 1700, 491). They were called *Qalbi* and ‘*Abadat al-Shaitan*, in Turkey; *Abede-i-Iblis*, and *Shaitan parast* in Persia. Describing them in such terms, even worse than ‘infidels’, deprived them of dignity and allowed others to treat them like objects to be freely disposed of or annihilated. In the Ottoman era, this manifested in *fatwas* issued by muftis who accused the Yezidis of Satan worship, deification of ‘Adi the Umayyad’, following ‘the cursed Caliph Yezid’ and belief in reincarnation. Muslims were encouraged to kill them, and to take their wives and children into captivity (Al-Damlooji 1949, 428–439; Al-Jabiri 1981, 165–166). In the *fatwa* issued by the mufti of the Ottoman state, Ahmed ibn Mustafa Abu al-Imadi (d. circa 1571), we read almost the same statements as those presented in ISIS’ publications (‘The Revival of Slavery. Before the Hour’ 1435):

Their killer is a conqueror and the one killed by them is a martyr for their war and fight in a great holy war and great martyrdom. (...) The reason requiring their killing is their belief in Adi, son of Musafir the Omayyad, as being the great partner to the God of Glory (...). Or the reason is in their complete love of Satan the cursed and their belief that he is the Peacock of Angels (...). They are more infidel than the original infidels and their killing is permissible according to the four schools of theology (...). And the starting on their murder and the murder of their Chiefs is of the religious obligations. (...) They [the present rulers: A. R.] must kill their men capture their children and women and sell them to the Muslims like the rest of infidels and they have full right to make use of their virgin girls and wives (...). Imam Numan (...) said that Yazid is cursed. (...) All of them are bastards by the (words) of all the religion's theologians. [...]⁵

Putting an end to the corruptions of this group from the face of the earth is a legal duty and for this I wrote this religious edict. (Ahmed 1975, 385–390)⁶

Being illiterate and having no 'holy' book, the Yezidis were also excluded from the community of *Ahl al-Kitab*; this resulted in numerous persecutions and caused the Yezidis to migrate north, to Eastern Anatolia and then to Transcaucasian territories free of Muslim control.

A significant migration to the area of the South Caucasus began in the second half of the eighteenth century. At that time, Yezidis' representatives asked for shelter from the King of Eastern Georgia (Kartli and Kakheti), Heraclius II (1762–1798), who tried to gain allies among the Assyrians and Yezidis.⁷ He counted on the involvement of both communities due to the war declared by Ottoman Empire to Russia in 1768. In a letter sent to the Assyrians and to the representative of the Hasanli tribe, Çoban-Aga, the king invited them to participate in the fight against the Turks. It was a rare moment in Yezidi history when they were treated as subjects. In answer, Heraclius II received a declaration: 'We obey your orders. The whole Yezidi nation is ready to accept your domination'⁸ (Macharadze 1989, 50–51). Heraclius sent a letter to the Russian authorities, dated August 13, 1770, adding a note concerning Çoban-Aga that:

This Yezidi is neither a Christian nor a Muslim. He is rather a supporter of Christians and the enemy of the Muslims. He also wants to join us. We also, like them, are very oppressed by the Muslims. (51–52)

It should be noted that the Muslims with whom the Yezidis were in permanent conflict were not only Turks or Arabs, but also their nearest neighbours, the Kurds, who looked at them with undisguised contempt. A father of Kurdish historiography, the prince of Bitlis, Şerefxanê Bedlîsî [Bedlisi] (d.1603/4), mentioned in his *Şerefname* the ‘Yezidi-Kurds’, *Akrad-e Yezidi, Korde-ye radde-ye Yezidi* (Bedlisi 1860, 221–222) and enumerated their tribes:

those as Daseni, Khalidi, Basyan, and some of Bakhti, Mahmudi and Dunbeli, who have a Yezidi faith (*mazhab-e Yezidi*) and belong to the disciples (*muridan*) of sheikh Adi ibn al-Musafir, who was one of the followers of the Marwanid caliphs. And they assign themselves to him. According their false beliefs sheikh Adi took upon himself our fast and pray, and on the day of Resurrection we will get solace without being exposed to condemnation and punishment. (1415)⁹

He also mentions their peculiar conflict with the Shia followers of Hossein, noting that ‘an old enmity between the Hosseini and the Yezidis continues’ (277). However, he generally evaluates ‘abominable Yezidis’ (115) and their ‘inappropriate Yezidi customs’ (310) by contrasting two Kurdish groups: ‘those from the tribes that followed the path of the people of the Sunnah and the community’ against those, who ‘have chosen the unrighteous Yezidi path and follow that nation (*qoum*)’ (263). This Muslim Kurds’ opinion, in which they distance themselves from the Yezidis, has not changed for a long time. The end of the book *Habits and Customs of Kurds* (*Adat u rasumatname-ye Akradiye*), written two hundred years later by Muslim scholar Mela Mehmûdê Bayazîdî (d. 1859), is significant:

There is also a Yezidi tribe in Kurdistan who do not belong to Muslims; they are the Yezidis. And all of the customs, rites and laws among them are different. This tribe worships Iblis and calls Satan ‘Melek Tawus.’ But they speak Kurdish. If I tell everything about them, the book will be extremely long. It is enough. (Bayazîdî 1963: 189b/190b and 64/74)¹⁰

Those of the Yezidis who did not run away from persecutions and remained in Eastern Anatolia had to deal with the tensions triggered by the Kurds from whom the Ottoman authorities recruited cavalry units called *Hamidiçeh*. In 1891, in order to increase control of the state’s eastern territories, Sunni Kurds were encouraged to produce such troops.

This strengthened internal tensions in the region and intensified divisions within the Kurds (Duguid 1973, 145–147; Klein 2011; Reynolds 2014; Sykes 1908, 452). It should be noted, however, that the Yezidi tribe from Şingal also joined the *Hamidiye* under the leadership of Hasan Kanjo, after he officially accepted Islam (Guest 1993, 140). Within four years, 57 such Kurdish divisions, with a total of 50,000 soldiers, were formed (Vanly 2005, 155; Averyanov 1900, 241–285), and were used, with others, to suppress the Armenian rebellion. The Yezidis became victims of local pogroms as well (e.g. in 1895 in Bitlis). In 1901, the Russian consul, Vladimir Mayevskiy, wrote in his monograph on the Vilayet of Van:

In previous years, during the anti-Armenian operations of the Kurds, the Yezidis were also subjected to some persecution and Kurds during their marches apparently did not bypass some of the Yezidi villages. During all meetings with the Yezidis, they do not give themselves a miss of practice of expressing regrets to the Kurds, who allegedly persecute them as much as the Armenians. But these grievances seem to be exaggerated and are rather the result of the permanent latent hatred towards Muslims. In fact, in 1892, they were persecuted, especially in the Vilayet of Mosul. (236–237)¹¹

The events of 1892 were associated with an attempt to convert the Yezidis to Islam. Forced conversions intensified, especially during the reign of Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909), who pursued a policy in favour of ‘Muslim unity’ (Duguid 1973, 139; Çetinsaya 2006, 80). This was also one of the tools used to force the Yezidis to return to the ‘right path’ of religion, Islam, treating them as Sunnis.

The descriptions of the Yezidis changed. In censuses they were classified as ‘Muslims’ and Turks denied them the right to declare themselves ‘Yezidis’ (Gölbaşı 2013: 10). At the same time, they started to be defined in the Ottoman documents not as ‘infidels’ but as ‘apostates’ (*mürted*), which made it legally required to give them a chance to return to the bosom of religion. This qualification, although it did not allow legal murder, provoked forced conversions, which often ended with massacres (Gölbaşı 2013, 4; 2008). At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman authorities attempted to convert the Sheikhan Yezidis with the help of two specially committees: the *Heyet-i Tefhimiye*, ‘Advice and Persuasion Commission’, and the *Fırka-i Islahiye*, ‘Division of Reform’ (2013, 5–6).¹² The price for refusal was the obligation to pay taxes and

perform military service, but the advice did not work, and the persuasion began to take increasingly bloody forms.

As the Yezidis inhabited areas where the geopolitical interests of empires clashed, they, as well as the Kurds, became groups of special attention. Russia counted on military cooperation with the Kurds in the war against Turkey. According to contemporary documents, such as a note by Russian Consul General Ivanov, special attention was paid to the Yezidis, whose conflict with the Turks and the Muslim Kurds made them natural Russian supporters:

They were never Muslims [...] and therefore not having the dogma of the successor of the Prophet Muhammad do not see any responsible role for themselves in the Caliphate of Sultan. (Averyanov 1900, 87–88)¹³

For the Russians, though, the Yezidis were still a largely unknown community, as is seen in the first reports. Lieutenant-General Nikolay Ushakov, responsible for the war correspondence of the imperial Russian military leader Paskevich, recalls ‘a leader of 300 Kurdish families, Hassan Aga’ (Ushakov 1836, 358), who commanded cavalry consisting of 100 horsemen ‘distinguished by special zeal and courage’ (359–361).

Kurds claim to be the Mohammedans of Omar sect, but their ignorance and remnants of ancient cult which mingled with the current forms of piety are the reasons why the Muslims consider them infidels. Among them there is a very large so-called faction of the Ezdis [Эзды] or the Yezidis [Езиды], who lead a nomadic life throughout Kurdistan [...]. They are essentially implacable enemies of Christians and Muslims, and they worship the evil spirit, about whom in their presence is not allowed to talk disrespectfully. They adopted the name of the caliph, Arabic Yezid [Езид], the second of the Umayyad dynasty, who had killed Huseyn, the son of Ali, and until now in Mosul they show the tomb of their founder, Sheikh Aod [Шехъ-Аод]. The Yezidis do not deny themselves wine and other strong drinks, and for this derogation they experienced bloody persecutions by Muslims. They have no clergy, nor holy books. [...] Up to now, no one researched the language and religion of the Kurds. Such inquiries could shed new light on ancient Asia. (122–123)¹⁴

Ambiguity concerning the identity of the Yezidis is also reflected in the Russian population censuses (*Russian population census 1897*, tab. XIII; *Soviet population census 1926*; cf. Amoev and Mosaki 2014) and reports published annually in Tiflis by the ‘Caucasian Calendar’, where they appear once as a separate group, and once as Kurds. In turn, the Soviet census of

1939 (and subsequently 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989) included them within the group of ‘Kurds’. Nevertheless, in official documents such as passports and identity cards issued in both the Armenian and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republics, under the heading ‘nationality’ the term ‘Yezidi’ was written.

A special case in the history of the description of the Yezidis’ identity concerns Armenia, where a considerable number of them have migrated over the centuries. They found refuge among Christians, who still had the memory of the 1915–1917 genocide in which the Muslim Kurds also participated (encouraged and provoked by the Turks). In addition, the events connected with the Karabakh conflict resulted in an Armenian force attempting to separate the Yezidis from the Muslim Kurds accused of supporting Azerbaijan. Formally this division was sanctioned in 2001, although even in 1988 the representatives of a Nationwide Conference of the Armenian Yezidis asked the authorities of the USSR to grant them the status of a separate ethnic group (Khachatryan 2004, 7; Krikorian 2006). The request was considered positively and taken into account in the 1989 Soviet census. To this day the Transcaucasian Yezidis are divided, with part of the diaspora considering themselves Kurds and another part speaking about the independent Yezidi nation. In May 2001, the Armenian Parliament adopted a law establishing a new language called ‘Yezidi’ (*Ēzdîkî*). For political reasons it was not considered a local variant of Kurmanji, but a separate language, which is written not in Latin or Arabic script in the manuals distributed by the state, but in Cyrillic. Thus, referring to the linguistic criterion as a determinant of national identification, the Yezidis were classified as a separate nation in the census conducted in the same year. Among 40,620 Yezidis living in Armenia (and 1519 Kurds listed separately), the vast majority (31,310) declared *Ēzdîkî* to be their mother tongue, while only 5278 declared it to be ‘Armenian’ and 230 ‘Russian’ (*Armenian Population Census 2001*, tab. 5.1 and 5.2). The curious report prepared for The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe stated that:

The number of Yezidis in Armenia in 1830 was 324 registered. At present there are 40,500, whose ancestors immigrated from Iran and Mesopotamia. [...] They are Zoroastrians. They speak Yezidi, Armenian. [...] Kurds settled in Armenia during the Turkish and Persian power, emigrating from Mesopotamia and partly from Iran. They are Moslems or Zoroastrians. [...] They speak Kurdish, Armenian. [...] Armenia, as an expression of good will, bears the responsibility for the above-mentioned five languages [Assyrian, Yezidi, Greek, Russian and Kurdish – A.R.], especially since three of them (Assyrian, Yezidi and Kurdish) are not state languages in any country. (*The First Report of the Republic of Armenia... 2003*, 5 and 11)¹⁵

Most changes in the perception of the Yezidi identity, which also resulted in profound revisions to their self-consciousness, can be noted in the first half of the twentieth century. Two factors in particular seem to have been behind this change: the Western secular ‘myths’ of communism and nationalism. In this period, the Yezidis abandoned the centuries-old prohibition of the use of the written word. The Bolsheviks contributed greatly to this, forcing them or enticing them with the promise of social advancement to participate in public education. In 1929, according to a directive of The National Board of Education of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, a new version of Kurdish script (based on the Latin alphabet) was developed and widely distributed among the Yezidis.¹⁶ Communists, with the help of new mass propaganda tools, tried to implant secular and atheist ideology among them. One of these tools was the film *Yezidi-Kurds* (1932) directed by Amasi Martirosyan, where the tribe of the Yezidis, camping on the slopes of Aragats, was portrayed as an ignorant mass of illiterate nomads praying to the sun and stuck in old, pagan beliefs, kept in them by the greedy class of Yezidi clergy. In order to keep them in serfdom, the film claimed, Sheikhs spread the belief that literacy was a sin against God. As a remedy, the film suggested modernisation based on the rejection of religion combined with learning the alphabet in schools founded by the communists. The last cadre showed an entrance to a newly built school where, above the communist hammer and sickle, a large inscription in Kurmanji was placed: *Dîn jere, xweyîkin ziyara* (‘Religion is a poison, take care of children’).¹⁷ Indeed, many of the Transcaucasian Yezidis became communists, and many of those who overcame their unwillingness to write later became reputable citizens and popular writers.

Apart from communism, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Yezidis were also implanted with another modern ideology: nationalism.¹⁸ If the Yezidis were earlier described from a religious perspective, over time, religion was gradually replaced by the ‘national’ criterion. The secularist notion of ‘nation’, understood mostly in the primordial way as ‘being Kurds’ and the Kurdish-Yezidi dichotomy were, in a sense, imposed on the Yezidis by the dominant discourse ingrained in modern myths of science and politics. Nationalism was founded upon an idea of secularisation and the separation of the scientific and public spheres from the religious context (Smith 1986), which was considered ‘backward’, while ‘beliefs’ started to be understood as ‘non-objective’ and ‘non-scientific’. The fundamental objection raised in most of the earlier descriptions of the Yezidis, their supposed Satanism, lost any meaning in the secularised discourse,

and now appears only in the publications of so-called Islamic State, promoting a pre-modern worldview.¹⁹

The modern nationalist myth built upon the common origin of the Kurds has been spread among the Kurds and Yezidis by their intelligentsia, who opened them up to Western political ideas. Intellectual leaders like the Bedirxan brothers started to describe ‘Kurdishness’ by appealing to the alleged ancient Yezidi roots common to all of the Kurds. As Sureya Bedirxan [Bedir Khan] (1928, n. 14) stated:

Many Kurds, notably the Yezidis, have since clung to their ancestral Zoroastrian faith.

