Digital Docu-fiction: A Way to Produce Kurdish Cinema

Digital Docu-fiction:
A Way to Produce Kurdish Cinema

Hassan Sonboli

B. Film &TV production, MA (Hons) Media Production

Queensland College of Art,
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Visual Arts

January 2017

Abstract

This exegesis contextualises my feature-length film *The Sultan and the Kings,* a studio-based project produced for the Doctorate of Visual Arts.

As a Kurdish émigré and filmmaker who left Iran in 1997, lived in Turkey for a couple of years, then emigrated to Australia in 2000, I studied film and also continued the filmmaking practice that I had begun in Iran in 1988.

The exegesis examines the shortage of literature about Kurdish films, the misrepresentation of Kurdish filmmaking, the emergence of Kurdish cinema and the obstacles faced by it, as well as the emergence of Kurdish cinematic styles.

By considering how my film relates to Kurdish cinema overall, what is referred to as the "cinema under oppression" and the "cinema of diaspora", this exegesis examines the development of a form of storytelling that I term digital docu-fiction, which blends elements of documentary, fiction and digital film manipulation. Through this form of practice, Kurdish filmmakers aim to take control of the whole process of filmmaking, from production to exhibition.

The exegesis discusses this form of storytelling with reference to the development of my own practice and aesthetic, using my short film *A Woman with a Digital Camera* as an example of digital docu-fiction.

In particular, I discuss my major studio work, *The Sultan and The Kings*, a contemporary version of hybrid Kurdish film in diaspora, which I argue is independent of political and economic interference.

Contents

Table of Figures

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisors, who have directed me through the whole process of my doctoral study: Associate Professor Pat Laughren, for his massive support and guidance throughout the exploration and complex journey of my DVA; Associate Professor Trish FitzSimons, for her perceptive view and wise advice during the process of my studio works and while I was developing my thesis; and Dr George Petelin for his intelligence and enlightenment throughout his art theory lectures and during the writing and editing of my final thesis.

I would like to thank Dean Chircop for his useful advice during the production and post-production phases of the major studio work and Nick Oughton for his wise comments and valuable guidance. My special thanks goes to all the members and actors who were on the set whenever they were needed. You have all been acknowledged in the closing credits of my films.

I am very thankful to my dear friend Margaret Hounslow for her great help and assistance during the writing process. Thanks Margaret – you are the best! Many thanks too for the technical advisers at the Griffith Film School, who have guided me during the production and post-production of my studio works. My special thanks goes to Alex Waller, Brett Wiltshire, Hugh Gormley and James Stafford. Thanks to Anne Demy-Geroe for her useful information and the generous help she offered me. Thanks to Therese Nolan-Brown and Cherie Basile for their advice and help.

I am very thankful to my family for their love and support. Gina and Rosina – you have been so good, and thanks for being so patient! The final words of acknowledgment must go to my dear one, Kezhal Reyhni, who has been so patient during all these years of study. Without her support, I could never have accomplished my mission. Kezhal, I love you.

Thanks again, to all the people who believed in me and helped me for this to happen.

Hassan Sonboli- Brisbane, Australia

December 2016

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)

Hassan Sonboli

Introduction

With a population of nearly 40 million people, Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the world with no country. The Kurdish people are still living on the land that always has belonged to them as their homeland. However, Kurdistan – the land of the Kurds – is divided by the national borders of present-day Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Kurds have their own unique culture, language and history. Today, we are proud of our flag and our national anthem. I grew up as a Kurd in Iran, and I am a proud Kurd who belongs to the whole of Kurdistan.

I am a filmmaker. I am a storyteller. I entertain my audiences with my films in order to enlighten them and to introduce them to truth. Moreover, not all Kurdish history has yet been written or told. For these reasons, some of the present exegesis relies on personal biography and storytelling – my own experiences of what happened, and what life is like, in the land of the Kurds: Kurdistan.

A New Form of Filmmaking

As an exiled Kurdish filmmaker wishing to convey an awareness of politics associated with the current oppression of Kurdistan and Kurdish culture, I set out to ask how I could develop a new form of filmmaking that would enlighten the public about Kurdish politics and culture while at the same time be entertaining. This exegesis is an account of the production process

and reasoning behind a feature-length film I made to answer this question and to complete my Doctorate of Visual Art: *The Sultan and the Kings*.

From the beginning of this project, I was attracted to a style of filmmaking that would blend documentary and historical elements with fictional narrative: “Less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality … something must in fact be built up, something artificial, posed” (Brecht, quoted in Jennings, Howland and Smith, 1999). This hybrid style, combined with advantages of digital technology that I will discuss in Chapter 3, has enabled me to produce and distribute a form of film that is more authentically Kurdish to a broader audience in an entertaining way.

My Background

As I grew up during the 1970s and 1980s, I saw many films on national TV, and occasionally at the cinema. I loved the Western serials with the super-heroes of the time – Tarzan, Superman, Zorro and the Six Million Dollar man. And I wanted to be like them – I wanted to act in the movies. It was not until much later that I realised it was not all about the actors – someone had to *make* those movies. And that was when I started thinking about making my own movies. But how?

Here is a story. Once upon a time, a teenage boy wandered into a second-hand junk shop in the middle of Mahabad, a major Kurdish city, which is located in north-western Iran. There he discovered a real treasure

– for him at least. It was a cartridge of unexposed Super 8 film, and the shopkeeper did not know what it was. So the boy bought it with his pocket money and rushed it home to put it in the fridge.

Then he wrote the script for his first film, borrowed a Super 8 camera and planned the shoot with a couple of local kids as the cast. Unfortunately his film cartridge contained only 50 feet – enough for two and a half minutes at the usual 24 frames per second. But the script needed three minutes at least. Then the answer came: he would shoot at 18 frames per second and the time would be just enough.

So the film was shot, and two months later the boy had a small reel of celluloid back from Germany – and there were the images he had filmed! Now it had to be cut – quite literally – into a story. With nothing but scissors and Sellotape, the job was done. And that boy was hooked on the magic of film forever.

That boy was me. And those early experiences with a different sort of filmmaking have led me to the present – and to my latest project to develop a new type of film, employing new digital film technology.

In 1989 I made my second short film, *The Calm Before the Storm (Aramesh Gabl az Toofan)*, which was supported by the Ministry of Culture of the city of Mahabad. The film was shot on Super 8 film, which was the only available option for me at that time. The film was accepted into a

national film festival and I was awarded Best Film Director at the West Azerbaijan Province Film Festival.

Figure 1: *The Calm Before The Storm* (1989). Hassan Sonboli behind a Super 8 camera.

The next project on which I worked was a short film called *Shame* (*Sharm)*, written and directed by Ebrahim Saeedi. As usual, I was the cameraman for Ebrahim's film. But this time our project was completely different from every other film we had shot. We decided to make a film about a local boy who decided to leave school and work as a labourer. But this time Ebrahim and I agreed to shoot it in the Kurdish language. It was a big decision for both of us. The film was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Mahabad (Iranian Youth Cinema Society).

When we finalised the film, we faced a big problem. The film could not be screened due to the use of “unofficial language”. Ebrahim and I were]upset about this, and we did not know what to do. In the end, we did not have any choice if we wanted the film to be shown in the film festival. So we made the awful decision to dub the film in Farsi. We killed it.[1] Because when we dubbed it into Farsi, the original identity of the film disappeared. We felt so bad during the festival screening.

Figure 2: ***Sharm (1990). Ebrahim Saeedi (director) front left, Hassan Sonboli (cameraman), Logman Farspoor (sound).***

On 13 July 1989, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the head of PDKI,[2] was assassinated in Vienna by Iranian government assassins. This was

1 Yılmaz Güney, a famous Kurdish filmmaker from Turkey, Couldn’t use Kurdish language in his films while he was producing films in Turkey. So, to be able to screen his films in Turkey, he used the Turkish language.

2 Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran

about the time I started to produce my third short film, *Shot* (*Tazrigh)*. The film was accepted into the West Azerbaijan Province Film Festival in the city of Urmia, and I received a special invitation to attend the festival as a guest.[3]

The day after my arrival, a few people who were involved in organising the festival quietly congratulated me and told me that I needed to prepare myself for a few awards this time. They said I should also be ready to talk about the movie with other filmmakers and members of the audience. But something unexpected happened during the official screening of the films. The planned screening of my film was abandoned only a few minutes prior to it being due to screen. Instead, the next scheduled film was screened. When we asked why, the manager of the festival mentioned some technical problems with my film. But there were no technical problems as far as I knew. Finally, at the awards ceremony, my cameraman Ebrahim Saeedi[4] was awarded best cinematographer, which was so great.

A few days after returning to my city, I was almost arrested by the secret police (the Sarollah at that time), just for making this film. They believed it was related to the assassination of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the head of PDKI. I was saved from imprisonment due to the intervention of

---

3 Urmia is the capital of west Azerbaijan province, Iran.

4 During 1990s Ebrahim and I were collaborating together, shooting each other's films. He is a documentary filmmaker and a film editor, producing film in Iran and in autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq).

"Mr X", [5] the head of the Ministry of Culture of Mahabad, which at that time had a great influence on local government, It was then that I understood the reason why the festival organisers had stopped the screening of the film.

Figure 3: *Tazrigh* (1990). Hassan Sonboli (director) front left, Halaleh Farokhy (nurse), Ebrahim Saeedi (cameraman), Khaled Saeedi (patient with bandaged face)

Months after this incident, I prepared to shoot my next film, which was a short documentary, *The Dervishes of Kurdistan*. After I completed shooting, I submitted the film to the same film festival. Again, my film was accepted at the festival; however, just as before, it was not shown. For the second time, "Mr X", the head of the Ministry of Culture of Mahabad, defended me against this decision. This time, "Mr X" had a big argument with the chief of the Ministry of Culture of the state of West Azerbaijan.

---

[5] For security reasons, I have chosen not to use Mr X's real name.

These arguments between the two parties took place in front of participants during the film festival official screening, when the screening of my film was stopped due to “religious matters”. Unfortunately, this time my protector paid a heavy price for his support, and a few months later he was exiled to another city, far away from Mahabad.

During those years, Ebrahim and I made a few more films together and after that he went to university and studied film in Tehran. During that period, we worked on two more films together. One was a feature film called *Mina*, directed by Eraj Fattah, a Turkish director from the West Azerbaijan Province of Iran. I was the second assistant director. But my essential skill was as a communicator between the Turkish-Persian director and the Kurdish local people. I was paid very well, and the opportunity to work on a big production was a wonderful chance for me to learn more about the industry. Ebrahim was the first assistant director and he was going to edit the film at the end.

The central story was based in a Kurdish village in Iran. It was about Mina, a Kurdish village girl, and the problems she faced as a woman in a traditional Kurdish family. The movie was shot on 16 mm film and it was in the Kurdish language. Due to the armed conflict between the government forces of Iran and the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in that village, and just after finishing the filming, Mina and her family were persecuted by the secret police. Mina’s father, who was part of the cast, was imprisoned for

years. The post-production of the movie was stopped and the film was banned. I have never seen it.

The second film, on which Ebrahim and I worked together, was a documentary for National TV of Iran. Generally, the film explored traditional Kurdish dance and music in the local areas of Kurdistan in Iran. The documentary was never broadcast on TV for political reasons.

During the period 1988–97, I wrote, directed and produced numerous short projects, including a documentary called *Water, Life* for television. This documentary, which was written and directed by me, was twice broadcast on local Iranian TV. I participated in the Eleventh Screenwriting Competition in Tehran as well, and among 523 participants I was nominated in the top 15.

During that period, I was under much pressure. The new officials from the Ministry of Culture of Mahabad would no longer let me make films. They even told other organisations not to help me with any sort of filmmaking facilities. So I was forced to move from Mahabad to a city close to the capital of Tehran. I felt so desperate about the whole situation: it was almost impossible for me to have access to any filmmaking facilities at that time.

For a few years, I was working as an electronic device repairer. I had good experience in that field, and I started working in my brother's shop. I was making good money, but I wasn't happy. Finally, I decided to say

goodbye to everything, including my family, friends and my people. I left Iran at the end of 1997 seeking refuge in Turkey, and ended up in Australia for good. As I was heading towards a new start and a new life, the technology of cinema was shifting towards a new era as well.

Even after arriving in Australia, making film was a nightmare for me, due to the language barrier, cultural difficulties, financial problems, struggles with establishing a new life and again problems with the accessibility of cinematic tools. Finally, after much hard work and receiving some good advice from a few people,[6] I entered the university and began my academic study of film.

As I was studying, I could see the technological improvements occurring in the cinematic tools. Surprisingly, those changes and novelties were happening very fast. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), "The introduction of consumer and prosumer digital cameras and affordable software for computer postproduction has led to the rise of 'do it yourself' (DIY) filmmaking"(p.32). In this regard, the whole process was in favour of the new generation of filmmakers – especially isolated young filmmakers like those from the Kurdistan region.

6 Nick Oughton is a Senior lecturer and Convenor (Screen Production) in the Griffith Film School. He was one of the first people I met in the film study area. His information and advice helped me enormously in finding my way toward film study at Griffith University during 2002.

Finally, as I started to make film in Australia, I realised a very important aspect of filmmaking in this country: there were no “Bogeymen”. There was no one looking over my shoulder. So I finally felt free to express myself. In 1988, Saddam Hussein’s regime bombed the Kurdish city of Halabja with chemical gas, and killed and injured nearly 20,000 civilians. The effect of seeing thousands of videos and pictures from that massacre was very disturbing for me. A few months later, I decided to make a film about that horrific incident. Unfortunately, though, I did not have the financial resources or the right facilities to employ green screen, mixing live action and animation (stop-motion) together to make my film. For many years, I visualised this idea in my head and I was looking for a way to actually create my movie.

