


Women and Literature: A Feminist Reading of Kurdish Women's Poetry

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Abstract

This research work is a detailed feminist reading of the poetry of a selected group of Kurdish women poets which has been written in Sorani Kurdish. The poets come from two different locations, but are originally from Iraqi Kurdistan. A group of them live in the diaspora and the rest are home-based. Thus, it is the study of the Sorani-written poetry produced by Kurdish women poets locally and externally. The study chooses the time extending from 1990 to 2009 as its scope. There are clear reasons for the selection of this time as it stands for the most hectic period when Kurdish women's poetry flourishes at a fast pace in southern Kurdistan. The study argues that the liberation of southern Kurdistan in 1991 from the overthrown Iraqi Ba'th regime plays a vital role in the productive reemergence of Kurdish women's poetry after decades of silence and suppression being inflicted by the male-dominated Kurdish literature.

Reliance on Anglo-American feminist criticism, Showalter's gynocritics and some limited theories about the relation between gender and nationalism for the thematic analysis of the poetry of Kurdish women poets is another influential aspect of this study. The study justifies the importance of these theories for giving Kurdish women's poetry the literary and social value it deserves and placing it within the larger repertoire of Kurdish literature. It is these theories that reveal the misjudgment and misapprehension of Kurdish women's poetry by Kurdish male critics.

Meanwhile, an extensive thematic analysis of the poetry of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets forms the core content of this work. The work studies the poetic texts of seventeen Kurdish women poets, seven from the diaspora, and ten from home. The themes to be focused on significantly represent the life realities of Kurdish women and the attitudes of Kurdish society towards their rights and existence. Through the exposition of the themes, this study aims to present a realistic picture of Kurdish women and urge for actions required to guarantee gender justice in southern Kurdistan. The themes symbolise a long-term war waged jointly by Kurdish women poets at home and in exile against the classic Kurdish patriarchy and its misogynistic laws. They reflect the injustice committed against women in a century when the respect of women's rights have taken big steps forward elsewhere and should theoretically be ensured.

The conclusion the study reaches is an emphasis on the overall condition of Kurdish women's poetry and the challenges lying ahead of it. It indicates the level of progress Kurdish women's poetry has made in southern Kurdistan and the role feminist criticism in unison with certain gender theories that criticise the link between women and nation can play in further developing this type of poetry. Moreover, a rather detailed comparison between the thematic structure and form of the poetry of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets is what enriches the conclusion. The influence of exile on diasporic Kurdish women poets and its relation to freedom of expression is also underlined and measured against opposite conditions back at home. Finally, the point where the poets of the two different localities converge is not omitted.

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Note on Translation

The English translation of all Kurdish poetic texts, quotations and statements which are taken from relevant Kurdish books, journals, newspaper articles and literary websites is self-provided in this study. Nevertheless, for those poetic lines and articles where an appropriate and idiomatic English translation has already been available, that translation is used, though on occasional basis and when preferable.

Dedicated to...

Vala

Varna

Vina

My three angelic daughters.

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Transcription

The transliteration system used for the familiarisation of non-Kurdish readers with the Kurdish content of this study is taken from Ahmadzadeh's *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse* (2003: 3-4). Similar list of transliteration tables showing the matches of vowels, diphthongs and consonants in Sorani and Latin Kurdish used by Ahmadzadeh are illustrated below. However, there is only one phoneme which has been uniquely modified in Kurdish to represent the English /θ/. This phoneme is /t/. It is worth saying that Ahmadzadeh has not used this phoneme in his novelistic work. Thus, the tables of vowel and consonant sounds are as follows:

Vowels and diphthongs

Sorani Kurdish	Latin Kurdish
ا، آ	a
ە	e
ۆ	o
ێ	ê
وو	û
و	u
ی	î
—	i
وی	wê

Consonants

Sorani Kurdish Alphabets	Latin Kurdish Alphabets
ﻩ	'
ﺑ	b
ﭘ	p
ﺗ	t
ﺮ	r
ﻉ	c
ﻍ	ç
ﻫ	h
ﺧ	x
ﺩ	d
ﺭ	r
ﺯ	z
ﺝ	j
ﺱ	s
ﺷ	ş
ﻉ	'
ﻍ	ğ
ﻑ	f
ﻭ	v
ﻕ	q
ﻙ	k
ﮔ	g
ﻝ	l
ﻝ	l
ﻡ	m
ﻥ	n
ﻭ	w
ﻩ	h
ﻱ	y

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 General Overview

Kurdish women's poetry is an aspect of Kurdish literature to which little critical attention, either by Kurdish or foreign literary critics, has been given. It still remains largely uncovered by scholars and researchers on local and international levels, a situation which has undermined the influence of this type of poetry on Kurdish literature, and resulted in the marginalisation of women's poetry in the literary arena. There are many factors in the lack of attention to Kurdish women's poetry: primarily the nature of the Kurdish society which is predominantly patriarchal, and has been helpful only for the creation of male rather than female poets, and the constant dearth of courage by Kurdish women to break with tradition and challenge a literature which has been written and controlled by men. Patriarchy, which is defined by Walby as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990: 20), governs almost all the functional social and political institutions in southern Kurdistan. Walby (*ibid.*) contextualises the function of patriarchy in society in relation to six structures: the mode of production, paid work, state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. In all these structures, she explains how women are disadvantaged and discriminated against on false pretensions that men are more powerful and capable of running sensitive and vital organs of society. Although in making such relations Walby adopts a more Westernised model of patriarchal dominance in society, similar cases have been happening repeatedly in southern Kurdistan. The various forms of women's oppression can be seen in multiple contexts, each either complementing and reinforcing the other or acting relatively independently. It is mostly in the light of these structures that the status of Kurdish women throughout this study will be reflected upon.

There are different factors which have reinforced patriarchy and undermined potential resistance to it by progressive forces in Kurdistan. The prime factor is perhaps the long-standing Kurdish nationalist struggle for the creation of an independent Kurdish state which has regarded many internal issues as marginal, including the emancipation of women and the establishment of their rights. The various forms in which patriarchy is practised in southern Kurdistan, its influence on the Kurdish social peace and security

and women's resistance to it and their conscious and unconscious complicity in its reinforcement and expansion will be discussed in further detail in the next chapters of this work. In Chapter Two, a historical overview of the general situation of women in Kurdish society and the stages of development of Kurdish women's poetry since its emergence in the nineteenth century will be given.

Thus, Kurdish women poets who have dared to go beyond the limits defined by men are few in number and have only been able to achieve their ambitions of writing poetry and facing up to the dominance of men over literature on intermittent basis. A batch of early Kurdish women poets who are the pioneers of Kurdish women's poetry will be invoked in detail in Chapter Two of this study. However, this inertial propensity of Kurdish women to remain hand-tied and weak against the conspiracies of men to keep them continually on the periphery of Kurdish literature came almost to an end in the last two decades of the twentieth century with the emergence of a group of Kurdish women poets in southern Kurdistan who self-reliantly started writing poetry albeit insufficiently¹. Amidst a vulnerable economy, Kurdish women's poetry developed, though slowly, both inside and outside southern Kurdistan, in the early 1990s, particularly after the uprising by Kurds against the toppled Iraqi Ba'th regime in 1991, which resulted in the liberation of the three Kurdish cities of Erbil (Hewlêr), Dihok, and Slêmani.

The creation of a Kurdish region in Iraq with a self-ruled government and parliament has triggered the establishment of many publishing houses both private and governmental, which have played a crucial role in the provision of printing facilities for women poets. Although from 1991 to 2003 these publishing houses were limited in number and capacity due to the difficult economic situation of southern Kurdistan, their number almost tripled, if not much more, after the collapse of Saddam's regime in 2003 and the subsequent unprecedented economic boom and stability witnessed across the whole of southern Kurdistan. This has resulted in the publication of dozens of poetry books by Kurdish women poets in the past fifteen years to challenge a literature that had so far included only male voices. These publishers have not only served women poets from inside Kurdistan Region; Kurdish women poets living in the diaspora, who have not

¹ Azad Heme Şerîf illustrates the flourishing condition of Kurdish women's poetry in southern Kurdistan in an article titled 'Berengarbûnewe û rojî yaxîgerî le şî'ri jinanî Kurd' (Confrontation and rebellious spirit in the poetry of Kurdish women), published in *Bedirxan* newspaper, No. 129, pp. 14-15.

been able to publish their poetry abroad due to expensive costs, have also benefited from them, and released their poetry written over years to their readers both inside and outside Kurdistan. This cohort of Kurdish women poets have not merely broken their way through by publishing their poetry in the form of books, but have also made use of the large number of Kurdish and foreign websites, and alongside men poets, have published their poetry online. Examples of websites, online magazines and newspapers, where my selected group of Kurdish women poets usually publish their poetry, are *Raman (Gaze)*, *Exiled Writers Ink*, *Dengekan (Voices)*, *Bedirxan*², *The Poetry Archive*, and *Rûberî Dahênan (Creation Space)*.

However, favoritism and the arrogance of competent Kurdish male critics have been influential factors in the underestimation of the importance of the poetry written by Kurdish women poets, and have led to its failure to gain recognition on national and international levels, which proves the prevalence of the masculine spirit and power in Kurdish literature. This is a kind of patriarchal oppression of women argued by Walby (1990) which is conducted explicitly in the cultural institutions. Naļe ‘Ebdulřehman³, in an interview with the *Edeb û Huner (Literature and Art)* page of *Kurdistan Ŗaport (Kurdistan Report)* newspaper, criticises experienced male Kurdish critics for ignoring the poetry of young Kurdish poets, including women poets, and considers factors like personal and mutual interests and nepotism as the dynamics of treatment of women’s poetry. She goes on to say that “leading Kurdish literary critics see themselves as superior to the inexperienced young poets and take age rather than the works of such poets into account while judging them, which is a huge disaster” (‘Ebdulřehman 2009: 5).

It is worth noting that the current condition of Kurdish women’s poetry in southern Kurdistan is similar to the situation of women’s literature in America and Europe in the early nineteenth century where the voices of women writers were silenced by male writers. The current situation of Kurdish women’s literature, especially poetry which has taken the lead over the other literary genres amongst Kurdish women, is despairingly bad, and has only attracted a few Kurdish critics to cast a merciful eye over

² It is the name of a prominent early nationalist Kurdish family.

³ Naļe ‘Ebdulřehman (b.1979) is a Kurdish woman poet and journalist, born in Hewlêr in southern Kurdistan.

it. Unlike Anglo-American women's or feminist movements, there are no particular feminist associations or women's groups formed to defend Kurdish women's literature, as women or feminist critics are invisible on the literary ground of southern Kurdistan to revitalise the dead or silenced voices of Kurdish women poets who have emerged recently in tens, and the number is still growing. This lack of organised Kurdish women critics has left the poetry of Kurdish women poets at the mercy of the male critics who, as mentioned above, choose the poets on the basis of common interests and belonging to the same regions they live in. However, this absence of critical attention has not only affected women's poetry, but also literary texts written by men, and there is a widespread outrage among Kurdish writers over marginalising the role of literary criticism in Kurdish literature. Kurdish critic Dişşad 'Ebdulla argues that Kurdish literary criticism has ignored all the literary conventions, pointing to the problem of rejecting each other's criticism among the Kurdish writers which has caused a paralysis in Kurdish literature. Responding to a question by *Kurdistan Report's Literature and Art* page about the negligence shown by Kurdish critics towards the younger generation of Kurdish poets, 'Ebdulla says "the relationship between the old and new generation is weak and cold, adding that the famous Kurdish critics we have do not accept criticism from the young generation, as they select poets for criticism on the basis of personal relations" ('Ebdulla 2009: 5). In the next sections, I will explain in detail this dilemma in Kurdish literature, which has placed many obstacles in the way of the progress of the various genres of this literature, and has slowed down the process of its internationalisation to compete with other world literatures. Kurdish women's poetry has always been the major victim of this ongoing crisis in Kurdish literature, and is badly affected by its adverse consequences.

The patriarchal and unsympathetic attitude of Kurdish critics and criticism towards the poetry of Kurdish women does not seem to be negative only inside southern Kurdistan, but even abroad, particularly in the West, as this ignorant view is held by the majority of Kurdish critics who operate within diasporic Kurdish literary circles and who have contributed notably to the development of exilic Kurdish literature. Diasporic Kurdish woman poet Çoman Herdî (2006: 102) expresses her discontent at the mode of functioning of the Kurdish magazines and newspapers published abroad in the late 1990s, which were highly reluctant to approach the works of Kurdish women writers and assign

space to them. She argues that “some of the writers of these Kurdish journals publicised each other’s books and supported one another, while remaining silent over the works of women” (*ibid.*). Thus, if this was the mentality of Kurdish critics abroad, who were expected to be more open-minded and optimistic towards the works of Kurdish women, should anything positive be expected from the local critics whose minds are widely conquered by the old Kurdish traditions and norms that are generally unfriendly towards women?

1.2 The Aim of the Study

This study tackles Kurdish women’s poetry in southern Kurdistan which has been written from the early 1990s. Using a methodological approach inspired by the gynocritics of Elaine Showalter and others operating within Anglo-American feminist criticism, the poets selected for this study are all from southern Kurdistan who are now either living in Kurdistan or abroad, and who write their poetry in the Kurdish Sorani dialect. Thus, I will be allocating a chapter to the poetry written by women poets who live now in southern Kurdistan and a chapter to diasporic Kurdish women poets. This study is an attempt at bringing to light the poetry of Kurdish women poets which has been generally overlooked both by academia and the public readers. The obvious dominance of Kurdish male literature has been able to undermine the influence of the sporadic literature of Kurdish women writers in general and poets in particular; this has been the factor why most women poets who wished to write poetry in the middle of the twentieth century followed in the footsteps of men and used the same male voice and themes in their poetry, which greatly affected women poets’ success in finding a style that could be used to express their feelings, experiences and stories. Kurdistan Mukiryani⁴ states that Kurdish women poets in the past had no choice but to imitate men because they could not find any particular antecedent women poets to influence them and inspire them with women-related themes. She continues to say that “such women poets, whether they liked it or not, were found under the impact of a male writer whose style and structure had

⁴ Kurdistan Gîwî Mukiryani (b.1948) was born in Hewlêr; she has a PhD in Kurdish linguistics and has written many books and poems. Mukiryani is the daughter of the famous Kurdish writer Gîwî Mukiryani (b.1903-d.1977), who has a special place in Kurdish literature; she is currently the head of the KDP-run Kurdistan Women’s Union based in Hewlêr, the capital of the Kurdistan Region.

clearly reflected in their poetry, or, in other words, their voices were immersed in the voice of that male writer” (Mukiryani 1980: 12).

This lack of a specific woman’s voice and trend persists to a good deal even in today’s Kurdish women’s poetry as most Kurdish women poets that I have chosen for my study point out in interviews and press articles that they are influenced by specific Kurdish male poets, mainly by the classical Kurdish poets such as Nalî (b.1800-d.1856), Salim (b.1805-d.1869), Mewlewî (b.1806-d.1882), Kurdî (b.1812-d.1850), Mehwî (b.1830-d.1906), and etc.⁵ Most of them, in particular Roj Helebceyî, imitate to certain degree similar styles and sentiments taken into consideration by these classical Kurdish poets and feel proud of being inspired by these pioneers with the straightforward praxis they have adopted to express themselves and their realities in their poetry.

While there are some Kurdish women poets who, on the contrary, are rather more influenced by foreign poets- whether they are poets from the Western countries, particularly Britain and France, or the Middle East- than the Kurdish male poets. This case is literally clear with those Kurdish women poets who have been living away for quite a long time in the diaspora and have found themselves greatly inspired and enthused by non-Kurdish voices. Kurdish critic Haşim Seřac (2004: 66), while making a critical reading of Nezend Begîxanî’s⁶ poetry book *Stayîş* (Celebrations)⁷, points out the huge impact of the contemporary Iranian woman poet Forugh Farrokhzad (b.1935-d.1967) in terms of bravery and the expression of the sufferings of women in Begîxanî’s poems, and says that Begîxanî, similar to Farrokhzad, invokes the painful and sorrowful moments of earthly life in her poems.

⁵ These classical Kurdish poets who lived in the early years of the nineteenth century are the landmarks of Kurdish poetry; they have made considerable influence on their successor Kurdish poets, and have remained as the source of inspiration for the current young generation of Kurdish poets, particularly those Kurdish women poets who mostly write love and romantic poetry. However, Kurdistan Mukiryani (1980:12) believes that the visible impact of such great poets has failed Kurdish women poets along the history to have a special poetic voice of their own that can represent their personalities, way of thinking, and life pattern disparate from the world of men.

⁶ Nezend Begîxanî (b.1964) is a Kurdish woman poet from Southern Kurdistan. She is currently living in France, working as a researcher on the issue of violence against women, and has published several articles in this regard. She has five poetry publications in Kurdish and one in English.

⁷ According to the Kurdish-Kurdish dictionary *Ferhengî Şêxanî* (Shekhani Dictionary) (2009: 304), the word “Stayîş” means “praise or thanking”; however, the translation of this book’s title into (Celebrations) is the exact translation the author herself has given to it in English. Therefore, it seems more logical and academic to keep the author’s translation here than the genuine meaning the word holds in Kurdish.

I have decided to select seventeen Kurdish women poets from southern Kurdistan with the aim of creating a place for them in the overall body of Kurdish literature which, as I have already mentioned, has so far dismissed this type of poetry as a genuine part of its long history and legacy. Unfortunately, the situation of Kurdish women's poetry is highly embarrassing in an age where there is a strong demand for the equal rights of women in all walks of life, whether social, cultural, political, or literary. I intend to trace the early history of Kurdish women's poetry in general and such sort of poetry in southern Kurdistan in particular to unearth those Kurdish women's voices who over the past two centuries have been able to face up to the patriarchal institutions of society, and, through the medium of poetry, expressed their deep passions, inner feelings, thoughts, experiences, and male-imposed oppression against them.

The study will encapsulate Kurdish women poets from the early nineteenth century to the end of 2009, and it will then put them in a form that can lead to further research on the Kurdish women's poetry on a wider scale. After a general history and background of the Kurdish women's poetry is explored, a broader focus of attention will be given to the specified poets of this study. The core task of my study will be the scrutinisation of their poetry to see if they express themes of love, fate of women, oppression and violence against them and any other women-related subjects in a direct and challenging manner because most Kurdish critics and writers argue that the new voices are braver and more defiant than their predecessors in confronting the unequal treatment they receive from the "classic" (to use the term used by Moghadam (1993: 104)) patriarchal society ruled by the traditional norms and ideologies (see Chapters 3 and 4). Cebâr Sabîr⁸, in a research conducted on the poetry of several modern male and female Kurdish poets who have started writing in the early 1990s, highlights the daring spirit of the Kurdish women poets who have heroically stood against the new orthodox ideologies which have restricted the freedom of the Kurdish women by a great extent if compared to the recent past. He exemplifies a poem by the Kurdish woman poet Kejaļ

⁸ Cebâr Sabîr, in his book *Lewdîw Henasekanî Şi'rewê* (Beyond Poetry Breaths) (2008), critically analyses the content of the poetry of selected young Kurdish poets, including three Kurdish women poets, in which he concentrates mostly on the main differences between these poets and their antecedents in terms of the national feelings and courage to touch and speak about the taboos in society.

Ehmed⁹ titled “Be Tenûreyekî Kurtî Sûrewê” (dressed in a red short skirt), in which she slams the recent unexpected emergence of the extremist Islamic movements and groups in southern Kurdistan which have put a ban even on the dress once was worn quite normally and unrestrictedly in Kurdistan. A scrupulous exploration of the major themes of the poetry of the target Kurdish women poets will be the cornerstone and focal point of my research.

As this research work is dedicated to the standing and role of the Kurdish women’s poetry in Kurdish literature in southern Kurdistan, it is essential to define my most important research questions to be achieved throughout the long process of writing my thesis as follows: Does Kurdish women’s poetry have a clear position in Kurdish literature in southern Kurdistan? Do Kurdish women poets practise writing poetry from an inner aspiration and love for it or as a conscious reaction to the form of life women generally lead in society? Are the themes of Kurdish women’s poetry different from the themes of Kurdish male poetry? Do Kurdish women poets have a particular style and form of writing poetry or they copy the poetry of the principal male Kurdish poets? Are the themes raised by the diasporic Kurdish women poets similar to those raised by the home Kurdish women poets or they are different? If different, what causes this discrepancy? Have there been any potential motives behind a gradual increase in the number of Kurdish women poets writing in Sorani Kurdish both in southern Kurdistan and abroad in the time to be prioritized in my study?

1.3 Method and Theory

The study of the poetry of these women poets will be carried out on the basis of reading individual poetry books by each one of these poets, and then pointing out the relevant themes which prove the research questions I have defined in the previous section of this chapter. In each one of the two main chapters of my study, i.e. Chapters Three and Four, the woman poet with most poetry publications will come first. However, it has to be said that it is not necessary that I include all the poetry books and poems by every single poet

⁹ Kejal Ehmed (b.1967) was born in the city of Kirkuk in Iraq; she was able to publish her poetry at the early age of 21, and has gained a considerable reputation for being an outspoken Kurdish woman poet whose poetry has recently been translated for the first time into English by the London-based Kurdish poet Choman Hardi in collaboration with Mimi Khalvati under the title *Poems* (2008).

in the study due to limited time and quantity of words, which consequently makes me to be selective in the process of incorporating the themes and poems. As noted above, the most influential and controversial poems and themes from each poet will be picked on. Apart from the works to be discussed later in this section, which are written in English on women's poetry, and are helpful with the application of the feminist literary theory to Kurdish women's poetry, I have found two good specific literary items which can serve as a model for my thematic analysis of the poetry of Kurdish women. These models are a chapter by Dr M.F. Patel titled "Indian Feminine Sensibility in Current Indian-English Women Poets" cited in *Recritiquing Women's Writing in English*, volume one, (2009) edited by Dr M.F. Patel, and an article by the American poet and feminist critic Alicia Ostriker entitled "'What Are Patterns for?': Anger and Polarization in Women's Poetry". Patel conducts a thematic reading of a group of Indian women poets, indicating the central themes presented in their poetry. From each Indian woman poet, he chooses several poems to discuss the themes he finds distinctive. When Patel highlights any theme, for instance, "reminiscences of childhood" from Kamala Das' poetry, he immediately supports this theme with certain poetic lines from a poem which represent that theme. As for Ostriker, nearly the similar method of Patel is undertaken, as she makes a thematic study of the poetry of three women poets, viz. Margaret Atwood, Diane Wakoski and Anne Sexton. Ostriker (1984: 486) mainly emphasises the theme of "female victimization within patriarchy". Thus, these two examples will act as pathways for my thematic analysis of the poetry of the selected women poets of my study. In each chapter, space according to the number of the poetry books will be given to every Kurdish woman poet. The poets will be worked on individually, with their poetry confined to the section to be dedicated to each one of them. Additionally, the basic method for the thematic analysis of the poetry of those women poets with more than one poetry book will be a sharp focus on the production date of each book, i.e. the practice of the chronological order. However, this technique is principally unique to Chapter Four due to a further specified criteria adopted in selecting the poets of this chapter, which are differently used in Chapter Three. Accordingly, the poetry book with the earliest date of production will be thematically analysed first. And similar to Patel and Ostriker's poetic analyses, whenever I raise a theme by any one of my poets, I will justify it by poetic lines from

their poetry. The poetic texts will first be provided in their original form in Kurdish, and an English translation of them will immediately follow. However, for those poems for which a reliable and official English translation already exists, that translation will be used with reference to the translating body.

A great deal of the poetic analysis of my research work has been conducted with the support of the critical articles and books written so far by Kurdish critics from inside and outside southern Kurdistan on the poetry of Kurdish women. Electronic Kurdish newspapers and magazines provide a good amount of critical articles and interviews on the poetry of Kurdish women; however, not all the poets I have chosen for my study are tackled by Kurdish critics, which is again related to the issue of friendship and common interests between the women poets themselves and the critics. I have noticed during my search for materials on Kurdish women's poetry, whether in the form of research, articles, interviews, books or case studies, that those women poets who have been talked about more than others are either prominent in the Kurdish society by holding a political or administrative post or they are from a well-known Kurdish family or have a very close relationship with those Kurdish writers and critics who have occupied a large space in the Kurdish literary arena. Kejaļ Eħmed, Çoman Herdî, Nezend Begîxanî, Naļe 'Ebdulfehman, Çinûr Namiq, Lazo and Kejaļ İbrahim Xidir¹⁰ are examples of those Kurdish women poets whose poetry is paid much critical attention by the critics in books, Kurdish magazines and newspapers. However, this shortage in material on the poetry of Kurdish women will not cause serious problems to my research project because it is underpinned by the Anglo-American feminist literary theory which has clearly defined the boundaries of work on the literary products of women writers. Additionally, there are books, articles, and theses written on women's poetry in other literatures which can give much insight into my methods of research, particularly works conducted on the women's poetry in the Arab world as there are quite many characteristics and elements shared

¹⁰ Kejaļ Eħmed, as well as of being a good poet, was a prominent member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) for a long time. She has quit political life very recently; Çoman Herdî is the daughter of the famous Kurdish poet Eħmed Herdî; Nezend Begîxanî, Naļe 'Ebdulfehman, Çinûr Namiq, Lazo and Kejaļ İbrahim Xidir enjoy close relations with Kurdish critics, among them Mehmed Zamdar, Awat Mihemmed and Haşim Sefac, despite the fact that these poets are active and visible in the literary circles. Naļe 'Ebdulfehman, alongside her literary career, is the current director of Cihan Radio, which is an independent radio station broadcast locally in Erbil, southern Kurdistan.

between the Kurdish and Arab women's poetry. For instance, a book about women's poetry, which I have found relevant to my project, is Nathalie Handal's *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2001). Although this book is only an anthology which embraces eighty three Arab women poets both from inside the Arab countries and abroad, it acts as a good model for me because most poets chosen for it are from the last two decades of the twentieth century, nearly the time span of my work, and, in its introduction, there is a thematic comparison between the poetry of the diasporic Arab women poets and those living inside their home countries, a point which is of much benefit for the third and fourth chapters of my research. Besides its being in English, I have included this book in my theory and method section due to the cultural proximity reflected in both Kurdish and Arabic literatures, as well as the life experiences and stories shared by Kurdish and Arab women poets. The method used in the book is of great help for my work, and the criteria adopted by Handal for selecting the poets are in much harmony with those I have undertaken to limit the number of poets. Handal's work differs from mine in the way women poets are picked; she chooses not only poets who have published poetry books, but even those who have been publishing in journals, and who have aroused interest among other poets, translators and critics (Handal 2001: XIII). Furthermore, for Handal the decision to include which poets was hard, as she says:

The decision of which poets to include was difficult, for apart from the fact that such an undertaking involves perpetual interior and exterior debates, there was the issue that many of the women poets were not established poets yet. Therefore, many of the poets' works cannot, at this point in time, be evaluated in terms of their poetic influence, nor can many of these poets be looked upon as major cultural, social and political figures. It is vital to note, however, that even if the evolution of each poet cannot be determined at this point in time, every voice is important in that it contributes to the creation and expansion of Arab women's poetry (*ibid.*).

Thus, here is another point of disagreement with Handal as I have only selected those Kurdish women poets who have at least published one poetry book between 1990 and 2009. However, Handal's book is inspirational in many other respects, including her meticulous introductory section which provides a historical background of Arab women's poetry and a satisfactory coverage of the controversial themes and issues generally invoked and evoked by this poetry. In her book, Handal cleverly manages to point out the diverse poetic themes which account for the reality of women's life in the Arab world. And this fact is confirmed by Handal (2001: 1) when she says in the introduction to her

anthology that “the first concerns and preoccupations of Arab women poets were, unsurprisingly, their unjust degradation, marginalization, and oppression by the social system, and their boundedness by tradition.”¹¹

As I have already stated that this study is the first of its kind to focus solely on Kurdish women’s poetry in English, supported fundamentally by Anglo-American feminist literary theory, I considered it of high importance to look for some works being conducted in English on women’s poetry, which use feminist literary theories, in order to be successful in using my theory and make the output of my work as creative as possible. *Women’s Poetry* by Jo Gill (2007) is one such example that benefits from feminist theories and criticisms. She does not employ one specific feminist critical school or theory in analysing the poetry of a group of women poets from Britain and America-poets such as Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore, but, rather, picks up a mixture of theories with the aim of presenting diverse themes and women-centred issues. Gill’s book is very significant since it tackles similar subjects and themes that I intend to point out in my study when analysing the themes of Kurdish women’s poetry. It shows the difference of women’s poetry from men’s, indicates the style and language used by women poets, and focuses on the critical issues raised in women’s poetry, such as the fight against patriarchy, the dominance and authority of male writers over women, and dozens of other obstacles facing women poets and their activity of writing poetry. For instance, when referring to Mary Barber’s poem ‘Conclusion of a Letter’, written in 1734, Gill argues that this poem “delivers a passionate defence of a woman’s right to write, and to read”, adding that “this is a poem about writing as a woman, or about writing as a woman in a culture which disapproves of such a project” (Gill 2007: 25).

The second literary work accomplished in English on women’s poetry, which has been a source of inspiration for me, is a PhD thesis by Alison Jayne Donnell, from the University of Warwick, Centre for Caribbean Studies. Donnell’s work, “Cultural and Gender Politics in a Neglected Archive of Jamaican Women’s Poetry: Una Marson and her Creole Contemporaries” (1994), is mainly an exploration of the neglected poetry

¹¹ For further details on how Nathalie Handal describes the content of the poetry of contemporary Arab women poets and the status of Arab women in society, see the introduction of her book *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, 2001, pp. 1-60.

written by Jamaican women poets. The study's scope is the first half of the twentieth century, which seeks to bring forward Jamaican women's poetry being marginalised by the canonical rules and modes of interpretation. It relies heavily on feminist literary theory to achieve that goal, although side by side with that theory, it also employs post-colonial theory to look into the influence of the colonisation of Jamaica on the status of women poets in Jamaican literature. Donnell chooses Una Marson, a black woman poet, as representative of the neglected voices of Jamaican women poets, and begins a thematic analysis of her poetry. Throughout my reading of Donnell's thesis, I found that there are several similarities between the works of the two of us, as both of us are in search of discovering the silenced voices and texts of women's poetry and identifying the reasons which have led to this unfavourable finish. Crucially, Donnell (1994: 3) defines one of the basic objectives of her thesis as "the recuperation of silenced texts", that coincides with one of the main tasks of my work, which is bringing Kurdish women's poetry to the attention of critics and readers in academia.

Hence, the centerpiece of the study that helps me unveil the inner messages of the poetry of Kurdish women poets is the Anglo-American feminist literary theory. For me, this theory harmonises well with the nature of the poetry of poets I have selected for my study, and, against its backdrop, the themes of poems will be explicably analysed and discussed. To know the significance of this theory and why it has been deemed appropriate for the analysis of the poetry of the poets selected in my study, I need to illustrate its implications and the particular assumptions made by the eminent candid critics of this very distinctive branch of feminist criticism¹² who have written many books and articles about how the literary works of women writers must be read, commented, analysed, interpreted, and diligently compared to the dominant and challenging works of the opposite sex, male writers, who, to date, have managed to hold a tight grip on all the genres of literature, and at the top of them poetry.

¹² Anglo-American feminist criticism adopts views and analytical techniques which are greatly different from the French feminist criticism since it places much focus on the themes, voice and tone of the literary texts by women writers, while the French feminist criticism pays attention to language and how a special style of writing pertinent to women can be established. These two opposite orientations have resulted in clashes between the critics of the two theories and produced various interpretations of texts by women. Charles E. Bressler (1994: 106) states this situation when he defines the American, British, and French feminisms, pointing to the fact that American feminism "is suspicious of any one theory that would attempt to explain the differences between the male and female writings."

Meanwhile, in order to enhance the value and result of the use of Anglo-American feminist literary theory for the poetry of Kurdish women, a combination of this theory will be made with relevant gender theories which discuss the situation of women in the Middle East. Although such combination will be made to a limited degree, it is necessary to find out the relation of gender to nationalism and women, as a biological category, in the poetry of selected Kurdish women poets. What necessitates the exploration of an interrelationship between Anglo-American feminist criticism and certain gender theories in a Kurdish poetic context is the complex patriarchal composition of the Kurdish society. Because this society is built on highly gendered social practice, finding an overlap between these two literary and social theories will offer a more rationalised account and reasonable understanding of the condition of Kurdish women.

1.3.1 Anglo-American Feminist Literary Theory

Although it is to varying degrees the same case with all other feminist literary theories, one of the main factors which has made me choose Anglo-American feminist literary theory is the close affinity that I have perceived between the Kurdish women writers in general, poets in particular, and English-American women writers, in the sense that both have been the victims of patriarchal rule in society and dominance over literature. In the case of Anglo-American women writers, this issue comes gradually to an end by the appearance of an enormous number of challenging and hardworking women writers and feminist critics such as Kate Millet, Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Annette Kolodny, and Elaine Showalter, who have allocated their time looking for manuscripts and other writings by women, and have succeeded in bringing to life hundreds of names of women writers, poets, novelists who, due to unfair attitudes of male writers towards them, were buried in the history of English and American literature. Showalter in an article titled ‘American Gynocriticism’ indicates that Judith Fetterley, in the introduction to her anthology *Provisions*, expresses her astonishment at her discovery of an “extraordinarily rich, diverse, and interesting body of prose literature written in the nineteenth century by American women” (Showalter 1993: 111). Alongside other American feminist critics, Fetterley has played a crucial role in uncovering the American women writers who were neglected in the male-written canon of American literature, and

has dedicated her anthology to serve this purpose. This process of discovering women's voices, old and new, both in Britain and America has become a concrete project and resulted in plans to establish a women's literary tradition that is intended to be separate from the male tradition. Jan Montefiore (1987: 57) believes that women writers must have a tradition of their own because it is difficult for them to adopt the male tradition which is only representative of the male voice and style. She advocates the idea of an alternative women's tradition, particularly for women poets who, according to her, find it hard to incorporate themselves in the male tradition or take advantage of its materials. She believes that:

The idea of women's tradition would enable feminists not only to rewrite our independent history of women poets, but to construct a context of poetic meaning in which women's poems were not constantly overdetermined or undermined by patriarchal suggestion and symbol; finally, it would work more generally to help make a woman's discourse thinkable. All of these make the (re) creation of a woman's tradition into an ambition well worth pursuing, even though the very magnitude and importance of the project make it problematic and controversial (Montefiore 1987: 57).

Feminist literary theory, as an integral part and philosophical branch of literary criticism, has witnessed its point of departure since the late 1960s. Academic, literary, political, economic and cultural institutions around the world have all sensed the impact of an all-inclusive and quickly flourishing revolution led by feminist criticism. Feminist criticism, alongside other critical approaches, has played a major role in rediscovering and revitalising the lost and ignored works of women writers all over the world, and succeeded in challenging the literary tradition and canon which have been formed and monopolised by male writers and voices. Showalter, in the introduction of her book, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, highlights the importance of the rapid development of feminist criticism since the late 1960s as a complementary part of the international movement led by women for the alteration of the position and image of women writers on the world's literary stage. Showalter (1985: 3) defines her women-centred argument this way:

Whereas it had always been taken for granted that the representative reader, writer, and critic of Western literature is male, feminist criticism has shown that women readers and critics bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experience, and has insisted that women have also told the important stories of our culture.

This development in feminist criticism has sparked off three geographically distinct feminist criticisms which are American, British and French feminist criticism, each with relatively discrete sets of ideas, principles, theory and way of thinking towards the works and literary achievements of women writers around the world. However, they share the same obvious goal which is finding the missing and long-neglected oeuvres of women writers, as Bressler (1994: 106) says:

No matter what they emphasise in theory, however, all feminist critics assert that they are on a journey of self-discovery that will lead them to a better understanding of themselves. And once they understand and then define themselves as women, they believe they will be able to change their world.

Nevertheless, due to the analytical nature of my study, I would prefer choosing both American and British feminist criticisms to provide a manageable theoretical base and background for my study. I assume that the combination of American and British feminist criticisms will serve as a good model of literary theory for the thematic analysis of the poetry of Kurdish women poets. Generally, Anglo-American feminist criticism seems to comply with the series of conventions embodied in literary realism, and deal with literature as clearly a sequence of authentic representations of the experience and lives of women that can be judged and assessed against what happens in reality. Peter Barry (2009: 119) argues that Anglo-American feminists have a unique view towards the analysis of literary texts and that “they see the close reading and explication of individual literary texts as the major business of feminist criticism.”

Contextually, American feminist criticism differs from its counterpart, British feminist criticism, by putting a strong emphasis on the text itself, paying crucial attention to the textual characteristics such as theme, the inner and outer voice of the texts, and the diverse tones each text is supposedly predicted to embrace. British feminism, on the other hand, is more politically motivated with its agenda centering round social change and equality between men and women. British feminism is often looked at as Marxist which tends more willingly towards ideological conceptions and therefore apparently more related to social and cultural reform and change than American feminism. Bressler (1994: 106) sees British feminism finding its base outside the universities in the publishing world, journalism, and politics, adding that “British feminism attempts to analyse the relationship between gender and class and to show how the dominant power structures

controlled by men influence all of society and oppress women.” Despite all the inner differences and disputes that can be noticed between the American and British feminist criticism, the two criticisms, according to Showalter (1985: 9), the leading feminist critic of the American branch, “try to recover women’s historical experiences as readers and writers.” American feminist critic Annette Kolodny, in her critical essay published in Showalter’s *The New Feminist Criticism* (1985: 144), considers the major task of feminist literary criticism as revealing the “sexual stereotyping of women” in both literature and literary criticism as well as laying bare the incompleteness of the critical schools and methods established by male writers, with the aim of finding a fairer and more sensitive way of treating literary works written by women writers. Kolodny emphasises the historical importance of feminist literary criticism for triumphantly unearthing the discarded and deliberately denigrated works of women writers, stating that “under its wide umbrella, everything has been thrown into question: our established canons, our aesthetic criteria, our interpretative strategies, our reading habits, and most of all, ourselves as critics and as teachers” (Kolodny 1985: 145). Besides, the American feminist critic Jane Marcus defines the main task of feminist criticism as opposing the hegemony of the male theoreticians over the literary theory. She calls for the reformulation of all the theories whose structures and functions are drawn up by male writers. Critically, Marcus takes the case of literary theory in the United States as an example of the male domination over its goals and audience. She considers literary theory as a significant part of philosophy, arguing that “its most vigorous practitioners in the United States have been male” (Marcus 1982: 623-4). She also underlines the fact that the slowly changing situation of literary theory and its hostility towards women writers and their writing is the insupportable extension of the new generation of phallogocentric male critics who refuse to admit or take responsibility for what their male predecessors had done to women writers for centuries. Marcus (1982: 624) deplores the unapologetic attitude of male critics towards the unfair treatment they and their literary forefathers have made of women authors throughout history, adding that:

They refuse to bear the burden of the sins of their literary fathers or to make amends for centuries of critical abuse of women writers involving the loss, destruction, bowdlerisation, or misevaluation of women’s texts, diaries, letters, and biographies.

Meanwhile, Marcus, in her essay entitled “Storming the Toolshed”, carries on unveiling the first missions that feminist critics were up to when they ran out of patience against what male writers did to women’s talents on a wide scale. She puts her description of the situation this way:

When feminist critics first forced open the toolshed, they polished and sharpened the rusty spades and hoes and rakes men long since had discarded. They learned history, textual criticism, biography, the recovery of manuscripts. They began to search for and reprint women's works and to study the image of woman in Western art. Many moved into linguistics to get at the origins of oppression in language, while others worked to find the writing of women of colour. We were all forced to become historians and biographers and to train ourselves in those disciplines. We devoured theories of female psychology, anthropology, and myth to broaden our grasp of the work of women artists. The more materialist and particular the labour of feminist critics became, the more abstract and antimaterialist became the work of the men (*ibid.*).

These principal tenets and key facts encapsulated in Anglo-American feminist criticism are pathways for my journey through the poetry of Kurdish women poets; I will be approaching the poems more from the social, political and cultural dimensions and almost all the themes I will be picking out should justify this statement. By means of this critical theory I want to explore those numerous diverse and hidden questions and issues which are raised in the poetry of Kurdish women poets and find out whether Kurdish women poets are generally aware of the little importance given so far to their efforts of producing poetry by academia, public readers, and critics. This theory should also help in putting the Kurdish literary canon¹³ in a fresh critical light, revealing the standards and structure on which that canon has ever been established, and uncover those historical, cultural and social factors which are behind the extensive, ideologically-motivated exclusion of Kurdish women’s poetry from this male-dominated canon.

According to a vast majority of Anglo-American feminist critics, any study purely conducted on the works of women writers has to adopt a revisionist approach so as to

¹³ The controversial issue of the literary canon is something almost all feminist critics are deeply engaged in. An enormous number of the feminist critics are against the standards apparently set by the male writers, which decide which author to be included in the literary canon. In a critical article, Lillian S. Robinson (1983: 83) states that the literary canon embraces only an author who meets “generally accepted criteria of excellence.” Meanwhile, she casts doubt on the validity and fairness of such criteria, believing that they are not equally applied to all the writers. With regard to the Kurdish literary canon, it is necessary to point out that there is no official canon in Kurdish literature to bring it under question. Nevertheless, by canon here I mean the academic syllabi and courses which are studied in the southern Kurdistan universities and institutes, and, to some extent, the body of the works which are consensually conceived to be the masterpieces of Kurdish literature.

determine and demarcate those crucial factors which have instrumentally resulted in largely marginalising not only the mediocre literary products by women, but their masterpieces as well. This area will be one of the critical missions of my study as to why Kurdish women's poetry is seldom heard of, read, and written about by Kurdish critics. Feminist critic Susan Stanford Friedman, in her article published in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl's *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (2007: 724), identifies four strategies used by women poets to feminise the genre of poetry¹⁴; she believes that by these four strategies women poets aim to blur the boundaries in order to place themselves as women writing inside a tradition that has considered them as outsiders. To further clarify what "revision" means in a critical and poetic context, Friedman borrows an explanation of the term provided by the American woman poet and feminist critic Adrienne Rich as she defines it as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Friedman 2007: 730). In view of this definition, this study will, similarly, look back at history to discover the buried voices of Kurdish women poets, and the reasons behind that burial act, in addition to exploring this fact whether it has been reflected and spoken about in the poetry of new generation women poets who are the focal point of this study.

1.3.1.1 Gynocriticism

When speaking of American feminist criticism as led by Showalter, one must discuss the notion of gynocriticism introduced by Showalter as an approach specific to the analysis of texts being written by women writers. After the productive activities of the women's movement in the 1960s, which resulted in great changes in the position of women in society and in particular the status of women writers, since the movement had initially concentrated on literature and the representation of women in the literary works produced by male writers, a shift of attention from "androtexs", books written by men, to

¹⁴ Susan S. Friedman (2007: 724-5) defines the four strategies as: first, the making of the discourse of the satiric Other, the outsider who attempts to sarcastically defeat the insider; second, the repossession of the public area from where women have been mainly excluded via a discourse of history "–a (her) story in which the inside is the outside and the outside is the inside"; third, the creation of the discourse of "revision", where the outsider goes deep down into the discourse of the inside with the aim of reshaping it; and fourth, the invention of a discourse of "linguistic experimentalism, a gynopoetic of the outside that establishes a new inside by turning the inside, inside out."

“gynotexts” books written by women, was made, with the aim of finding out the literary qualities and values of women’s writings (Barry 2009: 118). Gynocritics, a term originally coined by Showalter, refers to the study and analysis of texts and literary works written by women. Barry (*ibid.*) quotes Showalter describing the basic topics and central issues tackled by gynocriticism as “the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution or laws of a female literary tradition.” The relevance of gynocritics to the study of Kurdish women’s poetry comes from the fact that this type of poetry is in crisis from inside southern Kurdistan. It is a poetry that requires critical attention, and liberation from the vast influence of male literature that has left no space for it to be heard of and studied. Kurdish women’s poetry is facing extinction locally rather than regionally or internationally; it seems like a colony that has been suppressed and repressed by fellow Kurdish male writers and critics who appear to be ignorant of the impact this subjugation will have on the future of Kurdish literature. This poetry first needs to be rescued from the fear of disappearance from inside, and then formed into an academic discipline for development and comparison in terms of literary quality and prestige with the surrounding literatures. With this hypothesis, I believe that approaching Kurdish women’s poetry from a gynocritical perspective will take this poetry out from its current neglected position, and give the kind of consideration it deserves, first on local and then on international level. It is through gynocritics that Kurdish scholars and readers should know about Kurdish women’s poetry, study it, and place it on equal terms with men’s poetry. I hope that this move will lead to greater projects on Kurdish women’s poetry to see how far this nascent poetry can compete with other minority literatures which have already emerged in the region and with the developed literatures in other parts of the world.

A gynocritical approach to the study of Kurdish women’s poetry will be helpful in isolating it from the influences of the male tradition and displaying the actual standing of this type of poetry in Kurdish literature. Instead of expressing strong interest in or hate towards the male literature, gynocritics has a special programme which aims at constructing a female framework for analysing literature by women, developing new paradigms underpinned by the study of women’s experiences, rather than fitting into

models and theories invented by male writers. Showalter's famous essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" cited in *The New Feminist Criticism* (1985: 131) points out that "gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture." Based on this women-centred critical approach, I will attempt to conduct as much as possible a feminist analysis of Kurdish women's poetry, and look for those aspects and key facts about women's poetry that are laid down at the heart of the programme of gynocritics to avoid any clashes with its procedures and sets of attitudes. The application of gynocritics to the poetry of Kurdish women poets would probably be a great and serious challenge to my study as it is unclear yet whether Kurdish women poets have really been able to establish and devise styles and techniques of poetry writing which are typically representative of women's experiences and situation in society. Also, it will be an additional task of my study to investigate the proportion of the Kurdish women poets who have really decided to challenge the male literary tradition, and, as Showalter says above, attempt to "free themselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history."

In her outline of the three phases of feminist criticism¹⁵, Showalter places gynocritics in the second phase since it comes after and develops from an earlier phase of feminist critique which had put much emphasis on women as the writers of male texts. However, the chief purpose of gynocriticism is to expand and reorganise the literary canon which has been governed by male writers. Gynocritics believes that literary canon— the collection of works which by an authoritative agreement have been considered as the most important ones that can serve as the main and deserved subjects of literary history, criticism, research and teaching, has done a great deal of injustice to women writers by

¹⁵ In *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), Showalter mentions three phases in the development of a specifically female tradition which are tantamount to the evolutionary phases of any art labelled as subcultural. Firstly, there is a protracted phase of copying and imitation of the established patterns of a tradition dominated by male writers, and using its criteria of art and its attitudes towards the social roles. Secondly, there comes a phase of disagreement with and rejection of these criteria and values, and a sheer support for the rights and privileges of the minority, including a call for self-dependency. Thirdly, she introduces the phase of the discovery of the self, an inward turning away from some of the reliance on opposition, a hunt for the female identity. The right terminology that she uses for these stages is *Feminine*, *Feminist* and *Female*. She (1977: 13) identifies the phases as "the Feminine as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880s; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960."

excluding their works on the pretext of femininity and the spurious premise that women are unable to write valuable and meaningful pieces of literature. In an article entitled “Contribution of gynocriticism to feminist criticism”, the Chinese literary scholar Xu Yue highlights the important and historic role played by gynocriticism in rediscovering many silenced and unknown women voices:

All in all, in gynocriticism, feminist studies have served to raise the status of many female authors who have more or less been paid scant regard by scholars and critics and to bring into purview other authors who have been largely or entirely overlooked as subjects for serious consideration. Some feminists even have devoted their critical attention especially to the literature written by lesbian writers, or that deals with lesbian relationships in a heterosexual culture. The discovery of the general female writers and their literary works makes feminist criticism, even the whole literary criticism, more comprehensive (Yue 2007: 62).

To sum up, gynocritical studies conducted on women’s literary works have rendered positive results for the establishment of a literary tradition special to women, and have given an impressive taste to the reading of works by women, as gynocriticism helps readers understand the qualities and aesthetics of female art and literature. The great attention gynocritics gives to the real world and its inevitable facts has elevated the status of women writers and put them deservedly on equal terms with male writers. While carrying out academic research and studies on literary and non-literary works, feminist critics adopting gynocriticism always keep in mind the historical, cultural, and social factors which have been crucially effective in marginalising women writers. They employ logic in analysing these factors and attempt to put them in a feminist context with the aim of mending the distorted image of women.

1.3.2 Gender and Nationalism

A prominent aspect of the writings of the female poets to be discussed in this study is the realisation of the importance of the Kurdish national issue. It is a feature that consolidates their position in the Kurdish national literature. Therefore, it is vital to trace the reflection of nationhood, the gender perspective of Kurdish women poets on projects of nation building and their reading of the gender implications of Kurdish nationalism in their poetry to be analysed in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

The relation of gender to nationalism and projects of nation building preoccupies many gender theorists, particularly in the Middle East where this relation is always problematic and controversial. This issue in the Middle East was problematised after the emergence of nation-states following the end of colonial and imperial powers in the region. Over the past several decades, gender critics in the Middle East have been questioning the marginalised role of women in nationalistic movements and criticising the gender constructions masterminded mainly by men to degrade the position of women in fateful national strategies and decisions. A factor behind the failure of successful democratisation of the Middle Eastern societies has been the culturally and socially constructed gender identities which model roles for women far different from those modelled for men in terms of power and character.

Critics such as Yuval-Davis, Kandiyoti, Mojab, Moghadam and several others underline different historical, social, political and cultural factors and elements which have been instrumental in undermining or shrinking the position and role of women in nationalist struggles and projects. In their arguments it is implied that the political and cultural ideology of certain collectivities prevents women from being key players in nationalist movements and lead leadership roles; instead, they are given peripheral titles and restricted to tasks which imply their subordination to men and ghettoisation in important societal affairs.

Yuval-Davis (1997) outlines the intersection of gender and nation in specific domains of life where women are assigned various roles by men. These roles contribute in one way or another to the construction of an image of women whose function in society is more reproductive than productive, passive than active, natural than cultural, local than global, and a resident of the private rather than public sphere. The first intersection is about the role of women as the biological reproducers of the nation. Women's reproductive ability and its impact on a collectivity's national agenda is a crucial issue tackled by Yuval-Davis as well as her fellow gender critics. It is a mainstream discourse in vast areas of the Middle East that the biological reproduction of the nation is the task of women. Nationalist, ethnic and religious masses value and sacralise this quality of women and consider it as essential for the survival of a nation. This reproduction process of nation is urgently called upon in the regions where nations

are in danger of extinction and need popular power. Yuval-Davis conceives the pressure experienced by women who are required to multiply the population of a nation under exceptional circumstances, arguing that “as a result of the discourse that ‘people is power’ they would be called upon to have more children, so that the nation could flourish and defeat its enemies” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 116). Clearly, it is under the effect of this gender identity that women are seen and nationally respected as the “mother of the nation”.

The second intersection concerns the depiction of women as the reproducers of specific cultures. In our multicultural world, women’s importance as guardians of a collectivity’s traditions and identity has been central to the theories of gender and nationalism. Women are described as symbolic border guards which protect and separate a collectivity from another. Yuval-Davis states that:

These ‘border guards’ can identify people as members or non-members of a specific collectivity. They are closely linked to specific cultural codes of style of dress and behaviour as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, religion, literary and artistic modes of production, and, of course, language (Yuval-Davis 1997: 23).

It is important to note that such women-specific gendered identities are more common in the Middle East where religion and tribes play an important role in social practice. On the cultural identity assigned to women in patriarchal and traditional systems, Yuval-Davis argues that “women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity’s ‘honour’ and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 67).

The third intersection Yuval-Davis makes between gender and nation is related to citizenship and difference. Although it is much about citizenship rights and difference in a multinational and transborder context, the universally agreed meaning of citizenship as membership in a community with full civil, political, and social rights and responsibilities is discussed in considerable detail. As diasporic citizens, Yuval-Davis (1997: 24) claims that “women have tended to be differentially regulated to men in nationality, immigration and refugee legislation, often being constructed as dependent on their family men and expected to follow them and live where they do”. However, she believes that this form of legalised women’s subordination to men has weakened sharply in the West. For Yuval-

Davis, gender is a factor that affects women's full citizenship rights, as it has also played a crucial role in locating women in the private sphere and constructing them as passive citizens. These gender-constructed roles have been instrumental in depriving women of certain citizenship rights that men normally have in the community.

The fourth intersection focuses on "gendered militaries and gendered wars". Here, Yuval-Davis discusses the roles assigned to women in the militaries and during wars, arguing that such participatory roles are also gendered, where women are not part of the combat forces and the battlefields (1997: 102). She realises that ranks in the militaries are highly gendered, while men are always generals and commanders, women are soldiers and junior to men in ranks. However, these arguments about gendered militaries and wars are only pertinent to Kurdish women when their situation is discussed in two particular Kurdish political parties, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), which originated in Turkey, and Komala, which, according to Mojab (2000: 90), "was the Kurdistan branch of the Communist Party of Iran"¹⁶. Kurdish women in these political organisations are involved in army struggles. But the relevant part of this intersection is where Yuval-Davis examines "the gendered character of wars and the sexual divisions which take place not only among the fighters but also among the war victims- the murdered, the raped, the interned and the refugees" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 24-5). This part may find a reasonable link with the poetic content of this study's women poets, particularly where they talk about their national tragedies and traumatic personal and family experiences.

Yuval-Davis attempts to draw some political conclusions from these intersections, specifically when she considers the extent to which "feminist solidarity is possible given women's social and especially national divisions" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 117). In doing this, she starts by looking at the interrelationships between nationalist and feminist groups and movements. Yuval-Davis sees a tension and ideological disparity between Western feminists and women from the Third World, arguing that:

Third World women would feel that western women were constructing them solely in terms of what seemed to them to be barbaric customs and subjugation, without taking into account the social and economic context in which they existed (Yuval-Davis 1997: 118).

¹⁶ Mojab (2000: 89-90) states that these two Kurdish political parties started recruiting women into their military and political ranks since the 1980s. However, there is also PJAK (The Free Life Party of Kurdistan), established in 2004, which have numerous women in their military ranks.

According to Yuval-Davis, this understanding of Third World women has resulted in their removal from history and constructing them forever as politically ignorant who need to be taught in the schools of Western feminism. Western feminists see the contribution of Third World women to national revolutions and liberation movements as surrender to male-dominated political ideologies and symbolic of a self-inflicted subjugation which explicitly does not recognise their freedom and equal gender rights. But she believes that Kumari Jayawardena's book, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986), somehow broke this deadlock between the feminists and the nationalists. She argues that through evidence and concrete facts the book:

Pointed out to western feminists that loyalty to one's national liberation movement does not necessarily mean that women do not fight within it for the improvement and transformation of the position of women in their societies. At the same time it also pointed out the fact that feminism has not been a specifically western phenomenon (Yuval-Davis 1997: 118).

An important issue that Yuval-Davis raises as the result of both a clash and an interaction between the feminist and nationalist activists is the emergence of women's organisations and groups whose aim was to empower women. She says "as in the West, there has been in the 1980s a development of feminist awareness and an autonomous organization of women in a variety of revolutionary and liberationist social movements in the Third World" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 120). She keeps on arguing that "this has brought a new sense of legitimacy to the pursuit of the promotion and transformation of the position of women in many Third World societies" (*ibid.*). In fact, Kurdish society in southern Kurdistan is one of these Third World societies mentioned by Yuval-Davis, but the public surfacing of such organisations and their activism on the ground in southern Kurdistan happened after 1991 following its liberation from the Iraqi Ba'th regime.

In the case of Kurdistan and Kurdish women, the outline of intersections of gender and nation drawn by Yuval-Davis is applicable, but with some visible differences. Being part of the Middle East, Kurdistan is also influenced by the discourses of discriminatory gender roles, culture-specific gender violence and socially constructed gender relations. However, the line that differentiates Kurdish women from women in the rest of Middle East is their stateless nation which disadvantages them still further. According to Mojab

(2000), patriarchal Kurdish nationalist movements across the four parts of Kurdistan have always ignored or delayed the resolution of the issue of women's rights because of the unfulfilled project of building a sovereign Kurdish nation. Thus, women in Kurdistan have greatly been stripped of the power to contribute to political and military struggles and instead are being given natural and reproductive responsibilities such as childbearing and emotional support for the community. This is a process which has been happening along the history of Kurdish people until now, though with somewhat less force currently in southern Kurdistan for the autonomy gained by the Kurds in this part. On the reason for the lack of gender equality initiatives in Kurdistan in general and the perception of women, Mojab argues that:

The patriarchal nationalist movement continues to emphasize the struggle for self-rule at the expense of the struggle for equality. Nationalists depict women as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its "motherland," the "honour" of the nation, and guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language. In these depictions of women, or in the relegation of equal rights to the future, the Kurdish case is by no means different from other nationalist movements (Mojab 2000: 89).

It is in the light of this situation that a similar historical reading will be made for the Kurdish patriarchy in Chapter Two. Patriarchy has long existed in Kurdistan and has sometimes become stronger when the collectivity has perceived itself to be in danger. It is this lack of nation state that differentiates Kurdish patriarchy from patriarchy in other parts of the Middle East.

The exploration of these inherent tensions and interrelations between gender and nationalism in a Kurdish poetic context will shape part of this study. It is crucial to find out how Kurdish women poets of this study look at Kurdish nationalist projects and whether they seek the production of any impact on such projects. Besides, it is important to discover if Kurdish women poets have a different perception of Kurdish nationalism and if they agree with Mojab's argument about the relegation of their emancipation to the future and after a self-ruled Kurdish state is established.

These questions might come upon some convincing answers as Kurdish women's activism for guaranteeing women's and gender rights in southern Kurdistan could emerge with a fresh energy following the liberation of this part from Saddam's regime in 1991. In the wake of this liberation, this part of Kurdistan has become an interesting research field

for local, Kurdish diasporic and foreign gender specialists and scholars (al-Ali and Pratt 2011; Begikhani *et al.* 2010; Brown and Romano 2006; Hardi 2011; Mojab and Gorman 2007; Saḷih 2002). Research conducted on the gender aspects of Kurdish nationalism, the chronic effects of “classic” Kurdish patriarchy on women’s lives and internal and transnational gender initiatives by Kurdish women groups and organisations give deep insight into the current and past situation of women in southern Kurdistan. Compared with significantly opposite conditions in the rest of Iraq, the provision of relative political freedom and activism ground for women by the Kurdish authority in southern Kurdistan is what Al-Ali stresses in her article on the reconstruction of gender in pre- and post-Saddam Iraq. She demonstrates that “at the same time as Iraqi women were loosing [*sic*] state support in terms of socioeconomic rights, semi-autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan allowed women there to establish civil society associations and become involved in party politics” (Al-Ali 2005: 754). The reflection of this new sociopolitical and socioeconomic stage in southern Kurdistan on women’s status and gender relations will also be traced in the poetry of selected women poets, some of whom are directly involved in women’s activism.

1.3.3 Women and Gender

The two terms ‘women’ and ‘gender’ have recently been differentiated by gender scholars and researchers. A shift from the traditional usage of gender as a differential category and measurement of sexes in women’s studies happens in the middle years of 1980s to indicate socially developed notions and discourses that separate women from men on the basis of femininity/masculinity traits and constructions. This shift has redefined and retheorised the whole area of gender studies in social sciences not only in the Middle East, but all over the world. Kandiyoti describes this transformation of women’s studies into the study of gender as the “analyses of the ways in which all aspects of human society, culture and relationships are gendered” (Kandiyoti 1996: 6). Socially motivated interpretations of the male and female bodies in terms of structure, power and behaviour has turned to be the central concern of gender studies. For example, gender is associated with the biological difference between women and men which decides which sex is to have power and dominate the other. In the communities where

religion is dominant, discriminatory gender roles are obvious, as men are seen as more powerful than women and are allowed to subjugate them and dictate the way of their life. This perception is based on the biological construction of female bodies which finds women as responsible for human reproduction. Issues related to childbearing and menstruation have identified women as weak creatures, emotional and in possession of a forgetful memory, excuses firmly adopted in patriarchal societies to deprive women from holding equal power with men. However, these definitions are forcefully contested by gender critics in the Middle East and are considered to have been constructed socially and culturally to leave women excluded from the public sphere.

Social constructions about the distinction between female and male bodies lead Kandiyoti to argue that:

Sex is subsumable under gender and not separate from it since our constructions of the body are themselves subject to social interpretation and redefinition. Gender has therefore been transformed into an increasingly inclusive category denoting an expression of difference within a field of power relations (*ibid.*).

Gendered identities attached to women in different social environments and cultures are the result of regular interactions with men and the prevalent ideologies which are practised among the members of different collectivities. Religious, nationalistic and ethnic ideologies make up various gender-based identities for women which are dynamic and changeable as time passes by. Gender identity is unfixed and women are socially and culturally liable to take on multiple gendered identities in different time contexts. On the production process of gender, Salih points out that “gender does not happen once and for all when we are born, but is a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that’s been there all along” (Salih 2002: 66).

Gender, according to Lorber, has concretely identified itself as an all-inclusive social institution with specific tasks and agenda. She adds that it:

Establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself (Lorber 1994: 1).

Socially and culturally defined gender roles for women have had a clear influence on their place in society and on their eligibility to share equal power with men. However,

this influence has never been claimed to be invariable and everlasting, but fluctuating as per different contexts and times. Feminist writers are continuously involved in criticism of the gender-based imbalance between women and men and they play down the impact of androcentric discourses which take an essentialist attitude towards women. Yuval-Davis underlines the debates which are underway in feminist circles to trace and determine the origin of the difference which is ontologically shaped between women and men. She comes up with a conclusive argument that:

From its inception, feminist politics has depended on the differentiation between sex and gender. Claims that sexual divisions of labour, power and dispositions are not biological ('sex') but are socially constructed ('gender') have enabled feminists of various schools to argue that women's social position can/should be transformed towards sexual equality (Yuval-Davis 1997: 8).

In patriarchal cultures, power is associated with masculinity and virility, a gender-specific understanding that has played exclusionary roles in terms of women's participation in decisive social and political decisions. In support of this argument, Yuval-Davis says that "in many cultural systems potency and masculinity seem to be synonymous" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 60).

However, studying the above gender roles, positions, discourses and constructions in the poetry of Kurdish women poets is crucial. It will be argued that Kurdish women live in a society where gender-driven social and cultural repression is rife and that their poetry expresses awareness of this. Territorially integrated into the broad geography of the Middle East, the land of the Kurds has been experiencing diverse social and cultural assimilations and integrations. As claimed by Mojab (2000), the effects produced by these processes on the Kurdish society at large have been huge and for the most part detrimental to the cause of women and their rights. If changes in gender relations in other areas of the Middle East have had positive consequences for women, even though relatively, they still seem to have backfired on women's situation in southern Kurdistan. The simple piece of evidence is the poor situation of Kurdish women's poetry in Kurdish literature. Nonetheless, this fact will be explored in the next chapters of this study where a comprehensive account of Kurdish women's status and developments in their situation in the public and private spheres will be provided.

1.4 Rationale

This research work, which is wholly and sincerely dedicated to the study of the poetry of Kurdish women poets in southern Kurdistan, is, to the best of my knowledge, the first ever such academic work to have been conducted so far in Kurdish literature. To the best of my knowledge, no similar work has been taken up by any Kurdish or non-Kurdish literary scholars on this poetry. Regrettably, this indicates a neglect of the poetic works of Kurdish women poets caused by multiple factors such as the weak role women generally and in particular women writers play in Kurdish society, and the overall social system of southern Kurdistan which is mainly run by patriarchy-inspired minds. On the one hand, this dearth of studies and academic scholarship on the poetry of Kurdish women poets poses difficult challenges to my research as perhaps much more time and harder work will be required to finish the project and make it a complete work. On the other hand, it will be the starter project in the field of Kurdish women's poetry that can help the production of similar works in the future.

My particular selection of Kurdish women's poetry comes as a challenge to the dominance of male writers in Kurdish literature— a situation which has resulted in Kurdish women poets to be hardly able to survive and pass their messages through to the literate society and readers of Kurdish poetry. Through my whole literature review and survey, it is unfortunate to see that numerous books, anthologies, PhD theses, MA dissertations, research papers, articles, commentaries and reviews have been made and written about the poetry of Kurdish male poets, while only a few articles, reviews, and commentaries, but PhD theses or MA dissertations, have been produced so far solely on Kurdish women's poetry. Apropos books and anthologies, there is only one book (to be reflected on fully in *literature review* section) to have been written until now on Kurdish women's poetry, and for anthologies, only a very little and narrow space in a relatively insufficient number of anthologies of Kurdish poetry has been assigned to the poetry of Kurdish women, usually the final part of them with only one or a small group of briefly-discussed women poets among a dozen elaborately-covered male poets. Some cases in point are the recently published seven volumes of *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature) by Marif Xeznedar; Rafiq Sabir, Kamal Mirawdeli, and Stephen Watts' *Modern Kurdish Poetry: An Anthology and Introduction* (2006); Selim Temo's

two volumes of *Kürt Şiiri Antolojisi* (The Anthology of Kurdish Poetry) (2007); *Berew Cîhanî Şîrî Çend Şa'irêk* (Towards the Poetic World of Some Poets) (2008) by Kemal Gembar; and Xelîl Dihokî's *Çend Stêrên Geş de Esmanê Helbesta Nû Ya Kurdî de: Kirmancîya Jêrî* (Some Bright Stars in the Sky of Modern Kurdish Poetry: Sorani Dialect) (2008). In his seven volumes which are mostly allocated to Kurdish poets in history, Xeznedar deigns to include only three Kurdish women poets in his fourth volume, which covers the history of Kurdish literature from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, i.e. from 1851 to 1914. The handful of Kurdish women poets Xeznedar talks about in his fourth volume comes at the very end of the book and he even labels them as a group of lesser known Kurdish poets. Writing poetry by Kurdish women until the past two decades was a minority activity, and the strong desire for becoming a poet among women was rather discouraged by the social and cultural environment broadly gendered and controlled by the system of patriarchy in all parts of Kurdistan. However, there had intermittently been some challenging Kurdish women who had resorted to poetry writing as a means for fighting against the unjust social life fuelled by the Kurdish patriarchal institutions. This situation can be testified in the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century by the appearance of a group of defiant Kurdish women poets who were able to introduce good pieces into the larger corpus of Kurdish poetry. These Kurdish women poets will be considered in detail in Chapter Two of this study which is partly dedicated to tracing the early history of Kurdish women poets. However, only three of these women poets have been represented in the volumes of Xeznedar, which I think demonstrates the wide extent to which Kurdish women poets have been ignored.

Similarly, although it starts more promisingly, Rafiq Sabir, Kamal Mirawdeli, and Stephen Watts' anthology has adopted the same attitude towards the poetry of Kurdish women, as out of thirty modern Kurdish poets they have selected for their anthology, only five of them are women. In fact, Temo's anthology is probably the best of them since it embraces tens of Kurdish women poets from both the classical and modern ages of Kurdish poetry. He has attempted his utmost to incorporate Kurdish women poets from almost all parts of Kurdistan into his two volumes. Gembar's anthology includes only one woman poet out of more than a dozen men poets, and Dihokî's work, just like Sabir *et al.*

(2006), has used five Kurdish women poets. This lack of critical attention to the poetry of Kurdish women not only in anthologies, but in books, literary journals and research works and even in academia has placed this type of poetry in a ghetto within Kurdish literature. My focus on anthologies comes from the fact that these works play a crucial role in the introduction of women poets to the readers and the public, and bringing them together in a single body, which then helps the incorporation of their poetic works in the literary canon. Gill (2007: 10) emphasises this fact as she believes that “anthologies of poetry play an important role in canon formation and in the development of audience ‘taste’”. Unfortunately, because almost all the anthologists in Kurdish literature are male, women’s poetry has always been either unkindly overlooked or given a meager share if compared to the widely covered men’s poetry. Gill (*ibid.*) puts it right, when she quotes Cora Kaplan¹⁷, that “poetry by women has less frequently been anthologised ‘because of subjects that do not appeal to male anthologists’”. She adds that women poets have been ignored from those anthologies edited by males mainly because of what they usually write about (Gill 2007: 11). What Gill has raised in her argument about the deliberate exclusion of women poets from the anthologies produced by male writers can be applied to the neglected poetry of Kurdish women poets whose bad fate has unmistakably sprung from the topics and issues it tackles as an unswerving reaction to the oppression women face in the Kurdish society. For instance, Cebâr Sabîr as a Kurdish critic takes up two paradoxical critical stances towards the poetry of Kurdish women poets, one quite positive and constructive and the other entirely the opposite, in his previously referred to study which was titled *Beyond Poetry Breaths*. He switches to a completely different view on the poetry of Kurdish women developed from the 1990s when he analyses a poem by the Kurdish woman poet Kejaļ İbrahîm Xidir¹⁸, which does not generally tie in

¹⁷ Cora Kaplan (Queen Mary, University of London *n.d.*) is currently an honorary professor in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, and is Professor Emerita of English at Southampton University. She is a feminist critic and theorist, particularly interested in class and race, whose works mostly pay attention to the issues of aesthetic and politics in the writings of women in Britain from the late eighteenth century through the middle of Victorian era. She has also found herself involved and interested in feminist fictions and films over the past fifty years.