‘Yezidism’ linked with ‘Zoroastrianism’ was needed as a binder of the Pan-Kurdish ideology and was also supported by Mesud Barzani, uniting the different tribes that inhabit different states and speak different dialects.²⁰ This strongly resembled the colonial approach and fixed the image of the Yezidis as backward ancestors stuck in ancient pagan superstitions. As Christine Allison stated: ‘having been hailed as “the original Kurds” by the Iraqi Kurdish political establishment, and “Zoroastrians” by the PKK, their symbolic status as a sort of living fossilised ancestor is deeply ambivalent’ (Allison 2008, 2; 2014, 103–108). The ‘Kurdisation’ of the Yezidis (or ‘Yezidisation’ of the Kurds) was combined with an attempt to depreciate Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, who, as an Arab and a descendant of the Umayyads, did not fit the vision of Kurdish ethnic purity. Such trends should also be seen as a response to the earlier political action of the Ba’athist government, the aim of which was the ‘Arabisation’ of the Yezidis by emphasising their associations with the Arab Umayyad dynasty (Al-Jabiri 1981, 225–226). Both ‘Arabisation’ and ‘Kurdisation’ resulted from treating Yezidis’ identity as an element of the political games of others, rather than a thing in itself. In Nadia Murad’s words: ‘for a long time we had been pulled between the competing forces of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds, asked to deny our Yazidi heritage and conform to Kurdish or Arab identities’ (Murad 2017, 4; cf. 21, 40, 247). This propaganda can be illustrated by the titles of two modern Iraqi publications, which identify the Yezidis with the Arabs or question their ‘Arabism’: *The Yezidis: Kurdish Group Led by Arabs* (Husayn 1995) and *Taj Al-Arifeen: Al-Sheikh Udday bin Musafir al-Kurdy Al-Hakary is not an Umayyad* (Muzury 2009).

Last but not least, it should be mentioned that, after the leading role of religious myth was marginalised and replaced by the belief in the primacy

of scientific explanations, scientists also became a part of this political-ideological skirmish. As Martin Strohmeier noted, ‘The Bedir Khāns did not invent just any claim, but based it on the findings of European scholars, many of whom had been fascinated by the Yezidis’ (Strohmeier 2003, 112 and 167, n. 17). In fact, among academic scholars one can find representatives or supporters of each of the above-mentioned positions concerning the Yezidis’ identity. Starting from the first modern reports and analysis, some considered the Yezidis remnants of ancient Assyrians (Ainsworth 1861; cf. ch. ‘Nationality’ in Joseph 1919, 194), Zoroastrians, Manicheans or a sect born of a Christian heresy, even Armenians, as noted by Solomon Yegiazarov (1891, 179). Others, such as Michelangelo Guidi, called them a *‘fenomeno essenzialmente curdo’* of Islamic identity (1933, 390; cf. 1932; Al-Azzawi 1951, 81 and 84). Others, such as anthropologist Henry Field, perceived them as ‘one of the most important racial minority groups in Iraq’ (1951, 43). John Guest described them as a community of Kurds (1993, xiii), while Philip Kreyenbroek in turn recognised them as a religious Kurdish community of Mithraistic or Zoroastrian roots (2015, 1992; Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 3), others, such as Garnik Asatrian and Victoria Arakelova (2010) consider the Yezidis a ‘separate ethno-religious entity’ (Asatrian 2009, 3) definitely different from the Kurds. By developing theories on the Yezidis’ identity, scholars provide the grist to the mill for both politicians and the Yezidis themselves.

From the second half of the twentieth century, scholars of Yezidi origin (including Lamara Pashayeva, Kerim Amoev, Kerim Ankosi, Dimitri Pirbari, Kovan Khanki and Khanna Omarkhali) have appeared in the field of Kurdish and Yezidi studies. They are also divided about the question of Yezidi identity. As the spiritual leader of the Georgian diaspora stated in an important article on the Yezidi identity:

This issue [...] nowadays took the form of a hidden confrontation between identifying themselves as the Yezidis and considering themselves the Kurds, which is partly warmed up by external forces. (Pirbari and Rzgojan 2014, 170)²¹

7.3 THE OLDEST TESTIMONIES OF YEZIDI SELF-IDENTIFICATION

The first written traces that show the Yezidis’ own point of view regarding themselves and their relationships with others are few and fragmentary. This is mainly due to the taboo on literacy, which was in force for centuries.

Only members of Sheikh Hasan's family from the clan of *Adani* sheikhs were exempted from this prohibition.²² The situation changed in the twentieth century, mainly because of the Soviets. With time, the global wave of popularisation of a compulsory education, and widespread access to written media, the entire Yezidi community moved away from this prohibition. Day by day, the primarily oral community moved further into a literary phase and the ideas spread through worldwide media, codifying customs, rules and theological principles hitherto predominantly learned by listening to religious hymns (*qewls*), poems (*beyts*, *qasidas*) and prayers (*du'a*).

We know only a few written documents from the time when the taboo on writing was in force. These can be divided into four categories.

Firstly there are texts that were composed for the needs of the community, such as sacred manuscripts written in classical Arabic, called *mişûrs*, individual collections of religious texts called *cilvê* and *keşkûl* (Omarkhali 2017, 55–72), or catechisms, such as the one composed at the request of the Yezidis in Transcaucasia, written on the command of the Yezidi spiritual leader, Ismail Beg. These texts are generally still kept in secret and reluctantly shown to strangers. Ismail Beg's activity marks a clear turning point in the Yezidis' history. Although illiterate he apparently was not averse to the written word and sent his children to schools. In writing he saw hope for the Yezidis to survive in the modern world. As he declared to the German journalist Paul Schütz, he wanted to 'write down the principles of our religion and publish them in all the languages of Europe, so that our faith may be known before it perishes' (Schütz 1930, 135–42, cited by Guest 1993, 185). His idea was realised in 1925 and in 1934 the world saw a book written in Arabic, *El Yazidiyya qadiman wa hadithan* (*The Yazîdîs: Past and Present*) consisting of Ismail Beg's autobiography, an exposition of the Yezidis' doctrine and customs and a description of historical events in Sinjar (Chol 1934). Unfortunately, the author did not live to see its publication.

The second group of texts consists of those written under pressure from others, such as a petition from 1872, prepared to avoid conscription into the Ottoman army, in which the Yezidis formulated their religious rules, or the *Sheikhan Memorial*, addressed by the Yezidis to the administrative inspector of Mosul in 1931.

The third category comprises texts written by a founder or reformer of the Yezidi community, Adi ibn Musafir, which are in fact the oldest preserved sources relating to the Yezidi tradition (Frank 1911). Although

Sheikh Adi is recognised by the Yezidis as God's incarnation and worshipped as one of the three main divine persons (along with Tawûsî Melek and Sultan Ezid), his writings, except the *Qasida of Sheikh Adi* (if he is the author) do not play any role in Yezidism and are not remembered by the community. Perhaps this is because they belonged to his early life, before the founding of the mystics' community in Laliş, and contain ideas typical of Muslim orthodoxy, with a surprising lack of references to specific Yezidi motifs.

In the fourth category, one can include the Yezidi apocrypha, so-called books (but very short), esp. *Meshefa Resh* and *Kiteba Jihwe*, which are doubtful and should be regarded either as forgeries (although written by an author who knew the Yezidi culture very well),²³ or a kind of catechism prepared for the internal use of *Qewwals* dealing with the oral tradition and teaching the principles of the Yezidi faith. In the latter case, they should be included in the first category.

Taking into account the small number of written sources, and their limited valuation by the Yezidis themselves, in order to investigate the Yezidi concept of their community and its religion, one should turn to their sacred hymns. These *qewls*, recited from generation to generation are the oldest and the most authoritative source of the Yezidis' theology, wisdom, law and myths, an equivalent to the holy scriptures of other religions. For centuries they were transmitted orally and their first printed publications appeared only in the late 1970s. It is worth noting that the language of the *qewls* is Kurmanji with a strong presence of Arabic words. The Yezidis sometimes call it *Êzdîkî*, but within a generally accepted linguistic taxonomy it is described as the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish or as Northern Kurdish.

7.3.1 Şerfedîn, Êzî(d)

One of the main self-identifying phrases present in the *qewls* concerns the name of the Yezidis' religion:

Me dîn Şerfedîne û Êzî atqate.

*Our religion is Sherfedin and belief is Ezi.*²⁴

Me dîn Şerfedîn, atqad Siltan Êzîde.

*Our religion is Sherfedin, belief is Sultan Ezid.*²⁵

The religious terminology of the *qewls* includes a distinction, derived from Muslim theological reflection, between such terms as ‘*atqat*’ (belief), ‘*din*’ (religion) and ‘*iman*’ (faith). What draws special attention here is the approach to definition, a specific Yezidi manner of naming expressed through personification. Calling their beliefs ‘Yezi(d)’ or ‘Sultan Yezid’, the Yezidis suggest that he manifests through them²⁶ and makes them the ‘Yezidis’ (kurm. *Êzîdî*). This refers to a caliph, Yezid ibn Muawiyya, a member of the Umayyad house (sub-group of Quraysh),²⁷ from whom Adi ibn Musafir also originated, although this is rarely admitted officially. Both of these historical figures are perceived in Yezidism as God’s incarnations.

On the other hand, the Yezidi religion took the name ‘*Sherfedin*’, which etymologically means: ‘the honour of the religion’ (Asatrian and Arakelova 2014, 29–30) and is a component of the full name of Sheikh Adi.²⁸ Most likely it is derived from a Yezidi leader living in the thirteenth century, Sharaf al-Din (d. 1257/8), who is believed to return in the end times as a *mehdi*.²⁹ This explanation for choosing the name of Sherfedin was given to me by the spiritual leader of the Georgian Yezidis, Dimitri Pirbari (Pir Dima):

Sherfedin is a collective image and personification of the Yezidi religion. Sharfedin is a Yezidi leader, the son of Sheikh Hasan, who lived in Shingal, Sinjar, where is his temple. In my opinion, in the Sherfedin’s time the final canonization of the Yezidi religion took place. Hence the combining the whole of this canonization with his name. One can also say that Sherfedin is the Sheikh Adi’s true name. And thirdly – they often say that Sherfedin is one of the names of Tawûsî Melek. In my opinion, however, the name is primarily related to the person who lived in Sinjar. I think that during his time the canonization finished. And that is why it is said that this is his religion, his way, his law. (Rodziewicz 2017, 38)

The same formula cited above, but in inverted form, is a component of the Yezidi Declaration of Faith: ‘*Atqata min Siltan Êzîd, Dîné min Şerfedîn*’ (*Şehdetiya Dîn*, Omarkhali 2017, 366–370) giving a sense of the entire religion, the beginning and the end of the Yezidi doctrine—from its starting point connected with an Umayyad (Quraysh) origin, to the end, which can be understood here as a final stage of the codification of the religious principles as well as in the terms of eschatological vision.

7.3.2 Sunet, Gelî Suniya, Sunetxane, Êzîdxane

The most important name denoting the Yezidi community in the *qewls* is ‘Sunet’, a word of Arabic origin. The term ‘Sunet’ is frequently used by the Yezidis to separate the true representatives of tradition, ‘the People of the Tradition’ (*Gelî suniya*),³⁰ from apostates or heretics, called *şeri’et* (Ar. *Şari’a*, ‘Law’). This layout of concepts is still alive among the Yezidis. During my fieldwork, I heard, for example, that when someone broke the religious injunction of endogamy by marrying a non-Yezidi, it was said of him that ‘he became *şeri’et*’, which means, that he no longer belongs to the tradition. In addition, the distinction between the People of the Tradition and the People of the Law can symbolise those who follow direct mystic experience and oral teachings, as opposed to those for whom the written word is the foundation of faith and who follow the Quranic-based law and Islamic institutions.³¹ Some examples of the use of these terms are present in the *Qewlê Aşê Mihbetê* (st. 5–38, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 380–385):

<i>Muhib malî şeri’ete</i>	<i>The House³² of the Shari’a are lovers of possessions</i>
<i>Sunet bi heqqî wê diherite [...]</i>	<i>The Tradition³³ truly goes its own way [...]</i>
<i>Mekanê Paşayê min Sitiya Êzidyê têda. [...]</i>	<i>The place³⁴ of my King is on the neck of the Yezidis. [...]</i>
<i>Ya Siltan Êzî tû li ber me vekey deriyêt biwab [...]</i>	<i>Oh Sultan Ezi, open the doors of the gates for us [...]</i>
<i>Gelî suniya, desta berden ji şolêt xirab. [...]</i>	<i>Oh people of the Tradition, abandon (all) destructive³⁵ works. [...]</i>
<i>Şerfedîn atqata me û Siltan Êzîde.</i>	<i>Our belief is Sherfedin and Sultan Ezid.</i>

The distinction mentioned above is frequently used in one of the most venerable Yezidi hymns: *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*. In the version that I received from Pir Dima (attested by Bavê Çawiş, Pir Şero), we hear:

<i>Ya Rebî şikir, ez dame ser pişka sunetê [...]</i>	<i>O Lord, thank you, You made me a part of Tradition [...]</i>
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<i>Paďsé min xweş suhibete, Lê rûniştinibûn muhibete, Paďsé min li wê derecê kir hed û sede.</i>	<i>My King is a pleasant interlocutor They³⁶ sat [with Him] in Love My King from this level created rules and limits.</i>
<i>Paďsé min hed û sed li wê çêkirin, Şerî'et û heqîqet ji hev cibê kirin, Sunete mixfî bú hingê dehir kirin.</i>	<i>My King made of it rules and limits Shari'a and Truth, he separated one from another The Tradition was in hiding, then he revealed it.</i>
<i>Sunete mixfî bú hingê kirin debare, Paďsé min heqîqet navda dibinare, Gotê: ezîzê min! sunet li ku bú, li ku girtibû ware?</i>	<i>The Tradition was hidden, then they revealed it My King sent the Truth into it³⁷ He said: My dear! Where was the Tradition, where did it stay?</i>
<i>Çi mewlekî minî hukim rewa, Mersûm şandibû ji cewa, Bi qudretê sura sunetê maliq westabû li hewa.</i>	<i>How majestic is my Lord He sent a command from the sky Through the power, the Mystery of the Tradition was hanging in the air.</i>
<i>Bi qudretê maliq westabû sunete, Û bire ber paďsé xwe îcazete, Gotê: ezîzê min! Me bezret muhibete.</i>	<i>Through the power the Tradition was hung And asked permission from its King Saying: My dear! We desire Love.³⁸</i>

In another version of the same *qewl*, recorded in the Syrian village of Khawaziye and published by Philip Kreyenbroek, instead of the name *Sunet* we see *Sunetxane*, that is, 'the House of Tradition',³⁹ which is another name for the Yezidi community and an equivalent of the notion of 'Ēzîdxane', the 'House of Yezid' or the 'House of the Yezidis'. The 'House of Tradition' is also mentioned in other *qewls*, as *Qewlê Qere Ferqan*, *Qewlê Îmanê* or *Qewlê Şerfedîn* (St. 2–3, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 368–369), where in the context of the coming of the Mehdi, Sherfedin, it is stated:

<i>Dê kangî rabî Mehdi</i>	<i>When the Mehdi arises</i>
<i>Ne efendî dimînin ne qadî</i>	<i>Neither lords nor judges will remain</i>
<i>Wê rojê sunetxane bit hêsayî.</i>	<i>On that day the House⁴⁰ of the Tradition</i>
	<i>will be comfortable.</i>
<i>Dê hêsa bit sunete...</i>	<i>The Tradition will be comfortable...</i>

The use of the terms ‘*Sunet*’ or ‘*Sunetxane*’ as a name for the entire Yezidi community suggests that either the *qewls* that contain it were created at the time when there were strong influences on the forming Yezidi community from Muslim mystics (preserved texts by Adi ibn Musafir show him in this way), or that the Yezidis perceived themselves as the only guardians of the truest religion, which has no scriptures and which was contaminated by those called in the *qewls* ‘the People of the Shari’a’.⁴¹

Both variants are possible and reveal an old conflict known from the beginnings of Islam, originating in the holy place of Islam, Mecca, which is at the same time a symbol of Islam and the pre-Islamic cult. In this context it is worth noting that the term ‘tradition’ is particularly linked in several hymns (see below) with the Quraysh, the famous tribe that controlled pre-Islamic Mecca and its religious cult (cf. Al-Tabari 1988, 51–60).⁴² Additionally, a toponymy of the main cultic places located in the holy valley of the Yezidis, Laliş, such as the Zem-zem spring, Mount Arafat or the Pira Silat bridge, strongly resembles the topography of Mecca (Açıkyıldız 2009, 307; cf. idem 2002; Joseph 1919, 134–137). One can add that they were also known to pious Adi ibn Musafir from his *Hajj* (Ebied and Young 1972, 498). Therefore the religious capital of the Yezidis, Laliş, can be seen as the realisation or restoration of the Mecca that stood before the appearance of Islam. It remains an open question whether this was intentional effect of Sheikh Adi’s ideas or whether it came from the pressure of the local Hakkari tribes, who had a special respect for the Umayyad dynasty, worshipping Yezid ibn Mu’awiya and Adi ibn Musafir (as the descendant of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II). The dynasty had a ‘specific’ or even bad reputation among Muslims, who perceived them as opportunists, accepting Islam late and reluctantly.⁴³

7.3.3 Mala Adiya, Terîqet, Adawiyya

The term connected in the *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr* with ‘tradition’ is ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ (*Heqîqet*), which was ‘sent into’ the *Sunet* by God, and which supposedly means that the Yezidi community is a repository of Truth.