During this period, my idea was gradually developing into something more concrete. Soon after I started my new life in Australia and entered the Griffith Film School, my dream of creating the film about Halabja became a reality. Finally, after an interval of almost 19 years, everything came together – facilities, knowledge, support – and the result was my creation *Pawana: A Girl from Halabja*. By the time I started my Master of Arts (Hons) in Media Production in 2007, digital film technology was well developed and was available for the students to use at Griffith Film School. At the same time, I was aware that I could access the Green Screen studio, which was essential for my new project. By 2008 I had developed my final script about

the chemical attack on Halabja. I shot the entire project on the Green Screen, mixing live action and animation together.

Figure 4: ***Pawana, A Girl from Halabja*** **(still frame), actress Melissa Smith**

As already mentioned, I grew up in the city of Mahabad, in the west of Iran. The population of this city is mainly Kurdish, and indeed the first Kurdish republic[7] was established here in 1946. Sadly for us Kurds, that

[7] "… Theodore Roosevelt, wrote in "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" that a main problem of the People's Republic of Mahabad was that the Kurds needed the assistance of the USSR... However, this close relationship to the USSR alienated the republic from most Western powers, causing them to side with Iran. Qazi Muhammad [Head of the Republic] did not deny that his republic was funded and supplied by the Soviets, but did deny that the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was a communist party. He claimed that this was a lie fabricated by

lasted just one year, and it would be true to say that the Kurdish people have been wishing, and working towards, an independent state of Kurdistan ever since. My aim in this project is to enable Kurdish culture and politics to be conveyed to the world through filmmaking. As the following account will show, historically this has been extremely difficult, but it has nonetheless begun to happen.

Chapter 1 of this exegesis discusses the shortage of literature available about Kurdish film, and the misrepresentation of Kurdish filmmakers as belonging to other nations. It also outlines how I researched and assembled information about Kurdish film in order to partially overcome this problem. The chapter concludes with an account of my own background as a Kurdish filmmaker.

Chapter 2 discusses the emergence of Kurdish cinema, the issues it faces, and the cinematic style that characterises its two phases: one that I refer to as “cinema under oppression” and the other, described by Naficy (2001,p.8) as accented cinema or “cinema in diaspora”.

In Chapter 3, I outline strategies for filmmaking that may alleviate some of these issues, and discuss how these emerged from my experiments in making a short film called *A Woman with a Digital Camera*.

---

the Iranian military authorities, and added that his ideals were very different from the Soviets.” (Meiselas, 1997,p.182)

In Chapter 4, I discuss how my earlier experiments and my feature film *The Sultan and the Kings* address some of these issues.

The Conclusion sums up my argument, and suggests further research that may still be necessary.

Chapter 1

What is Kurdish Cinema?

The Long but Recently Neglected History of Kurdish Culture

As Michael Gunter (2013) observes, “Most Kurdish nationalists …would argue that the origins of their nation and nationalism reach back into time immemorial. Many see themselves as the descendants of the ancient Medes who overthrew the Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE”(p.30). Kurds are one of the ancient peoples of the Middle East. They are an Indo-European tribe that migrated to the mountainous area today called Kurdistan. As Meiselas (1997) describes it, ”Kurdistan, ‘Land of the Kurds’ is mentioned by European travellers from the fifteenth century onward: a mountainous, wild land of ill-defined extent between Persia in the east and Asia Minor and Syria in the west”(p.2). Kurds have their own unique language, culture and history. Archaeologically, Kurds’ ancient ancestors were known as the Medes. In a book titled *Kurds*, King (1993) describes Kurds as:

> The group of people called the Medes, who are mentioned in Bible, are probably ancestors of the Kurds. The Kurds are also mentioned by an ancient Greek author, Xenophon, writing in around 400 BC, who says that a Greek army met some people called the Kardukhoi on the borders of Persia (p.15).

> Xenophon wrote that the Kurds of his day were very warlike, and defied the Persian emperor.

Originally, Kurds were the followers of the Zoroastrian religion. But during the conquest of their area by the warriors of Islam in the seventh century, most of the Kurds changed from the Zoroastrian religion to Islam. King (1993) indicates that:

> When the Arabs brought the Islamic religion to the region in the seventh century AD, the Kurds resisted the new religion and fought against the invading Arabs. But the Arabs won a great battle near the modern Iraqi city of Suleymaniyah in AD 643. The Kurds converted to Islam, but kept their political independence on the borders between the Arab, Persian and Byzantine empires for many centuries(p.15).

One of the glorious periods for the Kurds was the twelfth century, when Saladin[8] established the Ayyubid Kingdom in the heart of Islamic regions. According to Gunter (2013):

> History does record that Saladin (1137–93) was arguably the greatest and most famous of the Kurds. In 1171, he overthrew the Shiite Fatimid caliphate in Egypt and established the Sunni Ayyubid dynasty that ruled throughout Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Saladin …

[8] For more information on Saladin's life, see Reston (2001) and Macdonald (2006).

> defeated the Christian Crusaders led by the English king Richard the Lion Heart and regained the holy city of Jerusalem for Islam (p.31).

Saladin, who was so famous and respected because he had defeated the Crusaders, called himself the King of Egypt and Syria. The Ayyubid ruled much of the Middle East during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Unfortunately, religion overshadowed every aspect of the life of Kurdish sultans and their people at that time. As Gunter (2013) points out, "nationalism is a contemporary phenomenon"(p.30), so Kurdish nationalism was not as important as religion. Gradually, after Saladin's death, other Islamic sultans weakened the Ayyubids' power so that their lands and territories shrank in size and influence. Finally, the weakened Ayyubid Kingdom was demolished and the Kurds lost their power and were incorporated into either the Ottoman Empire or the Persian Empire.

The present-day problem of the Kurds emerged just after World War II. Kurdish nationalism increased immediately after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – the Turkish Empire that ruled over south-eastern Europe as well as the Middle East from 1299 to 1923.The Kurds wanted to be independent and take control of their own destiny. As Gunter (2013) explains, "Kurdish nationalism … was not a cause of [the Ottoman] Empire's disintegration, but rather the result of it"(p.35).Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and according to the Treaty of Sèvres,[9]

9 "Treaty of peace with Turkey": Section III Kurdistan. See full text at treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1920/TS0011.pdf (viewed 26 April 2016).

signed by regional powers including the United Kingdom, France and Italy, Kurds were promised an independent Kurdish state (Treaty of Peace with Turkey, 1920). Unfortunately, as the Treaty of Sèvres was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne[10] on 24 July 1923, the promise to the Kurds was forgotten and the Kurds were ignored. According to Smith (2014, para 21), "The 'war guilt' provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres disappeared, and with [them] the Financial Commission. Gone too were restrictions on the size of Turkish military forces. Likewise provisions for an autonomous Kurdistan …" Consequently, the Kurdish regions were divided between modern Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. According to Meiselas (1997):

> Today "Kurdistan" does not exist on the map. Since 1918, the Kurds' homeland has remained divided among Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and what is now the former USSR. In each country the Kurds have been continuously threatened with either assimilation or extermination (p. xv).

However, despite all these atrocities faced by the Kurds, they never stopped dreaming of, and working towards establishing, an independent Kurdish state, or Great Kurdistan.

10 For the full text of the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923), see: wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne (viewed 26 April 2016).

After World War II, the colonial powers promised to create the country of Kurdistan, but it never happened. In 1925 a Kurdish uprising started in Turkey, but it was defeated by the Turkish army, which massacred many people. In about 1946, "the Republic of Mahabad" was declared in the city of Mahabad – a completely Kurdish city in Iran. This republic was backed up by the Soviets, but after about a year it was abandoned by them, and subsequently crushed by the Iranian army. In 1962, under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani, another armed resistance started against the Iraqi government. This war continued until the Shah of Iran betrayed the Kurds in about 1975 in an agreement he made with Saddam Hussein. Later, immediately after the Iranian revolution, the Kurds in Iran demanded autonomy – but again, it never happened. According to Meiselas (1997), "In August 1979, Khomeini dispatched the army and revolutionary guards to bring Kurdistan under control"(p.280). So the prolonged fight between the Kurdish guerrillas (or Peshmerga) and the Iranian Army started again.

Many lives have been lost from both sides, and the fighting has continued ever since. In 1980, the war between Iran and Iraq started; this was a good opportunity for the Kurdish opposition in Iraq to reorganise its fighters against the Iraqi government. At the same time, the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party from Turkey) was demanding a free Kurdistan in Turkey. So Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan – Iran, Iraq, Turkey and even Syria – started fighting for a free Kurdistan. In 1988, as mentioned

previously, Saddam Hussein used chemical gas against the Kurds in the city of Halabja and killed and injured about 20,000 people. Nearly 250,000 Kurdish refugees fled over the borders in to Iran or Turkey.

Then, in 1991, a “no fly” zone was created and enforced in northern Iraq by the coalition forces to create a safe haven for the Kurds in Iraq. In 2003, the coalition forces occupied Iraq to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. Northern Iraq is now an autonomous region with its own Kurdish parliament. Saddam was captured and Iraq was liberated, but Kurdish liberation in Iraq has remained an unfulfilled promise. The appearance of ISIS, or Islamic state, in 2014 created a new drama for the Kurds in Iraq and in Syria. According to one report ,“In August 2014 the militants overran Yazidi territory in Sinjar and began killing and kidnapping thousands of men, women and children. The United Nations has already acknowledged that what happened in those dark days may be considered genocide” (Ridge, 2015, para.15). The war with ISIS has claimed the lives of many innocent people, including numerous Kurds. ISIS demolished many Kurdish villages, towns and even cities.

Since 1920, with each incident, uprising and act of war in Kurdistan, many Kurdish individuals and families have been displaced, deported, exiled or migrated to another place or country. Kurds have been spread all over the world. For instance, we have Kurdish communities in each major city in Australia. Each community is a mixture of Kurds from all parts of

Kurdistan. From time to time, the community gets together for different events and occasions. For instance, each year Kurds celebrate the New Year (Newroz) on 21 March – the first day of spring. Symbolically and politically, Newroz is a very important event for all Kurds. We gather, wearing Kurdish costumes, to dance and celebrate while we convey the message of solidarity of the Kurds to the governments of those countries that have supressed the Kurdish Nation. In 2016, about "40 million Kurdish people"[11] are still living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and some in exile (Koohzad, 2015). According to Koohzad (2015), "After reviewing 70 references (from 1921 to 2015), this study was able to calculate total Kurdish populations … the present study has discovered that the most accurate figure is 41 million"(para.2). This is the largest number of people from a single ethnic group in the world without a homeland.

The Scarcity of Literature on Kurdish Cinema

Despite the long duration and continuing presence of Kurdish culture, very few of the scholars who have written books on Middle Eastern cinema produced in Turkey or Iran mention when movies or directors are in fact Kurdish. Currently, Kurdish cinema is buried in the national cinemas of the four nations of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. One of the biggest challenges for Kurdish cinema is to get all the films made in those countries to be

---

11 For more information on the Kurdish population, see Koohzad (2015).

acknowledged as one Kurdish cinema. It is my fervent hope that my own project, including this exegesis, will contribute to this.

Although Kurdish cinema has existed in these four nation-states – all of which, in different ways, have oppressed the Kurdish people – and there are many Kurdish filmmakers in those countries, cinema literature published in these countries has done little to acknowledge this. I have been unable to find any books at all that are entirely about specifically Kurdish cinema. For instance, Yaghoub Yadali (2014) describes Batin Ghobadi as an Iranian filmmaker who directed the Iraqi film *Mardan*. However, Batin Ghobadi is in fact a Kurdish filmmaker from Iran who directed *Mardan* (2014), a Kurdish film with a Kurdish story, in the Kurdish language, with a Kurdish cast and filmed within autonomous Kurdistan, which is in northern Iraq. Yaghoub Yadali is a writer and television director who also writes short stories, essays and novels. He has been awarded for his works and publications in Iran. His writings and translations are published in Iran and Turkey.

Although Javad Mohammed (2010, p. 6), an author and founder of MyFavoriteReview.com, acknowledges that, “Due to colonial rule of the Middle East and its later sub-division the Kurdish people are split amongst Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and several other countries” and that ” some films from the region are starting to address Kurdish people and their issues”, he introduces three Kurdish films as “Muslim theme films”, even though they are not. In his data table and under the heading “101 Must See Muslim

Theme Films", he lists films such as "*A Time for Drunken Horses* [2000] and *Turtles Can* Fly [2004], both by Bahman Ghobadi] and *Yol* [1982, Yılmaz Güney]" (2010, pp.14-17). Despite explicitly acknowledging the claims of Kurdish cinema, in much of his writing he elides Kurdish cinema with other forms of Islamic cinema. As he said previously, Kurdish films address Kurdish issues, and with due respect to the author, I cannot see where in those films Muslim themes were emphasised.

Similarly, a very well-written book by acclaimed film scholar Gönül Dönmez-Colin (2008), called *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, examines the way national cinema of Turkey finds its way toward a new identity or modern cinema. It acknowledges how "filmmakers in Turkey" address this attempt in their films by visualising "taboo subjects" such as homosexuality or denied identity (e.g. Kurds). Yet, in Chapter 4 of her book, which is specifically devoted to the films, life and achievements of Yılmaz Güney, she never completely acknowledges him as a Kurdish filmmaker. Other books by Dönmez-Colin include *Cinemas of the Other* (2012), *Woman, Islam and Cinema* (2004) and *The Routledge Dictionary of Turkish Cinema* (2014).

However, many filmmakers from Turkey who have been recognised at international film festivals under the name of "Turkey" are in fact not Turkish. For instance, Yılmaz Güney, Kazim Öz and Yüksel Yavuz are all Kurdish. Therefore, it would be more accurate to discuss "Cinema in Turkey" instead of using the term "Turkish cinema". As Dönmez-Colin

(2008) points out, “Güney reappeared in France to receive the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival of 1982 for *Yol/The Way* … The following year his citizenship was revoked, his films were recalled and his name was erased from the history of Turkish cinema ...”(pp.116–17). A question must be raised here regarding the national identity of this filmmaker. How could a Kurdish filmmaker who was not allowed to make a film in Kurdish and was oppressed and imprisoned by the government of Turkey for years be part of “Turkish cinema”? Has the Turkish government apologised for the wrongdoing towards him and his people?