¹⁸ Kejaļ İbrahîm Xidir (b.1968) was born in the town of Qeļadize in southern Kurdistan. Writing short stories and poetry for the children in 1987 does mark the beginning days of her literary career. She has a collection of 12 published and unpublished books, and writes poems permanently for the Kurdish literary journals. There has been written a fairly good number of critical articles on Kejaļ’s poetry in the Kurdish

with his positive comments on Kejaļ Eħmed’s poem “Be Tenûreyekî Kurtî Sûrewê” (dressed in a red short skirt), as here he describes the poetry of Kurdish women poets of that period as simplistic and discriminatory. Sabîr underplays the efforts and literary influence of those Kurdish women poets who desperately struggle to defend their female identity, stand against the Kurdish patriarchal traditions and norms, and attempt to establish a literature of their own, devoid of the leverage and characteristics of the male writers. He (2008: 199) derisively argues that:

Women’s poetry is a lot more like a talk than a poetic text; it is more about the humiliation of men than endeavours to come to terms with them. In short, women’s literature has only widened the rift between women and men and nothing more.

It is this sporadic cynical and hostile attitude towards Kurdish women’s poetry, assumed by the vast majority of Kurdish critics, which has led this type of poetry to be out of the sight of readers and be placed in the lowest part of the history of Kurdish literature. Besides the paternalistic structure of Kurdish literature, this skeptical understanding of Kurdish women poets has resulted in their poetry being hardly covered in the Kurdish journals, literary circles, research and studies. Moreover, it is this reason that has contributed to the huge marginalisation and exclusion of the Kurdish women’s poetry from the biased and male-controlled canon of the Kurdish literature.

Based on the above facts, this research work will endeavour to shake the masculine foundation of unsystematically canonised Kurdish poetry held so far solely by men writers and critics, and will mark the first academic attempt at officially bringing forth the poetry of Kurdish women poets to be included on a larger scale into the yet unofficial Kurdish literary canon. This study will show that there is a good poetry that has been written over the past twenty years in southern Kurdistan in Sorani dialect by a group of Kurdish women poets both inside and outside Kurdistan which necessarily pleads for critical attention from Kurdish critics to explore its appeals and calls for the freedom and rights of women. This academic work aims to be a great contribution both to the Kurdish academe in particular and Kurdish literature in general. This study will certainly raise a volley of questions about the early stages of the Kurdish women’s poetry, the legitimacy

magazines and newspapers, and her poetry has been translated into different world languages such as English, Dutch, Arabic, and Persian.

of the choice to neglect Kurdish women poets throughout history, and whether it is too late or not to prospect for the unheard voices of Kurdish women poets and their poetic outputs. It will also be a touchstone for the quality of the Kurdish women's poetry as to whether there has been good or bad poetry written so far by women poets, and if it deserves to have been studied and researched earlier than now.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study covers a precise transitional period in the history of Kurdish poetry, which is the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty first century. It specifically deals with the Kurdish women's poetry in southern Kurdistan which has been written only in the Sorani dialect. Importantly, it does not stay within a single Sorani-speaking city of southern Kurdistan, but chooses poets originally born in Erbil (Hewlêr), Slêmanî, and the chiefly Kurdish-populated city of Kirkuk. The latter is not yet integrated into the Kurdish region due to unresolved territorial disputes with the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. There are seventeen women poets to be included in the content of my research project who enjoy a relatively good record of poetry writing, and are known to the community of men of letters in southern Kurdistan. As it is mentioned earlier in the *Method and Theory* section of this chapter, all these poets are from southern Kurdistan, but some of them have been living in the diaspora for a long time but have been in close touch with what has been happening in Kurdistan, particularly with regard to women's life and issues. Obviously, it is questionable why this specific time period, part of Kurdistan, and Kurdish dialect have been chosen here and what motives are there behind this selection. Concerning the time span, there are clear reasons as these two decades have witnessed a unique and rapid development in Kurdish women's poetry which is unprecedented in Kurdish literature all along its history. The study's start time coincides with a national uprising in southern Kurdistan in 1991 against the dictatorial regime of the now overthrown Iraqi Ba'th Party. That uprising led to the liberation of a large area of southern Kurdistan and the immediate establishment of a Kurdish self-governed parliament and administration, which provided a moderate space for the freedoms of writing and expression in the area. Accordingly, after holding back strong passions and desires for poetry writing for a long time, Kurdish women have been able to

invest in those freedoms and start using poetry as a medium for expressing their opinions, and opposition to the hierarchical Kurdish patriarchal regime which has been oppressing women in the region for centuries. Kurdish scholar ‘Ebas Salih ‘Ebdullā indicates a sudden growing progress in Kurdish women’s poetry by the end of the eighties in his PhD thesis entitled “Fêmînîzm le Şi‘rî Kurdîda: Kirmancî Xwarû” (Feminism in Kurdish Poetry: Sorani Dialect), which was accomplished at the University of Koysinjaq in southern Kurdistan in 2007. ‘Ebdullā (2007: 103) points out a turning point in the course of Kurdish women’s poetry from the 1990s onward, particularly in southern Kurdistan, resulting from, as he puts it:

Political changes, a breakthrough in the cultural and literary realms, the development of the women’s movements, and change in many walks of life, which have created a transformation and a visible difference between this new generation of Kurdish women poets and those preceding them in history.

This frenetic wave of poetry writing by Kurdish women poets in southern Kurdistan from the 1990s follows years of silence in which a few dispersed voices had been heard occasionally with their poetic texts more strictly focusing on national, patriotic, aesthetic, romantic, and country life subjects than the hard and oppressive conditions lived by the Kurdish women in society. Mukiryani in the conclusion of her *Honrawey Afretî Kurd* (The Poetry of Kurdish Women) (1980) draws attention to this fact, encouraging Kurdish women poets to reflect bravely in their poems, and face up to the bitter realities of women in the Kurdish community rather than just look at the normal behaviour and position of women among their families. While commenting on the content of the poetry of a group of Kurdish women poets from the second half of the twentieth century she has chosen for her book, Mukiryani (1980: 169) concludes that:

The majority of Kurdish women poets talk in their poems in general about women, particularly those spending life in the villages. They only pay attention to the beautiful and impressive appearance of those women, i.e., their clothes, jewelry, and behaviour, and rarely plunge deeply into their psychology. Therefore, most of them have failed to reflect the stifling reality that exists in the mind of the rural Kurdish women.

Thus, the period chosen for my study marks an important stage in the history of Kurdish women’s poetry, and it is one task of this study to prove what ‘Ebdullā has said

in parts of his PhD project about the emergence of fresh Kurdish women poet voices in the 1990s who have been observing women's situation and social status in the society with a feminist vision. There is the question of part of Kurdistan— southern Kurdistan— which has been defined as the setting limit of my study. The chief factor behind the selection of this part is the rapid boom in attempts at writing poetry by women on a large scale again due to the relative freedom attained by women after 1991. However, even before this date, southern Kurds in Iraq had much more freedom of writing and expression in Kurdish than eastern, western, and northern Kurds respectively in Iran, Syria and Turkey. Southern Kurdistan has for a long time been the hub of Kurdish literature as most great Kurdish writers are originally from this part of Kurdistan. Hashem Ahmadzadeh stresses the influential standing and vital role of southern Kurdistan in Kurdish literature in his *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse*; while he justifies his decision for choosing two Kurdish novels out of five from southern Kurdistan and the rest from other parts of Kurdistan, he admits that “due to the pioneering position of Iraqi Kurdistan in forming and spreading Kurdish literature, two novels are chosen from this part of Kurdistan” (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 12). Another convincing reason is the *de jure* autonomy enjoyed by the region which has opened up the doors for other literatures to rush to the area, as well as Kurdish poets, novelists, short story writers, dramatists, and critics from the other three parts of Kurdistan, including those living in the diaspora, from both sexes, to come in droves and settle in southern Kurdistan, a relocation of the Kurdish intelligentsia which has resulted in the production of a huge amount of both Kurdish and non-Kurdish literary materials never seen before in the history of the region. This unique circumstance has given Kurdish women of letters in southern Kurdistan a great opportunity to be able to cultivate their literature and successfully produce it, a situation which has put them at the forefront of Kurdish women writers from other parts of Kurdistan. Indeed, women poets are the chief beneficiaries of this incomparable condition, with their number overwhelmingly increased.

With regard to the dialect choice, Sorani is the only dialect in which most Kurdish women's poetry has been written. Even if considering other parts of Kurdistan, it is clear that women's poetry books written in Sorani outnumber other Kurdish dialects. This is due to notable political progress and financial boom witnessed by the Kurdish

government in southern Kurdistan, particularly after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, which has resulted in the establishment of many publishing houses, both private and public, and these houses have played a critical role in the publication of thousands of books in various fields, including dozens of poetry books by Kurdish women poets. There are tens, if not hundreds, of Kurdish women poets writing in both Sorani and Bahdini¹⁹ dialects from southern Kurdistan, but those writing in Sorani vastly overtake Bahdini poets in terms of quantity. Thus, in order to control the scope and material range of the study and respect the time limit, I will choose only Sorani-writing Kurdish women poets in southern Kurdistan. There is one more fact, as I am personally a Sorani native speaker, I think selecting only Sorani Kurdish women poets would result in more reliable and informed interpretations, and be more efficient in terms of timing.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to explain the criteria by which I have selected a group of women poets. As mentioned earlier, women poets writing in Sorani Kurdish from southern Kurdistan are in tens. Names had been sent to me on a monthly basis during my literature review and material collection, but it was necessary to discover a method to cover a specific number of poets that can be consistent with the time frame available for the study. The first criterion that I have found very useful is the number of publications, as I have decided to include only those women poets who have one or more poetry books. However, this criterion will also be applied differently in Chapters Three (Diaspora Poets) and Four (Home Poets) due to the much larger number of Kurdish women poets to be placed within Chapter Four. During my search for the women poets of this study, it became clear that the number of diasporic Kurdish women poets was rather small, and did not exceed seven poets. This small number of poets has obliged me to be flexible with the selection of poets for Chapter Three, and include women poets with even a single poetry book publication. But the situation was significantly different when home Kurdish women poets of Chapter Four were tracked. The number of home women poets who have published poetry books from one and on was over twenty seven and it did

¹⁹ Bahdini, in a broader sense often called Kurmanji, is one of the two main dialects of Kurdish language. Together with Sorani, Haig and Matras consider them as "dialects of a superordinate unit "Kurdish"" (Haig and Matras 2002: 3). Kurmanji speakers stretch from Mosul, north of Iraq, into the Caucasus. In southern Kurdistan, the population speaking in this dialect is mainly settled in Dihok province and its towns and villages. Speakers of this dialect in Turkey use "Turkized Latin" characters in the written form which are different from the Persian-Arabic characters used by Sorani speakers.

continue to rise. Thus, using the same criterion in Chapters Three and Four will create a significant imbalance between these two chapters and will also greatly affect the word and time limits of this study. Therefore, I have decided to reasonably modify the criterion for Chapter Four to balance the content of the study and be fair to diasporic Kurdish women poets. Simply, the modification was to include only those women poets in Chapter Four who have published over two poetry books within the time span of this study. Besides publishing more than two poetry books, fair literary criticism of their poetic works, the poets' gained publicity and their regular appearance in the Kurdish literary quarters are also some other important criteria for the selection of women poets for Chapter Four. As a result, the final number of home women poets for Chapter Four to meet the redefined criteria clearly stopped at ten. This practical measure has helped me enormously in restricting the increasing number of poets because there is also an unmanageable figure of women poets out there who have written plenty of individual poems, published them in Kurdish newspapers, magazines, literary journals, and online, without bringing them together in a published book.

There is not a particular touchstone to distinguish the selected poets from each other in terms of fame, position in society, academic or professional background except for the number of poetry publications they have, and that means poets with the most publications will come first in the ranking of the chapters. Another criterion for the selection of the poets is the quality of their poetry, which is evaluated through the critical articles written on them in the Kurdish journals, literary magazines and websites, and literary studies conducted in the shape of books on the content and themes of women's poetry by the critics visible on the Kurdish literary ground. But the latter criterion is not central to the inclusion policy I have adopted for the selection of poets due to partial Kurdish critics and the injustice they have done to Kurdish women poets at large by writing critically on only those women poets whom they closely know and have common interests with.

On the question of bad poetry, Montefiore indicates the male critics' misjudgment of poetic texts by women in order to detract from the value and meaning of their works and make them appear low in quality. To reveal the self-interested approach of male criticism towards the classic manuscripts of women, she states an argument by feminist critics saying that "conventional scholarship and criticism has, because of its masculine bias,

either ignored classic texts by women or so misread them as to obscure most of their meaning” (Montefiore 1987: 65). Thus, the point of quality cannot be regarded as pivotal because Kurdish literary criticism has touched only a few women poets and widely ignored the rest of them, as it is through critical comments and analyses that one knows which texts are worth researching and which ones are not. Regrettably, along the whole hard process of my material collection, it has become clear that almost a quarter of the women poets I intend to cover in this study have scarcely been spoken about by Kurdish critics in various Kurdish media outlets and research works, which would be a dilemma for me if I do not include them in my project on the basis of evaluation and analysis, because very little has been said about the quality of the poetry of these poets, and by discarding them for not being sufficiently tackled by critics, I will push them further to the corners of neglect. This neglect of Kurdish women’s poetry by Kurdish critics is seen by women poets as a disgraceful act, which they believe shows the critics’ disrespect for their efforts and imagination product. Begîxanî, in an interview with the weekly *Ferheng* (Culture), expresses her annoyance at Kurdish critics for ignoring Kurdish women poets, critically replies to the interviewer that “if Nezend Begîxanî, Kejaļ Eħmed or Çoman Herdî were Persian or Arab, our self-styled intellectual men would now have adequately evaluated us and seen us as worth of attention” (Begîxanî 2010: 11).

A universal criterion which judges the worth and credibility of a piece of literature to be studied is literary canon. Culler defines literary canon as “the works regularly studied in schools and universities and deemed to form ‘our literary heritage’” (Culler 1997: 47). If I use this definition as a basis for the selection of the poets, there would, certainly, be a big problem with my study as none of the poets has been studied in southern Kurdistan schools and universities. However, it is obvious that literary canon has been protested and objected to on different scales by literary and feminist critics for not being impartial in accepting the representative works of literature. Ahmadzadeh quotes Robinson as saying that “during the last decades feminist scholars have been protesting the apparently systematic neglect of women’s experience in the literary canon” (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 30). The visible neglect of Kurdish women’s poetry in the academic curriculum in southern Kurdistan is expected because the academic body which introduces this syllabus is basically run by a hegemonic patriarchal group. Regrettably, Kurdish academics in

charge of preparing the syllabus not only reject the poetry of women on the pretext of bad quality, some are even unhappy with campaigns launched by Kurdish feminist activists for establishing the rights of Kurdish women in society, which shows the highest degree of their loyalty in glorifying the monolith of classic Kurdish patriarchy. For instance, in an interview with *Rûberî Dahênan* newspaper, Kurdish critic and academic Xeznedar openly admits that:

He avoids reading any book or piece of writing which has been specifically and defensively written about the freedom of women and the protection of their rights, as he believes that women should not be manipulated in that way as they are very delicate creatures being created to merely represent beauty and make passionate love relationships with men (Xeznedar 2010: 4).

Consequently, the traditionally established literary canon in southern Kurdistan does not serve at all as a criterion for the selection of my poets, because women's poetry is not only ignored in the canon but by the wider reading public as well. The blatant practice of different forms of patriarchy by the vast majority of Kurdish society is to be blamed for this unfavourable situation of Kurdish women's poetry.

It is more sensible to think about other criteria that might suit the peculiar condition of this study. Criteria such as the popularity of the poets, the range of the themes covered by each poet, the number of times every poet has republished her poetry book, the reception of publishing houses to women's poetry, the reading audience each poet has, the spectrum of women's poetry as covered by the Kurdish literary media, the market each poet has for her poetry, and the manner in which the poets are viewed by the literary critics. As for popularity, there are only a handful of them who are more or less known to the Kurdish readers, such as Kejaļ Eħmed, Roj Heļebceyî, Mehabad Qeredagî, Nezend Begîxanî, and some others, almost most of them because of roles, other than poetry writing, they play in the region, which has positively reflected on their literary career as poets. I have noticed at a glance that the majority of poets share similar themes, and that has become apparent during my literature review and survey, and through the analytical articles which are written on their poetry. For reprinting their poetry, no poet has been able to republish her poetry books due to the poor reading market in southern Kurdistan, with the exception of Kejaļ Eħmed's *Benderî Bermoda* (Bermuda Port), which was

reprinted in 1999. I can confirm that this information is true as it has been checked with the poets themselves through a network of contacts I have established with them.

Publishing houses in southern Kurdistan generally tend to welcome the publication of the poetry of only those women poets whose positions in society and the Kurdish government are visible and secured, a state that has been criticised by the less known women poets who usually publish their poetic products at their expense. Reading in the majority of disciplines is at a low level in southern Kurdistan, and literature in general, not only women's poetry, suffers painfully from the lack of a reading audience. Kurdish novelist Xesro Caf expresses his disillusionment with the current situation of reading among the Kurdish writers and men of letters when interviewed by *Rûberî Dahênan*. He states that "he knows a Kurdish literary man who is famous, but, unfortunately, does not read a book over a year time. On another hand, eighty percent of our officials basically do not know if books exist!" (Caf 2010: 5) Kurdish literary media has also been negligent towards women's poetry as there is not much space allocated to women's poetry on the pages of literary journals when compared to the bulk of works available on men's poetry. Most of the time I labour in vain to find an article on women's poetry while I journey through the pages of Kurdish literary journals, particularly when I find that so much has been written and said about men's poetry, another unwholesome symptom of the leverage of cultural patriarchy that indirectly controls the journals.

Regarding the marketability of women's poetry books in southern Kurdistan bookstores and bookshops, there are no precise figures of the sales, although the maximum number of books to be printed, depending on the poet, does not usually exceed a thousand copies, and the big part of the books are given by the poets either as a special gift or distributed for free to friends and fans. The lack of Kurdish women's poetry books in southern Kurdistan libraries, bookstores and book markets has been my biggest problem in obtaining the poetry books of the selected list of women poets of this study. However, thanks to the internet as some books have been posted online, otherwise the only way that I have managed to secure the books has been through personal contacts with the poets. But this mechanism has also not been without troubles as some poets with more than one publication unfortunately do not keep all their poetry books. In addition to the reasons of space and word limit, this shortage and unavailability of poetry books also

makes it impossible to cover all the poetry books published by each poet. I have exerted my greatest efforts to achieve the maximum number of poetry books and have used all the available means and channels at hand to make the study as complete as possible. The number of poetry books that I have failed to obtain is rather small and does not exceed four to five books out of tens of them to be analysed thematically in this research. And lastly, there is the opinion of the critics on the poets which has been spoken about, to a rather convincing degree, in the preceding sections of this chapter. Evidently, it is somewhat disappointing that none of the criteria functions as a proper measurement for the selection of the poets in my study, but it must not be forgotten that, against the backdrop of the Anglo-American feminist theory, it is my scholarly duty to discover and bring these neglected poets to the attention of readers and academics and expose the injustice being done to them by the male writers and critics. Furthermore, the main aim of this research is to bring Kurdish women poets from non-existence to existence, which, I believe, will justify the inapplicability of the objective criteria that make the selection of poets to have sense and complete credibility.

1.6 Literature Review²⁰

My literature review on women's poetry includes all types of poetic works which have been carried out mainly in Kurdish, and a group of them achieved in English. Since there is not yet any academic work to have been solely conducted on women's poetry in Kurdish, I have made use of some riveting scholarship on women's poetry being written in English, which I without doubt believe have inspired me with the idea of how to

²⁰ One of the more challenging aspects of preparing this study project has been the collection of materials written so far on the poetry of Kurdish women. Literature made on Kurdish women's poetry is not vast, stored in retrievable manner, or kept on the library shelves for easy access. Rather, it comes in small amounts, spread thinly across a wide area, that require strenuous efforts to be discovered and assembled. Conducting this research in the University of Exeter, where less than half a dozen of resources on Kurdish women's poetry are available, has been a great challenge, which needs perseverance and courage. Were it not for the enormous help and support I have had from the selected women poets for this work, doing this research would have been impossible or would have taken a long time. Much of the literature reviewed for this study has been gleaned from the poets themselves; their collaboration with me is the driving engine of this project, which has resulted in the accumulation of tens of poetry books, critical articles and texts, and interviews they have made with the Kurdish journals. Besides, almost all the biographies and personal information about the poets to be used later in Chapters Three and Four are gained through personal correspondence with the selected poets themselves.

approach Kurdish women's poetry. These works have acted as a model for me and given me deep insight into the ways in which women's poetry should be tackled and analysed. Interestingly, there are a good number of critical articles and commentaries being written periodically by a specific group of Kurdish critics in the Kurdish literary journals, websites, and studies on women's poetry, which provide a glimmer of hope that this kind of poetry is sometimes looked at in the literary circles, no matter what the intentions originally are.

There are three noteworthy literary works in Kurdish to have been done so far, either wholly or partly, on Kurdish women's poetry. Although they are utterly different from my study in terms of scope and the number of poets, they do provide constructive knowledge on the nature of women's poetry. These works stay away from a comprehensive exposure of Kurdish women's poetry, excluding the minutiae of its early history and factors which have held back its natural progress. The most relevant one is Kurdistan Mukiryanî's *Honrawey Afretî Kurd* (The Poetry of Kurdish Women) (1980), which is a poetic study of a group of Kurdish women poets from the second half of the twentieth century. The majority of the poets mentioned in this study are from southern Kurdistan and few of them are from eastern Kurdistan. Mukriyanî did not use any literary theory to underpin her arguments, and her work takes the shape of a thematic analysis of several poetic texts written by the chosen poets. It is a pleasing collection of a good number of Kurdish women poets, who managed to write poetry from the late 1950s to the early 1970s side by side with men poets, but the few poems covered and themes identified make the study appear insufficient in details. The second work is 'Ebas Saliḥ 'Ebduḷḷa's PhD thesis (2007) titled "Fêmînîzm le Şi'rî Kurdîda: Kirmancî Xwarû" (Feminism in Kurdish Poetry: Sorani Dialect), which is about the extraction of feminist elements and themes in the poetry of a selected number of modern Kurdish poets. 'Ebduḷḷa allocates only the third chapter of his thesis to the activities and attempts of Kurdish women to achieve their goals, the emergence of women's poetry in Kurdish literature, and the concept of feminism as used in women's poetry. He also does not use any specific literary theory for the analysis of the poetry of the group of women poets he selects for his study, and this third chapter seems peripheral to his work since the information presented comes in rather incomplete pieces. However, he does include some

early history of Kurdish women's poetry, highlighting the most prominent women poets who first dared to embark on writing poetry amidst a rigid patriarchal society. 'Ebdullā's work also contains several Kurdish women poets from the early 1990s, but what he says about them and their poetry does not suffice since many other poets who actively existed at that time have been excluded from the body of his study.

One more significant work which has been achieved recently in Kurdish on the literature of Kurdish women is an MA dissertation by Sabîr Hûsên Resul under the title of "Dîyardey Fêmînîzm le Edebî Çend Nûserêkî Mêyîney Kurd: Lêkoşneweyekî Şîkarî" (Feminism Phenomenon in the Literature of Some Female Kurdish Writers: An Analytical Study) (2010). This dissertation is entirely dedicated to literature written by Kurdish women from the 1990s onward, its spectrum of genres is not only poetry but novel as well as short story. In the second chapter of his work, Resul provides an overview of women's literature in the world and how this type of literature has been viewed by the literary critics. Then, in the third chapter, he discusses the notion of feminism in southern Kurdistan, arguing whether this movement exists or not in its authentic form in this part of Kurdistan. Additionally, his third chapter includes four southern Kurdish women writers, namely Nezend Begîxanî, Kazîwe Saliḥ, Mehabad Qeredagî, and Selwa Gulî, from whom he takes specified literary works, ranging from poems to short stories, and makes a reading of them in search for traces of feminism. Poetry of Kurdish women is only a part of this dissertation, whereas the majority of the work space is set for other literary genres and again no specific literary theory backs up the arguments and analyses of this dissertation. This neglect of literary theories as a foundation for the conduct of research in southern Kurdistan is actually realised by most academics and critics who have been striving hard to incorporate new methodologies for research into the courses in southern Kurdistan universities, which consider literary criticism and theory as the basic framework of scholarship. Kurdish writer Aram Sidîq (2010: 17) underlines several reasons that have resulted in an absence of literary criticism and theory in Kurdish literature; he believes that one of the factors is "the lack of critical resources for the critics and writers to use them in reading and analysing new texts", and the other factor, he says, is that "ground still has not been prepared for criticism in Kurdistan, no criticism-specific publications or magazines are available in the region that

can help set in motion literary criticism.” This criticism crisis in southern Kurdistan has brought many poor quality literary works into being.

It is worth mentioning that, apart from Mukiryani’s book and the above two academic works on women’s poetry, there are some good critical articles and studies in Kurdish published recently on Kurdish women’s poetry. Kurdish literary journals, both the web-based ones and those available in hard copy, tackle Kurdish women’s poetry to a modest degree, and my daily and weekly reading of these journals, which come in tens, over the past two years, has secured me an acceptable amount of materials, a reliable literature that helps my research make a steady headway. Due to the limited space of the study, it is impossible to discuss the importance of all the materials I have collected so far. But I will mention one more reviewed literary item which replicates a significant part of my study, and that is an article by Azad Heme Şerîf, published in the weekly *Bedirxan* newspaper. Şerîf’s study is entitled ‘Berengarbûnewe û rohî yaxîgerî le şî’rî jinanî Kurd’ (Confrontation and rebellious spirit in the poetry of Kurdish women); it is a thematic analysis of the poetry of four Kurdish women poets from southern Kurdistan, who also come at the heart of my study, and, most importantly, two of these poets live abroad and the other two live inside southern Kurdistan. He chooses individual poems from each poet to show how rebellious these poets are and in what ways they stand up to the oppression of women by the various patriarchal institutions in southern Kurdistan. For instance, through the analysis of a poem by Kurdish woman poet Şîrîn. K, Şerîf describes her as a “defiant poet who struggles to end the oppression of women led by men” (Şerîf 2009: 14). This study by Şerîf is one of the good works being written on Kurdish women poets, which I have found very interesting since it provides insight into the nature of women’s poetry and the themes they bring forth.

1.7 Study Outline

This study falls into two main parts; part one comprises the Introductory Chapter and Chapter Two, as Chapter One embodies the theoretical framework, and Chapter Two is more about the history of Kurdish literature and poetry and the emergence of Kurdish women’s poetry. I have dedicated the second chapter to the history of Kurdish poetry because poetry marks the early days of the development of Kurdish literature, and, in

fact, Kurdish literature begins with poetry. Xeznedar (2001: 159-160) sees the early reliable poetic texts written in Kurdish as the beginning of Kurdish literature, considering poetic quatrains by Baba Tahirî Hemedanî²¹ as the indicator of first attempts at writing poetry in Kurdish language. This chapter continues to cover other aspects of Kurdish poetry such as its pioneers, style, form and structure. Chapter Two will also trace the history of the appearance of Kurdish women's poetry which has been a challenging part of my research work, due to a shortage in resources and scholarship in this field. As being pointed out previously, very little research has been conducted on the poetry of Kurdish women both by writers outside academia and inside it, which will consequently pose some difficulties to my project. Because the study is a literary project, the whole process of writing it up will be on the basis of literature surveys. Thus, the moment and time the Kurdish women's poetry became prominent will be mentioned, with a focus on the various factors that resulted in the production of this type of poetry. Besides, Chapter Two forms an important part of this study because it introduces and leads the readers to the following chapters which are specifically designed to thematically analyse the poetry of Kurdish women. Similarly, Chapter Two will track down the early Kurdish women poets who have provided courage and space to their successors, created a poetry that ultimately represents the voices and identity of Kurdish women. This historically-mapped chapter will not be confined to one part of Kurdistan, but rather it will look for voices of Kurdish women poets heard anywhere in the early history of Kurdish literature in the four parts of Kurdistan or further out in the world. Additionally, literary materials will be sought in Kurdish and other languages on a wide scale to include every piece of information to have been written on Kurdish women's poetry.

²¹ Baba Tahirî Hemedanî (b.937-d.1010) is the father of Kurdish poetry. He was born in the current Iranian city of Hemedan and died there; he was famous for writing Ruba'iyat (quatrains) in a simple and understandable poetic language similar to the renowned Iranian poet Omer Khayyam. However, there is a considerable controversy over the original nationality of Baba Tahir as Iranian writers and critics consider him Persian for his use of Loŕî in his poetry, which they argue to be a dialect of the southwest Iranian language, while Kurdish critics reject this allegation and confirm that Baba Tahir is Kurdish and his poetry represents his Kurdishness. As for the identity of Loŕî dialect, Kurdish linguists see it as part of Kurdish language, a linguistic tug-of-war, which, according to Shakely (2002), is not yet settled. For further details about the Kurdish identity and poetry nature of Baba Tahir see Classical Kurdish Poetry section in Chapter Two and for a clarification on the origin of Loŕî dialect and disagreements between Kurdish and Iranian writers over this dialect see a footnote in Chapter Two on pages 65-6.

The second part of the study, which is the kernel of my thesis, includes Chapters Three, Four, and Chapter Five which comprises conclusions and discussion. Apart from the last chapter, conclusions and discussion, the two preceding chapters, three and four, are a thematic analysis of the poetry of seventeen Kurdish women poets from southern Kurdistan whose poetry comes in the Kurdish Sorani dialect. The time span when their poetry has been written extends from the 1990 to the end of 2009. Although the poets I have chosen for my study are all originally from southern Kurdistan, they are divided into two groups: those who are now living in the diaspora and others who live in southern Kurdistan. Some are found to have double experiences of life, i.e. life abroad and in southern Kurdistan, which I see it as a positive point since this life status will enrich the quality of my poetic analysis. Obviously, this diversity in the life experience of the poets has compelled me to distribute the poets across two chapters. Chapter Three is allocated to the poetry of the diasporic Kurdish women poets, which encompasses the poetry of only those women poets who have still been living in the diaspora, while Chapter Four focuses on the selected poetry of those Kurdish women poets who have been leading life inside southern Kurdistan, including those who were once living abroad but have returned to southern Kurdistan. In each one of these two chapters, I will be discovering the most prominent themes which form the content of the poetry of these women poets, analysing them in the light of Anglo-American feminist literary theory and some specific gender theories to reach the conclusion that these poets write poetry out of their passions, life realities, experiences, loyalty to the motherland, national feelings, sympathy with their long suppressed and repressed nation, love of the landscape of Kurdistan, romantic love towards steadfast men, and the oppression they encounter on a daily basis in the community. While writing critically on Lazo and Mardîn's poetry book *Kiras Reş* (Dressed in Black)²², Kurdish critic Haşim Seřac (2009: 152) confirms that there is a spectrum of themes interwoven into the poetry of Kurdish women poets, and he shows his surprise at Lazo's ability to depict homeland superbly in her poetry, saying her being far from her homeland forces her to nostalgically fit all her childhood and girlhood stages

²² Lazo, a Kurdish woman poet, and her husband Mardîn İbrahim published their debut poetry book entitled *Kiras Reş* (Dressed in Black) in 2007 which entails 14 poetic texts; as a family, they live now in the UK. The two poets are known for having a special style for writing poetry. They have been regarded by the Kurdish critics as the breakers of the chain of patriarchy in the modern Kurdish poetry and that is by touching upon the taboo subject matters in the Kurdish society in their poetry.

of life into the body of her poem, “Yarbûnewe Legeļ Niştîman” (Friendship Again with Homeland). Clearly, individual study and scrutiny of the poetry of each poet will shape the basis of Chapters Three and Four, with much effort to be made to pick up all the major themes that mark the poetry of the Kurdish women poets chosen in this research as innovative, revolutionary, and representative of the real position of women in the Kurdish society. This arrangement aims to give an organised form and structure to the two chapters, to cast a fair eye over the works and efforts made by each one of these poets. Last but not least, the fifth chapter, conclusions and discussion, summarises the gist of the research work and discusses its obtained results.

Chapter Two

The History of Kurdish
Poetry

Chapter Two

The History of Kurdish Poetry

So that people don't say that the Kurds
Have no knowledge, no origin and history;
That all the other nations own their books
Except for the Kurds who are insignificant
(Ehmedî Xanî from Sa'ib 2008: 46)

2.1 A Concise Account of Kurdish Literature

The early history of Kurdish literature goes back to the European Middle Ages. This literature has faced many twists and turns through its development process and embraced many great writers and men of letters over its diverse historical stages. It encompasses all the literary genres, namely poetry, prose, short story, drama, novel, and criticism, although novel, drama, short story, and criticism have only recently emerged as parts of Kurdish literature. Kurdish writer Rafiq Sabir, in his article titled "An Introduction to Kurdish Poetry" (2006), emphasises that within the borders of Kurdish literature "it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that other genres such as stories, drama, literary criticism and journalism emerged" (Sabir *et al.* 2006: 14). Nevertheless, like other literatures of the world, poetry is regarded as the oldest type of Kurdish literature, as most Kurdish writers and critics believe that Kurdish poetry marks the early days of the development of Kurdish literature. It is again Sabir who provides a proper evidence for this situation, affirming that "poetry is the oldest genre in Kurdish literature" (*ibid.*). Kurdish literature forms an inseparable part of world literature, which chiefly emanates from the realities of life being experienced by the Kurdish people. It has been developing roughly since the early years of the Middle Ages and has contributed to the expansion of world literature with many prominent works and writers, such as the famous epic poem of *Mem û Zîn*²³ (Mem and Zin) (1694) by the Kurdish poet Ehmedî Xanî (b.1651-d.1707),

²³ *Mem û Zîn* is a Kurdish epic drama versified by Ehmedî Xanî in 1694. It brings together a rich wealth of mythological and historical incidents which had been happening in the everyday life of the Kurds and idealises their patriotic ambitions (*Kurdish Academy of Language* 1992). The drama is about the romantic love relationship between Mem and Zîn whose union was doomed and obstructed by an evil and vicious

and poets like Melay Cezîrî (b.1567-d.1640), Nalî (b.1800-d.1856), Salim (b.1805-d.1869), Mehwî (b.1830-d.1906) and many others. This rich literature covers a wide range of themes and concepts from Kurdism, patriotism, nationalism, humanism to love, cosmopolitanism, sexual relationships, religion, social events and Sufism (Xeznedar 2001: 156).

According to the *Kurdish Academy of Language* website, a large amount of Kurdish literature has been written by Kurdish literary writers and scholars over the many past centuries. However, the fact that the land of Kurds had been a place of battle and contestation between the imperial powers of the region, and the absence of official Kurdish cultural centres and institutions to reproduce the recovered works of ancient Kurdish writers have resulted in the disappearance of a huge proportion of Kurdish literary repertoires. Moreover, a great amount of written Kurdish literature has been lost to more than eight centuries of nomadic displacement and emigration through all the territories of Kurdistan, leaving behind insufficient fragments of literary works (*Kurdish Academy of Language* 1992). This terrible situation of Kurdish literature is further aggravated in modern times following the emergence and formation of nation-states in the Middle East. The process of state-building in the wake of the inevitable collapse of the Ottoman Empire results in the partitioning of the land mainly inhabited by Kurds into four separate parts, namely the Kurdistan of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. The geopolitical division of the land of Kurds has not only been damaging to the standing of Kurdish literature among other literatures of the world and the spectrum of genres and works it has made, but also triggered a wide intellectual and literary gap among the writers and academics of the four parts of Kurdistan, which has produced a Kurdish literature from each part noticeably separate from the other part. Ahmadzadeh, in his study of Kurdish and Persian novels, is aware of this fact when he attempts to bring in a proper definition for Kurdish literature. He (2003: 127) identifies one of the major issues regarding the study of Kurdish literature as “the definition of its boundaries”. He says that “the absence of a defined juridico-political Kurdish sovereignty, in other words, the non-existence of a Kurdish state, makes it almost impossible to decide the limits of

man called Bekir. Tragically, the epic ends by the death of the two lovers, with Bekir being slain by the people as a punishment for his inhumane character.

Kurdish literature as a national literature” (*ibid.*). This reality inflicted on the Kurdish people has impacted on their literature, with each part of the partitioned Kurdistan possessing a particular type of literature, expressing the lived reality of the Kurds, and the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions they experience in the countries containing them. It is hardly possible to believe or claim that there is a national Kurdish literature that embraces literature from all the four parts, a position always said to have been maintained by the Kurdish nationalist movements, due to the various totalitarian policies adopted by the nation states holding the Kurds. Ahmadzadeh clearly states the effects of the political partitioning of Kurdistan on the overall condition of Kurdish literature and how this division has enormously undermined the importance and readability of this literature on an international level. He also points to the bitter fact that Kurdish writers and authors from each part of the divided Kurdistan have been reluctantly taking on an individual style and agenda of writing extensively isolated from the other parts, without leaving any kind of influence on one another in terms of national unity. He carries on further arguing that:

Although there is a strong tendency among the Kurdish nationalists to claim that there is a homogeneous Kurdish literature, the reality of Kurdish literature is far from this. The geopolitical situation of the Kurds and their encounter with the aims of those nation states which govern them deprive them of any legal or formal cooperation and relationship with each other. This situation easily leads to separate endeavours which cannot provide any possibility of common investigations. Thus, Kurdish literature in one part of Kurdistan may develop without any noteworthy influence on the other parts (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 128).

This unfavorable and poorly developed condition of Kurdish literature, brought about by world politics against the will of the Kurdish nation, has also been indicated by Xeznedar in his recent voluminous work on the history of Kurdish literature. Xeznedar goes further back in history to discuss the serious damage done to Kurdish literature as a result of the division of Kurdistan by the world’s imperial powers. He (2001: 172) argues that the division of Kurdistan made the works of Kurdish literature experience peculiar styles and changes that seemed alien to the original Kurdish literary collections produced earlier in history. Xeznedar states that “the majority of Kurdish literature, which stretches back to a thousand years ago, has been written in the Kurdish dialects of Loŕi²⁴, Gorani,

²⁴ There are definite conflicting views over the origin and identity of Loŕi dialect. Almost all Kurdish writers and linguists like Xeznedar claim that Loŕi is an inseparable dialect of the Kurdish language, while

Sorani, and Kirmanci” (*ibid.*). He adds that “Kurdish literature has kept a separate style and form in each area where a particular dialect is dominant. And over many centuries, the literature of every region has been the reflection of the characteristics of that region” (*ibid.*). The divided geography of Kurdish literature continues to the present day, despite southern Kurdistan being autonomous and self-dependent since 1991. However, ongoing attempts are made in southern Kurdistan, firstly, to create a standard Kurdish language composed of the central Kurdish dialects with the help and expertise of Kurdish linguists from all parts of Kurdistan and non-Kurdish language planners, which, if it happens, will in turn can help the unification of Kurdish literature across the four parts, and secondly, bring Kurdish writers and intellectuals from the other three parts of Kurdistan together to capitalise broadly on the freedom of writing and expression, which has been achieved in southern Kurdistan, and reinvigorate Kurdish literature. Importantly, the most recent national initiative for creating a standard Kurdish language was an international conference held under the auspices of the current president of southern Kurdistan, Mes’ud Barzanî, in the capital Hewlêr, on 19th September 2011, attended by language experts from all parts of Kurdistan and several world countries. It has to be said that there is a long way ahead of this strategic project to be accomplished, but much has been done so far, and the horizon of success is predicted.

2.2 Periods of Kurdish Poetry

Like any other poetry in its developmental stages, Kurdish poetry has gone by definite time periods when different types of poetry in terms of form, structure, meaning, and style have been produced. Throughout history, Kurdish poetry has been subjected to a range of technical changes and modifications in the way it was produced due to close contact with and influence from the literatures that did exist side by side of it. As a normal phenomenon, Kurdish poetry has insertions from other surrounding literatures such as Arabic and Persian and has widely adopted styles, poetic techniques and structures used by these literatures. Structural and linguistic transference of adjacent

Persian linguists have the opposite view. They claim that this dialect originally belongs to the southern branch of Western Iranian languages. And in support of this claim, MacKinnon (2011) argues that “all Lori dialects closely resemble standard Persian and probably developed from a stage of Persian similar to that represented in Early New Persian texts written in Arabic script”.

literatures, particularly their poetry, to the heart of Kurdish poetry was typically habitual at the early stages of its emergence up until the early years of the twentieth century when a radical contextual change happens in Kurdish poetry.

Thus, it is necessary to define the periods into which Kurdish poetry has been divided by Kurdish literary writers and historians. For many different reasons to be discussed later in this section, Kurdish poetry, since its emergence around the tenth and eleventh centuries, has been categorised into two periods or classes— the classical and modern Kurdish poetry. In a study on the presence of women in Kurdish poetry, Rewşt Miḥemmed splits Kurdish poetry into two main periods, viz. the classical and modern periods. While tracing the participatory role of women in Kurdish poetry, Miḥemmed says “as far as I have noticed, the presence of women in Kurdish poetry is twofold, and is divided into two different forms, exactly as the broad division of the Kurdish poetry into the Classical and Modern Ages” (Miḥemmed 2007: 112). Elsewhere, Aso ‘Umer agrees with similar classification of Kurdish poetry into classical and modern periods in a research he has conducted on the influential role of the prominent modern Kurdish poet ‘Ebdullā Goran (b.1904-d.1962) in renovating and developing the Kurdish poetry. ‘Umer concludes his detailed study by putting it this way:

Goran is one of the modern poets who at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century modernised Kurdish poetry, injected a new life into it, and liberated it from the classic-centred form and tradition, which had been in command of Kurdish literature for more than ten centuries (‘Umer 2010: 70).

This division of Kurdish poetry solely into the classical and modern periods did not happen by accident. Neither did it occur because Kurdish poetry writers were unqualified and unaware of the developments of the poetry movements in Europe or were unable to catch up with the changes which were introduced to world poetry by the dawn of each new poetry trend. Rather, there are several compelling reasons which stand negatively behind centuries of passivity in Kurdish poetry and oblige it to cling on to the classical style for over ten centuries. Affecting other literatures of the region to varying degrees, the most dominant factor which made the Kurdish poetry take very slow steps forward was the relentless political and social instability produced by the imperial powers in the areas where Kurdish poets were normally living. Such unceasing instability continued,

ripping the land of Kurds apart and pushing its people towards further divisions and relocations, which in turn did not allow enough space and time to the Kurdish poets to think about the development of Kurdish poetry and reflect on its points of weakness and strength. Xeznedar affirms that “throughout history, most of the wars and battles between the Persian and Ottoman Empires were fought on the territory of Kurdistan” (Xeznedar 2001: 13). This state of war between the two empires, which lasted for more than four centuries, massively affected all walks of life of Kurdish people, and Kurdish literature received maximum damage. But there emerged some politically-motivated Kurdish emirates which used Kurdish as their language, a condition that urged some Kurdish poets such as Eḥmedî Xanî (b.1651-d.1707) to write poetry in Kurdish, but given the general situation of the Kurdish literature, it was not to the aspired level.

In line with the above argument, Kurdish writer Firyad Fazil ‘Umer justifies the lack of all the literary movements in Kurdish literature by what has happened to Kurds all along history, believing that “no-one is able to say that all the trends of the European literature can be found in Kurdish literature due to a difference in the psychological condition in which literatures across the world are born in” (‘Umer 1986: 16). This volatile, barren situation of Kurdish poetry stays unchanged by the passage of time even after the imperial system of the region overturns. A change in the political system and map of the region after the fall of the Ottoman Empire hits hard any plans and attempts thought to revive Kurdish poetry in a new form. Relevant to this claim, Kurdish writer and novelist Mehmed Uzun (b.1953-d.2007), from northern Kurdistan, reiterates this crucial fact in his book on Kurdish literature, *Antolojiya Edebiyata Kurdî* (The Anthology of Kurdish Literature) (2003). Following the end of the Ottoman Empire, Uzun argues that the geographical partitioning of Kurdistan among the four nation-states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria has vastly hindered the development of Kurdish literature and language. Uzun reflects that “due to the division of the home country, social life, and the oppression of foreign powers, Kurds never had a chance to cultivate their language, culture, and literature” (Uzun 2003: 25). Furthermore, he (*ibid.*) blames the unjust treatment of the superpowers and governing occupying nations towards the Kurdish people to be the major factor behind the failure of the Kurds to set up and own literary and cultural institutions and establishments. And there is no doubt that such important

foundations play a very crucial and constructive role in the development of the literature, language, and culture of any countries and nations. Uzun invokes another significant factor to be broadly instrumental in containing the Kurdish literature within restricted boundaries, which is the isolation of the four parts of Kurdistan from each other, an undesired situation that has negatively reflected on the relationship and cooperation among the Kurdish writers, intellectuals, critics, and authors from these parts. He (*ibid.*) argues that Kurdish writers have failed to break this isolation, which has resulted in the widening of the literary rift which has already caused much havoc to the status of Kurdish literature on the world literature stage. Uzun, by drawing on all these bitter facts, realises that:

[...] one cannot develop a phenomenal written literature in a 'country' such as Kurdistan which has a tragic and painful history and where man is deprived of having very basic information and knowledge. And in such a state, one cannot match Kurdish literature to those literatures which are in possession of their own state and educational, cultural, and literary bodies and institutions (*ibid.*).

Meanwhile, regular occupation, colonisation, and assimilation policies practised against the Kurds and Kurdistan by the states ruling them have clearly resulted in the making of a Kurdish literature in languages other than Kurdish. There are very noticeable groups of acknowledged writers of originally Kurdish ethnicity who have written famous works of literature in Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages, such as Selîm Berekat, Miḥemmed Qazî, Yeşar Kemal, and etc. However, the literature produced by these writers has been the source of deep tension and controversy among Kurdish scholars and critics over whether their literature could be counted as Kurdish or not²⁵. Regarding this argument, Kurdish writer Feqî Huseyn Sağniç in his recent book, *Dîroka Wêjeya Kurdî*²⁶ (The History of Kurdish Literature) (2002), refers to a number of Kurdish writers who did not usually write in their mother language, such as Şerefxanê Bedlîsî, Nurî Dêrsimiyê Dêrsimî, Yilmaz Güneyê, and etc, but declines to regard their works as part of Kurdish

²⁵ For a full account of the disagreement among Kurdish writers and critics over the literature made by Kurdish writers in other languages, see Ahmadzadeh' s book, *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse*, Chapter Four, pp. 135-9.

²⁶ This book by Sağniç, which studies the early and modern stages of Kurdish literature and the most famous Kurdish literary figures in history, is alleged by some Kurdish critics to be a Kirmancî translation of Sidîq Borekeyî's two Sorani volumes of *Mêjûy Wêjey Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature). To prove the authenticity of this allegation, a careful scrutinisation and analysis of the book is required by an independent Kurdish panel of literary experts.

literature. He states evidently that “because such writers did not write in Kurdish, attempt to add anything to the Kurdish national literature, we cannot include them in the list of Kurdish literary people” (Sağniç 2002: 655). Even so, such writers have played a constructive role in exposing the reality of Kurdish people and their national cause, allowing the people of other world nations to be extensively familiar with the brutal oppression, opportunistic and discriminatory policies being repeatedly exercised on a wide scale against the biggest non-state nation in the world- the Kurds. Moreover, the inclusion of the influential literature written by these well-known writers in the wider body of Kurdish literature will add further weight to this internationally marginalised literature and can help it be identified on a global level like Asian and African literature written in English and other recognised languages.

Accordingly, the history of Kurdish poetry to be included in this chapter will be divided into the Classical and Modern Ages. In each age, the most remarkable and widely read Kurdish poets, who have critically contributed to the development of Kurdish poetry, will be discussed. The poets will be organised in the manner they recurrently appear in the Kurdish literary books, or in other words, according to the chronological order in which they have been fitted into.

2.2.1 Classical Kurdish Poetry

This type of poetry marks the very early days in which Kurdish poetry emerged in a written form after many years of rich folkloric literature of the Kurdish forefathers. Crucially, there are many very distinct features which differentiate this type of Kurdish poetry from its modern form, which follows after a long period of classicism in Kurdish literature. Classical Kurdish poetry is by and large claimed to have been hugely under the impact of the Arabic and Persian poetry, and, consequently, has borrowed almost all of its features from these two types of poetry. Owing to the limited space of this study, only the most essential and prominent features of Classical Kurdish poetry will be discussed here. These features will be explained against the backdrop of the form and content of this kind of Kurdish poetry. Hence, in terms of form, classical Kurdish poetry has lyric,

also named as *qasida* and *ghazal*²⁷, and epic. The former is smaller in size compared to the latter, which is a very long poem. Lyric either has a single line (beyt), which is composed of two half lines, or a quatrain, a poem of four lines, known in Kurdish as “dûbeytî”, or is a piece “qit‘e”, which consists of twelve half lines. Regarding epic, Xeznedar (2001: 169) divides it into ballad and narrative poem, with unequal length. A ballad is not too long, written in a colloquial language, and is recited in the form of a song, while a narrative poem is long enough and, according to Xeznedar (*ibid.*), is mostly written for the literate and educated people. Meanwhile, classical Kurdish poetry has a rather complicated rhyme and metre system which comes significantly in a variety of forms, and is basically reliant mostly on the Arabic *aruz* metre which is explained further later in this chapter. Considering the content of classical Kurdish poetry, it encompasses a spectrum of topics and themes, from love of nature, of God, to heroic and patriotic adventures and narratives of Kurdish fighters and lovers. Writing on the poetry of Melay Cezîrî (b.1567-d.1640) from the classical Kurdish poetry epoch, Shakely argues that “the poet [Cezîrî] devoted most of his *qasidas*, also to some extent his *ghazals*, to philosophical and mystical ideas” (Shakely 1996: 329). This example by Shakely clearly indicates the religious side of the content of classical Kurdish lyric poetry which has many similarities to the themes of Persian poets such as Hafez Shirazi (b.1325/1326–d.1389/1390) and Farid al-Din ‘Attar (c.1142–c.1220). Alternatively, it is usually the content of classical Kurdish epic poetry that demonstrates stories of sheer heroism and patriotism, of which Xanî’s *Mem and Zin* (1694) is a good example.

Historically, the first Kurdish poet to be credited with the title of the father of classical Kurdish poetry is Baba Tahirî ‘Uryanî Hemedan²⁸ (b.937-d.1010) CE. Xeznedar (2001: 184) describes Baba Tahir as one of the sagacious men of the Yaresan, or Ehl-i Heqq²⁹, saying that he had a very distinguished position among its followers. Xeznedar

²⁷ These two terms are originally Arabic. *Qasida* means a lyric poem and *ghazal* means a love poem.

²⁸ For a critical comment on the ethnic background of Baba Tahir and the controversy between Kurdish and Iranian critics over his nationality, see *Study Outline* section of Chapter One on page 58.

²⁹ Yaresanism is an ancient religion practised by the Yaresans, sometimes called Ahl-e Haqq or Kaka’is, in some of the mountainous areas where Kurds lived during the lifetime of Baba Tahir. This religion is believed to be older than Islam, but at the time when Baba Tahir lived, it was practised as an Islamic cult. Along history, the Yaresans had been confronted by other religious and imperial forces, particularly during the Ottoman era. Notably, the religious poems or *kalams* of Yaresanism were in the literary Kurdish Gorani dialect. For further account of Ahl-e Haqq and the challenges facing Yaresanism, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini’s

(2001: 187) also adds that Yaresan's religious themes and values appear clearly in Baba Tahir's poetic texts. Baba Tahir is known for his "dûbeytî", four-line poems that are sometimes called "ruba'iyat". He wrote his dûbeytîs or quatrains mostly in the Kurdish dialect of Loŕî, which is mainly spoken in the Kurdish-populated areas in Iran, and such quatrains embody a more passionate and mystical connotation rather than a philosophical one. The musicality and adaptability of Baba Tahir's dûbeytîs provided the basis for the religious and ritualistic songs sung by the Yaresan companions in religious ceremonies and events. In terms of the form of his dûbeytîs, Baba Tahir uses simple words and sentences which are mostly used in everyday life conversations. On the other hand, he chooses love themes, particularly sincere and spiritual love towards God, for the content of his poems, as Xeznedar affirms that "in Baba Tahir's dûbeytîs, one can feel delicate love lyrics with a sense of dissolution in God" (Xeznedar 2001: 193). Following a rapid growth in the printing machines in the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth century, many Orientalists, who frequently travelled to Iran, started translating Baba Tahir's quatrains into the other world languages, namely English, French, German and several others.

For his substantial role in the development of Islamic sufistic poetry, Baba Tahir can be considered as one of the creators and innovators of sufistic poetry not only in the Kurdish literature, but in the whole world of Islamic Sufism. Nevertheless, he also uses his dûbeytîs for other earthly purposes other than religion. For instance, he has dûbeytîs which are elegantly set in a romantic fashion that expressly articulate the erotic relationship and passion between two lovers. In the introduction of his book on translating Baba Tahir's dûbeytîs from Loŕî dialect into the Kurdish Sorani dialect, modern Kurdish poet Eħmed Diŕzar (b.1920) says that "Baba Tahir is very famous in Iran, particularly in Hemedan and Loŕistan. His grave has become a sacred shrine and his poems are recited by the youths and elderly" (Diŕzar 2007: 7). Diŕzar states that Baba's dûbeytîs are easy to comprehend and are full of meaning. He is amazed at the beautiful feelings and emotions expressed in Baba's poems, adding that such aesthetic qualities make his poetry to be strongly attractive and persistently appeal to the readers' sense of

article "Redefining the truth: Ahl-i Haqq and the Islamic Republic of Iran" (1994), published in the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp.211-228.

interest. For Diłzar, it is the professional poetic skills of Baba Tahir which have ensured his poetry is still read and worshipped by the people of Lořistan and Hemedan after more than a thousand years. Somewhat hyperbolically, Diłzar commends Baba Tahir and his literary importance and place in Kurdish literature by saying that “for us, if Baba Tahir is not more important than Khayyam, he is not less, as it is known that Khayyam had the roots of his philosophy from Ibn Sina, while Baba Tahir had an independent philosophy” (*ibid.*).

After Baba Tahir in the tenth century classical Kurdish poetry enters a long period of silence and sterility until the 14th century when a new group of productive poets emerge to revitalise Kurdish poetry. Significantly, from the 14th century onwards, a boom in poetry production, mainly by male poets, is witnessed in the Kurdish literature. This classical production of Kurdish poetry reaches its peak in the middle of the 19th century with the emergence of numerous creative poets such as Nalî, Salim, Kurdî and Meħwî. Classical Kurdish poetry is the amalgamation of three different but complementary schools of Kurdish literature, spread over three Kurdish principalities which ruled in relatively different times within the Ottoman imperial era. These principalities are the Botan, with Cezîre as its capital at the turn of the seventeenth century, Ardelan and its capital Sine at the end of the seventeenth century, and Baban, with Slêmanî as its capital in 1784. It is relevant to discuss only a handful of prominent poets from each one of these here, taking into account the chronology in which they are embedded. In line with the above division, most Kurdish writers argue that the Botan principality represents the first school of classical Kurdish poetry. The rapid development of classical Kurdish poetry under this principality starts literally in the sixteenth century and celebrates its golden time in the 17th and 18th century. Using Kurdish Kurmanji dialect as the language of their poetry, Xeznedar (2002: 145) argues that the three greatest poets, namely Feqê Teyran (b.1563-d.1641), Melay Cezîrî (b.1567-d.1640), and Eħmedî Xanî (b.1651-d.1707), were able to expand widely the spectrum of the subjects of Kurdish poetry. Kurdish poetry from this principality is a solid reflection of the realities of life of people who formed the broad population of this entity; it stands for the traditions and culture of the Kurds as a separate ethnic group from other ethnicities. Judged by its content, the poetry of this principality is usually classified into lyric and narrative poetry. Clearly, Feqê Teyran,

much similar to Melay Cezîrî and Eḫmedî Xanî, is known to have a close relationship with all the layers and groups of Kurdish society. Xeznedar describes Teyran's poetic works in terms of form as "representative of original popular Kurdish poetry" (Xeznedar 2002: 172). Teyran uses simple and native Kurdish language in the construction of his poetry, accompanied by diversified rhyme.

Although he is much affected by Islam and the Arabic literature, Melay Cezîrî is seen as having a central role in the development of classical Kurdish poetry. He has tried hard to make maximum use of the techniques used in Arabic poetry to advance his poetry in a newer fashion. For example, he adopts the *aruz* metre in his poems which is a typical feature used by Arab poets at his time. He even has desired to make his poetry rhymes end with Arabic alphabets. Kurdish critic Firyad Fazil 'Umer disagrees with Cezîrî's use of Arabic alphabets in his poetry, saying that "this act has actually made some of Cezîrî's poetic works lose taste since some Arabic letters are without equivalents in Kurdish language" ('Umer 1986: 5). It is unquestionable that almost all the classical Kurdish poets were heavily influenced by Arabic and Persian literatures, since these two literatures were the dominant ones in the region from which Kurdish poets could acquire models for their poetry and were in direct contact with. Ahmadzadeh (2003: 135) reiterates this fact by saying that many classical Kurdish poets wrote poetry in Arabic and Persian due to these languages' "unique position in the Middle East before the establishment of the new state nations". He continues saying that "Arabic as the language of religion and Persian as the language of poetry were used by many groups of peoples who did not have these languages as their mother tongues" (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, the young Kurdish poet Zana Xelîl, in an interview with *Rûberî Dahênan* (Creation Space) (2011: 5) about the influence of the foreign literatures on classical Kurdish poets, emphasises the great impact Persian literature and poetry, particularly the poetry of the famous Persian poet Hafez Shirazi (b.1325/1326–d.1389/1390), had on Melay Cezîrî. He argues that it is easy for any researcher to notice this influence on Cezîrî when his poetry is studied (Xelîl 2011: 5). Importantly, Cezîrî gives birth to his lyrics in pure Kurdish language, which is a patriotic initiative by him representing his serious efforts to protect the identity of the language and make it sustainable.

One more charismatic poet from the Botan principality, whose poetic works occupy a large space in Kurdish literature, is Eḫmedî Xanî. Xanî, who lived in the 17th century, is a much respected Kurdish poet whose poetic works have widely been studied and researched by Kurdish and non-Kurdish scholars around the world. Uzun is very impressed by the poetic skills and character of Xanî, saying that “besides of being a poet, Xanî is identified and acknowledged as the greatest scholar and writer of Kurds” (Uzun 2003: 19). Xanî’s fame originally elicits from his magnificent epic poem *Mem and Zin* (1694), which is a love story whose end is marked by the tragic death of two young Kurdish lovers. As a patriotic responsibility, Xanî writes *Mem and Zin* (1694) in Kurdish rather than Persian, despite the fact that Persian was then the convenient language for advanced literary expression. Bruinessen, in his essay published in Abbas Vali’s *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (2003), asserts that Kurds consider Xanî’s *Mem and Zin* (1694) as the earliest source to have explicitly expressed Kurdish nationalist feelings. Even though his view is significantly contrary to those stipulated by modern Kurdish nationalists, Bruinessen realises that:

Understandably, many twentieth-century Kurds have recognised their own feelings in Xanî’s lines and concluded that their own nationalism had historical roots going back at least as far as Xanî. Xanî was declared a nationalist, so that the Kurdish movement could claim a history of three centuries of national struggle (Bruinessen 2003: 41).

The second school of classical Kurdish poetry with an enormous impact on the rapid expansion of Kurdish literature is that one developed within the Ardelan principality. This school of poetry has offered many notable poets whose names are held in high esteem by Kurdish writers and critics even today. A famous name in this school, with a constructive role at the dawn of the 17th century Kurdish poetry, is the poet Bêsarani (b.1643-d.1701). Written in Kurdish Hawrami dialect, Bêsarani’s poems are very short and usually contain very few lines. His poetry content is formed of the themes of nature and love. Xeznedar praises the amalgamation of nature’s beauty and romance in Bêsarani’s poetry, saying that “Bêsarani mixes these two themes in a way that makes it hard for the reader to exactly know the main purpose of his poetry” (Xeznedar 2002: 40). Another important name of this school with a remarkable contribution to the development of its style and techniques is Xanay Qubadî (b.1704-d.1778). Qubadî is a literate and highly educated poet who learns most of his education from the mosques. He knows to

speak Arabic and Persian perfectly which help him significantly master the literature and poetry written in these two languages. In terms of form, Qubadî's poetic works are generally divided into two poetic forms, namely lyric and epic poem. Xeznedar (2002: 74) states that "Qubadî's poetry is one of best poetry in classical Kurdish poetry", adding that "the meaning of his words is obvious, his sentence structures are simple, and the content of his poems is a little similar to that of the poetry of folkloric literature" (*ibid.*). The most celebrated epic poem produced by Qubadî is "Şîrîn û Xusrew" (Shirin and Khusrew), an impressive love epic poem with its story origin coming from the Persian literature. After Qubadî, one more landmark of this productive school of the Ardelan principality is Mewlewî (b.1806-d.1882). Writing in the Hawrami dialect of Kurdish as the central language of Ardelan principality, Mewlewî "represents the peak of this school of poetry" (Shakely 2002). His poetry, like the poetry of other classical Kurdish poets, takes the form of lyric with its various types. It is syllabic and uses the domestic metre form. Importantly, Mewlewî is known to have been writing sufistic poetry and his poetry is heavily charged with religious content. For his loaded poetic spirituality and the metaphysical nature of his poetry, Mela Saîh argues that "among the classical Kurdish poets, Mewlewî is being written about and researched more than any other poets of his era" (Mela Saîh 2008: 5). By and large, this is a fair realisation of Mewlewî's literary status in Kurdish literature and his impact on scholars.

Regrettably, for almost a century, a barren period in poetry production veils Kurdish literature, in which no important poetic voice is heard after Xanî and his colleagues. However, an impressive renaissance in Kurdish poetry within the Baban principality from the early decades of the 19th century brings dozens of leading Kurdish poets into being, who push classical Kurdish poetry to great achievements. Writing in the Kurdish Sorani dialect, Nalî, Salim and Kurdî, the pillars of classical Kurdish poetry, come at the forefront of the renaissance of Kurdish poetry within the borders of Baban principality in the 19th century. Nalî as a great Kurdish poet was one of the pioneers of classical Kurdish poetry whose influence up to this moment is seen on his successors. Woman is a key feature in Nalî's poetry, she crystallises most of his poetic images in a very elegant and romantic manner. Personal experience forms most of the poetry of Nalî, expressed in a refined, picturesque and lyrical language. Shakely argues that the early period of Nalî's

literary creation is typically distinguished by a powerful yearning for love as well as dreams and strong hope (Shakely 2009a). Nevertheless, following numerous years of daunting and depressing life experiences, Nalî's poetic writing gradually turns from the optimism of a young writer to a rather distrustful man of letter whose country's calamities and miseries of people left a great impact on his poetic talent. Shakely goes on to commend the patriotic spirit of Nalî this way:

Nalî was an enlightened Kurdish patriot, and he strongly hoped that the princes of Baban³⁰ would be able to defend Kurdish independence against aggressions from the Ottoman Turks and the Iranians. However, Baban was finally conquered and became occupied by the Turks, and Nalî was forced to leave Kurdistan (Shakely 2009a).

As a complement to Nalî, comes Salim, who is also a patriotic and freedom-lover Kurdish poet. Ironically, Salim, a nickname from an Arabic word meaning "healthy" in Kurdish, goes through difficult and bitter stages of life due to the wars and conspiracies led by the Ottomans against the Baban principality where he used to cultivate his poetic experience. His poetry is a reflection of the atrocities committed by the Ottomans against his people. Besides writing patriotic poems, Salim is also famous for writing love lyrics. He is much influenced by the classical Persian and Arabic poetry. Technically, Salim bases all his poetry on the Arabic *aruz* metre and his stanzas are composed of five lines. Lastly, Kurdî as another leading poetic figure in the classical Kurdish poetry from the Baban principality has not worked less than his two previous literary fellows for the development of Kurdish poetry. Kurdî achieves his education from the Islamic mosques and learning centres. He is known for writing sufistic poetry. Xeznedar (2003: 171) asserts that Kurdî's poetry is generally a reflection of a love affair which is neither earthly nor metaphorical. He adds that Kurdî is much in favour of a spiritual divine love without a female element being involved in it. Xeznedar justifies the unshakable religious affiliation of Kurdî in his poetry with the fact that "there is no material evidence to prove that Kurdî has described the nature and body of women in his poetry" (*ibid.*). However, Kurdî with his sufistic and mystical poetry has filled a great space in classical Kurdish

³⁰ Baban was a Kurdish Emirate, established with no precise date in the middle ages, with Slêmanî in 1784 as its capital city. The Ottomans were the arch-enemy of the princes of Baban who were in permanent clash and conflict with them until they were able to defeat the Baban Emirate in 1850. Baban Emirate has a marked place in Kurdish literature for supporting many poets to emerge, as the bravery and tragic life of its princes have been the materials of such poets' poetry (Heme Baqî 2002: 42).

poetry, and he has been the source of inspiration for dozens of poets who have followed in his footsteps.

2.2.2 Modern Kurdish Poetry

The long tradition and period of classical Kurdish poetry comes to a radical end with the emergence of a group of romantic and national Kurdish poets in the early years of the twentieth century who were in relatively close contact with developments and changes in European literature and who felt the impact of modernity and of nation-building initiatives in the region. This, along with political events including the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the partitioning of Kurdistan among the four nation-states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, led to dramatic changes in the classical state of Kurdish literature. The most obvious features of modern Kurdish poetry that distinguish it from the classical form are: firstly, —considering form, syllabic metre was used instead of the Arabic *aruz* metre; secondly, in order to make the language of Kurdish poetry more comprehensible and easy to a wider public, uniform verse, rhyme and the typical Arabic rhetoric style were abandoned; thirdly, poetic language was purified from foreign words such as Arabic and Persian vocabularies; and lastly, free verse mainly dominated the poetic form in modern Kurdish poetry. Meanwhile, the content of poetry also radically changed, so in place of abundant sufistic and religious themes, nationalistic, nostalgic, romantic, and nature themes literally made up the very content of modern Kurdish poetry (Hameed 2010). This poetic transformation clearly marked an important stage in the nationalisation and modernisation of Kurdish poetry. A satisfactory number of prominent Kurdish poets such as Hacı Tofîq Pîremêrd (b.1867-d.1950), Şêx Nûrî Şêx Saliḥ (b.1896-d.1958), Reşîd Necîb (b.1905-d.1968), ‘Ebdullâ Goran (b.1904-d.1962) and several others through reading and observing European literature and its literary movements were able to bring in fundamental changes to Kurdish poetry and liberate it from the classical form. Significantly, this literary revolution and modernism wave from Europe which headed towards the Kurdish literature was not influential merely in terms of poetry, but also resulted in the appearance of other literary genres like drama, short story, and literary

criticism in this literature. Sabir appreciates the value and big influence of this period on the development of modern Kurdish literature, stating that:

[...] authors focused on Kurdish history, literature and geography. Grammar was codified and a school system established. A shared ideal inspired these intellectuals: the dream of an independent Kurdistan allied to the community of free nations and civilisation's processes of modernisation (Sabir *et al.* 2006: 19).