Another explanation suggests that the group of those who follow the tradition contains a very important part or an element that came to them from outside. As such, it could be related to one of the groups that constituted the pre-Yezidi community or to Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir himself, who came from Baghdad to people living in the Hakkari Mountains, among whom he founded a mystical brotherhood: *Adawiyya*. A short description of his arrival is contained in *Qewlê Şêhadî û Mêra* (st. 2, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 178):

<i>Dahir bû Bêt el-Fare</i>	<i>He appeared in Beyt el-Far</i>
<i>Qesd kir, hate Hekare</i>	<i>He migrated, he came to Hakkari</i>
<i>Lalişê mêr lê cema dibûne...</i>	<i>At Lalish holy men gathered around him.</i>

For this reason, in the *qewls* we also find the Yezidi community called the ‘*Terîqet*’ (path, mystical order). Sometimes we also hear about ‘*Mala Adiya*’ (the House of Adi). The phrase designates in particular the *Adani*, one of the leading subgroups of the sheikh caste connected with the Adi’s family (cf. Ahmed 1975, 331). Some examples of the use of this term are present in the *Hymn of the Faith* (*Qewlê Îmanê*, st. 24, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 86):

<i>Rêya Meleka, me dabû sere</i>	<i>We have accepted the authority of the angels</i>
<i>Hinciyê bi ol û erkana xerqê</i>	<i>Whoever believes in the religion and the foundations of the kbirque of Sheikh Adi</i>
<i>Şixadî bêtin bawere</i>	<i>(Belongs to) the House of Adi, to our Order, for ever and ever.</i>
<i>Mala Adiya terîqeta me her û here</i>	

and in the *Qewlê Aşê Mihbetê* (st. 10-17, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 381–382):

<i>Bêjime we gelî suniya</i>	<i>I tell you, people of the Tradition</i>
<i>Dest berneden ji malêt Adiya [...]</i>	<i>Do not abandon (your allegiance) to the families of the House of Adi [...]</i>
<i>‘Aşiqê terîqetîm</i>	<i>I am a lover of the mystical path</i>
<i>Rêberê heqîqetîm...</i>	<i>I am a guide to (ultimate) reality...⁴⁴</i>

The formula ‘the House of Adi’ is also present in Yezidi official statements, such as the document explaining the structure and duties of their community, the so-called *Sheikhan Memorial* addressed by the Yezidis to Administrative Inspector of Mosul in 1931. In the first article concerning the *Mir* (prince), it stated that ‘he is the head over the House of Shaykh ‘Adi for he is of his descent’ (Edmonds 1967, 25–27). The term ‘*Adawiyya*’ has a broader meaning, though, and not all of the members of *Adawiyya* can be treated as Yezidis. Some of them were active not only in Iraq, but also in Syria and Egypt (Cairo), where they were one of the numerous Sufi brotherhoods (Guest 1993, 24–26). A famous Sufi, Abd el-Kadir al-Gilani, a friend of Sheikh Adi, was impressed by him, although al-Gilani cannot be numbered among the Yezidis. He wrote about many of Adi’s miracles; however, these texts are not in the specific interest of the Yezidis.

7.3.4 Mirîd

The particular attention directed by the Yezidis towards the early Sufi tradition is well known, with the cults of such mystics as Mansur al-Hallaj, Rabia al-Adawiyya, Shams Tabrizi or Hassan al-Basri. They prefer to call them ‘dervishes’ instead of ‘Sufis’, which shows their attachment to the early period of discussions at the heart of mystical Islam, as well as of them seeing themselves as the continuers of the true mystical tradition.⁴⁵ A sign of this is the caste division into *sheikhs*, *pirs* and *murids*, which is fundamental for the Yezidi community. We hear about two of these castes in the *Qewlê Şêşims* (st. 16, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 203), a hymn devoted to a person identified by the Yezidis, among others, with the sun and Jalaladin Rumi’s spiritual master, Shams Tabrizi:

Şêşimsê minî mîre
Babê me çenî sunetxane û derwêşan
 û qelender û feqîre
Ew kaniya şexan û pîra.

Sheikh Shems is my Mir
 Father of all of us [belonging to]
 the House of the Tradition and the
 dervishes, qalandars and feqirs,
 He is the source of sheikhs and pirs.

Many of these words are known in Sufism and denote a relationship between the disciple (Ar. *murid*) and his spiritual master (Ar. *sheikh*, Pers. *pir*). Presumably the fact that the Yezidis use different words of Arabic and

Persian origin (with de facto the same function) points to the original ethnic diversity of their community. Hence it seems probable—as some Yezidis claim—that before the arrival of the Arab, Sheikh Adi, there were only two groups among them: *pirs* and *murids* (Omarkhali 2017, 60).

Apart from belonging to one of the three castes, which is determined by birth, according to the Yezidi concept, everyone belonging to their community is in a spiritual sense a *murid*, who is subject to the spiritual teacher. Therefore, the name *Murids* can also be considered a name for the whole theocratic community of the Yezidis. Thus, in the *Hymn of the Murids* presenting the religious duties of *murid* (Qewlé Mirîdiyê, st. 1–29, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 292–296), one can find also descriptions of the entire community:

Dibêjîme we xelkê ‘erîfî jî rî zana *Oh learned, intelligent and wide people,*
I will tell you

Gelo mirîdî bi çî nîşane? [...] *What does it mean to be Murid⁴⁶ [...]*

Hûn hevêt mîr bin
Dî helîm bin, sî silgîr bin
Lî ber nefesa êqîsîr bin.

Be friends of the Prince!
Be gentle, be sad,
Be prisoners to your souls.

Nefesa mala Adiyaye
Hînciyê nefes hilînaye
Jê razî bit hostaye.

It is the soul of the House of Adi
If anyone has accepted his soul⁴⁷
His master is satisfied with him.

The descriptions are intertwined with ethical guidelines:

Herin nefesê bi nasî
Lî behra îlmê xewasî

Go and get to know your soul
You are a diver in the ocean of (mystical)
knowledge

Mêr bi xasa dê xas bî

It is through holy men that one becomes a
holy man.

Libsê îmanê yî spiye
Î nazîke, î letîfe, î gewiye
Hûn me hingêvinê gelî suniye
Ew zor renî dixeyiriye

The garment of faith is white!
It is delicate, charming and strong
Don't hurt the People of the Tradition
It is quick to change colour

*Her pênc ferzêt heqîqetê
Şêx û pîr, bosta û mirebî,
yar û birêt axiretê*

*All five religious duties:
The Sheikh, the Pir, the Osta and the Mirebbi,
The Friend and Brother [of the Hereafter]*

Ferze liser me çendî sunetê.

*Are obligatory for all who belong to the
Tradition.*

It should be noted that, in this poetic language, a colour was also indicated as a metaphor for the community, the white colour, that should not be changed. This belief is also preserved in the popular rhyme (Heard 1911, 211):

<i>Yezidine</i>	<i>Yezidis are we</i>
<i>Chek sipine</i>	<i>White are our clothes</i>
<i>Peve Jinnetine</i>	<i>Heavenly are we</i>

Even today every Yezidi is obliged to wear a white shirt (*kras*) under their garments. Black is reserved for the *faqirs*, who wear a special black cloak and a turban. These two colours—white and black—are also associated with traditional Sufi dress.⁴⁸

The religious taboo prohibits all Yezidis from wearing blue clothes. Besides the metaphysical meaning, the colour blue (kurm. *şîn*) has become a symbol of being non-Yezidi or even an apostate. As it was explained to me by Pir Dima: ‘When our grandparents swore, they used to say: “*Gol şîn şehdeye*” “The blue lake is a witness” and it referred to heaven. The blue colour was associated with the heavens and the angelic world. Then it began to be treated as a forbidden colour. Just like the word *şîn* in our language means “mourning”. And a conviction appeared that the Yezidi should not wear blue colour, but white, or black, like the *faqirs*. He who wears the blue colour, is a stranger – *şeri’et* – non-Yezidi. And if someone violated the prohibition and had a relationship with a non-Yezidi, then the Yezidis said: “You coloured blue”, “*Dalinga xwe şîn kiriye*”.⁴⁹ The blue colour has become a symbol of religious apostasy’ (Rodziewicz 2017, 37).

7.4 OTHERS IN THE YEZIDIS’ EYES

According to Yezidi beliefs, there were 72 nations after Adam. One can often hear from them about the 72 Adams (cf. Empson 1928, 46) and 72 Yezidi genocides. This number occurs also in the cosmogonical context; in

the *Qewlê Hezar û Yek Nav* we hear about the fish of 72 fins (St. 6, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005), and a mythical bird Enqer (equated perhaps with Tawûsî Melek) which has 72 feathers in the Yezidi song *Xizémok* (St. 2, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005). In reference to the nations, the number is present in the *Morning Prayer* (recorded in Armenia, Asatrian and Arakelova 2014, 5–6):

<i>Ya xwade, wara hawara</i>	<i>O God, come to the rescue of</i>
<i>Hafti-du milate,</i>	<i>Seventy-two nations,</i>
<i>Girtiya havsa,</i>	<i>Prisoners</i>
<i>Nafse tangiya,</i>	<i>in straits</i>
<i>K'asiva-k'usiva;</i>	<i>To paupers and the downcast;</i>
<i>Paşe wara hawara</i>	<i>And then only come to rescue of</i>
<i>Milate ma, ezdiya</i>	<i>Our nation,⁵⁰ the Yezidis.</i>

This is also attested to in the *qewls*, among other places in the *Qewlê Qere Ferqan* (st. 33, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 100), where God says:

Min ji Adem vevartibûn heftî û du milete From Adam I brought forth
the seventy-two nations.

and in the *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*:

<i>Ji Adem wê bûn coqete,</i>	<i>From Adam groups sprang</i>
<i>Jê vavartin heftê û du milete.</i>	<i>They separated from him seventy-two nations.⁵¹</i>

The concept of 72 nations (as well as languages and angels) was also known in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages to Christians. Furthermore, it appears in the mystical Persian poetry of Rumi and Hafez. According to early Jewish tradition, there were 70 or 71 nations, descendants of the three sons of Noah (*Genesis* 10; cf. Major 2013). Muslim hadiths in turn mention 73.⁵² The Yezidi concept, although similar to the Christian one, differs in its explanation. It derives the nations from Adam, not Noah, and is connected with a myth of the Yezidis' forefather, which I discuss below.

Of particular interest here is a word *milet* used in cited fragments. It can also be heard among the modern Yezidis in their auto-declaration formula:

Milete min Êzîd, dine min Şerfedîn.⁵³

This resembles verses known from the *qewls*, but *atqad* is replaced here by *milet*, a word of Arabic origin (*milla*, *millet*), present also in Persian (*mellat*). In modern Kurmanji it means ‘nation’ or ‘people’ (as gr. *ethne*). It originally denoted ‘religion’ and ‘religious community’, as for example in the Quranic *millat Ibrahim*, ‘the religion of Abraham’ or Arabic *al-milla al-masihyya* and Persian *mellat-e masihiye*, which denotes Christians, ‘the People of the Messiah’.⁵⁴

The Yezidi self-declaration can be literally translated: ‘My nation is Yezid, my religion is Sherfedin’, but depending on how old the formula is, the meaning could be much broader: ‘I belong to the religious group of Yezid.’ Obviously the use of words is changing and many of today’s Yezidis understand this sentence strictly in the nationalist sense. However, to understand what the word *milet* meant to the Yezidi community in the time before the coming of nationalistic ideology, we should go back to the *qewls* and see the ‘nations’ enumerated there. We find a little list of them in the *Qewlé Şêşims* (st. 24–33, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 205):

Here Turke, here Tetera
Ew xafilêt bê nedere
Ewan jî Şêşims mferê

*All Turks, all Tatars*⁵⁵
They are ignorant, without the views
Sheikh Shems is their refuge also

Here ‘Erebe, here ‘Eceme
Ewin xafilêt bê kereme
Ewan jî Şêşims pêşqedeme

*All Arabs, all Persians*⁵⁶
They are ignorant, without mystical power
Sheikh Shems is their leader also

File ku filene
Bi keşîş û abû nene
Ew jî li dû Şêşims diherine.

The Christians, being Christians
Have priests and monks
They also follow Sheikh Shems.

Cihû ku cihûne
Di selexor û buxtan û nebûne
Ew jî bi Şêşims bi recûne [...]

The Jews, being Jews
Are usurers, slanderers and liars
They also have hopes of Sheikh Shems [...]

Heftî û du milete
Heştî û duhezlar xulayaqete
Şêşims hemûya mor dikete.

Seventy-two nations
Eighty-two thousand creatures
Sheikh Shems ‘baptises’ them all.

It is evident that these are not nations in the modern sense of the word. The Turks, Arabs, Persians (*Eceme*) and Tatars are listed together with the Christians and Jews. I met similar classifications during my ethnographical

fieldwork on the self-identification of rural people living in the old Belarusian villages in the isolated backwoods of Białowieża Forest, who notoriously were unable to distinguish between the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘religion’. They declared their nation to be Christian Orthodox and equated the Poles with Catholics. Hence one can say that mingling blood relations with religious ones is a way of thinking typical of an oral community, which has not been indoctrinated by modern ideologies relying on the printed word.

The cited fragment is also significant from another point of view. Strikingly, there is no mention of the Muslims or the Kurds. It is also worth considering that there is not one Yezidi classical *qewl* where one can find the words ‘Kurds’ or ‘Kurdistan’. Words related to the Kurds are absent in the oldest Yezidi oral poems. The exception would be a single verse in the *Qesîda Şerfedîn*, published in 1996 by a son of Feqîr Hacî from Ba’adra, where we find a stanza: ‘*Ciwabê bidene Kurdistanê*’ (‘Let them take word to Kurdistan’).⁵⁷ During my fieldwork among the Yezidis, I met the opinion that this represents the politically motivated manipulation of the original version, which was in fact: ‘*Ciwabê bidene Êzîdxanê*’ (Rodziewicz 2017, 61). The absence of vocabulary related to the Kurds in the *qewls* could mean either that it was so obvious for the authors that the Yezidis are Kurds that there was no need to double them, or that the Kurds were not seen at the time of composing the hymn as a separate, autonomous *milet*.