Even the scholar Savaş Arsalan (2011) who, in his book *Cinema in Turkey* , clearly identifies Kurdish filmmakers as Kurdish – for instance, referring to Yılmaz Güney as “The Kurdish actor-writer-director known as the ‘ugly king” of Turkish cinema” (p.14) – does not include a specific chapter about Kurdish films produced in Turkey. This is a big gap, and one I find inexplicable, although I acknowledge that I view the world through a Kurdish prism.

I have found only one book that specifically addresses Kurdish filmmaking, not only in Iran Turkey, Iraq and Syria where the Kurds are living but also in the diaspora. This book is Hamid Naficy’s (2012a) *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 3*. Although Naficy dedicates only a few pages to Kurdish cinema, he manages to reference other events like Kurdish film festivals in the diaspora. According to Naficy (2012a):

> The Kurdish film festival was funded in London, and the Douarnaz Film Festival Brittany, France, devoted an entire section to films made by Kurdish filmmakers of various nationalities … in December 2009 … the first Kurdish film festival was held inside Turkey, in Diyarbakir, featuring films previously not screened there. These were by young Kurdish directors from Iraq, Iran, Turkey and the United States, and their primary focus was the young generation of Kurdish in diaspora (p.100).

As I was reading, I realised Naficy was addressing the existence of non-state Kurdish cinema. He specified (2012a) that:

> Nevertheless, by 2000 a non-state Kurdish cinema consciousness and even an actual non-state Kurdish fiction cinema were emerging thanks to the aforementioned documentaries and the works of innovative fiction directors such as Bahman Ghobadi from Iran and others from Turkey and elsewhere, who employed Kurdish characters, stories, landscapes, language and music in fiction movies (p.103).

Naficy is honest in describing the reality of the existence of the Kurdish cinema. He points out in *A Social history of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4* (2012b) that, “Ghobadi almost singlehandedly pushed into existence a new, indigenous accented cinema, a Kurdish cinema of diaspora”(p.236). In this section, Naficy (2012b) clearly emphasizes the

personal experience of Ghobadi and translates it as “indigenous accented cinema,” a style of cinema, which is intrinsically formed in diaspora. This “accented cinema” showcases films that have similarities in style while the form could be different based on the filmmaker’s background and their diasporic experience. The term employed by Naficy highlights the importance of this emerging genre as a hybrid style that has spread all over the world as a result of diaspora or exile.

However, Naficy (2012b) specifically acknowledges the originality of Kurdish cinema in the diaspora (p.236) and continues to include it with other characteristics of this cinema.

Though, in recent publications on cinema in Turkey or Iran, Kurdish cinema does not appear as such in either the title or the index. Despite this, small details can be discovered about the actual identity of the Kurdish filmmakers in the text. Unfortunately, this is a very big issue, which obscures the importance of Kurdish films. I realised this during my research because, even as a postgraduate student, I found it difficult to unearth the information for which I was searching.

In the case of the cinema of Iraq and Syria, I could not find any written texts on cinema, addressing any Kurdish filmmaker. I suspect that, because of the harsh political repression of the Kurds in those countries – especially during Saddam Hussein’s rule in Iraq (1979–2003) and the rule of Bashar al-Assad and his father before him in Syria – the reality is that no

Kurds were able to make films. Even if some people had the opportunity to make film, they never could have produced any Kurdish films. Not only could the filmmaker have been imprisoned or killed, but their entire family could have faced similar punishment. Yet I have to acknowledge at this juncture that there may be films and filmmakers of whom I am unaware. This history, while necessarily partial, can hopefully contribute to an emerging and more accurate picture.

International scholars – that is, scholars from countries other than the four main host nations to Kurds – who write articles on a particular Kurdish filmmaker or film do often describe them as Kurds. For instance, in his interview with Yılmaz Güney, which was published in *The Middle East Magazine* in January 1983, Chris Kutschera emphasises Güney's Kurdishness by asking questions like, "When did you find out that you were Kurdish? ... Since the main characters in your films are Kurds and your subject Kurdistan, how will you be able to go on filming outside your country? [And] What importance will Kurdistan have in your next films?" (Kutschera, 1983). In another interview with Bahman Ghobadi, the famous Kurdish filmmaker, Kutschera (2003) uses a similar strategy to enlighten readers that this filmmaker is a Kurdish filmmaker. For instance, Kutschera points out that, "Bahman Ghobadi faces other problems, due to the fact that he is living in Iran but he prefers not to dwell on them. He does not like politicians. His dream, he reveals, is to create a 'really Kurdish cinema'." Chris Kutschera is a French Journalist with an enormous body of research,

interviews and publications on the Middle East and the Kurds to his credit. Among his books on Kurds are *Le mouvement national kurde* (The Kurdish National Movement) (1979), *Le défi kurde ou le rêve fou de l'indépendance* (1997), *Le Kurdistan, guide littéraire* (1998), *Le livre noir de Saddam Hussein* (2005), *Kurdistan Stories* (2007) and *The Long March of the Kurds* (2012).

My discussion of issues in Kurdish cinema thus relies on viewing of films and brief accounts of Kurdish films by scholars who have written on Middle Eastern cinema, especially the cinema in Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. I have found that only a few of these scholars write specifically about the Kurdish cinema in order to emphasise its Kurdishness, and I could not find any scholarly written papers from Iraq or Syria highlighting Kurdish films or cinema. Furthermore, some of the information included in this text is based on my personal journey, which started from the time when I was making Super 8 films nearly 30 years ago. Before I left my family behind in Mahabad (Iran) and started to live as part of the diaspora, I had been involved in making more than 10 short productions, a few works for television and one feature film. I had also been involved in other activities such as writing, directing and acting in theatres as well as art photography.

As a Kurdish child, I grew up with some awful memories of war. In particular, I witnessed some very disturbing moments of killing during the clashes between the Iranian forces and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. My

brain is full of horrible sounds of machine guns, helicopters and jet fighters shooting at the Kurdish civilians. As is well documented, the Kurdish opposition made documentaries about activities and battles that happened in Kurdish areas in 1980, among them *Altercations in Mahabad* (*Dargiriha-ye Mahabad* (1980) was among them (Naficy, 2012a, p. 98).

The city of Mahabad was under fire for weeks, and there were very few food supplies left in the city. I cannot ever forget the children screaming when the Iranian army was targeting houses with artillery. Our double-storey house was the only one in the area with a basement, and lots of people were hiding there. Suddenly, a few people rushed into the basement carrying a six-year-old boy, nearly cut in half. His mother was crying and following them. I clearly remember the injured boy asking for water. A few people were desperately trying to stop him bleeding, but they couldn't do much. A few minutes later, he died. That was a very sad moment, and I will never forget it. Personal information, which I include in my exegesis, plays a substantial role in my methodology. Given the paucity of authoritative sources, however, I celebrate rather than apologise for this.

In order to find the information on the films listed in Appendix 1: Filmography of Kurdish Films, in addition to personal knowledge, I used internet resources such as IMDb, Kurdish film festival websites, Google search, articles on Kurdish films or filmmakers, direct communication with a few Kurdish filmmakers such as Ebrahim Saeedi and Sawkat Amin Korki and more. Gaining some of the information to complete the table was

beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, some sections in the table in Appendix 1 are marked as not known (n.k.) where I could not find the exact information. I hope that, in the future, they will be filled in with accurate information. In shaping the filmography, I only included feature films and feature documentaries produced or made all over the Kurdish regions and in diaspora by Kurdish filmmakers. The database does not include any short films of any genre.

Chapter 2

Issues in Kurdish Cinema and the Emergence of a Kurdish Film Style

My task in this chapter is to offer the readers some understanding of what is known about the cinema of the Kurdish people. This is not an easy task because, as explained in Chapter 1, my people have never had their own nation recognised, so have never had a national cinema. In order to come to an understanding of Kurdish cinema, we are forced to look at the history of the cinema in the four countries where the vast majority of Kurds live.

Issues of Kurdish Identity and Representation, and Censorship

In about 1926, a film called *Zara* was shot in a Yezidi village in Armenia. This black and white film was directed by Hamo Beknazarin (or Amo Bek-Nazaryn), an Armenian director. The film is about the love between Zara and Seydo, who live in a Kurdish village in Armenia. Their love faces trouble when Temur, the village chief, forces Zara to become his second wife. *Zara* is commonly believed to be the first Kurdish film ever made. However, from this writer's point of view, the Armenians can claim ownership of the movie, because the director was Armenian, not Kurdish.

As a result of political decisions made after World War I, Kurdistan was not given its promised independence. Instead, it was geographically divided between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Since then, the governments of all these countries have persecuted their Kurdish citizens physically, culturally and economically. For example, the use of the Kurdish language and expressions of Kurdish culture have been banned in Turkey since the establishment of the "New Turkey" by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Suppression of basic rights has only started to ease in recent years, in part due to pressure from European countries.

In practice, in all the divided territory of Kurdistan, it was impossible for anyone with a Kurdish background to make a film about Kurdish culture using the Kurdish language. It was impossible even for a non-Kurdish filmmaker to make any serious film about Kurds, in any language and by any means. However, some cheap stereotypical films were allowed – though not in the Kurdish language. Therefore, due to various political situations, economic hardship and technical unavailability in the Kurdish populated areas in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, no Kurdish films were produced until the early 1980s.

In 1982, the movie *Yol*, directed by a Kurdish filmmaker Yılmaz Güney from Turkey, received an award from the Cannes film festival. That year is seen as the start of a Kurdish cinema because, for the first time in the history of filmmaking, a Kurdish filmmaker was recognised by an

international film festival. In his films, Güney – who spent most of his creative and productive life in a Turkish prison – had never stopped trying to show the brutality of the Turkish government towards his people. Unfortunately, due to the prohibition on the Kurdish language in Turkey, the movies that Güney made were all in the Turkish language.

In exile, and just after escaping from prison in 1981, his last film *Duvar* (The Wall, 1983), in the Turkish language, was made in France. In this movie, Güney highlights the brutality of the government of Turkey towards imprisoned children. Not surprisingly, this film made the government of Turkey angry. Güney's citizenship was cancelled and he was sentenced "in absentia" to an extra 22 years in prison. Unfortunately, in 1984 Güney died in Paris while he was endeavouring to introduce Kurdish film to the world of cinema.

With his films and his award, Yılmaz Güney marked a beginning for the history of Kurdish cinema. The important thing to understand about Güney's films is that he scripted and directed some of his films while he was in prison. We can argue that he made those films while he was in "forced exile". Most of the time, he was forced to be away, or was kept away, from his homeland while he was planning or making his films.

These days, technology favours independent filmmakers, including the new generation of Kurdish filmmakers. During a survey I carried out on Kurdish films and filmmakers from 1980 to 2016, I came across some very

interesting information. The filmography in Appendix 1 shows that, while some argue there is such thing as Kurdish cinema, there is in fact a young but strong Kurdish cinema out there, marching through prestigious film festivals all over the world. *Yo*l (1982) at the Cannes film festival (1982), *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) at the Cannes Film Festival (2000), *Turtles Can Fly* (2004) at the Berlin International Film Festival (2005), the San Sebastian International Film Festival (2004) and the Chicago International Film Festival (2004), and *Memories on Stone* (2014) at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival (2014) and the Asia Pacific Screen Awards (2014) are good examples of Kurdish films that are recognised internationally. This cinema, with its own unique characteristics, has grabbed the attention of film experts and critics while it continues to grow dramatically.

The persecution of the Kurds started by denying the Kurdish identity, forbidding the Kurdish language and prohibiting the practice of Kurdish culture. The degree of atrocity toward the Kurds was different from time to time, depending on the political situation in the area and in the world. For example, the Turkish government called the Kurds “Mountain Turks”. According to Beşikçi, a Turkish scholar:

> The Kurdish people are in a nation partitioned by barbed wires and minefields as efforts continue to completely cut off parts from one another … in Turkey even their existence is not acknowledged. The

> Kurds in Turkey can have rights only to the extent that they become Turks. (quoted in Meiselas, 1997, p. 298)

The use of Kurdish language was banned in Turkey until 2002, and this policy was only changed due to the pressure from both local activists and members of the international community. In another instance, we can mention the displacement of Kurds by the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein and the massacre of the Kurds using chemical gas in 1988.

The same policy discouraged those Kurdish filmmakers who attempted to make films in the Kurdish regions. For instance, according to Yılmaz Güney:

> *The Herd*, in fact, is the history of the Kurdish people, but I could not even use the Kurdish language in this film; if we had used the Kurdish language, all those who took part in this film would have been sent to jail. (quoted in Kutschera, 1983)

For years, Yılmaz Güney was known as a Turkish actor and filmmaker, and was not acknowledged as Kurdish. As Gönül Dönmez (2008) indicates, "The Kurds were not depicted on the screen with their Kurdish identity until the 1990s"(p.15) The Turkish government concealed Güney's Kurdish identity, and created a new and fake identity for him by denying Kurdish existence in Turkey. But they couldn't take everything from him. The characters in Güney's films are real people. The stories of his films take us

to different places and areas in Turkey, where the people are not Turks and they have a totally different culture that is not a Turkish culture.