The exceptional political, social and cultural circumstances where Kurdish writers and poets lived after the end of the Ottoman Empire played a notable role in the development of modern Kurdish poetry. Many nationalistic and partisan Kurdish groups and organisations were briskly established to develop Kurdish culture, history, language and literature on a variety of levels. They concentrated efforts on enhancing the life of Kurds and consolidating their unity as an emergent nation side by side with the Turks, Arabs and Persians. Remarkably, Kurdish journalism had an historic role in the protection of Kurdish language and culture by bringing together Kurdish writers from different dialects and educational backgrounds to publish their works as representative of their national identity. It is arguable that Kurdish journalism took the role of present-day official cultural and political institutions in developing the general Kurdish political, cultural, literary and linguistic state, as it was a place for reviving the dead Kurdish texts and manuscripts which were discarded for a variety of reasons. Historically, the first Kurdish newspaper, which was published during the volatile power of the Ottoman Empire, was the Cairo-based *Kurdistan* on 22nd April, 1898 by Miqdad Midhêt Bedirxan. Other Kurdish newspapers and magazines born after the constitutional reform stated publicly under pressure by Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1908, a move which granted the peoples under the Ottomans, particularly the Kurds, greater political and cultural rights, are *Rojî Kurd* (Kurdish Day) (later *Hetawî Kurd* (Kurdish Sun)): Istanbul in 1913, *Yekbûn* (Unity): Istanbul 1913, *Bangî Kurd* (The Kurdish Call): Baghdad 1914, *Kurdistan: Sabîlax* (now Mahabad) and *Ûrmiyyeh* (later Rezayyeh, now again Ûrmiyyeh) 1914, *Kurdistan: Aleppo* 1915, *Jîn* (Life): Istanbul 1918-19, and *Kurdistan: Istanbul* in 1919 (Shakely: 2009b). These Kurdish newspapers and magazines had a considerable role in the spread of the Kurdish culture, language and literature. All modern Kurdish poets of the early years of the twentieth century had their poetry published in these newspapers and magazines. Many Kurdish intellectuals who were profoundly engaged in

literary, political and social activities at the time of the Ottoman Empire headed towards southern Kurdistan for establishing their new life there. Shakely indicates the importance of the repositioning of influential Kurdish figures in southern Kurdistan as follows:

The Kurdish intelligentsia who had been working for the cultural and political Kurdish movement in the Ottoman Empire now settled in South-Kurdistan. With them they brought several valuable years of experience and knowledge from their time spent in Istanbul. Among these intellectuals, who originally came from all over Kurdistan, and who now began to play an important role in the cultural life in South-Kurdistan, were Tawfiq Wahby (1891-1984), Pîramerd (1867-1950), Rafiq Hilmi (1898-1960) and Muhammad Emîn Zakî (1880-1948) (*ibid.*).

These historically political, geographical and demographic changes in the region are behind the upsurge in modern Kurdish poetry. It is these changes that help the Kurdish modernisation movement gain momentum in the area between the late years of 1920s and the early years of 1930s. The scholar who best represents this modernisation trend and promotes the awakening Kurdish national spirit is Hacı Tofîq Pîremêrd (b.1867-d.1950). The multiple professional roles played by Pîremêrd in developing Kurdish culture and literature have been emphasised by many local and international scholars. For instance, Hassanpour (1992: 172-173) indicates the technical abilities of Pîremêrd which result in the creation of a printing press by which he publishes a newspaper for featuring the rich traditions and habits of the Kurdish heritage. As a poet, Pîremêrd has been hailed by Kurdish critics as extremely patriotic writer whose lyric poetry reflects life, the spirit of resistance, and pure³¹ Sorani Kurdish language. Sabir lauds Pîremêrd for the literary weight he adds to modern Kurdish poetry, affirming that:

He introduced nostalgic, romantic poetry praising the lost golden age of the Kurdish nation. He wrote emotional and lyrical poems about the Kurdish fight for freedom in both the northern and southern parts of Kurdistan (Sabir *et al.* 2006: 19-20).

Pîremêrd is distinct from a majority of Kurdish poets by his translation skills and achievements. His intellectual ability and determination to speak Persian, Arabic, and various other Kurdish dialects, besides Sorani, brings in a large number of translated

³¹ The word 'pure' here refers to the use of the Kurdish language void of the Arabic words used by the Kurdish poets preceding Pîremêrd. Nonetheless, it has to be said that arguments about language 'purity' are subjective, and ideological in the context of Middle Eastern nation states. As a result of constant relations and communications between the nations and an exchange in cultures, it is almost impossible to accept that there exists a pure language. There is no language in the world that does not require borrowing words from other languages if it seeks survival and safe expansion.

literary masterpieces into Sorani Kurdish that later turned into a cultural legacy which has enriched modern Kurdish poetry. Equally, Pîremêrd, side by side other modern Kurdish poets, transforms the form of Kurdish poetry and, accordingly, introduces several innovations and artistic techniques. He modifies the Arabic *aruz* and the native syllabic metres to be in harmony with the form changes put forward by the European modern trends of poetry. Furthermore, there is a wide range of themes and ideological issues which garnish the content of Pîremêrd's poetry, starting by national, political, ecological, love, social and rural life themes to many others. However, due to the complex political atmosphere lived by Pîremêrd, it seems that patriotic and national themes take a toll on other themes. Regarding religious poems, Pîremêrd, as a Muslim person, devotes much of his poetry to spiritual practices and the praise of God. Xeznedar (2005: 112-3) argues that "Pîremêrd is one of the Kurdish poets whose large part of poetic works is classified as religious poetry."

The renovation process in Kurdish poetry was ubiquitous and covered all parts of Kurdistan. Each part contributed to changes in the Kurdish poetry with new techniques, themes, styles, and forms, and novel voices that were able to pump a fresher blood to the lifelines of Kurdish poetry and salvage it from the classical form. This wave of changes in the form and content of Kurdish poetry towards a modern style of writing is also seen in western Kurdistan in current Syria, where an active group of poets emerge to shine amongst the Kurdish poets from the other parts of Kurdistan. A name that much has been said about in this part is Kamuran Bedirxan (b.1895-d.1978). Kamuran, a poet, an academic, and journalist, comes from the family of Bedirxanîs³² whose place in the Kurdish culture, politics and journalism is unique for the great service and work they have undertaken in these areas. He published *Roja Nû* (New Day) newspaper in Lebanon from 1943 to 1946, which, as Uzun says, "has played a crucial role in preserving and developing the Kurdish language and literature" (Uzun 2003: 56). Initially, Kamuran's career, similar to most of the Kurdish men of letters, starts with poetry. He is known for

³² Bedirxanîs are a well-known princely family of Kurdish ethnic origin. The family was led by Bedirxan Beg (c. b.1802-d.1847), prince of the emirate of Botan, whose capital was Cizre, around 1821, in what is presently called southeastern Turkey. According to Michael M. Gunter (2003: 17), three of his grandsons, Kamuran, Celadet and Sureyye, were pioneers in the formation of Kurdish nationalism; the poet Hacı Qadirî Koyî (b.1816-d.1897) had been tutor to the family.

writing didactic poetry for Kurdish children. The poor educational situation in his part of Kurdistan urges him to write poems in a simple language so that children at school understand their content. His children poetry teems with national and social narratives that tell the tragic and heroic stories of his people. Xeznedar (2006a: 333) believes that Kamuran's elegant style of writing and the diverse national themes he has inserted into his poetry deserve a distinguished position in the history of Kurdish literature. Additionally, Kamuran makes his poetry a platform from where he urges the Kurdish youth to love their homeland and educate themselves with literature and science, as he simply realises that without a good education and learning one's nation and homeland cannot be properly developed and protected.

Importantly, the first Kurdish poet to be identified as the initiator of introducing ideas of modernism into literary criticism and Kurdish poetry is Şêx Nûrî Şêx Saliḥ (b.1896-d.1958) from southern Kurdistan. However, Şêx Saliḥ's involvement in politics was probably the reason he never acquired a pre-eminent position in Kurdish literature like his peers. His contribution to the modernisation of Kurdish poetry is acknowledged by Kurdish critics and writers who have studied his life and works. According to Sabir, Şêx Saliḥ "was an important innovator who introduced the stanza form into Kurdish folk literature and poetry" (Sabir *et al.* 2006: 20). Şêx Saliḥ, together with other modern Kurdish poets of his time, was dedicated to the legal cause of his people, and used his poetry as a means of confronting the injustice practised against his people. He was a thinker who was largely aware of the political and social demands of his nation. Kurdish writer and poet Azad 'Ebdulwaḥîd, in his collection of Şêx Saliḥ's poetic works, portrays the poetic stature of Şêx Saliḥ in a distinctive manner, saying:

Because Şêx Saliḥ had an appropriate cultural, political, and social awareness, he took on modernisation and rushed to embrace modernity right with the launch of the national liberation movement and the eruption of the uprising and revolutions against the occupiers of the Kurdish land ('Ebdulwaḥîd 2008: 14).

Turkey-based northern Kurdistan, which for long has been the cradle and the protection zone of the Kurdish poetry, does not come behind the other parts in the golden modern era of Kurdish poetry. Dozens of patriotic and freedom-fighting Kurdish poets emerge in this part to struggle with their poetry alongside other Kurdish poets for the

protection of Kurdish identity and literary heritage, as well as increasing chances of self-determination for the Kurdish nation. Amongst many other renowned poets in northern Kurdistan is Cigerxwîn (b.1903-d.1984). “Cigerxwîn” (bleeding heart) is a penname assumed by the poet to represent his poor life condition and the backwardness of his people (Xeznedar 2006a: 537). This fact about his life makes his poetry to be strongly informed by socialism and the social reality of his people. As a nationalist poet, Cigerxwîn approaches the local dynamic Kurdish nationalist movement and sets out to establish a logical mediation between the nationalist ideology on the one hand and the democratic and peace-loving ideologies on the other hand. Formalistically, Kurdish critics have placed the poetry of Cigerxwîn within the class of popular poetry because he uses an easy language whose vocabularies spring from the Kurdish grass-roots. Furthermore, in line with an argument developed by Xeznedar (2006a: 538), Cigerxwîn benefits from the “rhythm and metre of the popular oral poetry.” Although Cigerxwîn gains his primary education from the mosque and Muslim clerics, he does not abandon the rich literary legacy passed down to his generation by his literary forefathers. Heval Zaxoyî states that:

Any literary reader who attempts to study Cigerxwîn’s poetic works will come to the conclusion that technically Cigerxwîn has been influenced by Cezîrî and Xanî or that he has used the classical form in his poetry, while ideologically and thematically, Cigerxwîn is a contemporary and is regarded as one of the most important modern Kurdish poets for the fact that he intermingles his poetry with recent discourses, ideas, and beliefs that were common at the time he was writing poetry (Zaxoyî 2004: 13).

Besides being a known and competent poet, Cigerxwîn is also an experienced historian who has made successful efforts at writing the history of his nation. He wrote an elaborate two-volume book on the long history of Kurdistan.

The poet with an everlasting reputation in poetry writing who has been considered by the Kurdish writers and critics as the father of modern Kurdish poetry and who is always acclaimed to have been firmly behind a radical change towards modernity in Kurdish poetry is ‘Ebdullâ Goran (b.1904-d.1962). Involuntarily inherited from the long-lasting influence of the classical Arabic poetry on the Kurdish poets, Kurdish poetry at the time of Goran was filled with Arabic words. Significantly, it is Goran who launches a large-scale campaign for avoiding the use of Arabic vocabularies in his poetry. Shakely

underlines this fact as he discusses the quick interaction of the manifesto of modernity with Kurdish poetry at the time of Goran, stating that:

At this time Kurdish poetry was loaded with hundreds of years of foreign heritage, especially Arabic. Goran cleared his poetry of this influence and gave it a form, rhythm, language and content which were based on Kurdish reality and Kurdish culture, nature and folkloric traditions (Shakely: 2009b).

The major themes that Goran presents in the content of his poetry are his call for full freedom for his people and an ideal love for his homeland, the beauty of nature and women. Goran is lauded by Kurdish critics for developing an unparalleled style within the Kurdish literature in picturing nature, which shows his awareness and knowledge of the approaches used by pioneer Western modern poets whose poetic success partly originates from a sublime depiction of nature in their poetry. Kurdish scholar ‘Ebdulqadir Miħemmed Emîn in his book, *Wêney Şi’rî Le Rêbazî Romansî Kurdîda* (Poetic Image in Kurdish Romantic Movement) (2002), attributes the beautiful poetic images of nature and women used by Goran in his poetry to his study and wide knowledge of a group of leading English romantic poets such as Keats (b.1795-d.1821), Byron (b.1788-d.1824), Shelley (b.1792–d.1822), Wordsworth (b.1770-d.1850) and Coleridge (b.1772-d.1834). However, Emîn (2002: 47) also realises that “Goran’s spontaneous use of romantic form in his poetry is noticeable from his early stages of poetry writing, as he recurses to the portrayal of nature, women, and beauty in his poetry.” Goran is a member of the group of modern Kurdish poets who publicly advocate the rights of women and their equality with men. He was much in support of the provision of human rights to all the peoples of the world on equal basis, which he expressed in a modern and pragmatic style. Besides, Goran is similarly praised for cultivating Kurdish literature by introducing poetic drama to its readership and writing many essays and articles in literary criticism. Unmistakably, it is this incredible service to the Kurdish literature offered by Goran that drives the Kurdish writer Fû’ad Sidîq to admit that “all these times, starting from the 1920s to today, nobody has dared to contest Goran, or, in other words, say I have served the modern Kurdish poetry as much as Goran has done” (Sidîq 2005: 93). Thus, the wealthy and significant poetic legacy Goran has left behind him will remain forever influential on many more generations of Kurdish literary writers to come.

Kurdish poets from eastern Kurdistan have also had an enormous influence on the expansion and development of Kurdish poetry in the modern epoch with their impressive poetic works which mark important pages in the history of Kurdish poetry. A charismatic poet shining among many other famous poets in eastern Kurdistan is Hêmin (b.1921-d.1986), a creative poet and journalist who displays very strong national feelings towards the political cause of his people, which consequently put him in trouble. For instance, he leaves his birthplace in eastern Kurdistan in 1968 and heads to southern Kurdistan in protest against the atrocities and cruelty of the Iranian Shah towards the Kurdish people. Hêmin's ability to write poetry is innate; he manages to create his first patriotic poem entitled "Kurdim emin" (I am Kurd) in 1942 when he is only 21 years old. Technically, most of Hêmin's poems are based on the native syllabic metre. The issues that form the content of his poetry are women, nature, and the struggle of the Kurdish people for freedom and escape from the totalitarian regimes that suppress their voices. Xeznedar understands that Hêmin's poetic works defend humanity and promote human values. Therefore, he insists that "[...] Hêmin is to be grouped with those poets that human life from every corner reflects in their poetry" (Xeznedar 2006b: 426). Arguably, another poet who does not escape the eyes and pen of any writer who attempts to talk about the famous poetic figures in eastern Kurdistan is Sware Îlxanîzade (b.1937-d.1976). Apart from being an accomplished poet, Îlxanîzade has had the ability to write prose, dramatic texts and short stories. He has many works which early death, regrettably, does not allow him to publish. Îlxanîzade's role in developing the movement of modern Kurdish poetry in eastern Kurdistan is very central, a poetic stature that compels Naderi to describe him as "the spokesman of the movement and greatly affected by Goran" (Naderi 2011: 11). Interestingly, his poetry is written in a clear and simple Kurdish language, and being as part of the wider modern movement and influenced by Goran, it has romantic, nationalist and social topics in content.

The modern approaches and artistic techniques used by the above poets testify the large scale of changes that modernity has brought to the Kurdish poetry. The cultural, political and social developments of the first half of the twentieth century are visible behind the broad range of themes and subjects being raised by modern Kurdish poets, and such themes show how these poets have been able to use their poetry as an effective tool

for facing injustice done to their nation and interaction with the beauty of Kurdistan's nature and love stories in which women are their epicentre.

2.3 Background of the Emergence of Kurdish Women's Poetry

The volatile and sometimes adverse circumstance under which the majority of Kurdish women have led their life throughout history indicates why they have not been able to have a firm position and remarkable achievements in Kurdish history, politics, culture and literature. Since the middle ages, Kurdish women, despite the provisions of Islamic law, have generally been treated with extreme neglect and marginalisation, and considered subordinate to men, with no equal rights and freedom to represent themselves in community and the formation of the multiple sectors, including educational, social, administrative, political, cultural, literary, and others, on which a healthy society and ruling institutions are based.

Different factors can be blamed for this devalued status of Kurdish women, such as the resistant patriarchal formation of Kurdish society, the Kurds' stateless condition and the colossal direct impact the surrounding cultures and religions have had on gender relations in Kurdistan. As noted above, patriarchy as a "system of social relations" (Walby 1990: 20) where men mainly hold power over women is deeply rooted in Kurdish society. The economic growth and political stability of the late 2000s resulted in a relative change in gender rights and prepared the ground for serious activism by Kurdish women's groups.

However, the empirical role and type of Kurdish patriarchy will be clearer if it is approached more from the perspective of Middle Eastern social theorists. Kurdish patriarchy corresponds to Kandiyoti's notion of "classic patriarchy"³³ (Kandiyoti 1988: 278). According to Kandiyoti (*ibid.*), most obvious instances of classic patriarchy "may be found in a geographical area that includes North Africa, the Muslim Middle East

³³ Kandiyoti's notion of "classic patriarchy" is different from the patriarchy analysed by Walby by the context in which it is developed. Kandiyoti approaches patriarchy from an anthropological perspective in a non-Western setting. She analyses the historical and cultural roots of this social system as practised in patrilocally extended households, whereas Walby criticises patriarchy more from a socialist feminist point of view and indicates the relationships between patriarchal regimes and social classes under capitalism in a Western context. Walby focuses on gender disparities in specific terms in state and cultural institutions and underlines various forms of women's subordination in contemporary society.

(including Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran), and South and East Asia (specifically, India and China)”. Kandiyoti (1988, 1996), Yuval-Davis (1997), Moghadam (1993) and many other social and gender theorists argue that Middle Eastern societies are highly gendered and women are the main victims of this socially and culturally constructed division. They all find different patriarchal regimes with different ideologies engineered principally by men as responsible for the deteriorating situation of women in this region. Moghadam sees the treatment of women in classic patriarchy as a human rights issue. In giving a more obvious picture of classic patriarchy, Moghadam argues that “the patriarchal belt is characterized by extremely restrictive codes of behavior for women, rigid gender segregation, and a powerful ideology linking family honor to female virtue” (Moghadam 1993: 108). This indicates that women in classic patriarchal societies are not all free in their behaviour and it is even men who decide which form of life they should live and is suitable for them.

As noted earlier, Mojab (2000) illustrates how statelessness disadvantages women: in response to the demands of the patriarchal Kurdish nationalist movements, they have often chosen to delay their struggle for gender equality until the right time arrives. Nonetheless, this thinking radically changes when southern Kurdistan gained *de facto* autonomy in 1991. To put Kandiyoti’s geographically-limited paradigm of classic patriarchy into a distinctive social context and function, Yuval-Davis argues that “in this ‘belt’ of ‘classic patriarchy’ the patriarchal extended family is the central social unit, in which the senior man rules everyone else and family honour is closely linked to women’s controlled “virtue” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 7). Thus, for the close proximity of Kurdish society to other Middle Eastern societies, any social, religious, cultural or political interpretation of this type of patriarchy by social critics will significantly be true for Kurdistan.

It is the normative behaviour and ideology of classic patriarchy that portrays the social standing of Kurdish women and their complicity within it (women’s complicity in fostering patriarchal structure is discussed in further detail below). The linkage of patrilocal family honour to female virtue is a serious problem the majority of Kurdish women face in society. It is this gender role assigned to Kurdish women which has been

responsible for numerous deaths³⁴. Further to this argument of women as the symbol of a family or nation's honour, Begikhani *et al.* (2010: 15) blame this patriarchal discourse to be broadly behind regular physical violence by men against Kurdish women. In their research on the cases of honour-based violence against women in southern Kurdistan, they find that:

Honour-based violence usually results in the control of women's sexual and social choices by (mainly) male relatives, and the perception that women should obey strict codes of behaviour controlled by their male and senior family members (*ibid.*)

This culturally constructed moral restriction is responsible for many other limits set by the classic patriarchy on women's freedoms, including the freedom of choice of husband, working outside the home, socialisation and pursuit of romantic love.

An interesting aspect of classic patriarchy is the contribution of women to the reinforcement of this social structure. This counter-argument is logically developed by Kandiyoti who sees this complicity by women in the overall social politics of classic patriarchy as self-defensive tactics and a method for survival and power wielding at the expense of their gender. Kandiyoti puts the situation this way:

Woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. However, women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, and to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance (Kandiyoti 1988: 279).

³⁴ Latest figures issued by the Kurdistan regional government show that there has been a drop in cases of violence against women in 2012 when compared to similar figures in 2011. Zebari reports that "the Interior Ministry in the Kurdistan region announced that it had recorded approximately 3,000 cases of violence against women in the past year — including murder, suicide, immolation, beatings and sexual harassment — while in 2011 there were 4,000 such cases" (Zebari 2013). On the number of honour killings and Kurdish women's increased legal awareness, Zebari adds that "the provincial government said that honor killings had decreased, while more battered women had taken legal action, which some considered evidence of Kurdish women's awareness of their rights" (*ibid.*).

The lack of social power experienced by Kurdish women reproduces a similar situation to that described by Kandiyoti in southern Kurdistan. There are regular cases of forced marriage, failure of romantic love relationships and honour killings where older Kurdish women are key players³⁵. However, it is not clear yet if this explicit women's partnership in the construction of classic Kurdish patriarchy is discussed by the women poets in their poetry and what reading they have for it.

Given this situation, it is possible to argue that Kurdish women with the creative ability to write poetry have not had proper chances to cultivate their poetic talents and single themselves out from the situation of the rest of their fellow countrywomen. In southern Kurdistan, this social regime is responsible for widespread illiteracy among women, particularly in rural areas. Ideological and cultural discourses like 'woman as the mother of nation', 'reproducers of nation', 'the protectors of nation's honour' and social integrity are also operational in southern Kurdistan³⁶ and have been able to restrict hugely the movement space and activities of women. The only space of women's relative free movement and independence has been home, amongst their children and hard household duties. Moghadam agrees that under classic patriarchy women are treated as slaves and ignorant creatures. She sees that "women's life-options are severely circumscribed in the patriarchal belt. One typically finds an adverse sex ratio, low female literacy and

³⁵ Inherited the culture of patriarchy and violence against women, many Kurdish women collaborate with men to suppress the freedoms of women, particularly the freedom of choosing their husbands. They also play as actresses in reinforcing the traditional cultural habits that prevent women from falling in romantic love relationships and ask them to protect their honour which is chiefly represented by their virgin status. In her research study that involves fifty female interviewees from southern Kurdistan on whether sexism is a phenomenon inherent in Kurdish culture, Rabar says "it is disturbing to conclude that a large number of women in Kurdistan that I interviewed were complicit with honour Killings [*sic*]", adding "a large number of women that I spoke to in Kurdistan justified the killing of women in the name of preserving one's honour. The problem here was; "Honour killings" [*sic*] no longer constituted as an act perpetuated by a male-figure but also with the assistance and approval of women" (Rabar 2010).

³⁶ A way of showing respect to women in southern Kurdistan is to see them as the mothers of nation. The famous Kurdish proverb, which is also probably the case in other regions of the Middle East, that says "women are half of the community and the mother of the other half" symbolises the climax of Kurdish society's adulation expressed towards women. Begikhani identifies a similar role given to Kurdish women, whereas Kurdish men are recognised as national heroic figures and leaders of society. While men are idealised as national champions, Begikhani argues that "women too are idealised, yet in a manner that degrades behind the mask of adulation. This is best appreciated when one considers the famous Kurdish proverb used to define land, home and country: "country is mother". Here, in the imagination of men, the homeland is represented as a woman, a fertile woman who gives birth to the nation. She is fragile, weak and vulnerable, in need of men's protection. She must be protected from "others" who can violate her boundaries, intrude inside and occupy her" (Begikhani 2003).

educational attainment, high fertility rates, high maternal mortality rates, and low female labor force participation in the formal sector” (Moghadam 1993 : 108). This low social positioning of women has created a huge gap in the necessary role to have been played by Kurdish women alongside men in the development and modernisation of the Kurdish world. For instance, in education sector in the past, it was only men who had the right to be educated while women were left uneducated at home to do the housework and raise children. In the middle ages until the early twentieth century, the main source of education for Kurdish men was ‘Madrasas’ (Qur’anic schools), where they exclusively obtained their literacy and knowledge about Islam and its teachings. In her recently accomplished MA dissertation about women’s poetry in Kurdish literature, Bêrîvan Yûsif ‘Ebdullâ regards illiteracy as the major cause of an inefficient Kurdish women’s poetry, arguing that:

[...] high illiteracy rate among Kurdish women gave a greater chance to men to write poetry, as historically classical Kurdish male poets were more talented than women because they studied in religious schools and mosques, until the beginning of the twentieth century when girl schools were finally opened (‘Ebdullâ 2010: 7).

Only Kurdish women who lived in urban areas had the opportunity to find education, albeit limited, and be allowed to go to school. This situation was in the early years of the twentieth century when the first girls’ school was officially inaugurated in Slêmanî in 1926, accompanied by another one in Dihok in 1928. As for rural Kurdish women, it was not possible for them to have access to education outside the family except for those who, by accident, happened to migrate to the cities. Kurdish short story writer Heme Ferîq Hesen blames the dearth of a rich repertoire of literature by Kurdish women on their poor state of education. He claims that historically Kurdish women were famous storytellers who orally narrated stories to help children go to sleep at night, but because they were mostly illiterate, they lost the ownership of such stories to men, who through their good education have been able to write the stories down and declare their possession. Such an iniquitous condition makes Hesen observe that “there is hardly the name of a woman to be found on the front page of a Kurdish story collection” (Hesen 2010: 51)³⁷.

³⁷ This situation is no longer the case and visible on the Kurdish literary ground, particularly over the past two decades, owing primarily to major developments in the educational, literary, cultural, economic and political sectors of southern Kurdistan following liberation in 1991. Impressively, there are now hundreds of active Kurdish women poets, novelists, short story writers and critics not only in southern Kurdistan but

In politics and engagement in economic activities, Kurdish women were generally given a limited chance to practise their abilities and professional skills. Since the ignition of the armed struggle in the early years of the twentieth century by Kurdish *peshmerga*³⁸ forces in all parts of the divided Kurdistan against the powers governing them, Kurdish women have rarely taken the lead of political power. On the contrary, their role has always been reduced to supporting men morally, militarily, emotionally, and physically. During tough war times, Kurdish women used to provide food and medical treatment to men. Mojab argues that ideologically patriarchal nationalist Kurdish political parties usually place gender equality on their agenda, but, in practice, they have taken no serious step towards establishing that equality. Their women's organisations are male-dominated, with no practical power and feminist agenda of work. Mojab describes such parties' adopted policies towards women in this way:

Even when they had a women's organisation (e.g., in the Kurdish Democratic Party-Iraq), it was primarily ornamental with only a few female activists. These political parties were often involved in guerrilla war against the state; women in villages and the cities were expected to support the military and political work of these parties, but they were not recruited as active members and very rarely joined the members of the leadership team. The nationalist parties relegated women's emancipation and class struggle to the future, after achieving autonomy or sovereignty. Many women willingly accepted the nationalist agenda (Mojab 1997: 69).

Most Kurdish women are financially not independent. It is generally the man who is the source and earner of family income, a fact that justifies Walby's argument about the patriarchal structure in relation to production. Men in Kurdish society have occupied both public and private spheres, while women are typically in control of the private sphere. Jobs within families are habitually held by men, which have allowed them extra masculine power. This lack of economic and financial independence has considerably affected the voice of Kurdish women to reach out to the world in search of help and support for their cause. Yet within this discussion of economic dependence of women on men, it is important to point to another form of oppression of women in Kurdish society which is class oppression. Walby (1990: 4) argues that "class relations and the economic

across all the other parts. It is interesting to find that there are hundreds of books from all the literary genres published by Kurdish women alongside men.

³⁸ *Peshmerga* literally means "advancing one's death", which is a term referring to the Kurdish fighters who are part of the national armed struggle against the governments which are ruling over them. However, the term is mainly used by the political parties in southern and eastern parts of Kurdistan, while in the northern part the word "guerrilla" is specifically used.

exploitation of one class by another are the central features of social structure, and these determine the nature of gender relations.” Although it was more prevalent in the past and during hard economic times, wealth in the hands of middle and upper classes of society has been another means of Kurdish women’s torture. More recurrent in the villages than cities, some Kurdish families seek an income or subsistence by giving their daughters to rich families. Mostly happening as forced marriage, the women in this situation receive an unfair treatment and lose respect and most basic rights. Many suicide cases by women are found to be the result of this class oppression. Nevertheless, there is another face of this class difference and its influence on the social situation of women. This time it is a self-inflicted oppression initiated by women themselves who for the sake of wealth and financial security marry men who are not their wanted choice, equal in age with them and from similar social level. This type of marriage issue became relevant to Kurdish women specifically after the economic upturn since 2003. In the case of the women poets under discussion, class oppression is to some extent irrelevant and inapplicable as most of them are relatively prosperous and belong to the middle class.

In another critical article entitled “Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount The War”, Mojab indicates the serious consequences of the chauvinist assimilation and occupation policies practised by the four nation-states of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria against the Kurds on the general status of Kurdish women. She believes that such oppressive and repressive policies have unavoidably obliged the patriarchal Kurdish political leadership to put the issue of gender equality aside and concentrate all efforts on the national liberation of all parts of Kurdistan. Mojab emphasises the exceptionality of the Kurdish cause from others by stating that:

One may argue, however, that the Kurdish case can be distinguished from others by the brutality of national oppression. The Kurds have been subjected to genocide, ethnic cleansing, linguicide, and ethnocide, i.e., the deliberate killing of their language and culture. I call this the “external war,” i.e., a war imposed on all Kurds—men, women, and children— by four nation-states, which have forcibly incorporated Kurds into the state structure (Mojab 2000: 89).

Meanwhile, Mojab identifies another war against Kurdish women side by side with the “external war”, which is waged locally by the Kurdish men rather than by the states ruling over them. She (*ibid.*) labels this war as “internal war”, which totally rules out the existence of any sort of oppression against Kurdish women in society. She realises that

the two wars “are tied together in complex ways” (*ibid.*), which have further complicated the resolution of Kurdish women’s issue, as the patriarchal Kurdish nationalists regularly claim that “the nation’s unity should not be jeopardised by internal conflicts based on gender or class” (*ibid.*). But this is no longer the case particularly in southern Kurdistan after it has been liberated from the control of Ba’thists in 1991.

There are fascinating moments in history when Kurdish women managed to take the helm of power and lead armies of Kurdish warriors against the invaders. These are inspiring examples of women who have become models for the current Kurdish women who are involved in politics and social affairs, and are always looked at as symbols of memorable defiance and success by Kurdish women in the past. Among the most famous Kurdish women³⁹, who have impressed not only Kurdish writers and scholars but also European and Asian travelers and authors who have been visiting Kurdistan, are Xanzadî Mîrî Soran (b.1555-d.1615), ‘Adîle Xanim (b.1859-d.1924), and Hêpse Xanî Neqîb (b.1891-d.1953). These courageous women have left a rich legacy of leadership and stories of success for their successors, and made Kurdish women across the four parts of Kurdistan proud of their rule and multiple political, social, cultural and military achievements. However, there are a variety of arguments questioning the authority and legitimacy of these leader women. For instance, in his account of the sort of power that ‘Adîle Xanim had, Bruinessen argues that much of her authority was:

Due to the prestige of her family, the *wazirs* of Ardelan. Without such a family background, and without a tolerant husband, it would be extremely hard, if not impossible, for a woman to achieve a position like hers (Bruinessen 2001: 98).

This ambivalent argument can be proven true for the majority of other Kurdish women chieftains, but their firm taking of political sway, as Bruinessen points out, “appears to be much more acceptable among the Kurds than in most other Middle Eastern societies” (*ibid.*). So, the status of women in Kurdish society seems to be rather complex and holding various interpretations. Enormous inequality in care and severe shortage of scholarly research about the history of Kurdish women has undoubtedly missed out on a huge part of their life.

³⁹ For detailed information on the most important and charismatic political Kurdish women in history, see Shahrzad Mojab’s *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds* (2001).

The historically contextualised overall condition of Kurdish women explained above provides key facts about the literary milieu in which Kurdish women's poetry has generally risen. Against this backdrop, it is often argued that Kurdish women's poetry has experienced an unmistakably discontinuous history which is consensually agreed by Kurdish critics and writers to have its starting point in the early years of the nineteenth century with the emergence of the pioneer Kurdish woman poet Mestûrey Kurdistanî (b.1805-d.1847). There are several factors to be blamed for the lack of an efficient presence of Kurdish women poets in Kurdish literature. As has already been mentioned, the major historical reason behind the repeated and long absence of women poets in Kurdish literature is the patriarchal nature of the Kurdish society and this society's strict commitment to ancestral traditions and codes of life. For a long time, women in Kurdish society have been sidelined and never given enough space to practise their abilities and skills, as their role has always been reduced to serving men and acting as homemakers. This treatment has immensely destroyed their spirit to expose their aptitude and talents that could have added a greater force to Kurdish literature, culture, and politics, had they been capitalised on and developed. However, the tight control of men over Kurdish society could not prevent a number of iconoclastic Kurdish women from practising their skills and achieving their ambitions. Although these women are few in number, they could break the chain of slavery and subordination to men. They also prepared the ground for the next generation of Kurdish women to face up to men and reject their superiority over them. The small group of early women poets to be discussed and featured here has acted as a good model for the Kurdish women poets to be mentioned in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

The first Kurdish woman poet identified as the leading poet in the history of Kurdish women's poetry is Mahşeref Xanim, known as Mestûrey Kurdistanî (b.1805-d.1847). Mestûre⁴⁰ has been studied by many Kurdish writers and critics, and several informative books have been produced about her works, life, and position in the Kurdish history. Significantly, Kurdish classical poet Nalî has a long poem on the personality of Mestûre which reveals her great literary and historical character, despite the fact that he is

⁴⁰ Instead of referring to Kurdistanî as the poet's last name, Mestûre will be used through this study as this is the name she is generally known both in Kurdish and foreign literatures.

antagonistic in certain lines of the poem. ‘Adil Miḥemmedpûr indicates that Nalî’s satiric poem about the charm and persona of Mestûre is a confession of her great abilities and national stature, adding that “this is a fact which rejects the assumption that Mestûre was only known as a poet, whereas Mestûre is a literary woman and historian as well” (Miḥemmedpûr 2006: 83). According to Leyla Saḫîḫî (2006), Mestûre is one of the few Kurdish women writers who have managed to write books in a range of disciplines, namely history, religion and literature. Saḫîḫî (2006: 65) says that “Mestûre has written the history of Ardelan⁴¹ emirs from the beginning of their political life until the demise of their names in the history of Iran.” As for her role as a classical poet, Mestûre was very successful in writing poetry both in Kurdish and Persian languages. In his study and translation of Mestûre’s *Mêjûy Erdeḫan* (The History of Ardelan) (2002), Hejarî Mukiryânî shows his admiration at Mestûre’s expressive and articulate poetic style. However, he (2002: 15) regrets the fact that most of her poetry has disappeared; only two thousand lines have survived. Kurdish scholar Tosinê Reşîd idolises Mestûre for her relentless courage and determination to defend the legitimate rights of women at a time when the Kurdish society was strictly committed to the preservation of the power of men over families. Tosinê argues that when one reads Mestûre’s poems, they can feel the greatness of this Kurdish female poet and the deep meaning tucked away inside of her poems. In support of this argument and Mestûre’s call for the freedom of women, Tosinê indicates a section of a poem by Mestûre where she defiantly says “the head that deserves a diadem, we hide it under the veil” (Reşîd *et al.* 2006: 10). Mestûre has basically taken a decent place in the history of Kurdish poetry, and has become the source of a continual pride and inspiration for the Kurdish female poets who have followed in her footsteps. Mestûre was able to remain as the only famous Kurdish woman poet in the classical history of Kurdish poetry for a long period of time, although there have been some other lesser known and less productive Kurdish women poets who were her approximate contemporaries.

⁴¹ Ardelan Emirate is one of the Kurdish emirates believed to have existed quiescently in the middle ages. The capital city of this emirate was Sanandaj, which is now situated in the eastern part of Kurdistan. Sabir (2006) argues that the official language spoken in this emirate was the Kurdish Hawrami dialect and the only female poet who was active among many other Kurdish male poets was Mestûre.

The few other voices of Kurdish women poets to be heard within the same short time span of Mestûre are Cîhan Ara (b.1858-d.1911), Mîhreban (b.1858-d.1905) and Amîne. The birth and death dates of the latter remain unknown. These names come in the fourth volume of Xeznedar's *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature) (2004), which positions them among the lesser known Kurdish poets. These Kurdish women poets are not well known to the Kurdish literary audience because they do not have a significant enough quantity poetic works to persuade Kurdish critics to study them. However, they do stand for the female voice of three Kurdish poetic figures that were able to use poetry as a tool for expressing their inner feelings and passions towards men. Besides, they form an inseparable part of the history of Kurdish women's poetry. Born in the Kurdistan of the Persian Empire, Cîhan Ara is a female poet with an immense natural ability for poetry writing whose passionate love for her husband, who divorces her early in life, pushes her to produce melancholic and elegiac poems. Xeznedar expresses respect for Ara's sincere thoughts towards her husband, despite the fact that he abandons her. He states critically that "Cîhan Ara is left behind lonely by her husband whilst she laments the break-up from him through poetry" (Xeznedar 2004: 611). As is arguably the case in other societies in the world that women are literally more faithful in their relations with men than men, this situation of Ara suggests the extent to which Kurdish women are loyal and honest towards their husbands. Mîhreban, on the other hand, comes from an educated family in the Kurdistan of the Ottoman Empire. Forced marriage, one of the social problems in Kurdish society, turns Mîhreban into a poet. Mîhreban protests against her father's choice of husband through a long challenging poem which compels the suitor to back down on his appeal to marry her. Xeznedar (2004: 618) realises that "through her resistant poem, Mîhreban was able to cleverly express what was flaming inside her heart and make an in-depth description of her potential love." Mîhreban's poetry is full of real emotions, and makes readers sense true and romantic love, features that add uniqueness to her works at a time when women were under the strict control of the classic Kurdish patriarchy. In addition to these two Kurdish women poets, Xeznedar brings a third woman poet into question, who is Amîne, nicknamed "Feqê Amîne." It is quite unfortunate that no concrete information has been collated about this female poet except for the single fact that she was the lover of a man called Hesen, who adored her and

inspired her to be a poet. Amîne's poetry is high and embodies strong poetic messages. Xeznedar (2004) indicates a few poetic lines by Amîne which were written to her beloved Hesen while he was in jail following an offence he had committed during the rule of the Ottomans. He says Amîne's poem, written in the classical form, has an elevated lyrical style, expressing a deep sense of love.

Meanwhile, in the early decades of the twentieth century there have been a relatively good number of Kurdish women poets, mostly from the southern and eastern parts of Kurdistan, who have managed to contribute markedly to the enrichment of Kurdish poetry. Although their poetic voice has continually been silenced and ignored by the dominant male Kurdish literature and writers, they are still an integral component of the Kurdish literature. Around forty Kurdish women poets, whose poetic works were periodically published in the local Kurdish newspapers and magazines in the middle of the twentieth century, are the content materials of Mukiryani's *Honrawey Afretî Kurd* (The Poetry of Kurdish Women) (1980). Despite inadequacies in available details about the poets, Mukiryani attempts to say as much as possible about the poets' lives, motives for writing poetry, and the various themes raised and implied in their poetry. She argues that women poets write poetry mostly in defence of their homeland or they describe the beauty and nature of the Kurdish countryside, or a love affair between two intimate lovers. Furthermore, as Mukiryani (1980: 12) herself says, none of these women poets owns an independent voice and approach to represent the reality of the Kurdish women. Instead, they are influenced by contemporary male poets and follow the same patterns and themes used by their male counterparts. It is hardly true to say that these Kurdish women poets wanted to write poetry in defiance of the oppression and social injustice they had been facing at the hands of men or use their poetry as a weapon to fight back the power of the classic patriarchy that was enslaving Kurdish women at home. Rather, they happened to write poetry out of an individual passion and desire to communicate and illustrate the particular style and nature of life they had been leading at a particular moment.

The most visible and widely read women poets on the Kurdish literary arena are Pakîze Refîq Hîlmî (b.1924), Xanim Resul Ehemed (b.1949), whose penname is (Erxewan), Xurşîde Baban (b.1940), Fîrîşte Xan (b.1929) and Kurdistan Mukiryani

(b.1948) herself. Despite being active in poetry writing, some of these women poets have also developed a career in other academic fields such as journalism, linguistics, history, and politics. In their glory days in the 1950s, they had a constructive contribution to the Kurdish press, as they were able to publish their poetry in the Kurdish newspapers and magazines like *Hetaw* (Sun), *Pêşkewtin* (Progress), and *Jîn*. A small group of them also managed to publish poetry books, namely Pakîze, Xanim and Xurşîde. Pakîze's sincere attention to the abject life conditions of her people drives her to publish *Jîyanêkî Piř Endêşe* (A Life Full of Contemplation) in 1961, which is a mixture of a variety of themes, such as poverty, illiteracy, suppression, and national awareness. Xanim was able to publish *Xoşewîst* (Beloved) in 1972, a collection of poems that feature the national, social, romantic, and political aspects of Kurdish people. Similarly, Xurşîde has three poetry publications whose dates are unknown, and they are *Dîyarî û Yadgar* (Gift and Memory), *Tîşîk* (Sun Beam), and *Darewan* (Tree Climber). 'Ebdulla (2007: 96) strongly criticises Xurşîde for failing to embody the sufferings and suppressed emotions of the Kurdish women in her poetry and produce a valid feminist discourse to reflect their bitter reality and miserable experiences. He believes that Xurşîde is categorically influenced by the male tradition of poetry writing and has forgotten the simple fact that she is from a gender whose rights are blatantly violated by an unjust system of society led by men. As for Firîşte Xan and Kurdistan Mukiryani, they have only single poems that are not yet put together to appear as poetry books on the shelves. Kurdish writer and critic Kerîm Şareza (2004: 84), who is Firîşte's brother, expresses his astonishment at his sister's ability to recall tens of poetry lines within a short period of time, saying that "whenever she is reminded that she has recited a poem on a certain occasion, she stands up and recites it again, even if the poem is fifty lines long!"

In reality, the impact of this small group of Kurdish women poets on the underdeveloped situation of Kurdish women's poetry has not been so noticeable, because, as towards the end of the 1960s and 1970s, silence covers up Kurdish women's poetry triggered by political, social, economic, and cultural instability. The relative political quietness of the 1950s follows serious conflict and bloody fighting between the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces and the Iraqi regime. This war brought huge devastation. Thousands of people were killed and hundreds of villages destroyed. Under such

circumstances, it becomes very difficult for Kurdish women to think about cultural and social activities as any available Kurdish cultural and intellectual institutions became the target of the Iraqi army⁴². Al-Ali as a researcher cognizant of the women's situation in the Iraqi history reiterates the authenticity of this argument, saying that "although Iraqi women have a history of some political participation and activism before Saddam Hussein came to power, their autonomous political participation came to an end in the 1970s" (Al-Ali 2005: 754). If this gender segregation policy was the reality of Iraqi women, then how much more so for Kurdish women who were repeatedly the victims of genocidal campaigns conducted by the Ba'th regime against the Kurds in Iraq. Kurdish women always bore the brunt of the political and military conflicts between the Kurdish nationalist movements and the Iraqi governments, as men were mainly in the mountains serving in the *peshmerga* forces. The coming of the Ba'th party to power in the early 1960s imposed a ban on all types of activism by women, which caused a sharp decline in the creative production of works by women in all the fields. On a blow to the women's talents during the Ba'th era, according to Al-Ali and Pratt:

Women's public organizing was practically eliminated under the regime of Saddam Hussein, except for the Ba'th-sponsored General Federation of Iraqi Women (*Ittihad al-'am li-nisa' al-'iraq*), although some women continued to participate in underground movements linked to opposition political parties (Al-Ali and Pratt 2008: 76).

This dramatic change in the Iraqi political situation in the 1960s and 1970s caused many hardships to Kurdish women and failed any social projects they had to improve the life conditions of women. The rule of the Iraqi Ba'th party turned southern Kurdistan into a battlefield in which its infrastructure was the main target. This hostile political situation resulted in the resurgence and reactivation of Kurdish nationalist parties and fierce

⁴² Schools and mosques have always been the centre of education in southern Kurdistan. The military operations conducted by the toppled Iraqi Ba'th regime in the 1960s, 1970s and even 1980s against the Kurdish *peshmergas* resulted in the destruction of hundreds of schools and mosques in the villages and towns which were the hub of political activities by Kurdish political parties. Religious clerics and teachers were always among the many victims who fell in these operations. The most prominent example of a Kurdish academic institution targeted by the Iraqi military army in the 1970s was the University of Slêmanî. Established at first in 1968, University of Slêmanî was partially relocated to the town of Qeşadize because it was constantly monitored and raided by the Iraqi security agents. On 24th April 1974, this university was heavily bombarded by military planes, a tragedy that claimed the lives of tens of students. Targeting this university did not stop by this as it was moved totally to the city of Hewlêr in 1981 once more for political reasons and even its name was changed into Salahaddin University. During this process, tens of students and teachers were either executed or imprisoned.

national resistance by the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces against the Ba’th armies. For about two decades, life in southern Kurdistan politically, socially and culturally went into a state of quasi-paralysis, with little cultural, social or literary activities not only by women, but by men writers, too. Many talented Kurdish women like Necîbe Eħmed joined the Kurdish national forces to liberate their land from the Ba’th regime. Meanwhile, many others, such as Begîxanî, escaped political arrests and persecutions and crossed the Kurdistan borders either towards the neighbouring states or Europe, working on transnational gender and political projects. There were also other Kurdish women who opted for remaining inside southern Kurdistan to engage in secretive political and literary activities, of whom Mehabad Qeredagî is one⁴³. Until 1991, nationalist ideologies of state construction and liberation of southern Kurdistan become the focal discourse of many Kurdish women activists, because as Yuval-Davis puts it:

⁴³ Kurdish women’s organising in exile has served both the national and women’s issues. Diasporic Kurdish women activists work to raise the national and gender awareness of the Kurdish community in the diaspora. Mojab and Gorman (2007: 66) say “our field work with Kurdish women’s groups in Canada, Britain, and Sweden showed us that Kurdish women’s organizing has the dual characteristic (or potential) of being both *internationalist* and *nationalist*”. Mojab initiated the International Kurdish Women’s Studies Network in 1997, which, according to her and Gorman, “has rendered visible many of the international organizing activities of Kurdish women’s groups” (Mojab and Gorman 2007: 67). They argue that “the Network, the first transnational Kurdish women’s organization, was a product of an informal gathering of a group of women researchers and activists at a conference on Kurdish urban life held in Paris in 1996” (*ibid.*). The existence of the Network indirectly resulted in the creation of London-based Kurdish Women’s Action Against Honour Killing (KWAHK) in 2000, which later changed into Kurdish Women’s Rights Watch (KWRW) in 2004, led by Begîxanî. The influence of the Network similarly helped the formation of other organisations and women-led programmes such as the Kurdish Women’s Organisation in Britain, a radio programme in Sweden and the emergence of a Kurdish women’s press in the West. As for women’s activities inside southern Kurdistan, there were no civil societies or independent women’s organisations before the fall of the Iraqi Ba’th regime in 1991. The patriarchal-authoritative regime of Saddam was in control of every institution in Iraq and male power was the backbone of its leadership. Brown and Romano argue that “[...] Saddam’s dictatorship over the country also extended to women who, like other sectors of society, were not permitted to organize themselves. They were instead recruited into the corporate authoritarian structures of the regime. Hence women in the country never learned the organizational and mobilization skills that their sisters in Latin America, Asia, and Africa often did. The General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW) - the only women’s organization allowed, was under the strict watch of the Ba’athist government and became a tool of the Party - members were forced to join” (Brown and Romano 2006: 53). Thus, the only ground of political and literary activism available for Kurdish women then was to join the clandestine Kurdish political parties and their associated women’s unions like the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Kurdistan Communist Party (KCP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Kurdistan Toilers Group, etc. Mehabad Qeredagî and Necîbe Eħmed are examples of those women poets who secretly worked in the ranks of these nationalist parties.

As long as their people are not free there is no sense for them in speaking about women's liberation: how could they struggle to reach equality with their menfolk while their menfolk themselves were oppressed? (Yuval-Davis 1997: 117).

On the direct impact of political volatility on patriarchy, Moghadam states that "patriarchy can be intensified as a result of political and economic changes" (Moghadam 1993: 109). Thus, in the case of southern Kurdistan, fresh national revolutions and political struggles entirely led by male leaders push back any chances of mobilising women's unequal status in rights with men and opportunities to practise their dormant creative skills. In such an emergency, their gender concerns, as reaffirmed by Mojab (2000), become held up until a later time when national freedom and stability are established. Traditional gender roles defined under the classic patriarchy such as women as fertile reproducers and homemakers and men as the supreme head of family and societal affairs gain momentum to hold back any activity to be launched by women, including the act of poetry writing. Most women poets invoked in Mukiryani's book suspend the activity of poetry writing, and choose either to stay away from any cultural acts or go into married life. On the one hand, those who refrain from cultural activities continue to write poems on an irregular basis, but manage to compile and then publish them in a book many years after the date of their production. An example here is Erxewan whose poems have been made into a book entitled *Çawe Tawisîyekanî 'Elî* (Ali's Peacock-like Eyes), published in 2004. On the other hand, many of those women poets, who decide to form a family, abandon the idea of poetry writing as the responsibility of childcare in the Kurdish society lies squarely on the shoulders of women. Kurdish critic Emîn Gerdîglanî (2010), in his study on the situation of women's literature in eastern Kurdistan, argues that as long as women writers are unmarried, they are very energetic and dynamic, but once they are married, they tend to forget about their literary talents and abilities. He attributes a large part of this dilemma to their husbands, saying that before marriage, they promise their fiancées that they will not intervene in their cultural and educational life, but once they are with them under one roof, the wives will be forced and put under huge pressure to give up writing.

By and large, the circumstance under which the poetry of Kurdish women was written throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s remains highly unsteady until the 1990s

after the Kurdish popular uprising in 1991 in southern Kurdistan, which opened the gates to virtual freedom for Kurdish women to restart writing poetry and produce books in tens, if not in hundreds and become involved in awareness campaigns for equality in gender rights, women empowerment projects and the promotion of national solidarity and interests. Despite harsh living conditions caused by the UN-imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, which affected southern Kurdistan doubly due to another internal embargo by Baghdad, the liberation meant something more valuable than food and life luxuries for the Kurds of this part. The freedom achieved was the end of torture and brutal treatment for national, ethnic and political reasons. It made the dream of a sovereign Kurdish state an attainable reality than just a fantasy. Although predominantly patriarchal, the creation of a self-ruled Kurdish parliament and government in southern Kurdistan was a rare chance for Kurdish women activists and feminists both inside and outside to initiate mainly gender-based projects, targeting a range of key issues at national and communal levels. Mainly urban-based, dozens of women-led organisations and unions took shape to play a constructive role in the social, political and cultural reconstruction of southern Kurdistan. Kurdish women who fled homes to avoid persecution by the Ba'athists and resettled in the regional and Western countries were key actresses of the nation's civil awakening. Nevertheless, the liberation heyday was soon overshadowed by nearly two years of civil infighting which adversely affected all aspects of life in southern Kurdistan, including women's civil activism and gender equality projects.

The interesting aspect of these women's organisations and groups was that they did not perform only gender-related activities, but also diverse civil services and programmes. Women of different ages from a variety of professional backgrounds were involved in these activities. On the varied nature of services provided by women activists of these organisations, al-Ali and Pratt find an interesting list of activities ranging from "welfare and humanitarian assistance; education and training; publishing and journalism; developmental projects; politics; legal aid services; support and protection of victims of gender-based violence; and political lobbying related to women's legal rights" (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 340). However, they criticise the urban bias of these organisations as thus:

Women activists are well-represented in civil society organizations in urban areas and, to a lesser degree, in political parties. For the most part, these women are urban and middle class and

do not necessarily represent the views or desires of rural and/or working class women (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 340-1).

Al-Ali and Pratt describe the effect of a free southern Kurdistan on women's abilities as saying:

The creation of the safe haven in the Kurdish north of Iraq in 1991 enabled Kurdish women, who already had a long history of activism within political parties, to increase their involvement through participation in women's unions, women's organizations and groups not linked to political parties (Al-Ali and Pratt 2008: 76).

Through the work and activities of these women's organisations and groups many cases of gender-based violence and honour killings were brought to the attention of the Kurdish public, government, media and international human rights organisations. Numerous perpetrators of honour crimes were also brought to justice. These cases, which were intentionally ignored during the occupation years by the Kurdish nationalist parties not to inflame internal conflicts, and to keep national unity, were no longer accepted by the Kurdish women activists to continue following the liberation of southern Kurdistan. Diaspora-based Kurdish organisations like KWAHK were also very active both in southern Kurdistan and in the diaspora in exposing gruesome deaths of Kurdish women by the male members of their families on the pretext of honour and love relationships with non-native men.

Fight against honour crimes is one type of activism by Kurdish women that engages the attention of Mojab and Gorman to the plans for improving the situation of Kurdish women in southern Kurdistan. They see this civil resistance as effective for undermining the patriarchal ideology and its deep-rootedness in the Kurdish culture and promoting the social awareness of the society. They both agree that:

A number of organizations, both in the homeland and in diaspora, emerged in resistance to honor killings. The first and most active was a communist group which formed the Independent Women's Organization (IWO) in May 1993, and held the first conference on the "mass killing of women" in Arbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, in December 1993. This organization launched a campaign to persuade the Kurdish parliament, now independent of Baghdad, to revoke Iraq's misogynist Personal Status Laws and replace them with a gender-egalitarian alternative. It also established the first shelters for abused women, but was itself subjected to the violence of the conservative Islamist groups and the Kurdish administration (Mojab and Gorman 2007: 74).

And for initiatives involving fight against gender-based violence and honour killings by the Kurdish parliament and government and the two leading Kurdish political parties, the KDP and PUK, Mojab and Gorman state that:

In April 2000, the leader of the PUK and its regional government, Jalal Talabani, issued two resolutions, one criminalizing honor killing and the other restricting polygyny. In August 2002, the Kurdish parliament in the KDP-led Kurdish Regional Government also amended Iraqi criminal law in order to criminalize honor killing (*ibid.*).

But on similar gender-egalitarian initiatives by the KDP and PUK-led parliament and governments, al-Ali and Pratt have a different view and understanding, believing that these initiatives were just words on the paper, since, in practice, they do not seem to have changed much on the ground and honour killings are continuing to happen in different proportions. Thus, their perspective on the initiatives is that:

Despite the hostility they faced from some quarters, Kurdish women's rights activists campaigned to annul the provisions within the Iraqi penal code that allowed lenient punishment for the murder of women in the name of 'honor'. They were successful in achieving these changes in 2000 in the PUK controlled areas and 2002 in the KDP-controlled areas. Despite this achievement, the prosecution of honor crimes is reported to be low. During the 1990s, Kurdish women's rights activists also lobbied for reforms to the Iraqi personal status code of 1959 in order to introduce greater equality in marriage and divorce. In the PUK-controlled region, Jalal Talabani signed Resolution 62 (2000), which made taking more than one wife punishable by up to three years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 dinars. However, like the outlawing of so-called honor crimes, the implementation of Resolution 62 has not been consistent (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 342).

In addition to women-related activities, these women's organisations were also very instrumental in national conflicts. They played an important role in ending or containing the civil infighting in southern Kurdistan between the two main Kurdish political parties in the 1990s, as al-Ali and Pratt (2011: 342) say that "many Kurdish women marched between Sulaymaniyah and Erbil in 1994 to demand peace and reconciliation between the two parties." The visibility of Kurdish women's position and impact in the modernisation and civilisation of Kurdish society after 1991 testifies to their improved situation and the importance given to their role by the Kurdish authority.

However, the work of these women's groups has not been without problems. As most of them are anticlerical and holding secular ideologies originally copied from the West, their gender agendas are sometimes forcefully opposed by certain Kurdish political

parties, particularly the Islamic parties which emerged in the 1990s, benefitting hugely from the internal fighting between the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). According to al-Ali and Pratt, it is this secular orientation that significantly separates Kurdish and Arab women activists from each other:

Historically, and up to the present, the majority of Kurdish women's rights activists work within a secular framework. A rejection of political Islam has been an important element of distinction between Kurdish and Arab identity in a context where Islamist political parties and movements play a significant role in post-invasion central and southern Iraq (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 341).

The dominance of Islam and its traditions over other religions and ideologies in southern Kurdistan has always been the major obstacle to the manifesto of non-Islamic women's organisations and unions. To date, it is possible to argue that whatever is gained by these women's organisations has been offset by the widespread influence of Islam in Kurdish society. However, the demise of the patriarchal-totalitarian regime of the Iraqi Ba'th party and the gradual increase of civil society and women's organisations are positive signs of a better future for Kurdish women. These organisations are playing a role in changing the power balance between women and men and restricting patriarchy from being the dominant force in all the social and political institutions.

Importantly, after 1991, the contribution of Kurdish women to the development and democratisation of southern Kurdistan alongside men was not only from a political, social or gender perspective, but from the literary side as well. Many women who were engaged in civil activism and gender equality projects were also poets, novelists, short story writers, dramatists and critics. The combination of these roles is further explained in the next two chapters of this study. The new situation was much better particularly for the political women poets who were unable to write poems freely for fear of torture and imprisonment by the Ba'th regime. The activities of the women's groups discussed above encouraged the emergence of innovative poets who for the fear of their traditionalist and conservative families did not dare to write poetry before the expulsion of the Ba'thists from Kurdistan. Moreover, another upside of the liberation was the provision of an opportunity to women poets like Necîbe Eḫmed (b.1954) and Erxewan, who for political reasons failed to publish their poetry in the 1980s, but took advantage of Kurdish autonomy and finally released it in a published form.

The downfall of the Ba’th regime in Iraq as a whole in 2003 brought a sense of relief to southern Kurdistan and ended the nightmare that this regime might come back one day to destroy whatever has been built in this part of Kurdistan⁴⁴. An unprecedented economic growth ensued in the region which has resulted in a speedy improvement in standards of living. Southern Kurdistan post-2003 is much different from pre-2003. All the sectors are growing fast and women are a significant part of this development. Women now enjoy a wider representation in the Kurdish politics and workforce. In parliament, their number has increased more than sevenfold if compared to the number of women parliamentarians in the 1992 elections which was only five. There are now thirty six female MPs in the Kurdistan parliament. Women hold high-ranking posts in the government spanning from ministerial posts, director-generals, judges, police officers to senior academic posts. As government employees, their number is much larger than the 1990s. Women are now common faces on TVs as presenters and newscasters, in the sports activities and in journalism. If compared to the position of men in these places, there is still a big inequality, but this progress indicates a promising change in gender relations in southern Kurdistan, which with further struggle by women activists will be still better in the future.

Women’s NGOs, unions, groups and associations are working on a wider scale now for changing the status of Kurdish women to a more progressive standard (see above). Gender discrimination issues are addressed seriously on a national level through a close collaboration between the women’s organisations and the Kurdish government. Al-Ali and Pratt (2011) cite the establishment by the Kurdish government of the “Council for Women’s Issues” (Encumenî BaĶay Xaniman) and the “National Center for Gender Research in Sulaymaniyah” (Senterî Nîştimanî bo LêkoĶînewey Cênder le Slêmanî) to resolve gender problems and coordinate efforts with relevant women’s organisations. Regarding women’s poetry, increased wealth and mushrooming publishing houses have been helping current and past generations of women poets to publish a sizable number of poetry books in different Kurdish dialects.

⁴⁴ For further information on the mental and psychological impact of the fall of the Iraqi Ba’th regime in 2003 on Kurdish women’s rights activists and their hopes for a better improvement in women’s situation in southern Kurdistan, see Nadjé al-Ali and Nicole Pratt’s article “Between Nationalism and Women’s Rights: The Kurdish Women’s Movement in Iraq” (2011), published in the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, pp.337-353.

Meanwhile, it is worth saying that since the last decade of the twentieth century, the developing movement of Kurdish women's poetry has not only been productive in southern Kurdistan, but even in other parts, namely northern, eastern and western, as a big number of Kurdish women poets have emerged there. Many of these poets have been able to make use of the freedom of southern Kurdistan and publish their poetry and other literary books in the publishing houses of this part. Women poets in these parts have created good poetry and published dozens of poetry books, not only in Kurdish, but even in other languages, such as Persian, Turkish and Arabic. Although their poetry has not been anthologised in unified collections of Kurdish women's poetry, the amount of poetic works they have published has certainly been significant to the overall corpus of Kurdish women's poetry, on the one hand, and Kurdish literature, on the other hand. Established women poets from these parts of Kurdistan include Jîla Hûsênî (b.1964-d.1996) from eastern Kurdistan, Fatme Savcî (b.1974) from northern Kurdistan and Dîya Cwan (b.1953) from western Kurdistan, to name but a few.

The new compartmentalised situation of Kurdish women's poetry and the enormous effect of the liberation of southern Kurdistan on this type of poetry will be discussed in detail in the next two chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Three

The Poetry of Diasporic Kurdish Women Poets

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3.1 A Brief Overview

Diasporic literature in general forms an essential part of world literature. This type of literature has literally spread all over the world; it has crossed different national and cultural boundaries, which, according to Zhang, has obliged the literary critics “to reconsider the assumptions and meanings of identity, nation, home, place and memory in a broad cross-cultural context” (Zhang 2008: 1). Zhang argues that “diaspora has been conceived not only as a process of migration in which people crossed and traversed the borders of different countries, but also as a double relationship between different cultural homes/origins” (*ibid.*). The literature created by diasporic writers symbolises a vivid combination of different cultures and traditions that usually compromises the values and standards such cultures and traditions adhere to. Besides, Zhang further articulates what diaspora in a much wider context means when saying that:

With all its complexity and ambiguity associated with the experience of multicultural mediation, diaspora, as both a process and a relationship, suggests an act of constant repositioning in confluent streams that accommodate multiple cultural traditions (Zhang 2008: 2).

Following the huge migration of the Kurds to different locations of the world for political, social, economic and cultural reasons, an impressive Kurdish literature has been produced in the diaspora. This chapter mainly focuses on the Sorani written poetry of Kurdish women poets in the diaspora. It is a thematic reading of the most influential poems ever written by diasporic Kurdish women poets. The poets chosen for this part should meet the condition of having being lived abroad, and produced the largest part of their poetry in the diaspora. The main purpose of this arrangement is to be clear with a number of diasporic poets such as Nîgar Nadir (b.1976) and Lazo (b.1985) who also have written poetry prior to their departure from their homeland towards the Western countries, but only published them in books after living in the diaspora. Additionally, the amount of poetry they have produced in exile is much larger than that written while at home. It is a fact that the poetry of such poets is mixed with poetic texts not written in the diaspora, but the bigger part of their poetry produced away from home and then

published in books again far from home will undoubtedly place them among diasporic Kurdish women poets.

Although the full number of diasporic Kurdish women poets when compared to home Kurdish women poets, to be discussed fully in Chapter Four of this study, is proportionally smaller, they have played a crucial role in the development of Kurdish women's poetry and have produced some worthy pieces of poetic work imbued with their own life and cultural experiences of the host Western countries. Literally, it is through the experience of this rich foreign culture and life patterns that they resolutely aspire to bring about a social and political revolution in their poetry with the aim of radically improving women's situation back in their society in southern Kurdistan. Importantly, the expression of personal life experiences in literature is what feminist literary criticism is primarily concerned with. Feminist critics argue that women writers should capitalise on their literary products to expose the much blatant oppression and injustice they have been facing in patriarchal societies. In poetry, it is Montefiore who states that feminists see the representation of personal experiences as crucial, adding that "the women's movement has always seen the perception and articulation of personal experience—in other words, consciousness-raising—as a vital form of political activity; some regard it as *the* feminist form" (Montefiore 1983: 77). Hence, the chapter's main focus on autobiographical traces in the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets originally comes from this clear feminist perspective towards the literary works of women writers.

In the meantime, this chapter aims to disclose the thematic nature and structure of the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets, stating the way such poets think about life away from their motherland, the impact of the tragedies happened to their people throughout history on them, the experiences of living a culture broadly different from theirs and their reaction to a patriarchal and traditionalist society they have left behind, which is unfriendly towards women and does not fully respect their rights. It similarly looks at the poets' level of awareness of the gender implications of Kurdish nationalism, gender relations in Kurdish society, the influence gendered identities and roles have had on Kurdish women and the actions such poets believe to be taken to establish a balance and equality in gender rights. This aspect originates in the truth that literature has been a significant locus for understanding the effects and motives of gender dichotomies and

relations. Kaplan states that “literature has been a traditional space for the exploration of gender relations and sexual difference, and one in which women themselves have been formidably present” (Kaplan 2007: 958). Besides, the poets’ defiance of dominant gender discourses and ideologies manipulated by men to control women in multiple social, political and cultural contexts is another issue of this chapter.

This chapter also emphasises the model diasporic Kurdish women poets provide for the construction of a modern society devoid of gender violence, and the breach of women’s rights, a society that can establish equal rights and justice between women and men. Nevertheless, some Kurdish critics and writers disagree with the fact that there is a diasporic Kurdish literature and poetry, believing that what Kurdish writers say and write overseas is much or quite similar to what has been said and written from inside southern Kurdistan. For instance, Kurdish poet and writer Nejad ‘Ezîz Surmê, when asked if there exists a literature in Kurdish to be called diasporic, in an interview with Kurdish *Henar* (Pomegranate) magazine, argues that:

What has been written in the diaspora is similar to the experiences put on paper by home writers, and I may say that except for some writers who to some degree have benefited from the language and literary knowledge of the countries they live in, otherwise there is no intrinsic difference between the literature of diasporic and home Kurdish writers and poets (Surmê 2010: 101).

This chapter will contest this, and show the most apparent points and perspectives that draw a fine line between Kurdish women’s poetry being written inside and outside southern Kurdistan from 1990 to 2009. Moreover, this chapter attempts to observe the influence of wider freedom diasporic Kurdish women poets have in the Western states on the real nature of their poetry and the themes they most frequently raise in the body of their poetic works, as it is unquestionable that writing poetry in more democratic and liberal countries should be very different from writing it in an area, namely southern Kurdistan, where there is lesser freedom of poetic expressions and less opportunity to be outspoken in criticising the damaging and regressive norms of society. The limited social and cultural freedoms women poets generally experience in southern Kurdistan may ultimately create a form of reality in their poetry different from that to be perceived in the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets.

It is worth noting that some poets to be placed in this chapter have also published poetry books in English, but because the study is concerned with women's poetry in Kurdish, these books will not be included in the thematic analysis though they will be mentioned among the poets' works. Technically, the chapter follows a very coherent structure of naming individual poets in turn and thoroughly going through the volume of poetic works written by each poet in search of the themes that mark the beginning of a defiant era of Kurdish women's poetry distinguishable from the poetry written by the limited number of Kurdish women poets in the middle of the twentieth century. The order into which the poets come in this chapter literally means that the first woman poet has produced more poetry books than the following one, and the arrangement basically carries on this way. However, this order does not give any other particular privileges to one poet over the other.