7.4.1 Şerî’et

In turn, regarding Muslims, in the Yezidi hymns they are usually covered under the name *şerî’et*, mentioned above, as opposed to the ‘People of the Tradition’. The lack of an explicit indication of Muslims may result from the fact that, in the times when the hymns were created, their authors distanced themselves not from Islam as such, but from its written and codified form. Such an explanation seems to be confirmed by the respect that the Yezidis show to the first Muslim mystics. The word *şerî’et*, though usually applied to Muslims, with time began to refer to all non-Yezidis (those, who follow not the Tradition, but the written word).

Additionally, the *şerî’et* sometimes also occurs in the hymns accompanied by a term ‘*Rafidîtes*’ (‘those who refuse’, from Ar. *rafîd*, ‘rejection’, ‘negation’, ‘heresy’) originally meaning a *Shia* opposition group to the first caliphs and Umayyades (Ebied and Young 1972, 494; cf. Kohlberg

1995; Watt 1963, 110–121). An example of these terms can be seen in two verses⁵⁸ from the *Qewlê Mela Abû Bekir* (st. 1 and 3, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 173):

<i>Minetjarim ji minetê</i>	<i>We are wholly thankful</i>
<i>Vavartim ji şir'etê</i>	<i>That we have stayed aloof from the Shari'a</i>
<i>Hemdilla û şikir</i>	<i>Praise be to God and thanks</i>
<i>Havêtime ser pişka Şêxê Sunetê.</i>	<i>That we have cast our lot with the Sheikh of the Tradition.</i>

<i>Minetkarim ji 'Adiya</i>	<i>We are grateful to the House of Adi</i>
<i>Vavartim ji Rafidiya.</i>	<i>We have stayed aloof from the Rafidites.</i>

The division between the Sunnites (in the Yezidi use of the term) and those who follow Ali ibn Abi Talib and his son Hosein (a main opponent of Yezid ibn Mu'awiya) refers to the first century of Islam. This seems, however, to be only the culmination of the process. Its origins are much older. They go to the very beginning of the Yezidi vision of their history, as related to the Quraysh, the Arabic tribe that gave birth to Muhammad as well as to the Umayyads, who were in conflict with his *Banu Hashim*.⁵⁹ A new religion appeared, which violated Meccan pagan tradition and took for itself the right to control Ka'aba, which was under Quraysh control. The Umayya's grandson and grandfather of Yezid ibn Mu'awiya, Abu Sufyan, was a Meccan leader of those Quraysh who opposed Muhammad. As Gerald R. Hawting noted 'Abu Sufyan, the head of the Umayyads, henceforth appears as the director of pagan Meccan opposition to Muhammad and Islam, an image which would naturally appeal to later Muslim opponents of the Umayyad caliphs' (2000, 23; cf. Kister 1986, 33–57; Crone 2016). The memory of him is still alive among the Yezidis (cf. Al-Jabiri 1981, 228).

This famous conflict according to popular stories started with the pro-toplasts of the Hashimites and the Umayyads, 'Hashim and 'Abd Shams, a father of Umayya. A Persian historiographer, Al-Tabari, recorded one of circulated legends on the theme: 'Hashim and 'Abd Shams were twins and that one was born before the other with one of his fingers stuck to his twin's forehead; when his finger was separated blood flowed; people regarded this as an omen and said, 'There will be blood between them' (Al-Tabari 1988, 17).

Indeed, the blood, real and imagined in the tales, has become a constant element of the relationship between Yezidis and Muslims even today. It is also the reason that the Yezidis are often afraid to mention them explicitly. There is a story popular among the Yezidis concerning a bloody incident between Muhammad and Mu'awiya (partly mentioned in the *Qewlê Mezin*). Its detailed fragment is preserved in the Isya Joseph's version of the *Meshefa Resh* (*Black Book*), where we read about:

Mohammed, the prophet of the Ishmaelites, who had a servant named Mu'awiya. When God saw that Mohammed was not upright before him, he afflicted him with a headache. The prophet then asked his servant to shave his head, for Mu'awiya knew how to shave. He shaved his master in haste, and with some difficulty. As a result, he cut his head and made it bleed. Fearing that the blood might drop to the ground, Mu'awiya licked it with his tongue. Whereupon Mohammed asked, 'What are you doing, Mu'awiya?' He replied, 'I licked thy blood with my tongue, for I feared that it might drop to the ground.' Then Mohammed said to him, 'You have sinned, O Mu'awiya, you shall draw a nation after you. You shall oppose my sect.' (Joseph 1909a, b, 127–128 and 225)

The written tradition, beside the oral one, is another important source for the investigation of the Yezidis' approach to others. Sacred manuscripts called *mişûrs*, written in classical Arabic (not Kurdish),⁶⁰ represent very special written testimonies to a meticulous care for the distinction between Yezidis and others. They are kept hidden, in the possession of the representatives of the *pir* caste. There are believed to be 40 in total. One of them dates as far back as the thirteenth century (Omarkhali 2017, 377). They contain the genealogies of the *pir* and lists of *murids'* families connected with his lineage.⁶¹ These lists can also contain the names of the Kurdish tribes no longer faithful to the Yezidi religion, but who have become Muslims.

We possess only a few written sources, from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, which show a specifically Yezidi attitude towards other people. In 1872 AD, to avoid conscription into the Ottoman army, the Yezidis formulated their religious rules in a petition (prepared in Turkish, Arabic and French) for an Ottoman government. The list contained articles that concerned relationships with other communities:

We may not comb our heads with the comb of a Moslem or a Christian or a Jew or any other. [...] No Yezidi may enter the water-closet of a Moslem, or take a bath at a Moslem's house, or eat with a Moslem spoon, or drink from a Moslem's cup, from a cup used by any one of another sect. If he does, he is an infidel.⁶²

'Infidel' means here that he is no longer a Yezidi and should be excluded from the community. Another written source, a kind of catechism containing 31 rules and ending with an oath, was composed at the request of the Yezidis' diaspora in Transcaucasia. For a very long time they were cut off from the core of the community and were in need of their code of faith. It was dictated by the Yezidi's spiritual leader, Ismail Beg, and given to the Yezidis during his visit to Iğdır at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Kurdish original was translated into Russian and published in a German translation by orientalist Adolf Dirr:

1. We believe in one God [...]. 2. Our prophet is Yezid. 3. The Yezidis have no scriptures. [...] 4. It is strictly forbidden for the Yezidis to enter into relations with members of other peoples/nations (*anderer Völker*); otherwise, they expose themselves to God's curse. [...] 9. The Yezidi clergy [*sheikhs* – A.R.] [...], have to choose a woman from his own class. 10. [...] Every *pir* has to choose a woman from his class. 11. If spiritual persons of the classes mentioned in § 9 and 10 [i.e. *sheikhs* and *pirs* – A.R.] marry with girls from other classes, they lose the right to receiving offerings from the *murids*, and the *murids* must not recognise them as priests and they have to expel them from their community. 12. The simple Yezidis are called the *murids*; they have no right to marry the daughters of the spiritual classes, but only those of their own. (Dirr 1917/1918, 558–574)

This strict endogamy remains one of the pillars of the Yezidi community. Such an approach was originally a survival strategy in the midst of hostile tribes and religions. It concerns not only external relations, but also those within the community's three castes. In the cases mentioned above, when the division between 'we' and 'others' was violated by someone, he would not be considered a Yezidi anymore.

7.5 YEZIDIS' ORIGIN MYTHS

There are two general myths concerning the beginning of the Yezidi community and both show them in relation to other people. The first refers to the Yezidis' forefather, Shahid ben Jarr, the second to Yezid ibn

Mu'awiya, called in the *qewls* 'Sultan Ezi'. The former presents origin of their 'ethnicity', the latter, the eponym. Both share a belief in the Yezidis' radical separation from other communities. Both also have intriguing analogies or even traces leading to the older myths of the Gnostics and Ancient Greeks.

7.5.1 *Shahid Bin Jarr*

The myth about the Yezidi forefather is commonly known within the community, but in the *qewls* is preserved only in a fragmentary way, and is better attested to in the Yezidi apocrypha. It sets a sharp line between Yezidis and non-Yezidis. We do not know how old it is and whether it was created to justify this difference, or the difference is due to the spread of this myth among the Yezidis. The oldest written document containing this myth is the *Meshefa Resh* (the *Black Book*). It is also preserved in fragments in a *corpus* of texts of unknown origin entitled the *History of the Yezidis*. There are a few slightly different redactions of it in Arabic, Syriac and Kurdish. We do not know in which of these languages the original text was written, or who the author was.

The Yezidi myth refers to the times of Paradise. In the Arabic version of the *Meshefa Resh*, published by Isya Joseph, we read:

The Great God said: 'O Angels, I will create Adam and Eve; and from the essence [سر] of Adam shall proceed Šehar bn Jebr, and of him a separate community [ملة] shall appear upon the earth, that of Azazil, i.e. that of Melek Ta'us, which is the sect of the Yezidis [ملة يزيدية].' (Joseph 1909a, b, 123 and 222)⁶³

The fragment is similar to the translation of another Arabic manuscript found in Sinjar and published by Anis Frayha, with only small differences: 'of the seed of Adam there shall be born شهر بن سفر and from him shall descend a people on the earth; then the people of 'Izrā'īl, that is to say Ṭāwūs Malāk, and these people are to be the Yezīdīs' (Frayha 1946, 25). Yet another manuscript, the Kurdish one, was found by Anastase Marie and republished in parallel with the Arabic one by Maximilian Bittner. It also has 'Shahr ibn Safar' but the community is called a 'nation of Azrail' (*melli/millat Azr'ail*).⁶⁴

Regardless of whether the Yezidis are a nation of Azazil, Izrail or Azrail (as they claim) and whether their forefather's name is Shehar ben Jebr or

Shahr ibn Safar, the different versions of the *Black Book* are consistent in one respect: the ‘Yezidi nation’ came from Adam’s *sur* and is connected with a specific angel, identified as Tawûsî Melek.

In the next part of the Joseph’s version (absent in other manuscripts of *Meshefa Resh*)⁶⁵ we find a detailed explanation of the appearance of the Yezidis’ forefather. After the creation of Eve and the animals there was a quarrel between Adam and Eve about who would be the sole begetter of the human race:

After a long discussion Adam and Eve agreed on this: each should cast his seed [نَسُو] ⁶⁶ into a jar, close it, and seal it with his own seal, and wait for nine months. When they opened the jars at the completion of this period, they found in Adam’s jar two children, male and female. Now from these two our sect, the Yezidis, are descended. In Eve’s jar they found naught but rotten worms emitting a foul odor. [...] After this Adam knew Eve, and she bore two children, male and female; and from these the Jews, the Christians, the Moslems, and other nations and sects are descended. But our first fathers are Šeth, Noah, and Enosh, the righteous ones, who were descended from Adam only. (Joseph 1909a, b, 124–125, 223)

Because the boy was born from a jar (ar. *jarr*), he was called Witness, son of the Jar (Shehid bin Jarr). The word ‘*shehid*’ can be interpreted here, especially if we compare it with the text of the *Quran* (V 117, VII 171–172), as stating that he is a true believer who bears witness that his origin comes from God. Moreover, he came exclusively from the masculine principle, without the participation of Eve. However, the oral tradition of the Yezidi origin myth presents other versions, too. We hear, for example, about the heavenly *Houri* who either accompanied Adam or was Shehid’s sister or wife (Empson 1928, 45–46).

Şehîd Pêxember ji wê kasê vedixware *Prophet Witness*⁶⁷ *drank from the Cup*
Kerameta wê kasê hate bale *The mystical power of that Cup came*
to him

Lew horiya çawa bora dibinare. *How they sent him the Houri*⁶⁸

Çî horiyeki çêye *What a beautiful Houri she is!*
Bi kerameta wê kasêye *By the mystical power of that Cup*
Heşem û Qurêş herdû jêne. *Both the Hashemites and the Quraysh*
*came from her.*⁶⁹

In fact, the Hashemites belonged to the Qurayshites' tribe, but from the Yezidi perspective they are separate groups, which is reflected in the story about Sultan Yezid that I discuss below. The uniqueness of the Yezidis, and their distinctiveness in relation to other peoples, can also be seen in the continuation of this myth, in which the Yezidis are perceived as the descendants of 'Na'umi', perhaps identified with prophet Nahum.⁷⁰ The story happens in the heart of Kurdistan, in territories with strong Yezidi settlement such as Jebel Sinjar (the second oldest Yezidi homeland after Laliş), 'Ain Sifni (located 10 km South from Laliş) and Mount Judi (near Cizre, Silopi, and the south Syrian-Turkish border), seen in the Eastern tradition, both Christian and Quranic (*Quran* XI 44), as a place where the Ark rested.

Besides the flood of Noah, there was another flood in this world. [...] The Yezidis are descended from Na'umi, an honored person, king of peace. We call him Melek Miran.⁷¹ The other sects are descended from Ham, who despised his father. The ship rested at the village called 'Ain Sifni, distant from Mosul about five parasangs. The cause of the first flood was the mockery of those who were without, Jews, Christians, Moslems, and others descended from Adam and Eve. We, on the other hand, are descended from Adam only, as already indicated. This second flood came upon our sect, the Yezidis. As the water rose and the ship floated, it came above Mount Sinjar, where it ran around and was pierced by a rock. The serpent twisted itself like cake and stopped the hole. The ship moved on and rested on Mount Judie. (Joseph 1909a, b, 126–127, 225)

Significantly, in two manuscripts of the *History of the Yezidis*, in which fragments of this myth are preserved, after the words '...who despised his father' and before 'The ship...' we find an extra line. In the Syriac version:

God spoke with Adam in the Kurdish language. (Chabot 1896, 119)

The Arabic one is little bit longer:

They likewise say that God Almighty talked with our father in the Kurdish tongue, which was the first tongue, and was from of old in the world. (Parry 1895, 381)

As mentioned before, we do not know the author of these apocrypha, but the addition seems indicate that it was written at the time when the issue of an ethnic identity began to be important, for the Yezidis themselves, or for the author.

Fortunately, thanks to the field research of Eszter Spät (2002, 27–56), who was especially interested in the myth of Shahid bin Jarr, we also have Yezidis' comments on the myth, given to her in 2002 and 2003 by one of the most honourable (and oldest) experts on Yezidi lore: Feqir Haji from Ba'adra.⁷² So, while the apocrypha are not fully reliable sources of the Yezidis' point of view, the words of a nearly 100-year-old *feqir*, an eminent authority in the area of the religious hymns, allow us to understand much more about the vision of its community's origins.⁷³

He explains the myth, starting from a Lamp (*Qendîl*), compared to God's throne and to the Pearl, from which the Peacock Angel and other angels came in the times before the male–female differentiation. From this Lamp came also Love, equated with Angel Sheikh Hasan,⁷⁴ one of the *Heft Sur* called by double title: 'Sheikh of the Tradition' (*şexê sunnetê*) and 'Sheikh Sin'. The *sur* reached Adam through his agency:

This *sur*, the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin came from the sky into the forehead of Adam. (Spät 2010, 422–423)

During the second interview, Feqir Haji uses the word '*sur*' interchangeably with the word 'soul' (*ruh*).⁷⁵ This description has a counterpart in the verses of the *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*, quoted by him, where the coming of the *sur* was compared to Adam drinking from the mystical Cup. 'Then it stayed a hundred years', says the Feqir, 'this *sur*, in the forehead of Adam in the Paradise' (424), until the time of his expulsion from Paradise by Tawûsî Melek who 'took out the *sur* from his forehead' (425).