As mentioned previously, the Kurds are the world's largest ethnic group (of nearly 40 million people) without a country. Their existence, identity, language and culture cannot be denied. More obviously, their newborn cinema cannot be denied, as it carries the Identity and the DNA of its real makers. Yılmaz Güney's films are very good examples of this. Like the existence of Kurds and Kurdish Identity, the very existence of Kurdish cinema was under attack for years, due to the political, economic, social and cultural situation of the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. In these countries, government bureaucrats had direct control of the film industry. The harsh policy of censorship – especially towards minorities, such as Kurdish artists and filmmakers –made it almost impossible for them to practise, educate, improve and expand a cinema that could authentically belong to the Kurds. These harsh policies forced out the filmmakers, many of whom are making films in exile.

According to Bahman Gobadi, a contemporary Kurdish filmmaker in exile, "Kurdish cinema is like a pregnant woman. One must help her to give birth" (quoted in Kutschera, 2003). According to my research, Kurdish cinema had already begun to emerge from non-traditional places like prison or exile years before. According to my survey on the "Kurdish films" made by "Kurdish filmmakers" (see Appendix 1), the Kurdish cinema was born a

few decades ago and surprisingly we have twins. One is “cinema under oppression” and the other one is “cinema in diaspora”. I will discuss both styles later in this chapter on page (46-64).

Looking at the Kurdish films made from around the 1980s to 2016 (see Appendix 1), we can clearly see the start of Kurdish cinema from 1982, when Yılmaz Güney’s film *Yol* (1982) was recognised at the Cannes Film Festival. However, Güney’s filmmaking career started in the late 1970s, with astonishing movies such as *The Hungry Wolves* (1969), *Hope* (1970), *Elegy* (1971) and *Baba* (The Father) (1971). As previous research has indicated:

> Kurdish filmmaking in general has tended to emerge from non-traditional places – from within prison, around the widespread diaspora and in exile. And, in the case of one of earliest Kurdish filmmakers, Yılmaz Güney, he created film from all three of these places during the course of his career. It would also be non-controversial to trace the beginning of Kurdish cinema to Güney whose later films from the late ’70s and early ’80s were set in Kurdistan and deal with the marginalisation of the Kurds. (Gundogdu, n.d.: 4)

Even though Kurds do not have a recognised country that is printed on the world’s map, they have a cinema that began to be officially recognised in 1981 when Yılmaz Güney’s film *Yol* won the Palm d’Or at Cannes. The government of Turkey couldn’t stop Yılmaz Güney’s “expression of national

identity" through his films, even by its harsh polices of censorship, language bans and imprisonment. His expression of Kurdish nationalism through symbolism enabled him to create unique films, which caused anger within the government. For instance one of the symbols used in Güney's film was the prison. According to Naficy (2001:181) "It is the image of the prison that Güney deployed in his protoexilic film, *Yol (The Way*, 1982) to critique his own society". Another example is, the demonstration of love of Omer for the Kurdish girl in Yol (1982), which symbolizes his love for Kurdistan. Omar, was expected to go back to prison after his five-day break from jail, but decides not to go back. Because, his brother who was a freedom fighter was killed by the Turkish army and by tradition he has to marry his sister-in-law instead of marrying the girl whom he loves. However, Omar decides to join the Kurdish fighters in the mountainS and leave everything behind. Therefore, instead of going back to the jail, he rides on his horse back towards the mountains, which horse symbolizes freedom. Güney cunningly expresses his Kurdish-ness via culturally recognisable symbols, coded pictures and words. In this regard, by imprisoning Yılmaz Güney, Turkish government tried to stop the birth of a cinema movement that could be dangerous for them because it showed the government's dirty policies toward Kurds. Later on, Yılmaz Güney escaped from prison and took refuge in France. He finalised the post-production of *Yol* (1982) in France and remains the most inspiring Kurdish filmmaker in the history of Kurdish cinema.

Kurdish filmmakers have faced massive political, economic and technical problems on their journey to establishing a Kurdish cinema that could reflect the image of Kurdish culture. Imagine you are living in a country where the government controls every aspect of your life, including the language you speak and the outfits you wear. In other words, they deny your cultural rights and your existence as a nation. For the same reason, you could be persecuted or even killed for making a film about Kurdish culture or Kurdish history. You are a Kurdish filmmaker with absolutely no right to make a film that reflects your cultural background, as the "bogeyman" is always around the corner, controlling every step you take. If you were able to make a film about Kurdish people, you would still have to face the censorship committee prior to screening. And this process could be even more painful, as 99 per cent of the time it would result in your film being banned and the end of your career as a filmmaker.

Economic problems also impeded the growth of the Kurdish cinema. As mentioned before, the governments in all four corners of Kurdistan had similar policies towards their Kurdish citizens. There were absolutely no funds available for any Kurdish-based story films. Neither the government nor the private sector showed any interest in supporting Kurdish films, so filmmakers knew they would face lots of problems, including the cancellation of their business licence or even the shutting down of their company. In this regard, Kurdish filmmakers had no hope at all of obtain finance for their films.

The history of Kurdish filmmaking and cinema within all Kurdish regions in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria is filled with struggles against censorship and proscription. According to Dr Muhammad Kamal,[12] "the idea of Kurdish Cinema has started by the films of Yılmaz Güney … though his films are not in Kurdish as a result of oppressions in Turkey, the topics and characters of his films are Kurdish"[13] (quoted in Kilic, 2007). Although cinema dates back to the 1890s, movie-making in Kurdistan started almost 100 years later. As discussed above, Appendix 1 shows that Kurdish cinema began with Yılmaz Güney's *Yol* in 1982. This late start was due to factors such as political pressure, poor economy and inaccessibility to cinematic tools by young Kurdish enthusiasts. Making a film was almost impossible for a person with a Kurdish background. Even for those few who had a chance to make a film, the process – including distribution – was a difficult and even life-threatening process.

In an interview with artist and a freelance journalist Alfreda Benge in 1984, Yılmaz Güney said:

> In all the films I made in Turkey, I have never been able to express a single one of my thoughts in the way I would like to have, let alone a

---

12 Dr Muhammad Kamal is a Kurdish scholar originally from autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq). He is part of the academic staff of the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Arts – Asia institute.

13 Muhammad Kamal's speech at the first Melbourne Kurdish Film Festival, 21–23 March 2007.

> serious matter like the Kurdish question, let alone an important question like that of the working class; even basic questions of justice and injustice which exist in our society, could only be dealt with partially and indirectly. (Benge, 1985, p. 36)

Unfortunately, Yılmaz Güney spent most of his productive life in Turkish prisons. Almost all the Kurdish filmmakers who attempted to make films within the occupied Kurdish regions had similar experiences. For example, Bahman Ghobadi, a well-known Kurdish filmmaker who has made about six feature films since 2000, is prohibited from making films in Iran. He is living in exile at the moment, and his latest film, *Rhino Season*, was produced in exile in 2012. As Bülent Kücük[14] states (in Farzanefar, 2005):

> Exile plays a very big role when you're talking about Kurdish cinema: for example, the last film Hener Saleem made in France, *Vodka Lemon*, has a style of its own, different from French cinema or the Armenian perspective, which also forms part of the background: the attempt to find an original language.

To introduce Kurdish cinema, therefore, Kurdish filmmakers had to showcase their movies outside their home countries. According to Kocer (2013b), "Kurdish filmmakers have navigated global production and

---

14 Bülent Küçük is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey.

distribution avenues to enable and maintain their media practices"(p.724) In reality, Kurdish cinema has shaped its identity in exile.

Both Suncem Kocer and Bülent Kücük are from Turkey and have written some articles and papers about Kurdish issues. Suncem Kocer (2013a), in particular, has written a few articles on Kurdish cinema, including an interview called "*Rhino Season* is in Exile, Just Like Me: An interview with Bahman Ghobadi".

Technical Issues

The next major difficulty faced by Kurdish filmmakers was technical. The cinematic tools are the things on which every filmmaker in the world depends. Without those tools and materials, the filmmaking process cannot happen. Even if you managed to shoot your film, you would not be able to develop and print it because there was no film laboratory in your area. It would be necessary to smuggle your negatives out of the country – a very dangerous process. These technical difficulty made it almost impossible to produce films in the region.

All these obstacles have eased in favour of Kurdish filmmakers since the early 1990s, since the political situation changed for the Kurds in Iraq due to the creation of "no fly" zone and later the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. According to Naficy (2012a):

> With the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, in 1992, after the imposition of the no-fly zone on Saddam Hussein by British and US forces, and with Hussein's defeat and demise, in 2003, an autonomous Kurdish nation, a pan-Kurdish TV, and a pan-Kurdish national cinema became a reality (p.101).

Thus, for the Kurds in Iraq, the "no fly" zone and the downfall of Saddam Hussein have meant they can have some freedom, and can also enjoy the autonomy enforced by the West. This peace of mind gave the opportunity to the filmmakers to equip themselves and start making Kurdish films without being worried about the consequences. Also, these political changes have had direct impact on other Kurds in Iran, Turkey, Syria and in the diaspora. Therefore, autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq) has become a haven for all the Kurdish filmmakers to get into and make films. In this regard, there are no restrictive rules and regulations and no punishment in autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq) for the Kurdish filmmakers.

Now Kurdish filmmakers in exile can fly back home (to autonomous Kurdistan) and other Kurdish filmmakers can cross the border from Turkey, Iran and Syria to autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq), and freely make films about Kurds in the Kurdish language. For instance, Bahman Ghobadi, who is from Kurdistan of Iran, produced most of his films in autonomous Kurdistan, while Karzan Kader, who lives in exile, returned to autonomous Kurdistan to produce his film *Bekas* (2012). However, if Kurdish filmmakers from those regions return back to the countries where they live after making a film, they

might still face punishment for producing a film in the Kurdish language, highlighting the nature of Kurdish life in those countries. According to Naficy (2012a), “Assimilationist states, like Iran, tend to discourage minority-language theatrical movies, because they fear that these movies might empower nationalist, cessationist [secessionist] and autonomy-seeking movements” (p.102). For instance, Bahman Ghobadi is living in exile at the moment as a result of making films that the Iranian government did not like.

In parallel with the political changes that happened in autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq) or southern Kurdistan, the technological innovation of digital filmmaking also helped Kurdish cinema to expand dramatically. In this regard, the availability of digital cinema has substantially solved the huge problems involved in funding a production. For example, by employing digital film technology, filmmakers were able to cut production costs by more than 70 per cent since they no longer had to pay for film stocks, negatives, printing and reprinting, expensive camera hire and gadgets, lighting equipment and so on. One of the things that enabled many Kurdish filmmakers to produce film was low-cost digital film technology. Similarly, digital film advancement has reduced the significant technical difficulties formerly faced by the filmmakers. For instance, Kurdish filmmakers do not need to deal with delivery and film processing, cutting the negatives, colour corrections at the laboratory, complicated soundtracks in a sound studio and other similar factors.

One example of the direct impact of digital cinema on Kurdish filmmaking is the films of Halil Uysal.[15] Uysal, who joined the Kurdish guerrilla fighters (PKK) in Turkey, and had experience in photography, was fascinated by the way these fighters survived in the mountains. So he decided to make films about them. I believe he knew that, with the flexibility of digital technology, he would be able to make films independently. During 2002–06, he made three feature films using real characters (guerrilla fighters) to act in his docu-fiction films The characteristics of his films in exile have introduced a kind of Kurdish cinema that is independent, powerful, promising and realistic. His cinema is the cinema of liberty and independence. Unfortunately, in 2008 Hali Uysal was killed in a clash with the Turkish army while he was preparing for his next film. Chapter 3 provides further details on docu-fiction, and looks at strategies for Kurdish films employing hybrid genres.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Kurdish cinema was born and recognised in exile. At the moment, most Kurdish filmmakers – including Yuksel Yavuz, Yılmaz Arsalan, Hiner Saleem, Ravin Asaf, Bahman Gobadi, Ibrahim Selman and many more – are living and making

15 "He was a well known and respected filmmaker who spent more than a decade documenting the lives of Kurdish guerillas. Halil İbrahim Uysal was born in Germany [in a Kurdish Family] in 1973 and first came to the mountains of Kurdistan in 1995 in order to make a documentary film on the lives of Kurdish guerillas. Uysal decided to remain in the mountains and join the ranks of the guerillas, with whom he lived until his death – together with three other comrades – in a Turkish military ambush in 2008." (*Rojava Report*, 2014)

films in the diaspora. The diaspora was due to the problems of political and economical repression facing the Kurds, as discussed in Chapter 1. For instance, Bahman Gobadi is a successful Kurdish filmmaker who has won many awards for his films all over the world. His film, *A Time for Drunken Horses*, won the Golden Camera award at the Cannes film festival in 2000. After making more successful films and gaining more international awards, the Iranian government banned Bahman Gobadi from making films in Iran. Later, he left Iran in the hope of finding a safe haven where he could make films; since then, he has been making films in the diaspora.

Compared with the age of world cinema, Kurdish cinema is very young – just 35 years old. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, the first internationally recognised Kurdish film, which was created by a Kurdish director from Turkey, was not recognised in Turkey until recently. As Gönül (2008) points out, "Audiences in Turkey were first able to see *Yol* on 12 February 1999, seventeen years after its Cannes success" (pp. 116–17). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go in to more details about Turkish political changes regarding the Kurds, but Turkey's decision to give more freedom of expression to the Kurds – including permission for Kurdish films to be screened in Turkey – can be linked to the Turkish request to be granted entry to the European Union. According to BBC News (2014), Turkey, "Applied for full membership [in] 1987 [and] confirmed as candidate on December 1999 … [In this regard] the European Commission has urged Turkey to strengthen democracy and human rights, underlining the need for

deeper judicial reform." But Turkey has never stopped its cruel treatment of its Kurdish citizens.

Over many years, when Kurdish people were forced to take refuge away from their homeland, they had the opportunity to study film overseas. So a new generation of Kurdish filmmakers emerged in exile, and these filmmakers living in the diaspora – of whom Huner Saleem and Karzan Kader are good examples – have received recognition at international film festivals. However, a closer look at this young cinema reveals a twin cinema that has merged together as one. I refer to the first as "cinema under oppression" in contrast to the second one "cinema in diaspora" a term widely described by Hamid Naficy (2012b,p. 236).