3.2 Nezend Begîxanî⁴⁵ (b.1964)

⁴⁵ Nezend Begîxanî is a poet with an impressive range of poetry books. She publishes her first poetry book in Kurdish in Paris, France, entitled *Dwênêy Sibeynê* (Yesterday of Tomorrow) in 1995, then follows *Stayîş* (Celebrations) in 2004, *Řengî Xoĭ* (Colour of Sand) in 2005, *Zengulî Witin* (Bells of Speech) in 2007, and *Eřiq Ğîyabêke Îlham Řaydejêni* (Love: An Inspired Absence) in 2008. She has also published a poetry collection in English, *Bells of Speech*, in 2006, whose introduction is written by the British poet and polyglot translator Richard McKane (b.1947). Begîxanî has been living in exile in Denmark, UK, and now in France since 1987. She obtains her first degree in English language and literature at the University of Mosul in north of Iraq, and then her MA and PhD degrees in comparative literature at the University of Sorbonne in Paris, France. Begîxanî is an active women's rights campaigner whose role in this area is quite remarkable. As her first task, she addresses the issue of violence against the Kurdish women at the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. She is one of the founding members of the International Kurdish Women's Studies Network, established in 1996. She also has extensively researched on the phenomenon of "honour killings" in the Kurdish society and has published her relevant research in Kurdish, French and English, which has partly been conducted in academic partnership with both the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and Bristol University. Her feminist struggle against violence towards women results in her leading role in the formation of Kurdish Women's Action against Honour Killing (KWAHK) in 2000 in London. She presides over this organisation after its name changes into Kurdish Women's Rights Watch (KWRW) in 2004. Significantly, Begîxanî is a multilingual speaker who has translated her own poetry into the languages of French and English. Writing on her literary achievements, Moniza Alvi (2007) says that many of Begîxanî's poems have been published in Arabic and Persian, adding that Begîxanî has been successful in producing the Kurdish translations of Baudelaire and T S Eliot. Furthermore, according to *Kurdish Aspect* (2012), Begîxanî has been awarded two important prizes in two different realms, the British Emma Humphry prize for fighting against honour-based violence in 2000, and recently on 8th March 2012, the French Feminine Simone Landry prize for her poetic achievements, from which she was selected out of forty two poets in France. This simply indicates that Begîxanî has managed to make her poetry and feminine character be identified on an international level. Meanwhile, it is worth pointing out that Begîxanî's poetry has also been chosen for anthologies of English poetry, published both in the UK and the US, such as *Inspired Verse: An Anthology of Favourite Poems* (2007) by Wyndham Thomas and *After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery for Life-Shattering Events* (2008) by Tom Lombardo. Although there is much to be said about the professional, political and academic

Begîxanî belongs to the generation of Kurdish women poets who emerged in the early 1990s. The period during which she starts writing poetry follows the most painful history of her nation when Anfal⁴⁶ and the chemical attacks on Halabja⁴⁷ happen. These national tragedies, as usually are the main themes of Kurdish poetry in general, vastly shape the content of the majority of her poems for more than a decade to come. In discussing them, she does not raise anything particular not discussed by other poets, whether male or female. However, being personally caught in these tragic events, Begîxanî turns most of her poetry into a ground where heartbreaking own family and national narratives are told. This point of difference differentiates her from many poets of this study. However, this flow of poetic sense changes in her latest poetry books where topics of love and fight against gender-based violence towards women replace.

As a diasporic poet, the feeling of being away from one's family, relatives, land, and birthplace wonderfully turns Begîxanî into an emotional, romantic, and melancholic poet. Likewise, brutal tragedies happened personally to Begîxanî's family and generally to her nation, make her lament her past in a tone that attracts readers to be immersed in her

life of Begîxanî, it is similarly interesting to briefly reflect on her rich journalistic career. Thus, Begîxanî has worked for several years as an editor at the *BBC Monitoring* and she is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the Kurdish edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

⁴⁶ Anfal, which in English means "the spoils of war", was an extensive mass arrest operation conducted intentionally by the toppled Iraqi Ba'th regime in the 1980s against the Kurds in Iraq. Kurdish female human rights activist 'Edalet 'Umer Saîhî (2002) points out that this infamous tragic detaining campaign was launched in multiple stages, in which thousands of innocent Kurdish people—men, women and children, disappeared to end up in mass graves in Iraqi deserts. As there are many books written in English on the tragedy of Anfal, perhaps the most recent ones that give detailed accounts of this operation of annihilating Kurds are Choman Hardi's *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq* (2011) and Michael J. Kelly's *Ghosts of Halabja: Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide* (2008). These two interesting books draw a clear map of Anfal campaigns by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds in Iraq and the aftermath of these campaigns, as they point out the mental and psychological states of those Kurdish families who have lost their loved ones in this tragedy.

⁴⁷ The township of Halabja is in southern Kurdistan which is close to the Iranian border. On 16th March, 1988, the Iraqi army led by Ali Hassan Al-Majjid (known as Chemical Ali) attacked this Kurdish town with chemical gas, which resulted in the killing of more than five thousand people in a single day—including children, women, and the elderly—and thousands of fatally injured townspeople. Reporting to *BBC NEWS* website on the 14th anniversary of the attacks, Osman describes the after-effects of the gas attacks as deadly, saying that "since the chemical attacks, the number of various forms of cancer, birth deformities, still-born babies and miscarriages is reported to have dramatically increased" (Osman 2002). Meanwhile, Kelly on the global political value and meaning of the Halabja tragedy clearly argues that "consequently, Halabja has become emblematic of the Kurdish genocide, much as Srebrenica is for the Bosnian genocide or Auschwitz for the Jewish Holocaust" (Kelly 2008: 33-4). Specifically, the gas attack on Halabja happened during the eight-year long war between Iraq and Iran when the Iraqi Ba'th army at that time had military and political support from the West against Iran.

poems. Begîxanî reflects abundantly in her poetry on her young age and the terrible times she had passed through in her motherland before leaving for the West in search of peace and freedom. One crucial side of Begîxanî's poetry is its confrontation with gender inequality and violence women face in Kurdish society. Her poetic lines carry an urgent message for Kurdish society and act as a warning against men's maltreatment of women, which she fears to last for an indefinite time. In "Pîyawanî Hozekem" (My Tribe's Men) from *Dwênêy Sibeynê* (Yesterday of Tomorrow) (1995), Begîxanî strongly criticises the unnatural sexual relationship between Kurdish men and women, believing that most Kurdish men manipulate women as a means only for satisfying their sexual desires rather than respecting them as life partners. It is the first time that a woman poet dares to raise this issue in Kurdish poetry. Besides, she argues that men never think about the beauty of women and the human feelings they have, which shows the hegemony of male power in a patriarchal society in which women are treated as slaves:

Pîyawanî hozekem şewane bermaî sipî le ser řanî jinekanîyan
 Řadexen û derwêşane roşe ehrîmenekanîyan depjênine naw
 Pirstgakanî leş
 Hergîz bîr le cwanî nakenewe pîyawanî hozekem...

Jiyanî jinanî pîyawanî hozekem jêyî bûnêkî nezoke
 Mêrdekan awazî şehwetî Leser saz deken (Begîxanî 1995: 73).

My tribe's men lay the white prayer mat on their wives' thigh every night
 They pour their satanic spirits dervish-like into the body's temples
 My tribe's men never contemplate beauty...

The Life of the wives of my tribe's men is the cord of a barren existence
 Husbands compose libido music on it.

In "Pîyawanî Hozekem" (1995), Begîxanî discusses the tribal codes of life designed to be followed strictly by women with no time limit. This fresh treatment of the social structure of Kurdish society in poetry is the result of her acquaintance with the civilised societies of the West. For Begîxanî, tribal codes are partly responsible for the gender segregation policy practised explicitly in her society. She believes that inequality between the two genders and the inability of women to face up to the sheer authority men have in society have created an imbalanced life cycle which has repeated itself all along history. Within the gender discourse of "women as the honour of nation", Begîxanî introduces a

new and contentious argument to Kurdish poetry never approached before. She notes that Kurdish mothers keep on watching over the virginity of their daughters until they marry, since it is their virgin status that gives them respect and protects their honour in the eyes of men, whereas men insist on their superiority, pride in their virility and pass this feeling and understanding down to their sons. This unfair gender-based code of life has remained largely unchanged in society and has resulted in further violations of women's rights. Begîxanî portrays this stark picture of Kurdish women's life from the real experiences of her female friends and those women from her extended family who unwillingly have to surrender to their fates:

Jinekanîyan debin be dayîk û bîr le kiçênî kiçekanîyan dekenewe...
Pîyawekan debin be bawik û bîr le kuřekanîyan dekenewe
Pîyawanî hozekem be fizewe dest dirêj deken û le kelêne teřekanî
Leřîyan qefe hêz û qefe řeřef deřinnewe û deyken be mułkî
Kuřekanîyan (Begîxanî 1995: 73-74).

Women become mothers and consider the virginity of their daughters...
Men become fathers and consider their sons
My tribe's men conceitedly stretch their hands and from the wet areas of their
Bodies harvest bundles of power and honour and make them the property of their
sons.

While journeying through the poetic experiences and texts of Begîxanî, it is easy to find that this poet has passed through very difficult and tragic moments in life. Her life includes horrible stories of death of her brothers and father at the hands of the bloody Ba'th regime which ruled Iraq for almost thirty five years. In his introduction to Begîxanî's *Bells of Speech* (2006), McKane underlines the tragic life story of Begîxanî's family by saying that "Nazand is a genocide survivor; two of her brothers were executed in Saddam Hussein's prisons and her third brother who managed to flee was killed in Germany. Her father was one of the first victims of the Ba'thist regime in 1968" (Begikhani 2006: 8). This tragic life endured by Begîxanî largely reflects in most of her poems. It represents the part that she as a woman has played in the political life of her oppressed nation and its portrayal in a symbolic poetic language forms the active side she has had in the Kurdish nationalist discourse. Mojab and Gorman assert that "Kurdish feminists also share common or interrelated histories of political struggle in relation to national oppression" (Mojab and Gorman 2007: 80). Accordingly, in "Dû'akanî Daykim"

(My Mother's Prayers) from *Celebrations* (2004), Begîxanî recounts miserable past memories through her mother's steady worship of God and prayers. She strongly feels the pain of losing her father and brothers in her mother's constant prayers to reunite with them in paradise. Begîxanî sympathises with her mother for endlessly sitting on the prayer mat with hands raised towards the sky asking for God's mercy to protect her children taken aggressively by the evil forces of Saddam. However, she is convinced that nothing can console her heartbroken mother but her resurrection in life after death, with the hope of a fresh meeting again with her dearly loved children:

Hîç şitê dadî daykim nada	Nothing consoles my mother
Tenha tirûskey hîwayek nebê	Apart from the gleam of one hope
Hîway zindîbûnewe le mirdin	The hope for afterlife
Ew xewin bewewe debînê	She dreams of resurrection in the other world
Dwatir le koşane şînekanî beheşt	Later in the blue lanes of paradise
Çawî be kuře nawencîyekey roşin bêtewe	Meeting again with her middle son
Destî kiçe biçkoîlekey bigrêtewe û	Holding the hand of her baby daughter and
Baweş be kuře hiraşekekeyda bikatewe	Hugging her grown son
Ke bo geştî hîwa çû û nigeřayewe	Who left on a journey of hope
(Begîxanî 2004: 13)	And never returned

Agonisingly, the tragic death of Begîxanî's family members, particularly her three young brothers, seems to haunt her day and night. She is much affected by her early separation from her three innocent loving brothers, who were not allowed enough time to share many family memories with her and make her feel the normal passionate moments of life. Obviously, Begîxanî's poem "Dişnîyayî" (Certainty) in the same poetry collection, *Celebrations* (2004), is, too, written in bleak memory of her family victims. In an epigraph to the poem, she says "to those beloved ones who were here yesterday, but are no longer present today, those who always live amongst us" (Begîxanî 2004: 29). *Celebrations* (2004) embraces a whole range of outstanding poems which raise a series of contentious themes that symbolise different stages of Begîxanî's life. In her assessment of *Celebrations* (2004), Kurdish female writer Dişxwaz Fayzulla (2009: 13) states that Begîxanî has chosen different techniques for dealing with poetry. She argues that Begîxanî has gone deeply down into the various components and genres of poetry and worked on an individual style that utterly represents her character and nature without being influenced by or emulating any other poet. Besides Begîxanî's intense efforts and

typical experience in poetry writing, Fayzûlla realises that “an entirely brave woman writes, whose bravery literally transforms into invention” (*ibid.*).

In *Colour of Sand*⁴⁸ (2005), which comprises an epic-style long single poem, Begîxanî remembers a tragic day in the modern history of her people. Jointly written with the Kurdish male poet Dilawer Qeredagî⁴⁹, the book reflects on the bloody terrorist attacks by radical Islamic groups on two main Kurdish political parties’ bases on first of February of 2004 in Hewlêr during the Muslim celebration of Sacrifice Feast. The date of this book indicates that it is written precisely for this tragedy and this poetry book is another contribution by Begîxanî to the broader national identity that she is proud of as a Kurd and works to accommodate it within a sovereign national state. Sadly, these twin attacks led to the death of tens of innocent people and injured dozens of them, which caused a shock across the entire region, and turned the feast to funerals in hundreds of homes. This incident reminds Begîxanî of many previous tragedies happened personally to her family and generally to the Kurdish people in a country where death and torture were heinous methods used to annihilate the Kurds. National oppression of the Kurds and affection for the nation pushes Begîxanî to write *Colour of Sand* (2005) metaphorically, using poetic imagery to depict what had taken place on that day. Besides, she ironically inserts sufistic and religious terms and expressions into the poem to glorify the day, since human killing is forbidden on such a holy day in Islam. While asking the French artist Edith Henry to design poetic motifs for *Colour of Sand* (2005), Begîxanî describes the content of this poetic book for her as follows:

When drawing the motifs, think of my mother, of Anfal, of Helebce, of the tragedy’s size, of death, of solitude, of destruction, but, as I said, in the entire poem, there is a spiritual atmosphere, which is not connected to a particular religion. This sufistic spirituality will eventually become the source of freedom. Across the whole poem, there exists a mystic figure

⁴⁸ This poetry book represents the combination of two voices, a female and a male one, which carries a political undertone in defiance of the wave of terrorist attacks that struck southern Kurdistan after the fall of the Iraqi Ba’thist regime. It is difficult to distinguish the two voices from each other since the text stands for both and is written in several sessions between two minds. As this book’s poetic text can be put in the name of the female partner, it, similarly, can represent the male partner without exception. As a result, it is logical to say that the book is simply double-gendered or bisexual.

⁴⁹ Dilawer Qeredagî (b.1963) is an acknowledged southern Sorani-speaking Kurdish writer, poet, translator, who is currently living in Sweden. He is one of the few Kurdish writers living in exile who has translated many books into Kurdish from the Persian language. He is an active and defiant voice in the Kurdish literary arena, who has a large collection of poetry books.

[who may be Şêxî Sen'an⁵⁰ or Meħwî] whose name is recurrently repeated as a symbol of liberation, of hope, as well as of persecution...It is true that torture has a huge presence in the poem, but it is not only a bloody torture... (Begîxanî and Qeredagî 2005: 2).

In a unique poetic imagery, Begîxanî creates a magnificent personification out of the mournful city of Hewlêr. She likens the city to a very young child who never stops crying because of the injuries sustained from the blasts. In fact, the truth is that children should be very happy and jovial on Sacrifice Feast, but because the plague of terrorism makes the city wallow in blood, the public mood turns completely upside down. It is a special day the whole children have been waiting for a long time to dress new clothes, put on new shoes, and obtain sweets from the elderly and neighbours. However, the ill-fated children of Hewlêr are still unhappy and in tears, despite wearing new shoes and clothes, and having their mouths full of sweets:

Şar...berdewam degrî şar
Şar mindaġtîre le caran
Pîrtîre le sibeynêyî rojekan
Şar be demî piř le nuġlewe degrî
Şar be pořakî nwêyî cejnêwe degrî
Şar be pêlawe tazekanîyewe degrî
(Begîxanî and Qeredagî 2005: 64)

The city...it cries continuously
The city is more childish than before
Older than the days' tomorrow
The city cries with a mouthful of sweets
The city cries wearing new feast clothes
The city cries wearing its new shoes

It is worth indicating that such dolorous situations and touching stories keep repeating themselves in Begîxanî's poetry. She is one of those Kurdish women poets who have experienced psychosomatic conditions in their life.

The most controversial and remarkable poetry book written thus far by Begîxanî is her all-encompassing *Bells of Speech* (2007). This book includes dozens of critical poems about a variety of themes ranging from childhood, love and nostalgic feelings to poignant themes of Anfal, honour killings and social and moral problems caused by the high dominance of classic patriarchy over the Kurdish society. Although published in 2007, it has poems written from the 1990s up until early 2007. It looks more like a collection of republished poems from the preceding poetry books. Kurdish and non-Kurdish literary

⁵⁰ Şêxî Sen'an is a Muslim Sufi who is very famous in Kurdish literature for his unusual love relationship with a Christian girl. Sen'an is said to have fallen passionately in love with this Christian lady who later for the sake of gaining her heart and love converts to Christianity. Sen'an's deviant love story has become inspirational for many Kurdish poets and singers as several poems and songs have been written glorifying this type of unprecedented love affair in the Muslim society.

critics have actually paid fair critical attention to this book. In an analytical article entitled “Stream to ocean: on the poems of Nazand Begikhani”, the British critic McKane is amazed by the poetic ability of Begîxanî, saying that in her poems, she generally “fights with the Anfal, the genocidal campaign carried out against Kurdish civilians at the end of the 80s; she fights against honour killings and she fights for the perception of the Kurds in the West” (McKane 2005). Afterwards, he adds “her persona goes to the roots of violence in the family with the male mentality, with the patriarchal father figure rejecting daughters and approving sons” (*ibid.*).

Bells of Speech (2007) is about Begîxanî’s life experiences, as it is also possible to consider it the poet’s biography, which extensively reflects various stages of her life. The groundbreaking themes that have made this collection readable amongst the feminist activists, critics, poets and writers are the defence of the women’s legal rights and combat against gender-based violence towards women. These themes were not popular before in Kurdish women’s poetry and started to emerge after 1991 in conjunction with the gender awareness campaigns by Kurdish women’s organisations and groups. As a challenging Kurdish feminist, Begîxanî uses her pen as a tool to confront the socially and culturally constructed gender stereotypes of Kurdish women and their oppression by men who still firmly abide by the traditional codes of life under patriarchy. Kurdish writer Seîlah Hûsênpûr notices the apparent gender and social importance of *Bells of Speech* (2007) when he starts a thematic analysis of the book, intentionally dubbing the book as “Zengulî Jin” (Bells of Woman), for its intense focus on women’s affairs and their constant subjugation by men in Kurdish society. He believes that *Bells of Speech* (2007) is “the portrait of Nezend’s life, the bell of women’s sufferings, war, immigration, exile, struggle with life and death, and rebellion” (Hûsênpûr 2010: 21).

It is characteristic of Begîxanî to oppose the ongoing cultural practice of accepting sons and despising girls in families during their birth. She is against belief that sons are the source of power and strength for families and daughters the source of shame and weakness. In the poem “Xudawendî Gunahbar” (The Sinful God) (1994), Begîxanî stands against misogyny and the hostile feelings shown by Kurdish patriarchal fathers and their collaborators from the aged women when daughters are born. Siding with Begîxanî’s

feminist campaign for the protection of the rights of Kurdish women from the day of birth, diasporic Kurdish critic Eḫmedî Mela argues that:

Previously 'I' for Nezend was a sensitive poet who used to dream of Eden, but now a different 'I' grips her collar, who everyday whispers in her ears that you as a 'woman' need to be born again. The reason is that women in our culture come to life disabled, grow with disabilities, receive improper education, and, at last, die an unusual death, leaving behind life for men. (Mela 2007: 23-4).

He publicly emphasises that women should be given a new birth from the region where Begîxanî comes from. It is interesting to find that this stance of Mela and Begîxanî agrees with the agenda of Anglo-American feminist theory, which calls for redefining the position and role of women in society and the responsibility women writers and critics need to take in order to escape the narrow territory assigned to them by men writers (see Chapter 1: 27). In reality, the society in which Begîxanî grows up in brings her many heartrending stories of women's torture, psychological punishment and deprivation of family grace. All these calamities materialise evidently in "Xudawendî Gunahbar", when she pleadingly states that it was not her sin to be born a girl and exist in life in the form of a woman. She skillfully draws the picture of a traditionalist Kurdish father who turns very angry and loses his temper when he is given the news of the birth of a baby girl. This news also brings a deep, long-lasting sadness to the wretched mother and makes her cry because she knows that she will not be treated with mercy after the delivery of her baby girl⁵¹:

Tawanim çîye ke min hem?	Why should I be guilty of existing?
Tawanim çî bû ke min bûm?	What was my sin when I was born?
Bawî-im le çayxanekey ser sûç çawerêyî dekirî	My father was waiting in the corner tea shop
Ke hewaî bûn-mî bîst	When he heard my birth news

Çend loçêk le nawçewanî rwa, pêluwekanî daxist û ahêkî hejkêşa...
Several wrinkles grew in his forehead; he closed his eyelashes and sighed...

⁵¹ It is a dominant cultural ideology in almost all the Middle Eastern societies that fathers prefer boys rather than girls in their families. This, however, is an obvious feature of the sturdy patriarchal system in place in such societies, which has added much more difficulties and miseries to women's life. Boys in patriarchal communities are looked at as symbols of force and they, clearly not girls, are usually entitled to carrying the family's name after the death of the father, a radical mindset that is responsible for the big gender gap in such communities. Meanwhile, Islam and its inheritance laws are other issues in connection with this argument which for irrelevancy cannot be discussed here.

...Ke min bûm daykim girya	...When I was born, my mother cried
Girya û minî le amêz na	She cried and embraced me
Bawk-im şeqazileyekî lêda û hawarî kird: “firêyde, xwardinekem bo bêne”	
My father gave her a slap and shouted: “throw her, bring me the dinner”	

(Begîxanî 2007: 62-3).

In her defence of Kurdish women in her poetry, Begîxanî fights an epidemic disease in the Kurdish society that has been chasing women on regular basis. This epidemic is “honour killing”⁵², or killing women for the sake of keeping one’s family honour intact. In Kurdish society, the honour of the family is felt to be reflected in the sexual behaviour of the women, which is why the men feel it is directly connected to them. Since the early 1990s, Kurdish women’s groups and activists, among them Begîxanî as an influential member, have been struggling to end honour-based violence against women in southern Kurdistan. They are aware that the association of women’s sexual identity with the family’s honour is motivated by a male-schemed gender ideology. Begikhani *et al.* (2010: 15) identify this form of violence as “a gendered form of cultural behaviour within families and local communities.” Hence, sexual misconduct by women is immediately revenged commonly by their death, executed mostly by the male members of the concerned family. It is from this perspective that Kurdish women’s organisations have basically marked this particular type of death as “honour killing.” For Begîxanî, “honour killing” is a crime against women. Significantly, “Stranî Jinêkî Serbiřaw” (The Song of a Murdered Woman)⁵³, a poem Begîxanî dedicates to the souls of the victims of honour crimes, stresses tough measures taken by Kurdish men against those women who are

⁵² It is significant to point out that “honour killing” is not a phenomenon unique to southern Kurdistan only. Rather, this particular form of women-orientated crime happens around the world and in almost all the worldly faiths. However, it is hugely rife in the Asian, African and Middle Eastern communities and is often spotted largely in the Muslim community. The fact is that Islam is against this inhumane crime and it is Chesler (2009) who partially refers to this basic fact by bringing in a clear argument made by the US-based Islamist advocacy organisations as saying that “Islamist advocacy organizations, however, argue that such killings have nothing to do with Islam or Muslims, that domestic violence cuts across all faiths, and that the phrase “honor killing” stigmatizes Muslims whose behavior is no different than that of non-Muslims”. Locally in southern Kurdistan, cases of “honour killing” occur frequently and the concerned Kurdish authorities have always struggled hard to tackle these cases with strict laws and force. According to Mahmood (2008), “in 2002, the Kurdish parliament amended the 1969 law to allow honour killings to be treated in the same way as murder. However, critics say that the changes were too weak”. The Kurdish government is persistent in its efforts to end this infamous cultural phenomenon and bring to justice all those who are responsible for heinous crimes against women.

⁵³ This poem should have been translated as (The Song of a Beheaded Woman) because the Kurdish word “Serbiřaw” in English means “Beheaded”, but because the translation is taken from the poet’s English version *Bells of Speech* (2006), therefore it appears as (The Song of a Murdered Woman).

blindly accused of adultery, infidelity, family betrayal and love affairs. What is interesting about this poem is the date of its production (2000), which marks the official struggle of Begîxanî in the form of a formal institution against honour-based crimes against women. Begîxanî says “this poem is written for the occasion of the announcement of Kurdish Women’s Action against Honour Killing (KWAHK)” (Begîxanî 2007: 75). In this poem, Begîxanî adopts the pathetic fallacy technique to transform the wind into an evil, cruel man, who uses his long, sharp nails as a knife to cut off the head of innocent, butterfly-like women:

Bay bor, qurs, nagehan
 Be bergî pîyawanewe hat
 Nizîk bowe
 Nizîktir hat

The grey, heavy long-clawed wind
 in a man’s shape
 came closer and
 much closer

Çîrnûkî çeço asay le rûmetekanim gîr kird
 Pepûlekanmî xinkand
 Roşnayîmî ser biñ
 (Begîxanî 2007: 76)

put its sharp claws into my cheeks
 suffocated my butterflies
 and cut off the throat of my light

The most revolutionary poem to represent the fearless feminist spirit of Begîxanî in *Bells of Speech* (2007) is “Cestem hî Êwe Nîye” (My Body is Not Yours). A woman openly reclaiming her body in a poem in a society where there is no free woman’s body is a new feature of Kurdish women’s poetry. This poem signifies the direct influence of Western culture and feminist ideology on Begîxanî’s poetic imagination. As here, she heroically introduces a feminist culture which is totally different from the social culture practised back in her homeland. In this poem, she desperately seeks freedom of body, of self-representation, of expression, and exercising free will as to whom she should be a life partner and on what basis. Yet again, she stands in defiance of classic Kurdish patriarchy and the oppression this system has inflicted on women in her society. However, she realises that— largely different from other women— she has been able to understand her body soon from her childhood, and has not allowed anyone to manipulate her and take freedom from her:

Le heraşîmda
 Fêrbûm legeļ xud aştîmewe
 Pantayîekî payîzî piñ le hêlî ba
 Cestem bû be hî xom

In my childhood
 I learnt to reconcile with the self
 An autumnal area full of wind lines
 My body became mine

Înca le naweřastda
Nemamêkim nařt
Nemamî azadî
Beřam min yek bûm û ewanîř giřt
(Begîxanî 2007: 114)

Then in the centre
I planted a tree
The tree of freedom
But I was one and they were all

In her latest poetry book *Love: An Inspired Absence* (2008), Begîxanî breaks away from the sad tones and tragic themes expressed in her previous books. As part of her campaign and activism for gender equality and an end to gender-based violence against women in the progressing post-2003 Kurdistan, Begîxanî allocates this poetry book for the promotion of love in her patriarchy-exhausted society. She expresses the aim of this book as saying “as a researcher in gender studies whose main focus is honour crimes, I want to defend love and the desolate lovers of my country” (Begîxanî 2010: 12). In this collection, no fashionable theme has been explored except for the invocation of certain Western sites and literary masterworks, but she does show a more positive picture of life and encourages the young generation of her nation to embrace love and stand for a brighter future for Kurdistan. Dedicated to the young female and male lovers of her home region, the book represents a turning point in Begîxanî’s poetic experiences, and marks a radical change in her understanding of the relationship between women and men.

After the fall of Saddam’s regime in 2003 which has resulted in a notable political and economic success in southern Kurdistan, Begîxanî changes her poetic style and themes to bring in a fresh poetic interpretation of the general situation in her society. Instead of addressing fake and morally unacceptable sexual love, this time she chooses passionate, real love and the necessity of spreading it among her society’s lovers as the major theme of her latest book. The type of love Begîxanî advocates deconstructs gender hierarchies and protests against discriminatory gender roles (see below); it is love that brings social peace and happiness to the people involved. Begîxanî seems to be in favour of opening up a new chapter in the ordinary life of her people after suffering the most unpleasant moments of life more than enough in the past decades. Her latest book is an indication of discarding the miseries of the past and using love as the source of happiness and gender reconciliation in the Kurdish society. In “Xořewîstî” (Love), Begîxanî speaks about the steps in which love is formed between two individuals. It is about two persons, a female and a male, apparently not knowing each other, but while accidentally passing

by each other, they exchange intimate expressions and gestures to eventually develop into a genuine love. This remarkable poetic image shows Begîxanî's real sense of life and the context freedom can provide for avid lovers:

Dû tenhayî pîyase deken	Two lonelinesses walk
Dû tenhayî temaşay yektirî deken	Two lonelinesses look at each other
Dû tenhayî bedem yektirî pêdekenin	Two lonelinesses laugh at each other
Dû tenhayî pêkewe dadenîşin	Two lonelinesses sit with each other
Dû tenhayî qise deken	Two lonelinesses talk
Dû tenhayî destî yek deşrin	Two lonelinesses hold hands
Dû tenhayî yektirî le baweş deşrin	Two lonelinesses hug each other
Dû tenhayî têkeş be yektirî deşrin	Two lonelinesses blend into each other
Deşrin be Yek	They become One
Deşrin be Xoşewîstî	They become Love

(Begîxanî 2008: 13-14)

Another thing to offer a specialty to this poetry book is Begîxanî's attention to places and literatures of the host countries, where she has been successful in developing her poetic career. Begîxanî's migratory journeys in the European countries make her benefit from the famous historical and cultural places of such countries, and their literature, which leads the literature of the world. She manages to incorporate well-known Western literary figures and masterpieces into her poetry, as this idea, she believes, has enriched the content of her poetry. This mixture of Kurdish women's poetry with foreign locales and literary elements is a step towards widening its localised vision, as it can also be seen as one of the aspects that separates the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets from the poetry of home poets.

The influence of Western literature enables Begîxanî to produce a poem—“Berzayîyekanî Ezmirî, Berzayîyekanî Wezerîng” (Ezmer Heights, Wuthering Heights), in which strong nostalgic emotions and memory of homeland are expressed. This poem symbolises the poet's national loyalty to her motherland, as she appears to feel safe in the arms of her lover on the tops of her region's mountains. This shows that the poet has a sense of insecurity in the West, despite the established widespread freedom and personal safety that is in place there. She knows that her gender has been discriminated against and suffers highly from inequality in rights back at home, and that publicly practising love with her lover might bring her misfortune, unhappiness, and disrepute, but her natural nationalist, personal connection with homeland urges her to return to her birthplace. It is

in the arms of home nature that she feels the taste of love and her lover's adoration of her. Moreover, this poem, through the love story of *Wuthering Heights*⁵⁴ (1847), aims to shape a close bond between two lands, the land of exile, where Begîxanî is exiled to, and that of home, which constantly haunts her in her poetic fantasies. The lover Catherine, who might be the poet herself, attempts to reunite with her beloved, Heathcliff, or the poet's 'dream knight', being left behind on Ezmer Heights in southern Kurdistan. This reunion hope might also be the poet's longing for a meeting with her loved ones in her homeland:

Min ewim	I am her
Katrîn	Catherine
Roĥanîyetî jinêkî 'aşiq	The spirituality of a woman in love
Le berzayîyekanî Wezerîngewe	From the Wuthering Heights
Dedeme şeqeyî baĭ	I flap the wings
Le lûtke nesrewtekanî Ezmir	On Ezmer's resistant peaks
Le baweşî Hit'klîf aram degrim	I rest in between Heathcliff's arms
(Begîxanî 2008: 31-2)	

However, it can be argued that this sense of belonging to motherland and the feeling of safety at home have some roots in the biological construction of Begîxanî and the essentialist views held of women. It has been noted above that frequently women are associated with nature and men with culture, as women are thought to be the "mothers of the nation" and its biological and cultural reproducers. Hogan says "in the popular imagination, women are strongly linked to nature and to the home, two powerful symbols of nation" (Hogan 2009: 7). Within this theoretical frame, similar interpretation of Begîxanî's obsession with home can probably be true.

3.3 Nîgar Nadir⁵⁵ (b.1976)

⁵⁴ *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is the title of a novel written by the English female novelist and poet Emily Brontë (b.1818-d.1848). It is Brontë's only novel which is about a doomed love between its two main characters, namely Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Begîxanî has benefited from the love story of this novel and used its main characters as the figures of her poem "Ezmer Heights, Wuthering Heights".

⁵⁵ Nîgar Nadir was born in the border city of Serdeşt in eastern Kurdistan in 1976. She is originally from southern Kurdistan from the town of Qeĭadize. After the failure of the Kurdish revolution in 1975 in Iraq, her family members, similar to thousands of other Iraqi Kurdish families, flee to eastern Kurdistan, where she comes to life in exile. Nadir is an acknowledged Kurdish writer, novelist, poet, and women's rights activist. She holds a BA in law, and has been granted two literary awards in southern Kurdistan in 2000 and 2007. She is the official member of Hewlêr branch of Kurdish Writers' Union. Her first publication was in 2004, which was a poetry book entitled *Be Taw Pêkda Debarîn* (We Torrentially Rain against Each Other). She publishes her second poetry book, *Nîştimanêk le Şûşe* (A Homeland of Glass), in 2006, and her latest

Nadir is seen by many Kurdish critics as a poet belonging to the post-2000 generation of Kurdish poets, since her poetry emerges in print in the early years of the first decade of the twenty first century. The content of her poetry embodies life experiences mostly after 2000 and the changes which have occurred to the Kurdish society since then. Nadir is one of the few Kurdish women poets who are rebellious against all the backward habits of Kurdish society, especially those norms which are inimical to women. She has experienced different stages of brutality and oppression against women in her society. As a result, she dedicates her pen and poetic texts to the defence of women's rights in her phallogocentric society. It is her challenging and defensive position in her writings that sends her away to exile, a turning point in the history of Kurdish women's writing. In an article if she must give up writing, Nadir admits this fact, saying "oh God, what an unlucky woman I am, even writing has turned out to be my harshest fate which has deported me from my dear Kurdistan" (Nadir 2011: 3).

Nadir is an outspoken woman poet who is very brave in her poems. It is her courage of facing the patriarchal Kurdish society that endangers her reputation. In her poetry, she is honest with the issue of women and touches it in a form which contradicts her society's old traditions. She knows that talking publicly about the miseries of Kurdish women and the pains inflicted on them by men in her community is similar to playing with fire. But her social conscience and faith in the women's cause urge her to use her poetry as a weapon for the protection of the rights of her sisters in a society which is in the process of establishing gender equality. For Nadir, diaspora is a place where she can make the suppressed voices of Kurdish women and gender discrimination against them better heard by the wider world. She feels under less pressure in exile to express her sincere thoughts and ideas on the standing of women in Kurdish society.

The personal quality that differentiates Nadir from other women poets of this study is her claim of being politically independent. In her writings, the tone gives the impression that she is not affiliated to any political party in southern Kurdistan, as she

poetry collection is *Hemû ji Teda Jîwnetewe* (All Resurrected in You), published in 2008. Nadir leaves southern Kurdistan for Europe in 2004 following the liberation of Iraq from the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 by the US-led coalition forces. Notably, all her poetry books are published while she has been living in the diaspora. And she presently carries on with her intellectual and poetry writing activities in London, United Kingdom.

equally criticises all parties and the Kurdish government as undemocratic and detrimental to the rights of people in general and women in particular. As a women's rights activist, she is very critical of the chaotic situation of the women's movements and organisations in southern Kurdistan, believing that such organisations have failed in radically addressing the issue of Kurdish women and are run by a group of urban-based opportunistic and aristocratic women who do not understand the problems of Kurdish women on a holistic level. She argues that trade in the name and character of women has reached a level that can be named as "the civil deaths of women" (Nadir 2013b: 19). This and many other government and society-related controversial issues she raises in her articles and poetry are what distinguish her from other poets.

The poetry of Nadir is a mixture of a variety of themes and subjects, ranging from loyalty to homeland, one's lover, and life partner to the issues of honour killings, political and social injustice towards the Kurds, widespread violence against women, and the influence of classic patriarchy on the gender education of society. Generally, her poetic texts are literally charged with feminist ideology and sincere passions towards men based on mutual respect and understanding between the two sexes. She is against the exploitation of women for sexual pleasure only, believing that as men need women for satisfying their sexual needs, women also require men for the same purpose. Although Nadir criticises men's subjugation of women in general, the romantic poem of "Be Taw Pêkda Debarîn" (We Torrentially Rain against Each Other) from her first poetry book embodies a genuine sense of sexual love towards men. She seems to be worshipping her lover and is impatiently waiting for him to come to please her with his erotic touches and hugs. Nadir creates an impressive atmosphere out of personifying rain to be both her lover and the moment a man ejaculates. Rain is the vital figure of this poem which takes on several important roles: it acts as a lover, piece of jewelry, sudden flow of sperm, and natural rain. By using extremely erotic terms in this poem, she jeopardises her life in her very religious and conservative society, as only Herdî before her has apparently dared to write such poems, but still not to her degree of sexual extremity.

Kurdish critic Xalîd Cûtîyar is astonished by Nadir's bravery for using taboo terms and expressions in her poetry. He believes that Nadir's poetic style and themes differentiate her from a majority of Kurdish women poets. In his analysis of "We

Torrentially Rain against Each Other”, Cûtfiyar underlines the range of sexual connotations embedded in the poem, stating that “such raining against each other symbolises the blending of two lovers into a single body to venerate mystic love” (Cûtfiyar 2009: 15). Nadir pleads her lover to flood her with extreme sexual joy:

Ke hatîyewe dişop dişop	When you have returned, drop drop
Dişopekanî baranê m le mil ke	Wear rain droplets around my neck
Kirasêkî lew... mije... m leberke	Dress me from that... sucking organ ⁵⁶ ...
Terzane pêmda bibare û	Fall on me like hail, and
Wekî baranê be taw be sermda dake	Fall torrentially like rain over my body
(Nadir 2004: 34)	

Diasporic Kurdish critic, Hendrên, similarly admits that Nadir is an uncommon woman voice who is significantly clear from the traditional male influence. He praises the particular poetic language used by Nadir, saying that “it is actually seeking independence” (Hendrên 2006: 82). Importantly, this testimony by Hendrên indicates a contextual concordance between Kurdish women’s poetry and Anglo-American feminist theory as the latter encourages women writers to write autonomously and avoid copying the styles and language of male literature. As an original theme in Kurdish women’s poetry, in an admonitory poem from *We Torrentially Rain against Each Other* (2004) entitled “Kwêrbûnewe” (Going Blind), Nadir criticises those Kurdish women who for the sake of gold and money lose their freedom and authority to men. She invokes a number of obvious cases where the woman and man are not on equal terms at all, but the woman decides to marry that man because of his wealth and socio-political position in community. She warns such naïve women of a possible dark future, asking them to reconsider their marriage and the unwholesome relationship that is ephemeral and more based on a selfish decision rather than a logical love relationship. This sound attitude of Nadir comes essentially from her broad awareness of the general situation of women in the third world where the majority of women are treated more like a sex object rather than a natural human being. Generally, this misconception of marital life is rife amongst Kurdish women:

Jinêk misqaş misqaş	A woman pennyweight by pennyweight
Xo defroşê	Sells herself

⁵⁶ “Sucking organ” according to this poetic context should mean the male sex organ or “penis”.

Be pekkewteyek...be kwêrêk	To a disabled man...To a blind man
Be gulêk...be şêtêk	To a leper...To a mad man
Nawî lê denê (Hawserêti)	She calls it (Marriage)
Le pişt serî piyawêkewe	From behind a man's head
Le dunya denoê û	She looks at life, and
Parçe parçey xoy	Auctions off
Heřac deka	Every bit of herself
Be syasiyek...be çeteyek	To a politician...To a bandit
Be raport nûsêk...be bazirganêk	To a spy...To a businessman
Nawî lê denê (Evîn)	She calls it (Love)
(Nadir 2004: 109)	

This poem stands for a clear-cut evidence of a dangerous social crisis in Kurdish society in which money plays a crucial role. Nadir feels sympathetic towards this type of women who have exchanged their moral standards for money and jewelry. Evidently, one of the main problems of these women is losing their true personality and dignity, as the majority of them fail quickly in their marital relationships since mutual understanding and love between the couples is absent from the very beginning of the marriage. Furthermore, another serious consequence of this social misbehaviour and naivety is the reinforcement of the patriarchal system in Kurdish society. The surrender of such women to men for temporal life enjoyment and wealth justifies their complicity in maintaining the patriarchal traditions and even promoting them. Perhaps, realising that confrontation of the patriarchal system in their society is a hard choice and may not lead to any positive result is a reason why they decide to remain submissive to the wishes of men and choose subservience rather than rebellion in their normal life. Such vulnerable women cause huge problems to the women's rights activists who work for weakening the foundation of backward cultural norms and changing the society's gendered attitudes towards women, which always find them as low and subordinate to men.

The panoramic *A Homeland of Glass* (2006) recounts the different stages a Kurdish woman generally goes through in southern Kurdistan. It draws an obvious picture of the life story of a woman who faces many hardships and challenges in her society. Moreover, it highlights the various ways in which she suffers in her life and the life complexities she sustains as a result of effective patriarchal mentality that is in charge of the management codes of her society. It is a book that leaves no part of the problematic life of Kurdish women untouched. *A Homeland of Glass* (2006) comprises one single poem which is divided into stanzas of different length. It needs to be read and looked at as one package

in order to render full meaning and the complete image of the woman the poet paints. Accordingly, in a part of the poem, Nadir unveils the oppression Kurdish women confront in Kurdistan when time for marriage approaches. She regrets the fact that a vast majority of women in her homeland are not free to choose their husbands. It is their family, typically father and brothers, who decide unilaterally whom they should marry and live with. Older women and mothers can also sometimes have a hand in this type of marriage. The reasons are diverse. Some families want their daughters to marry within the same extended family to protect their inheritance rights and prestige or social standing in the community. Others want their daughters to marry in the same tribe or clan— endogamous marriages, as a form of keeping their collectivity’s traditions and social boundaries. Social and gender theories about the Middle Eastern societies reflect intensely on these restrictive marriage arrangements and the aims of their continuity. Also broadly applicable to the Kurdish society, Moghadam (1993: 108) sides with some social scientists and gender critics:

The Arab-Islamic tribes are endogamous and favor cousin marriage, as noted also by Goody. Tillion, Keddie, and Baffoun have pointed out that endogamy increases the tendency to maintain property within families through the control of women in tightly interrelated lineages.

However, besides pursuing family and tribal interests, such marriages are also meant to please men and meet their sexual needs. Real life experiences have shown that this form of forced marriage occasionally results in failure, and, consequently, the woman will be remarried to several men. Literally, Nadir believes that each act of remarriage equals a death in which the woman is shrouded differently in colour. She feels the sharp pain of women with a severely ruined reputation. Therefore, she firmly condemns the painful experience of being sold like a toy— speechless, deaf and dumb, every day in a different house and in the hands of a different player:

Rojî [*sic*] hezar car le tewawî wejat
 Everyday thousands of times across the entire country
 Debûme bûk û
 I was becoming a bride, and
 Coreha tarayan Leser dekirdim
 Different tiaras were put on my head
 Bo ew pîyawê be coşaneyan debirdim
 I was taken to those sexy men
 Hezar car demirdim û...coreha kifnî sipî
 I was dying thousands of times and...different white shrouds,

Kifnî be baq û birîqeyan leber dekirdim

I was dressed in a brightly coloured shroud (Nadir 2006: 20)

Elsewhere in *A Homeland of Glass* (2006), Nadir accentuates the lack of freedom as another reason for the wretched condition of Kurdish women. She argues that the number of Kurdish women suffering from subjugation by men is very large. Nadir sees that women in her society live in constant imprisonment, as she compares woman to a no-man's-land where no-one has the right to approach unless authorised by her father or brother. As noted above, women represent the honour of the family. A Kurdish woman in general is forbidden from making love publicly, and if she is caught with a man by her male family members, her fate will be disastrous. It will either be an immediate death or life-long house captivity. In the following piece of poem, Nadir employs poetic imagery to make a Kurdish woman resemble a bleak, deserted house with all her lights switched off, curtains drawn down, and doors tightly shut where no stranger dares to come close to because of the serious consequences to be brought upon them by any knock on her doomed door:

Ke qedegebûnîyan têda radegeyandim...
Qedegeyan dekirdim
Ne kes dewêra be nêwim kewî
Ne be nêw kes dekewtim
Gîlopekanîyan dekujandimewe
Perdekanîyan dadedamewe
Dergakanîyan dadexistim
(Nadir 2006: 24)

When a ban within me was imposed...
I would be banned
Neither anybody could pass across me
Nor I could pass across anyone
They would switch off my lights
They would draw my curtains
They would close my doors

Also in *A Homeland of Glass* (2006), Nadir wages a war against such Kurdish patriarchy. In many places she indicates the brutality of male power in Kurdish society and how women are robbed of their basic civil rights, including the right to hold important political and cultural positions and run businesses. On the low participation of women in the capitalist economy of Kurdistan, Nadir argues that “women are not the workforce until now in this wealthy region!” (Nadir 2013a: 19).

This notion of sexism and disrespect for women is prevalent in a number of poems by Nadir, which is widely in agreement with feminist studies on the damaging effects of patriarchy on the place of women in society. In a study on the struggle of feminists to abolish the power of patriarchy, Ruthven brings to light the sort of serious epidemic that

patriarchy brings to the whole society, as he unequivocally declares that “the oppressive effects of patriarchal domination manifest themselves as ‘sexism’” (Ruthven 1984: 2). Thus, sexism, fought determinedly by Nadir by means of her poetic texts, is one of the vicious aims of patriarchal rule. In terms of conjugal rights, Nadir states that women of her society are strongly suppressed by their families because it is not usually in the hand of the woman herself to decide which man she would like to have legitimate sex with. Nadir points out that it is a pity that even when the imposed marriage fails, the woman would not be given an opportunity to decide for the man of second marriage providing that she obtains the chance to remarry at all as widows are not generally preferred as life partners in Kurdish society. Consequently, the woman will either sit for the rest of her life living as a widow or she will be traded one more time by a superior order from her self-opinionated father. Nadir denounces this inhumane treatment of women in her society:

Le piř her řewey le nwên û
 Le baxelî piyawêkda deyannwandim
 Her řewey piyawêkiyan le baweř û
 Le nêw cêgekeyda denwandim [*sic*]
 (Nadir 2006: 48)

Suddenly, every night I was laid to
 Sleep in the bed and bosom of a different man
 Every night, a different man was brought to
 Sleep between my arms and in my bed⁵⁷

One more unconventional issue that Nadir points to in *A Homeland of Glass* (2006) is prostitution. It is the first time that this sensitive topic is addressed in Kurdish women’s poetry. The use of previously undiscovered and taboo themes gives a special flavour to Nadir’s poetry. Nadir is very explicit in dealing with this phenomenon in Kurdish society, and indicates the various factors that have led to the emergence of this illegitimate sexual practice in her society. If anybody browses through the whole book, it will be clear that factors such as dominant patriarchy, gender inequality, poverty, forced marriage, and infidelity are right behind a steady increase in prostitution in Nadir’s community. Besides, rapid economic development and massive cash flow into southern Kurdistan has created big gaps in classes of society, where the poor families are unkindly exploited by the rich. In a study on sexually oppressing women in Iraq and Kurdistan Region,

⁵⁷ The English translation of the last line does not exactly correspond to the Kurdish text because there should be a typographical error in the last Kurdish line. It actually makes no sense if the Kurdish line is translated as it is typed, as it is even impossible to translate it into English.

Marcovich points out the sexual exploitation of girls by wealthy people and sex gangs of these regions. She says:

Buyers come from all socio-cultural backgrounds and include government officials, police, businessmen, intellectuals, students, laborers, farmers, and tribal men. Most of them are married and go to brothels during the day. Men with more money can pay for spending the night with the women or girls that they buy (Marcovich 2010: 22).

Significantly, Nadir is aware that the worst victim of this unwanted situation is woman who very easily falls prey to the hands of the wealthy sex buyers. She is shocked to find women of her society losing their independence and control of body for the sake of a small monetary interest. Moreover, her heart aches with pity for them, for they will be entirely ignored after the end of the sexual activity and in most cases they will end up becoming pregnant or killed when found by relatives:

Zor caran piř piřyan dekirdim
Le jinî awis
Lew jinaney le demaņçeyek
Awis bibûn
Lew jinaney le tîrey gurgêk
Mindalîyan wezigî kewtibû
(Nadir 2006: 58)

Many times I was fully filled
With pregnant women
Those women who became pregnant
From a pistol shot
Those women who were impregnated
By a pack of wolves

Nadir, at this point, likens the conscienceless male sex buyers to a group of wild wolves hungry for sex, a pathetic fallacy that shows Nadir's ability and poetic skills in addressing such a precarious social issue. Furthermore, this rare anthropomorphic model of poetry demonstrates Nadir's seriousness in confronting the looming threat of unlawful sex that has put the life of many Kurdish women in danger, and claimed numerous Kurdish women's lives under the rubric of "honour killing".

Nadir's latest poetry book *All Resurrected in You* (2008) is an interesting mixture of a variety of themes, all inspired by her sense of nostalgia. Although most of the poems are about romantic love and the idolisation of one's lover, memory of Kurdistan and the tragedies which happened to its people do not elude the book. Unlike her earlier poetry books, *All Resurrected in You* (2008) is intensely blended with features of European literature and place names from the area she lives in. It seems that her diasporic life has encouraged her to benefit from the famous landmarks of Europe in general and Britain in particular, as names such as Madrid, Victoria and The River Thames do occur in her

latest book. This collection is largely a reflection of her life conditions in Britain and the difference her second home has brought to her life. In a piece of poem entitled “Kurdistanit be naw dekem” (I will name you after Kurdistan), Nadir pretends to foster a baby whom she likes to protect from the evil eyes and kidnappers. She acts as her guardian and stays vigilant in order to make sure that she is safe and sound. She names the baby “Kurdistan”, which clearly indicates that even though she is far from her homeland, her heart is still full of love for it. This patriotic and nostalgic feeling runs through the whole poem, and, more notably, the selection of “Kurdistan” figuratively as the name of the baby appears to be her best companion in the lonely atmosphere of exile, who gives her lasting comfort and patience:

Lewetey etom dîtîbû
Xewim nebû wekî şêtan
Detirsam jinêk bitxwênêtewe
Kîjek leberit ka...

Since I saw you
I was sleepless like mad people
I feared a woman to read you
A girl to dress you...

...Lê qet be zeynimda nedehat
Kurdistan be nawî to bikemewe û
Ewcar gewretirîn sebûrîm bidat
(Nadir 2008: 48)

...But I never thought that
I would name you after Kurdistan
Which would then give me greatest patience

Here we recall the stereotypes of women as the “bearers and mothers of the nation.” Nadir seems to reproduce her nation even in exile by being the guardian of the baby who is metaphorically her “homeland”.

Nadir, like most of her fellow Kurdish women poets, does not evade the issue of Anfal tragedy in her poetry. She is proud to have her role in the national movement of her people expressed in poetry. In addition to her work for equality in gender rights and fight against the gender identities within which women are the main losers, Nadir finds herself responsible in front of her nation to defend the national goals being sought decades ago. On the struggle of Kurdish women, Mojab and Gorman (2007: 66) claim that:

Often women must choose between a focus on national liberation for Kurds and a feminist agenda, due to the patriarchal character of Kurdish national liberation organizations on the one hand, and the intrusion of the state on the other.

But Nadir like most women poets balances her activism and poetic content between national and feminist agendas. She is as desperate for the national dreams of her people to come true as her hopes for the emancipation of women in her society. Thus, as a Kurdish

woman who has been influenced by the dark days of the Anfal incident, she reflects on the aftermath of this atrocity being committed by the Iraqi Ba’th regime and shows how lovers were separated from each other by the Ba’thist thugs and buried alive in separate pits in the Iraqi deserts. In “Dişim Henarêk bû Rinîyan” (My Heart was a Pomegranate Harvested), Nadir combines the stories of two human tragedies inflicted on her nation in which thousands of innocent lives were lost. These two tragedies are the Anfal operations and the chemical bombardment of Halabja in the late 1980s. She melancholically tells the story of two young lovers who had hope in life and wanted to enjoy every moment of it, but the evil wind of hatred and ethnic cleansing comes and wipes out their dreams and the dream of thousands of similar lovers and buries them alive. Basically, Nadir realises that these ruthless military operations against the Kurds can never be forgotten and they should be remembered in literature, art, and other cultural activities:

Taze dişim bû bû be henar ke şer	My heart just grew into a pomegranate when war
Wêkîra şewandinî wêkîra taşanî kirdîn	Deformed us together, looted us together
Wêkîra jehre baran wêkîra Anfali kirdîn	Poisoned us together, “Anfalised” us together
Wêkîra raygwastîn degoşî nayîn	Displaced and buried us together
Wêkîra kirdinî be toz û be bay kirdîn	Transformed us into dust and blew it away

(Nadir 2008: 92)

To conclude, the themes raised in Nadir’s poetry are closely related to the social, cultural, economic, and political context and environment of her people. She seems to be aware of the hard conditions of Kurdish women and the tragic events occurred throughout history to her people. Nadir’s poetry is a mirror through which one can judge the social organisation of Kurdish society, particularly this society’s attitude towards women and its evaluation of gender roles. Nadir is against the enslavement of women and their deprivation of the right to choose their husband on the pretext of several social and cultural mindsets. She sees this as gender violence and the imposition of the men’s masculine will and instinct on women. Along her struggle for better gender relations, she believes that politics is not only men’s domain and her response to this is her political poems which are charged with nationalistic tones.

3.4 Çoman Herdî⁵⁸ (b.1974)

Herdî begins a career as a poet at the age of twenty after settling in the UK in 1993. Like Begîxanî, she is a poet of the 1990s' generation. Living the tragedies of her nation in the late 1980s and becoming one of the victims of these tragedies greatly influence the themes of her poetry. However, the reason for becoming a poet for Herdî is different. She says that "it was love that finally made me a poet" (Herdî 2006: 101). The intimate love that she talks about does not take shape in southern Kurdistan, but in the West where she finds herself freer and not restricted by the religious and social laws of her society. With her exilic love relationship, she challenges the "classical love"— if it is to be called "love" at all, which is practised in her traditional society, where the women are emotionally, mentally and physically controlled by men and are treated as sex objects with no equal sexual desires. Herdî's life in exile changes her into a different person, particularly sexually, academically and politically.

The difference between Herdî and most poets is that she adopts a transnational approach in dealing with the problems of Kurdish women. She works on the plights of women both at home and in the diaspora. As an academic, her poetic experience is more research-based than just an ordinary narration of situations related to women's rights and gender differences. Another difference is that Herdî's poetic activities apparently come

⁵⁸ Çoman Herdî was born in the city of Slêmanî in 1974. Following the spate of chemical attacks on the Kurds in the 1980s by the Iraqi Ba'th regime, she leaves Kurdistan with her family for eastern Kurdistan when she was only 14. Herdî arrives in the UK in 1993 where she was able to attend the University of London in 1999 to pursue her MA degree in philosophy. In 2001, she obtains a scholarship to conduct her PhD on "the mental health of Kurdish women refugees at University of Kent in Canterbury" (Hardi 2011: viii). She manages to secure a two-year post-doctoral scholarship from the Leverhulme Trust to return to her homeland and start research on the mental and psychological state of Anfal survivors. Herdî is much concerned about the general situation of those Kurdish women who have survived Anfal and has carried out extensive research on how these women have been able to live with the trauma and violence they have experienced during days of captivity in the wake of Anfal operations. Nevertheless, as an active poetry writer, Herdî has had a significant role in the development of modern Kurdish women's poetry. She is a diasporic Kurdish woman poet with a special style of poetry writing. She has produced three poetry collections in Kurdish language and one in English. Her first poetry book is *Geřanewey bê Bîrewerî* (Return with no Memory), published in Denmark in 1996, and the second book is *Runakî Sêberekan* (Light of the Shadows), published in Sweden in 1998. She publishes *Komele Şi'r* (Selected Poems) in 2003 in Slêmanî in southern Kurdistan which comprises a number of selected poems from her two previous collections. Interestingly, Herdî tries her luck in publishing poems in English language which ends with an impressive collection entitled *Life for Us*, published by Bloodaxe Books in 2004. However, due to the unavailability of Herdî's poetry books at bookstores and libraries, only the 1998 and 2003 Kurdish editions will be covered in this study, which are the only copies achieved from the poet herself. Inevitably, this is the case with several other Kurdish women poets.

almost to an end in the middle of the 2000s when she changes her career into a researcher on gender relations and inequalities in southern Kurdistan and in the diaspora. However, she is still known more as a poet than a gender specialist.

Poetically, Herdî is a defiant Kurdish woman in multiple senses. She has even gone further than several other Kurdish women poets in expressing quite heterodox ideas and beliefs in her poetry in opposition to the traditions and standards which are dominant in her society. Herdî's long life in the diaspora helps her reject most of the norms her people back in southern Kurdistan follow in their social lives. In particular, she is in total disagreement with the ways women are treated in her society. As a proactive feminist and being from a liberal family, she has carried out research on the difficulties and miserable conditions of women in Kurdish society. Literally, nothing seems to have been able to stop her from showing and writing about the barbaric acts of gender violence committed against women by a large majority of men in her community. Unquestionably, the credit of her firm standing on women's issues goes to the freedom she has been enjoying in the West. It would be true to say that Herdî's view of the relationship between women and men, the rights women should have, and the basis on which the two sexes should live together elicits from quite a Western formula.

As will be indicated later in her poetry, Herdî adopts a positive attitude towards life and she does not bind herself to any religious beliefs. Besides, she even dares to take a step further beyond to say things which are religiously banned in her society and anybody saying them will face serious consequences from her predominantly Muslim community. Herdî is very concerned about the poor social and cultural situation of Kurdish women and the regular oppression imposed on them by Kurdish patriarchy. In an interview with *Awêne* (Mirror) newspaper, she clearly states that "perhaps a reason that has made me write is my state of being a woman. We as women live in a community where our voices are suppressed" (*Awêne* 2010: 16). Herdî does not only make her position on women's case obvious in her encounters with the Kurdish media, but even in many of her poetic texts, she is a staunch supporter of Kurdish women's public rights. Her poetry, similar to the poetry of many other Kurdish women poets, literally holds the exact features of her life and the real stories she has experienced since her childhood. On her poetry, McDermott asserts that "the poems bear witness. The reader is unlikely to differentiate

the narrator in most of the poems from the author. (McDermott 2005: 92). As a Kurdish woman who has gone through tough moments in life with her family, she reflects on the tragedies and unforgettable times that have marked her future in her poetry. Fleeing home from the age of childhood and crossing regional borders while in her early teen years to avoid death differentiates her from the community of poets she befriends now in the diaspora. McDermott argues that Herdî's childhood was unsettled as she had been on the constant run from attacks by Saddam's regime. Assessing the role of biography in Herdî's poetic works, McDermott concludes that:

A poet's biography can seem more or less important, as it affects their poetry. In Herdî's case, the biography is overwhelming. While many other young poets have their sexual encounters to write of, or the end of their love affairs, Herdî has a mass gassing. Her subject is not a private, intimate one, such as most writers in the west have, but massive: ideological violence, the repression of an entire people, and how that impinges on the small, suffering individual trying to make the best of what they can (*ibid.*).

However, as explained earlier, sadness and melancholic tones do not entirely occupy the world of Herdî's poetry. Rather, love themes are in fierce rivalry with the gloomy and tear-jerking themes, and in most cases they overcome them to show that the force of love is able to defeat unhappiness. In quite a large number of poems, Herdî seems to worship love and makes it a negotiator to reconcile her with men. She attempts to present a form of men in her poetry broadly different from the narrow-minded men of her society. Man in Herdî's poetry is the main source of love, mercy, and life, unlike the malicious men of her patriarchal community who are the cause of torture, misery, and death for women. In terms of sexual rights, she rejects the masculine ideology that potency gives superiority to men over women, as she strives to deconstruct the masculinity/femininity binary which sees men as active givers and women as passive receivers or men controlling women even during sex. She uses her poetry as a medium for establishing equal sexual rights. She believes that she can mend the distorted image of men in the eyes of women by portraying their original function and aim of existence. This rare treatment of men is perhaps a Herdî invention as other poets demonise them.

The most controversial poetry book of Herdî is probably the middle one, *Light of the Shadows* (1998), which contains poems of intimate love affairs and the most romantic moments of life. This book explicitly reveals Herdî's stance on sexual matters and her

understanding of sexual relationships. She seems very optimistic about life and adopts the theme of “carpe diem” in a large part of the book. She believes that every moment of life should be enjoyed and casts doubt on the truth about afterlife. Nature fosters the romance pictured in this collection, as rain appears to be present in most of the poems. It is rain that prevents the death and aging of love and romance in this book as it endlessly rejuvenates courtship between two passionate lovers. An aspect of this book unique to Herdî which justifies her interest in sexual pleasure and naturism is her portrayal of naked paintings that reflect the content of poems they come with. Such paintings give a clear picture of what is happening in the poems. Accordingly, in the first bunch of poems grouped together under the title of “‘Eşiq” (Love), Herdî creates the romantic image of a love affair that involves the practice of sex in front of a mirror. The sexual fantasy played out in this poem is rather unique and represents the most rapturous moments when two lovers meet in secret to enjoy the maximum joy of sex:

Destim berê
Ba be rûfî
Biçîne awênekewe

Give me your hand
To enter the mirror
Without any clothes on

Baranî ‘eşiq
Herdûkmanî teř kirdûe
Arezûî fiřnêkî tir
Le çawmana sewz bûe
Ba biçîne awênekewe
(Herdî 1998: 10)

Love rain
Has drenched us both
Desire for another flying
Has grown in our eyes
Let us go into the mirror

The depiction of sexual practice in poetry in this erotic form by a woman poet is also unprecedented in the history of Kurdish women’s poetry. The atmosphere Herdî produces in this book is full of hope and is intermingled with a range of poetic imagery that glorifies love. Kakesûr argues that *Light of the Shadows* (1998) is written in an unusual way in which the poetic language is put at the service of self-expression. He states that in this collection Herdî “creates a surreal space and attempts to make words into body and soul” (Kakesûr 2008). Besides, it is possible to say that the feelings and wishes ardently expressed in poems of this book indicate a sort of late compensation for the lost times when the poet was a teenager who had no suitable opportunity because of war in her country to share romantic moments with a lover of her choice.

In another poem from the group of “Asoy Nwê” (The New Horizon), Herdî never hesitates to narrate the painful story of her family’s escape from the aggressive regime of the Iraqi Ba’th party which had waged an all-inclusive war against her nation. She recounts the days when her family in a rainy day of autumn felt very happy to be back home after fleeing it in search of a safe haven. She remembers her soaked brother having a big smile on his face while he was unloading the truck the family had used for saving themselves from an inevitable capture or death. However, that return and happiness turns out to be short-lived and temporary as the family starts to run away again in autumn from another mass arrest and killing campaign by the Iraqi army:

Baranî payîz debarî û
 Deme û êwarê birakem
 Şitekanî le lorîyeke dadegirt û
 Teř teř bû bû
 Zerdexeney geřanewey debeşîyewe
 (Le payîzda hatînewe û
 Le payîzda carêkî tir deřoynewe)
 (Herdî 1998: 49)

Autumn rain was falling and
 In the evening, my brother
 Was unloading the stuff from the lorry and
 He was wet to the skin
 He was giving out the smile of return
 (We returned in autumn and
 In autumn, we flee again)

The seasons of the year form an integral part of Herdî’s poetic formation and are associated with particular events in her life. It is through the seasons and the climatic changes happening in each season that Herdî remembers the most determining and striking moments of her past life. Alternatively, Herdî’s special attention to the cycle of nature and weather conditions in her poetry may come from her love of nature and its beauty as the part of Kurdistan she is from is naturally very beautiful. The question of nature and women’s association with nature’s beauty and attraction is palpably stressed by Anglo-American feminist critics as they believe that women by way of their biological construction are closer to nature than men. And in support of this argument, Showalter states that “many forms of American radical feminism also romantically assert that women are closer to nature, to the environment, to a matriarchal principle at once biological and ecological” (Showalter 1981: 201). Critically, Herdî’s thematic reflection on nature is symbolic of the implications of the gender discourse that classifies women and nature together for their reproductive function and ability.

In *Selected Poems* (2003), Herdî turns out to be more radical in terms of defying religion and the divine powers. As mentioned previously, Herdî feels under no pressure

to summon her courage to write a poem in which she challenges the abilities of God and the absolute truth about his all-encompassing mighty force. In “Maļ’awayî le Bêgunahî” (Farewell to Innocence), a short poem about a romantic love and the consequences of an intimate love relationship, Herdî undervalues the extensive rule and supremacy of God over the world. She rejects the convention that any love relationship which is not allowed by religious laws is forbidden. However, she does acknowledge that God is lonely and is awake all the time to monitor the deeds of human beings on earth, a belief held by Muslims. This contradiction in her personal character implicitly indicates her inevitable entanglement with two different cultures and the practice of two conflicting ideologies, namely the religion of Islam she has been influenced by as a result of the religion’s dominance over her society and her existentialist perception of the world that each individual is free to choose the way of life they are in favour of. Herdî’s long stay in the West sets her apart from many other Kurdish women poets in terms of disengagement from religious beliefs. Moreover, she comes from a well-educated family which soon abandons many harmful Kurdish cultural habits:

Çira nekûjawekanî se ‘at dûî paş nîweşewê	The unturned-off candles of 2 a.m.
Çendtan bo ‘eşiq desûtên?	How many of you burn for love?
Çendî tirîş tarîkayîye tenîyakan rademaļin?	And how many will sweep away lonely nights?
Le baļexaney maļî xwa	At God’s home mansion
Çend hezartan dağîrsawin	How many thousands of you are lit
Ta rêge ben le tîyanûse gewrekanî gunahda	To allow even my name be registered
Nawî minîş tomar bikrê?	In the big registers of sin?
Çend diļim bo xwa desûtê!	How much I pity God!
Bêxewe û êcgar be tanîya	He is sleepless and all alone
Pêwîstî be pişûyekî dûr û dirêje û	He requires a long-lasting rest
Yekê ke bitwanê piştî pê bibestê;	So that one can count on him;
Beļêyî [<i>sic</i>] xwa qet ‘aşiq bûbê?!	I wonder if God has ever been in love?!
(Herdî 2003: 11)	

Herdî also does not forget the tragedies which happened to her nation in her poetry. Politically, Herdî’s struggle for the national rights of her people is conducted on a national, transnational and international level. She does not seem to be affiliated to any particular Kurdish political party for the credibility of her agenda of political work. Her role as an academic in the national political projects is vital. Herdî’s political activism is concentrated more on the Anfal operations and their consequences for the survivors. She says “it was when I was doing my MA that my interest in Anfal was sparked once again”

(Hardi 2011: viii). Also, according to *Awêne* (2010: 16), she conducts her postdoctoral study in the UK on the women survivors of the Anfal tragedy. Herdî's latest book quoted above and postdoctoral research which were achieved through a transnational context between her home region and diasporic residence represent her determination to defend the national and political rights of her people and raise her national cause with evidence in academic and international circles. Grown up in a known nationalistic and secular family who respect gender equality, Herdî has never felt that her role is only childbearing and residence within the private sphere. Rather, she is a feminist and gender equality campaigner who realises that the role of women in the projects of nation building is as important as the role of men. She attempts to discover this role and the traumas of women survivors of Anfal in her book on the gendered experiences of genocide which studies the traumatic life experiences and current psychological status of Anfal survivors in southern Kurdistan⁵⁹. Herdî is one of the women claimed by al-Ali and Pratt to have been "able to build on their roles in the Kurdish national movement to launch a women's rights agenda after 1991" (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 349-50).

Being a person directly affected by the nation's tragedies, she even tells the touching stories in a much realistic way. Thus, Herdî's account of the human tragedy of Halabja brings a piece of poem into being in *Selected Poems* (2003). She skillfully fuses her own experiences of nightmarish moments of running away from the mass arrest campaigns led by the Iraqi army with the last dying minutes of a child from Halabja who fails to escape chemical attacks on their town. Herdî's commemoration of the gas attacks on Halabja occupies a wide space in her academic and non-academic works. In an interview given to Benjamin Morris of *textualities*, Herdî protests the blatant silence of the international community, particularly the US and the UK, over the genocide of thousands of Kurds in Halabja. Besides, she suspects that the US-led war on Iraq in 2003 was to liberate the people from the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, arguing that:

⁵⁹ On the main objectives and central themes of her recent Anfal-researching book, Herdî argues "I wanted to know more about the women victims and survivors of Anfal – how they have coped with violence, loss and rupture, what support they have had access to and what role they have played in rebuilding Kurdistan after the No Fly Zone was set up to protect the Kurds in 1991, and a Kurdish parliament was selected for the first time in 1992" (Hardi 2011: ix).