About the forefather of the Yezidis, Feqir Haji's version is different from this one, which is presented in the *Meshefa Resh*. According to him, it was Peacock Angel, or Jibrail, who was responsible for Shehid's birth:

It wasn't Adam who put it in a jar. Jibrail brought the *sur* from his forehead, put it in a jar [...]. Tawusi Melek brought it out from the forehead [...] put it in jar, and threw Adam out of Paradise, put him outside. Adam became like an empty snail-shell, like... a human. (432)

Eve did not exist yet. He put the *sur* in a jar. And this *sur* of his, this has even reached us. He put the *sur* in a jar and from it Shehid was created. Prophet Shehid. Now we are his nation [*nûbu wî milletê me*]. His nation has no prophet other than Shehid. [...] We have always been the nation of Tawusi Melek and the nation of the *sur* [*Em her milletê Tawûsî Melekî, û milletê surê in*]. We have knowledge, we were not a nation which was ignorant [...]. We had understanding before the prophets, we knew. (426)

The *sur* is evidently connected with a kind of *gnosis*. It went away from Adam with the appearance of the male–female division. This division became even greater when the 72 pairs of offspring from Adam and Eve appeared, and gave rise to the 72 nations. In the opinion of Feqir Haji, there is no place for marriage in heaven, so Eve was created outside of Paradise after the loss of the *sur* by Adam. He married Eve after he was thrown out of Paradise by Tawûsî Melek.

When he threw Adam out, he created Eve from his rib. [...] Abel and Cain were born. Cain killed Abel, Abel died, after that God gave Eve and Adam 72 boys and 72 girls, and they married each other. (443)

They all came from Adam and Eve, the children of Adam and Eve swore at Tawusi Melek [...]. We did not, we are the nation of Tawusi Melek, we are his nation. We are the nation of Tawusi Melek, the nation of that *sur* [*Em milletê Tawûsî Melek in, milletê wî surê in*]. [...] We are the children of that *sur*. We are the House of Tradition [*Sunnetxanek*]. There is not a House of Tradition among the Muslims, or anywhere else. (431, 436)

When Adam was thrown out, he swore at Tawusi Melek, he swore at him. He said a bad word about him. Since then, until now, 72 nations were born from Adam, and they swear at Tawusi Melek. Only we Yezidis do not⁷⁶ swear at him. We alone. [...] 72 nations say the forbidden word to Tawusi Melek, but we don't say it. (442, 445)

The *sur* passed from Adam to Shehid through the agency of the Peacock Angel. In effect, apart from the ‘Nation of the *sur*’, other nations are not a carrier of the tradition and they call Peacock Angel *Sheitan*. Indeed the taboo on pronouncing this word is still in force within the Yezidi community. Expressions used by Feqir Haji bring to mind the Gnostic movements, as ones having a secret religious and philosophical knowledge which made them distinct from others. The association with Gnosticism is not accidental here, because the Yezidis’ Shehid myth strongly resembles the Late Antique myth of Seth (or Sethel in its Manichean version), as Eszter Spät demonstrated. According to this myth, Seth was conceived from Adam’s ‘other seed’ and gave birth to the ‘Race of the Heavenly Seth’. The Sethian myth was not just known in the Middle East in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages among the Sethians influenced by neo-platonic philosophy. It also spread among Muslim Shia circles discussing the *Nur-e Muhammad*, the prophetic light that ‘at the birth of Sheth shone upon his forehead’ (Rubin 1979, 43) and then was transmitted and divided between Muhammad and Ali. The idea of putting a seed into a jar, resulting in the

appearance of a child, is also present in the Pythagorean tradition (derived from Zoroastrianism and the Chaldean lore).⁷⁷ The special position of Seth among the Harranian ‘Sabians’ should also be mentioned, who had many customs and beliefs similar to the Yezidis and can be seen as one of the components of the proto-Yezidi community.

The Sethian myth mentions also that Seth had a sister (or a power) whom he married, called Norea, Horaia or Oraia (Stroumsa 1984), which sounds very similar to the *Houri* from the Yezidi myth, who was brought from heaven to marry Shehid. According to Feqir Haji, the old Meccan tribe came from this pair:

We were apart from all other nations. The children of Adam and Eve (are) Christians, and Jews, Muslims, and all kind of nations. The children of Shehid are we Yezidis, we Yezidis alone. We stayed faithful to our ancient roots. Now the children of Adam and Eve are the children of sin, they married each other. [...] Not Shehid. Shehid is apart. Shehid brought a houri from the sky, from Paradise, married the houri, from her were born Hashim and Qoresh. Until today we have no prophets, because we are the nation of God [*em milletê Xwedê in*]. We bear the name of God. When God created Shehid, Shehid said [...] ‘Created me’ [*Ez dam*]. ‘God created me’ [*Xweda ez dam*]. We are the ‘Ezdayi’ nation [*Em milletê ezdaîn*]. (Spät 2010, 444–445)

This popular etymology usually offered to foreigners also includes such names of the Yezidis’ ancestor as Êzî or Êzda (cf. Yegiazarov 1891, 178). However, the reader of this interview must bear in mind that the statements are addressed to outsiders, not to the Yezidis themselves. The analysis of their own lore transmission shows another etymology of this ethnonym.

7.5.2 *Sultan Êzî*

It is well known that the Yezidis asked publicly for their eponym to be strongly distanced from any connections with the Umayyade caliph, Yezid ibn Mu’awiya. Given their fear of Muslims, among whom he has an infamous reputation, it is understandable. Instead, with non-Yezidi interlocutors, they often derive their name from the Persian *îzad*, meaning a divinity/god, or the Avestan *yazata* (‘worthy of veneration’), or, as mentioned above, the Kurdish phrase ‘*Ez dam*’ or ‘*Ez da*’ which would denote them to be ‘the Creator-worshippers’. The first propositions, however, are most likely a product of feedback and reaction to the theories of scholars

writing about supposed Zoroastrian origins of Yezidism, while the last one seems to be only a word play. The confusion as to the origin of the name reveals problems with description of their identity. In fact, many of the modern Yezidis are not sure if they are descendants of the ancient Zoroastrians, Kurds or Arabs.

However, the rare cases of open talk about the Umayyads among the Yezidis should be mentioned. They occurred after 1968 in Iraq, when the Arabisation of Iraqi citizens was strongly promoted by the Ba'athists. Then the Yezidi prince Ba-Yazid (son of Ismail Chol) established his little office in Baghdad (permanently closed) with a large signboard saying 'the Umayyad Bureau' on the building. In leaflets he printed in 1969 in the official Iraqi newspaper (*al-Thawrah* no. 116), he openly mentioned caliph Yezid ibn Muawiya as the source of the Yezidis' eponym and called them descendants of the Quraysh tribe. Moreover, instead of 'the Yezidis' he wrote 'the Umayyads' and declared:

It has been opened in Baghdad a Bureau to direct the affairs of the Omayyads in Iraq (...) It fosters the Arab cause and demonstrates the Arabism of the Omayyads in both official and popular spheres. (...) The Bureau welcomes all inquiries about the Omayyads and answers will be frank in order to exhibit their real identification as it has been distorted in the past. (Ahmed 1975, 84)⁷⁸

Another example could be an article by Îsa Şewqî containing a fragment of the *Qewlê Êzîd* and presenting Yezid ibn Muawiyya as a defender of religious tolerance, published in the Yezidi newspaper *Denge Êzîdiyan* along with German and Turkish translations, in 1997.

A special cult of the Umayyade caliph, Yezid ibn Muawiya, among the people living in North Mesopotamia was already noted by medieval Muslim authors. Al-Sam'ani, an Arab biographer contemporary to Sheikh Adi, wrote that:

They believe in Yazîd ibn Mu'āwiyah and that he was righteous. [...] I heard that [...] a learned man who had traveled widely, visited them once in Sinjār and went in to a mosque of theirs. One of the Yazîdîs asked him 'What do you think of Yazîd?' 'What could I say (but good) of a man who was mentioned several times in God's book where it is said 'He increases unto people as He pleases' and 'God increases the righteousness of those who have found the right path,' sad I. They showed great generosity toward me and gave me plenty of food.' (Frayha 1946, 20)

The worship of the Umayyades in the Middle East is confirmed, among other places, in the writings of the tenth-century Arabic geographer, Al-Mukaddasi (1877, 399). In Isfahan, he met followers of Caliph Mu'awiya who recognised him as a prophet. The special status of this dynasty, extending even into deification, can also be investigated in the context of the peculiar use of the '*khalifa*' title by Umayyades, who understood themselves to be deputies of God.⁷⁹ After the fall of the dynasty, systematically exterminated by the Abbasids, some descendants of the Umayyades settled in the Hakkari mountains and enjoyed great respect among the Kurds.⁸⁰ One of them was Adi ibn Musafir. He was an heir of the last Umayyade in power, Marwan II, whose mother was Kurdish and who ruled over Northern Mesopotamia, Armenia and Azerbaijan before becoming a caliph (Al-Tabari 1985, 175; cf. Aloiane 1996, 96–7; Aloian 2008, 40).

In a preserved fragment of Sheikh Adi's *aqidah* (cited by Ahmad Taymur), he expressed his respect for the second Umayyade caliph:

Yazid b. Mu'awiya—May God bless him—is an imam and son of an imam. He became a caliph and fought the infidels. He has nothing to do with the death of Husayn—May God bless him—nor with anything like that. Let it be banished and cursed the one who defames him. (Meier 1954, 254)⁸¹

We do not know, however, if he perceived him as God's incarnation or if this cult was introduced by another Yezidi leader, as is suggested, for example, by Abu Firas 'Abd Allah ibn Shibl, who wrote in 1324 about information acquired from 'a righteous group of the Sunnis who live in the Eurat (Euphrates) district' about the 'sect that adopted the idea of the ignorant Adawite Yezidis':

This Yezidis were misled by Satan who whispered to them that they must love Yazid, to such an extent that they say we are justified in killing and taking the property of whoever does not love Yazid. [...] They ceased to join Friday prayer, but the most deviant one of them was Hasan bin 'Adi. (Açıkyıldız 2015, 37–38)

The Muslim theologians Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), the author of *Risalat al-'Adawiyya* (1323, 262–317; cf. Guidi 1933, 394–403), and his contemporary Abu 'l-Firas Ubaisallah⁸² were of the opinion that the person who deformed Sheikh Adi's teaching and changed the respect for Caliph Yazid into deification was a Yezidi leader, Hassan ibn Adi (born 1195). He

is sometimes mentioned in the Yezidi tradition as the author of *Meshefa Resh*. The Yezidis call him ‘Sheikh Hassan’ and identify him with Hassan al-Basri, as well as with one of the Seven Angels. He was the father of Sheref al-Din (an eponym of the Yezidi faith) a grandson of Sheikh Adi’s nephew, Abu ‘l-Barakat, and son of Adi ibn Abu ‘l-Barakat, who was the first Yezidi sheikh born in the Hakkari mountains. For this reason, he is called ‘Adi the Kurd’ (Guest 1993, 18–19; Guidi 1933, 414–418). According to Ibn Taimiya, this heretical approach to Hassan has found an expression in the Yezidi literature:

They also reported that Hasan b. ‘Adi was a saint, for such and such a reason... At the time of Sheykh Hasan, they added to this [respect for Yazid – A.R.] many further errors, in poetry and prose. They devoted to Sheykh Adi and to Yazid an excessive veneration, incompatible with the doctrine of the great Sheykh ‘Adi. In fact the teaching of the latter was orthodox and did not admit any of these innovations. (Kreyenbroek 1995, 32)

It should be stressed, however, that these are opinions of Muslims, for whom Adi ibn Musafir was a great Sufi master. Analysis of the content of the Yezidi *qewls* gives an opportunity to look at this issue from the point of view reserved for the members of the Yezidi community. A myth about ‘Sultan Ezi’, a son of Mu’awiya, is present in the oral Yezidi tradition, for example in *Qewlê Aşê Mihbetê* (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 383–385), but is, more prominently, a main theme of the longest Yezidi hymn, *Qewlê Mezin, The Great Hymn*.⁸³ It also circulates as a recited *Story of the Appearance of the Mystery of Ezi, Çîroka Pêdabûna Sura Êzî*,⁸⁴ which contains many fragments from the *qewl* but is more detailed. The beginning of this myth, known also from the *Meshefa Resh*, was mentioned by Ismail Beg Chol, the first Yezidi leader who decided to publish a written work about the doctrines and customs of his people. Being illiterate, he dictated this book, including the following words:

After a long time, God decided to send our angel Yazid. At that time, the tribes of Banu Omayya and Banu Hashem existed. The Banu Omayya was stronger than the Banu Hashem. When Muhammad, prophet of the Ismailis came, the Banu Hashem increased their power to the detriment of Banu Omayya, and Mo’awiyya became someone who at that time might have been seen as the treasurer of Muhammad. Muhammad was not well, his head made him suffer. He told Mo’awiyya, who was a barber, to shave his head. (Chol 1934, 77)⁸⁵

We read about the unfortunate wounding of Mohammad's head and his commentary is:

'You have thus committed a fault whose consequences will be eternal: you will have as your descendants the people who will fight against mine and will win over them.' 'If it be so, I will forsake the world and will not marry under any pretext!' After some time God gave a power of scorpion against Mo'awiya. The scorpion spread its venom on the face and body of the unfortunate. Then Mohammed and his parents assembled doctors to look after Mo'awiya. They declared that if he did not marry he would die. They brought him an 80-year-old maid, called Mahusa, who was a sister of 'Omar el-Khattab. He knew her and on the morning of the second day she found herself [like] a 25-year-old woman. She conceived and bore our Yazid. And this happened, because God had promised Tawuse Melek to send our Yazid. (Chol 1934, 77)

The Yezidi myth refers to a continuation of the old conflict within the Quraysh, which began in the days of Hashim and 'Abd Shams and was continued by both the tensions between Muhammad and the leader of Meccan pagans Abu Sufyan (Yezid's grandfather) and between Ali ibn Abi Talib and Mu'awiya.⁸⁶ It finally intensified in the hostility between Husayn, Ali ibn Abi Talib's son and a grandson of Muhammad, and Yezid, son of Mu'awiya, who designated him his heir. Husayn ibn Ali considered himself the rightful successor to the prophet, refused to swear allegiance to the new caliph and accused Yezid of misappropriating Islam. The effect of the growing conflict was a massacre near Karbala, with the killing of Husayn and his young son by troops subordinate to one of the Yezid's commanders, 'Ubayd Allah Ibn Ziyad.⁸⁷ From that moment, Yezid ibn Mu'awiya became the most hated person in Shi'ism. Sunnism was more forgiving,⁸⁸ although it did not change the opinion of Yezid as a lover of poetry and wine, a person who had been breaking rules of the religion⁸⁹ and was not present at his father's deathbed (Al-Tabari 1987b, 208–214). This Sunni ambiguity is well illustrated by the words attributed by Tabari to Husayn's daughter, Sukaynah, who 'used to say, "I never saw a man who did not believe in God who was better than Yezid b. Mu'awiyah"' (Al-Tabari 1990, 175).

The episode concerning the conflict with Husayn and his death is not mentioned in the Yezidi *qawl*, but seems crucial to understanding Yezidis' unwillingness to speak openly about the second Umayyade caliph, and their tremendous fear of Muslims, especially Shiites, who accuse Yezid of

murdering Ali's son. According to Shia propaganda he was not even seen as a legal son of the caliph, but of his wife with one of the caliph's slaves.