Cinema Under Oppression and Cinema in Diaspora

The first Kurdish "cinema under oppression" was shaped at home, with censorship and many bans enforced by the occupying governments of the Kurdish regions. According to Yılmaz Güney (quoted in Kutschera, 1983):

> During my whole life as a creator, I have had to use indirect means to express my thoughts, and I must frankly admit that to date my works have not totally expressed what I wanted, either in their style or in their spirit. The dominant element in these works is that they are a compromise.

The Kurdish cinema started with coded pictures and symbols, and it has continued to develop within the prisons and in the mountains where the

Peshmergas (Kurdish fighters) continue to survive and fight. Yol (1982) by Yılmaz Güney, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) by Bahman Ghobadi, *1001 Apples* (2013) by Taha Karimi and *Beritan* (2006) by Halil Uysal are good examples of coded Kurdish films. For instance, in the movie Yol (1982) prison is a coded representation that can be read as a symbol for Turkish society. However the script was written and developed by Güney while he was in jail whilst his co-director Şerif Gören was directing the movie outside the prison. Further, Halil Uysal is a typical example of a mountain- Kurdish filmmaker who was producing movies while he was a guerrilla fighter at the same time. Unfortunately he died during the conflict with the Turkish army. *1001 Apples* (2013) by Taha Karimi is another example of a coded Kurdish cinema that is more like a contemporary art installation than a narrative movie. Like most of the Kurdish filmmakers, Taha Karimi , employed the real memberS of the community who found it painful to be in front of his camera. Karimi created a magnificent film with outstanding shots that tells the story of the genocide of the Kurds, committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein during 1988s. This documentary-fiction film unpacks the story of a few survivors of the massacre, through symbols and metaphors. Sadly, Taha Karimi died in a car accident in 2003.In general; these films reflect the suffering of the Kurds and their efforts towards unity and freedom. In tandem, the Kurdish cinema in diaspora carries a similar theme with the same style, also using symbols

and coded pictures. Generally, both forms of cinema are political, taking one road towards the idea of Kurdish identity and freedom.

As already explained, making a Kurdish film has always been challenging for Kurdish filmmakers living in their homeland. Because of severe political repression and censorship, Kurdish directors began to find ways to deal with Kurdish issues and topics outlawed by the occupier governments. This was often accomplished through elaborate symbolism and metaphors. Using this method, they hoped to escape silencing by the censors and punishment by the government. This particular kind of Kurdish film developed within, and partially as a response to, these constraints. According to Naficy (2012b), “Censorship, however, remained both a problem and a criterion for conferring value. As a form of constraint, censorship also encouraged creativity and innovation in theme, style, and narrative form”(p.3). Accordingly, this is the limitation that resulted in the invention of their techniques. As a filmmaker in exile, I nevertheless adopted aspects of this style, but under different conditions and within a different context.

In many of these films, the director cleverly implies Kurdish unity and freedom in ways that can be interpreted visually by the government censors in diverse ways. For instance, the final scene in Bahman Ghobadi’s *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), where the little boy Ayoub and his younger brother are crossing the border, is very significant. Symbolically, it suggests that the border between the two countries of Iran and Iraq that divides two

parts of Kurdistan is not accepted by the Kurds of either country. This scene in the movie suggests that Kurds are from the same homeland, and they can cross the line whenever they want to do so. Technically, Kurdish films are full of imaginative symbols and metaphors that sometimes manage to slip in under the censors' detector.

Apart from facing harsh political oppression and censorship, Kurdish filmmakers did not have the facilities, financial support or professional expertise they needed, so they started making homemade films. This artisan cinema was the fundamental basis for a new wave of Kurdish films, the cinema under oppression. The cinema under oppression developed a distinctive style that cinema in diaspora continues to incorporate. Even though Kurdish filmmakers in the diaspora did not have to use it, they chose to do so. The primary element of this style is the language of coding. Logically, the cinema in diaspora does not need any coding, but it still retains this form of language.

I believe that creative filmmaking – indeed, artistic expression of any kind – works better when it is presented in terms of metaphors and coding. The political situation forced Kurdish filmmakers to use coding in their films, and that in turn generated an artistic tradition. By being forced to use coding, filmmakers became artists rather than just communicators. As a filmmaker in the diaspora, I not only used similar style such as coding and non-actors in my films, but I also handed over the camera to an actor to use

it as a "pen": to visualise and record their thoughts and ideas. These methods added more of a sense of reality to my work. For instance, in *A Woman with a Digital Camera,* I handed the camera to a person (a non-actress), to record herself in real life as well as in a fictionalised environment.

The stories told by most Kurdish filmmakers are real stories that are happening in the real world. Therefore, in this "new wave Kurdish filmmaking" process, the "characters" and "actors" are all from the same reality from which the stories are emerging. To clarify this, the actors employed in the movies are real people from the same community, who have experienced similar conflicts or dramas. For instance, the characters in films like *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) by Bahman Ghobadi, *The Last Season: Shawaks* (2009) by Kazim Oz, and *All My Mothers* (2009) by Ebrahim Saeedi and Zahawi Snjavi are all real people who have experienced similar stories in real life.

Kurdish cinema has indeed thrived on a close relationship with Kurdish society, and has been intertwined with Kurdish social, national and political history. So Kurdish films have recounted and depicted discourses, issues and images of Kurdish society during important historical moments. Both cinema under oppression and cinema in diaspora have depicted stories that Kurdish people have told themselves. In this regard, filmmakers – as members of the society – have perceived the reality of Kurdish political situations and the actual reality of Kurdish people.

Using real people in cinema under oppression meant Kurdish filmmakers would go to the site where an atrocity had happened. They would then choose people who had experienced the pain to re-enact the atrocity. Through this process, the outcome would be completely realistic. For instance, in *Turtles Can Fly* (2004), Bahman Ghobadi used real people from the Kurdish community to act in a movie with a natural set, where the children were exposed to the battlefield with landmines and broken tanks. What we see in the film is the real life of the Kurdish children in the Kurdistan of Iraq.

In my own films, I also began using local people, employing the same style even though these people had not experienced any atrocities. Logically, I directed films on the kinds of subjects that I had taken from Kurdistan as I remembered them, even though many of the actors were born in Australia and they were all locals. However, I treated them in the same way that I would have in Kurdistan. For instance, I enabled them to include their own stories in to the script. This involved adding a form of documentary practice that has become integral to my own work. By being realistic and aesthetic, Kurdish films have expressed a sense of resistance against the brutal political repression of government(s) towards Kurds.

If we consider the works of other Kurdish filmmakers, some of them convey stories that are set in exile. Not all the films are located in Kurdistan; they are about Kurdish culture and ideas, but they are not necessarily set in

Kurdistan – except in a metaphorical sense. For instance, Hiner Saleem from autonomous Kurdistan (Iraq), who lives as an émigré, made his first film, *Vive La Marie … et La Liberation du Kurdistan* (1998) (*Long Live Bride and the Liberation of Kurdistan*), in exile. The film tells a Kurdish story that took place in France.

In practice, the classical cinema under oppression is using real people in real situations. However, as soon as the filmmakers leave their country and start making film in exile, some adjustments have to be made. For instance, when telling my story with some Kurdish elements, I encountered many problems. While other Kurdish films are concerned entirely with Kurdish subject-matter, my film *The Sultan and The Kings* is focused on the West as well as on Kurdish issues. For instance, the characters of Richard and David tell different stories about the West. My film does not just cover Kurdish politics; it deals with the entire planet as one global community. This is a way of using Kurdish cinema to try to pinpoint the world's events as they are seen by people outside of Kurdistan. With this method, I am able to cover both sides of the story. I am a Kurdish nationalist, but at the same time I have an equal passion for the place where I now live. I consider myself an Australian, and also a member of a bigger community: that of planet earth.

As the characters and the stories are all real, the outcome is realistic and effective as well. Kurdish films frequently mix documentary or actuality footage with fiction. For instance, *The Dark Wind* (2016) by Hussein Hassan

is a very powerful film that visualises the massacre and tragedy of Yazidi Kurds and enslaving of Yazidi girls by the terrorist group ISIS. In this film, Hussein Hassan blurred the line between documentary and fiction to powerfully tell the heart-breaking story of the Yazidi Kurds. Either way, or in combination, it is undeniable that Kurdish cinema is very informative.

Comparing Kurdish cinema under oppression with Italian neo-realist cinema, it is possible to see how some elements from both regions shaped the style of their respective cinemas. Like Italian neo-realist filmmakers, who did not use trained actors because they could not afford to pay them, Kurdish filmmakers also started to use non-actors for the same reason. At the same time, Kurdish filmmakers used real locations and natural lighting, and the actors' everyday outfits and footwear for costumes, just as neo-realist filmmakers did. But looking more closely, we can also see some stylistic and characteristic similarities between the two cinemas.

Before Italian neo-realism emerged, there was professional cinema in Italy that was financed by Mussolini's government. According to Bondaneella (1983), "a number of films, primarily among those produced during the second half of the regime's twenty-two-year reign, can be accurately described as films which supported the values and the politics of Mussolini's government"(p.18). Therefore, while the neo-realism filmmakers were struggling with budgeting their films and finding negative film stocks,

there was a tradition of making high-budget films that supported the fascist ideology.

A similar situation still exists in the Kurdish film industry, where Kurdish filmmakers are producing films in countries like Turkey, Iran and Syria, with the partial exception of the Kurdistan of Iraq, due to its autonomy. For instance, the movies supported by the governments of these countries never mention political problems or human right issues. Most of the time, they tell the stories of middle-class or rich people with nice, fully furnished houses and no real financial problems. Tales of social issues like marriage and divorce, romantic stories and propaganda films are common. At the same time, alternative Kurdish filmmakers are not able to obtain any direct funding from government because their stories are very provocative and real in social terms.

Looking into the history of Italian cinema, I found a number of similarities in the style and form of filmmaking of the Italian neo-realists and cinema under oppression. Fundamentally, for both forms, similar economic situations forced a more realistic style, whereas the subject matter of high-cost movies in both periods was very fictional and trite.

We can argue that both Kurdish cinema under oppression and Italian neo-realism cinema use actuality footage within fictional narratives. For instance, in Vitoria De Sica's movie, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), by using real

locations in the city, De Sica showed what the city looked like at that time. According to Bill Nichols (2001):

According to Bill Nichols (2001):

> Neo-realists such as Roberto Rossellini (*Rome, Open City*, 1946), Vittorio De Sica (*Bicycle Thief*, 1948), and Luchino Visconti (La Terra Trema, 1948) stressed narrative qualities in tune with the photographic realism of the motion picture: a casual, unadorned view of everyday life; a meandering , coincidence-laden series of actions and events; natural lighting and location shooting; a reliance on untrained actors; a rejection of close-ups doting on the faces of stars; and a stress on the problems confronting ordinary people in the present moment rather than the historical past or an imagined future. Here was an important strand of narrative filmmaking that contributed to the continuing development of documentary (p.92).

Location shooting gives a sense of geographic realism. In addition, by employing non-actors instead of professional actors, De Sica introduced the real members of society at that time. As Bill Nichols (2001) states, “Stories that rely on non-actors, such as many of the Italian neo-realist films or some of the New Iranian cinema, often occupy part of the fuzzy territory between fiction and non-fiction, stories of wish-fulfillment and stories of social representation (p.5)”. Equally, in Bahman Ghobadi’s Kurdish film, *A Time for Drunken Horses (*2000), the use of non-actors (real members of

the society), wearing their own clothes instead of costumes, and situated in real locations, gives a sense of documentary.

Location shooting gives a sense of geographic realism. In addition, by employing non-actors instead of professional actors, he introduced the real members of society at that time. Equally, in Bahman Ghobadi's Kurdish film, *A Time for Drunken Horses (*2000), the use of non-actors (Members of society performing roles very similar to those of their everyday lives), wearing their own clothes instead of costumes, and situated in real locations, gives a sense of documentary.

Economic conditions determined the neo-realist filmmakers' use of technology and influenced their style. Similarly, Kurdish cinema under oppression produced simple movies out of necessity, yet this style continues to be used by exiled filmmakers. However, if we look at the Kurdish films in general, some are simple in the sense that, certain directors might have just been starting out, setting up a camera and without many plans. Rather, they might have an idea, developed while they are on the set. For instance Bahman Gohbadi develops his shots and the story on the set. He treats his fiction films as if he were making a documentary. According to The Age Company (23 Aug, 2005):

> For *Turtles Can Fly*, Ghobadi came to Iraq with a script barely 10 pages long, needing to cast and find locations in a couple of months. His young actors are locals - only one of them had ever seen TV -

> and they were unaware of the filmmaking process, or of what cinema was. Ghobadi says he spent time living alongside them to establish a connection. He told them little in advance about their characters, or the plot of the film, concerned that they would make up their minds in advance about what they thought or felt: he preferred to work from scene to scene, and get immediate reactions. "When they are playing a role, it is reliving their lives, their stories in the film are so close to reality," he says.

As mentioned previously (p.38) Kurdish filmmakers have typically experienced a lack of equipment, financial difficulties, and censorship. Consequently, these situations have often forced the filmmakers to become more inventive, resulting in new techniques. Kurdish cinema at home very much picked up on its own form of neo-realism, and can certainly be described as a Kurdish neo-realist cinema. Just like Italian neo-realism, the camera in the Kurdish film directly records “reality”.