If they were concerned about the Kurdish people, or Iraqi people in general, they would have done this many years ago, in 1991. I was also angry with the public, because I thought ‘All these suddenly mobilised people shouting anti-war slogans, not wanting anyone to be killed - where were they when we were being killed?’ And thousands of us were being killed. Some of those events were covered here [she means in Britain]. I have gone to the *Guardian* archives, and Halabja was covered. Nothing was done about it. It was just a passing thing (Hardi 2005).

The title of the Halabja gassing poem carries a strong meaning and symbolises the atmosphere of death clouding over the city. Herdî entitles that elegiac poem as “Bo Mindaļêkî Cwanemergî Heļebce” (To a Child Who Died at Halabja) where she laments the death of an abandoned infant who has blood and bruises on her face inflicted by the chemical bombs on her city. In this poem, she refers to the barbarity of the defunct Iraqi Ba’thist regime which did not differentiate between adults and children when it targeted the Kurds of Halabja. She believes that even the townspeople’s faith in religious myths—exemplified by the blue necklace⁶⁰ in the poem— could not secure their lives. She blames God for failing to take care of the infant and save her from harm. As another example of Herdî’s disbelief in God and his mercy towards mankind, she states in this poem that God was conscious of what is going to happen to this infant, but he did not react to prevent her death. This particular antireligious approach to the mass gassing of Halabja differentiates Herdî’s demonstration of the tragedy from demonstrations made by other poets. Her interpretation may also mean that on that death day both the human and divine powers were ruthlessly against her defenceless nation:

Milwanke şînekey milit ney parastî biçkoleke
The blue necklace around your neck did not protect you you little child
Xwda bo xoy çawî lêbû û ney parastî biçkoleke.
God himself saw it and did not protect you you little child.
Le çawan û lêwekanit تنها birîn be cêmawin
There are only wounds left in your eyes and on your lips
Hekayete şîrînekan nehatine dî biçkoleke.
The sweet stories did not come true you little child (Herdî 2003: 33).

These samples of poems by Herdî show the huge influence of her life experiences and events on her poetic works and imagination. They agree with the arguments put forth

⁶⁰ The blue necklace is made of blue beads worn around the neck of children, usually with a big stone in the middle, having an eye on it, to protect them from the evil eye. This traditional religious belief is held by many Kurdish families, particularly those living in the villages. It is believed that by putting on this necklace, misfortunes will be spared from happening by far and away. It is noteworthy that belief in the evil eye is common through a large area of Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

by Anglo-American feminist critics, saying that women writers should attempt to write and reflect on their experiences in their works (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.1). Moreover, the defensive and mutinous style she uses in her poetry attributes to the unstable life conditions she had experienced in her early teens.

3.5 Dişoz Heme⁶¹ (b.1968)

The poetic experience of Heme is slightly different from similar experiences of formerly discussed poets. The simple reason is that she does not start her intellectual life from the beginning as a poet or from a discipline close at all to the humanities and social sciences, but rather as an architect. Nonetheless, Heme is one more significant and current Kurdish woman poet whose poetry turns out to be circulating around various issues surrounding women in general and Kurdish women in particular.

Dihokî (2008: 313) says Heme as a woman poet emerges after the 1991 uprising of the Kurds in southern Kurdistan. Thus, Heme is also the 1990s generation of Kurdish women poets whose poetry brings distinctive differences to the content of Kurdish women's poetry. Her poetry similarly emerges at a hard time when politically, socially, culturally and economically her people were far less developed and the wounds of the political and military oppression of her nation at the hands of the fallen Iraqi Ba'th regime were still very fresh. Poetically speaking, it is the beautiful nature of Heme's motherland, pure love relationships, allegiance to her homeland, inequality in gender

⁶¹ Dişoz Heme was born in the city of Slêmanî in southern Kurdistan in 1968. She completes all the stages of her school education in this city and ends up her academic education as a graduate of architectural engineering from the University of Mosul in 1993. In 1993, she holds an administrative post at the Kurdistan regional government's Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism. She is married and is the mother of three children. Heme leaves her motherland towards Europe in the late 1997, where she finally settles down in Holland. She has been living in Holland since then, but she is in permanent contact with her homeland. Despite her work as an architect, Heme is an active writer and poet. She writes continuously for Kurdish journals and magazines on a variety of subjects, particularly the social topics. She is also regarded as a person familiar with the politics of her region where she has a range of political articles and commentaries on the political situation of the Middle East in *Kurdistanî Nwê* newspaper, the official organ of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a major Kurdish political party in southern Kurdistan. As a feminist, Heme's role in defending the rights of Kurdish women is obvious, as she has been very expressive in the Kurdish media about the damaging effects of classic patriarchy on the social integrity of Kurdish society. Heme is a known Kurdish poet who has thus far published two poetry collections. The first collection, entitled *Le Kotayîda Bîrm Kewtewe Temaşay Xom Bikem* (At the End I Remembered to Look at Myself), is published in Sweden in 1996, while the second one, entitled *Le Payîzêkda Demxwazêt* (He Asks for My Hand in an Autumn), is published in 2009 in Slêmanî. In addition to these two published poetry books, Heme carries on writing individual poems for Kurdish literary journals and supplements.

rights, and, above all, the patriarchal system of Kurdish society that really push her to find poetry writing as her most favourite activity. These themes and many others make the very content of Heme's poetic texts. It is interesting to discover that Heme considers a radical shake-up of the social and cultural structure of the Kurdish society as necessary, particularly in terms of the relationship between men and women. And, significantly, this attitude clearly reflects in her poetry. Heme is enormously critical of the poor situation of Kurdish women and the treatment they receive from their families and husbands. In a detailed article on the subjugation of Kurdish women, she expresses her discontent at the way society in Kurdistan treats women and the status allocated to them by men, which confines them to home only. She protests the gender construction that women should serve society and family within the private sphere. However, it is her fate that the society she belongs to practises a religion which distinctly defines the masculine and feminine roles. Moghadam argues that "sex-segregation, also legitimated on the basis of *hadith*, is part of the Islamic gender system" (Moghadam 1993: 108). It is this gender system that embodies the duties of childbearing, childcare and homemaking in the feminine character of women and family leadership and guidance in men, who are literally blessed with masculine power and practical brains. The oppressive dual system of patriarchy-Islam is responsible for the pathetic circumstance of Kurdish women. On the victimisation of women within this longstanding dual system, Heme states that:

Our society is full of those women who are treated badly in life and who begin and end their life by housework and bringing up children within the borders of a bleak house. They pass through life and leave it like a dead person without knowing what life is and was (Heme 2011a: 14).

Meanwhile, this firm position of Heme on the oppression of a large section of her fellow Kurdish women should come from her good understanding of the main objectives of the Western feminist schools from which she is indirectly part of. Her life experiences of Western culture, especially with regards to the liberties of women, should have taught her lessons about the public rights of women. She almost takes those routes similarly followed by a majority of Anglo-American feminist critics in terms of blurring the social boundaries drawn deliberately between women and men. As Western feminist critics struggle hard to end the confinement of women within the private sphere, Heme also believes that this feminist policy should be stretched urgently to the Kurdish society since

women there are in desperate need for freedom from the hegemonic rule of patriarchy over society. To help other women follow suit her gender beliefs, she takes a practical step in employment life and works in the Kurdish public sector despite the widespread rumours about the morality of women who work outside home. Besides, she takes this decision at a time when the rule of patriarchy over women was quite tight. She turns herself into an example for those women who were hesitant to take similar decision and challenge the discriminatory gender roles in their society.

Heme regrets the basic fact that the average Kurdish women are oppressed violently both at home and outside home, both in front of the public eyes and in the workplace. She argues that concentrating the whole family honour and status in the behaviour and character of women has resulted in restricting the civil rights and freedoms of Kurdish women⁶². She knows that without fragmenting this gender identity, it is impossible to secure public rights for women. The sexed body of women and its symbolisation of the nation's honour and authenticity make Heme conclude that:

Despite the fact that the human value of women is lower than men in practising life and their social role since they are treated unequally in public life, they are simultaneously a being, a body that represents social honour and esteem (Heme 2011a: 15).

The public/private dichotomy implied by Heme largely agrees with what American feminist critic Leslie Rabine understands of the difference between the average man and woman both at home and work. She believes that women, in general, are the victims of patriarchy wherever they are. It is the dominant man, according to Rabine, who is always the oppressor of women and the transgressor of their rights. Thus, she makes her position clear on the superiority of the masculine power as follows:

For the average man, work and home really are very different. At work the man must accept the power of his employer, while at home he is master of his family and finds relaxation. The

⁶² The gendered identity that women symbolise the honour of the family discourages women to join the public sphere and function socially and politically side by side with men. Heme (2011a: 15) argues that the worst type of insult men use in her society to revenge on or punish their rivals is to mention the honour and body parts of their women. The fear of being exploited by others by way of their women makes Kurdish men to take a conservative option and forbid their women from leaving home without their prior consent. Heme interprets this old thinking as one of the most dangerous threats to women's willingness to take part effectively in the social and political realms of their community.

average woman, on the other hand, finds herself contending with a masculine power both at home and at work (Rabine 2007: 979).

Although Heme's poetic experience is modest, she does make the question of women the central issue of her poetry. The content of her poems encapsulate a strict criticism of the traditional culture practised by the majority of Kurdish society, which is broadly inimical to the social existence of women. From a feminist point of view, Heme critically enters the whole body of Kurdish society from multiple directions to diagnose the complexities that surround the issue of women. On the one hand, she attacks the tribal structure of Kurdish society which is one of the most important causes of miseries of women. In the light of the tribal ideology and its gender discourse of connecting the tribe's honour to women, she argues that keeping the moral reputation of tribes intact is more important than the death of women. On the other hand, she criticises the sheer hypocrisy of society members, particularly the male ones, for being so brutal towards women and showing no mercy towards them when they are caught in social troubles. The poem that embodies the above argument is "Gunahî Zîwîn" (The Silver Sin) from her first collection of poems. In this poem, Heme tells the love story of a couple who dearly love each other, but the girl fears that if she allows her beloved to kiss her, the smell of his kiss and his breath may be recognised by the members of her tribe and in consequence she will be tortured to death and her lips will be burnt:

Etirsim ke maçit kirdim	I fear that when you kiss me
Bonî gonat	The smell of your cheek
Pelke gîyay henaseyekit	The grass leaf of a breath of yours
Dişlopêk 'etrî penceyek	A drop of a finger's perfume
Beser qijmewe cê mênê û-	Stick around over my hair and-

Miskî em beheştî maçe ber lûfî berdêk bikewê,
The musk of this kiss's paradise be smelt by a stone,

Em hewaļe benaw xêfî kwêrayî da	This news through the tribe of blindness
Demawdem biļawbêtewe,	Spread immediately,

Ay lem hewaļe hewrîney diļî 'eşîret reş dekat!!
Ah, this cloudy news that blackens the heart of tribe!!
Ay lem gunahe befrîney dîwarî bîstin debřêt û-
Ah, this snowy sin that penetrates the wall of hearing and-!!
Dem deygeyenête gwêçke The mouth whispers it in ears

Gwêçkeş le naw diļî xêļa dozexêkim bo dadexat!!
And the ears will ignite me a hell in the heart of the tribe!!

Renge be dwama bigeřên
Gijugîyay pirçim helkêşin
Her dû lêwim giř têberden
(Heme 1996: 11).

They might be looking for me
To root out the grass of my hair
To burn up both of my lips

Meanwhile, it is not only sad and hopeless tones that underpin the thematic corpus of Heme's poetry, but love subjects, similar to other Kurdish women poets, also constitute a fundamental part of her poems. Heme is witty in adding a special flavour to her poems that attracts the attention of poetry readers. Her technique of word selection is subtle which has created a positive influence on the general meaning of the poems. It is this precision and subtlety in Heme's poetry that inspire a taste of reading in the Kurdish critic Teyîb Cebâr. In a stylistic reading of Heme's poem "Be Mirdinim" (With My Death), Cebâr acknowledges the poetic ability of Heme, stating that "although this poem has been published for seven months, I have read it several times and still feel its taste. The first image of this poem is always on the tip of my tongue" (Cebâr 2009: 6). This testimony of Cebâr may indicate the success of Heme in the process of poetry writing. Significantly, Heme's talk of love is idealistic and is based on reciprocal love feelings and rights between a lover and her beloved. In "Naw" (Name), she describes an ideal romantic love between herself and a man whom she believes worships her and sees her as the only love in the world. Besides, Heme feels very proud to have been able to win the heart of such a man and states that if he were hers, she would be the happiest woman in the world:

Hez dekem nat [*sic*] bihênim
Ay le efsûnî ew nawe!
Min diñîyam bextewertirîn afretim
Ke pîyawêkî wekû to xoşî dewêm û
Beweş zîyatir bextewerim
Ke rêt dawim xoşim bwêy.
(Heme 1996: 63).

I would love to utter your name
Ah, what a magic name this is!
I am sure I am the luckiest woman
That a man like you loves me and
I am much luckier
That you have allowed me to love you

The articulation of such non-exploitative and well-intentioned love relationships in poetry is a novel characteristic of Kurdish women's poetry. These love forms were the subject of Kurdish women's poetry in the past, but they were expressed in a simplistic fashion under the influence of the traditional habits of society where men were the key players and subjects and women were objects and obedient lovers.

The second poetry book of Heme, *He Asks for My Hand in an Autumn* (2009), contains fresher themes and a variety of issues that complement her first book. Although this collection includes several poems republished from her first book, it does use an innovative method in addressing a number of social cases that presently face Heme's society. Equally, the troubled situation of Kurdish women does not escape this latest edition as she dedicates it to her mother, who, for Heme, stands for the sufferings and injustices of life. Heme is rather successful in tackling the issue of women in her poetry as she approaches it with extreme care and exposes the problems confronting Kurdish women in a somewhat realistic manner. Dihokî sees Heme as a sharp-minded Kurdish woman writer who has clearly written "interesting and valuable articles on the situation of Kurdish women in Kurdish journals and magazines" (Dihokî 2008: 312). Heme is in support of the feminist mission to restore the human value and position of women being taken from them in a world quite dominated by men.

The first poem that gives way to other poetic texts of *He Asks for My Hand in an Autumn* (2009) is "Nêwendî Destekan" (The Middle of Hands) which recounts the tragic story of two lovers who have had a secret romantic rendezvous away from their families. This poem symbolises the lack of freedom that lovers sustain in Heme's society which in turn makes the two lovers to meet in secret, but instead expect serious consequences if detected by the male members of their families. Again, the embodiment of family honour in women restricts the freedom of lovers to meet in public. The poet draws a remarkable scenario where the two lovers capitalise on their date, but such a date ends in tragedy when the male lover inevitably loses his sexual control and makes his beloved lose her virginity. With poetic imagination, Heme describes the rendezvous as spoilt and life-threatening because this act will be perceived by the family of the girl as adultery and the usual punishment for it is death in search of "cleaning the family's honour". This poem indicates that intimate love relationships are in danger in Heme's society and lovers are unwillingly restricted by a number of socially and culturally constructed gender barriers and norms that prevent them from behaving freely with each other. Additionally, it shows the suppression of sexual pleasures and practices that oblige the lovers to exercise them in secrecy and accept the consequences. Ironically, Heme tells the events in this poem in a rather more optimistic and challenging fashion, as she allows the lovers to do

everything irrespective of the society's disciplinary measures. Despite the fears, Heme shows the two lovers as taking maximum pleasure from their date and feeling that there is no one else in the world but them:

Seretay 'eşqî zêd guļ bû	The beginning of country's love was a flower
Naweřast koļanêkî kwêr	The middle was a dead-end lane
Kotayîş riştinî xwên bû, ey kiçî baş	The end was the shedding of blood, you good girl
Çon derbaz bîn lem haje hajî nezîfe??	How can we escape this gushing sound of bleeding??

(Heme 2009: 11).

Such sexual scenarios are rare in Kurdish women's poetry and it is arguable that few poets like Heme have the courage to insert such precarious themes and expressions in their poetry because of the danger of losing their moral reputation or encounter with the conservative and radical male members of society who are even ready to eliminate such liberal-minded women poets from life. This innovation in style significantly differentiates the current generation of Kurdish women poets from their predecessors who are often identified more as copycats of men's poetry.

The phobia of sexual practice between unmarried women and men is one of the obstacles to a healthy and reliable relationship between the two sexes. The dominance of religion and patriarchal culture over all the social behaviours of Kurdish society has badly reflected on a steady improvement in the decrepit situation of Kurdish women. Heme supports the idea that a solution for a better understanding between men and women should be the enhancement of trust between these two genders and the erasure of all gender identities and discourses which are based on the masculinity and femininity divisions. This attitude similarly comes from her rejection of the belief that any kind of relationship to exist between women and men is primarily based on an interest in sexual desire. Dwelling on the gender relations in Kurdish society, Heme argues that "suspicion of sex is the first reading made of any relationship between a man and woman in our society. And it is this perception which has created a huge gap between these two main elements of society" (Heme 2011b: 15).

Being a diasporic poet, it is expected to identify the reflection of homeland themes in Heme's poetry. In her second collection, the theme of nostalgia pervades a large area of the book. Heme presumes that being away from one's homeland means solitude and

death of conscience. However, this presumption also constructs links with the theory of gender and nationalism and the idea of women as the mother of the nation. As mothers are compassionate towards their children, Heme's life in exile in solitude makes her feel guilty towards her nation and realise that she has not been a good mother or she would not have left them behind without a carer to protect them from misfortunes. Although Heme is living in a Western country where her rights are guaranteed, she still misses her Kurdistan house and her family whom she shares very beautiful memories with. In "Tenhayî" (Loneliness), Heme seems to be groaning deeply with pains of remembering the past days she has spent in her house back in southern Kurdistan. She turns this poem into a movie where she sees all her daily routines and responsibilities that she used to have when she was living in Slêmanî. This poem implies that the poet is in an unstable psychological condition and is dubious about everything around her, as it also shows a person being mentally divided between two geographies:

Yadî maçekem dekem	I recall my home
Yadî çayek ke be تنها deyxomewe	The memory of a tea that I drink in loneliness
Le hemû şitê dûdîlm	I doubt everything
Be taybetî pêkewebûn lege xomda	Particularly being with myself
(Heme 2009: 81).	

Heme is seemingly trapped between two cultures, but the significant part about her poetry is her tremendous concentration on the social issues facing her community and backing up her remedies for such issues by the experience she has harvested from the culture of the "Others". Her poetry is a clear picture painted with a variety of colours, each colour representing an important aspect of human life.

3.6 Vînos Fayeq⁶³ (b.1969)

⁶³ Vînos Fayeq Nurî was born in the city of Slêmanî in southern Kurdistan in 1969. Her literary and journalistic name is Vînos Fayeq. Fayeq finishes her primary school education in both Arabic and French languages in Algeria and her secondary and preparatory studies in Kurdish and Arabic in southern Kurdistan. She studies philosophy in Baghdad University in 1989. Fayeq is a known Kurdish writer, poet, critic and journalist. She has worked for many local and international media associations and has taken part in many conferences and workshops in southern Kurdistan and Europe. She is an active feminist and human rights activist whose works centre around the genocide of Kurds during the Anfal operations in the late 1980s. As a journalist, she has worked for several local Kurdish TVs and radio stations, as well as a number of Kurdish magazines and newspapers. Fayeq is an acknowledged literary writer in Kurdish, Arabic and Dutch, and has published many books in these languages, ranging from poetry books to books on social reform and journalism. Some of the poetry books are written jointly with a group of Iraqi poets

Fayeq is another Kurdish feminist voice who is struggling to regain the appropriated social and political rights of Kurdish women. She is also the poet of the 1990s who was personally caught in the Kurdish civil war between two main Kurdish political parties in 1994. According to her biography⁶⁴, it was this war that sends her to exile in search of peace and economic survival. Being an active woman and feminist in the Kurdish political arena during this war makes her a target for elimination by one of the Kurdish political parties. In addition to this life status, another thing that differentiates her from many other poets is that she writes poetry in a multicultural context where various languages and audiences are involved. In the diaspora, Fayeq has produced poetry books in Dutch and Arabic in collaboration with Arab poets.

It is clear in Fayeq's poems and the literary articles she has written on the social problems of Kurdish society that she is dissatisfied with the general situation of Kurdish women. Although Fayeq's experience of poetry writing in Kurdish is not as rich as her experience in Arabic and Dutch languages, her Kurdish poetic texts are charged with feminist ideologies. And together with the feminist undertones, she politicises her poetry to make it a springboard for protecting the national interests of her nation and showing the national catastrophes that have happened to her people in southern Kurdistan. Fayeq is against the political ideology of Kurdish nationalist parties which has suspended the provision of equal rights for women for other more important national issues, including the creation of a Kurdish state. She believes that now southern Kurdistan is free, such patriarchy-based policy should no longer sustain and women must find their place in the political future of Kurdistan. She states that:

living in Holland in the early 2000s in both Arabic and Dutch languages. Her only poetry book in Sorani Kurdish is *Gunahe Cwanekan* (The Pretty Sins), published in Holland in 2001. This poetry collection is also published in Kirmancî Kurdish in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2007. Following a deep political crisis and an economic instability in southern Kurdistan in the middle of the 1990s, Fayeq flees from Slêmanî towards Iran, and then to Holland, where she has been living since 1997. Currently in Holland, she continues her fight via the civil means for establishing the suppressed rights of Kurdish women. It is worth mentioning that these bits of information about Fayeq's professional career have been achieved through a personal correspondence with her and her special webpage.

⁶⁴ Fayeq's biography is saved in the researcher's *Gmail* account as a word document file which was sent in a personal correspondence with her. For privacy reasons, the address details of this specific email exchange between the researcher and the poet are not revealed.

The mentality, thinking and vision of women have changed to a degree that no longer they will accept humiliation, oppression and subjugation in this age of new world order, adding that the era of silence is over (Fayeq 2011: 17d).

Fayeq seems to worship her poetry as she implies that she cannot literally live without it. Poetry is the only means that can make Fayeq cheerful and resist the anxieties of life. It is like a person whom she trusts and entrusts the secrets of her heart and mind. In the introduction of *Gunahe Cwanekan* (The Pretty Sins) (2001), she says “it is only for poetry that I can declare the secret of my heart and the secrets that I tell poetry have a different colour quite similar to the different colour of the sins that poetry make me commit” (Fayeq 2001: 11). This indicates that poetry is Fayeq’s closest and dearest friend who dutifully listens and attends to her unfulfilled ambitions and complaints. Fayeq is rebellious against the patriarchal traditions of her society and that genuine sense of rebellion is deeply ingrained in her poetry. As a liberal feminist, she believes that without equality in gender rights, women of her society can never be free. She champions the right of Kurdish women to work in the public sector, administer important institutions and participate in taking crucial political decisions. She says:

Preventing women from real participation in politics and the establishment of peace as well as playing a role in the political destiny of their country is the prime factor that keeps their cause localised rather than globalised and their feminist discourses fail to be recognised on a universal level (Fayeq 2011: 17e).

Fayeq calls for the ultimate liberation of women’s voice from the men’s reactionary policies. Interestingly, the civil and bright method of struggle adopted by Fayeq for the emancipation of Kurdish women is in agreement with Erben’s definition of feminist writers’ task when he argues that:

Generally, however, feminist writers are concerned with the political, social, and cultural equality of women and with researching the effects of gender upon writing— determining how the writing of women differs from the writing of men (Erben 2012: 1).

It is a property of Fayeq’s poetry that when one reads her poetic texts written in support of the women’s cause, they immediately recognise the female tone of the poems and the language that is characteristic of women. She uses a feminised language in her poetry to properly fit the aims she is running after. It is much in praise of her poetry that Kurdish critic Heme Se’îd Hesen considers the language of Fayeq’s poetry as feminine

and free from male influence and imitation. He seems to be using a rather exaggerated style in assessing the content of Fayegeq's poetry. And technically, Hesen is amazed by the poetic style and expressions used by Fayegeq, believing that:

Vinos Fayegeq's poetry has a slim body because she considers brevity, her portrayals captivate our attention because they are beautiful, love gushes out from her expressions because they are graceful, and authentic poetry drips down from her because she writes at the command of a god who is resting on the chair of her soul. A bravery star shines in her expressions which can help us recognise her poetry immediately (Hesen 2011: 15).

Fayegeq even in her poems which are mainly written in reminiscent of her homeland does use a style typical of women and write in women's terms. This is an innovation by her to avoid the classical form of nostalgic feelings towards homeland which is seen as a typically male invention. Thus, it is interesting to find that in "Wîlatname" (Homeland Letter), Fayegeq makes use of a love relationship to remember the beautiful nature and landscape of southern Kurdistan as well as the calamities and sad stories that are stuck in the mind of every Kurdish individual in this part of Kurdistan. In this poem, she pleads her beloved to give her his hands to fill it with the breathtaking fragrance of Kurdistan mountains, flowers and snow. She also asks him for his eyes to show them the red blood of Kurdish martyrs who either have fallen for the sake of free Kurdistan or been martyred by their enemies for their Kurdish identity. A noticeable element in this poem is a symbolic reference to Godot, the imaginary character of *Waiting for Godot* (1948), an absurd play written by Samuel Beckett (b.1906-d.1989), who was endlessly waited for but never appeared. Godot in this poem refers to those Kurds who were arrested in masses by the Iraqi army at the time of the toppled Ba'th regime during the genocide operations of Anfal, but never returned to their families alive except for their flimsy bones which were found in mass graves in the Iraqi deserts:

Her dû lepî destitim berê
Piñî kem le bonî şax û
Nêgiz û
Befir.

Give me both of your hand palms
To fill them with the perfume of mountain,
Daffodil and
Snow.

Her dû çawtim berê
Piñî kem le rengî sûrî xwênî şehîd û
Le rengî serkewtin û şikist
Le rengî çawekan ke le çawerwany
Godo da sipî debîn.

Give me both of your eyes
To fill them with the red colour of martyr's blood and
The colour of victory and defeat
The colour of eyes which turn white
While waiting for Godot.

(Fayeq 2001: 29).

Like the preceding poets, it seems that Fayeq's closeness in time to the tragic events of her nation results in the integration of such tragedies into her poetry. The emotional impact of these tragedies was very huge that their reflection is clear on a wide scale in Kurdish literature and politics. Besides, Fayeq considers the remembrance of these events as her national duty and part of her poetic political struggle. Through this struggle, she attempts to share the Kurdish political ground with men.

Perhaps the most influential poem of *The Pretty Sins* (2001) in terms of defence of women's rights and position in society is "27-9". This poem is written in a totally feminist spirit since it shows the high level of disrespect for the female gender in Kurdish society. Fayeq believes that the traditional dominance of patriarchy over Kurdish society has left no powers in the hands of women and has made them lose trust in their abilities and skills to stand side by side with men in social, political, and economic life. She seems to have a faint hope in a change in the situation of gender in southern Kurdistan because, according to her, those who run the solid policy of improving gender relations are predominately men, who themselves have constructed women as subordinate to them and unable to face life challenges on their own. She argues that:

What has failed the question of women in our region to develop is that even those men who speak about the cause and problem of women continually portray women as a powerless creature with no strong will. Meanwhile, they urge society to pity them (Fayeq 2011: 17e).

The main theme of "27-9" is misogyny and the dominant masculine discourse that men are the backbone and power of the social and political systems. This title refers to the day Fayeq was born to a world where women are looked down on. The originality of this poem is that Fayeq gives herself as concrete evidence of the oppression of Kurdish women from the day they were born. This poem carries similar feminist attitude towards the tribal Kurdish society pointed out earlier by Begîxanî which denounces the hatred shown by the male members of family towards the girl babies when they are born. This hatred emanates from the social stigmatisation of women whose source is the gender identities assigned to them along history by men. Fayeq justifies this ignorant view held by the majority of Kurdish families by her birthday when her family reluctantly felt

unhappy in their neighbourhood and flew into a temper following her unwanted birth. She is critical of the classical mentality of the tribal Kurdish men who never consider changing their understanding of women. Besides, she is shocked by the fact that such men have never one day thought that the creature they are against and regard as the symbol of shame was once their mother and gave birth to them:

Lew rojewe	From that day
Heta êsta	Until now
Tênegeyîştîm	I have not understood
Ew zemaney	The time
(Pîyawânî xêl), bo le dayik	When the tribal men,
Bûnî kiçêk	For the birth of a girl,
Quŕyan saz deda	Made troubles
Çon deyan twanî	How could they
Seyrî çawî	Look at
Daykiyan biken??!	Their mother's eyes??!
(Fayeq 2001: 62).	

These example poems show that Fayeq is determined to liberate Kurdish women from the patriarchal domain that has taken away all their authority and their right to express themselves as normal human beings. Alternatively, national themes also form a fundamental part of Fayeq's poetry. She has made a good balance between a fight for her rights as a woman and a fight for the national rights of her nation. Like many other poets, Fayeq is also deeply touched by the human tragedy of Halabja. She feels hysterical as how a regime dared to gas children, women, and the elderly of a town who had no harm to its authoritarian agenda in any way. In "Bo Mîndaŕanî Heŕebce" (For the Children of Halabja), Fayeq makes her distress clear at the tragic scenes of children being burnt to death by the poisonous mustard gas and their little scorched bodies littering the streets and courtyards of Halabja. Like Herdî, she criticises God for being nowhere at the time the town was gassed to protect the children. She accuses God of oblivion and negligence and implicates him in this horrendous crime against humanity. In an innovative poetic imagery, she demonstrates that even fire literally feels bewildered and hesitant as it does not know where to start so as to burn the little children because of their small and immature bodies lying abandoned from their mothers:

Zor gewreye sûtan	The burn is so huge
Le biçûkîtan sersame	It is surprised by your littleness
Nazanê be kwêtan dest pê bika	It wonders which part of your body to begin with

Be qijî kem û kaştan
Yan be lêwî aştan..?
Yan êskî nemeyîwtan
Yan demî piş le şîrtan..?
(Fayeq 2001: 87-8).

With your little and pale hair
Or with your scarlet lips..?
Or your immature bones
Or your mouth which is full of milk..?

These themes and several others give a particular importance to Fayeq's poetic experience. Besides national and romantic subjects, she hopes that her poetry will become a source of understanding for the men of her society to stop oppressing women and using violence against them. Moreover, she urges women to initiate serious struggle for ending their subjugation by men and avoid waiting for men to improve their situation since that will never happen in the positive manner they expect. Fayeq is very pessimistic about any reform to happen in relation to gender inequality in Kurdistan, as she, equally, believes that "it is impossible for a creative woman to grow in the shade of any man" (Fayeq 2010: 48). Thus, Fayeq is adopting a sound feminist approach away from home towards solving the issue of women in her society.

3.7 Lazo⁶⁵ (b.1985)

Lazo's age shows that she is from a new generation of Kurdish women poets. She says "I published my first poem in 2003" (Lazo 2010: 104). This means that she started writing poetry when she was living in the diaspora and when her homeland was making a steady political and economic progress. The time gap between Lazo and other poets is evidence why she does not approach political topics and the calamities which have happened to her people. Lazo seems uninterested in politics and more interested in romantic relationships. She is a fresh poet in a fresh Kurdish literary age. Her poetic subjects and style are way different from a majority of Kurdish women poets. The themes she raises in her poetry are inventive, personal and sexual. However, her poetic approach is much influenced by

⁶⁵ Lazo Azad Bastan was born in the city of Slêmanî in southern Kurdistan in 1985. She completes her primary education in Slêmanî. She migrates with her family to Sweden in the early 2000, where she finishes her high school education. She starts writing for Kurdish journals, magazines and literary websites in 2003 in Sweden. Lazo moves to Birmingham, United Kingdom, in 2007 to pursue her university studies at Newman University College. She has only one poetry book, *Kiras Reş* (Dressed in Black), published in 2007. The book is co-authored by her husband, Mardîn Îbrahîm, who is a young Kurdish poet, novelist and writer. Lazo has a very young experience in poetry writing; however, she continues writing single poems for Kurdish newspapers and literary supplements. Despite the basic fact that her poetry book is written jointly with her husband, one can easily distinguish her poems in the book from her husband's as they are clearly labelled with the names of each poet.

her diasporic experiences and the freedom these experiences have brought to her. The secular status and education of her family and husband are other factors behind her brave poetic expressions and topics. In her poetry, Lazo looks in front and ahead rather than back. She is creative in her poetry and avoids discussing issues which she believes have expired.

Lazo has a short, often interrupted experience in poetry production. It seems that her engagement with family life and study has been a big obstacle ahead of her poetic development. Unlike previous poets, she appears less often now in Kurdish literary circles, as her ability to continue writing poetry appears to be limited. However, Lazo's only published poetry book is groundbreaking in terms of the defence of women's rights and the exposure of genuine Kurdish women's feelings and understanding of sexual matters. Lazo is much similar to Herdî in frankly talking about her body and the value of intimate love relationships. She is keen to choose a voice that really represents her sex and character. Giving prominence to the personality and traits of woman is one of the basic aspects of her poetry. She acts as a staunch feminist defender of the position of women in society. It is no surprise to find Lazo fitting the argument made by Stimpson as she compares the struggle of women writers in America and Europe in the past to what feminist critics are currently engaged in to regain the hegemony stolen from them by men. As a modern feminist critic, Stimpson states that "many women writers in the past have undergone a process similar to that of feminist critics today", adding that "they have cut loose from male hegemony and sought another, more authentic voice" (Stimpson 1983: 274). With her rather slender portfolio of poetic works, Lazo has been successful in creating a female voice in her poetry and, to a large extent, disposing of the male stereotypes of women. Through a careful study of her poetry collection, it will be clear that she enjoys a liberty that the majority of her fellow countrywomen lack. She freely speaks about the sexual concepts and the pleasure of mating with men, as well as the sexual organs of her body. Her courage of reflection on her personal sexual experience and discussion of her own body is unmatched in Kurdish women's poetry. The socially and culturally flexible context through which Lazo has been writing poetry was not available for her predecessors, which is a reason why she has been writing differently from them.

She gives the process a sort of identity, explaining the specific responsibilities that lie on the shoulders of Kurdish husbands during pregnancy:

Êsta Nîştîman destî be piştîyewe girtuwe, Dûgiyane ew.	Now Homeland is laying her hands on her back, She is pregnant.
Êwaran telefonêk bo mêrdekey dekat û Daway lê dekat şerbetî mêmî bo bêmêwewe (<i>ibid.</i>).	She phones her husband in the evenings and Asks him to bring her home raisin juice

Importantly, Seřac (2009: 152) has a similar interpretation for the above poetic text as he believes that the concept and theme of homeland occupy a large area of the thematic ground of Lazo's *Dressed in Black* (2007). Furthermore, he is impressed by the multiplicity of meanings that the term "homeland" holds in "Falling in Love Again with Homeland", arguing that Lazo:

[...] recounts the past times of her childhood and girlhood in an excited moment of nostalgic contemplation. She takes homeland away from the traditional mode of portrayal and shiny compliments to make it symbolise a maiden, a spinster, a housewife, and a pregnant woman. In the behaviour and character of the motherland, Lazo embodies all the materials, items and requirements of the women's world as well as the customs and procedures followed during childbirth in Kurdish culture (Seřac 2009: 152-3).

But another significance of this poem is its connection with the arguments raised by the theorists and critics who have been questioning the relation between gender and nationalism. The discourse of women being given the role of mothering the nation authenticates itself in this poem of Lazo when she acknowledges that her exilic survival is firmly dependent on her memory of homeland. Meanwhile, the metaphorical depiction of homeland being pregnant with a child is also a clear indication to the gender identity women are basically known by as the "reproducers of the nation". Yuval-Davis's (1997: 37) argument that "women are constructed as biological reproducers of 'the nation'" has concrete proof displayed through the details of this poem.

As a rebellious Kurdish feminist, Lazo hates and denounces the male-centred power of society. The poem that embraces Lazo's wide condemnation of male power is "Ger To Bimrît" (If You Die) in which she criticises the patriarchal mentality of those Kurdish men who only think about hurting women and killing them for no clear reasons. She regrets the fact that such men have no mercy towards women who serve them day and

night, and they furiously shout orders at them as if they are treating slaves. In this poem, she imagines herself to be a person hired to take tea to ignorant and arrogant men who never understand and use the language of peace. In his critical analysis of “If You Die”, Kurdish critic Muhsîn Aware hails Lazo as a daring feminist poet who confronts patriarchy in Kurdish society. He states that “although Lazo expresses her love towards men for being the life partner of women, she considers part of them as aggressive, apoplectic with rage, and killers” (Aware 2008: 8). Aware’s poetic assessment of Lazo’s texts is that she writes with a fully feminine spirit, adding that “if we even remove the name of Lazo from “If You Die”, one can tell that this poem belongs to a female poet” (*ibid.*). Thus, Lazo believes that if it is dangerously impossible to face men physically, it is quite possible to challenge them in poetry:

Ger to bimrît
 Min debme çagêrî ew pîyawaney
 Hîç nazanin,
 Şer nebêt
 Hîç nazanin,
 Tûreyî nebêt
 Hîç nazanin,
 Kuştin nebêt
 (Lazo and Îbrahîm 2007: 158-9)

If you die
 I will be the tea-taker of those men
 Who know nothing,
 Except for war
 Who know nothing,
 Except for anger
 Who know nothing,
 Except for killing

The courage to talk about sex and the overt eroticism of several poetic texts by Lazo sets her at the forefront of the small group of liberal Kurdish feminist poets. She unreservedly describes the most sensitive sexual parts of her body and tries to use them as erotically effective tools to gain control over men. It is a new phenomenon adopted by the current generation of Kurdish women poets, as this move was hardly thought of by their predecessors for strict cultural reasons. As a dedicated feminist, Lazo attempts to give a fresh feminine sense to her poems and believes that she should speak chiefly as a woman in her poems without considering the surrounding social and cultural barriers. This stance of Lazo comes in harmony with what Rooney perceives feminism and its relevant critical theories should essentially do so as to promote women’s writings. Rooney argues that one of the fundamental tasks of feminism involves “a “rewriting” of femininity or femininities, of the categories that define women as women” (Rooney 2006: 73). Crucially, the poem in which Lazo justifies her womanhood and loyalty to her

Kinêr Hesen is a young Kurdish woman poet whose modest experience of poetry writing is interesting. She is one of those Kurdish women poets who have managed to produce inspiring and decent poetry within a short period of time. Like Lazo, Hesen is a post-2003 woman poet whose poetry is more concerned with the social side of society and its gender relations rather than its political history. She focuses on the gender-generated injustices towards women and the male- and culture-constructed stereotyping of them as the honour of the family and nation and household care providers. Hesen's emergence in the diaspora as a poet is in coincidence with an increase in women's feminist activism in southern Kurdistan for the establishment of their gender rights. She contributes with her poetry to the transnational feminist campaign which Mojab and Gorman describe as a revolution brought to the Kurdish society by a group of Kurdish women's rights activists "to resist and reform its masculine, patriarchal-feudal-religious dispositions" (Mojab and Gorman 2007: 66). It is possibly the concentration of focus on classic Kurdish patriarchy that differentiates Hesen's poetry from the poetry of other Kurdish women poets. Hesen's poetic work embraces a variety of social, national, romantic, feminist, diasporic, cultural and, to a certain extent, political themes that are cleverly put into context. She presents meaning clearly in her poetic texts through the use of poetic techniques and devices such as metaphor, simile and imagery, as she makes benefit from the poetic scenarios and narrations to achieve the targets she is after in her poetry.

Ideas and fantasies are spread over different geographies in Hesen's poetry which symbolise her oscillation between the two feelings of desperation and hope. The general feeling of desperation caused by the tragic situation of women in her society and that of hope that a change is likely to happen quickly to restore the suppressed rights and peace to Kurdish women who have always been the victim of patriarchal rule and gender-based violence. It is important to discern that Hesen is frantically fighting for the basic rights of

many poetry reading events in Şeqlawe, Hewlêr, Berlin and Nürnberg. Hesen leaves southern Kurdistan for Germany in 2000, but that does not affect her ambitions to develop her poetry writing skills. Academically, Hesen starts her university study at the department of Middle Eastern Studies at Tübingen University in Germany in 2008. She is currently pursuing her master programme at the University of Eberhard Karls in the city of Tübingen in Germany. *Mîtra to Kuřî Kêyi?* (Whose Son Are You, Mithra?) is her only poetry book, which is published in Hewlêr in southern Kurdistan in 2009. Although Hesen is now busy with her postgraduate studies, she actively carries on writing poems for the Kurdish literary magazines, newspapers and websites. Additionally, she is a productive feminist activist who has written several articles on the gender relations and problems in Kurdish society.

women, even possibly more seriously than other Kurdish women poets. The simple proof is that most of the poems of her only poetry book recount the very sad stories that have happened to women of her community and underline the gendered treatment women receive in Kurdish society. Hesen is an archenemy of patriarchy and blames it for all the miseries of Kurdish women. She calls for eradicating all forms of patriarchy in Kurdish society, including the Kurdish language, which she believes is structured on an entirely patriarchal system. In a linguistic article where she plainly analyses those Kurdish terms which are fully charged with patriarchal meanings, she argues that “patriarchy has turned into a mill for grinding the abilities of women” (Xanim⁶⁸ 2007: 3). She realises that a change has to be made in the vocabularies of Kurdish language to neutralise those words which in some clear ways enhance the rule of patriarchy in society. She (2007: 1) gives the word “fraternity” as an example, which is used frequently by the people of her region to mean peace and coexistence while it is composed of the word “brother” that has nothing to do with the female sex. From this example, she thinks that women are disregarded as being an essential part of society. Hesen’s focus on language is an indication that Kurdish language, quite similar to all other languages of the world, is dominated by male terminology and women are obliged to copy it without any chance for them to place their forms of expression. Similarly, it is a call for a balance in terms used by the two genders and an end for the silencing of women’s language. This particular problem of language appropriation by men seems to be on a global scale as it also clearly shapes a significant part of the agenda of Anglo-American feminist criticism. Feminist critics of this school of feminism argue that women are indirectly assimilated into the dominant male discourse by their use of a language which is mainly representative of the male voice. Writing on the theories that emphasise the suppression of women’s language, American feminist Terry Winant affirms this fact as she says:

Theories of women's language have, by now, been elaborated at all levels of sophistication, and on the basis of scholarship in a large number of disciplines. Such theories are alike in explaining that women use men's language because our own has been silenced. According to some, this means that women use a language that is the same as that used by men; according to others, it means that women use a fragment or distortion of the language used by men—namely, that

⁶⁸ Xanim is a pen name Hesen uses uniquely for this article in place of her widely used poetic name which is always Hesen.

fragment or distortion of the dominant discourse assigned to women by the dominant, androcentric institutions (Winant 1987: 126).

The form of patriarchal disease Hesen dwells on in her poetry has entered all the joints of Kurdish society, particularly its literary realm. She, herself, is a clear-cut victim of this male dominance over Kurdish literature as one can seldom find a piece of critical article being written on her poetic work.

It is feasible to assume Hesen's *Whose Son Are You, Mithra?* (2009) a revolution against the extensive injustice done by men to women in Kurdish society. She calls upon women to unite against the exploitative male power and stop following the classical traditions designed solely by their "forefathers". This personal outcry of Hesen echoes noticeably high in "Em Sataney Azarekanman le Yek Asman Da'ebarin" (Those Moments When Our Pains Fall from One Sky) in which she calls for a radical female uprising against the suppressive male rulers of Kurdish society. Hesen urges her fellow Kurdish women to depend totally on their inner strength and rebel against those egotistic Kurdish men who reject to accept them as half of community. She believes that it is high time that they no longer give their fate to the hands of men who are unwilling to share social, political and cultural life with them:

Ba lem wişane yaxî bîn ke nîwey komeļ esnewe.
Let us revolt against those words that wipe out half of society
Ba rêçkekanman bigořîn bibîn be xawenî çaw û hizrî xoman
Let us change our paths to be in charge of our vision and thought
Çawe kizekan îtir natwanen bimangeyenin be cêy mebest
Short-sighted eyes can no longer take us to the intended destination
Gwêçkekanyan twanay dengî jin nabîstin.
Their ears fail to hear the power of women's voice (Hesen 2009: 15).

In the last few lines of the same poem, Hesen addresses the public in general to come together to end inequality between women and men and make an honest, gender-friendly and beautiful society that holds all colours and species in one hand. This reconciliatory message in the poem stands for Hesen's noble aims and more positive attitude towards men who, on the contrary, think the other way round:

Ba mirovekan dabeş nekeyîn beser dû beşî nayeksan le nêr û mê.
Let us not divide humans into two unequal groups of male and female.
Ba ême le cwanî ke cwane, le rastî wek ewey raste,
Let us from beauty which is beautiful, from truth as what is right,

Le pakî komelga drust keyîn...
From integrity, establish society... (*ibid.*).

The memory of homeland and family members left behind does have a notable place in Hesen's poetry. As a young lady poet who has left her homeland in search of broader freedom and knowledge, diaspora is a place to which she does not have any personal attachment. Environmentally, she seems to have no interest in the beauty of Europe, but, rather, is more connected to the miraculous nature of Kurdistan's seasons and natural landscape. However, her connectedness to motherland's nature can critically imply the gender discourse of women's biologically-influenced proximity to nature and their ability to reproduce "new 'things' naturally" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 6).

It is a common feature among all diasporic Kurdish women poets that they bodily live in Europe, while mentally and spiritually they are at home in southern Kurdistan. As for Hesen, young Kurdish poet Raber Farîq implies that she writes poems as a close observer of the general situation of her society. In a very brief comment within an interview with Hesen on her poetic experience, Farîq states that "the body of this poet is in exile while her poems are always here [he means southern Kurdistan] unidentified" (Hesen 2011: 4). The piece of poem that best represents Hesen's obsession with the sweet memories of motherland is "Daye" (Mother). This poem shows the technical ability of Hesen in using a variety of poetic devices for rendering a range of meanings and themes in one single poem. Although the main theme of the poem is the love of mother, through the personification of homeland, mother also refers to Kurdistan, the motherland, that Hesen has left behind. Interestingly, Hesen addresses two mothers concurrently while expressing her deep love and admiration in the poem. She feels much indebted to these mothers for their great attention and the peace she had when she was in their care. She promises to return to pay them tribute and do all that she can to keep their names shining and high above all the sacred things, but she is afraid that the violent storm of diaspora might prevent her from delivering on her promise:

Daye gîyan	Dear mother
Ke hatmewe basî beharî bo ekem	When I return, I will tell you about Spring
Ke êwareyek legeî rojwabûn heîdê û	Which rises after sunset in an evening and
Tarîkî eyşarêtewe û win ebê	Darkness hides it and it disappears
Ke hatmewe romanî gewreyî to enûsmewe ke ta temen	
When I returned, I will write your greatness epic and as long as my age	

Berew pêş ramepêçê, min le astî to da biçuktir ebmewe û
 Becomes older, I will be much smaller vis-à-vis you and
 Sozî baweşt û nîga aramekanit giringtir ebin bo manewem le jîyan
 Your cuddle and peaceful looks will be more important for my survival
 Namom, le xom namotir to ebînim! I feel alienated, I see you more alienated than me!
 Baļe şikawekanim le xom piřpûttir My broken wings shabbier than me
 Epêçme rohit ta le daykayeft qûltir bibmewe
 Will fold around your soul to go deeper into your motherhood
 Reşebay tarawge dûrtirm exatewe! Diasporic tempest pushes me further away!
 (Hesen 2009: 57-8)

The controversial aspect of this poem is its confirmation of the social construction of woman as the mother of the nation. Hesen's symbolic reference to Kurdistan as her mother glorifies the mainstream gender discourse that women are the symbolic and cultural reproducers of the nation as well as representative of its social, cultural and political boundaries, or are the bearers of national authenticity.

The themes expressed in Hesen's poetry are rather fresh and are closely interrelated with the current reality of Kurdish society. Although she is now away from her homeland, she is aware of the general condition of women in her community and is determined to show the facts as they are in her poetry. Living in a Western country where all the rights of women are guaranteed makes Hesen feel sorry for her sisters in southern Kurdistan and use her freedom for defending their rights in her poetry. A prominent theme that is repeated in several poems in Hesen's poetry collection is "honour killing" or "honour crimes". She condemns this form of gender-based killing of women which has claimed the lives of thousands of women in southern Kurdistan. She believes that patriarchal mentality and religion are primarily behind an increase in this crime which does not know any age limit or social background. According to Hesen, women from all strata of Kurdish society are liable to this crime, particularly those living in rural areas. The poem that appallingly features "honour killing" in southern Kurdistan is "Berdî Sûr" (The Red Stone) which recounts the tragic story of a young girl, named Du'a⁶⁹, who was

⁶⁹ Du'a was a 17-year-old Kurdish Yezidi girl, stoned to death in public by her relatives on 7th April, 2007 in the town of Bashika, near the city of Mosul, in northern Iraq. Her only "sin" was a love relationship with a Sunni Muslim man, and she was reportedly converted to Islam. Du'a's tragic death sparked a fleeting bloody conflict between the Muslim and Yezidi communities and brought death carried out by "terrorist" Islamists to tens of Yezidis. The barbaric killing of Du'a shocked people in the entire region and was covered widely by both local and international media outlets. Her incident put the Kurdish government in an embarrassing situation and obliged it to take urgent legal actions against the perpetrators of such tragedies. As a result, the government urgently ordered the formation of two fully empowered general

stoned to death by her relatives for falling in love with a man. Significantly, this poem is written in the same month and year when this tragic incident had happened and is particularly written under the influence of this tragedy. Similar to other people who have either heard about or witnessed this human crime, Hesen is traumatised by the brutality of killing this innocent girl who was still in her mid teens. Metaphorically, she uses “red stone” to symbolise the concrete blocks which were used to smash Du’a’s head and burst her brain out. She criticises the Kurdish authorities for failing to protect this defenseless little girl who was simply in love in a lawless region where there is no human sense for love and women are banned from practising it. The poetic expressions used in this poem are critical of the ruling system in place in southern Kurdistan, particularly with regard to its position on the status of women in society:

Xunçe guļ lêt negořê	You flower bud do not be confused
Eme berde eřjête ser cestey kařit	This is stone that falls onto your teen body
Guļî sũrî ‘eřiq nĩye.	It is not love’s red flower ⁷⁰ .
Na azĩzim eme biloke û bo serĩ to drust kirawe	
No my dear, this is stone which is made for crushing your head	
Lêt negořê, lem wiļate bê ĥakme da	Do not be confused, in this headless country
Lem wiļate bê wĩjdane da...lem ġabate da...	
In this ruthless country...in this jungle...	
Bilokekan bo barandin drust ekrên	Stones are made for dropping down
Nek bo binaġey em kořkey ekra bibête cêjwanit	
Not for the foundation of the mansion that could have become your rendezvous site	

(Hesen 2009: 103).

It is clear from the above poetic texts that Hesen has managed to stretch her hands to very crucial issues surrounding the question of women in Kurdish society. And the only channel through which she can expose them is poetry. Life in Europe has helped Hesen to be brave enough to reject silence over the death of women in southern Kurdistan for

directorates for fighting violence against women in both Hewlêr and Slêmanî. Meanwhile, the Kurdish parliament also took its position on Du’a’s murder by amending and reinforcing all its legislations which were already enacted in protection of women.

⁷⁰ Guļî sũr (red flower) is quite a common motif in Kurdish verbal art which has a variety of meanings. In romance, red flower is the most precious gift exchanged between two lovers. In southern Kurdistan, it is usually a red flower which is often exchanged by lovers, either the married or unmarried couples, on Valentine’s Day. While in Kurdish politics, red flower represents the blood of martyrs who have died for the sake of Kurdistan’s liberation and freedom. Furthermore, there is also a preventive function for the red flower which is common in the Kurdish countryside. Red flowers are used by the Kurdish villagers to attract a small red caterpillar and prevent its infestation at home. It may also be worth mentioning that red flowers are similarly used by the Kurds for house decorations.

reasons of honour protection and engagement in a love affair. As a Kurdish feminist poet, Hesen seems insistent on the establishment of women's rights in her home region and an end to their violent oppression.

Chapter Four

The Poetry of Home Kurdish Women Poets

Chapter Four

The Poetry of Home Kurdish Women Poets

4.1 A Brief Overview

The number of home Kurdish women poets is almost five times bigger, if not more, than the number of diasporic Kurdish women poets, and it is definitely expected to rise in the future. However, only ten out of this big number of home Kurdish women poets will be included in this chapter as per the specific criteria drawn in the first introductory chapter of this study. This chapter attempts to embrace the full range of published poetry by these ten poets who are living on permanent basis in southern Kurdistan. It aims at drawing a thematic comparison with the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets treated in detail in the previous chapter. The term “home” is used in this chapter to separate the poets from those poets who have been writing poetry in the diaspora and are plainly from the same region. “Home” is used in various sources and academic realms to mean the country or region where somebody originally lives in. Terkenli defines home as a geographical region where a large crowd of people live collectively on the basis of a largely shared culture and history:

Home regions are culturally constructed and geographically and historically contingent. They exist to serve fundamental individual and group needs, and, as human constructs and cultural products, they also sustain these needs. Indeed, every human activity or experience to some degree affects the delineation of a home context. In this way, a lifeworld becomes a collage of overlapping and ever-transforming personal and collective geographies, a system of irregularly shaped nodal regions that correspond to homes of individuals or groups of individuals. In each case, the sense of home varies in space: some places are conceived as more homelike than are others. The strongest sense of home commonly coincides geographically with a dwelling. Usually the sense of home attenuates as one moves away from that point, but it does so in no fixed or regular way (Terkenli 1995: 324).

This chapter brings together the published poetry of ten home Kurdish women poets whose poetic works are the reflection of their life experience and direct contact with patriarchal Kurdish society. The poetry analysed in this chapter is expected to be different from the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets, possibly for the limited freedom and chances of expression they have in their home region of Kurdistan. However, it may be more realistic for their day to day awareness of the facts on ground, particularly in relation to the situation of women and the general condition of gender in Kurdistan. The

large number of domestic Kurdish women poets recently attracted, although partially, the attention of male Kurdish critics to cast a critical eye on the poetry produced solely by women as representative of their female voice. Writing on the domestic production of poetry by women, Kurdish critic Reûf Mehmûdpûr (2011: 27) argues that the skilled group of Kurdish women poets who are nowadays active have done a great service to Kurdish literature and filled a very important gap in this literature. He believes that despite the difficult political, economic, cultural and social obstacles ahead of the development of Kurdish women's poetry, this group has managed to "push forward the continuity process of Kurdish literature" (*ibid.*). Moreover, he states that this group will play a crucial role in stretching the borders of Kurdish women's poetry to reach the other parts of Kurdistan, as they will act as a model for the future generation of Kurdish women poets.

The poetry to be included here represents another move towards securing Kurdish women's liberty. It is written by women who are themselves the victim of a society they are trying to change. It is the poetry of pain, passion, hope, endurance and resistance. It is one of the weapons women in Kurdish society have used for informing the educated of the brutal oppression and injustice inflicted against them which threatens their rights. Women poets included in this chapter depict the life of Kurdish women in their poetry and disclose the sheer indifference of Kurdish men towards their essential role in the formation of a healthy and sustainable society. From the themes of their poetry, it becomes clear how much these Kurdish women poets are aware of the fact that poetry is one of the effective ways that can help improve the vulnerable situation of women in society. They arguably believe that poetry as a reform tool is able to enter the sanctuary of most Kurdish families without the risk of being obstructed. Significantly, this argument can be underpinned by an evaluation of the social force of poems put forward by Montefiore who assertively argues that "poems are exchanged between individuals or passed round groups— a small-scale but intimate and widespread activity characteristic of the women's movement" (Montefiore 1983: 69).

The basic structure of this chapter will be similar to Chapter Three in terms of the classification of poets and theme analysis, and owing to a higher number of women poets

and poetry books, a wider space will be given to each poet in this chapter. Hence, the chapter will be slightly longer.

4.2 Mehabad Qeredagî⁷¹ (b.1966)

There are some difficulties in defining the status of Qeredagî as she is divided between both the diaspora and home. As is clear from her biography, Qeredagî has spent long periods in Sweden, and has published almost half of her poetry books outside southern Kurdistan, a condition that simply gives her an exceptional place in this study. It is rather difficult to decide whether to situate her with the diasporic Kurdish women poets or with the home poets, because the themes of her poetry books which are published in Sweden are remarkably different from the themes of those books which are published at home. Significantly, the themes of her poetic texts which are published in the diaspora are much related to the ones raised by diasporic Kurdish women poets of Chapter Three of this

⁷¹ Mehabad Qeredagî was born in the town of Kifrî, Kirkuk, in 1966. Her Kurdish political and national ideology sends her to the toppled Iraqi Ba'ath regime prison in 1980. After spending a year in prison, she joins the Kurdistan Toilers Group in 1982. She obtains her diploma degree from the Kirkuk Arts Institute in 1987. Qeredagî leaves southern Kurdistan for Sweden in 1993 where she attends academic courses on the sociology and psychology of education at Stockholm University in 2003. She returns to her homeland in 2005 to work as a special advisor to the Kurdistan regional government premier on gender equality and women's issues. Decided to live the rest of her life in Hewlêr, she is presently studying her BA in English language and literature at Sabis University in Hewlêr. Qeredagî is a poet, short story writer, novelist, translator, journalist, women's rights activist, critic and sociologist. On her Facebook page, she claims to have published twenty seven books in the above subjects. She has conducted research on the overall conditions of women in southern Kurdistan and has translated several works both from Arabic and Swedish languages into Kurdish. Examples are: *Le Pênawî Jîyanewey Afret da* (To Resurrect Women), a sociological research on the problems of women, published in 1995 in Stockholm and *Dan Pîyananêkî Pîyawane* (A Masculine Confession), published in 1994, which is a novel translated from Arabic. In 1997, Qeredagî co-authors a poetry book with the Swedish woman poet Eva-Lill Patil Nilsson in Swedish language, entitled *Snöfåglar* (The Snow Birds). Listing all Qeredagî's works would take too much space and as this study is only allocated to the poetic works, it is more practical to indicate Qeredagî's poetic achievements only. Thus, as a poet, Qeredagî has been writing poetry since the early 1980s. While Dihokî (2008: 304) states that Qeredagî manages to write her first poem in 1979 and publish it in *Hawkarî* newspaper in 1980. Roughly, Qeredagî has six poetry books published in Sorani Kurdish from the early 1990s at different publishing houses both inside southern Kurdistan and in Sweden. Regrettably, not all these books are available now and some have been republished in later collections. The first poetry book is *Nexşey Dwarojî Kirêkar* (The Map of Worker's Future), which is published in 1992 in Hewlêr and the second book is *Panorama* (Panorama), published in 1993 in Skinnskatteberg in Sweden. The third poetry book is entitled *Şax Kêlgey Genmeşamyê* (Mountain is the Maize Field), published in 1994 in Skinnskatteberg, whereas the fourth one is *Mîdalya* (Medal), published in 1995 in Stockholm in Sweden. The fifth collection which is rather substantial is *Hajey Rôh* (Soul Thunder), and it is published in 1999 in Slêmanî. This poetry collection embraces four other books which are already published. And her latest poetry book is *Hêşûy Êşiq* (Love Bunch), published in 2004 in Hewlêr. Obviously, the publication of this important series of poetry books shows the poetic talent and ability of Qeredagî and her literally unending love towards the oldest genre of literature, which is poetry.

study. They include references to homeland and childhood memories as well as the national tragedies and events which have happened in the history of her nation. Once reading her diasporic poems, one can immediately decide to place her in the third chapter, but when a shift of attention is made to her poetry books produced at home, an opposite understanding of her category formulates. However, the technique that basically resolves this controversy is the series of criteria which are pointed out in the first chapter of this research work as a touchstone for the selection of poets in Chapters Three and Four. And as Qeredagî has returned to her homeland since 2005, there is no point as why she should not be considered as a home Kurdish woman poet.

Nevertheless, the presence of Qeredagî in this study can act as a bridge between Chapters Three and Four as she embodies themes from both poetic categories. She can be regarded in some ways as both a diasporic and home Kurdish woman poet. Besides, the thematic analysis of her poetry can provide a sort of a miniature conclusion for the whole work since it will be a combination of two different poetic experiences, one in the diaspora and away from the “sweet home” and the other within her community and with the concrete life realities of a people largely holding opposite views to those adopted by her, particularly in regard to the women’s status in society.

It is clear from the production dates of her early poetic works that Qeredagî is of the 1990s generation of Kurdish women poets, if not from an even earlier generation; arguments about her poetic career push her further back to 1979 and 1980. Similar to Begîxanî and Herdî, her practical involvement in politics and experience of national tragedies from a young age give a political and nationalistic form to her early poetry. Rojbeyanî argues that inset this “Mehabad has lived the tragedies of Iraq-Kuwait and Iraq-US-led coalition wars; she has witnessed the chemical bombardment of Halabja and lived through the pains of Anfal” (Rojbeyanî 2008: 16). It is from 1990 to 2003 that political issues and national and patriotic discourses as well as national calamities reflect abundantly in Qeredagî’s poetry. After her civil engagement in society and government affairs in the wake of the collapse of the Iraqi Ba’th regime in 2003, she changes her poetic style and themes to go to matters related to gender inequality and the killing of women for reasons of honour protection in southern Kurdistan. However, her poetic

career after this period loses strength and gives way to other literary genres such as novel and activities which are more political, social and journalistic.

Given her rich poetic experience, Qeredagî is possibly the most studied Kurdish woman poet both in academia and in literature. Her works have recently been researched by several Kurdish scholars, critics and book writers. The latest literary academic work to study her poetic texts is an MA dissertation by Sabîr Hûsên Resul in 2010 at Salahaddin University in Hewlêr. Generally, part of this critical attention to Qeredagî is the quality of her literary works which literally comes from a mixture of clear influences from classical Kurdish literature and Western literature, while the other part is due to her familiarity to writers and critics for the social and political status she holds in southern Kurdistan. Qeredagî is a rebellious secular poet. She disagrees with the social, cultural and Islamic religious structures of her society and firmly opposes any orders to come from religion as rules of social behaviour. This fact is reiterated by the Kurdish literary critic Hesen who argues that “the poetry of Mehabad Qeredagî flies with two massive wings, the wing of rebellion and that of defiance” (Hesen 2012: 18). Rejection of religious codes and religion’s superiority over society is a distinctive feature of Qeredagî’s poetry. It is this poetic stance of Qeredagî that sometimes creates problems for her to disseminate her poetic products easily among her readers in southern Kurdistan. As a clear case in point, she has apparently published a literary book entitled *Evîn Awî Jîyane*⁷² (Love is the Water of Life) in 2004? which has no publisher’s name on it due to its very controversial content. It is argued that the publisher did not dare to put its name and publishing details on the book because it found that its content and the issues raised in it might provoke adverse public reaction. Critically, this case is not unique to Qeredagî only as the works of several other Kurdish poets and writers have also recently been banned from circulation due to their apparently anti-Islamic content. One of the latest works to face

⁷² *Evîn Awî Jîyane* is a novel written simultaneously in both a prose and poetic form. It totally consists of 124 pages. The first 17 pages are introductory and are written in a prose style, while the rest comes in a poetic form. The book is dedicated to all those Kurdish lovers who have lost their lives in the Anfal tragedy. In this novel, Qeredagî creates a universe which is run by humans rather than God and she grants all the powers that God clearly has to the characters of her novel. Time seems eternal in this novel and the novel’s story progresses gradually through the exchange of a love letter between two lovers, one living in heaven and the other on earth. Making a rather detailed critical reading of this novel, Ehemdzade describes its main features as “metaphoric, romantic, idealistic, autobiographic or a form of memoir” (Ehemdzade 2011: 284). The novel’s letter literally travels through three hell stations, with each station having a particular nature of events and stories and distinct implications.

religious censorship in southern Kurdistan was a poetry book by the male Kurdish poet Qubadî Celîzade. This ideological and religion-centred censorship problem draws a borderline between the freedoms of writing and expression in the West and in Kurdistan.

In reading Qeredagî's early poetic texts, one sees that she uniquely makes a great use of a variety of world religions. Elements from the earthly and spiritual stories narrated in Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and to a lesser degree Islam, shape almost a quarter of her poetic texture. She learns pure love and the respect of human beings from these religions and attempts to make much of their long struggle against the forces of darkness and destruction. Initially, Qeredagî's poetic message has been the peaceful cohabitation of humans and respect of different ideologies and ways of thinking, which is possibly the direct result of the difficult life she suffers under the rule of the Ba'th regime. In her poetry, she tries to change the form of life which was imposed on her fellow citizens by that regime and explains that humans are not created to be tortured and killed cruelly. Consequently, it is noticeable that her early poetic books are more political and humanistic than social and in defence of women's rights.

Being a Kurdish émigré in the West, it is expected that themes of nostalgia and love of homeland will be reflected in books which are written in the diaspora. Thus, in *Medal* (1995) all that has already been said about the themes of Qeredagî comes to readers' notice when a journey is made through the range of poems which give shape to this book. In "Hewir" (Cloud), two interesting interpretations can be made for this poem. The first holds a sacrilegious connotation which is to do with the origin of God and the parent he is from. Qeredagî cleverly creates a poetic image through which she pursues the parent from whom God comes. At the very beginning, she gives a reasonable justification for human creation out of two different sexes by means of a practical poetic technique, namely pathetic fallacy. She personifies cloud and mountain to act like a married couple who give birth to a spring. This birth process which is the general way of human reproduction is accepted unquestionably by Qeredagî, but she desperately struggles to know the real parent from whom a massive sea— which figuratively may indicate God, the Creator— comes from. However, this poem could also be interpreted as Qeredagî's limitless love towards her homeland and its impressive nature, which is full of natural

springs and green high mountains. This latter interpretation brings Qeredagî so close to the relation made between women and nature by way of their biological essentialism:

Şewê hewir legeş şaxa nust	Cloud slept a night with mountain
Skî be kanîyek piş kird	He made her pregnant with a spring
Êsta kanî kiçî heqî şax û hewre!	Spring now is the legal daughter of mountain and cloud!
Ey deryay bê bin û gewre?!	How about the bottomless and big sea?!
Dwêtî kêye?	Whose duet is it?
(Qeredagî 1995: 61)	

For her, poetry is the most sacred thing in life and she finds all her concerns and human feelings expressed palpably in her poetic lines. Significantly, on poetry, she says “poetry is a language which reveals the secrets and relationships of the spirit of the person who writes it” (Qeredagî 2010: 38). This unfeigned admiration of poetry is similarly demonstrated in Qeredagî’s poems and sometimes poetry appears to be even her saviour and instructor of personal skills. The poem that categorically indicates the great value of poetry for Qeredagî is “Heşwerînî Başkanîş Sirûdin” (Even the Dying of Wings is Anthems). This melancholic poem, which generally underlines a condition of pessimism and hopelessness, shows how poetry literally acts as the only protector of the poet from death and inevitable disappearance. The poet does not want to die and she insists on living an everlasting life. Thus, the poet believes that the eternity she is after can only be achieved by resorting to the unlimited power of poetry. It is also poetry that can teach her a sublime form of dance which is typical of God only. The poet realises that poetry is able to give her the skills to copy God’s dance:

Le şîrewem pêçin!	Wrap me in poetry!
Ba xak be mirdinim nezanê	So that earth does not know about my death
Be şîr lasayî semay xwa dekemewe!	I imitate God’s dance in poetry!
(Qeredagî 1995: 82)	

This antireligious form of poetry and unusual treatment of God in a language of a nation that is in general devoutly Muslim are innovative features to Kurdish literature. Since its inception, Kurdish poetry, including women’s poetry, has mostly been composed of religious and sufistic subjects. Most, if not all, of pioneer Kurdish poets have been pious religious figures (see Chapter Two). Therefore, these contents of Qeredagî’s poetry are a turning point in the thematic structure of Kurdish women’s

poetry; such themes in this radical style have not been written before and the credit for their introduction to women's poetry goes to Qeredagî.

The poetry book which seems too bulky and has rather unusual long poems is *Soul Thunder* (1999). Literally, this book follows the same route of *Medal* (1995) in terms of themes and style. Most of the poems take on a philosophical form and they seem to have been written in two different locations. On the one hand, there are poems which are produced in the 1980s and early 1990s, most of which tackle the theme of romantic love that imply the time when Qeredagî was young and was about to feel passionate love towards the opposite sex. On the other hand, this book includes scores of poems written in the diaspora after Qeredagî leaves her motherland for Sweden. The themes of poems written in the diaspora are largely different from those written at home. One can simply see that diasporic themes are mostly about the memories of home and the missing of dear people she has left behind. It is noteworthy that the publication of poems of various locations in this book means that Qeredagî did not have the opportunity to publish poems which she had written at home until she arrives in Sweden where she manages to collect and publish all her poems in one big single volume.