What for Muslims was a violation of the rules of religion, for the Yezid's followers became a mark of their distinction, so in a Yezidi myth about ibn Mu'awiya, his passion for poetry and wine is clearly emphasised. Yezid's position among the Yezidis can be explained by the fact that in their eyes he is perceived as a representative of an old pagan aristocracy of Mecca, who apparently resisted Islam and politics, but had a clear inclination towards poetry and mysticism.⁹⁰

The Yezidi myth present in the *qewl* begins with a prediction made by Mohammad to Mu'awiya that he would marry and God would give him a son, who would be the scourge of Islam. For this reason Mu'awiya swears not to marry, to have no child, but finally breaks his promise and gets married. When he sees his wife pregnant, he gets rid of her. She escapes death and goes to Basra, where she bears a child named Êzî.

When Êzî grows up, he goes to Damascus to meet his father, a pious follower of the Religion of the Book. In response to a Mu'awiya's question of who the young man is, the caliph hears a demand to bring his mother from Basra. Next, the unrecognised guest presents himself:

...Navê mine şîrîn Siltan Êzîde ...My sweet name is Sultan Ezid.
Ezim itaqata çendî mirîda. I am the belief of all Mirids.

Dibêjin: Êzîde kurê Mi'awî They call me Ezid son of Mu'awiya⁹¹

Êzî was not welcome, so having left Mu'awiya's court, he appeared in a dyer's house as someone who knew a thousand and one colours (in a possible analogy to the peacock's tail). The dyer, having understood 'the sur of Truth' (*Sura heqî*) recognised in him 'the King of the religion and hereafter' ('*Ewe Pedşê minî dinê û axiretê*').⁹² Then Êzî manifested himself:

Sebaşo, ez nûrim, eslê min jî nûre Dyer, I am light, my essence is [from]
light

Kasê digêrim şerab il-tehûre I make the cup go round, (full) of pure
wine

We'de wê hatî, dê li bacêrê It has been promised that, in the city
of Damascus, I shall abrogate

Xet û kitêb û defter û mişûre. Writing, books, tracts and scriptures.⁹³

Êzî left the dyer's house with a retinue of tambourine-players and singers praising him. He came to a spring and, by putting wine grapes under the stone, miraculously transformed all the water in the river of Damascus into wine and made it so that all of the people became drunk and the daughters of noble citizens started to dance before him.

Hêş jê venexwarî, pê dibû meste. Anyone who drank of it became drunk.

*Çî meyeke wete What a wine!
Heçî nuxtekê jê vexote Any creature that has a little of it
Ser û malê xo lê dete Give his life and his house for it
Ev dinya berçavê wî dibite dawete. In his eyes this world becomes a feast.⁹⁴*

Such a description is exactly in line with the Muslim tradition in which Yezid was remembered as a lover of wine and music. As al-Masoudi noted in his *Muruĵ al-Dhahab*: ‘Yezid was passionate about music; he loved hawks, dogs, monkeys and leopards. He was looking for joyful feasts. [...] It was under his reign that music appeared in Mecca and Medina; the use of symphonic instruments was established, and wine began to be drunk in public’⁹⁵ (Maçoudi 1869, 156–157, cf. Al-Tabari 1987b, 185). Muslim authors remember him as an author of good poetry too. A sample of one of his poems is cited by Ibn Khallikan (1843, 230):

*When the wine-cup assembled my companions,
and the musician sung to excite the joys of love,
I bade them take a full share of pleasures and delight,
for even the things which last the longest must have an end.*

In the Yezidi *qewl* we find an explicit description of Yezid's followers as the ‘Yezidis’, which does not indicate an ethnicity, but their status as worshippers. When the noble citizens try to understand the meaning all of these events, it becomes clear for them:

*We divêt, hûn Êzîdî bin bi keçik û kure. You must all become Yezidis, with
your sons and daughters.⁹⁶*

After these events, Sultan Êzî, with his followers, tambourines and singers singing in honour of him, leaves the city and withdraws to a fortress or tent in the middle of the ocean, which can be interpreted as achieving a deeper awareness by a mystical brotherhood.

The story also includes a motif about the religious conversion of a pious Muslim, a Shari'a judge, who wanted to persuade Sultan Êzî to turn to Islamic orthodoxy, but first agreed to try a drop of wine. In another version of this legend, recalled by Ismail Chol, it was Muawiya who tasted the wine (Chol 1934, 77; Ahmed 1975, 243).

<i>Siltan Êzî kas li qazî şiro xeyirand</i>	<i>Sultan Ezi changed the cup of the Shari'a judge</i>
<i>Bi renga xemiland</i>	<i>He adorned it with colours</i>
<i>Binê behra seyirand</i>	<i>He let it go round under the ocean.⁹⁷</i>

In effect he realised that Êzî's clothes were made of light. Then he stopped reading books and became Êzî's follower:

<i>Qazî şiro xakez hemû dibirîn [...]</i>	<i>The Shari'a judge tore up all his papers [...]</i>
<i>Qazî şiro nema bixûnit kaxedê</i>	<i>The Shari'a judge no longer reads papers</i>
<i>Buwe nedîmê subbetê</i>	<i>He has become a member of the Friends</i>
<i>Buwe reqasê dawetê. [...]</i>	<i>He became a dancer at the feast. [...]</i>
<i>Dil li qazî şiro buwe ker bi ker.</i>	<i>The heart of the Shari'a judge was torn to pieces.⁹⁸</i>

The plot ends with the request of Mu'awiya to restore the water in the riverto its previous condition. He proposes that he will give up the city in exchange for it. Sultan Êzî agrees and takes over Damascus.

The entire Yezidi story has, of course, mystical depth and resembles Sufi poetry, where wine and love themes are often present. However, on the simplest level, it shows a difference between Muslims and the Yezidis, the followers of Sultan Ezid, who see his divine nature, follow his rules and deny the written word. It should also be noted that his mother is treated very positively in the myth. She was in fact a Christian Arab, named Maisoun, also a poet (Al-Tabari 1987b, 215; Lammens 1921, 31–35 and 366). In the Yezidi *gewl* it was she who said:

law. Its antithesis is an innovation (*bid'a*). The first fiery controversies among the Qurayshites of Mecca were in fact controversies about the *sunna*: if they should follow the religious tradition of their ancestors (*Qur'an* V 104: 'Sufficient for us is what we found our fathers following',¹⁰¹ cf. II 170; VI 148; VII 70; VII 173; XLIII 22) or the new *Sunna* established by the prophet, perceived by them as an innovation (XXXIV 43: 'they say: This is just a man who desires to turn you away from what your fathers worshipped'; cf. L 2; XXXVIII 5–7).

Sunna and its Kurdish equivalent *Sunet* are often translated into English as 'tradition', a word of visible Latin etymology (*traditio, tradere*) pointing to 'delivering', 'handing down', 'a transmission' of knowledge, 'to hand over' or 'to transfer' (cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* 1968, 1956–1957). Though not fully coinciding with the etymology of the Arabic word emphasising an exemplary model of conduct, it provides rich connotations meaning a custom that, thanks to being handed down from generation to generation, is long-established in the community.

What exactly is handed down by the Yezidis? Using their own terms, one can say that the essence of the *sunet* is a transmission of *sur*. The Kurmanji word *sur* and Arabic *sirr* mean 'a mystery' and 'an essential agent of the soul', 'a secret thought', the 'innermost part of the heart', or 'an organ of inner consciousness' (cf. Amir-Moezzi 2004, 752–754). In the Yezidi hymns and stories it denotes a pure divine essence that has its own personality and will, described as the light (*nûr*) coming from a source imagined as a Lamp (*Qendîl*) and called *Sura Xudê* ('*Sur* of God').¹⁰² In the *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr* we hear that 'the Mystery of the Tradition (*sura sunetê*) was hanging in the air' and came down because of the desire for love. So the *sur* can be understood as a mediator between God and the lower world (similar to *Eros/Love* or *Logos/Reason* in Plato's philosophy and later traditions derived from it). This is exemplified in the Yezidi myth of Angel Sheikh Hasan, who was equated in the story related by Feqir Haji with Love coming from God's Lamp. In a special sense, the term *sur* refers just to the 'Seven Mysteries' (*Heft Sur*), the seven highest of God's angels, worshipped by the Yezidis. *Sur* also plays a fundamental role in the Yezidi cosmogony. In the first sentence of *Meshefa Resh* (Joseph 1909a, b, 122 and 221) we read:

In the beginning God created the White Pearl out of his most precious essence [من سره العزیز].

The Yezidis' forefather also participated in this 'essence' (*sirr*), compared sometimes to a pearl, or a drop, which he took from Adam (Spät 2010, 330–331; Al-Azzawi 1951, 85–86). Because of this, Shehid's descendants define themselves as the 'Nation of the *sur*' (*Milletê surê*) or 'Nation of God' (*Milletê Xwedê*), because they participate in God's essence, which is passed down from generation to generation and makes them the 'People of the tradition' (*Gelî suniya*). For this reason, they reject all innovations considered an opposition, rebellion or revolution to this, which means the interruption of the transmission process. This principle is a metaphysical formula, which is realised on many specific levels. Whenever a case arises contrary to the original state, the *Sunet* remains faithful to the origins.

From this point of view, the angel, who according to other religions refused to prostrate himself before Adam, can be described as a defender of the tradition which commanded that one should bow only before God. It can also explain the special attitude of the Yezidis to using the word 'Satan', meaning after all 'opponent', 'adversary' or 'antagonist' (Breytenbach and Day 1999, 726–732; Fahd and Rippin 1997, 406–409), words that fully define the principle opposite to the 'tradition'. In the eyes of others (the 72 nations) Satan is an essence of revolution, and rebellion against God. From the Yezidi point of view, though, he can be understood as the archetypal traditionalist who rejects religious innovation. Therefore, their veneration of early Sufi mystics is easy to understand, especially al-Hallaj, who was executed by the Abbasids for preaching extreme theological ideas. He interpreted the angel's act of refusing to prostrate himself before the new creature, Adam, as a model of the monotheist who loves God only (Massignon 1911, 195–207; 1922, 864–877; Arakelova 2001, 183–192).¹⁰³ From this position, the original significance of the word 'Satan' must be recognised as an insult essentially contradictory to how the things happened.

The adoption of this principle also results in Yezidis looking for their origin in Adam himself. At the moment when a division into male and female appears in the myth, the Yezidis follow Adam and his son but ignore Eve. This perspective is also consistent with their specific perception of history and identification with the Quraysh and Umayyades. From the perspective of the Yezidis, when a new religion—brought by a representative of the *Banu Hashim*—appeared among Meccan community and took written form, it was necessary to be faithful to the linear, oral tradition from the times before the appearance of Islam. For the same reason,

they worshipped Yezid ibn Mu'awiya, perceived as the defender and representative of the Quraysh tradition,¹⁰⁴ and attacked the Muslim revolution continued by Hossein, relative and supporter of Muhammad family. Additionally, Adi ibn Musafir, an heir of the Umayyades, might have been seen by them as a representative of the ancient Quraysh in the days when the Umayyad dynasty was replaced by the Abbasids.¹⁰⁵ It can be assumed that, for the same reason, the Yezidis define themselves as monists, who reject the existence of evil, since the recognition of the existence of evil would be the acceptance of the existence of opposition to Good. This principle is also reflected in the Yezidi vision of cosmogony, which begins with the absolute unity symbolised by the luminous Pearl or God's Lamp (*Qendîl*). Therefore tradition can be imagined as a candle firing from a candle, and the ensuing spread of light. In Feqir Haji's words:

Sheikh Adi is a *sur*, he is light from light [*Şêx Adi sur e, nûr a la nûr e*]. [...] Sheikh Adi is from the light of Ezi. Ezi is from the light of Tawusi Melek. Tawusi Melek is from the light of God. (Spät 2010, 445)

A physical symbol of the *sur*'s transmission can be seen as manifested in two customs. One of them takes place during the *Seré Salé* festival, when the Yezidis commemorate the creation of the world and its ruler, the Peacock Angel. After the sunset Baba Sheikh bears from the sanctuary of Sheikh Adi a sacred fire, which is distributed among the crowd of participants—everyone, one from the other, lights wicks held on the little stones (Rodziewicz 2016, 354). The second custom is receiving '*berat*', a small white ball, which every Yezidi, as a *murid*, should carry with him. He obtains it from his *pir* and *sheikh*, and can also get it during the pilgrimage to Laliş, where it is made of clay mixed with laeven and water from a White Spring (*Kaniya Spî*). These two practices mark the descent of the *sur*, and the way of the tradition, what can be illustrated by the following model describing the 'Nation of the *sur*' or 'Nation of God':

God/Good	
↓ (<i>sur</i>)	– Evil
Pearl/Lamp/One	
↓ (<i>sur</i>)	– Multitude
Tawûsî Melek	
↓ (<i>sur</i>)	– Satan

Adam↓ (*sur*) – Eve**Shahid bin Jarr**↓ (*sur*) – 72 nations**Qurayshites**↓ (*sur*) – Hashemites/Mohammad/*ṣerīʿet***Ezi/Yezid ibn Muʿawiya**↓ (*sur*) – Hosein**Sheikh Adi and dervishes**↓ (*sur*) – Sufis**The Yezidis**

In a sense, all of the elements listed above on the left side could be named ‘the Shehid’ because he is a witness to God’s presence. The scheme is not complete and one could add more names (as Abraham and Abu Sufyan) and levels, especially between the Yezidis’ forefather and the Qurayshites. The Yezidis try to do that when they look for their ancient roots and consider the oldest Mesopotamian rulers as their kings (Joseph 1909b, 224). It is no accident that the names of the *Adani* and *Qatani* clans of the Yezidi sheikh caste strongly resemble the ancient Adnanites and the Qahtanite Arabs.¹⁰⁶ This approach is not just a megalomaniacal effort or a cognitive confusion, but a realisation of this basic principle: being a continuation of the most ancient origins, deriving one’s own origins from the very beginning of all things.

An interesting example of such an approach is the recognition of the holiest objects of Yezidism—the so-called *sanjaqs* (seven tripods topped with the likeness of a peacock)—as ancient Meccan relics. In an article devoted to them, published in 1973 by the Yezidi prince Ba-Yazid al-Amawi (son of Ismail Beg) in Iraqi ethnographical magazine, we read:

These peacocks, were set up in the Holy Ka’abah side by side with the Quraish’s gods which were worshipped at that time. After Islam, Abu Sufyan saved the seven Sanjaqs for being holy for Quraishites and for a memorandum of his great grandfather Ibrahim Al-Khalil. Those Sanjaqs remained with him until his son Mua’wiya inherited them and transferred them from Holy Mecca to Al-Sham (Syria) when he was amir (ruler) over it in the caliphate of Omar ibn Al-Khattab. (Chol 1973, 172)

The idea of ancient origin of the Yezidi tradition has also found expression in the words of Feqir Haji, talking about Shehid bin Jarr and the *hourri*:

From them were born Hashim and Quresh. They say the Qureshi came to the true faith in the name of God. We used to be Qureshi. [...] We were the House of Tradition, after that we were Qureshi, we were Adawi, we became Daseni, became Mittani,¹⁰⁷ became Babylonians, became Assyrians, became... We Yezidis are the nation of Layla and Shehid. We have no connection with Eve and Adam. [...] We Yezidis are all the nation of this sur (*milletê wê surê*). [...] All the time our nation was independent. (Spät 2010, 427–430)

It can be stated that in the case of the Yezidis, we are dealing with the notion of *millet*, which is different from the commonly accepted sense of the word ‘nation’ today, and definitely strongly competes with the Yezidi *miletê sur*. As long as the question of a ‘nation’ is posed in a Western language, we remain trapped in a circle of connotations, determined by the Latin etymology of the word. Regardless of how the various definitions and criteria of a nation are built, from the etymological point of view, the issue of the ‘nation’ (*natio* from *natus*, ‘that which has been born’) can be reduced to the question ‘Who is the parent?’ The modern world has degraded this question to a strictly physical meaning. If the Yezidis adopted this view, they could point to Assyrians, Chaldeans, Medes or Sabians, but first of all to Arabs and local ancestors from Kurdistan, among whom Adi ibn Musafir appeared, as we hear in *Qewlê Şêxadi û Mêra* (st. I, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 178):

Şêxadi xudanê keremê *Shiekh Adi is a lord of kindness*
Dahir bû li ‘erebê li ‘ecemê *He appeared among Arabs and non-Arabs.*

They are represented in the Yezidi community by the threefold sheikh caste, which includes *Adani* and *Qatani* sheikhs, who are connected with the Arabic substratum and the *Shamsani*, connected with local pre-Islamic tribes.