Kurdish cinema also owes something to cinéma vérité, elements of which can be found in the history of the Kurdish style. Cinéma vérité takes a realistic approach towards documentary films without any complicated tricks or visual effects – although I would personally prefer to mix this sort of genre with some complicated staged shots to attract a wider audience. For instance the scene where Saladin and King Richard are fighting is a complicated shot with different characteristics and meaning. Technically the

scene is a green screen shot with elements that were composed during the postproduction. For example, the background plate, the wooden horse, blood, dust, Queen Sara and Queen Natalia are the elements that were brought together to create this shot. Metaphorically, the element of the wooden horse is very significant to how this scene functions. However, historically Sultan Saladin and King Richard never had such a confrontation. Although, metaphorically the shot presages some ideas in conjunction with the next scene where Yusuf and Richard had a fight over a small misunderstanding regarding Richards' wife Sara. Overall, the battle scene increases the entertainment side of the film, as well as the enlightenment factor of the film, by blurring the line between fact and fiction.

As a Kurdish filmmaker, my view is that the audience needs to know something about our history, our culture and our suffering if they are to really understand Kurdish movies. This is why Kurdish filmmakers tend to concentrate on the informative rather than the commercial aspects of films. When I started making *A Woman with a Digital Camera*, followed by my first feature film, *The Sultan and the Kings*, the idea was to create a totally new form of cinema that is both enlightening and entertaining. While producing my films, I constantly asked myself why I should bother to go through all these difficulties to make a project with these specifications while other Kurdish filmmakers had already found a style to make Kurdish films. The reality is that their films reach a narrower art-house audience and cannot be so commercially successful. I am aiming to produce a different kind of

Kurdish cinema, one that can earn its independence by reaching out to a much wider audience worldwide.

In order to survive and to be commercially successful, we need to have a wide target audience. At the moment, most Kurdish filmmakers are targeting similar audiences and focusing on similar themes in their films. The styles employed in the films are all the same and, despite having a Kurdish cinema, we do not have a Kurdish film industry. Most of our films are dependent on foreign sponsorships, and only a few films have been funded independently. Therefore, because of the small market available for such films, Kurdish filmmakers struggle to recoup enough money to make their next film. This could be very dangerous for the new and young Kurdish cinema, as it needs to improve both technically and commercially to survive.

At the 2014 Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA), I met Shawkat Amin Korki, the award-winning Kurdish filmmaker from autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq, whom I had known from the time when I was making films on super 8 about 25 years ago. We had an extensive discussion about how Kurdish filmmakers make films in Kurdistan. He was surprised when I told him about making a feature film here in Australia, with no real funding. Then I started to explain my Idea of independent cinema and the style that I believe helps Indie cinema in general, and Kurdish cinema in particular, to grow and survive. I stated that, in order to reach mass audiences for our films, we need to make them more entertaining. In this regard, my film *The*

Sultan and The Kings has humorous characters, singing and dancing and musical scenes that capture the audience's interest and attention. Although I have not adopted his techniques entirely, Brecht (1964,pp.179-205) had similar idea for political theatre. I could have made my film a serious political film, but instead, I have lightened it up and instead chosen Pinocchio the puppet as a narrator to inform the audiences with his peculiar poetry and funny voice. Furthermore, I have other engaging elements such as narrative elements with symbolic significance and the characters of Saladin, King Richards, and King David that are significant in their multiple roles. These characters are memorable even after the movie finishes because they are not just serious and boring historical figures. They are engaging characters that are entertaining as well as enlightening. Additionally, the narration is structured in a way that engages the audiences, rather than simply relaying repetitive historical information. Even some of the props have multiple dimensions, and this is not an accident. For instance, the figure of the horse helps to maintain audience engagement because audiences are naturally invited to a puzzle to decode this symbol as we juxtapose five musical scenes one by one throughout the main storyline. As the Kings are putting the parts of the horse together in different ways, the audiences will decode the symbol in their own way. Fundamentally, these elements make my film entertaining and distinguish it from a didactic form. Therefore, while my film *The Sultan and The Kings* is entertaining it is enlightening as well. As Karzan Kardozi (2012)-a Kurdish writer and film ctitic- states in his blog, "The Poor State of Kurdish Cinema":

> It is no wonder that today's Kurdish viewer is more exposed to foreign films than Kurdish films or drama series. We hear time and again criticism of the local TV and satellite channels for broadcasting dubbed drama series or foreign films, but criticizing alone is not the answer. Let us not forget that a Kurdish viewer is like any other viewer in the world, and wants to be entertained. By not finding that aspect in Kurdish films, he or she looks for it in foreign films. The reasons are intertwined.

However, Kurdish cinema is the cinema of war and struggle. The situation is driving our filmmakers to create movies that show our pain to the world. In our movies, there are rarely sophisticated Hollywood techniques, glamorous celebrities, and stunning visual effects. In most cases, the elements of actuality and fiction are blended in such a way that for audiences it is difficult for them to distinguish between reality and fiction. For instance, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) by Bahman Ghobadi and *The Dark Wind* (2016) by Hussein Hassan are two good examples of Kurdish films that present these features of what may be termed "Kurdish cinema under oppression".

It is true that our cinema is doing well in film festivals all over the world, but our movies are struggling in commercial screenings. Realistically, in order to build an independent Kurdish film industry, we need to be commercially successful as well. Since we do not have any Kurdish film

industry to support our filmmakers, we have to change our way of making films in terms of style and techniques. There is no doubt about the “wow factors” of our films when we show them in the film festivals – and we should be proud of that. According to Campbell MacDiarmid (2015), a New Zealand freelance journalist who is currently living in Kurdistan (Iraq), “Kurdish films have traditionally been about Kurdish culture and history, fighting and suffering.” Further, he states, “They've enjoyed a lot of success at film festivals globally, but that hasn't always translated into widespread commercial success” (para.20). So, we must not forget that this “new-born baby” needs to be fed properly and taken care of appropriately in order to help it grow strong and healthy.

The idea of an independent cinema has developed in my mind because of my background, and also because of all the suffering my people have been through. If we look again at Appendix 1, it is possible to see how the use of the Kurdish language has been employed from 1980 to 2016, due to the political, economic and technological improvements. As the survey shows, from 1982 to 1990 only two feature films were made. In both films, the spoken language used is Turkish, not Kurdish. Yılmaz Güney was the director of both films.

According to my Appendix 1, since 1990 until the time of writing, the use of Kurdish language in the movies made by Kurdish filmmakers has increased dramatically. These figures indicate that the circumstances of Kurdish filmmakers are improving, and there is more opportunity for them to

produce films. But, as can be seen from Appendix 1, most of those filmmakers are living outside Kurdistan (in the Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria). Besides that, a small percentage of those filmmakers who live inside Kurdistan are either financed by foreign investors or privately fund their films.

The biggest challenge faced by Kurdish filmmakers, apart from all the troubles mentioned previously, is the lack of trained actors – especially female actors. Shawkat Amin Korki addresses this problem beautifully in his film *Memories on Stone* (2014). The film is about two friends, Hussein and Alan, who decide to make films about "Anfal", the genocide committed toward the Kurds in 1980 by Saddam Hussein's regime. While Hussein and Alan struggle to finance the film, they face a bigger problem: finding an actress for their film. In the end, they find a young woman who is willing to act in their movie. But the trouble gets worse when Hussain, the director of the film, is shot by the young woman's fiancé, who believes acting in a movie brings disgrace to the family. Finding trained Kurdish actors has been an ongoing challenge for Kurdish filmmakers. According to Güney (quoted in Kutschera, 1983):

> We have only one professional actor, Tuncel Kurtiz (who played the father in *The Herd*). All the others are amateur; most of them haven't ever played in a film before. It is impossible to get professional actors

> to come from Turkey, and even those who are in Europe do not dare come to work with me … they even refuse to talk to me.

This problem of not having enough actors is related to the oppression of the Kurdish culture; however, the shortage of trained actresses can also be traced to the overall situation of women in Kurdish culture, which is influenced partly by Arab-Islamic culture.

This visually sophisticated movie, *Memories on Stone* (2014), beautifully addresses the problems faced by filmmakers in Kurdistan. Shawkat Amin Korki also shows the psychological damage inflicted on the younger generation by the genocide of the “Anfal”.

Chapter 3

Strategies for Kurdish Film

This chapter discusses the elements of the Kurdish film style and looks at strategies I have adopted to enable a Kurdish film to be both independent and popular. These include the use of hybrid genres, digital filmmaking and digital distribution.

The Kurdish Film Style

To illustrate how my film *The Sultan and the Kings* shares certain characteristics with other Kurdish films, I will now discuss the work of Bahman Ghobadi (*Rhino Season*, 2012) from Eastern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Iran), Kazim Oz (*The Last Season: Shawaks*, 2009) from Northern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Turkey) and Karzan Kader (*Bekas*, 2012) from Southern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Iraq). All these filmmakers, except for Oz, share the problem of having to work in exile, and they all tell stories that have both fictional and documentary elements through the use of digital technology.

In *Rhino Season* (2012), Bahman Gobadi portrays the life of a Kurdish-Iranian poet Sahel who was imprisoned for 30 years in the Islamic Republic of Iran. For about 20 years, his wife thought he had died in prison, so she moved to Turkey in the hope of taking refuge in a third country.

When Sahel is freed, he looks for his wife, and finally finds her in Istanbul (Turkey).

Compared with all Bahman Ghobadi's other films, *Rhino Season* is the most personal because of its autobiographical elements. This film has not received as much attention in international film festivals as Ghobadi's other works (apart from its beautiful cinematography by Torraj Aslani), and it was a totally different kind of filmmaking for him, mainly because of the way he approached the subject-matter, using new cinematic tools in a completely different atmosphere and hiring a non-Kurdish cast and crew. According to Ghobadi (quoted in Kocer, 2013a,p.75):

> With its deep silence, *Rhino Season* is different from my other movies. That silence that has dominated my life here [in Istanbul] is due to deep homesickness. My life here is quite differently than my life in Kurdistan or Iran … *Rhino Season* has been my cure, my medicine, during a time in which I felt so lost deep in myself.

The style of *Rhino Season* differs from that employed by Ghobadi in his other films, such as *A Time For Drunken Horses* or *Turtles Can Fly*. For instance, neither the mise-en-scène nor the characters are as innocent or natural as those in his other films, in the sense that in the other films these are totally un-staged. Therefore, in contrast to Ghobadis' other films such as *A Time For Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly*, etc., *Rhino Season* has less of a documentary spirit, because it has been limited by the casting

process. The casting was too professional to create a documentary look. Additionally, the mise-en-scène including the CGI shots overshadowed the result of this Ghobadi's production. This time Ghobadi was exploring the world of fiction, CGI and his childhood hero Behrouz Vossoughi .The whole film was digitally recorded using a DSLR camera, a still photography camera with the ability to record in full HD and full frame.

Kazim Oz's *The Last Season: Shawak* is a documentary-fiction film that poetically visualises the everyday life of a Kurdish community, the Shawaks. Each year, at the start of spring, the Shawaks move to the high mountains to feed their livestock, then before the start of winter, they ride back home to their small village in eastern Turkey. Oz beautifully recorded the Shawaks' dangerous and tiring journey. He and his small crew followed this small community for one year.

While Oz was filming the challenges and struggles of the community using observational camera work, however, he also managed to record planned scenes. For instance, on one occasion he purposely engaged the characters in a debate about the unfairness of over-working of women in comparison with men. While this conversation allowed a few women to speak out about the issue of domestic violence, Oz's voice as a questioner reminds viewers that he was behind the camera and was in control of the story. This beautifully crafted documentary-fiction film portrayed the humble life of the members of a Kurdish community whose livelihood is dependent

on their cyclic journey with their animals from home to the high mountains and home again. This film was recorded on a Sony HDV digital camera and has been successful at European film festivals.

Bekas (2012) by Karzan Kader is a comedy docu-fiction. The film is about two orphaned brothers, Zana and Dana, who live in a small Kurdish town during the 1990s. The two brothers, inspired by a *Superman* movie, decided to go on a journey to the United States and find their hero, Superman, to live with him. Zana and Dana believe he is the only person with super-powers who can help them to punish those who have been cruel to them. While Zana, the younger brother, makes a list of people – with the name of Saddam Hussein at the top of the list – to give it to Superman to punish, Dana makes a list of things they may need for their trip to America, including money and passports. Unfortunately, they face too many obstacles for their trip to the United States to be successful. But the two brothers are happy they are alive and have each other.

Karzan Kader, the writer and director of the film *Bekas*, created his docu-fiction film using non-actors and natural use of mise-en-scène. Karzan Kader was living in Germany at the time, and to produce his film he went back to his homeland in Kurdistan (Iraq). While this film was an extended version of a short film by the same director, his attempt at creating a "Kurdish film" was successful, as the story was a reflection of his own life during 1991 when his family left Kurdistan (Iraq) to take refuge abroad. The

film was digitally recorded and produced with financial assistance from countries such as Sweden and Finland.

These films all blurred the boundary between documentary and fiction film – as does my major studio work, *The Sultan and the Kings*.

Bahman Gobadi used digital film manipulation techniques in his film *Rhino Season* and used trained actors in the same way I did in my own film. On the other hand, the realistic approach taken towards the truth in my film is more comparable to the work of Kazim Oz (*The Last Season: Shawaks*, 2009) and Karzan Kader (*Bekas*, 2012).

Also like *The Sultan and The Kings* (2015), *The Last Season: Shawaks* (2009) and *Bekas* (2012) emphasise the identity of Kurdishness through the use of Kurdish language and symbolically highlighting Kurdish Issues or history. However, *Rhino Season* (2012) fails to fulfil the identity of a Kurdish film, despite the claims of Ghobadi to tell a story about a Kurdish poet, Sahel. This is because there is no indication about the Kurdishness of Sahel in the film. Moreover, the main actor, Behrouz Vossoughi, who plays Sahel, was a famous actor in pre-revolution Iran and shows none of the characteristics of a Kurdish nationalist or poet. He was an iconic character for the Farsi films that were produced during the regime of the Shah. He had been away from the screen for more than 30 years until his appearance in *Rhino Season.*

In contrast to all three works, though, my film is a totally independent Kurdish film that to some extent achieved its goals and objectives without relying on institutional finance. Appendix 1 shows that foreign investors supported all three of the movies discussed above, while my film had no direct investors.