Importantly, a basic fact that has to be said about *Soul Thunder* (1999) is that Qeredagî hardly approaches gender issues and the bad situation of women in her society. Either she was not completely aware of the oppression of women in Kurdish society or more likely it was not the first priority in her writing at that time. The majority of poems of this collection are more political than social. She plays the role of a man rather than a woman in most poems in defending the national identity of her people and showing the cruelty endured by her nation under the rule of the defeated regime of Saddam. Critically, this style of political poetry is more common among men than women. Thus, it is perhaps plausible to say that in this book Qeredagî significantly copies a male style instead of having a style of her own to represent her female voice. This situation is tantamount to the conclusion reached by Eḥmedzade⁷³ in his study of the novels which are written by Kurdish women novelists in the last decade. In his study in which Qeredagî figures as a novelist, Eḥmedzade argues that “the themes of women's novels have no basic difference to those raised in men's novels” (Eḥmedzade 2011: 301).

⁷³ Eḥmedzade is known in English as Ahmadzadeh.

In “Kernewalî Zam le Êwarey Tarawge da” (The Carnival of Wounds in the Diaspora’s Evening), from whose title it is clear that the poem has been written in the diaspora, Qeredagî in the warm arms of her beloved nostalgically remembers her homeland and the very sad moments she has spent with her people. This poem contains autobiographical elements since it is about the real life of the poet and the feelings she has had away from her beloved family and nation. In a poetic stanza, Qeredagî together with her patriotic lover uses her mathematical skills to draw a symbolic triangle where she can place on its three edges life, love and Kurdistan. The combination of these three terms in a triangle indicates the vital importance of each term for Qeredagî and confirms that she cannot continue to exist without them:

<p>Herdukman, Le endaze rengînekanî nestman, Le sêgoşeyekî tîj degeřayn, Ta le goşe tîjekanî da Jîyan û `Eşq û Kurdistan qaym keyn (Qeredagî 1999: 36)</p>	<p>Both of us, In the colourful geometry of our senses, Were looking for a sharp triangle, So as to fix life, Love and Kurdistan To its sharp angles</p>
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Notably, this poetic pattern of great praise of homeland and the recollection of Kurdistan’s tragic political history keeps repeating in most poems of *Soul Thunder* (1999). This form of political poetic content emphasises the fact that Qeredagî has been in pursuit of Kurdistan’s politics more than its sociological conditions. As pointed out in her biography, she defies from an early age the dominant gender ideology of Kurdish nationalist movements that only men are eligible to serve in the *peshmerga* forces, while women should stay at home to take care of children and support men only emotionally, medically and by taking food to them in the mountains. She struggles for the liberation of Kurdistan and the construction of a Kurdish nation-state side by side with men. The most interesting poem that shows Qeredagî’s political determination and her national struggle in pen is “`Eşqî Agir” (The Love of Fire). This poem clearly embraces a specific group of Kurdish national tragedies and political objectives. It seeks the unity of Kurds and the reintegration of the four divided parts of Kurdistan into “Great Kurdistan”. The poet indicates the history of Kurds, which, according to her, is a history of their pain, their

collective death, their land occupation and mass deportation. This history is a deep wound in the poet's body which is incurable:

Zamekanim	My wounds are the
Nîştîmanî hezareha bê ser û şwênî enfale	
	Homeland of thousands of disappeared Anfal victims
Cêgey řazî sedan şehîdî Helebce û Badînane	
	Place of the secret of hundreds of Halabja and Badinan martyrs
Zamekanim,	My wounds are the wounds of
Hî serî Kirkuk û piştî Dîyarbekre	Kirkuk's head and Diyarbakir's back
Hî lamîlî Mehabad û nêwçewanî Qamişliye	Mahabad's shoulder and Qamishli's forehead
(Qeredagî 1999: 83)	

It is evident that Qeredagî in the above two poetic works fails to embed strong feminist principles since there is very little room in these two works for the pains and sufferings inflicted on women in Kurdish society. Indeed, Qeredagî's role as a feminist develops after 2003, particularly after taking the advisory position in the government in southern Kurdistan. With her political post, she complements other feminist activities taken up by various Kurdish women's rights groups following the region's interaction with other global feminist agendas and movements. Qeredagî suddenly becomes the most common face in southern Kurdistan to be working in defence of women's rights and guaranteeing their equality with men on different levels. However, her activity might have a connection with a barely controlled upsurge of violence against women and their killing in remarkable numbers in the early 2000s, which had been reported among human rights and women's organisations both on local and international levels⁷⁴. As an active feminist from then, Qeredagî has had a positive effect on promoting the awareness of the Kurdish community with regards the rights of women. She has published a good range of interesting articles and books in Kurdish on women's issues and is continuous in her feminist writings⁷⁵. At present time, she is a known figure that the Kurdish government consults regarding women's problems and gender rights.

⁷⁴ The comprehensive evidential report Begikhani makes together with a group of academics from certain UK universities and in partnership with Kurdish Women's Rights Watch is perhaps the most valuable document that gives insight into the cases of honour-based violence and killings in southern Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora in the UK. Concluded in November 2010, the report provides the grounds on which honour crimes are committed in the Kurdish families and brings to attention the most heinous honour killings that have been reported on widely by the local and international media.

⁷⁵ Most articles and books by Qeredagî referred to in this study stand for concrete examples of her feminist challenges in writing. However, the book that is clearly charged with a radical feminist tone and marks the

It is no surprise to find that her latest poetry book, *Love Bunch* (2004), whose most poems are written between 2000 and 2003 in the diaspora, is dedicated to one of the many victims of classic Kurdish patriarchy and “honour killing”. The word “Hêşû” (Bunch) in the Kurdish title of the book is the name of a young Kurdish girl who is killed by her father, apparently in protection of her family’s honour. Raising a cultural practice like “honour killing” in the title of a poetry book indicates Qeredagî’s concern about a male-ruled gender regime that targets women in Kurdistan to a dangerous level. In this book, Qeredagî calls urgently for stopping disrespect towards women and restoring their deserved human rights. She attempts hard to deconstruct the social and gender system of Kurdish society so as to introduce a new system which is also looked at from a woman’s point of view. Thus, she understands that it is only through a radical transformation of the highly patriarchised Kurdish social makeup that an effective limit can be drawn against the excessive violation of women’s rights. In “Lêre û Lewêşim!” (I Am Both Here and There!) (2003), a poem which is written in the diaspora during Qeredagî’s promotion of her feminist thoughts, a criticism of the Kurdish society’s gender constructions of women is made. In the last few lines of this poem, Qeredagî shows that she is not the woman who is identified by her society’s men as inferior and weak and in possession of a forgetful mind not suitable for running the society’s affairs:

Min jinêkim, dewlemend be yad	I am a woman, rich in memory,
Zengîn be xeya!	Rich in imagination!
Hejar be le yadçûnewe û feramoşî!	But poor in forgetfulness and negligence!
(Qeredagî 2004: 30)	

Categorically, Qeredagî’s actions in support of women constitute a basic part of the concerns of feminist criticism. On the latest urgent attention of feminist criticism, Jacobus argues that:

More recently, feminist criticism has concerned itself with the woman reader—with woman as the producer of her own system of meanings; meanings that may challenge or subvert patriarchal readings and undo the traditional hierarchy of gender (Jacobus 2007: 1030).

Poetically recounting the tragic life story of the young Hêşû in “Hêşûy ‘Eşiq” (Love Bunch), Qeredagî shows the sheer barbarity of those Kurdish families who for the

stage of Qeredagî’s involvement in feminist movement is *Şerêfname* (The Book of Honour) (2004) which criticises the embodiment of honour in women’s body.

sake of defending their honour which they believe is embodied in women and their sexual behaviour kill innocent women. She believes that such families do not only kill women, but they also kill love and mercy in the community. In the poem, Qeredagî hates autumn and October, which are probably the time when Hêşû, the honour victim, is murdered. This feeling of hatred towards a season explicitly indicates Qeredagî's great anger with the massacre of women among the male members of her society:

Çend le payz zîzim!	How much angry I am with autumn!
Çend!	How much!
Çend lem oktobere bêsemere pestim, çend!	
	How much displeased I am with this fruitless October, how much!
Ke hêşû, hêşû, 'eşq hejdewerênê!	Which eliminates love in bunches!
Ke řengekanî kirîştalî xewn deşewênê!	Which distorts the colours of dream crystal!
(Qeredagî 2004: 71-2)	

In *Love Bunch* (2004), Qeredagî emerges confident of her female talents and abilities. She tries to use a language which is more characteristic of women than men. She expresses the challenges that women should face in Kurdish society in a clear poetic language. For Qeredagî, language can be used as a means by which women can assert their right of equal existence with men. It is through language that the looming threat of patriarchy can be directly defied. Therefore, Qeredagî argues that “a woman should full consciously take responsibility of the language she uses in writing” (Qeredagî 2011: 7). The impact of language on balancing gender difference reflects clearly in “Xoşewîstî le Deverî Gunah da” (Love in the Sin Region), where Qeredagî points out the challenges facing lovers in her homeland. In a quite female tone, Qeredagî argues that love, which is one of the rights of humans, is not allowed to be practised in public in her society. She accuses religion to be mainly in charge of the prohibition of love in her society, as she states that the religious edifice has prepared hell as a gift for whoever thinks about falling in love. However, approaching the end of this poem, Qeredagî stands entirely defiant of the religious power and she declares that love is the holiest belief that she has and nothing can stop her from worshipping it. Moreover, on behalf of women, she says that love is the peace and human message that women have⁷⁶:

⁷⁶ This attitude of Qeredagî is representative of her secular belief which sees love as a legitimate right of both women and men that can be practised in public without any moral and religious restrictions. It is against the Islamic form of love which usually happens after the two lovers are officially and religiously

Xoşewîstî!!

To peyamî hemîşe kirawey jinî!

To taqe bawerêkî negoîrî minî!

(Qeredagî 2004: 100)

Love!!

You are the always open message of women!

You are the only invariable belief of mine!

Thus, it is evident how Qeredagî employs language at the service of her women's cause and considers it as an important medium through which the main message women have in her society can be spread. Recent typical social changes and cultural openness in southern Kurdistan make her disagree with the idea and local cultural habit that women have to be acquiescent about their current rights and remain always obedient to whatever men order. She sees that it is time when Kurdish women should no longer accept the appropriation of their basic rights by men and this realisation reflects clearly in her current feminist activism and initiatives in Kurdistan.

4.3 Kejaļ Eħmed⁷⁷ (b.1967)

engaged or married to each other. In Kurdish Muslim society, love relationships are generally prohibited in public or before marriage and are considered as illegitimate and punishable according to the Islamic sharia. Qeredagî protests this Islamic interpretation and formulation of love which she believes is responsible for part of the miseries of Kurdish women. This rather unusual reading and assessment of love by a woman poet is one more innovative characteristic of Kurdish women's poetry.

⁷⁷ Kejaļ Eħmed was born in Kirkuk in 1967. She achieves her diploma degree at the Slêmanî Institute of Art in 1991. Eħmed starts writing poetry in 1983 and manages to publish her first poem in 1986. She embarks on a career in journalism in 1992 and records remarkable achievements in the Kurdish press. She successfully runs the position of editing secretary of the PUK-owned *Kurdistanî Nwê* newspaper in Slêmanî for a few years. Eħmed is a known writer in southern Kurdistan who has actively been working in the Kurdish politics and journalism and has interesting publications in these fields. *Kitêbî Jin* (The Book of Woman) (1999) is an example of her publications which embraces her essays on the political, literary and social situation of her homeland. As a productive woman TV presenter, she has been able to make important programmes on literature, social matters and women-related issues. No one can deny the influence of Eħmed on modern Kurdish poetry. She has five poetry books until now; however, due to a shortage in copies, only three of them have been achieved from the local Kurdish bookstores. The first poetry book is *Benderî Bermoda* (Bermuda Harbour), published twice in 1999 in Slêmanî. Her second book is *Witekanî Witin* (Speeches of Speech), published also in 1999 in Slêmanî. Published in 2001 in Slêmanî is her third poetry book, entitled *Qaweyek Legeļ Ewda* (A Coffee With Him). And the fourth book is *Awênem Şikand* (I Broke the Mirror), which is published in 2004 in Slêmanî. Meanwhile, her latest book is a poetry collection which includes all her previously published poetry books. The book is entitled *Dîwanî Kejaļ Eħmed* (Kejaļ Eħmed's Poetry Collections), published in 2006 in Slêmanî. Significantly, Eħmed enjoys the ability to translate from Arabic and her efforts in this respect has resulted in the translation of a book into Kurdish, entitled *Nasname Bikujekan: Çend Xwêndineweyek Bo Înfîma û Be Cihanîbûn* (Identity Murderers: Studies on Affiliation and Globalisation), published in 2003 in Slêmanî. The Norwegian Cappelen publisher has published a poetry book by Eħmed in the Norwegian language in 2005 which contains an interesting number of selected poems from Eħmed's Kurdish collections. The book's Norwegian title is *Erobringr* (Conquests). Despite the poetic texts, this book includes a general introduction on Kurdish literature and the history of women's literature in Kurdistan. Eħmed mysteriously quits all her literary, political and social activities after entering marital life from 2009. This decision has

This study would have been incomplete without Eḥmed since she is the most rebellious Kurdish woman poet to have allocated all her personal and poetic life to the fighting of male dominance over the general lifestyle of Kurdish society. Without fail, her works express a strong feminist view towards the situation of women in her society, a characteristic that clearly distinguishes her from all other women poets. She shows no fear of being attacked by her male society for the honesty she expresses at the heart of her poetic texts. A report by *Bedirxan* weekly on the professional life of Eḥmed argues that “Kejaḷ Eḥmed endured extreme pains inflicted on her by the Kurdish community” (*Bedirxan* July 2008: 2). Eḥmed talks about her femininity and parts of the female body without any restrictions and taking notice of her society’s traditional patriarchal background. Kurdish short story writer Paḷewan goes even much further than this brief description of Eḥmed to say that “after Mestûrey Kurdistanî, Eḥmed is the most courageous woman poet to write about female feelings and body” (Paḷewan 2010: 47).

The poetic biography of Eḥmed indicates that she is also from the 1990s generation of Kurdish women poets. Grouping Eḥmed with a number of other Kurdish poets to determine their time of emergence, ‘Ebdullā explains that “they started publishing their poetry in the 1990s and they keep publishing it until now”. He further adds that “they attempted to look different which is one of the features required to start a serious literature” (‘Ebdullā 2009: 5). Eḥmed could have published extra poetry books in the 1990s were it not for the difficult political situation she was through as an active member of the PUK⁷⁸. Thus, most of her poems written in the 1990s are published as books in the 2000s when Kurdistan attains relative political stability.

literally disappointed many Kurdish women who have had high hope in the great abilities and seriousness of Eḥmed to confront the powerful male authority in southern Kurdistan. Following this late marriage, Eḥmed has completely disappeared from the public view and from the pages of Kurdish newspapers and magazines.

⁷⁸ In an introduction to *The Book of Woman* (1999: 3), Eḥmed argues that two wars prevented her from collecting and publishing her women-related articles and other writings. The first war was between the Kurdish *peshmergas* and the Iraqi Ba’th army in 1991 during the popular uprising that resulted in the liberation of southern Kurdistan. The second war was in the form of a civil infighting between the two main Kurdish political parties, the KDP and PUK, over power dominance in southern Kurdistan that lasted for almost two years from 1995 to the end of 1996. In both of these wars, Eḥmed states that her archive was destroyed by fire, once in the town of Kelar in 1991 and the second in Hewlêr in 1996. This archive destruction makes Eḥmed delay her publication activities for some few years.

Ehmed's early poems express a strong opposition to the control of women's life by men. Furthermore, it is rather common in southern Kurdistan that when Ehmed's name is invoked, it is usually associated with the hate of patriarchy and resistance to the widespread injustice towards women. Hardi considers Ehmed as "one of the leading women poets in Kurdistan" adding that:

Unlike other women poets, whose voices were tamed, and who wrote in the same manner as the male poets, Kajal Ahmad was daring and she wrote about the world as she saw it. She portrays the connections between her oppression as a woman and her subjugation as a Kurd in Iraq very well. In a patriarchal society where anything to do with a woman's body is taboo, she writes its desires and wishes. Her poetic voice is neither bitter nor angry but full of irony and delicious humour (Hardi 2008: 6).

Like Qeredagî, Ehmed as a modern Kurdish woman poet has been widely studied in southern Kurdistan. She has also been fairly studied outside the Kurdish context by several Arab and Western critics. Her translated poems into Arabic, English and Norwegian languages and articles about her poetic experience in the Arabic press can testify Ehmed's success in her poetic career. Thus, Ehmed's position in modern Kurdish poetry is largely different from the majority of previously studied poets in this study. Her fame in southern Kurdistan and the wide range of works on her poetry make study on her poetic works much smoother. However, the lack of an archive of all her poetic works and of studies which have been conducted on her is another issue.

Ehmed's poetic skill and engagement with the feminist movement's goals and concerns is unique and matchless. Although there is not yet an organised feminist front in her geographical region, she can simply be deemed as one of the most active members of feminist awakening in southern Kurdistan. She is the poet who is persistently engaged in a battle of confrontation with patriarchy in her poetry. A key feature of Ehmed's poetry is that she uses a simple and clear language to show the oppression of women in her society. She uses women's real life stories as the core material of her poetic texts and presents them in an artistic form where emphasis is chiefly placed on the brutal treatment they receive from men. For Ehmed, the way her fellow women live is like a grotesque in which all sorts of punishment and exploitation flash and protrude from its deep surface. Significantly, feminist critic Gubar states that there are women writers who transform certain life experiences into multiple forms of art to attract the readers' serious attention.

She underlines confessional poetry as one of these artistic forms where women poets launch their feminist struggles:

The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life, as does women's traditional interest in cosmetics, fashion, and interior decorating (Gubar 1985: 299).

A distinguishing feature of the poetry of Eḥmed is its coverage of very small details of the Kurdish culture and its treatment of women. In her poetry, she deals with the way women are married, the expectations of the family of the groom from the bride on the night of marriage and the consequences of not being virgin. Virginity is usually the major condition of the marriage bond that brings a woman and man and their families together. A woman's lack of virginity, not only in Kurdistan, but across vast areas of the Middle East, will be disastrous for her and her family and in most cases will result in her death. This culturally constructed gender identity singles out the position of women in most Middle Eastern societies, particularly the Muslim ones, from societies in other parts of the world.

In *Bermuda Harbour* (1999), it is very easy to find poems which criticise and condemn the Kurdish tradition of marriage. In "Xaḫ Guman" (Point of Doubt), Eḥmed makes an ontological reading of the general life conditions of women in southern Kurdistan. It is hard for her to assimilate the current situation of her society's women which puts a question mark over the legitimate authority of the Kurdish government and its public plans for confronting injustice towards women. She adopts an archetypal feminist attitude towards her society when she critically explains that it is not normal for women to only play maternal role and be treated as home and sex slaves. She seems to be seriously campaigning for the full emancipation of Kurdish women in a social system which has withdrawn all the normal rights from them:

Zor car lêkî edemewe	Many times I ponder
Biḫêy asayî bê kiçan	If it is normal for girls
Jîyanyan her şûkirdin û mîna bûne	To have their lives only spent on marriage and childbirth
Debne xizmetkarî roj û çêjî şewan?!	To be servants of day and the pleasure of nights?!
(Eḥmed 1999: 12)	

This section also protests the discourses of women as the mother of nation or the reproducers of the nation and calls for a restriction on the birth rate to enable women to share the public sphere with men and have their footprint in the political and nationalistic agendas of their region. Eḥmed criticises men's obvious monopoly of every important field in southern Kurdistan, arguing that:

Politics, power and even Kurdistan have become the property of men. It turns out that the world, too, is owned by men, and women here play the role of a subordinated being who even have failed in this role (Eḥmed 1999: 27).

She articulates the purpose and agenda of her feminist struggle as thus “in this era of protecting human rights, Eḥmed wants herself and her fellow countrywomen to live as a “human being” whose rights are guaranteed” (Eḥmed 1999: 47).

In the same collection, Eḥmed continues her objection to the Kurdish patriarchal system and the cruelty of men towards women. She categorically rejects the constriction of power in the hands of men only and calls for an equal distribution of such power between women and men in all the aspects of life. Notably, this bold reaction to the superior position of men in Kurdish society has had a clear influence on the younger generation of Kurdish women poets. It is noted by some poets who seem to be interested in Eḥmed's poetic style and may have thought about following in her footsteps⁷⁹. A clear example here is the young Kurdish woman poet Sara 'Umer, who, in an interview given to *Hewlêr* newspaper, says that “sometimes Kejaḷ Eḥmed openly expresses her pains in a poem and blames the society, the political system, authority, racism and patriarchy in it” ('Umer 2011: 16). This and many other critical comments on Eḥmed's poetry confirm her important status among Kurdish women poets in general.

The high level of exploitation of women and their betrayal by men angers Eḥmed, to the extent of cutting all sorts of relationships with whoever is called man around her. In “Berd Baştire” (Stone is Better), Eḥmed poetically argues that stone is more merciful than man. This unusual understanding of men comes from the fact that their treatment of women is even harder than the solidity of stone. In this poem, Eḥmed breaks up with love

⁷⁹ Apart from 'Umer mentioned above, there are other women poets such as Muftî and Nurî who clearly indicate to Eḥmed's poetic influence on their works and style of writing. Muftî is grateful for Eḥmed for being inspirational in her poetic life and making her love poetry much deeper. She argues that “Eḥmed pushed the door of poetry further open for her to enter” (Muftî 2008: 8).

and attempts to live a life of solitude, because she is disillusioned with the lies and mistreatment of men. She states that love has no real sense in her chiefly traditional community and it is only women who are the victims of fake love relationships, whereas men come out of them victorious. There is absolutely no doubt that this poetic portrayal of women's life is a sincere rendition of their everyday real life:

Emewê be 'eşq bişem xwda hafiz	I want to say goodbye to love
Berd baştirêke le mirov	Stone is better than humanity
Kirdinî ew hemû diro û şer û zulme	It is only because of all the lies, wars and oppression
Waylêkirdim ewe bişem.	That I say this.
Ême tenya be nawî 'eşqewe ekujrêyîn	We are killed only in the name of love
Be nawî xebatewe hejexeletêyîn!	Deceived in the name of struggle! ⁸⁰

(Ehmed 1999: 138-9)

Challenges of patriarchal Kurdish society and the evil killing of women are also noticed in Ehmed's *A Coffee With Him* (2001). However, this collection is enriched by poems which point out the calamities and human tragedies which have happened to her nation. These poems signify the political participation and activism of Ehmed in the Kurdish nationalistic movement in which she has been part of since the 1980s⁸¹. They also represent her feminist challenge to the mainstream gender conviction that politics is the sacred realm of men where women have no right of access.

In "Le Nîştimanî Tîrora Cadem le Pyaw Xoştir Ewê!" (In the Homeland of Terrorism, I Love Street More Than Man!), Ehmed reaches the peak of her hatred towards women killers. Like previous women poets, she strongly criticises the mass killing of women in her society on the flimsy pretext of honour using the strong term 'terrorism' to define her homeland. This poem shows how much Ehmed is concerned with the oppression of women in southern Kurdistan and attempts through her poetic voice to put a radical end to it. Conducting a critical linguistic reading of some poems by Ehmed, Camî arrives at the crucial fact that "Ehmed's poetic experience confirms her femininity", as he metaphorically adds that "she shares pain with a groaning woman, if

⁸⁰ This English translation is taken from Ehmed's English copy of poems, entitled *Poems* (2008). The book is co-translated by Mimi Khalvati with Choman Hardi.

⁸¹ In an interview given much earlier originally to Rêbwarî Azadî of *Honya* magazine which is inaccessible but has been republished verbatim by *Rûber* website on 3rd of July 2012, Ehmed says "at the beginning, I did not start by love poems. It was during the [Iraqi] Ba'th era that I joined the secret organisations of the PUK and started writing revolutionary poems" (Ehmed 2012).

that woman loses fight for life, she will die, too” (Camî 2005: 12). In the above vindictive poem, Eḫmed uses an unusual image – she personifies the street (with all its connotations of the public and the insecure) and prefers forming a close friendship and a love relationship with it rather than with a man. The street is more compassionate and human than man and never thinks about causing women any harm or killing them. Meanwhile, it is also arguable that the use of street has another symbolic meaning which is embodied in its equal provision of opportunity for everyone to tread it and benefit from it without showing any sign of selfishness, whereas men are very opportunistic and selfish in their behaviour and actions and want to be in charge of everything by their own. The deprivation of women of their basic rights is one concrete example of men’s egotism:

Cadeke hîç dawayekî lêm nebû	The street did not want anything from me
Keçî hemû cwanîyekî pêşkeş kirdim	Whereas it presented me with all beauty
Ew destê dirêj û zibrekani	His long and rough hands
Be xwênî hîç jinê sûr nebû	Were not red with the blood of any women
Boye ke degeme wîstgey jin kujan	Therefore, when I arrive at the station of women killers
Wa hest ekem	I have a feeling
Cadem le pyaw xoştir ewê	That I love street more than man

(Eḫmed 2001: 60)

In “De Saļ Xoşewîstî” (Ten Years of Love) (1991), Eḫmed shows her poetic talents and abilities again. She once more talks about the persecution of Kurdish women. This time it is not at the hands of Kurdish men, but the intelligence forces of the toppled Iraqî Ba’th regime. The date of the poem, after the liberation of 1991, indicates that it was written in direct response to the political persecution of the Kurds by the Iraqî Ba’th regime. It is Eḫmed’s collective memory of her nation’s tragedies that brings in this poem. The text of the poem implies that Eḫmed may have visited certain places of torture and witnessed methods of punishing Kurdish political prisoners which have inspired her to turn the scenes into a poetic narrative. In this poem, Eḫmed aims to say that as Kurdish women are currently the victims of classic Kurdish patriarchy, they were also the first victims of the hostile policies of the Ba’th regime against the Kurdish people. In the poem, she gives examples of slain Kurdish women in Halabja and Anfal campaigns. She indicates how Kurdish women and girls were raped and impregnated by Ba’th agents and security forces in the prisons and concentration camps and were compelled to give birth to illegitimate children in such places under insanitary living conditions:

Min aram nîm	I am not settled
Çon aram bim	How I can be settled
Derpêy jinan êstaş le Emne Sûreke	Women's baggy trousers still at Amn-e Surek-e ⁸²
Be 'sîyekan îdane eken	Condemn the Ba'thists

(Ehmed 2001: 81)

The main narrative of this poem supports Yuval-Davis's arguments of gendered militaries and gendered wars where she states that women sometimes become innocent victims of national and political conflicts. As men are fighting on the battlefields or seek hiding from the enemy forces when defeated, "the women left become vulnerable to rape by the enemy soldiers" (Yuval-Davis 1997: 109). In the case of Ehmed's poem, Kurdish women were raped in revenge for the military losses inflicted on the Ba'th army by the Kurdish *peshmergas* and secret political activism by their families.

It is important to point out that the large presence of women's problems and their threatened existence in Ehmed's poetry does justify her naming as the mother of feminist awareness in southern Kurdistan and in Kurdish poetry. Another key aspect of Ehmed's literary and poetic character, which suitably positions her within the broad ideology of Anglo-American feminist criticism, is her complete rejection of women writers copying the same writing style of men. She critically argues that by following the male writing footprints, the female literary identity will definitely vanish. She even regards it as a self-war when women replicate male style. This original feminist stance is stated clearly in *The Book of Woman* (1999), when she says "when a woman writer writes and expresses herself in a masculine style, she makes an attack on herself not on other people" (Ehmed 1999: 13). This simply means that a writing production is once called a female writing when it embodies female feelings, language and concerns.

The last available poetry book by Ehmed, *Keja! Ehmed's Poetry Collections* (2006), also contains interesting poetic texts and narratives which underline her unending defence of Kurdish women's social and gender plight. In "Be Tenya" (Alone), Ehmed makes a sensible comparison between the type of love practised by women with men and

⁸² Amn-e Surek-e, which literally means "The Red Security", is the name of a tall, huge building at the heart of Slêmanî city. This building was one of the headquarters of the defeated Ba'thist regime's military intelligence in southern Kurdistan where Kurds were tortured and cruelly executed. It is now turned by the Kurdish government into a museum where local people and foreigners visit to witness the vicious instruments of torture used by Saddam's security elements against the Kurdish men and women.

the one made by men with women. She artfully analyses the social and romantic nature of the two sorts of love and shows the level of sincerity and truthfulness of each one. The result is that women are faithful and honest in their romantic relationships with men while men, on the contrary, act domineeringly and see women as their own and private property. This self-appraisal of love bonds by Eḫmed does not come out of nothing, but is the reflection of the true nature of love in her society:

Ke diḫdarîṭ legeḫ ekem	When I fall in love with you
Senterî jîyanî minîṭ	You are the centre of my life
Hîç dyar nîye	Nothing is visible
Hemû dinya serabe to nebîṭ	The whole world is a mirage except for you
Ke diḫdarîm legeḫ ekeyîṭ	When you fall in love with me
Şîṭekim le şîṭekanîṭ	I am another one of your possessions
Ey pyaw to çende nercisîṭ!	You man, how narcissistic you are!
(Eḫmed 2006: 221)	

The poem which can clearly justify what has thus far been said about Eḫmed's defiant attitudes towards the Kurdish social and political institutions is "Kejaḫêkî Cuda" (A Different Kejaḫ). In this poem, Eḫmed talks about herself and why she has decided to be different from other women of her society. She normally feels very proud to be able to challenge gender inequality in Kurdish society and its phallogocentric structure which has placed women on its periphery. She even encourages her fellow countrywomen to defy fear and threats of traditions and come together in a united front against male oppression, as she argues that "we need to talk about our problems" (Eḫmed 1999: 20), a perception which implies that if women do not act for themselves, they will not achieve anything from the propaganda of men who claim to be friendly towards women's basic and public rights. Eḫmed knows well that being a challenger is not easy and that it might bring her many complicated problems, including a different life and death. It is not unproblematic for a Kurdish woman to live a life of challenging the system, though such brave examples are few in Kurdish society. Nevertheless, Eḫmed opts for a life of contention with Kurdish patriarchy and braces for it:

Çend hezim be goṛan ekird	How much I loved change
Her demûṭ sibeynê egoṛêm	I always said I will change tomorrow
Ey xwda le nakawêkda çende goṛam	Oh, God, how suddenly I changed too much
Le berdem heḫbijardinêkî tir û	Ahead of a different choice,
Mirdinêkî tir û	A different death and

Jîyanêkî tir da
Îtir min Kejaîêkî cudam.
(Ehmed 2006: 358)

A different life
From now on, I am a different Kejaî.

The poetic experience of Ehmed makes a valuable contribution to the firm stance of Kurdish women's poetry on the general conditions of women in southern Kurdistan, as it sends fresh female blood into the main arteries of Kurdish poetry. Besides, her poetry genuinely represents the silenced women's voice. It also calls for a radical reform in the Kurdish society's attitude towards women and the realisation of their equal rights with men in all the aspects of life. The poetry of Ehmed is the poetry of defiance, bravery, modernisation, gender reform, peace and equality.

4.4 Çinûr Namîq Hesen⁸³ (b.1971)

The poetry of home women poets takes extra pride in having Hesen as another authentic female voice desperately in search of the emancipation of Kurdish women. Hesen is a well-known poet and is often discussed in the Kurdish journals and literary magazines. It is strictly not clear whether constant attention to her by critics is due to her personal relations with them or the quality of her poetry. However, the production of a range of poetry books by Hesen could be a concrete proof that she is an active and assiduous

⁸³ Çinûr Namîq Hesen was born in Kirkuk city in 1971. She completes her primary and preparatory school education in Kirkuk. She accomplishes her diploma degree at Mosul Technical Institute in 1990 and is currently studying her BA courses in English language at Sabis University in Hewlêr. Hesen embarks on writing poetry in the 1990s and her debut poem entitled "Beharî Jîn" (The Spring of Life) becomes published in the Iraqi Kurdish *Hawkarî* (Cooperation) newspaper. She also writes poems in Arabic and some of such poems are published in a number of Arabic literary newspapers and magazines in Iraq. Despite her literary career, Hesen is an active journalist and a member of Kirkuk branch of Kurdistan Union of Journalists. Concerning her poetic activities and works, she is one of the productive Kurdish female poets in southern Kurdistan who has thus far published a range of poetry books. Her first poetry book is *Merkane Şikawekanî Ceng* (War's Broken Vases), published in 1999 in Hewlêr, and her second collection is *Êwaran Bonî Xewim lê Dê* (I Smell Sleep in the Evenings), published in 2004, but copies, unfortunately, are unavailable in the bookshops and even with the poet herself. Her third book is *Teymanêkim le Guş Cêhêşt* (I Left a Fence of Flowers Behind), published in 2006 in Kirkuk, and her fourth collection is *Lêwî Meraq* (Curiosity Lip), published in 2009 in Hewlêr. Her latest bulky poetic book, which is a collection of all her previously published poetry books, is entitled *Xetam Kird Dway Adem Kewtim* (I was Wrong to Follow Adam), published in Slêmanî also in 2009. Importantly, the publication of these poetry books has made Hesen one of the known women poets in southern Kurdistan, widely criticised by Kurdish critics and studied by Kurdish book writers. Besides writing poetry books, Hesen has also published two Kurdish novellas, *Dartûe Tenyake* (The Lonely Berry Tree) (2004) and *Geşanewe* (Return) (2011). It is worth mentioning that Hesen is a rather common face who appears regularly on a majority of Kurdish literary journals and websites such as *Dengekan* and *Raman*.

woman poet on the Kurdish literary stage. Hesen's poetry is the reflection of a variety of stages of life she undergoes in southern Kurdistan. Qadir argues that "Çinûr Namîq's innovation initiative is enriched by her and the surrounding's miseries and sufferings" (Qadir 2007: 198). Her poetry, whose date of emergence goes back to the 1990s, is the compendium of the social, political, cultural, emotional, romantic and ontological condition of women in her society. Mostly influenced by the hard life conditions of her people in the 1990s, Hesen's poetry constitutes a significant part of the Kurdish women's poetry. 'Ebdulla indicates the unusual circumstances under which Hesen develops her poetry, stating that "Çinûr has lived the dark and horrible times of internal fighting, hunger and economic embargoes" ('Ebdulla 2011: 41). Like many other Kurdish women poets, Hesen is much critical of the social system in place in southern Kurdistan and accuses it of taking away all freedoms from women. This fact is reflected in her poetry and in the selected poems to be critically analysed later.

It can simply be argued that the majority of Kurdish women poets who have emerged after the full clearance of southern Kurdistan from the Iraqi Ba'th regime in 1991 and within the current "democratic" autonomy of southern Kurdistan are rebellious and confrontational in their poetry. They have given up the fear of society and have gone beyond the restrictions laid ahead of them by classic Kurdish patriarchy.

Hesen is one such poet who has leapt over the social and cultural barriers to stand by the legitimate rights of Kurdish women. Her courage is noted by Kurdish male poet Cewher Kirmanc who states that "he expects a bright future from Çinûr Namîq since she writes with total bravery" (Kirmanc 2012: 18). The poetry of Hesen is the voice of a woman who speaks right from the heart of a society she is a member of. It is the poetry of an underprivileged group of Kurdish society whose existence is largely denied as a result of the dominance of classical patriarchal traditions over that society. The poetic work by Hesen to signify her defiance of the patriarchal power of Kurdish society is *War's Broken Vases* (1999). This book is Hesen's first challenge of the superiority of men over women in a largely religious Kurdish society. It contains a series of interesting poems with diverse themes. In his thematic analysis of this book, Gembar argues that "if we attentively go deeper into the poems, we see that the poet is rebellious, however, such

rebellion is rational and is conscientiously translated into action” (Ġembar 2008: 193). Melancholically, a poem that stands for the misery of and lack of interest by Kurdish women in life in Ĥesen’s *War’s Broken Vases* (1999) is “Wiçanê le Roxî Jane Narncîyekan” (A Break Next to the Orange Pains). This poem recounts the lonely story of a girl who is helpless in a society where love is forbidden from her and she is unable to practise it. It is only in the dreams where she can express her feminine emotions and think of love, but even there, she does not feel secure as her dreams might betray her and punish her for breaking generally accepted social norms. On this poem, Ġembar says that “it reflects the bitter reality which has engaged the freedom of women” (Ġembar 2008: 190). Technically, Ĥesen makes use of the figures of speech and creates an interesting poetic image in this poem where she compares Kurdish society to a jungle with no rain, a lifeless environment with no love. The hopeless girl has a heart full of love, eyes full of passions, but in a place where she is very much required to suppress them for the fear of being eliminated from life:

Ey jiwanî roĥ tezîwim de lêm geĥê
 Ba kiçênîm kaĥtir nebê
 Lew guĥaney ke le xewnim da heĥwerîn
 De lêm geĥê ba diĥî xom
 Lem cengeĥe bê barane lê wûn nebê
 Çawekanim piĥn le werzî ewîn û
 Destekanim le cirîwey bê hêllane
 Keçî hêĥta serî kasim her tînuwe
 (Ĥesen 1999: 19).

My spirit-frozen tryst please let me go
 So my virginity does not grow paler
 Than those flowers which fell in my dream
 Please let me so I do not miss my heart
 In this rainless jungle
 My eyes are crammed with love season and
 My hands with the chirp that has no nest
 However, my giddy head is still unsatisfied

Ĥesen’s third poetry collection, *I Left a Fence of Flowers Behind* (2006), embraces a number of poetic texts, most of them expressing intimate love relationships and the natural romantic world in which such love bonds usually take place. It is ideally the theme of requited love and its sublime adoration that flows through the majority of texts, and the poet in several cases uses autobiographical elements which normally speak for her life and the romantic experiences she had over different stages of adult life. However, there are poems in this collection which represent deepening pessimism about social and earthly life, a perception the poet basically has in reaction to her and her fellow women’s state of life. Ĥesen reflects on the dangers war and aggressive men pose for the general social stability of people and the role such evil forces play in shattering the world of love.

Accordingly, it is in the text of “Tîjtir le Roħim Têpeře” (Pass Sharper Than my Soul) that she clearly underscores her history to be full of wars and blood-thirsty men who had spared no effort to eliminate whatever was breathing on the ground. Possibly, she might mean here the atrocities happened to her nation in the 1980s, when hundreds of thousands of Kurds were caught in bloody campaigns of chemical gas attacks and mass arrests, of which Anfal was the broadest one. She deplors the fact that love was hanged at that time and numerous lovers were separated and left disappointed in detention camps. Hesen intends to narrate these tragedies from the personal point of view of a Kurdish woman. She daringly accuses the gods of war of haunting her homeland and bringing destruction and despair with them to the land of peace. Writing on Hesen’s poetic character and established social role, Qadir sees her as:

Representing the voice of a brave and decent woman, a woman charged with a revolutionary spirit who challenges the impossible. And from this perspective, she breaks free from those chains and limitations that undermine the will of Kurdish women (Qadir 2007: 198).

Hesen’s concern to the national cause of her people is evidence that like many of her peers she is involved in contemplation about the political future of their nation. They all see their role in the Kurdish national struggle as vital and necessary. Mojab and Gorman argue that “since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, Kurdish women have participated in a state-building project initiated within the “safe haven” region of northern Iraq” (Mojab and Gorman 2007: 60). This indicates that the post-1991 changes in Kurdish politics and society have given a certain leeway to women to find themselves a place in the Kurdish national discourse.

In “Pass Sharper Than my Soul”, love looks very pale and disabled, and instead of spreading happiness and joy, it brings sadness and disappointment. Because war is omnipresent and has stretched out its wings, it is very frightened. Hesen benefits from the poetic techniques and devices to enrich the content of this poem, and employs an impressive paradox where love flutters but it has no wings:

Mêjûy min pîre le ceng û piyawany şeř û maļî betaļ	
	My history is full of wars, warriors and empty houses
Fiře fiři ‘eşqî bê baļ û xemî aļî lêwe dê	
	It echoes the flutter of a wingless love and scarlet sorrow
Çepik çepik bêhudeyîm lê bikewê	Garner hopelessness from me in bunches

Tinok tinok mestî lêwim

Bibe bo xwawende tînokanî ceng û werewe lam

Take the drunkenness of my lips in drops

To the thirsty gods of war and come back to me

(Hesen 2006: 65).

It is oddly surprising to arrive at the fact that a sense of pessimism about and a lack of interest in erotic love relationships seem to recur roughly on regular basis in many poems of almost all of Hesen's poetry collections. Generally, this could be a sign of the rejection of such relations in Kurdish society, which are totally banned by the social system in place in southern Kurdistan. Moreover, the religion practised in this part of Kurdistan prohibits love to be exercised in public. Hesen takes a somewhat radical stance towards the suppression of erotic feelings in her society and she implies in her poetry that women have always been oppressed not only physically and socially, but emotionally and psychologically as well. This kind of defence in support of the basic rights of Kurdish women is likely to promote Hesen to the level of a determined feminist who ultimately deserves to be accommodated within the global feminist struggle for the liberation of women from the unkind patriarchal systems in power in different parts of the world. Besides, this thoughtful move initiated by Hesen in her poetry is an attempt to restore the human value to Kurdish women and win back the legitimate right being stolen from her by the long-practised institution of patriarchy. According to feminist theory, it is the task of poetry to guard women against patriarchal oppression and work towards guaranteeing all their social, political, cultural and economic rights in society. This rather particular case of Kurdish women's poetry is much similar to what Mills says about the responsibilities of Irish women poets in a paper on "the dynamic interaction between contemporary Irish women poets and the notion of tradition in Irish poetry" (Mills 1995: 69). In the paper's conclusion, Mills argues clearly that:

Irish women poets are actively seeking to express and make visible those aspects of experience previously ignored, obscured and falsely represented by two-dimensional, lifeless, inhuman icons. In the process they are restoring vitality to our culture and claiming a right to full participation in the civil and political life of this island (Mills 1995: 86).

It is possibly this gender-based human drive endorsed by Irish women poets that is sought by Kurdish women poets to strengthen the position of women in society. Hesen

seems to be acting like a sociologist in her poetry so as to diagnose the important social issues surrounding women in her community. Hence, in her fourth collection of poems, *Curiosity Lip* (2009a), Hesen again dedicates the majority of poems to the marginalised cause of Kurdish women and attempts to raise some serious questions affecting their future. In “Pêkêk Zemen Direng Bixat” (A Pint to Hold up Time), Hesen creates an intimate atmosphere with her long-waiting lover quite different from that enjoyed by normal Kurdish lovers. The striking anomaly of her rendezvous with her lover is that she celebrates the romantic time drinking beer, which is a deviation from the mainstream traditions of her society and, simultaneously, a technical innovation in the poetry of Kurdish women. It can be deduced from the date of the book that this form of expressing a romantic love relationship is reinforced by the post-2003 social changes and feminist activism in Kurdistan which have relatively reduced the patriarchal pressure on women and allowed them some degree of the freedom of expression. Meanwhile, this authentic treatment of love by Hesen may come from her deep belief in it and the inspirations it provides for her poetic creations. Hesen sees “love as a prerequisite for invention” (Hesen 2007: 200), which justifies her constant obsession with it.

Likewise, she is probably treating love in this way as a challenge to the religious hegemony of Islam in the region. The misinterpretation of whose principles has generally been the source of oppression of women in Kurdish society. In this poem, Hesen tries to give a Christian form to the rendezvous to attest to the fact that even though they are not linked to Islam, they still have difficulties on their way, and as two lovers, they find the time they have spent together as lost days. This tryst is the confession of two lovers of all the unlucky days they have passed together and the age they have wasted while waiting for their passionate love relationship to be a success. This bold representation and adventurous spirit in poetry is unique to the present-day Kurdish women poets due to the much wider freedoms they currently enjoy in southern Kurdistan. It simply indicates the undeniable fact that women poets never hesitate to resort to whatever means they feel will stop the deteriorating situation of their fellow sisters:

Pêkêkim bo têke
 Ciya le pêkekanî sajan
 Piř bêl lew temeney pêkewe sûtanman
 Momêkim bo pêke

Pour me a pint
 Different from the pints of past years
 Full of the age we have burnt it together
 Light me a candle

Ciya le Kirîsmise zorekanî nêwanman
Piř bêl le bêhořî û
Xařî le bawêřkî jîyan
Goranîyekim bo bêje
Bêzar le werzî pîrbûnman
(Ĥesen 2009a: 61).

Different from the many Christmases between us
Full of unconsciousness and
Empty from the life's yawn
Sing me a song
Upset from our season of senescence

The status of women in Kurdish society takes a spacious area in Ĥesen's poetry. She seems to have conducted a reading of women's vulnerable situation in society from different perspectives. In her poetry, she has her open say on the women's social, political, cultural and romantic condition and she sharply objects to the way women are treated by the social and political entities in southern Kurdistan. Kurdish critic Ĥeme Se'îd Ĥesen argues that what Ĥesen expresses in her poetry shields women from the common gender stereotypes attached to them by the classic Kurdish patriarchal mentality and culture such as women as the reproducers of culture and nation, homemakers and symbolic of ethnic identities. He also states that "Çinûr Namîq uses poetry to square up to those views that see woman as inferior and as no more than a body which is lifeless, whose responsibility is to satisfy the sexual needs of man" (Ĥesen 2012: 16). The poetic voice of Ĥesen should stand for the relentless efforts of a Kurdish feminist who is in search of the achievement of the basic rights of women in her homeland.

In her latest poetry book, *I was Wrong to Follow Adam* (2009b), Ĥesen becomes even more radical in her attacks on religion. She gives such a controversial and typical title to the book in defiance of the rather misogynistic description of woman in certain sacred religious books⁸⁴. She bases the title on the story of Adam and Eve in which Eve apparently lures Adam to eat from a tree forbidden from them by God. As a result, Adam eats from that tree and is in return expelled, along with Eve, from paradise as a punishment for breaking God's heavenly commands. This story is exaggeratedly used as a model for demonising women and considering them as evil and hypocrite in most

⁸⁴ It is a common belief that women have been described in major sacred religious books, namely the holy Qur'an and Bible, as weak and mentally unfit when compared to men. Theologically, there are certain groups of critics of religious texts, such as Spellberg (1996: 313), who generally argue that pains of childbirth and menstruation are punitive measures duly taken by God against women in retaliation for Eve's seduction of Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge or immortality following a warning by God himself to keep away from it. However, such arguments have been rejected totally by a wide spectrum of both Muslim and Christian clerics, scholars and literary critics like Badawi (2002: 1) and Morrissey (2001: 342) on the basis that Adam and Eve did eat from the prohibited tree each at their own free will and they were both equally punished for the disobedience of God's order.

religious communities around the world. Thus, Hesen endeavours to rectify the allegedly defamed image of women as a result of this story and narrate the facts in a rather feminised style. She cleverly makes use of this story to demonstrate the difficulties of Kurdish women and the manipulative tactics exercised by Kurdish men to drag them into acts of dishonour. Meanwhile, she is possibly the first woman poet to have introduced this theme and story into the Kurdish women's poetry.

Accordingly, it is in "Henasem Werzî Gulane" (My Breath is Season of Flowers) where Hesen portrays a malignant social phenomenon which she believes is rampant in her society. This is the betrayal of women by men after engagement in seemingly reliable love relationships. On marital infidelity, Hesen basically argues that "sense of distrust between a wife and husband is like a plague that infects the whole family" (Hesen 2007: 185). In an impressive poetic text blended carefully with technical devices and figures of speech, Hesen pictures the dashed hopes and failed wishes of a woman who for a long time prays to find the man of her dreams, but the phoney loyalty and exploitative intentions of the man eventually make her life hellish. She paradoxically prays for rain to help the woman make her dreams come true, whereas such rain is only able to help temporarily. Unlike the universally narrated story of Adam and Eve, Hesen satirically implicates men in the seduction act, portraying them as "sex-stricken ghosts". In this poem, she uses apple to be the kind of tree in the Garden of Eden that men use to attract women. After being trapped in passing sexual practice and losing virginity, the woman is left in despair and lonely, expecting a dark future at the hands of the male members of her family and relatives, because with this act, she is thought to have brought shame on them and in some cases on the whole community. Hesen personifies ghosts to stand for deceitful rapists and uses the expression of "going dry" to simply symbolise the woman's act of losing her virginity. She identifies in completely poetic terms and images the fact that willingly losing virginity outside legal and traditional marriage will destroy all the romantic fantasies women have in Kurdish society:

Zemenêke nwêj bo bonî baran dekeyt

You have been praying for rain scent for a long time

Tarmayîyekaniş be bonî sêw firîwit deden

Ghosts will use apple smell⁸⁵ to deceive you
Paş wişkewbûn wehmekanit gişt deden
After dying back, your fantasies will set you in flames
(Hesen 2009b: 186).

It appears that Hesen keeps a particular poetic style for her texts by breaking the fear of approaching religion. It is undeniable that not everyone dares to challenge the religious supremacy of Islam in southern Kurdistan, for they will face serious consequences if anything ever happens in contrary to the general religious guidelines set for people in the region to follow. This courage of Hesen is similar to Herdî's, but the big difference is that Herdî has managed to challenge religious icons in the diaspora, while Hesen is doing so at home where religious prohibitions are plenty. Hesen also aims to raise the awareness of her readers of the danger of certain cultural practices and gender discourses that target women on individual basis such as women as the honour of families and objects of sexual satisfaction that men can use whenever this need arises.

4.5 Roj Heleşbeyî⁸⁶ (b.1969)

⁸⁵ This idea of metaphorising apple to have a magic and seductive power is probably taken from the Greek mythology. In the Greek mythical story of "Melanion and Atalanta", apple is portrayed as an irresistible and delicious fruit with a supernatural distractive power that can help in fulfilling one's wishes. However, it is also possible to argue that the tempting smell of apple used in this poem is an indirect reference to the similar smell of the chemical gas which was used against Halabja town. Flynn describes the smell of the gas that killed thousands of Halabjans in one single day as the smell of "sweetened apples", adding "children breathed it in greedily but moments later lay blinded and writhing in their death throes, blood streaming from their eyes, nose and mouth" (Flynn 2013). This apple smell leaking from the gas which had an attraction power was meant to kill as many people as possible.

⁸⁶ Roj Heleşbeyî was born in the town of Halabja in 1969. She flees her town with her family towards Iran following the chemical bombardment of Halabja by the overthrown Iraqi Ba'th regime in 1988. Heleşbeyî loses her mother, three sisters and two brothers in the chemical attack, a family tragedy that leaves an enormous emotional and psychological influence on her and discourages her from returning to her town in 1991 after the Kurdish people's uprising against the Ba'th authority in southern Kurdistan. As a result, she settles in the city of Slêmanî where she accomplishes her Associate in Arts degree in Kurdish-English language. Heleşbeyî is currently a language teacher in one of the schools of Slêmanî. The literary life of Heleşbeyî is remarkable and is literally laden with painful facts, partly because she is coming from an educated, literature-loving family and partly due to the huge impact the human tragedy of Halabja has had on her psyche. She is the owner of the Poetry Golden Medal and nine other awards being given to her during local poetry festivals held in different areas of southern Kurdistan. Originally, she publishes her first poem in *Hawkarî* newspaper in 1986, entitled "Payîz le Bêdengîda" (Autumn in Silence). As for her poetic collections, there are conflicting facts about the real number of her poetry books. In an interview with her (2012: 14), Şêxanî says that she has five poetry books, while Naderi (2011: 143) states that she only has published two poetic works. However, the poet herself, while being contacted personally, has admitted that thus far she has three published books and two unpublished ones. Accordingly, the first published poetry book in 2002 is *Ne Xuşey Dergayek...Ne Qumêk Kes* (Neither a Door's Creak Nor a Gulp of a Person). The second book is *Ta Xew Da'egîrsê Binû* (Snooze Until Sleep Ignites), which is published in 2004. While the third collection published in 2008 is *Payzêk Be Paştoy Kanunêkewe* (An Autumn in a Winter Season's

Helebceyî is distinguishable from other women poets by her revolutionary poetry which is crammed with much complexity and hidden sufistic and pedagogic layers. On the structural and contextual ambiguity of her poetry, she says “as a poet I must make the reader contemplate and suffer” (Helebceyî 2010: 4). Through reading her poems, any reader needs an analytical and critical mind to make some clear sense of Helebceyî’s poetic aims and imagination and identify the central themes of her poetry. The poetic structure she uses is difficult and her language and word choices make her poetry look more like a form of sufistic poetry written in the classical not modern age. Technically, the composition of her poetic lines shows that she is significantly influenced by the classical Kurdish poets, such as Nalî (b.1800-d.1856), the classical Arab poets like al-Mutanabbi (b.915-d.965) and modern Persian poets, namely Forugh Farrokhzad (b.1935-d.1967) and Sohrab Sepehri (b.1928-d.1980). It is this direct influence of regional literature on Helebceyî’s poetry that takes the course of her poetry towards classical and causes a sort of ambiguity in immediately understanding her specific poetic messages.

In spite of these basic poetic facts, Helebceyî never hesitates to dwell on the current situation of women in her gender-segregated society. She is against the construction of women as secondary in rights to men and as merely care providers of family. The position of Helebceyî on discriminatory gender discourses is embodied in her unbiased poetic rebellion against the cultural exercises which underrate the abilities of women caused by their biological construction. She translates her literary mutiny as a revolt against “all those cultures which see her as a woman, unable to do anything at all” (Helebceyî 2009: 14). Helebceyî attempts hard in her poetry to discuss the main prominent factors which are responsible for the unsatisfactory and unacceptable conditions women regularly live through in southern Kurdistan. Like other women poets, she mentions the influential factors like the huge impact of classic Kurdish patriarchy, the

Overcoat). The titles of her yet unpublished books are: “Tarmayî Pêy Meraqêk” (The Shadow of an Anxiety’s Foot) and “Ew Munacatêke le Çawekan...!!” (He is a Soliloquy in the Eyes...!!). Helebceyî turns critical of the book publishers in southern Kurdistan for not publishing her latter two poetry books. In an interview given to *Rûberî Dahênan*, she argues that poetry is in crisis in southern Kurdistan, saying “as an example, take a poetry book to Serdem Press, they will say we do not publish poetry books” (Helebceyî 2010: 4). Nonetheless, Helebceyî is a productive poet, with regular appearances on Kurdish TVs, literary newspapers and magazines. As it is clear from most of her literary interviews and articles, she literally seems to have allocated all her life to poetry and creative writing.

widespread dominance of religious traditions, intergenerational cultural norms and the unproductive role women's organisations usually play in community.

In Şêxanî's interview with Helebceyî (2012: 14), she is described as a "post-uprising [1991] new poetic voice", though the publication dates of her poetry books show that 2000s is the decade when she releases her poetic products to the general Kurdish literary readership. The reason is clarified in her biography, which is the lack of interest by the Kurdish publishing houses in publishing poetry. However, another reason could be her unsociable disposition which has resulted in her poetry to be received with less enthusiasm by the publishers. Helebceyî explains this as saying "the time I spend at home is much greater than the time I spend on writing literature and my relationship with the writers is very poor" (Helebceyî 2009: 14). She acknowledges that her unfriendly nature "has proved counterproductive for her" (*ibid.*). One more indication to support her belonging to the 1990s generation of Kurdish women poets is the individual date of many poems which were written in different years of this decade.

Helebceyî's literary pen is the only defensive tool she uses in confronting social and political injustice towards women and the practice of inequality in gender rights against them. Being grateful for her ability to read and write in a community where female illiteracy is common, Helebceyî proudly says:

I want to write the sufferings of lonely women. There are many women alone like me, but they lack the ability to write. How can they tell about their loneliness and pains? I am pleased to be literate through which I express my sense of solitude (*ibid.*).

This pattern of autobiographical account keeps repeating itself throughout many poetic texts written by Helebceyî. Certainly, Helebceyî's family tragedy gives an elegiac shadow to most of her poems and her home town of Halabja is mentioned without fail in all her publications, which is another characteristic that sets her apart. Her reflection on Halabja is more personal and emotional than political. It is not coincidental that she uses the title "Helebceyî" as her poetic name. She is the daughter of Halabja who, alongside her defence of women's rights, attempts to keep the Halabja tragedy alive in her poetic texts. Hesen argues that in her poetry "Roj Helebceyî narrates the story of the victims" (Hesen 2012: 18). It is her town's human disaster that leaves her alone, with no mother, sisters and brothers. Therefore, one can hardly blame her for occasionally pointing out

the barbarous acts of the overthrown Iraqi Ba’th authority in her poems. In “Dwa Nûsînekanî Baran...Le Nêw Sirudekanî Hûzin û Nimekanî Giryan” (The Last Words of Rain: Between the Anthems of Sadness and Droplets of Crying) from her first poetry book, HeĽebceyî recounts the atrocities of the Iraqi army during the bombardment of her town. She shows how her townspeople were killed randomly and displaced to the border areas with Iran. In a heartrending stanza, HeĽebceyî narrates the story of a victim who survives the gas attack and asks for help from someone who is lying next to him but is in better condition than him. She draws a live genuine scene out of this situation to tell one small part of a human catastrophe that claimed the lives of thousands of Kurds and left thousands either disabled or suffer severe chronic diseases. As a witness and narrow survivor of this tragedy, it is effortless for the readers of her poems to imagine the bitter realities of the chemical attack from the few lines of this stanza and envisage the considerable pain inflicted on the helpless people of Halabja:

Le kenar amêzî dayke ziman..
 DeĽê le řêy xwa..dînarêk
 Le awedanî û aw..
 HeĽhatûm le derbendî lim û
 Le limozî gurg û le limozî seg û
 Le limozî ebû casmekan..
 (HeĽebceyî 2002: 35-6).

Next to the bosom of a fellow countryman..
 Says for God’s sake.. a dinar
 To reach a populated area and water..
 I have escaped the sand strait,
 The jaws of the wolf, the jaws of the dog and
 The jaws of Abu Jasims⁸⁷..

Benefiting profoundly from her past experiences of the chemical attack, it is possible to argue that the victim of the above stanza might be the poet herself reading from her memory of the horrific incident. Arguably, it is only through reading her poetry that one can feel the big impact of the Halabja gas attack on the long course of her everyday life and her limited interactions with society.

The first poetic work (2002) of HeĽebceyî does include poems which criticise the killing and murder of women in southern Kurdistan for a variety of reasons. HeĽebceyî emphasises cultural and social factors like family honour, love and forced marriage to be behind the persecution and oppression of women in her traditional society. She hopes that the day comes when her conventional society changes and women are no longer punished for their struggle to be equal in gender rights with men and be free in their love choices.

⁸⁷ Abu Jasim was one of the common names used alternatively by the southern Kurds for the Iraqi army Arab soldiers. Another common name was Abu Khalil.

In support of Helebceyî's resolve to direct the Kurdish society towards another cultural model where gender equality and free love are respected, Hesen sees "Helebceyî begging homeland to be sympathetic towards its lovers, give up the use of guns and fighting" (Hesen 2012: 18). Moreover, another side of social reform campaigned for by Helebceyî in her poetic texts concerns the few feminist groups currently working in southern Kurdistan. In a part of the "Ne Xuřey Dergayek...Ne Qumêk Kes" (Neither a Door's Creak Nor a Gulp of a Person), Helebceyî criticises the series of campaigns by feminist activists which are apparently organised to be in defence of women's violated rights while nothing noteworthy in reality has changed in terms of injustice done to women in Kurdish society. She believes that such activities are mainly for making profit and only specific groups benefit from them. Helebceyî argues that the existing empire of feminism is limited to certain impractical slogans without paying enough attention to the changing of society's misconception of women's rights:

Bîřwanin bo împratorî fimînîzim..	Look at the empire of feminism
Tawê têfikrên..	Think for a while..
Dewruber gardî tavgey kes û	Everybody around guards the cascade of personhood and
Hajey îdrak çole le kes..	The thunder of perception is deserted..

(Helebceyî 2002: 76).

Helebceyî's assessment of Kurdish women's activism bears similarity with Mojab's who comes to the same conclusion in her research on the situation of Kurdish women's NGOs and organisations in southern Kurdistan. Mojab argues that:

[...] most women's organizations and NGOs in Kurdistan have little or no informed awareness of the situation of Kurdish women. They do not have much contact with people at the grassroots level; nor do they rely on concrete evidence about women (Mojab 2009: 116).

This realisation is evidence that strong hope cannot be built on such organisations and NGOs and that gender-based violence and the killing of women will not stop only through the formation of feminist organisations, but through the radical change of culture and mind of those who have no faith in women's equal rights. Helebceyî is against the rapid increase of feminist movements at the expense of the extinction of social awareness and understanding of the basic rights of women in her society.

Helebceyî's vigorous defence of the suppressed public rights of Kurdish women continues in *Snooze Until Sleep Ignites* (2004). Here, she goes much further in exposing

the conduct of Kurdish patriarchal society towards women and discusses some of the prominent phenomena affecting women as a result of the arrogant behaviour of Kurdish men and their commitment to old traditions. Among them are the recurrent cases of early divorce, the aging of unmarried women or spinsterhood and unusual rape incidents. Arguably, unusual quick changes in the people's lifestyle and economy after 2003 urge Helebceyî to modernise the topics of her poetry and remain contemporary with the everyday life of her people. It is this socio-cultural dimension of Helebceyî's poetry that finds her supportive of the main concerns of feminist criticism and the principles such criticism is generally based on.

Feminist criticism as an effective force is tasked with healing the very deep wounds women globally have been suffering from as a result of the submission tactics being cunningly practised against them by patriarchy all along history. For Stimpson, there has been both a moral and historical imperative behind the very emergence of feminist criticism. She argues that:

Feminist criticism began, in part, as an anatomy of the pain that the pressures of history had imprinted on women, as a passion to erase that pain, and as a hope, often inadequately expressed, to ally that passion with other progressive political energies (Stimpson 1983: 287-8).

Literally, one can notice Helebceyî serving the public manifesto of feminist criticism in quite many of her poetic texts. However, it is obvious that her poetic performance is not yet at the required level as to embrace many essential details that feminist criticism is about and is looking ahead to accomplish.

The central theme that Helebceyî thoughtfully develops in "Cedeleanî Xinkan" (Quarrels of Drowning) is rape. This theme is also alien to and infrequently found in Kurdish women's poetry. Helebceyî argues that women who are raped in her society are helpless and lonely. The poetic devices Helebceyî uses in this poem are plenty and each is loaded with a deep sense of regret and condemnation of the deceitful acts of fake male lovers who cause a life of hell to women they are in love. For instance, in the last few lines of this poem, Helebceyî personifies fire to play the role of rapists who are at large and no one can stop them. She likens women to weak tamed animals with no control over men who attack them for sexual pleasure. Therefore, she advises women to remain silent so as not to cause themselves further pains:

Têbge lem cedele... To întimayekî toxî
Be tenhayî...
To çîlêk baran le kwê edozîtewe,
Bîdey le yexey ew agraney
Kolacin be îgtîsab,
Tê bige lem cedele...!!
(Heleşbeyî 2004: 29).

Understand this quarrel... You are an affiliation
Deeply coloured in solitude...
Where you can find a twig of rain,
To fix it to the collar of those fires
Which are collaged in rape,
Understand this quarrel...!!

Confrontation with the anti-women traditions of Kurdish society gains more strength in the second poetry collection of Heleşbeyî. She runs deep down to the very roots of the fabric of her society to diagnose the weaknesses which are responsible for the oppression of women and their encasement in classic patriarchy. Accordingly, in “Nîştimanî Birîn û Minî Jin” (The Homeland of Wound and Me as Woman), Heleşbeyî sharply criticises the gendered view of her society towards women. She says that women are not allowed to do anything without the prior consent of their families, particularly the male members, and whatever they approach at their own will is regarded as shame. She critically shows how unacceptable it is for a woman in her society to take a photo with a romantic smile on her face. This situation is still in full view in the Kurdish countryside where clans and local tribes are in charge of the social and political affairs and gender-motivated constructions and stereotyping of women are at the peak:

Lem nîştimanî xêlî û birîne da...
Hemû yadewerîyekanim şureyîn...
Şureyîye wêneyekî fotografi minî jin,
Be pêkenînekî romansîyewe,
(Heleşbeyî 2004: 66).

In this homeland of tribe and wound...
All my memories are put to shame...
A photo of me as a woman with a romantic smile on,
Is a shame,

Reading Heleşbeyî’s *An Autumn in a Winter Season’s Overcoat*⁸⁸ (2008), one can see a purposeful focus on deceptive love. This book also contains unusually long poetic texts, but its difference with the previous two books is that Heleşbeyî allocates most of its poems to the epidemic of temporary love relationships that exist between a large number of men and women in southern Kurdistan. Generally, it is men who deceive women and

⁸⁸ It is worthwhile to say that the translation of this poetry book title into English is slightly different from the Kurdish text due to the problem of mismatch in terms. The Kurdish title includes the Arabic word “Kanunêkewe” which is either of the first two months of winter, with different translations of these two months in English. Therefore, to avoid ambiguity and untranslatability, the whole season of winter is used in the title as the perfect match for the Kurdish title.

are not faithful in their relationships. Using informative poetic images, Helebceyî regrets the fact that women of her society are the victims of illusory love, arguing that most women who have been killed on the pretext of “honour protection” were involved in this type of love being set as a trap for them by groups of licentious men. Thus, it is clear that here Helebceyî deals with another social issue in her society and uses her poetry to show another reality of life of those women whose social position is very vulnerable. Kurdish literary critic Miħemmed describes Helebceyî as a realist poet, and while making a critical reading of her third poetry book, he states that:

When we read *An Autumn in a Winter Season's Overcoat*, we feel that Roj Helebceyî is attempting to portray the real moments of life. She would like to expose her anxiety through the portraits she paints for herself (Miħemmed 2010: 7).

The poem that explicably represents the above argument is “Dûemîn Xeyyam!!” (The Second Khayyam!!) where the main focus is on the separation of two lovers after being together for quite a long time. The speaker of this poem is a woman who pleadingly asks her beloved not to abandon her following a long intimate relationship with him. The poetic tone through which the woman expresses her plea for mercy from her beloved is very effective and it directly creates an emotional influence on the readers to sympathise with her. This sample of love failure put forward by Helebceyî from her society speaks for hundreds of similar cases in which the main losers are women and the consequence of almost half, if not more, of these situations is either the loss of life or an uncertain future for the women in question:

‘Îşq wêranî kirdîn taze deļêy maļ’awa	Love has destroyed us, you now say goodbye
‘Îşq le naw çawekanmanda xoy heşarda	Love has hid itself in our eyes
Taze deļêy çon kitêbî meħaļ mutaļakeyn..	You now say how we can study the book of the impossible..
‘Îşq bwe baļindeyekî maļî û	Love has become a tamed bird and
Le dû twêy singmana nûst,	Slept in the depths of our bosoms,
Taze deļêy drectî temenman guzešt..!	You now say our age tree is over..!

(Helebceyî 2008: 17).

In the same collection, it is interesting to find another poem drawing on a theme which is rather similar to the central theme of “The Second Khayyam!!”. Its story is a possibly successful romantic love which is on the verge of collapse. As normal, the

initiative for reconciliation is taken by the woman who explains for her beloved that life is too short and does not deserve all such complaints by him. Thus, “Were Legeļ Rohma Yarbe..!! (Come Woo My Soul..!!) attests to another poetic invention by Heļebceyî within which she admonishes lovers to be honest with each other and value the social consequences of a successful love relationship. Her poetic skills are visible particularly at the moment when she goes beyond the importance of a successful love to imply that it is the survival of human race which will be the result of a fair and morally acceptable love. She metaphorically associates the process of mating and reproduction in human beings with the relationship between flowers and butterflies, adding that if this romantic love fails, the flowers’ sexual appeal to butterflies will die away, too. In this way, the woman calls upon her beloved to remain loyal to her so that a proper balance happens in nature and the surroundings keep lively and flourishing:

Min îtir lêre nîm were legeļ rohma yar be..	I am no longer here, come woo my soul..
Ba çitir guļekan le orgazim neçnewe û	So that flowers no longer fail to reach orgasm and
Werzêk pepule nebînin	See butterfly for a season
(Heļebceyî 2008: 95).	

The importance of Heļebceyî as a poet is linked to the fact that despite being alone in all her life after the death of her family members, she has remarkably managed to reflect on social and political life around her and discuss its negative sides in detail in her poetry. As a Kurdish woman poet, she has realised the significance of her role in showing the inequality in gender rights between women and men and addressing it in a poetic language in her works with a hope of a timely reform.