Because their concept of identity is founded upon a primary spiritual idea, however, the Yezidis would answer the ‘Who is the parent?’ question: ‘God’s Witness (*Shehid*)’. In their original concept, the ‘nation’ is a community of spirits, not blood, and is not an effect of the transmission of genes, but of the *sur*. Someone might say to this: but they have a caste system and strict prohibition of exogamy. Yes, but the general purpose of

this system, which by the way suggests the original multiethnicity of the Yezidis, is not the transmission of genes, but *sur*. Its goal is such an ordering of the theocratic community that everyone who belongs to it can be a *murid*, who follows his *sheikh* and *pir*: spiritual teachers who watch over the transmission of the tradition. From this mystical perspective, where their genetic origin simply does not matter, the question of whether the Yezidis are Kurds sounds absurd.

7.7 THE TRADITION IN MODERN TIMES

The Yezidis are currently facing a number of challenges and problems that threaten their identity and the tradition built up over centuries. Four issues seem to be of particular importance in this context: breaking up the caste system, modern nationalism, acts of apostasy and the status of children born of relationships with non-Yezidis. They all stem from opening (not always voluntarily) to other communities.

The greatest threat to the Yezidi identity seems to be the degeneration of their caste structure. During their migrations from Iraq, which have strongly intensified in recent times, the most numerous caste, *murids*, have frequently been separated from their *sheikhs* and *pirs*. In effect, the tradition transmitted from generation to generation is in danger of interruption and deformation. The problem especially concerns the *murids*, those who by definition seek self-identity and have no profound knowledge about Yezidism. Political circumstances made them representatives of their people among others, in whose eyes they speak on behalf of the entire Yezidi community. They are very often exposed to alien ideas and strong indoctrination by followers of anti- or pro-Kurdish ideologies connected with ‘Zoroastrian propaganda’. Having no grounded knowledge, their self-identification often does not correspond to that of Yezidi leaders belonging to the *sheikh* and *pir* castes, which creates conflicts and misunderstandings within the entire community. It concerns not only the new European incomers, but also other diasporas living isolated from Iraq. During my fieldwork in Armenia, local Yezidis frequently paid attention to that issue.

The problem is not new. Especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Transcaucasian Yezidi diaspora suffered a lack of contact with Iraqi spiritual leaders, so that many customs, rituals and even festivals

(such as *Serê Salê/Çarşemiya Sor*, Rodziewicz 2016, 349) were forgotten there. In the context of considering the Yezidi identity, one can pose a fundamental question here: is there still one Yezidi *milet*, or due to such a strong scattering and cutting off from the religious centre, are we dealing with separate communities which called themselves ‘Yezidis’ but have different, even incompatible, identities? Some of them consider themselves Kurds, others identify with the Zoroastrians (dualists), and still others with monism.

Another threat is connected with falling into a modern version of nationalism, alien to the Yezidi tradition and an effect of ‘colonisation.’ Nationalist discourse appeared among them quite late, as a reaction to contemporary problems, such as the nationalism of the Kurds seeking their modern identity, or as an effect of melting into the communities to which they migrated. So far this has been much stronger in Transcaucasia than in Iraq, where the Yezidis lived in their old territories and were less open to contact with others. In addition, the Transcaucasian Yezidi diaspora during the communist era has been exposed to a strong atheisation, which resulted in the weakening of its religious core and its replacement or strengthening by an ethnic determinant.

Moreover, growing Yezidi nationalism is a response to insistent denial of their role as subjects. According to Article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution, which declares Islam the official national religion, the Yezidis are still not perceived as a separate ethnic entity (as are Turkomans, Assyrians and Chaldeans), but only as the religious one (with Christians and ‘Mandi Sabbeans’). Feeling excluded and deprived of their ethnic identity, they begin to demand it. In effect the concept of nation is changing and moving away from religious to ethnic one, which, in turn, raises questions about their relation to the Kurdish *ethnos*.

The tensions between the Yezidis and the Kurds are growing stronger now and seem to exclude the possibility of agreement, or recognition of the Yezidis as ‘Kurds’. Insufficient help from the Kurds after ISIS’ encroachment into Sinjar resulted—in the Yezidis’ opinion—in leaving them to genocide and slavery, and has significantly intensified anti-Kurdish sentiments (Barber 2017). Many of them were also effectively denied participation in the referendum on Kurdistan’s independence in 2017 (Browne 2017), and this was used by the nationalist-minded Yezidis as a pretext to strengthen anti-Kurdish tendencies.¹⁰⁸ However, apart from radical anti-Kurdish groups, there are also Yezidis who, although not perceiving

themselves ‘Kurds’, identify themselves as ‘Kurdistani’. It is a clear sign of transition from the primordial and culturalistic concepts of nation to the territorial one, which gives the prospect of agreement and coexistence with other groups living in Kurdistan.

Further modern threats to the Yezidis’ traditional identity are the more frequent acts of apostasy, which are often connected with breaking the prohibition of living among infidels or entering into deep relations with other communities. This results more and more frequently in secularisation or conversion to other religions, even atheisation. In 2011, Georgian Yezidi leaders made an unprecedented resolution, the *Act of returning to the bosom of the Yezidi religion*, which, though opposed to the old rules, seemed necessary in order to save the diminishing community living among the Christians. The official declaration stated:

‘Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia’ with the blessing of the Head of all Yezidis, Mir Takhsin Beg, the spiritual Head of all Yezidis, Akhtiyare Marge, and the Supreme Yezidi Spiritual Assembly, considering the current realities and challenges faced by the Yezidi community in Georgia, decided: to allow members of Yezidi community, who have moved to other faiths for various reasons, to return to the faith of their fathers and grandfathers. This permission appeals only to persons who have not violated the marriage ban. Those who decided to return should refer to the ‘Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia’ for his/her admission to the bosom of ancestral religion. The Spiritual Council will decide on the return of an individual in each case, based on interview with an applicant.

It was clearly stated that the permission does not apply to those who have married non-Yezidis. According to the principles of faith and the centuries-old custom, people who have entered into such relationships, as well as their children, are not Yezidis anymore.

The problem with children born of these marriages is a concern not only within the Transcaucasian diaspora, but has become one of the biggest questions since the seizure of Yezidi terrain by ISIS. Many Yezidis were then murdered, while others were enslaved, especially women, who were forced to live among Muslims, recite their prayers and have sexual relationships with invaders. Because of this, according to Yezidi custom, those who escaped from slavery should no longer remain Yezidis. In this unique situation, though, which was not the result of individual decisions, but of mass rape, the spiritual father of the Yezidis (Baba Sheikh), Khirto Haji Ismail, issued an unprecedented edict on 6 February 2015. He stated that:

The Ezidies are currently experiencing very difficult and complicated situations because they were exposed to a systemised genocide [...]. After ISIS, on August, 3rd, 2014, invaded Shingal, thousands of Ezidy women, children, and men were held captive who went through circumstances contrary to all human values such as being forced to convert to Islam.

In conclusion he declared that:

Those survivors both males and females will remain pure Ezidies and nothing could tarnish nor affect their belief in Ezidism for they performed those exercises against their will. (Omer 2016, 102)

The edict made no mention about the children conceived as a result of the rape of the Yezidi women, however. Are they also 'pure' Yezidis? According to Iraqi law, a child holds the religion of their father. Xamosh Omar (a court judge and a legal consultant for the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament) noted that there is no legal answer to the question of whether such children raised by the Yezidi mothers should be perceived as Muslims (Hussein 2016). Baba Sheikh answered this in an interview for the *Voice of America*:

The victims are our daughters and sisters, but it is unacceptable in our religion to allow the birth of any children if both parents are not Yazidis. [...] It is also tribally unacceptable and a source of shame. If such children are born, wouldn't people ask who their fathers are? Are they Afghans? Are they Europeans? (2016)

So, the Yezidi women were forced to abandon their children or undergo abortion, which is criminalised in Iraq (Nicolaus and Yuce 2017). As was related by Neman Ghafouri, the chairwoman of Joint Help for Kurdistan, an organisation that supports Yezidi women: 'more and more victims have returned home, with some of them eight months pregnant and others nine months. [...] Abortion has been used in all cases I have encountered' (Hussein 2016).

All these are dramatic problems, which show that the Yezidis are facing the challenge of openly declaring their identity or even redefining it. If they reject the current self-identification, which found expression in their myths, and whose distinctive feature was the religious criterion, defining them as a theocratic community of mystics, then they will no longer be the same Yezidis, and they will become various communities of different identities.

Perhaps the Yezidis, who in their history have passed through various stages of self-formation (from a polyethnic community, to the canonisation of its principles, to the final form of ‘the nation of many nations’: Whitman 1860–1861, 44; cf. Connor 1972, 1990; Maisel 2013) are just starting a new cycle? So far, they have managed to get out of similar problems. They remember well an old internal conflict in the core of the leading Yezidi caste, between the *Adani* and *Shamsani* sheikhs. The former, connected with Shaykh Adi’s family, were accused of pro-Arabic and pro-Muslim attitudes and attempts to undermine the pre-Islamic tradition represented by the Shamsanis, who were critical towards Shaykh Hasan’s teaching and were accused in turn of undermining the role of Sheikh Adi and of pro-Kurdish (and later also pro-communist) sympathies. However, the whole community has overcome the danger of an internal split and has constructed a system in which the two groups have control over each other (Al-Jabiri 1981, 101–107, 184–187 and 389–390).

Will the Yezidis also manage to meet the new challenge of adopting a national perspective for their polyethnic community? Accepting this modern perspective, which refers especially to self-identification and such criteria (enumerated by Smith 1986, 21–31) as a collective name, a common origin myth, common history, distinctive culture, association with specific territory and sense of solidarity, it is hard to doubt that the Yezidis are a nation. Is this ethnic definition of their identity consistent with their traditional metaphysical perspective, though, or does it rather show a submission to an alien, non-Yezidi, worldview? They have distinctive names for their community and its religion, moreover, they have their own political and religious structure (led by *Mir* and *Baba Sheikh* respectively), a caste system and respect for the principle of endogamy. Do we know of any religious group that is not a nation, but strictly follows endogamy? The Kurdish language, or more precisely, its Kurmanji dialect, which they share with the part of the Kurds, is not known to many of the Yezidis from Bashique and Bahzani villages, whose inhabitants’ language is Arabic. So it is difficult to recognise it as the ultimate proof of their Kurdishness. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that many Yezidis (for reasons already mentioned) consider themselves Kurds. This issue raises other questions about Kurdishness, which is also in the process of formation and still does not appeal to those ethnic Kurds who perceive themselves first as Muslims rather than Kurds.¹⁰⁹

If there is still one single Yezidi community—and not a few communities with different identities—it faces a fundamental choice: will they

choose between the primordial and territorial concepts of nationhood, or their initial mystical concept of it, presented in their *qewls*? Will they follow the solutions coming from others, or will they go their own way? It is the Yezidis who should answer this question.

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NOTES

1. Below I refer mainly to sources gathered in editions prepared by Omarkhali (2017), Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005), Kreyenbroek (1995), Joseph (1909a, b), Frayha (1946), Chabot (1896), Ebied and Young (1972). Unless otherwise noted, I quote translations contained in these editions.
2. Therefore I omit how they were characterised by representatives of the Western powers and representatives of Western Christian missions.
3. That is why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) question of *whether the subaltern can speak?* seems very apt here. The lack of the written texts representing the Yezidi community, comparable to the Bible or the Quran, seemed to justify 'the need' of others to speak in the name of the Yezidis especially in the nineteenth century after this region started to be exposed to the more modern ideologies disseminated with the help of the printed word.
4. Cf. Nau and Tfinkdji (1915–1917, 188–189).
5. Here follows a detailed summary of their positions about those who follow Caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, finished by a conclusion.
6. Another *fatwa* issued by Abdullah Al-Ratbaki (d. 1746): Ahmed (1975, 391–398).
7. Cf. Macharadze (1989 and 1968, part 2, 230–237), Chikhladze and Chikhladze (2003).
8. Translation A.R.
9. Translation A.R.
10. Translation A.R.
11. Translation A.R.
12. The literal purpose of the *Heyet-i Tefhimiye* was to “instill the Yezidis with the doctrine of Islam” (*akaid-i I'slamiyeyi telkin etmek*), and familiarize them with “the sacred military service” (*hidmet-i mukaddese-i askeriyeye alısdırmak*) (Gölbaşı 2013, 14).

13. Translation A.R. As Vladimir Minorskiy wrote: ‘during every war on the Transcaucasian front our interest in Kurds revived, and all of the leaders of warfare without exception drew their attention to the establishment of peaceful relations with them, which largely succeeded’ (Minorskiy 1915, 42). To this day the Russian policy has not changed. See the main Kremlin ideologist’s reflections on the Yezidis recognized by him as the Kurds, and their ‘Kurdish’ religion: ‘In general, the religion of the Yezidis reflects a deep of Kurdish identity that goes back to the depths of the epochs.’ (Dugin 2017, 333–350). Dugin visited Lalish before the Iraqi Kurdistan independence referendum in 2017.
14. Translation A.R.
15. However the next report stated: ‘The Yezidi and Kurdish languages are not treated as separate languages in higher education institutions as both communities use the same language’ (*Second Report of the Republic of Armenia...* 2007, 22). Cf. Dalalyan (2012, 177–201).
16. Earlier, in 1921, Hagop Gazarian (Lazo), in the journal *Shams* propagated his own project of the Yezidi script, based on the Armenian alphabet.
17. Translated by Pir Dima.
18. The fact that an ideology is modern does not mean that the concept of a nation must be its product (Gellner 1983; Kedourie 1961, 1988). Modernism has changed rather the perspective of its perception, giving to it a central place in the hierarchy (Smith 1986, 1998, 2008).
19. ‘The Revival of Slavery...’ 1435 [2014].
20. Barzani stated also that ‘the Yazidis are indigenous Kurds, their religion and worship is in Kurdish. No person or party is entitled to impose other definitions on the Yazidis’ (*Rudaw* 17 March 2017).
21. Translation A.R.
22. The epithet of Sheikh Hasan is ‘the Master of the pen’ (*Xudanê qelemê*).
23. Cf. *The Yezidi Book of Roj* (Ahmed 1975, 412–439).
24. *Qewlê Şerfedîn*, st. 27, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 373).
25. *Qewlê Qendîla*, st. 24, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 93).
26. It is an analogy to Christianity, where the Christian community is called ‘the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ’. Cf. *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (12:27 and 10:17), *Epistle to the Colossians* (1:18) and the Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Mystici corporis Christi*.
27. Cf. *Qewlê Aşê Mihbetê* st. 22–31, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 383–384).
28. That is: Sharaf al-Din abu al-Fadail Adi ibn Musafir ibn Ismail ibn Musa ibn Marwan ibn al-Hasan ibn Marwan (Joseph 1909a, 119; Ebied and Young 1972, 492).
29. *Qewlê Qendîla*, st. 22, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 93): ‘Sherfedin, the Mehdi, will appear.’