The Advantages of a Hybrid Genre

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in the number of hybrid films employing the forms of documentary and fiction together. As Rhodes and Springer (2006) point out, “Late twentieth-century film culture has given raise to a rich corpus of hybrid texts which show, in increasingly self-conscious, even *generic* ways, the creative merging and synthesis of documentary and fictional narrative cinema”(p.4) This hybrid genre that has both characteristics of documentary and fiction could be called “docu-fiction”.

However, Rhodes and Springer consider that there is not just one form of docu-fiction but rather a number of different docu-fictions. According to Rhodes and Springer (2006: 9), “docu-fictions stand, then, at the blurred boundary between fiction and documentary”. In the late twentieth century, because of the “multiple nature” of the genre, the filmmakers or film critics began to adopt the term “docu-fiction” to justify it. In fact, the term is used to categorise films as diverse as *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Close-Up* (1990). Two of its sub-genres can be called fictionalised documentary, or docudrama, or documentarised fiction, or

mockumentary. Rhodes and Springer (2006) explain that, “The status of these two forms has been and still a matter of debate because, by their very nature, they break boundaries”(p.11).

During the early cinema, the limitation of moving the film equipment around, forced filmmakers to stage most of the scenes in the studio. With the appearance of the portable 16mm camera, both the style and genres of filmmaking changed. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), “Direct cinema emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, when portable camera and sound equipment became available”(p.353). In this regard, the current improvements in technology, particularly the much simpler functionality of cameras, have made it possible for the actors to basically carry a camera and film the other actors while they are part of the same action. As Rhodes and Springer (2006) claim:

> Changes in filmmaking technology have increased the accessibility of cameras and other recording equipment for no-budget filmmaker … The majority of the footage in *The Blair Witch Project* is shot not by Josh’s 16mm camera … but by Heather’s Hi8 camcorder, or “shaky cam”(p.242).

To create a movie like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which pretended to be a documentary, the actors were camera operators as well, and this is one of the methods that was used to generate the feeling of truth and reality in that film.

Each sub-genre conveys a mixture of documentary and fiction to achieve different levels of reality and different degrees of entertainment – for example, producing a docudrama using actors or non-actors to recreate a real-life story and producing a mockumentary or using actors to make an entertaining fiction story in a documentary format are common ways of making docu-fictions.

In other words, docu-fiction is a genre that filmmakers use to present their ideas in a more diverse way than was feasible within the separate genres of documentary or fiction. In this regard, filmmakers combine the form of documentary and fiction to generate the feel of realism. According to Michael Rabiger (2009), "today's documentary makers use every imaginable storytelling method to engage us with ideas about the actual"(p.8). Therefore, when a filmmaker mixes animation or CGI footage with live action to tell about an incident or narrate a story, it is to inform and generate the feeling of reality as well as to provide entertainment.

It was while I was watching *Man with a Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov (1929) that the idea of creating my first studio work for my doctoral research occurred to me. I wanted my work, *A Woman with a Digital Camera*, to experiment with and formulate the possibility of a new idea for a film that could contribute to the wider new cinema, employing newly available digital film technology.

A Woman with a Digital Camera

A Woman with a Digital Camera is a mixture of both fiction and non-fiction elements, making it a docu-fiction; however it appears to be a documentary-style film. *The Sultan and the Kings*, on the other hand, is a mixture of historical materials, fiction and staged re-enactments as part of a docudrama, which represents the reality of the characters of my story. Both films carry the elements of fiction and non-fiction genres, and both employed digital film technology and digital film manipulation to represent the actuality.

The central character in the movie *A Woman with a Digital Camera*, Gahzhal Alishahi, took a journey with her husband from Iran to Australia in the hope of starting a new and better life. Just a few months after her arrival in Australia, Gahzal, who had no acting experience, took the opportunity to participate in a movie, and was surprised when placed in a situation that changed the whole idea of her being an actress. I asked her to film herself and record whatever she thought might be good about her journey or feelings.

At the beginning, she believed there would be a film crew and, of course, a camera operator to record her story. But soon she realised that she was going to be all by herself, and there would be no one on the set to help with filming and directing. As soon as she was convinced of the feasibility of the process and agreed to the job, she became a woman with a

digital camera – with a lot of help and direction from me. The filming process took about nine months, with Gahzhal bringing the footage to me for review and discussion every week, or sometimes every two weeks.

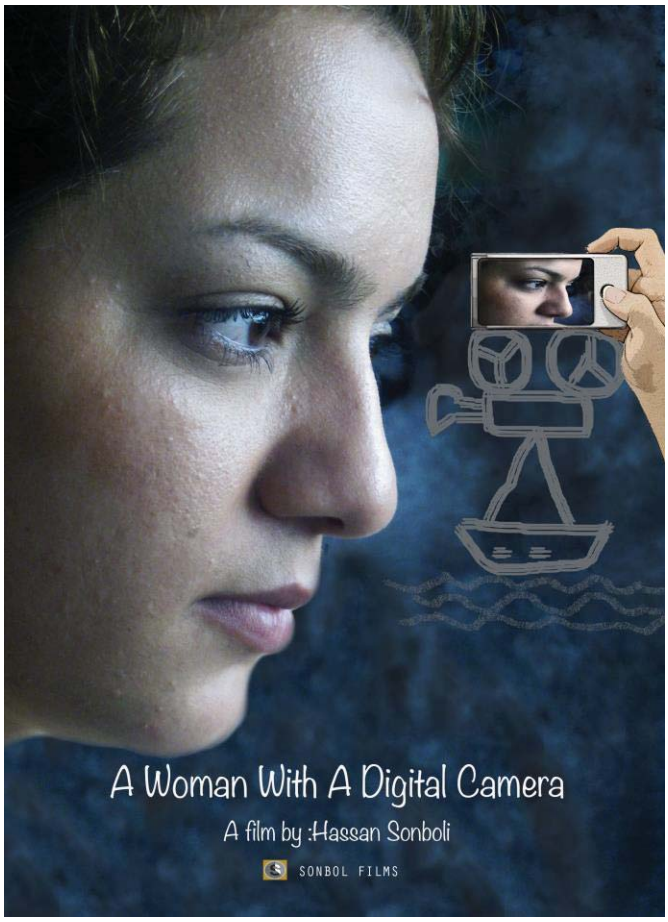


Figure 5: Publicity poster for *A Woman with a Digital Camera*

While she was filming, I was working on how to put the story together. The story was part documentary and part fiction, and in the end it was a good combination that was both informative and entertaining. *A Woman with a Digital Camera* used the techniques of docu-fiction to

create a new and challenging experience for the participant, the audience and me.

In practice, this new experience of filmmaking would not be achievable without digital technology. The main actor filmed more than 70 per cent of the film without the presence of any camera operator or any technical help on the set, albeit under the continual guidance of myself as director.

Hypothetically, the challenge I faced was to validate that there is something new in this method of filmmaking that needs to be noticed by other practitioners as well as by theorists. So when the post-production of *A Woman with a Digital Camera* ended and the movie was screened, the magic of the work was revealed. I screened the film during my DVA Confirmation Seminar at Griffith Film School, and it attracted some interesting critiques. I also hosted some private screenings, and in 2013 my film was showcased at 'The Real Deal' at Crane Arts in Philadelphia.

Apparently, the character played by Gahzhal, who had no previous film acting experience, was believable despite my fictionalising part of her story. For instance, in the opening scene where she was talking about her auditioning achievement and celebrating the success of it with Arash, until the masked man killed her, all this was scripted and rehearsed prior to the filming. I did this because I wanted the movie to be entertaining as well as informative. With just one character in the movie, and with lots of personal

story and no excitement or mystery, the film could have been a tedious doco-diary. This would have been slow, unpleasant and difficult to watch for the audiences. Therefore, I thought we needed a jump-start to attract the attention of the audience members, so they would continue watching the whole film to the end.

To create and apply my style, I manipulated some parts of the film while I was directing the scenes, as well as during the editing process. For instance, at one stage Gahzhal was performing as I was directing her, while at another her actions were totally genuine, as she was talking about her experiences and journey from Indonesia to Australia, expressing her true feelings. This method of blending fact and fiction to create the "virtual character" of Gahzhal worked very effectively.

It is important to stress here that *A Woman with a Digital Camera* was not my main studio project – it was my build-up towards it. Therefore, my confidence was boosted and I became certain that I could offer new insights in this study. Then I prepared my blueprint for the major studio work. But this time, my goal was a much more complex project than the first one. The success of this project would complete my claim about a "new cinema of liberty in the digital age". Consequently, I was so ambitious about the credibility of the work and the outcome that I ventured to complete my first feature film in this way. In particular my "contribution to the knowledge" would be validated upon the final and successful completion of my major studio work.

If we return to the time when Vertov made his film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), we know that the accessibility to a movie camera was almost impossible for a normal person. Even if one were available, you needed to be an expert to operate it. In addition, movie cameras were huge, and really difficult to move around. In contrast, digital cameras and other devices with camera are now widely accessible. These days, digital cameras able to record in high quality are small enough to carry them in the palm of the hand, or hide them in a small handbag without anyone noticing. Thus it is now theoretically possible for anyone to become a documentary filmmaker.

However, while I was planning my first studio work I realised that I did not want it to be pure documentary, but rather to belong to the new genre of docu-fiction. It would be a work of art that would carry both the idea of actual happenings and fiction.

It quickly became apparent that "pure documentation" of actual events is quite rare anyway. To demonstrate this, I will compare Vertov's (1929) documentary technique with that of two documented incidents, which happened in two different timeframes. Both incidents were filmed by amateurs – one used a Super 8 mechanical camera and the other used a digital camera.

The first incident is the documentation of the death of Neda Aga-Soltan in Iran in 2009. During the protests following the 2009 Iranian

presidential election against the disputed victory of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, police started to violently beat protestors and then opened fire on unarmed people. The protests continued for months. The police bashed, imprisoned, injured and killed thousands of protesters and journalists who attempted to report the incidents. At the time of the protests, no journalist had permission to record and report any video or pictures. But people who participated in the protest had used their mobile phones and digital cameras to record some shocking videos and pictures of police beating and firing on people.

Immediately after that, hundreds of photos and films were posted on YouTube and elsewhere on the Internet. Even major TV programs like *Voice of America* and *BBC World News* used those videos, taken mainly by protesters, for their coverage of those protests. Later, these programs broadcast some documentaries about the protest using mobile phone video footage shot during that period. For instance, *A Death in Tehran*[16] was a documentary about the death of Neda Aga-Soltan. In 2009, the footage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan during the protest drew international attention. The footage shot with a mobile phone by one of the participants in

---

16 *A Death in Tehran*, video recording, Ronachan Films in association with WGBH/Frontline and the BBC; producer Monica Garnsey; Frontline executive producer, David Fanning.

the protest was highly effective in showing the reality of the dictatorial government of Iran.

Later, I studied Zapruder's video of the assassination moment of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas on 22 November 1963; this was filmed accidentally with a Super 8 movie camera by Abraham Zapruder. When I contrasted the footage of the death of Neda Aga-Soltan with Zapruder's video, I found one commonality and some enormous differences between the two. For instance, one common thing about both pieces of footage is that "ordinary people" filmed both incidents.

According to Stella Bruzzi (2006), the "Zapruder footage is an archetypal example of accidental, reactive and objective film"(p.21). But would the footage of Neda's death be in the same category? My understanding is that Abraham Zapruder unexpectedly captured Kennedy's assassination when he was openly filming with his Super 8 camera but the footage of Neda's death was captured deliberately by one of the participants in the protest with the camera on his small mobile phone. Zapruder's footage was thus "accidental", whereas the film of Neda's death was by someone who intended to capture police brutality on film. In this regard a digital device's small size was crucial to enable a protester to record a real-life story or incident without being noticed by the authorities. So a digital camera empowered an individual to transfer captured motion images, as the event happened, to enlighten viewers all over the world.

Alternatively, Stella Bruzzi (2006) states “newsreels and documentary reportage in general are ‘innocent’ or ‘artless’ due to their lack of aesthetic reconstruction”(p.19). However, though she says newsreels and documentaries are innocent, they are not entirely innocent. In fact, they are structured with a deliberate intention to communicate in a certain way. Otherwise, how could Orson Welles have been able to parody them in Citizen Kane? Fundamentally, Neda’s footage was spontaneous, but it was an intentional capture of that footage. It was already on the way to becoming a documentary film. Therefore, by the time it becomes a documentary film it is no longer innocent. Thus, only Zapruder’s footage, which was just filmed by accident, could be considered entirely innocent. Whereas, Vertov’s movie was made by him carrying his huge camera everywhere to record the everyday life of people. As Bordwell and Thompson (2013) state,“Vertov will try to show that documentary film goes beyond simply recording its subjects. Thanks to editing and cinematography, along with associational form, a multitude of tiny scenes from everyday reality becomes an exploration of the power of moviemaking”(p.430). Accordingly, his documented footages are not innocent because he manipulated the segments to introduce a new form of filmmaking.

However, Vertov used available filmic technology at the time to create the ideology of "kino Pravda".[17] Realistically, would it have been possible for Vertov to be in a demonstration such as the one in which Neda was murdered and record the same incident?

Here is where I can argue that the footage taken of Neda's death is a portion of real life film that technically can be considered as a documentary because it was intentionally captured by someone and it is not an accidental filming like Zapruder's footage. Historically, cinema was started with one single shot of less than one minute. For instance, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896) by Lumiere brothers showed the arrival of a train at the station and the action of the arriving passengers. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013):

> The first films usually consisted of a single shot framing an action, usually at long shot distance … The Lumieres, however, took their cameras out to parks, gardens, beaches, and other public places to film everyday activities or news events, as in their *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*. Until about 1903, most films showed scenic places or noteworthy events, so these can be considered early documentaries (p.464).