4.6 Behre Muftî⁸⁹ (b.1974)

⁸⁹ Behre Muftî is the poetic name she uses in her literary and poetic activities. Her proper name is Behre Luqman ‘Ebdulhemîd. Muftî was born in 1974 in the famous town of Koye, the birthplace of several renowned Kurdish poets, artists and writers, such as the classical poet Hacı Qadirî Koyî (b.1816-d.1897) and the contemporary popular singer Tayer Tofîq (b.1922-d.1987). Muftî finishes all stages of her education, from primary to preparatory to commercial school in Koye. She has a diploma degree in commerce. She is currently an employee at the Central Library of Salahaddin University in Hewlêr. As a poet, Muftî’s career starts in the 1990s, and she initially publishes her first poem entitled “Paş Mergî Azîzan” (Following the Death of the Beloved Ones) in *Birayetî* (Fraternity) newspaper in 1994. Muftî has taken part with her poems in a number of poetry festivals and poetry reading events held on local levels in a variety of cities and towns in southern Kurdistan. In return, she has been awarded poetry prizes four times by Enwer Mesîfî Festival, Kurdistan Women’s Union, Kurdistan Journalists’ Syndicate and the Dihok branch of Kurdish Writers’ Union, respectively. However, when compared to previous Kurdish women

The importance of discussing the poetry of Muftî is that she is a concrete example of the broad marginalisation of women's poetry in Kurdish literature. In line with the literary agenda of Anglo-American feminist criticism, she is the silenced voice that deserves to be rediscovered. Despite writing four poetry books, she is a woman poet who has been paid very little attention by Kurdish literary critics and writers. There are a number of reasons for this; perhaps her minimal contact with other writers plays a role, along with her family's social construction, which, as she indicates in her self-written biography, tends to be more conservative rather than liberal. On a poetry-related interview with her which was shown on a local Kurdish TV, Muftî says "it angered my mother and made her show her protest against it", adding "my mother does not support me until now" (Muftî 2008: 8). This personal confession justifies the argument developed by Kandiyoti (see p.88) which criticises certain women for their complicity in reifying patriarchal regimes. Muftî argues that "her mother was afraid of the community" (*ibid.*), which is the reaction every classic patriarchy anticipates to result from its subjugation and social containment policies. However, these somewhat plain factors should play a secondary role in her disappearance from the Kurdish literary scene since copies of her poetic texts have been displayed in a number of bookshops and local libraries and quite a few comments have been written about them. It is from here that the particular importance of feminist criticism comes forward which helps women poets such as Muftî to come to surface and be read by audience. Underlining the critical role of feminist criticism in recovering and rediscovering large numbers of writings by women, Showalter recognises the fact that:

The focus on women's writing as a specific field of inquiry, moreover, led to a massive recovery and rereading of literature by women from all nations and historical periods. As hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered, as letters and journals were brought to light, as new literary biographies explored the relationship between the individual female talent and the literary tradition, the continuities in women's writing became clear for the first time (Showalter 1985: 6).

poets, her poetry appears much less in the Kurdish literary magazines, journals and newspapers. Importantly, Muftî's strong love of poetry results in the production of four poetry books, of which *Dergakanî Ew Dyû* (Doors of Other Side) is the first one, published in 2005 in Hewlêr. Her second poetry book is entitled *Bedem Şepoşewe Baranekan Deşon* (Rains Walk Together With the Wave), also published in 2005 in Hewlêr. The third poetry collection comes into existence almost three years later under the title of *Ew Piyawey Be Lamewe Ret Bû* (The Man Who Passed By Me), published in Dihok by the Dihok branch of Kurdish Writers' Union. And her most recent poetry book is *Başindekanî Jin* (Woman's Birds), published in 2010 in Hewlêr.

As stated in her biography, Muftî engages in poetry writing in the 1990s. All her poetry books are published in the 2000s probably due to the difficult and unstable family conditions of Muftî (see below) and the poor political and economic situation of southern Kurdistan in the 1990s. Muftî's first two poetry books have most of their poems written in the 1990s. Therefore, as with other women poets of the 1990s generation, many such poems, as will be discussed further down, are about the political history of Kurdistan, the catastrophic national events happened to the Kurds and bad life conditions in southern Kurdistan in the 1990s.

Significantly, there are several motives behind the conversion of Muftî into a poet rather than something else. The primary one is her national affiliation that spurs her to reflect on the tragic life of her people who were the victim of a range of bloody wars waged against them by the successive Iraqi regimes. As a case in point, she was much affected by the heartbreaking sights of Kurds from southern Kurdistan fleeing the Ba'ath army in 1991, following a ruthless crackdown on Kurdish *peshmerga* forces which were retreating from the Kurdish cities after liberating them for some few days. That terrible event known locally as the "exodus in millions" in the Kurdish political history of southern Kurdistan found huge masses of Kurdish refugees trapped in cold weather in the mountains bordering with Iran and Turkey. Meanwhile, another influential motive to be directly taken from the mouth of Muftî herself is "my disaster, which took my poetry further deep down and burned me to the bone" (Muftî 2008: 7). This disaster is the tragic loss of four of her young brothers all together as a result of an army attack on her family house in Koye during the Kurdish civil war in the 1990s which forced them to migrate from this town for ever and resettle miles away in Hewlêr.

Muftî's literary articles and comments show that she adores poetry and takes much pleasure from writing and reading poetic texts. As will be indicated later in the thematic analysis of her poetry, Muftî argues that she finds herself and her life experiences expressed in precise detail in her poetic lines. For her, poetry making is not a routinely undertaken activity, but rather a task that is the product of a sophisticated mind. Furthermore, she gives a much elevated status to the words that come out of the mouth of poets, saying that "the poet's speech is not the ordinary dialogue that takes place between a speaker and listener" (Muftî 2009: 7). The themes that make up the content of Muftî's

poetry are diverse, some are recurrently repeated in most poems, such as her lamentation over the death of her brothers, whereas there are themes that are seen on irregular basis, such as themes related to the impact of religion on society and the overall position of women in Kurdish society. In other words, there is a notable difference in terms of themes between one poetry book and another, as in the first two collections, she mostly talks about the beauty of homeland and the exploits of Kurdish *peshmergas*, the natural environment of her home region and the social value of non-bourgeois love relationships between women and men, with intermittent references to the bad situation of women in her society. While it is mainly in the third collection where she broadly reflects on the gender oppression Kurdish women face at the hands of men and where she criticises the social system that arranges gender relations in her society.

In “Hejokan” (Eagles) (1997) from the first poetry book, Muftî celebrates the political freedom of her people achieved in 1991 following an uprising by southern Kurds against the toppled Iraqi Ba’th regime. She means by the word “Hejokan” those Kurdish *peshmergas* who were behind the success of the uprising and who gave their life for the sake of the freedom of Kurdistan. Thus, there is a close connection between the title of the poem and the events of its content. This poem carries a deep patriotic connotation and stands for Muftî’s sense of nationalism and her particular style of political struggle side by side with Kurdish men. Through this form of poetry, she attempts to deconstruct the mainstream gender discourse that sees politics and nationalism a solely male business. Also, she defies what Smith argues in his recognition of men’s role in nationalist projects that “hegemonic nationalist symbols and narratives proclaim the need for men to defend both the ‘Motherland’ and the nation’s women who symbolise and express its ‘purity’” (Smith 1998: 207). Throughout this poem, Muftî points to all the national tragedies which had occurred to her people, such as Anfal and Halabja, and indicates the climate of fear produced by the then Iraqi army forces which were involved in intensive arrest campaigns and torture of innocent people. Muftî heralds the arrival of liberation and happiness which is brought in by the iron will of people and the national struggle of *peshmergas* and urges birds, trees, rivers and all the living creatures in this part of Kurdistan to stand and cheer up, saying that dark days of suppression and persecution are over by now. In a piece of this poem, she says:

Ho zêy Badînan	You Badinan Zab
Şepoîe yaxî bwekanit	Glad tidings for
Mijdeyan lê bê	Your rebellious waves
Mijdetan lê bê	Glad tidings to you
Guî azadî rwawe	Freedom flower has flourished
Guî azadî	Freedom flower

(Muftî 2005a: 24).

As her debut poetry book was produced at a painful time when her family tragedy had happened, it is no coincidence to find that almost three quarters of the book are allocated to the death of her brothers. There is a quite melancholic atmosphere hanging above the texts, indicating the poet's deep sense of bereavement and feeling of harsh days ahead to be endured in solitude. Muftî feels shattered by the tragic death of her brothers and to keep them always in front of her eyes, she dedicates the whole book to them, saying "it is dedicated to the souls of the four birds who have flown and never returned: Şaîaw, Hengaw, Sengaw and Heme" (Muftî 2005a: 3). Elsewhere, in "Ew Jinaney Weku Daykim Jiwan Legeî Goîstan Deken" (Those Women Who Like My Mother Date Cemetery) (1997), Muftî dwells on the agony suffered by her mother resulting from the loss of her sons. Lamentably, she points out that her mother is not alone to have suffered this painful tragedy, as there are many more women in her society who are experiencing the same trauma. In a poetic metaphor, she describes such heart-torn women as a spring continuously oozing out blood from incurable open wounds which are caused by the lives of their dear ones claimed in tragic ways:

Ey jin êwe kanî xwênin	You women are blood spring
Be ser termî rakşawî cergtana	Over the laid corpses of your beloved ones
Gyantana serapa	Your whole body
Sûr, reş deçêtewe	Keeps changing from red to black

(Muftî 2005a: 35)

Nonetheless, Muftî does not stay secluded from passions of strong love and enjoyment of some fresh days of her homeland's stunning natural environment. She does write impressive poetic texts about the beautiful mountains and hills of Kurdistan and regular changes in weather in the four seasons in this collection. In an interview with the Kurdish critic Mehmud Zamdar for *Bedirxan* weekly newspaper, Muftî says "nature was born from me", further adding "the love between me and nature is very deep" (Muftî

2009: 20). Her admiration for nature reaches a level that makes her say “if my poetic name was not ‘Behre’, I would change it into ‘Siruşt’ [Nature]” (*ibid.*). Given that theories of gender explicitly criticise the combination of women with nature because of their biological structure, this significance of nature for Muftî comes up with opposite results and it categorically reinforces such linkage.

In “Twanewe” (Dissolving), Muftî expresses an inimitable romantic sense of togetherness with her beloved, urging him to be so close to her until she dissolves her spirit in him. The basic idea of spiritual unity and dissolving seems to have been taken from Sufism, where Sufis attempt to achieve unity with God by leading a basically simple life and practising meditation on a regular basis. Using a variety of poetic techniques, such as oxymoron, metaphor, simile and imagery, Muftî likens her lover to a river whose love to him flows continuously like the flow of river. The bare love theme of this poem represents Muftî’s challenge to her conservative society and its phallogentric rules and regulations:

<p>Ey rûbare xoşewîstekem ʻEşqim leğel şepoştaye Bo menzilgay roḥim bibe Ba le naxî kefî zîwînta Win nebim (Muftî 2005a: 47).</p>	<p>You my beloved river My love is ingrained in your waves Take me to soul’s niche So as not to disappear In the depth of your silver foam</p>
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It sounds like there is no significant change in the previously pursued rhythm of themes by Muftî when her second book is thematically scrutinised. A demonstration of the main features of her place of residence and its natural surroundings, atmospheric changes and the beauty that follows each season shape some prominent themes of *Rains Walk Together With the Wave* (2005b). However, Muftî combines her national voice with some of her fellow Kurdish women poets to mention the first of February tragedy in 2004 in Hewlêr, which was caused by two terrorist attacks and resulted in the death of tens of people, a human disaster which will always be remembered by all Kurds, particularly those who are from southern Kurdistan. In the poem “Yekî Şubat” (First of February) whose title is taken from the tragedy itself, Muftî narrates the whole story of the two blasts, recounting the general mood of people and even the names of most of those who lost their lives in this horrible incident. It is also in this collection where Muftî discusses

the overall condition of women, believing that social life in southern Kurdistan is like a permanent prison for women. All this underlying pessimism is expressed in “Pêncşem” (Thursday), where she tells the stories of lonely girls who are keen to find lovers of their choice, but all their positive expectations will at last prove contrary since no man dares to approach them in front of the public eyes because love is already jailed in their society and is prohibited under patriarchal rules. Muftî uses moon as the lover of a girl who all Thursdays rises and stares at the eyes of the girl. Because free love with men is forbidden in the girl’s society, she instead chooses the moon as her lover and begs him not to disappear. This personification of moon shows Muftî’s ability in indirectly exposing a socially gendered aspect of her society which is a ban on the practice of romantic love as a measure to protect family honour. However, in this poem, it is a pity to come to the conclusion that even the moon leaves the girl forever and destroys even that little hope she has had in him:

Mang nehatewe	Moon has not returned
Bimba bo asman	To take me up to the sky
Ême le yek têdepeşîn	We pass by one another
Ême yektir nabînîn	We do not see each other
Ême xoşewîstî nazanîn	We do not know about love
Ême mangman le sefer nehatewe	Our moon has not returned from his trip

(Muftî 2005b: 51-2).

Kurdish culture and various cultural and ethnic rituals also form a significant part of Muftî’s poetry. She includes in her poetry some pieces of local cultural and folkloric practices that are pursued even in different parts of the world. In “Pêşkeşe Be Nenkim” (Dedicated to My Grandmother), Muftî emphasises the role of grandmother in the Kurdish society. She believes that this person brings great joy to the family and is the source of inspiration for children, especially girls, as there is a strong bond between girls and grandmothers in Kurdish society. For Muftî, the enormous love shown by her grandmother meant a lot for her family, particularly for her sisters, after losing her four brothers. Speaking from her daily life experiences of an intimate relationship with her much loved grandmother, Muftî argues that “as long as you live in a family which is built on love, you feel the value of life much more” (Muftî 2009: 18). Unfortunately, the death of Muftî’s grandmother deepens the fresh wounds of her family members further and leaves them in an unexpected loneliness, as she seemed to have been the only person who

could console the girls and their mother on having lost their brothers. As the deceased grandmother used to gather the girls and tell them traditional stories as an alternative for their external relations with the outer society, there is literally now nobody to fill this gap and engage the girls as a way for preventing them from contacts with outside, particularly with the male sphere, which is a minefield for them:

Ho ne ney şazadey seyran	You grandmother, princess of picnics
Hawar bo malî çolît boşayîyeket betaîe piř nabêtewe	Alas, your house is vacant; your empty place is irreplaceable
De pêman biîê îtir le dewrî kê danîşîn	Tell us whom we should sit around from now on
Kê çaweřêy hatinman bika?	Who should await our arrival?

(Muftî 2005b: 102).

The above poem is another indication of women's agency within the patriarchal system and their role in perpetuating its cultural traditions. Hogan argues that "[...] in many contemporary nations, women are discursively constructed as the conservators of tradition, particularly in periods of rapid change" (Hogan 2009: 7). Hence, the character of Muftî's grandmother justifies Hogan's argument as with her deep affection for her granddaughters, at the same time containing them within the private sphere as a form of protection from the exploitative treatment of men, she backs the suppressive and subjugatory policy of classic patriarchy and its misogynistic tradition. Examples of Muftî's grandmother act as a barrier to the emancipation of women in an informal way.

A radical change in Muftî's poetic attitudes happens when she starts writing the poetic texts of the third collection. In this book, a significant dramatic awakening about the poor condition of women's basic rights in Kurdish society can be noticed. It seems that after a rather long period of psychological relaxation following the death of her brothers, Muftî finally reflects on the gendered life of women in her society. Similar to other women poets, Muftî takes a contemporary stance against the Kurdish patriarchal power and points out a good range of social abuses which are constantly committed against women in various localities of southern Kurdistan. It is in the canto of "Mîwecat" (Fruits) from "Çuklête Şî'riyekan" (The Poetic Chocolates) where Muftî refers to blatant disrespect by Kurdish men towards women. She exemplifies the case by the arrogant speech of a high-ranking Kurdish official who treats women like the fruit which has been

placed on a table. Quoting him in the canto, Muftî says this official states that as he relishes eating the fruit and disposes of its inedible parts, he acts with women in the same way, taking sexual pleasure from them, and when reached orgasm, will dump them and threaten to harm them if they ever mention it anywhere:

Mes'ûlek wîfî	A man in charge said
Jin weku mîwecatî ser mêze ke le tamî	Woman is like the fruit on the table when I
Têr bûm	Feel full of its taste
Nawkekey fiřê dedem û	I get rid of its stone and
Le xomî nakeme beļa	Do not take its responsibility
(Muftî 2008: 23).	

What Muftî demonstrates in the above canto is the sexual objectification and abuse of women in Kurdish society, which has always been one of the major concerns of women's rights associations in southern Kurdistan. This focus on the sexual exploitation of women groups Muftî's sex-specific attitudes with those raised by feminist critics and activists. Clearly, one central category of feminist ideology is its defiance of the sexual stereotypes made about women by the male power.

Muftî does not forget the role of Islamic traditions and religion in directing social issues in southern Kurdistan. The influence of this role is largely emphasised in the third collection, with tremendous concentration being made on the divine story of Adam and Eve. Literally, there is not a significant thematic difference between the Adam and Eve narrative being indicated by Muftî and those stories formerly introduced by Kurdish women poets of this study. Similarly, Muftî believes that women at present time are being punished by men in retaliation for Eve's deception of Adam to eat from the apple tree, which resulted in their expulsion from paradise. She acknowledges the fact that "women's Adams until now do injustice to women and their world and views are quite contrary to their opposite gender" (Muftî 2009: 20). Moreover, the imbalance of power and clerical authority between women and men in religion is another aspect being duly criticised by Muftî in her poetry. Hence, in "Dîwar" (Wall), Muftî clearly shows her disapproval of the religious leadership being pursued "since the creation of mankind on earth". She argues that the arrogance of men stems from the fact that all the prophets have been male without exception, a male power dominance which has been handed over

by the passage of time to the present days. She goes on to say that the relentless oppression of women by men originates in this unjust history:

Ey pîyaw girurî
Ke pêgemberî jin nabînî
(Muftî 2008: 60-1).

Man, you are egotistical
When you do not see a female prophet

It is worth to note that the poetic language used by Muftî in her third poetry book is simple and straightforward. The use of this uncomplicated language means that she wants the ordinary readers to understand the messages of her poems and, accordingly, act on them to minimise at least something from the pains and life miseries being inflicted by traditionalist men on women in a society which is heading towards modernity in life and the establishment of equal gender rights. In her poetry, Muftî calls for the social and political freedoms of Kurdish women and an active resistance to patriarchy. Nevertheless, one problem with the poetry of Muftî is that she does not seem to have contributed with any innovative theme or feature to the Kurdish women's poetry. From the thematic analysis of the group of poems taken from her poetic books, almost all the themes are already raised in one way or another by her contemporary women poets. But this does not affect her status as a fresh poetic voice of the 1990s.

4.7 Çinar Namîq⁹⁰ (b.1974)

The general poetic style and themes of Namîq are not much different from her fellow Kurdish women poets either at home or in the diaspora. She continues the same themes of

⁹⁰ Çinar Namîq was born in the city of Kirkuk in 1974. She is the junior sister of the Kurdish woman poet Çinûr Namîq Hesen (b.1971). Namîq achieves her diploma degree in media at Hewlêr Technical Institute in 2008. She is currently a senior stage student at the College of Arts, Media Department, at Salahaddin University in Hewlêr. She is an active member at both Kurdistan Journalists' Union and the International Federation of World Journalists. Namîq's first publication is a small poetry book entitled *Bîrewerîyekanî Rojîmêrêkî Şeket* (The Memories of an Exhausted Diary) in 1999. Due to the few copies of this book, it is unavailable in the bookshops. Her second poetry book is *Pêkekan Bîrîyan Deçêt Bimxonewe* (Pints Forget to Drink Me), which is published in 2004. The third poetry book of Namîq is published by Aras publishing house in Hewlêr in 2006 which carries the title of *Ko Şî'r* (Poetry Collection). Namîq is also able to publish a play in Kurdish under the title of *Werzekanî Heşwerîn* (Falling Seasons) in 2009. And finally, her latest poetry book is entitled *Be Pêkêk Dejê Bimbûre Natxomewe* (I Tell a Pint: Pardon Me, I Will Not Drink You), published in 2011. Namîq is a productive woman writer who has published many articles on the political, social and literary situation of southern Kurdistan in the Kurdish newspapers, magazines and online journals. She is a hard-working women's rights activist who has contributed to a series of civil activities and projects on empowering the position of women in society.

struggle against classic patriarchy and the emancipation of Kurdish women. However, pessimism and lack of hope in life often expressed by Kurdish women reflect on a wide scale in Namîq's poetry. The poetic tone used in Namîq's poetry is one of a woman who is depressed and surrounded by many hardships. Possibly, this norm of poetic writing may have a link with her life experiences and the social problems she has had in her family. As evidence for this argument, she has a poem entitled "Geřanewe" (Return) (2006: 30) which is dedicated to her father who returns to his family after being absent for a long time. It is not clear why her father had been away from them for such a long time, but the pattern in which Namîq expresses her joy for her father's return is unique. She says in the poem that their life has been hellish and dark in his absence and that his comeback has restored light and happiness to their home of which they have been deprived for long. In an exciting poetic passion, she describes the moment of her reunion with her father as follows:

A ewe toy
 Le amêzma be tasewe maçit dekem
 Paş seferî nawade
 (Namîq 2006: 30).

Oh, is it you
 That I passionately kiss while hugging
 After the untimely journey

Meanwhile, the period when Namîq embarks on writing poetry is probably another reason for her wretchedness in poetry. Dihokî states that Namîq "starts writing poetry at the beginning of the 1990s" (Dihokî 2008: 291). This is a period when Kurdish civil infighting happened and the living conditions of people were not good because of UN-imposed economic blockades. These situations may have affected Namîq's style of poetry writing, especially the political conflicts, which could be said to be a reason for her father's disappearance. Dêhatî argues that "the condition of political life has influence on the poetic world of Çinar Namîq" (Dêhatî 2004: 52). These clear arguments and poetic dates also indicate that Namîq is the post-uprising generation of Kurdish women poets whose poetry should largely mirror the then realities of life.

It is logical to claim that there are interesting autobiographical elements in Namîq's poetry. However, as an educated poet, Namîq never turns a blind eye to the sufferings of women in her mostly male-dominated society. She unflinchingly sides with other Kurdish women activists and writers and uses her poetic pen and imagination to regain the

usurped public rights of her fellow sisters. Significantly, Kurdish critic Celal finds Namîq as mindful of the poor situation of women in Kurdish society and the inequality they face in most areas of their ordinary life. He argues that:

We can say that Çinar Namîq is one of those Kurdish women poets who do not give up their deserved rights. She is brave in her writings and refuses to surrender to the old traditions of her society. She supports the legal rights and emphasises the natural beauties of women and attempts to be a productive member in her society (Celal 2005: 9).

What is unusually remarkable about Namîq's poetry is that she benefits from the natural environment and landscape of Kurdistan to adorn her poetic lines. She uses the word "pigeon" quite often to indicate the innocence of women and "mother" also occurs frequently in her poems, which, according to her, is the symbol of women's oppression in her gendered society. It is therefore fair to argue that Namîq is also in line with other Kurdish women poets in defence of women's freedom to work in the political fields and have gender-free social rights like men. As the focal topic of the vast majority of feminist critics is women's equal rights with men, Namîq is not distant from that objective in her poetry. To clarify the position of Namîq from a feminist perspective, we may define the goal of feminism from Bressler's point of view. Bressler argues that feminism is basically tasked with a challenging responsibility to restore the human values to women being wilfully taken away from them by men intensely believing in patriarchy. He states that the main aim of feminism is to change the men's:

Degrading view of women so that all women will realise that they are not a "nonsignificant Other," but that instead each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man (Bressler 1994: 103).

Thus, Namîq is a Kurdish feminist who seeks the rights of Kurdish women within the wider framework of feminism, as whether that goal is pursued by her in full awareness of this school of criticism is unclear.

The attitude of Namîq towards her society and the treatment of women by the male power of her home region are clear in her poems. If an eye is cast over her first poetry book, it becomes evident how far she is against the mass killing of women in her society on the gendered pretext of "honour". She condemns the relevant Kurdish traditions for being behind this phenomenon. Moreover, she underlines a widespread negative feature

of social life in her society which is one of the major causes of miseries of women, resulting mostly in their death. This social epidemic is infidelity as well as mistrust in a majority of men during seemingly dependable love relationships. In “Pêkekan Bîrîyan Deçêt Bimxonewe” (Pints Forget to Drink Me), Namîq addresses a disloyal lover who has been betraying her with flowery words and fake promises. She plucks up all her courage to reject his false offer of love in solidarity with all those female lovers who have been the victims of such love affairs. After experiencing a series of failed promises, she asks her partner to stop lying to her. Meanwhile, she remembers the many similar stories other Kurdish female lovers have told her in which their destinies were either complete isolation from society and family members or death:

Na hawîê çîdî be cwanî
 Êwareyekî narincî swêndim mede
 Neba le girurî xom da
 Razî diî
 Çiîe nêrgizêkî jakawim bîrçêtewe
 (Namîq 2004: 61).

No friend no more make me swear
 By the beauty of an orange evening
 Lest out of my egotism
 I forget the secret of the heart
 Of a pale daffodil branch

It is in the same collection that a theme about the political situation of Namîq’s homeland emerges. This shift from the issues related to women to the political destiny of her region is unusual since it makes the flow of the gender themes of her poetry books disrupt from here. Although the incident talked about by Namîq embodies the same melancholic tone of the rest of her poems, this time she stands away from gender inequality to dwell on a national tragedy that has happened to her nation at the hands of the radical Islamic organisations. In “Topeļekan Gemeyan be Bêzarîm Dê” (Snowballs Make Fun at My Annoyance), Namîq speaks about a human tragedy that occurred to her people in southern Kurdistan on the first of February of 2004. By talking about this bloodbath in her poetry, she manages to keep its sad memory alive in the minds of the coming generations of Kurdish readers. Similar to Begîxanî and several other women poets of this study, Namîq remembers the “first of February tragedy”— as dubbed by the Kurdish authority in southern Kurdistan— since the overall scale and timing of the incident were horrendous. In the poem, Namîq says that despite her sorrows of the oppression suffered by Kurdish women, she senses something more tragic than what she

expects from the news that swings at the gate of her ears. In a poetic image, she pictures the destruction caused by the twin suicide bombs:

A lew dîwî şorşekanî xemewe
Zengêk be derwazey bîstinm da
Dêt û deçê...
Nuqlî em cejne pîroze
Zarî talman şîrîn nakat
Daristanêkim nebînî
Le şubat da
Nînokî qîn
Rumetekanî neñîbê
(Namîq 2004: 99).

Beyond the sorrow's revolutions
A buzzing sound at my listening gate
Moves forward and backward...
The sweet of this holy feast
Does not sweeten our bitter tongue
I have not seen a forest
In February
Whose cheeks not scratched
By the nail of hatred

It seems that repeatedly making reference to national tragedies in their poetry is a characteristic that results in the formation of a unity among the majority of women poets of this study. Such tragedies are issues that they are unable to avoid since they form part of their national struggle history and identity. Yuval-Davis argues that “specific historical conditions should dictate the form and substance of particular feminist struggles” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 125), which means that the feminist struggle led by these Kurdish women poets has to be intermingled with such national narratives because they have emerged at a time when these narratives substantiate representative patriotic character and allegiance to the nation. If women poets are keen to expect a non-hostile reaction to their feminist agenda, they should keep Kurdish nationalism integral to it.

The poetic struggle of Namîq against the wrong social codes of her society continues with a firmer determination in her second poetry book, *Poetry Collection* (2006). In her ongoing confrontation with the classic Kurdish patriarchal system, Namîq goes further in criticising the religious laws upon which her whole society affairs are judged. Like her sister, she also brings in the story of Adam and Eve and believes that men's betrayal of women have roots in this story, in which she conversely accuses Adam of deceiving Eve to eat from the apple tree. Her antireligious attitudes extend to touch Islamic religious practices like the wearing of veil which she sees as a restrictive measure taken by the Islamic religion against the freedom of women. It is this distinctive nature of a range of Namîq's poetic texts of her second collection that makes the Kurdish literary critic Dêhatî realise that “a particular world, language, rhythm and sorrow-stricken melody is what

distinguishes Namîq from her contemporary poets” (Dêhatî 2004: 53). This recognition of Namîq’s poetic ability is possibly a good reason for her popularity.

A point that invites criticism of Namîq’s treatment of Islam in her poetry is her correlation of a social system like patriarchy with a strictly religious subject. These two institutions will offer more convincing results if tackled independently in addressing the problems of women as each is responsible for a separate section of the unsatisfactory situation of women in the Middle East as a whole. In discussing the social structure of certain collectivities in the Middle East where Islam is the dominant religion, Moghadam states that “patriarchy, therefore, should not be conflated with Islam but rather should be understood in social-structural and developmental terms” (Moghadam 1993: 109). In general, both patriarchy and religion present different constructions of women and assign various gendered roles to them to act upon in the community.

The touching poem in *Poetry Collection* (2006) whose central theme deeply focuses on the helpless condition of women in Kurdish society is “Cwanîyekanî Dawênî Gunah” (Beauties Lying At The Foot of Sin). In this critical poem, Namîq is explicit about the unstable psychological state of Kurdish women and mothers, arguing that no day passes in the life of Kurdish women during which they are not free of the thoughts of exploitation of their rights and the suppression of their feelings by men and the classical social structure running the family institutions. She invokes the pains inflicted on Kurdish mothers which live with them as far as they are alive:

Roj deguzerê û	Day passes by and
Zakîrem bo satê nanwê û xemekan deşêsetewe	My memory never rests from spinning sorrows
Daykim be destê lertzokekanî	My mother fans the painful wounds of fate
Birîne be swêkanî qeder bawêşên dekat	With her shivery hands

(Namîq 2006: 41).

The themes raised in Namîq’s poetry hold many messages for the political and social institutions of southern Kurdistan. In a literary interview given to *Hewlêr* newspaper, Namîq (2012: 18) explains that nothing she has written is aimless, as she adds that a good writer is the one who precisely identifies their readership. Namîq employs a clear poetic language to represent a culturally alienated group of her society who until today are desperately fighting for repossessing their basic human rights. She concentrates her poetic efforts on the side which is responsible for the poor social and cultural conditions

of women in her society. The major culprit she finds in charge of the miseries of most women is patriarchy. Therefore, in “Ew” (Him), Namîq criticises men. She uses a male personal pronoun to harmonise the title of the poem with its content. She cleverly uses many poetic techniques and figures of speech to display all the negative and offensive characteristics of men in her society, inventing realistically imagined scenarios in this poem that show the exploitative behaviours of men and the manners they take up to approach women with the aim of making temporary love relationships. In “Him”, Namîq benefits from the religious saga of Adam and Eve, arguing that men of her community replicate Adam in handing out apples to women in an attempt to persuade them for erotic relationships. She warns her fellow women against the deception of selfish, unkind Kurdish men and ensures that any contact with them will inflict unimaginable pains on them and bring them life insecurity:

(Ew) deryayekî mence
 Be astem lêy nîzîk bibyewe
 Nuqmî na'aramît deka
 (Ew) hemîşe pê m delêt
 Gişt sêwekan bo to rewan
 Belam bo ewanî dî na
 (Namîq 2006: 142).

(He) is a stagnant sea
 If you approach him by inches
 He will immerse you in insecurity
 (He) always tells me
 All apples are allowed to you
 But not to others

The existing poetic mindset of Namîq is egalitarian in terms of her staunch support for an urgent improvement in the unacceptable human situation of women in southern Kurdistan. Although she is aware that the poetic tool she has in her hands is not enough for confronting the wide-scale gender-based violation of women's rights in her society, she hopes that it plays a changing role along other feminist and women's organisations' activities which are underway in her politically and economically developing homeland. As for thematic invention in her poetry, just like Muftî, there is not a theme to be worth mentioning that sets her apart from the rest of women poets.

4.8 Naļe 'Ebdulreħman⁹¹ (b.1979)

⁹¹ Naļe 'Ebdulreħman was born in the city of Hewlêr, the current capital of southern Kurdistan, in 1979. She completes her primary, secondary and preparatory education in the schools of Hewlêr. She has a degree in law from the college of law at Salahaddin University in Hewlêr. She is currently the director of the first local independent radio in Hewlêr. She is also a member at Kurdistan Journalists' Union. As a woman poet, 'Ebdulreħman writes her first poem entitled “Kurdistanim” (My Kurdistan) in 1991. She has

The force of resistance to the patriarchal traditions of Kurdish society mounts with the poetic achievements of ‘Ebdulrêhman. ‘Ebdulrêhman joins her fellow women poets at home with a fresh energy and persistent determination to change the unequal balance of gender power in her society. Although she is not much known in Kurdish society for her poetic works, she stays resilient and defiant in her challenges of the suppressive measures taken by the male power against women in her society. The setting of most of her poetic texts is where a confrontation with classic Kurdish patriarchy takes place. In the two small size poetry books she published between 1990 and 2009, a broad area is allocated to the painful reality of Kurdish women and the maltreatment they receive from the male members of society. ‘Ebdulrêhman is proud of being able to put her poetic skills and talents at the service of women. She believes that if it is impossible to fight back the oppression enforced by reactionary men on women in physical actions, then it is possible to challenge that oppression in poetry. In a reply to an interview question by *Edeb û Hunerî Kurdistanî Nwê*⁹² (Kurdistanî Nwê’s Literature and Art) as what urges her to be so open and fearless in expressing her natural feminine feelings and abandoning the mainstream patriarchal social codes of her society in a majority of her poems, she argues that “poetry is actually an acrobatic game which disentangles the poet from different social bonds and restrictions” (‘Ebdulrêhman 2011: 4).

The poetry of ‘Ebdulrêhman is mainly the product of the difficult social and political life conditions of the southern Kurds in the 1990s. In the above interview with her, it is explained that her poetry start date is 1991 and the first literary genre that she

thus far produced three poetic works. Her first poetry book is *Semay Şûşeyî Ahenge Asmanîyekan* (The Glassy Dance of Heavenly Revelries), published in Hewlêr in 2001. The second one is *Ew Pîyawaney Le Naw Rengî Tablokanim Sema Deken* (Those Men Who Dance in the Colour of My Paintings), published in Dihok in 2009. While her latest poetry book is published just one year after, i.e. in 2010 in Hewlêr, under the title of *Kitêbî Weswesity Sêw* (The Book of Apple’s Temptation). ‘Ebdulrêhman is a productive journalist who writes in the local Kurdish newspapers, magazines and journals, such as *Xebat* (Struggle) newspaper, *Raman* magazine, *Hawlatî* (Citizen) newspaper and several others. The subjects she talks about in the Kurdish media centre on the social, cultural, political and religious aspects of Kurdish society. ‘Ebdulrêhman has run many TV and radio programmes on the Kurdish literary and poetic breakthroughs in southern Kurdistan. For instance, she directed the “World of Poetry Festival” on the local *Gulan Radio*, a programme dedicated to the development of the poetic skills of young Kurdish poets. A number of studies on her poetic works have been conducted by Kurdish critics.

⁹² *Edeb û Hunerî Kurdistanî Nwê* is a weekly literary supplement to the daily *Kurdistanî Nwê* newspaper which is issued by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a major Kurdish political party in southern Kurdistan.

chooses to develop her career in is poetry. However, living within a conservative family, it was not easy for ‘Ebdulřehman to be a poet. On her hard social status at home, she says “because our household had a conservative and tradition-bound character, the practice of artistic and public activities by a woman was seen as a deviation from the general social norms” (‘Ebdulřehman 2009: 98). Thus, ‘Ebdulřehman’s socially very obstructive home environment made her start her women’s emancipation struggle right from her home. She goes on to add “but I insisted on showing my poetic talent and fought for it, a fight with the impossible” (*ibid.*). It is this in-house revolt against the closest family members that enables ‘Ebdulřehman to extend her challenges to her culture.

It comes as no surprise to find in the two poetic works of ‘Ebdulřehman a big number of cases where she rejects the religious structure of Kurdish society and agrees to a more liberal and women-friendly society where gender equity is guaranteed. She publicly advocates a human society based on mutual love and respect between the two genders. There are poems in the first collection in which she adores her lover and begs him to stay close to her for ever since she cannot breathe away from him. Examples of such romantic poems are “Jêr Dewarî Çawenorî” (Under the Waiting Tent) on page 26 and “Çaweřê Ebim” (I Will Wait) on page 33. However, in the absence of such love in her society and the presence of a continuing brutality against women in general, ‘Ebdulřehman calls for a rebellious spirit in the vast majority of her poems, particularly in the second collection, which is specifically dedicated to the many oppressed Kurdish women and those who have courageously stood against patriarchy.

Within a spectrum of a variety of themes in *The Glassy Dance of Heavenly Revelries* (2001), ‘Ebdulřehman depicts the real life of women who fall in romantic love. She argues that if that love is unauthorised, which means not permitted mainly by the male members of the woman’s family, it would be difficult to predict sure success in that relationship. The woman will be trekking through a thorny path along the duration of her love relationship with the man of her free choice. Critically, ‘Ebdulřehman condemns the existing subjugation of women’s free will and the determination of their social destiny by men. She believes that it is this social misconduct that has created a real hell for a majority of women in southern Kurdistan, as she realises that love grows naturally inside

one's heart and cannot be enforced by any factor from outside. All this disappointment by women who are looking for their romantic wishes to come true is expressed in a dejected tone in "Dûrgekanî Meħal" (Islands of The Impossible). Metaphorically, the islands of the title might be the places where the Kurdish women believe their romantic dreams can be achieved, but reaching such islands is impossible because of the numerous restrictions their culture and religion have placed on their social and sexual freedoms. Representing a pessimistic Kurdish woman who is involved in a love relationship, 'Ebdulřehman demonstrates the impossibility of that love, believing that the social barriers which are lying ahead of this relationship are huge and have left no chance of success. This poem embodies a public outcry from women embedded by proxy in 'Ebdulřehman's voice and it reveals one single part of the violation of their social rights:

Bo to bûnim,
 Be ser serkeřtirîn lutkey bişindî
 Meħala tê depeřê...
 ('Ebdulřehman 2001: 31).

To be your life partner,
 Crosses across the most exhausting high summit
 Of the impossible...

As already explained in the poetic analysis of other women poets, the prevention of free love in traditional Middle Eastern societies is adopted for a variety of reasons. It is not only men who are responsible for banning this form of love, but senior women are also sometimes participants of plots which target women who wish to engage in this life-threatening love relationships. Protecting the boundaries of a collectivity, its ethnic identity and cultural traditions can be some reasons for restricting the sexual behaviour of women and their free relationships with men who are not from their own collectivity. This repressive practice is conducted underhandedly by means of certain gender-inspired discourses such as women as the symbolic boundaries of a collectivity, its honour and reproducers of its cultural image and habits (see Chapter One).

Any reader of 'Ebdulřehman's poetic texts can feel that she is in constant conflict with the basic human principles on which the morality of her society is based. And more specifically, this conflict is over social injustice and the mismanagement of gender relations in a society torn apart by classical cultural norms. 'Ebdulřehman admits the fact that it is her moral responsibility as an educated person to face social corruption and

inequality in rights in her society. It is the predominantly male-run life of her society that provokes her saying “it is this sort of life that sows a strong hatred inside me so that I confront it with the most lethal weapon and say those things which are quite visible and are not concealed” (‘Ebdulřehman 2009: 104).

The reflective force of the oppression and hardheartedness of men in “Sê Kurte Şî‘r” (Three Short Poems) again in ‘Ebdulřehman’s first poetry book is another evidence of her boredom with the current gendered life pattern in her society. In the second brief poem, she describes the nightmarish reality of the unwelcomed state of Kurdish women’s life with exploitative men. She states that these two genders are created to live permanently side by side each other in harmony, but facts on the ground have proved the opposite. In a creative poetic image, she likens the coexistence of men and women to the joint growth of thorns and flowers in the same field. Critically, she argues that it is not possible to eliminate any of the two genders from existence, but to find a fair solution to conciliate them so they can both lead a deserved equal life. In addition to that, personifying thorns as men shows the level of harm they cause to women, while women as flowers signifies their innocence and beauty being spoilt by men. ‘Ebdulřehman understands that life has been unfolding to date with the two genders completing each other, so one suppressing the other in the name of a superior gender is unacceptable:

<p>Ay le ebedîyetî pêkewe jîyan.. Pêkewe jîyanî dişk û guļe ‘Enberîyekan Çi cîhanêkî berfirey dije řewtin...? Ke çî bê yektir hejnaken (‘Ebdulřehman 2001: 46).</p>	<p>Oh, the eternity of cohabitation.. The cohabitation of thorns and Amber flowers What a vast world of opposite currents you are...? Whereas you cannot live without one another</p>
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Significantly, resistance to the largely misogynic nature of Kurdish society gains new momentum in ‘Ebdulřehman’s second poetry book, *Those Men Who Dance in the Colour of My Paintings* (2009). In this collection, ‘Ebdulřehman goes deep down to the roots of inequality against women. The book looks like a film which tells all the injustice done to women in Kurdish society. Composed of three very long poems, *Those Men Who Dance in the Colour of My Paintings* (2009) leaves no stone unturned in its attempts to expose the various breaches of rights of Kurdish women. Reading the poems closely, one

can easily perceive the clear reflection of the poet's real life experiences in them. Before reading 'Ebdulrêhman's poetic texts, she addresses her readers as saying "the items you are about to read are part of me and I am part of them; therefore, I believe that part of me will breathe in them even after my death" ('Ebdulrêhman 2010: 3).

'Ebdulrêhman's second poetry book takes the shape of a social study about the patriarchal behaviour of Kurdish society against women, basing its findings on the early history of oppression of women and their marginalisation from running the socio-political affairs of the Kurdish community. It is at the heart of the first poem of this collection where 'Ebdulrêhman defiantly starts a symbolic conversation with her mother to discuss the cruelty of men and the Kurdish society's tribal traditions against women. She knows from her mother's practical life experiences that women are caged in her society and are generally prohibited from playing significant roles in the development of the society's social and political institutions. She explains metaphorically to her fear-stricken mother that men are basically hypocritical and should not be trusted easily, arguing that they are not honest even with their religious faith, praying regularly to satisfy God and when time comes to entertain themselves sexually, they deceive vulnerable women and forget about their religious piety and spiritual commitments to God.

It is no coincidence to come across and identify anti-religion attitudes and critical remarks in 'Ebdulrêhman's poetry as she also makes use of the multiple interpretations of the holy religious books regarding women. As expected, one prominent religious event that most Kurdish women poets have worked on, apparently hugely in relation to the miseries of women, is the gendered story of the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Accordingly, 'Ebdulrêhman also originates the sufferings of women to the very day when Eve was punished by God for breaking his command. For instance, in a short stanza of "Şeř le Nêwan Jin û Xwaye Pîyawîş Nawbijîwanêkî Dirozin" (War is Between Woman and God and Man is a Two-faced Mediator), she argues that God has thrown away women from heaven to the most unwanted corners of earth in reaction to Eve's disobedience of his divine order. In the title, the mediating man apparently colludes with God to defeat the woman. This collaboration between God and man has disempowered

the social position of women. ‘Ebdulfehman regrets the fact that all women are paying the price of a mistake they are not responsible for:

Roje kiçî qelenderim	My poor daughter
Bê hîdayet xway asman	Without conversion of faith, God of heaven
Firêy dawyetîye goşeyekî bêzrawî zemîn	Has thrown you to an ugly corner of earth
Axir be letê sêwî Hewayêkewe	It is due to an Eve’s piece of apple
Êmeş sûtayn	That we are also in distress

(‘Ebdulfehman 2009: 16).

‘Ebdulfehman’s second poetry book is a credit to her poetic ability and the level of courage she acts upon in facing the dark history of classic patriarchy in her society. She publicly calls for the rewriting of social, political, literary and cultural history of her people which has extensively ignored women’s role in its various developmental phases. She widely focuses on the position of women in the Qur’an, which, according to her, has shown unequal respect to the creation of women when compared to men. This idea of reform in history and religious texts to bring to light the ever silenced role of women is largely in accord with Showalter’s identification of the importance of gynocentric criticism for discovering the hidden potentiality of women and the suppressed role they have had in literary history. Showalter argues that women have been broadly wiped out from the long history of literature since it has been mainly written by men. She urges that a totally separate history of female literature be drawn up by women themselves, a history that incorporates all the works, minor and major, that have thus far been written by women and have deliberately been discarded by men from the literary canon. She also adds that this task can be made possible by gynocentric criticism:

Insofar as our concepts of literary periodisation are based on men’s writing, women’s writing must be forcibly assimilated to an irrelevant grid; we discuss a Renaissance which is not a renaissance for women, a Romantic period in which women played very little part, a modernism with which women conflict. At the same time, the ongoing history of women’s writing has been suppressed, leaving large and mysterious gaps in accounts of the development of genre. Gynocentric criticism is already well on the way to providing us with another perspective on literary history (Showalter 1985: 264-5).

Based on this argument by Showalter, it is important to note that the rejection of a reasonable variety of interpretations of religious texts and theories regarding the human and existential rights of women by ‘Ebdulfehman does indicate her awareness of the wide

oppression experienced by women as a result of the extensive supremacy of religion over the social structure in southern Kurdistan⁹³. With history in view, ‘Ebdulrēhman’s critical reading of the influence of Islam on Kurdish society implies that a fresh reading of the relationship between women and men has to be made. She believes that the organisation of such a relationship has so far been undertaken by male religious clerics, which has visibly been damaging to the status of women in Kurdish society. Thus, she realises that women should no longer accept such interpretations and work for making interpretations of their own, which is the only way of liberty from patriarchy.

Criticism of Kurdish Muslim clerics who are seen by ‘Ebdulrēhman as uneducated in terms of gender equality and those texts of holy Qur’an understood by her to be rather against women comes in her second long poem of her second poetry book, “Ewaney Wîstîyan Kiçênî Dîlim Bidizin” (Those Who Attempted to Steal My Heart’s Virginity). In this poem, ‘Ebdulrēhman takes a critical position against religion and considers it as behind the unhappiness of Kurdish women. She says that religion in her society has imposed many restrictions on women’s sexual freedom which cannot be transgressed. If such restrictive measures are breached by women, an indefinite severe punishment by the male members of the family will ensue. Besides, the poem’s title refers to the deception of women by men through fabricated love stories and seductive bids and shows how women are treated as sex objects only. ‘Ebdulrēhman regrets gender discrimination against women in her society and their construction as weak creatures and as a group of human beings whose female identity is lost and subsumed under the superior male identity. She satirically transforms several verses and stories of prophets in holy Qur’an into her poetic lines, in which she links the current status of Kurdish women

⁹³ From a religious perspective, Shah (2006) has a different understanding of the position of women in Qur’an and he believes that “the intention of the Koran was to raise the status of women in society, not to relegate them to subordination as is commonly believed and practiced in much of the Muslim world today” (Shah 2006: 868). However, he contends that certain clerical misinterpretations, which are sometimes blatantly gender-based, of women’s rights in Qur’an have resulted in wrong judgments on the Qur’anic perception of women as the complementary sex of the survival of human race on earth. Shah uses an explicit interpretive approach to explain the rights given to women in Qur’an and rejects the claims that women are looked down on in this holy text and Islam. In the article, he concludes that women are respected and given equal rights, if not more, as men in Qur’an and that the common interpretations of their rights are narrow and decontextualised “that ultimately lead to the unequal treatment of women in Muslim jurisdictions” (Shah 2006: 869).

to the events of such stories. For example, she invokes the problematic love story of Joseph and Zulaikha (pages 48 and 49), arguing that love has been banned from her society's women from that day. Another example is a Qur'anic verse in which God says to men that your women are like fields, so go into them and plough them, which draws the critical attention of 'Ebdulreḥman, making her say that this verse puts women in a weak and subjugated position where they should have no power over men and should immediately obey what they see as best:

<p>Werin be gasinî xwa bimbênewe Her be destê çîlkine be nwêjekanî xotan Towum bikenewe Min zûrgêkî textanim Bo towu fiştin nebê Bo hiç azarêkî tir nixim nîye... ('Ebdulreḥman 2009: 49-50).</p>	<p>Come recultivate me with God's plough With your sullied ablution-taken hands Sow me with seeds again I am a flat terrain Except for growing seeds For no other pain do I have value...</p>
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It is feasible to say that the bravery that a selected group of home Kurdish women poets have in facing up to the unfair control of men over women's affairs in Kurdish society will be coming up at last with certain promising outcomes. Irrefutably, examples of women poets like 'Ebdulreḥman will have an effect on the general attitude of the Kurdish literary readership and can be considered as dynamics of change in the overall social and cultural structures of society. In the poetry of 'Ebdulreḥman, it has become clear that she focuses less on the political and national aspects of her people. Rather, she reflects more on the conditions of women and their socially and culturally constructed gender identity. 'Ebdulreḥman's repeated criticism of Islamic religion and her insightful approach to its representation of women and their male-influenced feminine construction as vulnerable beings are elements that differentiate her to some degree from the former women poets. Her battle with the religious contextualisation of women's rights brings a sort of freshness to Kurdish women's poetry.

4.9 Şîrîn. K⁹⁴ (b.1954)

⁹⁴ Şîrîn. K is the literary or penname of Şîrîn Kemal Eḥmed Saḫîḫ. She was born in the city of Slêmanî in 1954. She completes her higher education study at the University of Baghdad in Baghdad and achieves her BA degree in Kurdish language and literature at the College of Arts. K can write proficiently in Kurdish and Arabic. She has been working in *Kurdistanî Nwê* newspaper since 1993 and has been running the

The voice of another defiant woman poet to speak out against the broad marginalisation of Kurdish women's poetry in Kurdish literature is K. Despite her long experience in writing literature in Kurdish, very little critical attention, like the majority of Kurdish women writers, has been paid to K. K's poetry works have rarely been discussed by Kurdish and non-Kurdish critics and writers. One reason may be is that as a poet she is not as known as Eḥmed, Qeredagî, Begîxanî or Herdî, which has led to her placement on the margins of Kurdish women's poetry. Otherwise, her poetry is also enriched by a multiplicity of themes and interesting ideas about the volatile situation of Kurdish women and the society's preconception about their existential role.

The poetic experience of K has roots in the simple economic life and political instability of southern Kurdistan in the 1990s. As mentioned in her biography, the poetic career of K starts quite late after her emerging literary figure as a short story writer in the early 1980s. Being from an active political Kurdish family, the dissolved Ba'th army's operations of ethnic oppression against the Kurds did not spare K's family properties and literary achievements from damage. On such experiences, she says:

In the early years of the 1980s, I once wrote a piece that I thought was a novel...but later this piece of writing disappeared in the political events similar to many other things from my house (K and Qeredagî 2011: 6).

A prominent characteristic of K's poetry is that love is the central and dominant theme of her poetic books. However, it is problematic and troublesome love affair that

newspaper's "Literature and Art" section since 1997. Upon her influential presence in the newspaper, she finds herself promoted to act as the editing secretary of the newspaper from 2009. As a family, K is the wife of the modern Kurdish poet Dişad Merîwanî (b.1947-d.1989), who was executed by the security members of the fallen Iraqi Ba'th regime for his programme of teaching the Kurdish Latin alphabets to Kurdish schoolchildren. It is clear that Merîwanî has had a huge impact on the poetic abilities of K and he has been a crucial factor in the relative social and political fame she currently enjoys in southern Kurdistan among her fellow citizens. Despite her fairly busy professional life, K mothers three daughters. Because K knows Arabic well, she has translated many journalistic articles and commentaries from this language into Kurdish. Besides, she also has translated into Kurdish the Arabic translations of many literary works from novels to short stories to research by famous world writers such as the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa (b.1936) and the German novelist Patrick Süskind (b.1949). Unlike the other Kurdish women poets, K starts her literary career by writing short stories rather than poetry. And thus, she has published two short stories in Kurdish. As a poet, she has thus far published two poetry books in Kurdish and one in Arabic. It has been difficult to achieve the Arabic version of her poetry books, while the two Kurdish collections are: *Kenarekanî Xewin* (The Dream Banks), published in 1999 in Slêmanî and *Êwareyek Ew Nayet* (An Evening When He Does Not Turn Up), published in 2003 in Slêmanî. It seems that K's involvement in Kurdish politics and journalism has been a barrier ahead of further achievements in her poetic life, as she has presence on regular basis in the Kurdish press, tackling political, social, economic, and gender issues.

composes many of her poetic texts. Love in K's poetry is usually portrayed as the harbinger of misery and gloomy life that devours the temporary joy of women in Kurdish society. K associates love with treason, mistrust and the sexual exploitation of women in which men are the prime cause. It is through love that K exposes the multifaceted policy of Kurdish society towards women. And in fulfilling this challenge, she seems to enjoy a high level of freedom of expression in a poetic language. Arguably, K's poetic courage and her fearless approach to the society's current issues is probably one crucial factor that induces 'Ebdulla to choose her as a vital part of his PhD thesis. 'Ebdulla argues that "K as a known woman in Kurdish literature has been thinking and expressing her words freely and liberally" ('Ebdulla 2007: 108-9).

There are other minor themes that shape the content of K's poetry, but they do not take the same space as the theme of love. Such themes usually go around topics like the oppression faced by her nation at the hands of the successive Iraqi regimes, including the ill-famed Anfal operations and the chemical gas attacks on Halabja. Significantly, one poetic text that draws a sharp similarity between K and several other women poets of this study is "Ew Firmêskî Bot Neşja" (The Tear That You Failed to Shed). This poem is dedicated solely to K's younger brother whose name was "Hawrê". Hawrê was a Kurdish *peshmerga* who, as K dolefully points out, "goes into disappearance during the infamous Anfal crime of May, 1988" (K 2003: 19). The poem is a moving narrative of the pleasant moments K had spent with Hawrê when they were children. It is likewise a heartbreaking poem which indicates the simple fact that there is seldom a home in southern Kurdistan which could survive the brutality of the defeated Ba'th regime. Thus, it has to be said that the harsh living conditions southern Kurds used to live during the Iraqi Ba'th era has involuntarily politicised the poetry of most Kurdish poets from that part. Therefore, K as the direct victim of that regime's hostile policies is no exception to be involved in writing political poetry to express the pains being inflicted on her and show her representative political contribution to the Kurdish nationalist movement.

A tactical feature of K's poetry is focus on the treatment of love in her society which she uses as a springboard from where she criticises the hegemonic patriarchal culture in the Kurdish community. She might have found it uncomfortable to directly criticise the deep-rooted traditional norms of her society for the largely uncertain

conditions women generally live in southern Kurdistan. She reiterates this fact in an interview given jointly with Qeredagî to *Kurdistanî Nwê*'s "Literature and Art" section on the position of women novelists in Kurdish literature, saying that "me as a woman neither can nor dare say everything" (K and Qeredagî 2011: 6). She warily admits the precarious situation in which Kurdish women writers attempt to promote their works.

Through a selection of poems in K's first poetry book, *The Dream Banks* (1999), it becomes somewhat clear how love is K's major concern and the main battlefield where she launches her critical attacks on the Kurdish social and cultural fabric. In the second stanza of "Wirêne" (Delirium), K explains the situation where delirious lovers in her society live in. She says that young lovers are hopeless and live in a confused state. The risk of being involved in free and public love is what haunts most lovers of K's society. As usual, the construction of honour and its purity in the female body and associating it with the public image of a family is one main reason for forbidding the free meeting of lovers in public. According to this symbolic poem, lovers' youth is short and vulnerable due to their unstable mental state. K argues that the feeling of shock and horror romantic love relationships brings is behind the inevitable death of love in her homeland. Thus, there is no other way for lovers but to lament such death:

Bo bêdengî bo wa mendî?	Why are you silent and stagnant?
Hêştalawî û baļay sewzît	You are still young and your green height
Nîştûy xeme	Is immersed in sadness
Em serdeme piř siteme	This cruelty-stricken age
Zerdexeney toranwe	Has made smile sulk
Wiřey 'eřqî toqanûe	Has terrorised the word "love"
(K 1999: 4)	

In "Rojmêrî Çawanî Hawrêm" (The Calendar of My Friend's Eyes) again in the first collection, K refers to treason from the side of men who fall in love with women only temporarily. Similar to the opinion of most Kurdish women poets, she states that helpless women are easily trapped by dishonest male lovers and find themselves treated as merely sex objects. This fact reflects explicitly in the sixth canto of this poem where K shows that women are faithful in their relationships with men and once they are in love, they exercise it with full honesty. On the contrary, she sees men as manipulative and transitory in their romantic relationships with women. K believes that when men feel

fully satisfied in their sexual practices with women, they leave them forever in agony and seek fresh and untried women who are susceptible to fake love:

Ke tom nasî xom le bîr kird	When I knew you, I forgot myself
Ke mint dozîyewe	When you found me
Xot lêm winkird	You hid from me
Le damênî hezekanta	You planted me at the foot of your desires
Mint çand û seferêkî ebedî kird	And started an everlasting journey

(K 1999: 56)

Similar disappointing and unsuccessful love stories carry on in K's second poetry collection, *An Evening When He Does Not Turn Up* (2003). These stories somehow indicate a sort of autobiographical reflection, which explain that similar love experiences might have happened in the poet's life. It is hard to claim that frequent stories of love failure take a spacious area in K's poetry by accident. However, K lives with the realities and represents reality in her poetry, and such love narratives constitute an aspect of her society's social life. Kurdish writer 'Elî affirms that K conceptualises realism in her poetry, arguing that "K is able to represent our existence, which in return compels her to escape confrontation with death" ('Elî 2012: 14). Moreover, K's rather tricky use of language in her romantic poetic texts stands in between the two arguments defiantly articulated by some literary feminist critics. On the one hand, K looks like being silenced by the largely dominant patriarchal terminology which indistinctly bans her from using all expressions and words that she needs and, on the other hand, she manages to dwell on practical life experiences as her poetry's weaving material. Hence, K's poetic standpoints bridge the two opposing feminist views being argued by Montefiore in her article on the "Feminist identity and the poetic tradition" as she says:

Since for most people poetry means primarily the expression of personal experience, is the main difficulty for feminists that existing language is not adequate to articulate women's experience? The immediate feminist answer would seem to be a factual *No* (since women can and do speak and define themselves) countered by an idealist *Yes* (man made language silences women) (Montefiore 1983: 77).

In "Dû Pênase Bo 'Eşq" (Two Definitions for Love), K makes a substantially distinct comparison of the practice of love in the past and in the present. This transgenerational reading of the situation of love relationships in K's society reminds her

of the honesty and respect that shaped the basis of love between two lovers in the past, while now the circumstances have significantly changed, where love has become one of the sources of misery and dishonour for women. Personified in the form of a shade, K argues that at present time suspicious practice of love has made love scare human beings and flee them when they attempt to approach it:

Ewsa	Then
Hezit le hîkayet û metelî bû	You used to love story and riddle
Hîkayetekanî diîdarî	You used to memorise
Ezber dekird û	Love stories and
Degiryayt	Cry
Metelî	You used to create riddle
Bo jîyan da'ehêna û	For life and
Pêdekenî	Laugh
Êsta	Now
(Her defoyt û naygeytê)	(You keep walking, but fail to reach it)
'Eşq	Love
Sêberêke û	Is a shade and
Leberit heîdê	Is escaping from you
Her defoyt û naygeytê	You keep walking, but fail to reach it
(K 2003: 27-8)	

The gendered experiences of Kurdish women caused by socially and culturally constructed behaviour of men have produced a noticeable effect on the literary imagination of K. K believes that women's problems in her society will never fully end as long as the classic system of patriarchy controls all its social and political institutions. She argues that there is no sense for freedom for women under the colossal structure of patriarchy. Literally, it is the yet irresistible male supremacy, not only in Kurdistan, but all over the world, that moves K to say with pessimism:

After a decade has passed over the twenty first century, the world is yet a male-controlled world. The culture of masculinity is still the master of the globe. For how many more centuries is it going to be like this? (K 2012: 9)

Thus, for K, the dramatic change of current social relations between women and men is of prime concern. It is the attitude and treatment of most men towards women which stands behind the Kurdish women's social crisis and ghettoisation. In "Bêdengî" (Silence), K once more emphasises the hypocritical nature of men and the cunning tactics they use for betraying women. She understands that it is rather difficult to differentiate

men with goodwill from those harbouring ill will. In this didactic poem, K states that there are lying men who literally tell very impressive and emotional words to women to win their hearts and minds, but once they gain mastery over their emotions, they start manipulating them both sexually and socially. She adds that by the disappearance of such men nothing worth remembering or romantically valuable will be left:

Rojanê pyawanêk
Her bo pişûyek
Layan edaw
Le nakawêkda win debûn
Pyawanê cige le yadgarî ka] û kirç û
Xewnî suryalî û
Edgarî perş û bi]aw
Çîtiryan
Bo cênehêştîm
(K 2003: 99)

In the past, some men
Just for a rest
Used to stop over
They suddenly happened to vanish
Those men apart from fading memories,
Surreal dreams and
Blurred features
Left nothing else
For me

The key lessons demonstrated in K's poetry are the social and romantic unreliability of current generation of Kurdish men, desperate need for reform in gender relations in southern Kurdistan, particularly with regard to the basic rights of women who are at the mercy of the classic Kurdish patriarchy and urgent awareness campaigns by socially and politically active women's groups and organisations to warn vulnerable and easy-to-prey women against the plots and dishonest acts of those arrogant and selfish men who use them as victims of their sexual appetite. Furthermore, it is noticeable from the covert themes of K's poetry that what she implies in her poetry is socially, culturally and less politically complementary to what her fellow women poets have already raised in their poetry. However, a point of difference could be her initial involvement in short story writing, to be accompanied very lately by her poetic experiences. K's literary career as a short story writer is way richer than her poetic career.

K's lesser attention to other very important issues surrounding Kurdish women such as "honour killing", women's under-representation at senior government posts and minor role in the political projects of southern Kurdistan show the superficiality of her poetic style and structure and the lack of an insightful approach to the wider gender relations and violence in her society. She fails to reflect on such contemporary issues and catch up with the social and political changes of her region since 1991.

4.10 Necîbe Eḥmed⁹⁵ (b.1954)

The poetry of Eḥmed is also symbolic of the injustice being done by the Kurdish male-dominated literary authority to Kurdish women's poetry. Despite having a good poetic experience and practical literary history, she seems broadly ignored in Kurdish literary circles and studies. The time Eḥmed started writing poetry was very critical for Kurdish women's poetry, since in the 1970s there were very few women who dared pick up a pen and express their inner feelings and imagination in poetry. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Eḥmed was one of the few women who could survive the escalating suppression and subordination of women in general and women writers in particular amid the situation brought about by army clashes between the Kurdish *peshmergas* and the former Iraqi Ba'th army. Such clashes forced the majority of Kurdish women to be family caretakers and give up everything but supporting men in their national revolutions and liberation movements. It was during these periodic armed confrontations that discriminatory gender roles such as women as the reproducers of nation and culture and as the generators of people's power became more prominent and Kurdish women were pushed further into the private sphere. Although she is suspicious of its discursive

⁹⁵ Necîbe Eḥmed was born in the city of Kirkuk in 1954 from a religious family. She is a poet, short story writer, journalist and translator. Apart from her native language, she can fluently speak and proficiently write in Arabic and Persian. She finishes her primary, secondary and preparatory education in Kirkuk schools. She achieves her BA degree in Kurdish language and literature at Slêmanî University in 1976. From 1976 to 1981, she works as a teacher in the schools of the two towns of Derbendixan and Çemçemal in southern Kurdistan. Eḥmed begins publishing her poetic texts and short stories in the Kurdish journals and magazines from 1976. A selection of journals she has published her works in is: *Hawkarî* newspaper, *Nûserî Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Writer) and *Raman* magazines, as well as publishing in *Sirwe* (Zephyr) magazine, published in eastern Kurdistan, when she was living in exile. She serves in the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces from the late 1981 to the early 1988 and becomes a member of the Kurdistan Writers' Union which then had its headquarters in the mountains of southern Kurdistan. Fleeing military attacks by the former Iraqi Ba'th army, Eḥmed has no choice but to migrate to eastern Kurdistan and carry on life there until 2003 when she decides to return to southern Kurdistan and settle into permanent residency in Hewlêr. As an experienced poet, she has thus far published three poetic books of which only two are currently in circulation among Kurdish literary readers. Her first poetry book is *Behare Giryan* (Spring Cry), which is published in 1993 in Tabriz, Iran. She publishes her second poetry book in Hewlêr in 1998, which carries the title of *Mêjûy Dar Sêw* (The History of the Apple Tree). And her latest collection is *Mamizêk Le Aw* (A Deer From Water), also published in Hewlêr but in 2005. Eḥmed also has published a range of short stories and translated works and has effectively contributed to the enrichment of Kurdish children's literature with short stories and poems for children. Two examples of her short stories and translated works are: *Pepûlekanî Merg* (Death Butterflies), published in 1998 in Hewlêr and *Serdemî Bêtawanî* (The Age of Innocence), published again in Hewlêr in 2002. The translated work is a play originally written in the Persian language by the Iranian playwright Qutbaddin Sadiqi. With her many literary works, Eḥmed has left her creative imprint on the development course of Kurdish literature. She writes less now and appears less often on the Kurdish journals and newspapers.

validity, Armstrong argues that “the gendering of vast areas of culture was a consequence of political events over which men had control” (Armstrong 2007: 915). In all the political events happened thus far in southern Kurdistan, men have always been the dominant gender. Such dominance has entitled Kurdish men to engineer roles for women at their wish and according to variant circumstances.

Ehmed is a concrete example of successful Kurdish women poets who did not give up their literary activities when it was harder for women to challenge the Kurdish male power before the liberation of southern Kurdistan in 1991. As pointed out in Chapter Two, the social and political situation of southern Kurdistan before the overthrow of the Iraqi Ba’th regime was unsuitable for women to develop their writing and literary skills, but Ehmed was one determined Kurdish woman poet who managed to push her courage to the limit and hold to her favourite track of poetry writing. Among a rather small group of Kurdish women poets who were irregularly writing poems for the Kurdish newspapers and magazines of the 1970s and 1980s, Mukiryani (1980: 167) lauds Ehmed for being an indispensable part of the vibrant literary movement by such limited number of women poets who added more importance and literary value to the Kurdish press by their aesthetically inspiring poems. Hence, this poetic history of Ehmed should have served her as a leading Kurdish poet rather than placing her on the periphery of Kurdish literature and making her another victim of phallogentrism.

Nevertheless, with all that has formerly been said about the unfairly treated and underestimated position of Ehmed in Kurdish literature, she never gives up producing new literary works and carries on with her indirect contribution to the enhancement of the Kurdish literary repertoire. Ehmed’s constancy of poetry writing is embedded in her determination to publish her poems at a time in the 1990s when people were more concerned about making a living and surviving political conflicts. It is clear from the dates of all her recent works being written after the self-rule gained by southern Kurdistan that she has been exerting further efforts to introduce extra literary products of her imagination and mind. Thus, this is another real challenge by Ehmed and evidence of her resilience which signify that she has hope that the current situation of Kurdish literature will not persist for ever and that a turning point will one day occur when a close and gender-free attention will be made to women’s literature.

The unsettled life conditions experienced by Eḥmed and her national and political affiliations turn her like several previous women poets more into a political rather than a social poet. However, her longer physical involvement in Kurdish nationalist movement and its armed struggle is a line that differentiates her from other women poets of this study, particularly Qeredagî who was also a partisan poet. The vast majority of Eḥmed's poems are dedicated to people being killed or who have died a natural death. Many of these people are her close friends either by profession as a poet or as a Kurdish *peshmerga* fighting the enemy alongside her. The two poetic books to be analysed later are full of melancholic poems, lamenting the deaths of Eḥmed's close relatives, victims of Anfal and Halabja tragedies and those who were killed in direct confrontation with the Ba'th army. In these two books, one can barely find poems with an optimistic tone and orientation. However, there are also poems which reflect the general situation of women in Kurdish society and indicate the unequal gender ratio in the social and cultural institutions which organise women-men relations. With this in mind, Eḥmed is somehow able to make a compromise between her political and social views on the overall state of her nation and the future expectations of her people.