30. *Gel* means ‘group’, ‘multitude’, ‘crowd’, ‘people’, ‘folk’, ‘nation’; cf. Chyet (2003, 202).
31. Cf. Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 39).
32. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *People*.
33. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *The Sunna*.
34. *Mekan* can also mean ‘homeland’ (Chyet 2003, 369).
35. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *Evil works*.
36. Presumably angels.
37. Inside a *Sunet*.
38. Translation A.R. *Qewlé Zebúni Meksúr*, 5 and 12–16 st. of the version I received, consisted of 51 st; cf. Omarkhali (2017, 213–223).
39. St. 16–17, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 59).
40. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *community*.
41. As Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 50) noted ‘in the case of several *Qewls* the relatively consistent use of terms and symbols with obviously pre-modern Islamic associations, such as ‘the Sunna’ for the community itself [...], strongly suggest that an important part of the *Qewl* tradition goes back to a time when a question of identity could still be meaningfully expressed in terms of Islamic discourse’.
42. About their rejection of Islam and Muhammad see: Al-Tabari (1988, 93–122), Hawting (2000, 21); about the Quraysh religion: Hawting (1999).
43. The first to deal with the issue in detail was probably Michelangelo Guidi, who regarded Yezidism as an Islamic heresy and investigated the origins of Yezidiyyah in the context of the caliph cult and the emergence of *Ghulat* movements, with their concept of deification of the imam figure, waiting for a *Mahdi*, *bulul* (incarnation) and *metempsychosis*.
44. Or ‘truth’.
45. In my interview with Pir Dima (Rodziewicz 2017, 46), he said: ‘I think that until Sufism was embedded in the framework of Islam by al-Ghazali, it was a separate teaching of gnostic and ascetic character. They called themselves ascetics. ‘*Derwesh*’ means ‘an ascetic.’ Then came a term ‘*tassawuf*.’ After a time, when some of the *derwishes* associated with the term ‘*tassawuf*’ (the Sufis) were recognised by the Islamic *tariqas*, the brotherhoods, the Yezidis disagreed on this. They remained *derwishes*, out of the framework of any religion’.
46. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *The characteristics of a Mirid*.
47. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *spiritual aspect*.
48. The Yezidis have a special inclination to the colour symbolism. About the analogies to *Ghulat* movements, see: Guidi (1932, 291); in Sufism: Fleischer (1862), Schimmel (1975, 255–256 and 379).

49. Lit.: 'The trousers stained blue'.
50. Changed by author, Asatrian and Arakelova: *people*.
51. St. 23 of the version given to me by Pir Dima.
52. Ibn Kathir (2006, 38–39): 'The Jews divided into 71 sects and my Nation will divide into 73 sects.' (Ibn Maajah) 'The Jews divided into 71 sects: one is in Paradise and 70 are in the Hellfire. The Christians divided into 72 sects: one is in Paradise and 71 are in the Hellfire. And by the One Who has my soul in His Hand, this nation of mine will be divided into 73 sects: one is in Paradise and 72 are in the Hellfire.', 'Indeed the children of Israel divided into 71 sects, and my nation will be divided into 72 sects.' (Ibn Maajah); al-Tabari (1987a: 108) mentions 73 languages of mankind.
53. Pribari and Rzgojan (2014, 153). Under the pressure of anti-Kurdish politics in Armenia, some of the Yezidis living there add words: 'zeman min *Êzdiği*' ('my language is Yezidi').
54. Richardson (1777, 1834–1835), Garzoni (1787: 192) gives '*mellea*' as an equivalent of a 'nation' (*nazione*); cf. Ursinus (1993), Braude (2014, 65–86).
55. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: Arabs.
56. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: Turks; cf. 'ecem in Chyet (2003, 171).
57. Heći (1996, 60), republished in Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 221) (*Qesida Şerfedîn*, st. 3). Cf. *Cnd tkstên pîroz yên ula êzdiyan* (2013: 280).
58. Attested also in the one of the versions of the Yezidi *Declaration of Faith*, st. 7, Kreyenbroek (1995, 226–227).
59. As Hawting noted (2000, 22): 'The traditions about the relations between 'Abd Shams and Hashim and between their descendants often seem to prefigure the hostility which existed in Islamic times between the Umayyads and the descendants of Hashim. Since Muslim tradition generally supports the Banu Hashim against the Umayyads, the stories about their pre-Islamic history usually glorify the former at the expense of the latter. [...] The Umayyads in fact appear as one of the leading families of Mecca at this period and by 624 they had become the leading Meccan family and, as such, leader of the Meccan opposition to Muhammad. 624 was the date of the first great victory of Muhammad and the Muslims over the still pagan Meccans at the battle of Badr'.
60. According to Omarkhali (2017, 60), except one 'all informants said that *Mişûr* were written in Arabic, or at least in the Arabic alphabet'.
61. Cf. photocopy, Arabic transcription and English translation of the *mişûr* of Pir Khatib Pisi ibn Pir Butar, dated on the 13th c.f Omarkhali (2017, 377–398); another one was published by Lescot (1975, 225–235).
62. Articles XII–XIII, in: Joseph (1909a, b, 154–155 and 246). Other editions: Lidzbarski (1897), Ebied and Young (1972, 506–507), Nau and Tinkdji (1915–1917, 168–171).

63. Cf. Parry (1895, 367–387), Ebied and Young (1972, 517–518).
64. Bittner (1913, 28) translates ‘*millat al-İzidiyat*’ as ‘*die Religionsgemeinde der Jezidis*’. A French translation by Anastase Marie (1911, 36) of his *editio princeps*: ‘... *la nation privilégiée de Taus-Melek, autrement appelée la nation des Yézidis*’.
65. But present as a separate part of the Parry’s Arabic manuscript and in the *History of the Yezidis* in Syriac published and trans. by Chabot (1896).
66. Lit. ‘lust’, ‘desire’.
67. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *The saintly Adam*.
68. Changed by author, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005: *So (God) sent him the Hourî Eve*.
69. *Qewlê Zebûni Meksûr*, st. 49–50, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 64). These verses, according to Yezidis with whom I talked about it, belong to another hymn, but they were not able to tell me which one.
70. Who wrote about the fall of Nineveh and whose supposed birthplace, Alqush, is located in the territories inhabited by the Jacobites and the Yezidis (20 km West from Laliş).
71. Lit. ‘King/Angel of the princes’.
72. The interview was published by Spät (2010: 417–446).
73. His version of the myth is little similar to the one recorded by Siouffi (1882, 256–260).
74. This ancestor of *Adani* sheikhs is also identified with Hasan al Basri; Kreyenbroek (1995, 31–33, 105–106).
75. Ibid. 438: ‘It was the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin, you know? The soul of an angel had to go into the body...’, cf. ibid. 443.
76. ‘*Bas em Êzidi naxeletîn*’, in Spät’s translation a typographical error: ‘now’ instead of ‘not’.
77. Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagorae*: 44.
78. Cf. Al-Jabiri (1981, 226–227).
79. Hawting (2000, 13): ‘In fact it was the Umayyads’ use of the title *khalifa* which probably played an important part in the tradition’s classification of them as kings. Whereas Muslim tradition regards the title as an abbreviation of *khalifat rasul Allah*, signifying successor of the prophet, the Umayyads, as evidenced by coins and inscriptions, used the title *khalifat Allah*. [...] *Khalifat Allah* (Caliph of God) almost certainly means that they regarded themselves as deputies of God rather than as mere successors to the prophet, since it is unlikely that *khalifa* here means successor (one cannot be a successor of God) and elsewhere *khalifa* is frequently met with in the sense of ‘deputy’. In other words, the title implies that the Umayyads regarded themselves as God’s representatives’; cf. Crone and Hinds (1986).
80. Cf. Guidi (1933, 391). As Kreyenbroek noted (1995, 28): ‘Four centuries after the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, a religious movement was prominent in the Kurdish mountains which taught an excessive worship for that dynasty [...]. Some descendants of the Umayyad dynasty, moreover,

- had established themselves there as Sufi Sheykh. At the time of Sheykh ‘Adi’s arrival, Sufi masters residing in the Kurdish mountains included ‘Uqayī al-Mambijī and Abu ‘l-Wafā al-Hūlwani’; cf. Lescot (1975, 21), Ahmed (1975, 24–25, 243), Açıkyıldız (2015, 38, 85).
81. Translation A.R.
 82. In his opinion (trans. by Lescot 1975, 38): *‘Ces ignorants se prirent à chérir Yazid et à le louer, sans connaître sa nature réelle. Ils vont jusqu’à dire, dans l’excès de leur vénération pour lui et dans l’excès de leur égarement: ‘Le sang et les biens de ceux qui n’aiment pas Yazid nous sont licites; nous ne pouvons pas plus prier derrière les imam des autres musulmans.’. Ils cessèrent [pour cette raison], d’assister à la prière du Vendredi.’*
 83. It belongs to the group of so-called *Berane Qewls*, the highest hymns hierarchy (Omarkhali 2017, 99).
 84. Recited by Feqir Haji: Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 131–156).
 85. Translation A.R., based on French citation in Lescot (1975, 60–61).
 86. Cf. accusations directed at Mu’awiya by Muslim scholars cited by Shahin (2012, 201–202).
 87. Entire conflict was described among others by al-Tabari (1990); cf. Lammens’ monography (1921).
 88. According to an opinion of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali: ‘it is not certain that he slew al-Husain, or that he ordered or consented to his death; and as long as these circumstances remain undecided, it is not allowable to believe that he acted so’ (Ibn Khallikan 1843, 230–231). Al-Tabari (1990, 81 and 169): ‘According to Hufayn b. ‘Abd al-Rahman-a mawla of Mu’awiyah b. Abi Sufyan: When the head of al-Husayn was brought to Yazid and put before him, I saw him weep and he said, ‘If there had been any kinship between Ibn Ziyad and al-Husayn, he would not have done this.’; ‘Yazid’s eyes filled with tears, and he said, “I would have been satisfied with your obedience without killing al-Husayn. May God curse Ibn Sumayyah. By God! If it had been I who had accompanied him, I would have let him off. May God have mercy on al-Husayn.”’
 89. Al-Tabari (1990, 198): ‘When [...] members of the delegation returned to Medina, they stood among the people and publicly cursed and vilified Yazid. They said, “We have come from a man who has no religion, who drinks wine, who plays lutes, who passes his time with songstresses, who plays with dogs and spends his evenings talking to robbers and young men. We ask you to bear witness that we repudiate him.” With regard to the passions for wine, music and entertainment, c.f. Lammens (1913, 446–463).
 90. As Wellhausen (1927, 168) concluded: ‘His memory is a bitter one to the Muslims, but, in reality, he was not a despot; he kept the sword sheathed as long as ever he dared. He brought to an end the long-drawn-out war against the Romans. What he may be reproached with is lack of energy and of interest in public affairs. As a prince, especially, he was extremely indifferent to them, and so made the struggle to secure to him the

succession a difficult matter for his father. He took part in the great campaign against Constantinople in A. H. 49 only under compulsion. Later on, indeed, as Khalifa, he seems to have pulled himself together, although he did not give up his old predilections, wine, music, the chase and other sport. In the *Continuatio* [*Byzantina Arabica* – A.R.], *par.* 27, it says of him; ‘*Jucundissimus et cunctis nationibus regni ejus subditis vir gratisime habitus, qui nullam unquam, ut omnibus moris est, sibi regalis fastigii causa gloriam appetivit, sed communis cum omnibus civiliter vixit.*’ No other is awarded such eulogy; it comes from the heart.’

91. *Qewlê Mezin*, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 163). In the *Çiroka Pêdabûna Sura Êzî* (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 149, repeated on 152) he says: ‘I am light, my essence is light, I make the cup go round, (full) of pure wine, It has been promised that, in the city of Damascus (Şam), I shall abrogate writing, books, tracts and scriptures. [...] I am Ezid, whom you call son of Mu’awiya.’
92. *Qewlê Mezin*, st. 74, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 166).
93. *Ibid.*, st. 79, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 167).
94. *Ibid.*, st. 85 and 87, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 168 = *Çiroka Pêdabûna Sura Êzî*, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 139–140 and 153).
95. Translation A.R.
96. *Ibid.*, st. 91, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 169).
97. *Ibid.*, st. 107, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 171).
98. *Ibid.*, st. 109–110, Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, 172 = *Çiroka Pêdabûna Sura Êzî*, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 155–156).
99. *Ibid.*, st. 52, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 163).
100. Cf. Hasan (1968, 47–69), Rahman (1962, 5–21).
101. Translation A.R.
102. *Qewlê Padîşa*, st. 26: Omarkhali (2017, 303); see also *Qewlê Qendîla*, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 90–93). Feqir Haji said (Spât 2010, 446), ‘Qendil is the light of God. Qendil is the Throne. In it there are souls of holy men’.
103. About al-Hallaj’s followers among the Kurdish tribes from the Hakkari mountains, see Aloian (2008, 71–75).
104. *Qewlê Qere Ferqan*, st. 36, Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005, 100): ‘*Qurêş bi navê Siltan Êzî têt bawerî û îmane.*’
105. As Sami Ahmed noted (1975, 331): ‘some shaikhs believe that they are descendants of Yazid ibn Muawiyah and inherited from him through their ancestors, the descendants of Shaikh Adi, a holy element. Thus they are able to direct human affairs in this life.’ He also recalls a Yezidi legend that ‘when Shahid, son of Jarrah died, the Yezidi religion was corrupted and God send Yazid ibn Muawiyah to set matters right. (...) Yezid forsook his Islamic faith to serve the Yezidi doctrine which adopted his name’ (243).

106. Edmonds (1967, 31): ‘The names Qātānī and Ādānī seem to echo the ‘Adnān and Qahtān of the two separate and rival legendary lines of descent of the Arabs, southern and northern, but I do not know whether the Yazidis themselves feel any connexion. [...] Side by side with other legends regarding their origins it is sometimes claimed that tribally the princely family and the Ādānī are Hakārī, the Qātānī are Khālṭī, and the Shamsānī are Khatārī.’ The third sheikh clan—the Shamsanis—shows many resemblances to the ancient worshippers of the sun sometimes called ‘Shamsi’ in the medieval sources.
107. As Spät noted (2010, 428, n. 1206): ‘this demonstrated that contemporary nationalist discourse on Kurdish origins (which identifies the little-known Mittanis with a Kurdish tribe) has affected even someone as traditional and far from bookish learning as Feqir Haji.’
108. An *exemplum* is a Yezidi-propaganda website ‘Ezidkhan’, which publishes many ‘citations’ on behalf of the Yezidi spiritual leaders, but not attested by the sources. The day before the referendum they published a fake statement of Baba Sheikh: ‘Ezidkhan’s policy toward Kurdistan and Iraq is and remains one of strict neutrality. The Kurdish referendum is not for Yezidis, but for Kurds only to decide. Yezidis have their own autonomous nation.’ (‘Baba Sheikh: ‘Kurdish referendum is not for Yezidis’ 2017). Such manipulations are reproduced by other media (El-Ghobashy 2017).
109. As Sami Ahmed noted (1975, 34–35): ‘Ethnically they are closer to the Kurds, although many of them claim to have Arab ancestors. (...) No doubt the princely family and many of the shaikhs are Arab Omayyads.’ In the opinion of Pir Dima: ‘in the ethnogenesis of the Kurds the Kurmanji-language tribes that adopted Islam were active. In the ethnogenesis of the Yezidis, the Kurmanji-language tribes that did not want adopted Islam and struggling with invaders. Naturally, and to these and to those adjoined other ethnic components. If the Kurds adjoined Muslim tribes, then to the Yezidis on the contrary adjoined those tribes, which were in disgrace and fought against Islam. In the seventh and eighth centuries they had a political unity under the banner of the first Omayyad rulers that were tolerant to non-Muslim population’ (Pirbari and Rzgojan 2014, 157).

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