Eḥmed thinks positive about the current social and political opening in southern Kurdistan which has helped women to leave the private sphere and join the public sphere side by side with men. Nonetheless, she argues that "with a rapid surge in opportunities and working alongside the opposite sex, attempts by women to shake off the contained traditional identity and achieve a new identity are facing many obstacles" (Eḥmed 2011: 6). This shows that the balance of gender rule in southern Kurdistan is still at stake and men remain atop the power hierarchy. This feeling of injustice towards women and the critical issue of social instability in Kurdish society are also reflected in Eḥmed's poetry. It is in "Wirde Gleyî" (Little Blames) in *The History of the Apple Tree* (1998) where Eḥmed stresses power imbalance between women and men in southern Kurdistan. She introduces an innovative paradox in the title of this poem as the blames she is making are not little at all, but serious and threatening the social integrity. In the second section of this poem, using an elegant poetic language, Eḥmed describes the uncertain relationship between husbands and wives in her society. She agrees that Kurdish families stick to a longstanding integrity amongst the family members, but what is problematic for Eḥmed

is that it is always the man who believes that he is in charge of everything. The wife, representing the female voice, admits that she has no power at all for separation from her husband if she feels unhappy with him as this decision is kept firm in the hands of men only. She argues that her husband wants her to be quite submissive and never think about disobeying him since the consequences will be unpleasant for her. The two poetic lines which denote a firm feminist stance expressed by the wife on behalf of Eḫmed are where she rejects to be the shade of her husband and insists that she wants to be herself, free of male influence. What Eḫmed seeks in her literary life is the application of this female rebellion to the everyday male-female relationships:

Min û to, ey hawsere şîrînekem	You and me, my sweet husband
Baran û hewrîn...yan tîr û kewan!	Are rain and cloud...or arrow and bow!
Nabê le yektir çiya bînewe	We should not separate from each other
Ger çî nazanim to kamyaniî û minîş kamyanim!	
	Although I am unsure which is you and which is me!
Beḫam ezanim to her kamyan bît	I know whichever you are
Pêt xoşe saye û sêberî to bim	You like me to be your shadow
Minîş ḫez ekem hetaku mawim, sêberî xom bim	
	And I would like to be the shadow of myself for as long as I am alive
	(Eḫmed 1998: 17)

The husband-wife relationship Eḫmed embodies in the above poem is exactly the copy of the relationship that classic patriarchy and Islam impose on the families. In her account of the relationship between a woman and man in a Muslim family, Moghadam realises that “a woman fulfills her functions by being a wife and mother, while a man is to be the undisputed authority, the breadwinner, and the active member in public life” (Moghadam 1993: 102). The majority of Muslim Kurdish families adopt the same form of relationship where women act under the sheer authority of men.

Meanwhile, arguments about the subjugation of women by men are what almost all Anglo-American feminist critics concerned with. As it is not acceptable to feminist critics to see all women’s affairs being run by men, it is similarly objectionable from the point of view of Eḫmed to find Kurdish men continue suppressing the freedom of women and stripping them of all their social rights. Eḫmed is looking for a society where women are allowed to think for themselves and decide their own affairs by themselves without being blocked or forced into submission by men. She urges Kurdish women to subvert all those gender stereotypes being socially and culturally constructed for them, such as women as

homemakers, reproducers and mothers of the nation, as well as the general religiously constructed feminine identity which symbolises women as mentally incomplete. In her male-dominated society, Eḥmed hopes to see the opposite of what Michie says about the kind of autonomy being basically assigned to women by men in her subtle account of the literature of the home birth movement. Indicating a rather ironic importance of home for many women, feminist critic Michie argues that:

In much of the literature of the home birth movement, as well as in feminist and profeminist accounts of home birth in more general contexts, home functions as a synecdoche for female autonomy; it becomes the place not only of comfort but of power and freedom (Michie 2007: 60).

Conversely, when Eḥmed uses the image of a mutinous wife who struggles hard in the Kurdish patriarchal society to be herself rather than a controlled entity of the male power, she means, on a broader scale, the complete liberation of women from the private sphere and positioning them equally on the seat of social power.

Eḥmed’s absolute rejection of male control over the Kurdish social, political and cultural institutions and systems is also pointed out in “Mêjûy Dar Sêw” (The History of the Apple Tree). The title of this poem is linked to the religious story of Adam and Eve and the poem’s critical reflection on the current circumstance of Kurdish women is based on a historical reading of that story where an eaten apple piece results in a life-changing tragedy for women. The misogynistic traditions, role of tribal culture, arranged marriage and an urgent call for a social revolution by women are issues raised in this poem. In this long poem, Eḥmed issues an ultimatum to the Kurdish tribal authority, warning of a fierce fightback by women to restore their forcibly taken rights. She states that women have learnt many lessons from their first mother, Eve, for confronting and defeating men. In a poetic image, she likens women to a leafless tree that resists the freezing cold of winter. She says as this tree never surrenders to winter, women in her society will also never let patriarchy bring them to their knees:

Lew katewe weku dirext;	Since then like a tree;
Çon rût û qût be bê geļa	How without any leaves on
Le rûy zordarî zistan da ra’ewestê	Resists the harshness of winter
Minîş awa, be bê çek...be destî petî	I, too, without weapon...barehandedly
Rûberû bûm legeļ yasay xêļ peristî û ser daxistin	
Stood in the face of the law of tribalism and submission	

There are also very significant poems with a feminist perspective in *A Deer From Water* (2005). Although this poetry book is rather small in size and contains very few poetic texts, the content of several poems draws the mind map of Ehmed for raising the social and sexual awareness of Kurdish women. In “Wenewşey Awî” (Water Violet), Ehmed attacks the classical model of love being currently practised between women and men in southern Kurdistan. She believes that in most of the cases there is not something to be really called love as today’s love relationships are more like a trap set for women by male sex maniacs with the aim of satisfying their sexual desires. Therefore, in “Water Violet”, Ehmed rejects love which is only meant for mating. Similarly, she does not like love to bring her a negative reputation, a reputation which intentionally describes women as insane and subservient. Rather, she is the staunch proponent of the kind of love that consolidates mutual respect between men and women and overtly guarantees gender freedom and independence both at home and outside:

Min ‘eşqim bo zelîl bûn û	My dear, I did not fall in love to
Çûne jêr baļ û	Be disgraced, subjugated and
Cûtbûn newîst gyaneke	Have sexual intercourse
Min wîstim dû baļinde bîn	I wished that we could be two birds
Le baxêk da	At an orchard
Herdûkman bo ‘eşiq bixwênîn	Both singing for love
Beļam her kes	But each of us
Be ziman û awazî xoy	With his/her voice and melody

(Ehmed 2005: 54)

It is clear from the above poetic lines how Ehmed is in a constant fight and conflict with the managerial minds of her society who are predominantly male. On the anti-patriarchal nature of Ehmed’s poetry and the feminine force of her poetic voice, ‘Ebdulļa markedly argues that “the feminine voice of this poet hits the ears of Kurdish patriarchy” (‘Ebdulļa 2007: 132). However, it is regrettable to find that such ears are still unbearably deaf when they receive voices like Ehmed.

A rather unique poem in *A Deer From Water* (2005) to reflect on the private life of Ehmed is “Bo Yadî Xom” (In My Memory). This poem is composed in a cheerless and lonely environment with a deep melancholic feeling. It stands for the local geographical

displacement and living status of Eḥmed, showing the extent of the physical and mental pain she used to suffer after fleeing her home place. Poetically, Eḥmed is successful in indicating the fact that she has always felt lonely and was not sure at all that she is going to be settled in a fixed place. In this poem, she depicts the moment when somebody else is going to replace her in her residential house after she unwillingly abandons it. She says that her unstable life has failed her to complete many incomplete short stories and poems, and as she will miss the window where she used to sit and have her poetic inspirations, the butterflies and flowers of her home garden will also miss those days when they were stared and smiled at by Eḥmed in her solitude. Literally, she has the weird feeling that whoever takes her place by the window will not feel settled and free of the pains of loneliness since her house is a doomed and haunted place:

Axo dway min kê bête ber pencerekem û	I wonder after me who will come and sit by my window and
Koşî piř kat le awazî cêhêştin	Fill their lap with the melody of departure
Le řengî maç	The colour of kiss
Le nazî guļe <i>Naz Naz</i> -ekan	The coquetry of <i>Naz Naz</i> ⁹⁶ flowers
Le bonî tenyayî	The smell of loneliness
(Eḥmed 2005: 61)	

It can be argued that reflection on personal experiences forms an original part of Eḥmed's poetic career. She exposes her past memories in the form of poetic stories and the aim of these narrations is to provide examples of forbearance in the face of harsh life realities. Eḥmed's life can also be translated into a story of resistance for women to copy. Structurally, the poetic style of Eḥmed in telling her personal and women's life stories is distinguishable from other poets in the way it presents such stories. Being a female Kurdish *peshmerga* for almost a decade gives a confrontational form to such narrations and makes them look more revolutionary. Informed by her adventurous spirit, in most poems she encourages women to fight back the classic Kurdish patriarchy and never succumb to the wishes and orders of men who see themselves as superior creatures and

⁹⁶ *Naz Naz* is a type of wildflower, native to the mountainous regions of Kurdistan. It has proved rather impossible to find the picture of the same flower in the online wild and non-wild flower galleries, which justifies the fact that this flower is possibly native to the Kurdish-inhabited areas. Likewise, the translation of this flower into English is unavailable in the Kurdish-English dictionaries, whether such dictionaries are online or are at hand in hard copies. As for the family group, *Naz Naz* is probably a type of flower from the lily family, with its purple and yellow flowers opening during the day.

women as their sex slaves and care providers. Living as an independent woman for most of her life also influences the making up of her poetic themes.

4.11 Awêzan Nurî⁹⁷ (b.1981)

The last Kurdish woman poet in this study is Nurî who is also known in the Kurdish poetic context to a rather satisfactory level. However, her poetry is hardly being criticised by the Kurdish literary critics and is not given enough critical care as some other previous women poets who have been enjoying a higher level of criticism. Possibly, the main clear reason behind the ghettoisation of her poetry is her late appearance in the Kurdish literary circles, in the middle of 2005. This means that Nurî like Lazo and Kinêr Hesen is a post-2003 poet whose poetry is innovative and representative of a particular stage in the history of Kurdish women's poetry.

As a very young home Kurdish woman poet, Nurî is new to the Kurdish literary criticism, if there is really something to be practically and academically called Kurdish literary criticism⁹⁸. Despite her many literary and social activities, she is also hit hard by

⁹⁷ Awêzan Nurî was born in Kirkuk in 1981. Her full name is Awêzan Nurî Hekîm. Nurî is a poet, novelist, writer, women's rights activist and journalist. She has taken part in several projects on fighting violence against women in Kirkuk. She is an active member of the Kurdistan Journalists' Syndicate and has worked as an editor in a number of Kurdish newspapers and magazines, such as *Kirkukî Emrô* (Kirkuk Today) newspaper and *Komarî Roj* (The Sun Republic) magazine. As a presenter in Kirkuk TV, she prepares and presents the literary programme of *Pencere* (Window). Nurî writes literary, political and social articles on regular basis for Kurdish newspapers, magazines and websites, as these media outlets are the sources where her poems are occasionally published. Besides writing in her native language, Nurî is also able to write in Arabic language. For her positive human role in the Kirkuk-based civil societies and women's organisations, Nurî finds herself awarded many honorary certificates by a quite variety of organisations and media institutions. For instance, *Roj Foundation for Qualifying Women* awards her in 2008 and *Azadî TV* (Freedom TV) honours her in 2009. As a poet, Nurî has thus far published two poetry books. These two books are both published in 2005. The firstly published book is *Pyaseyek Be Kuçekanî Qeder Da* (A Walk Through The Lanes of Fate), published in Slêmanî. And the second book is *Bersîle Îşqê Bo Xuda* (An Unripe Love for God), published by the Kirkuk branch of Union of Kurdish Writers. Besides, she also has managed to publish the first volume of her novel, *Namekanî Namo* (Namo Letters), in 2008 in Kirkuk. This novel's second volume is currently ready and is waiting for publication.

⁹⁸ There are numerous arguments by Kurdish writers and academics about the practical and unbiased existence of Kurdish literary criticism. They believe that Kurdish literary criticism is not yet an organised discipline and is still narrowly worked on by a group of self-interested writers who adopt unsystematic criteria in selecting the texts they criticise. On this issue, Kurdish writer Herdî argues that "we do not have an effective literary criticism movement", adding that "we even cannot claim that we do have such a movement" (Herdî 2011: 66). Generally, it is usually personal relationships and common interests that decide which writer is to be brought under the critical spotlight. In such case, it is difficult to differentiate good writers, poets, novelists and short story writers from bad ones, as bad writers may happen to be in a good friendly relationship with the critics and have their works brought to the attention of readers and, on the contrary, good writers who do not have such friendly relationships will be ignored and their works will

the patriarchal and gender-motivated injustice towards the creations and achievements of talented Kurdish women. Nurî realises that she is not on her own in her challenges of that systematic patriarchal oppression and quite similar to her fellow women poets, she resorts to poetry to unveil its multidimensional gendered agendas.

Nurî's poetry is diverse in themes and social topics, particularly those issues specifically related to Kurdish women. Nevertheless, all such diversity in poetic themes and multiplicity of current debatable social matters in her poetry still place her in a close range to other Kurdish women poets. The issues Nurî raises in her poetry are much similar to those invoked by women poets of this study. They seem as if being tackled under the influence of a reading of their poetry. They are to a large extent the invocation of similar romantic love failures and socially-constructed gender problems such as inequality in character and rights between women and men, disrespect for the female identity and forcible and prearranged marriages. Nurî also accuses classic patriarchy of all the injustice committed against women in her society. She turns her poetic texts into a mirror to show the reality women live in the Kurdish society. On the importance of the theme of realism for Nurî, Kurdish literary critic Hesen says "Awêzan Nurî writes herself by making a connection with the reality of everyday life" (Hesen 2012: 17). It is this real sense of life that makes Nurî's poetry enjoyable and attractive to readers. By reading her poetic lines, one feels living with the miseries and difficult life moments of Kurdish women and identifies their plea for help and freedom from the restrictive social and religious codes that have been keeping them in men's bondage.

In the first poetry book, *A Walk Through The Lanes of Fate* (2005a), Nurî reflects on unsuccessful love relationships and widespread disrespect for women in her society. She feels outrage at the general fact that for every social problem women have to pay a high price. She realises from her native experiences that it is typically women who face the blames from society without being given proper reasons for that. For Nurî, women are mostly the victims of failed love and social and family relationships on a wider scale. All these injustices towards women push Nurî to extend her activities from poetry writing to participation in many local and internationally funded women's groups and organisations

only by chance be tackled and criticised. As regards Kurdish women poets, the great effect of this plight is very clearly explained in the first chapter of this study.

where she defends women and promotes gender awareness and equality in rights. Examples of such groups and organisations are *Bîna Centre for Combating Violence Against Women* and a project for showcasing the role of women through media, funded by Merce Corps in 2009. Her intense activism in these women-centred circles, counterbalanced by her ambitious poetic works, is probably one distinctive feature of Nuri's professional career. On the role Kurdish women activists play in modernising society, Mojab asserts that "the Kurdish women activists consider themselves part of the growing civil society in Kurdistan" (Mojab 2009: 119). It is from this perspective that Nuri combines her poetic career with civil activism to mark her place in the changing social structure that sees gender reform as pivotal.

Women in Nuri's society pay for family and tribal feuds by being obliged into forcible marriage. They are commonly treated irresponsibly as reconciliation means between two warring families or tribes. In response to this unethical behaviour against women, Nuri writes "Key?" (When?), a poem that unmistakably symbolises an emotional cry by women who are suppressed and oppressed. This poem's title also stands for Nuri's outcry for placing a limit on women's oppression in which she questions the Kurdish community "When" such cruelty is meant to stop. Women's heartrending plea for mercy and an improvement in their state of life shows that there is a huge social and gender gap in Nuri's community that urgently needs to be addressed by the authority. It is this poem that calls for the voice of Kurdish women to be heard. The poem justifies the fact that the bad situation of women is no longer bearable:

Key ebřêtewe azarî sextim
Kewa le dinya reş bwe bextim

When will my severe pain end?
I have hard luck in this world

Key firmêsk bisřê çawanî reşim
Key bêtewe rûm xendekey geşim
(Nuri 2005a: 41-2)

When will my black eyes wipe the tears?
When will my big smile return to my face?

The poetic attitudes generally expressed by Nuri in her poetry place her directly on the feminist front established worldwide. She is a poet who is fighting for the public rights of women in a far corner of the world where democratic and civil institutions are in struggle for a better life for women and gender equality in society. Possibly, as a Kurdish feminist poet and activist, Nuri is one of the leaders who work for the emancipation of

women in Kurdish society and the establishment of their social, political and cultural rights to enable them to develop their homeland equally with men. It is through the discovery of women poets like Nurî and almost all other Kurdish women poets of this study that the importance of Anglo-American feminist criticism materialises. Bringing the largely marginalised poetry of Nurî to the attention of readers is one crucial task of Anglo-American feminist criticism. This major branch of feminist criticism has practically helped many other undervalued examples of women writers similar to Nurî by treating their works as of equal importance to works written by men regardless of their race, class, ethnicity and national background. Valuing the good job gynocritics, as part of the wider agenda of Anglo-American feminist criticism, has performed with regards to the works of women writers, Showalter agrees to the historical role this type of criticism has played in recovering a massive amount of forgotten works by female writers who are now big names in world literature. She argues that:

In a relatively short period of time, gynocritics has generated a vast critical literature on individual women writers, persuasive studies of the female literary tradition from the Middle Ages to the present in virtually every national literature, and important books on what is called “gender and genre”: the significance of gender in shaping generic conventions in forms ranging from the hymn to the Bildungsroman (Showalter 2007: 226).

Again in her first book, Nurî dwells on the theme of gender discrimination or the preference for boys more than girls during birth. She condemns this ongoing cultural practice and argues that the real oppression of women in her society starts from the moment they are born⁹⁹. According to Nurî, it is this early gender discrimination that has widened the social gap between men and women and allowed women to be treated as a commodity. Failure to show respect to and protect women from birth has resulted in their rights to be appropriated by men. It is from this point that women-related problems such as forcible marriage, inequality in rights with men and lack of freedom to practise free and

⁹⁹ The masculine construction of men as generally the source of power and community/collectivity stability and security is the main reason why Kurdish families, particularly fathers, prefer boys more than girls in their families. This gender discourse is prevalent in most Middle Eastern societies without religion having any interference in it. Moghadam (1993: 6) believes that “the low status of women and girls is a function not of the intrinsic properties of any one religion but of kin-ordered patriarchal and agrarian structures.” Thus, Kurdish families, as predominantly patriarchal, continue practising this gendered cultural habit as a way for protecting their future descendants and specific identities (also see p.120, footnote 51, for a further comment on the preference for boys in classic patriarchies).

romantic love arise. In relation to this challenging argument, Nurî inspires readers with a poem entitled “Êwareyek Hêsta Le Bunî Xoy Be Gumane” (An Evening When She Still Doubts Her Existence), where she criticises her father for producing her and bringing her to a life that rejects her sex and existence. The narrative of the title of the poem is related to what later comes in the poem’s body. The title prepares the ground for the readers to understand the poem’s content easily as the girl right in the title implies that though she is now out into the world of patriarchy, she still doubts her existence. She shows her surprise at how misogynists have allowed her to be born. In this poem, the poet is in a dialogue with her father about the real purpose of introducing her to a world where she is not welcome and is seen as sexual prey by men. She wishes that she was not born because in her world she feels lonely and even without the father who unwillingly initiated her birth:

Babe gyan...	Dear father...
Çon minit bexşî be şehwetekan û...	How you presented me to sexual appetites and...
Be zor le dinyat mare kirdim	You forcibly married me to the world
Ne ew dergay bo hatinî min waļa kird	Neither did he open his door for me
Ne min çawerêy bînînî ewim dekird	Nor I was waiting to see him
Toş le dûryanî win buna winit kirdim	And you lost me at the junction of disappearance

(Nurî 2005a: 53-4)

Nurî’s feminist challenges increase in strength in her second poetry book, *An Unripe Love for God* (2005b). In this book, she pays more attention to unfaithful love relationships in southern Kurdistan. As a young woman poet and activist, Nurî must have regularly witnessed many cases of such love relationships or she might have herself experienced this type of love, which can be the reason that she realistically pictures this form of love in clear poetic images in her poetry. She seems to be much affected by this negative social issue and comes to interpret it from a feminist viewpoint. She generally accuses men of standing mainly behind failed love and then her patriarchal society on a larger scale, where romantic love is significantly banned. Nurî believes that it is not only she who sees that love is in turmoil in her society, but even other women poets they almost have the same opinion. In an interview jointly given with Kurdish women poets Kejaļ İbrahim Xidir and Heļebceyî to *Hewlêr* newspaper, she argues that “most of the poems women have written about love discuss an unrequited, mad, lost or suppressed

love, because our society has not given enough freedom to lovers to publicly talk about everything” (Xidir *et al.* 2011: 14). She hopes that by raising this critical and controversial issue in her poetry, a more civilised and modern understanding of love, with less inhibiting gender roles, and its influence on the overall social fabric will finally occur.

The growing fear that female lovers have of the phallogocentric system of Kurdish society recurs constantly in Nuri’s poetic texts. It is this sense of fear that has obliged those female lovers to suppress their real romantic feelings towards their counterparts and practise banned love in solitude. In “Tenyayî le Min da Hejdeka..!!” (Loneliness Grows Up From Me..!!), Nuri narrates the personal touching stories of those lovers who love in complete isolation from the rest of society. The loneliness of the title keeps repeating itself in the poem. Due to social barriers, lonely female lovers fail to declare their pure love for their lovers and instead adore them only in their imagination and in a state where they are lonely. The lover in this poem states that loving in loneliness is very painful and sometimes she does not endure that pain and decides to break up with her lover, but he keeps moving in her breath:

Min tenya û...	I am lonely and...
Legele tenyayî sefer dekem	I travel with loneliness
Ewîş le nêw henasem da guzer deka	And he passes through my breath
Min demewê xom le tarmayî teîaq bidem	I want to divorce myself from the shadow
Ew dubare le tenyayî marek deka	He marries me again in solitude
(Nuri 2005b: 17-8)	

From a radical feminist perspective, the poem that indicates the possible influence of Kejaî Ehed’s fearless confrontation with classic patriarchy and her hatred of men is “Tewbeye û...Biryarîş Dedem” (It Is a Repentance And...I Promise). Like Ehed, Nuri condemns the brutality and arrogance of men towards women and decides to establish a separate domain far distant from the world lived by hardhearted men. It is clear from the title that she repents forming relationships with men and promises to cut these relations apart from suffering and psychological punishment, nothing positive has grown from them. Meanwhile, this title is also an intervention in the unstable relationships between women and men, urging women to give up any connections with men which only bring them humiliation. From inside this poem, Nuri makes up her mind to end subordination

to men and the slavery service they provide to exploitative and dishonest male lovers. She similarly criticises Islamic sharia laws which are relevant to women, particularly the law that allows polygamy in society. She finds this law as one of the major sources of women's miseries and oppression since it is breached, misused, exploited and wrongly interpreted by many Muslim clerics and men in her community¹⁰⁰. In an impressive poetic imagery, Nurî sees the year and its four seasons to be in the same situation of a man who is married to four women. She cleverly displays the sufferings and worries of those women who are multiple wives of a single man through the changes that happen to each season succeeding the other. Poetically, year here is personified to play the role of a polygamist and its seasons as his four wives. Through this poetic imagery, Nurî manages to justify the oppression a polygamous society brings to women, as she calls for a rapid reformulation of social and religious laws that repress women:

Îdî nefret le saļ dekem	From now on, I damn the year
Ke şerî'et rêgey pêda weku to çwar jin bihênê	Which sharia has allowed marrying four women like you
Behar çî bû...?	What was wrong with spring...?
Hawînî beser da hêna	That he also married summer
Ke çwe daway payzîş	When he asked for the hand of autumn
Hawîn rengî zerd heļgeŗa û...	Summer turned yellow and...
Tînu...tînu wişk bwewe	Out of a raging thirst, she dried out
Payz zani (hewe) beser ewîş dadê	Autumn knew that she also will be beaten out by another wife
Hemû pirçî xoy rinyewe	She took all her hair out
Katê zistanîşî xwast û...	When he also married winter and...
Geŗayewe bo lay behar	Then returned to spring
Zistan serî sipî bû	Winter's hair turned white
(Nurî 2005b: 73-4)	

¹⁰⁰ Islamic sharia laws based on the verses of holy Qur'an allow polygamy on certain conditions. A man is not permitted to marry more than one wife if he finds himself infringing such laws. Shah (2006: 890) explains the aim of polygamy and the conditions where it is allowed in Islam in this way: "polygamy is only permitted (not obligatory) conditionally in order to do justice to orphans and war captives. These conditions are (1) if there is fear that orphans will not be treated justly, then marrying up to four wives is permitted, and (2) this permission is further contingent upon "just dealing" among wives. If there is fear of unjust dealing among wives then a man should only have one wife". Whereas in classic patriarchies and Kurdish society as part of it, polygamy is monopolised and practised unrestrictedly as a method for multiplying the number of children, especially boys under the gender constructions of men as symbolising strength and power and protectors of the motherland and its security. Another function of polygamy in classic Islamic patriarchies is sexually satisfying men in a legitimate way. The Kurdish government under the pressure of women's civil societies has introduced restrictions on the law that allows polygamy in southern Kurdistan which prevent men from marrying the second wife if voluntary permission is not already achieved from the first one and clear reasons are not given.

The introduction of polygamy as a religious theme into the poetry of Kurdish women justifies the innovative approach Nurî is adopting in developing her poetic career. Challenging such problematic themes is basically characteristic of young Kurdish women poets like Nurî, Begîxanî, Nadir, Herdî, Heme, Fayeq, Lazo, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Heļebceyî, Namîq, Muftî and ‘Ebdulreħman and it has the implication that in the light of recent social, cultural, economic and political changes in southern Kurdistan, the restrictive role and dominance of religion is no longer accepted by the younger generation of poets.

All in all, the poetry of Nurî is in search of the real character of Kurdish women and the deserved role that they should be playing in society alongside men. Unlike many previous poets, Nurî does not seem much interested in the political history of her nation and the tragedies that mark its pages. Possibly, her age and her growing up during a time when living conditions are much different from her older generation of women poets are all factors affecting this absence of Kurdish politics in her works. For Nurî, it seems that social matters surrounding women are more important than national politics.

Nurî feels that women are missing in the cultural development of Kurdish society and their identity is under the threat of total exclusion from the restructuring of social and economic institutions in southern Kurdistan. And as ‘Ebdulla explicitly says “she is exploring her identity which did not exist in the past” (‘Ebdulla 2007: 117), her poetry do attest to this fact and is a strenuous effort to reclaim the rights of women in Kurdish society. At a young age, she has been able to write a memorable poetry that symbolises the continued resilience of a limited group of Kurdish women poets.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Discussion

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The study of Kurdish women's poetry has generally been a great challenge to face due to a noticeable shortage of literary criticism of it and resources analysing and embracing it. This work has asserted that the poetry of Kurdish women has specifically been ignored to a great extent by Kurdish literary critics, writers, scholars and researchers. Despite the quality poetry which has been written by Kurdish women poets, it is discernible that it still has no prominent role and decent place in Kurdish literature and is not even considered as an essential part of that literature. With the fairly long history it boasts that dates back to the nineteenth century, the few and incomplete works so far conducted on Kurdish women's poetry do not reflect the inherent value and quality that this poetry originally possesses. This undervaluation of Kurdish women's poetry refers to a wider existential crisis the female gender is confronting in Kurdish society. This state of devalued poetry owned by Kurdish women only constitutes one segment of this crisis and should surely lead to its other formative aspects.

This study has shown that the marginalisation of Kurdish women's poetry has a clear historical background which extends to present time and there are a number of factors which stand behind this neglect. These factors are diverse in form and effect and they are usually political, social, cultural, religious or economic. The arguments raised in this work emphasise the fact that social and religious factors, particularly patriarchy, are chiefly responsible for the bad situation of women in Kurdish society, which indirectly have produced similar negative effects on women's poetry. The multilateral influence of classic Kurdish patriarchy and gender-originated social and cultural construction of women on the talents and abilities of Kurdish women is nothing new, but has roots in ancient history and shares features with the surrounding cultures, namely Arab, Persian and Turkish. It is the male-dominated and gendered system of society that has withdrawn all the powers from Kurdish women and is working relentlessly to undermine and silence those female Kurdish voices who struggle to resist it and bring about a reform within it. Notably, regular political, social and economic instability and Iraqi Ba'athist anti-Kurdish

policies stand by the side of this classic patriarchal and genderised system and enable it to contain Kurdish women and suppress their basic rights to a large extent until the last decade of the twentieth century, or, in other words, until the time before the liberation of the southern part of Kurdistan in 1991. Afterwards, the trajectory of women's social and political freedoms and civil activism, particularly in southern Kurdistan, turns more positively upward. Local and diasporic Kurdish women exploit the chance liberation brings to their doors and become involved in national and transnational activities in order to reform the gender regime in southern Kurdistan and put an end to the different types of violence against women. Kurdish women activists in collaboration with international human and women's rights organisations and groups initiate many projects and work towards promoting the status of women in society through reforms in the legal and institutional bodies of the region.

The scope chosen for this study coincides with the freedom of southern Kurdistan from the toppled Iraqi Ba'th regime. It is a time that marks a turning point and a transition in the history of Kurdish women's poetry. As the research shows, Kurdish women's poetry has moved on in leaps and bounds and this rapid development occurs on various levels. For instance, Kurdish women poets circumspectly attempt to cultivate a style special to them and avoid the norm of copying men on a large scale. Moreover, they are aware that they need to catch up with the developments regarding the situation of women in their traditionally male society and deeply reflect on the concerns of their fellow countrywomen in their poetry. The freedom of southern Kurdistan opens a door of regional and international interaction for the women poets to know about the latest changes concerning women's rights. And this is specifically true for home Kurdish women poets as diasporic women poets were already in direct contact with wider international culture. One of the upsides of the window on the outer world provided by that liberation is a persuasive acquaintance by the women poets with the theories of feminism developed in Europe and America¹⁰¹. In the poetry of almost all Kurdish female

¹⁰¹ The potential importance of feminism and its theoretical principles and values is increasingly reflecting in the written works of Kurdish women writers, particularly in southern Kurdistan. Over the past decade, a range of books and research articles have irregularly been written and published in Kurdish on the theories of feminism and the influence of this philosophy on gender equation in society. There are also collections of translated feminist works into Kurdish originally written either in English, Persian or Arabic languages. Importantly, the majority of these works have been produced by Kurdish women writers who are either

poets, an explicit expression of women's grievances is very visible. But these feminist opinions and undertones are rather general and not representative of a specific feminist school or philosophy; this may indicate the fact that, due to lack of familiarity with feminism, the poets are as yet unwilling or unable to distinguish theoretically and practically the many feminist trends from each other. This fact, however, should not undermine the value of their poetry.

It is important to see if the research questions defined in Chapter One of this study have had satisfactory answers after the elaborate analysis of the poetry of a specific group of Kurdish women poets. The female poetry studied here was meant to respond to the question of if Kurdish women's poetry has a visible place in literature in southern Kurdistan; if Kurdish women poets have opted for a literary career in poetry because of having clear poetic talents and love for this genre over other literary genres or have selected poetry as a form of resistance to the oppression women in general face in their society; if the themes of Kurdish women's poetry are different from men's; whether Kurdish women poets have developed a special style of writing poetry different from the region's dominant style of the pioneer Kurdish male poets; if there are any obvious differences between the poetry of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets and if so, what brings about this situation; and lastly, whether there have been any contributing factors to a steady increase in the number of female poets writing in Sorani Kurdish in southern Kurdistan during the scope defined for this research study. Some answers to these questions are already stated above and the rest will be made in the sections to come next.

The study's group of female poets demonstrates a progressive, even revolutionary tendency by educated women against the long-lasting gender oppression women have

inside southern Kurdistan or are living in the diaspora. An example of these works can be *Mehabad Qeredagî: Le Fêminîzmewe Ta Hîumanîzim* (Mehabad Qeredagî: From Feminism to Humanism) (2010), which contains a series of mainly women-focused interviews conducted with Qeredagî and compiled by the Kurdish writer Xalîd 'Ebdulkerîm Hêmelaw. However, all these works are individual efforts to introduce the Kurdish readers to feminist movements abroad and their perception of women's standing in society. They are not based on feminist scholarship organised by women studies groups within the academia or gender institutions as these structures do not exist yet in southern Kurdistan. General critical attention to feminism in literature by Kurdish women writers is also noticed by Kurdish writer and poet Nasir Hîsamî who, in an interview given to *Jîyanewe* (Renaissance) weekly, argues that "in the recent years, feminism has occupied a considerable place in Kurdish literature, adding that feminist discourse in Kurdish literature keeps gaining strength as time passes by" (Hîsamî 2010: 7). Obviously, the date of the interview shows that he means by "the recent years" the time span covered in this study.

unjustly been facing in Kurdish society. Its relatively long journey through the poetry of the women poets discussed here underlines the simple fact that their poetry remains a rich ground for further studies using a variety of theoretical approaches. Although this poetry should have been brought under the critical spotlight many years ago or shortly after it emerged in abundant quantities, it is still not too late to pay what it deserves in both Kurdish and non-Kurdish literary quarters. It is unproblematic to identify this poetry as the poetry of resistance to the male power in southern Kurdistan. It encompasses challenges on a risky level which are essentially not different from challenges taken up by anti-patriarchy and gender-egalitarian women's groups in other parts of the world. However, maybe the only obvious difference is its quite late emergence particularly when compared with Europe and America. But the circumstances in which Kurdish women poets have lived may significantly reduce this difference as they are still part of a stateless and geographically borderless nation which has experienced a hostile political history, which in turn can partially be responsible for their miseries.

It is the overtly gendered nature of the Kurdish women poets' work which has led to the selection of Anglo-American feminist criticism as a theoretical perspective from which to examine the poems, despite concerns applying a very developed theory to a poetry which is basically considered part of the minority literature, and the tremendous cultural differences between the Anglo-American and Kurdish milieux. However, Anglo-American feminist criticism, since its inception roughly half a century ago, has not been formulated locally or for a specific type of literature, but rather it aims to target literature written by women all over the world. It is a concrete critical theory written for all national literatures irrespective of their ethnicity, race, religion and language, bringing together feminist critics from almost all national backgrounds. Its major concern is the recovery of the lost and marginalised manuscripts and writings which solely belong to women writers. This theory looks for suppressed female talents and works by women which have been overlooked by male critics, and this situation is clearly happening with the poetry of Kurdish women poets in question.

Through the inclusive critical support of this feminist theory this group of Kurdish women poets may be discovered by a larger public and discussed as part of a wider international literature. It is this theory's main focus on finding unseen and silenced

female voices that puts it in line with the literary context of Kurdish women's poetry. The literary content and thematic nature of Kurdish women's poetry also renders feminist criticism a particularly suitable theoretical tool. Moreover, this theory posits the legitimate existence of a literary tradition specifically assigned to women writers, a simple fact that a vast majority of Kurdish women poets are concerned with. This theory applies to literature by women in every corner of the world and defends it whatever the conditions and presumptions are. Its international goal is to achieve the creation of a united literature by women vis-à-vis the male-dominated literature that has been ruling for ages. Thus, there are visibly many justifications for the use of this theory with Kurdish women's poetry.

The application of this theory to Kurdish women's poetry follows a careful study of this poetry's content and objectives. It is clear from the poetic texts of the majority of women poets of this study that feminism is a generic characteristic which establishes a common ground between them. Feminism is one of the most effective tools in these poets' armoury that is hoped to bring relief to women and place them on equal terms with men in a society which is hard to change socially and culturally. It has become a slogan fought for by most women poets after almost all other means of social reform have failed to improve the situation of women in Kurdish society¹⁰².

An important point noticed during the use of Anglo-American feminist criticism for the analysis of Kurdish women's poetry is the time difference between the emergence of this literary theory and this branch of Kurdish poetry. The theoretical basis and practical formation of this feminist criticism goes back to the early 1970s and then it keeps developing until the present day. The majority of the critical feminist resources used in this study are written between the 1970s and 1990s, as the poetry of the selected women poets is set in motion from the 1990s and onwards. This difference in time shows

¹⁰² It is noticeable from the poetic lines used in the main body of this study that what almost all the women poets say in poetic language derives its energy from feminist ideas. Feminism is largely behind the current struggle taken up by Kurdish women writers and poets against the huge gender inequality which has undermined the social security of Kurdish society. In an article on the importance of feminism for social stability, Qeredagî argues that "feminism shows the alternative of equality and balance between male and female. It aims to challenge those views and the false understanding that cause gender discrimination and rank humans according to their biological sex, defining men as high beings and women as low" (Qeredagî 2012: 5). This vital role that feminism can play is realised by the majority of Kurdish women poets of this study and is clearly expressed in their poems and attitudes.

that this feminist criticism is somehow late in recovering this type of poetry and has missed an important literature being written by women in its global search for the ignored works of women. Meanwhile, this time difference indicates a serious crisis in Kurdish literature since the arguments made by Anglo-American feminist criticism and used in this study were put forward for women's literature thought to be in danger in the second half of the twentieth century, but they have been borrowed herein to support Kurdish women's poetry in the transition from the twentieth century to the twenty first century. Thus, when compared to American and European literature, this situation implies that gender justice and reform in Kurdish literature has never happened and this is why Kurdish literature has significantly failed to stand on its feet to compete with other literatures of the world.

The poets' strong preoccupations with both the problems faced by women in society and the issues facing the Kurds as a nation has necessitated some reference to the scholarship on women in Middle Eastern societies and the relation of gender to nationalist discourses. This scholarship contextualises a range of cultural practices and phenomena that are the product of the patriarchal structure of the Kurdish society and the wider influence of regional cross-cultural norms. Besides, they help in making something of the gender politics of Kurdish nationalist movements and the roles such movements define for women. It is partly through the use of these theories that the gender attitudes of women poets towards the social and cultural systems of their society are dwelt on and explicated and their reaction to the gender implications of Kurdish nationalism and its nation-building projects viewed and assessed. These theories have been instrumental in exposing certain controversial points and contradictory narratives in the poetry of the selected women poets which could escape the attention of the readers and critics if it was only analysed in the light of feminist literary criticism. Examples of this include the complicity and agency of women in empowering patriarchal regimes and the poets' self-reproduction and development of certain gender identities that distinguish women from men in many Third World societies— such as women as the mothers of nation and homeland, women as being especially close to nature and its reproductive character and function by way of their biological construction.

A starting point of this thesis was its attempt to make a comparison between the poetry of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets. The themes of both forms of poetry indicate a far-reaching awareness of the women poets of the general situation of women in Kurdish society. Moreover, they also represent the poets' social, political and cultural responsibility towards their national cause and ethnic existence. The themes analysed in this poetic study show how these women poets are eager to positively contribute to the development and civilisation of their society and uproot those negative phenomena and elements that gradually perish it. There is a sense of innovation on a variety of levels embodied in the poetry of these poets and it is never difficult to perceive that the poets have significantly deviated from the classical structure on which Kurdish society is originally built¹⁰³. This is slightly more the case with the diasporic Kurdish women poets, possibly as a result of the wider freedoms they are enjoying in exile. The poetry of these poets estimates the degree of responsibility the Kurdish authority needs to take to resolve the problems facing women in southern Kurdistan. Likewise, it sends out a clear message to the classic Kurdish patriarchy that there is a feminist-orientated rebellion and campaign for gender equality in literature on their way that aim to set a limit to its long oppression of women. In fact, what is rather unique in the poetry of these poets is that the narratives and raw materials used in weaving the poetic lines and structures come from facts mostly obtained from the personal life experiences of the poets themselves. And this, of course, is a credit to the poets' creative talents.

The influence of foreign literatures, particularly poetry, on the poetic imagination of Kurdish women poets of the diaspora and home is one more shared characteristic. It is noticed that most women poets are under the impact of either Western or regional literatures and they openly indicate to this fact. Additionally, the influence of the classical Kurdish poetry is also felt in the poetic texts of several women poets such as Heleşbeyî,

¹⁰³ The distinctive case of rejecting the traditional patriarchal Kurdish culture is generally noticed by many Kurdish critics who have cast a critical eye over the poetry of Kurdish women poets. More importantly, this situation is also felt by non-Kurdish critics whose research works include the poetry of Kurdish women. A clear case in point is the Iraqi Arab writer and researcher Naciî Me'murî who has recently conducted a research project in Arabic on the poetry of a selected group of Kurdish women poets. On the thematic nature of the poetry of those women poets, Me'murî says "I generally found the rejection of the orthodox social relations and masculine culture in the works of Kurdish women poets. Such poets have broken with the patriarchal culture that used to oblige them to comply with it or forced them to reproduce and perform it in their literary works" (Me'murî 2011: 4).

Qeredagî, Necîbe Eḥmed and Kejaḷ Eḥmed. As for the impact of regional poetry, it is typically the poetry of classical and modern Arab and Persian poets which has left its imprint on the mind of poets like Begîxanî, Nadir, Herdî, Qeredagî, Kejaḷ Eḥmed, Heḷebceyî, K and Necîbe Eḥmed. The thematic effect of Western literature and poetry is noticeably widespread in the poetic works of poets such as Begîxanî, Nadir, Herdî, Heme, Fayeḡ, Lazo, Kinêr Heḡesen, Qeredagî, Kejaḷ Eḥmed and Namîḡ. However, this effect is more evident in the poetry of diasporic Kurdish women poets for their closer contact with this literature. This influence has perceptibly enriched the poetry of these women poets and justifies the fact that they are well aware of what is happening around them and in the far parts of the world in terms of poetic techniques, themes, styles and language. Still within this theme of literary interaction and assimilation, the poetry of several women poets of this study has been translated into a variety of world languages as an attempt at producing a sort of counter-effect on non-native literatures. Examples are: the poetry of Begîxanî into English, French and Arabic, Herdî's into English, Fayeḡ's into Dutch and Arabic, Qeredagî's into Swedish and Arabic, Kejaḷ Eḥmed's into English, Norwegian and Arabic, Heḷebceyî's into English and K's into Arabic.

Perhaps, the key thematic difference that sets the poetic quality of diasporic Kurdish women poets apart from that of home women poets is the expression of exilic experiences and nostalgic feelings in their poetry. This tendency is explicitly shown in the poetry of all diasporic women poets and makes them spiritually divided between two largely different geographies. This division implies that diasporic poets are involuntarily juggling two different life styles and are experiencing a mental state which is quite unstable. Living in the diaspora has not been the ideal life choice of the Kurdish women poets in question. Examples like Begîxanî and Herdî have escaped political persecution by the overthrown Iraqi Ba'th regime and the rest have left southern Kurdistan either due to political instability in the region or because of bad economic situations at home in the 1990s. However, there is the case of Nadir who apparently argues that she has gone into exile in fear of revenge by her society as a result of her radical feminist attitudes towards it¹⁰⁴. Thus, it is true that life in the West has given some kind of liberties to diasporic

¹⁰⁴ In the analysis of Nadir's poetry on page 126 it is argued that one of the reasons she heads to Europe is her fear of reprisals from her society as a result of her particular feminist and erotic style of writing. In her

women poets, but, at the same time, their stay away from their homeland is an inner and psychological conflict they live with permanently. It is obvious from the homeland-focused poetic images of all diasporic Kurdish women poets that home is haunting these poets and has divided them physically and spiritually between the West and home country. This nostalgic obsession limits the taste of freedom and modernity they relish in the West. Against this backdrop, one can argue that relative freedom of life, cultural and technological developments are not the main factors behind the temporary residence of diasporic women poets in Europe. Moreover, they are not abroad to cut relations with home and forget it. Many of them like Begîxanî, Herdî, Heme and Fayeq are involved in national and transnational women's and feminist activities and awareness campaigns alongside other women's organisations and groups in protection of women's rights and guaranteeing them in official institutions in southern Kurdistan. Others long to return to the bosom of their motherland, but are waiting for an effective improvement in the cultural and social structures and institutions which run society.

Within this theme of nostalgia and memory of homeland, a gender concern arises which is related to the reproductive quality of women. In their feelings of attachment to homeland, certain poets like Begîxanî, Nadir, Heme, Lazo, and Kinêr Hesen promote the gender role assigned to women in the patriarchal nationalist societies which sees them as the reproducers and mothers of nation and its cultural symbols and traditions. However, there is also another group of poets such as Herdî, Kejal Ehed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen and Necîbe Ehed who oppose such stereotyping and constructions of women in their poetry and call for a fair restriction on birth rate and maternity duties and the provision of equal job opportunities for women in the public sector¹⁰⁵.

There is the important fact that diasporic Kurdish women poets have learnt useful things and accumulated rich civil experiences during their time of living in the West. The feminist knowledge they have gained from Western civilisation has helped them treat the

answer to the question on whether she will continue writing in her rebellious style in the diaspora, she is quoted as saying "oh God, what an unlucky woman I am, even writing has turned out to be my harshest fate which has deported me from my dear Kurdistan" (page 126).

¹⁰⁵ Uncontrolled birth rate results in an increase in maternity duties which would be a good reason for further exploitation of women by men and keeping them at home. It is again Moghadam who argues that "women's reproductive function is used to justify their segregation in public, their restriction to the home, and their lack of civil and legal rights" (Moghadam 1993: 5).

situation of women in their poetry with care and judiciousness. Knowing the rights of women from a European context makes their poetic experiences slightly different from the poetry of home Kurdish women poets. Additionally, relative acquaintance with Western poetic structure and form is another feature that separates their poetry from the poetry of home. With some modifications, diasporic women poets attempt to transfer the civil model of life women generally practise in the West to their society. They make their poetry a reform forum for bringing equal civil and legal rights women have in Europe to Kurdish women. The multiple poetic messages of diasporic women poets say that they will feel the joy and freedom of Europe when similar social and gender security is established in southern Kurdistan. It is clear from their poetry that they are experiencing extreme pain at the sight of regular oppression of women and their killing on the simple pretext of “honour” in their society.

Despite such points of difference, we can see a general agreement in terms of the themes raised in the poetry of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets. Except for the issues related to life in exile and some innovations in themes on individual basis, there is not a visibly big difference between the two types of poetry. Both are equally on the same front of fighting the classic patriarchal regime in southern Kurdistan, which they blame for being largely behind the problems confronting women. They choose almost the same poetic techniques and ideas for showing injustice to women in society. For instance, metaphors and personifications are poetic devices essentially found in the two forms of poetry to explain the behaviour and actions of men towards women and they play a good role in disguising the sensitive and dangerous feelings and concepts which are not easy to talk about publicly in the Kurdish community. Examples of poetic texts that express resentment towards the patriarchal system of Kurdish society and the wide gender rift this system has brought to this society’s social and political institutions repeatedly occur in the poetry of Begîxanî, Herdî, Fayeq, Lazo, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Muftî, Namîq, ‘Ebdulreħman, K and Nurî.

The basic poetic form used by the poets is the same as it is free verse which is heavily relied on in their poetic books. Perhaps, Heļebceyî is one exception who sometimes adopts the classical form of Kurdish poetry in her collections. The poetic imagery utilised by the poets all centre on almost similar subjects and circumstances they

have encountered in their society. They usually picture the dark side of Kurdish women's life and the different forms of gender-based oppression they face at the hands of non-progressive men and Kurdish cultural and religious traditions. For instance, Nadir focuses on the simple right of marriage which is completely taken away from women as she states that it is habitually the all-important father or the male members of the extended family who keep the absolute right to find husbands for their female members. Elsewhere, Helebceyî clearly emphasises an unusual rise in divorce cases and the number of unmarried women in her traditional society caused by the supercilious behaviour of irresponsible men. She describes the situation as unwholesome.

The analysis of the poetry of this study shows an interesting thematic gap between two groups of poets, but this division lies not in the diaspora/home division but rather in the difference between two generations. We may define a first group who belong to the 1990s generation of women poets, namely Begîxanî, Herdî, Heme, Fayeq, Qeredagî, Kejaî Ehed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Helebceyî, Muftî, Namîq, 'Ebdulrehman, K and Necîbe Ehed, whose poetry is politicised and nationalised and covers mostly and mainly political and national themes that express tragedies such as Halabja, Anfal and Kurdish civil war. The reason for indicating such themes is explicitly their proximity to these events and in some cases their direct involvement in them. Whereas the other group, which emerge after 2000 and include poets like Nadir, Lazo, Kinêr Hesen and Nurî, come up with an obviously different type of poetry in terms of themes. They rarely or never approach political and national themes and instead opt for current social and cultural themes such as prostitution, rape, eroticism and honour killings. Although most poets of the 1990s generation also tackle these themes, their wider attention is to politics and nationalistic discourses and issues. This thematic gap is the result of the dramatic changes which have occurred socially, economically, politically and culturally after 2000, particularly 2003 following the demise of the Ba'th regime in Iraq.

Both diasporic and home Kurdish women poets writing since 1991 offer new themes and subjects which were not expressed before in Kurdish women's poetry. One of the aims of this study has been to highlight these thematic innovations. Some specific examples are Begîxanî's poetic confession for the first time that men of her society treat women as sex objects, her realisation that honour in her society is linked to the virgin

status of women and her body reclamation in a society where there is no free woman's body; Nadir's expression of sexual terms and contexts, her themes of women's lust for wealth through the sale of their freedom and prostitution; Herdî's erotic performance of sex in poetry and her uncommon treatment of religion while narrating the tragedy of Halabja; and lastly Nurî's poetic condemnation of polygamy and its legitimisation in Islam and the Kurdish society. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to the discussion of such themes, which are highly innovative in the Kurdish context.

The concepts, narratives, interpretations and position of Islamic religion constitute a significant part of the poetry of most poets of this study. Being principally antireligious, almost all poets are against the influence of Islamic laws and rules on their society. They all find the teachings of Islam inimical to the freedom of women. For example, Namîq regards the compulsory wearing of the veil as a form of violation of women's freedom. Muftî argues that patriarchy has its origin in the Qur'an and she justifies her argument by the fact that all the prophets are male. Meanwhile, Nurî criticises the Islamic sharia laws for allowing polygamy which she considers as one of the main contributors to Kurdish women's social miseries. Even the prevention of overt romantic love in Kurdish society is blamed on Islam by certain women poets. 'Ebdulreḥman refers to the failed love relationship between Joseph and Zulaikha from the Qur'an, believing that the unfortunate women of her society have been banned from practising passionate love relationships since that incident. Poets like Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Muftî, Namîq, 'Ebdulreḥman and Necîbe Eḥmed all agree consensually that the exact history of women's oppression and undervalued rights goes back to the religious story of Adam and Eve. Although each one of them recounts this religious narrative in a particular way, they all realise that women are nowadays punished and deprived from their basic and public rights by men in revenge for the apparent deception of Adam by Eve to eat from the apple tree banned by God. Such antireligious attitudes have indeed had some serious consequences for the poets as they turn to be the main cause of a publisher's rejection in southern Kurdistan to put its name on a literary book written by Qeredagî.

There are themes which are meant to show the political stance and attitudes of the women poets towards the political history of Kurdistan. In this sense, they indicate the poets' awareness of the gender politics of Kurdish nationalism and the discrimination

made against women in the Kurdish political domain. Most poets adopt a special style for doing politics in their poetry and they reject the gender roles assigned to them by men that bind them to home and childbearing responsibility. They see their role in the national construction and projects of nation building as central and not less than that played by men. For some poets, achieving their national goals will ultimately reflect positively for the women's question¹⁰⁶. Therefore, they stand hand in hand with male poets to defend their national identity and political cause in a poetic context. A great majority of women poets have been able to crystallise the most tragic incidents in their history in their poetry and make them memorable in the minds of their readers. Begîxanî, Nadir, Herdî, Fayeq, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Ĥesen, Heļebceyî, Muftî, Namîq, K and Necîbe Eħmed all see the importance of reference to the national tragedies like Anfal, Halabja and the twin terrorist attacks in Hewlêr on the first of February 2004 in their poetry. Narrated in a unique poetic style, these events shape an intrinsic part of their poetry. The shocking national events which occur in the poetry of these women poets are the most atrocious committed against the Kurds in history. There is a clear unanimity among these women poets in expressing these tragedies, but what is remarkable is that each approaches these events in a rather special way and style. The peculiarity is that some women poets attempt to mix up the tragedies in single texts, while others give individual titles to them. Additionally, some poets use an emotional approach in talking about the incidents, whereas others make a political reading of them.

There is an identical method used by the selected women poets of this study for coping with the ontological crisis of Kurdish women. If a closer reading of the poetic texts of these women poets is made, a strange feeling arises telling that almost one

¹⁰⁶ In their study of the Kurdish women's movements in Iraq, al-Ali and Pratt realise that most women activists had no issue with taking on a nationalist character alongside their feminist struggle. They argue that "Kurdish nationalism is seen by many women activists as positive for the development of a Kurdish women's movement" (al-Ali and Pratt 2011: 343). It is in the same light that many women poets of this study, who also work as women's rights activists, choose to do national politics in their poetry and do not leave the ground for men only. However, Mojab has an opposite view regarding women's participation in national and political projects. She believes that "as long as Kurdish women remain devoted to the cause of the nation/nationalism and its dream of building a masculine, patriarchal and bourgeois modern state, they will inevitably compromise the cause of women's emancipation" (Mojab 2009: 121). Fayeq is one such poet who agrees with Mojab and rejects further delays in resolving the women's issue in the name of unity to achieve the dream of an independent Kurdish state.

woman poet has written all these poems. In the poetry of Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Namîq, K and Necîbe Eħmed a generally sad feeling is given which implies that sincere love hardly exists in Kurdish society and in most cases such poets blame men for being behind failed love. They basically agree that most men exploit love for temporary sexual pleasure and they do not care for the aftermath of such treatment of love for the women involved in such love relationships. They argue that practical love experiences have proven that women are more faithful than men in love relationships and it is this feeling that always finds women as victims not men.

There is also a common sense noticeable in the poetry of Begîxanî, Nadir, Heme, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Heļebceyî, Muftî, Namîq, `Ebdulreħman, K, Necîbe Eħmed and Nurî that women are looked at as sex objects, they are given attention when men are sexually aroused and when such desire dies away, they find themselves discarded as a worthless object.

However, there is a quite rare case where some women initiate problems for themselves, and this is the phenomenon of prostitution obviously demonstrated by Nadir in her poetry where she criticises greedy and degenerate women for bringing physical torture and death to their doorstep for an amount of money.

Contextually, there is another social reading of the situation of love in Kurdish society which is principally attributed to the patriarchal mentality of Kurdish men. Begîxanî, Nadir, Heme, Lazo, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Heļebceyî, Muftî, Namîq, `Ebdulreħman, K and Nurî argue that romantic love has long been placed behind bars in their society and there is scarcely a case where lovers are able to freely express their mutual feelings and emotions and act as they wish. They hold the belief that disappointment in love keeps dogging women of their society either for fear of their male-dominated families or the socially gendered regime which has largely restricted the expression of romantic thoughts between women and men. These poets, too, find Islamic religion primarily responsible for the troubled situation of free love in their society through punitive measures it takes against those women who mix with men illegitimately. Violent experiences witnessed back home enable these poets to argue that

there is capital punishment for a woman who is found involved in an erotic relationship with a man and the stoning of Du'ā is given in this study as recent concrete evidence.

Killing women for practising religiously and culturally unauthorised love publicly or secretly is regularly branded as “honour killing” by all the aforementioned women poets¹⁰⁷. The women poets concerned agree that the construction of honour in women's body and symbolising women as the honour of the nation and family are gender-based scenarios to further contain women's freedom. Crucially, what these women poets are concerned about is that it is typically poor women who are the victims of revealed erotic love relationships as men generally escape them safe and sound.

In the wake of this disillusionment with intimate relationships between women and men and deep concerns about the precarious situation of women in southern Kurdistan, a significant group of women poets in this study work hard to promote tolerance and peaceful cohabitation between the two disputing genders by means of poetic language. These poets are Begîxanî, Heme, Kinêr Hesen, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Heleşbeyî, Mufî and 'Ebdulreşman. Using a soft poetic language, these poets argue that it is only through love and respect between men and women that social peace and security will be firmly established in Kurdish society. They disagree with the use of love relationships as a form for subjugating women and limiting their social rights and freedom. They believe that love should bring gender equality and act as a source for removing all sorts of discrimination against women under the rubric of certain gender roles which are constructed both socially and culturally without any truth in them in reality and the actual context where women live. For instance, in the last part of the thematic analysis of Heleşbeyî's poetry, it is clear that she earnestly pushes for the idea of honesty to be respected between lovers and spreads a piece of advice in the poetic text analysed there, urging women and men to remove social barriers ahead of them and think

¹⁰⁷ Mojab sees the spread of patriarchal violence and the mass killing of women for reasons of honour, disobedience to patriarchal families and engagement in erotic love relationships in southern Kurdistan after 1991 as one of the byproducts of the brutal violence which was already practised against the Kurds by the fallen Iraqi Ba'th regime. On the vulnerable situation of Kurdish women and patriarchal oppression against them, Mojab concludes that “relieved from the patriarchal gender politics of the Ba'th regime, Kurdish women were now in conflict with the traditional patriarchy of Kurdish society and the new government. Decades of war, and especially the Anfal genocide of 1988, destroyed the very fabric of Kurdish society and unleashed patriarchal violence everywhere” (Mojab 2009: 123).

about living in durable peace. The same is true for Begîxanî who admits that she has written her latest poetry book in response to a drastic need for the circulation of faithful love among the emerging young lovers of her homeland.

It is in the innovative poetry of Begîxanî, Nadir, Heme, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Kejaļ Eħmed, Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Heļebceyî, Muftî, Namîq, ‘Ebdulreħman, K, Necîbe Eħmed and Nurî that the proposition of rejecting the imprisonment of women at home as housewives, chiefly looking after children and doing everyday housework is raised. This cultural practice which is typical of classic patriarchal and religious societies¹⁰⁸ is objected to by these women poets in a modern fashion through labelling it as a gender construction based on the masculinity/femininity dichotomy. The poets call for a more liberal view on the women’s rights and a realistic assessment of the women’s abilities and skills. They believe that both the public and private spheres should equally be divided between the two genders and that women should be given equal opportunities of work proportionately in all government institutions and offices.

The main arguments of this study state explicitly that men under the cloak of classic patriarchy have been the key oppressors of women and appropriators of their basic and public rights. They are to be blamed basically for every misfortune that has happened to women in Kurdish society. However, an interesting point is the collaboration of women, particularly the senior ones, with the patriarchal system which is in place in southern Kurdistan. Such women connive with men against other women for some limited power at home whose actions in return help in the fortification of patriarchal ideologies in society. Two such cases are pointed to in the poetry of both Nadir and Muftî. Nadir criticises the behaviour of those women who sell themselves and their freedom to men for money and a luxurious life without thinking of the consequences of such relationships for their future. She believes that the winner in this game is men and patriarchy as most cases of this form will end in failure. Another form of women’s complicity in patriarchal regimes is indicated in Muftî’s social situation at home where her mother plays an obstructive role in her emergence as a poet and her self-confession in

¹⁰⁸ It is Moghadam who describes the role of women and wives generally in the Arab and Muslim world as the mistress of house services. She says “in the Arab-Islamic family, the wife’s main obligations are to maintain a home, care for her children, and obey her husband” (Moghadam 1993: 109-110). It is the same pattern of Kurdish women’s life that the poets criticise herein.

a poetic text about the treatment of her grandmother who used to engage them in listening to stories she was narrating for them as a form of protection from interaction with men. This protection can be translated as a way for weakening women's ability to challenge men outside to reclaim their social and political rights. Presumably, there are other different forms of women's self-victimisation and indirect encouragement of the classic patriarchal structures which can only be discovered by further deep study and analysis of the works of these women poets.

The other themes that indicate a close similarity between the poetic structures and content of diasporic and home Kurdish women poets are the invocation of environmental images and situations, as well as the theme of femininity and brave treatment of personal bodies. There are clear poetic examples by women poets like Begîxanî, Herdî, Fayeq, Lazo, Kinêr Hesen, Qeredagî, Muftî and Necîbe Ehemmed on the climate of their homeland, changes in seasonal weather and the natural landscapes of Kurdistan which show a sense of belonging to home and the adoration of nature by these poets. However, what is awkward about the use of nature themes is the authentication of arguments about the gender identities given to women which correlate them with nature by way of their ability to reproduce. Such poets' attraction to nature is an excuse for gender theorists to find their gender constructions of women as rational and justifiable. In opposition to this one might underline the important role played by landscape and the impressive components of wild nature in both folkloric and classical Kurdish literature, which may at least partly account for their presence in this modern literature.

As already shown, a revolutionary radical change and characteristic innovation in the poetry of several poets of this study is the expression of intimate experiences and bold talk about explicit sexual practice which are impossible to utter in public. These cases are articulated in the poetry of Nadir, Herdî, Lazo, Qeredagî and Kejal Ehemmed. For instance, Nadir explicitly talks about the male sex organ and the joy women can have from it. Alongside very erotic poetic motifs, Herdî presents the drama of two lovers who are involved in a sexual activity in front of a mirror, whereas Lazo ignores all the social limits to talk sensually about her own hard round breasts and challenge all the round fruits of the world that are not as beautiful. This unflinching courage to write openly, even transgressively, about sensitive sexual body parts by home women poets belies our

assumption that diasporic women will make use of wider freedoms in expressing themselves. And there is no quite convincing poetic proof here to articulate that home women poets are actually copying the diasporic poets since Kejaġ Eĥmed, for example, emerges as a poet prior to Herdî and Lazo.

Another typical quality of the poetry of Begîxanî, Herdî, Heme, Kinêr Hesen and Necîbe Eĥmed, which is also related to the theme of femininity and women's body, is their defence of women's individuality and freedom of personal body control. These poets believe that women should fight for their bodily independence and do not allow men to take it away from them and control it as part of their personal belongings¹⁰⁹. Begîxanî poetically argues that her body is hers and no one has the right to touch it without her prior consent. Originating from Western liberal feminist ideologies, this stance of Begîxanî is a tough challenge to the classic Kurdish patriarchal regime and its traditional institutions. Necîbe Eĥmed develops the same challenge in her poetry when she refuses to be a tool and puppet in the hand of men, like their personal shadow. Rather, she is determined to be her own shadow and independent forever and through this she sends out a courage-laden feminist message to her fellow countrywomen to act like her and no longer accept slavery to the wishes of men.

The most important feature that combines the women poets of the diaspora and home is the incorporation of personal life experiences into their poetry. Most of their poems draw on personal life stories and incidents which have happened to them¹¹⁰. It is as if these poets have found in poetry a place where they freely express their private feelings and history. Based on the nature and form of these private life experiences, it is

¹⁰⁹ Women's body in most Middle Eastern societies is commodified and appropriated by men as an object to fulfill their sexual desires. Moghadam (1993: 105) asserts this fact as saying "in a patriarchal context, women are considered a form of property." It is this patriarchal devaluation of women's character that pushes women poets to fight for their occupied bodies and reclaim them.

¹¹⁰ The argument of interest in personal life experiences is also supported by personal statements from the poets themselves. For example, Begîxanî, in an interview given to *Raman*, argues that her life experiences form a fundamental part of her poetic works. She says "I embody myself in my poems, write a self who is honest, sensitive, nihilist and fallen in love. Reference to self in my poems is very close to the real Nezend, with all her beauties and ugly traits. However, there is something which I embody in my real life and that is turning reality into poetry" (Begîxanî 2008: 29). Elsewhere, Kurdish woman poet Îman Mehdî from Halabja endorses the idea of the influence of life experience on the poetry of women poets when she gives her opinion on the poetic experience of some women poets of this study, arguing that "the poetry of women poets is the exact copy of their life experience" (Mehdî 2012: 8).

possible to classify them into a set of categories. They can arguably be experiences of bereavement, family displacement, birth and own life privacies.

The first type of experience occurs commonly in the poetry of Begîxanî, Helebceyî, Muftî and K where tragic stories of the loss of family members are invoked. For instance, Begîxanî laments the loss of her father and brothers, Helebceyî mourns the loss of her entire family, Muftî her four brothers and K her husband. What unites all these poets is that all these life losses were the victims of long-standing wars that shattered the region for several decades. Thus, all these deaths are political rather than natural.

Experiences of family displacement are usually talked about in the poetry of Begîxanî, Herdî and Necîbe Eħmed. Family members of these poets were displaced from their birthplace and fatherland for political reasons, much related to their national identity and involvement in Kurdish political activities for a sovereign Kurdish state. These poets acknowledge the hard fact that the displacement policies of the toppled Iraqi Ba'ħ regime greatly affected the psychological and economic conditions of their families. They still seem traumatised by those horrific experiences.

As for the experiences of birth, it is Begîxanî, Fayeq and Nurî who use the stories of the birth of girls as clear evidence of the gender-motivated oppression of the classic Kurdish patriarchal and Islamic system against women. In their poetry, they reveal the misogynistic and extremely gendered attitudes of Kurdish fathers towards girls at their birth, arguing that hatred and injustice towards women start right from the moment they come to life. They all agree that this discrimination against women is gender-based and originates in the social and cultural constructions of women as weak beings and inferior to men¹¹¹. Thus, Begîxanî through an intentional poetic text shows what happens to the father when he receives the news of the birth of a female baby, putting on a harsh expression and starting to torment the baby's mother even while she is in birth pains. Fayeq uses her birthday as the title of a poem to remind her of the unhappy day when she came to life. She also argues that life has been harsh to her since that date and since then

¹¹¹ This construction of women has been very detrimental to their social and political positions in society and is responsible for ignoring them in important realms of life and in equally running the political affairs of southern Kurdistan. Moghadam states that "Muslim societies, like many others, harbor illusions about immutable gender differences. There is a very strong contention that women are different beings—*different* often meaning *inferior*—which strengthens social barriers to women's achievement" (Moghadam 1993: 5). Women poets believe that as far as this harmful gender construction is there and operative in society no constructive hope in the future of women or their rights can be built.

she has not seen any hope of change in the fathers' thinking towards girls. Nurî quarrels with her father about the real purpose of her birth. She asks if girls are not welcome and respected in this world, then why she was allowed to come to this life. She never conceals the fact that they are here to serve men and meet their sexual requirements. By bringing such birth stories into play, these poets spotlight the level of gender discrimination in their society and the culturally-motivated hatred towards women.

The final category of experience which is closely linked to own life privacies is what brings Çinûr Namîq Hesen, Namîq and 'Ebdulrêhman together. In this limited type of experience, the poets reflect on extremely personal stories which have been happening to them in life. They discuss the manner they have been treated inside their families and outside in the Kurdish community; therefore, there are cases where they start evaluating their life against the life of other women. As a case in point, on page 218 of this study, Namîq describes the chaotic situation of her family when her father was away for a long time for apparently no clear reasons. She recounts the sad moments her family had spent away from her father, seeing his absence as a big blow to the joy they were having in his presence. Similarly, 'Ebdulrêhman on page 228 makes it public for the readers that what they are reading constitute part of her and in turn she is part of them. She argues that her life can be seen in her poetry.

This study aims to bring together a representative range of marginalised women poets who have broadly been lost in Kurdish literary quarters. As the attitude and critical comments of some local and international literary critics show, there are some influential women poets missed out intentionally by Kurdish writers and critics in the long history of Kurdish literature¹¹². The study has shown that women poets writing since 1991 have in general been very eager to address the social problems facing women in Kurdish society. They deal with both Kurdish national issues and gender-related issues. Over the past decade there has been a significant trend away from issues of identity and rights as

¹¹² The issue of purposely setting aside bright female names in Kurdish literature is currently a controversial one and has been debated by many Kurdish women writers and critics. The award winner for best poetic text in this year's Slêmanî-based Gelawêj Festival for Literature Heyat Mecîd Perxî believes that Kurdish women writers and poets should be brought to the general public attention. She argues that "Kurdish women have reached the required level to enter history, adding that they should have cultivated the Kurdish history pages much earlier than now. There are a significant number of women who deserve their names to be written in the Kurdish literary history" (Perxî 2012: 16).

members of the Kurdish nation towards a stronger focus on contemporary social and political problems. At the same time, poetic form has evolved in a more flexible way to abandon the structures it used to have in the period of classical Kurdish poetry. Modern female poetry is less structured and its form is less recognisable as it is written in free verse. I hope this study will be a vital step towards further discovery of other ignored women writers who produce creditable literary works.

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