---

17 Kino-Pravda, which literally translates as "Film Truth", was a newsreel series that introduced and was developed by Dziga Vertov, Elizaveta Svilova and Mikhail Kaufman.

At that moment, this documented scene of "arriving train" was a horrifying experience for some spectators while it was amusing and entertaining for others. But for us, it is an archival/documentary film. For instance, as Geiger and Rutsky (2005) point out "The French newspaper *Le courier du centre* (July 14, 1896) announced that the approaching locomotive made "spectators draw back instinctively fearing they'll be run over by the steel monster" "(p.54). During that period, the Lumiere brothers could not expand or manipulate the footage. Firstly, film technology was not ready for that change yet. Secondly, they were not aware of the possibility of future styles of film narrative and editing techniques. So, they simply placed the camera, pointed at the subject and filmed it until there was no stock left in the camera. Fundamentally, the scene of Neda's death starts with the demonstration and ends with the death of Neda. In this regard, we should pay attention to the way the cameraman consciously moves towards the subject and changes the framing from a long shot of the demonstration to the medium shot of Neda who is lying on the ground as she is bleeding. Intensely, the process of editing is happening as the mobile camera moving from long shot to medium shot. This action is the kind of approach that any documentary filmmaker will make towards such an incident. Therefore, we can say that the footage of Neda is a short documentary. In reality, the film was distributed via the Internet but was exhibited globally through social media and TV stations such as BBC and Voice of America. As I pointed out on page (77), this mini real life documentary film inspired other filmmakers to create a documentary based on it.

Alternatively, *Man with a Movie Camera* by Vertov is a mixture of selected actuality shots that were manipulated through editing. While I believe the final product produced by Vertov is not strictly a documentary, it is made out of pieces of actuality footage – it is, I would argue, a docu-fiction. As Rhodes and Springer (2006) also note, "paradoxically, [docu-fiction] is as old as the cinema itself"(p.9). Therefore, it became clear to me that, in general, mixing genres to make films is not a new method used only recently by filmmakers.

To illustrate some of the ways in which fictional and documentary elements can be combined in a variety of genres, I will discuss the films of Dziga Vertov, Orson Welles, Vittorio DeSica and Abbas Kiarostami. I would like to start with *Man with a Movie Camera*, as this film's philosophical and ideological beliefs inspired me to design my first studio work, *A Woman with a Digital Camera*.

Man with a Movie Camera contains elements of both fiction and non-fiction. Because they are made with "shots" and have "cuts", almost all films made using mobile phones and digital cameras can be said to be "fictionalized". However, in Vertov's films the manipulation of actuality is even greater: the use of superimposing, duplications and even stop motion indicates that the film is not 100 per cent documentation of real life.

Dziga Vertov set out to pioneer a new way of filmmaking, as he explained at the beginning of his film: "This experimental work aims at

creating a truly international absolute language of cinema based on its total separation from language of theatre and literature." With this philosophy, he wanted to make a film without inter-titles, sets and actors. He was aiming at a totally visualized film, using a language that was unique to film. While Vertov was practising his method of recording actuality through a mechanical eye, his personal vision of Soviet society reflected the reality of that era in his film.

Vertov experimented with the available cinematic technology at that time to demonstrate his philosophical belief and to send his message to his viewers. Vertov says, "I am builder". Then he explains:

> I have placed you … in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls, shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing. (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.227).

His innovative sense of mixing technical methods with his vision to manipulate actuality, distinguish him from other filmmakers of his era. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013): "The film becomes a demonstration of cinema's power to control our perception of reality through editing and special effects"(p.430). Vertov filmed ordinary people in everyday life and, with the help of the available visual technology, structured documentary material to convey a message.

Dziga Vertov was a filmmaker and a film theorist who in the time of modernist cinema pioneered a cinema of post-modernity – a kind of docu-fiction. But, despite his claim about the 'truthfulness' of "Kino Pravda", his film *Man with a Movie Camera* was not a pure documentary. For instance, the superimposed shot of the cameraman on the top of a huge movie camera, the sleeping lady in the room and the whole orchestra at the cinema all appear to be staged, and indicate that the movie was not a pure documentary. Therefore, his film has traces of staged or manipulated shots, and is a combination of documentary and fiction.

My next example is a work from 1941, *Citizen Kane* by American filmmaker Orson Welles. Welles combined fictional footage that looked like newsreels to create a metaphorical journey through time. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), "Filmmakers can use mise-en-scéne to achieve realism, giving settings an authentic look or letting actors perform as naturally as possible"(p.113). Through this technical process, Welles created an experience of a sense of reality for the audience. For example, he imitates conventions of documentary news films to convey an illusion of truth or accuracy associated with documentary film.

The approach of visualising the life of Charles Foster Kane from different points of view was a technique that Welles adapted to create the feel of documentary and actuality. Thus, to generate the factual feel, Welles employed the technique of long steady shots and deep focus, and directed

the actors to move around so the audience could follow the action and have the feel of watching a portion of real life. Andre Bazin (2009) in his article "The evolution of the language of cinema" explains: "That depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of contents of the image, its structure is more realistic"(p.50). However, realism is a series of techniques and not a guarantee of documentary 'truth' – the capturing of an event or condition that existed without the filmmaker's intervention. We can see this approach in one of the scenes when Susan Alexander is lying in her bed with a container of drugs beside her. Charles runs into the room and stands beside the bed. In this scene, we clearly see everything in deep focus – the eyes can take in everything without being forced to concentrate on one specific subject. Watching such a scene, spectators would feel as if they were watching a real-life story through a theatrical staging frame.

It is interesting to see that in *Citizen Kane* and *Man with a Movie Camera*, two filmmakers from two different backgrounds, timeframes and perhaps with technical and technological differences have made films that mix the genres of fiction and documentary. *Man with A Movie Camera*, with its actuality material, is closer to documentation, while *Citizen Kane* attempted to create the feel of reality more in the spirit of mockumentary, given that the film is clearly a parody of a real person named William Randolph Hearst, renamed Charles Foster Kane for the film.

In 1948, Vittoria De Sica created his film *The Bicycle Thief*, which employed a realistic style called neo-realism. As Houston (1963) says, "New Realism was to some extent a revolutionary cinema in a non-revolutionary society"(p.29). In this regard, shooting at real locations with natural light instead of pre-setup locations, and using non-actors instead of professional actors, was the most revolutionary feature of his work. With this approach, some characteristics of documentary style were introduced to the film. Bordwell and Thompson (2013) say that, "Neorealist mise-en-scéne relied on actual locales, and its photographic work tended toward the raw roughness of documentaries"(p.484). While Hollywood movies were packed with tricks and visual effects, there were no tricks and no complicated visual effects in *The Bicycle Thief*.

In addition, the use of untrained actors and long takes in the film give the feeling of real life. De Sica uses a metaphoric language, which gives the film a feeling of the delight of watching a real-life story from behind a window. Although the essence of dramatic elements cannot be ignored because of the structure, his unique view and his stylistically developed mise-en-scène have added a documentary feel to the movie. So instead of manipulating the meaning of the film via editing techniques, De Sica uses a very well crafted mise-en-scène with "Photographic Realism" to achieve Documentary feel. According to Bill Nichols (2001):

> Psychological realism … Emotional realism … physical setting … All three of these forms of realism hold relevance for documentary film. Neo-realism made use of all three, giving us a vivid sense of the look of post-war Italy, of the hopes and anxieties of ordinary people, and generating a strong sense of empathy, if not humanistic sentimentality, in its audience. Documentary also frequently relies heavily on a realism of time and place. It depends on finding people, or social actors, who reveal themselves in front of a camera with an openness and lack of self-consciousness similar to what we find in trained professionals. (pp.93-94)

I believe that using non-professional actors alongside the real locations in the film was an inspirational idea to boost the feeling of reality, as the actors' faces and behaviour contributed considerably to the believability factor. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), "For [the] adult 'star' of *Bicycle Thief*, De Sica chose a factory worker. The way he moved, the way he sat down, his gestures with those hands of working man and not of an actor … everything about him was perfect"(p.484). While the scripted story and directing of the actors and the camera by De Sica constituted the fictional side of the movie, mixing the two elements of documentary and fiction heightened the believability and realism of the story.

The final work discussed here is that of Abbas Kiarostami, an Iranian new wave filmmaker of the 1990s. With his stylistically poetic films,

Kiarostami created highly sophisticated artworks that have a direct plot structure as well as a highly evocative concept. Symbols and metaphors in his films created a magical world, an atmosphere of the innocent world of true documentary. Like De Sica, Kiarostami used non-professional actors in his documentary style narrative films. In *Close Up* (1990), he used a real life trial of a man named Sabzian who used the identity of a famous filmmaker, Mohsen Makmalbaf, to make a family believe he was in fact Makmalbaf. In the film – which is part documentary and part fiction – the man and the family were asked to re-enact the actual story of their lives. In this film, Kiarostami appears to make his movie out of "uncontrolled actuality footage". Some of, the movie is constructed out of unpremeditated actuality. However, many of these events were orchestrated by him. In fact, the movie is very controlled because he has worked out a plan and anticipates things that will transpire. Although the movie didn't have any special effects or complicated setups, the actuality footage intensifies the documentary look of the movie. It looks like life unfolding without any controlled premeditation.

By comparing the work of Kiarostami and De Sica, we can see how two artists who lived in two different times and atmospheres technically created a genre that gives the feel of a pure factual piece of reality. When we analyse the elements of the two separate works, we can see that they have mixed different factors of genre but the outcome is realistic. In particular, Kiarostami mixed two separate forms of the filmmaking process –

observational documentary and drama – to accomplish his docudrama-style film. To achieve a more realistic approach, he used the real characters in the documentary to act out the actual story of their lives. On the other hand, we have the work of De Sica, who used non-professional actors to act in a big movie, *The Bicycle Thief*. So, while he did not have sophisticated Hollywood technology, De Sica orchestrated the shots and dramatized a symbolic story of a real society. As stated before, the characters were acted out by the real members of that society, and created a film with the essence and feel of a fictionalised documentary.

In general, the visual context of each artwork presented in the above examples strongly depends on metaphorical elements seeking or representing reality. For instance, the metaphorical figure of the cameraman in *Man with a Movie Camera* substitutes for the spectator, who is now able to witness everything that happens; Rosebud in *Citizen Kane* stands for the unknowable inner character of Charles Foster Kane; the bicycle in *The Bicycle Thief* stands for the continuity of life under difficult circumstances; and Sabzian, the main character of the movie *Close Up* stands for the fantasy aspirations of people in repressed societies.

All these works played some role in convincing me that mixing genres has long been a way to create new methods of storytelling. Looking at the visual context of each artwork or film, it is possible to see elements of documentary mixed with fiction.

The Advantages of Digital Production

During my research into the history of film and mixed genres, it became more evident that, with any changes in the size of cameras, new advances in colour or innovations in other cinematic tools, filmmakers developed a new form of storytelling to create movies. As we have replaced the mechanical cinema with digital cinema, the ways in which we treat or use actors, props and camera moves has changed too. In the end, the whole process formed a question in my mind: How can we define the role of technological improvement and advances in shaping or forming methods of storytelling? By answering this question in the following discussion, my aim is to achieve this outcome.

The twenty-first century is the century of the digital camera, with high-tech equipment that has largely solved the problem of low lighting conditions. This technology has allowed humans to design very small, high-quality cameras that can achieve a high performance in virtually any light and temperature conditions. According to Rombes (2009), “The camera’s small size and mobility suggest it as a tool for capturing reality” (p.40). Both the size of the camera and mobility matter when it comes to capturing a truth. Therefore, with this technology, cinéma vérité is more achievable than ever before. As Stella Bruzzi (2006) suggests, “technological changes have enabled documentary to shift direction” (p.122). So this change of direction, which is affected by new technology, is now shifting the whole industry – particularly independent creative artists and filmmakers, who are now

confident about experimenting with a new kind of cinema: a cinema of post-post-modernity.

Today's technology is both inexpensive and easy to access. This means the doors are open to innovators and practitioners without the world of film being dominated by industry people as it once was. Those who previously did not have the opportunity to make an artwork or film because of bureaucratic rules or financial constraints are now able to buy their own cameras and set up their own editing facilities with just a few thousand dollars.

These days, editing a sequence is an easy process. For instance, it takes very little time to cartoonify a picture or a piece of footage. It is achievable using Photoshop or other movie-editing or special effects software such as After Effects on personal computers. In modern society, the majority of people carry an electronic device, such as a mobile phone or tablet, that includes a high-quality digital camera wherever they go. They are therefore able to document any event or incident whenever it happens. For instance, they can film a fight, a car accident or a happy ceremony like a wedding. The materials stored on the memory of these devices can be transferred to a personal computer to be edited by any means.

New technology has provided an opportunity for the majority of people to capture pieces of everyday life and be like freelance "avant-garde" filmmakers. Through these devices, people are able to record

themselves without needing a camera operator. They can make a diary movie of their thoughts, beliefs, experiences and feelings. They can act out themselves and create digital videos that have the characteristic of a genre that was once dependent on digital technology.

During my study, I realised that that, even with the improvements that have occurred in technology, the aim of creating an artwork is still to represent or introduce reality. According to Houston (1963: 20), “all cinema ought to aspire to the condition of factual reporting”. So actual reporting is something that has become essential in contemporary films.

As Bordwell and Thompson (2013) point out, “Direct cinema emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, when portable camera and sound equipment became available and allowed films such as *Primary* to follow an event as it unfolds”(p.353). Cinéma vérité (1960) was an outcome of having 16mm synched sound cameras; to some extent, this also applies to the new wave cinema. These forms would not have come into existence if hand-held cameras had not been introduced. At that time, technological change was one of the prerequisites for the creation of a new kind of cinema. This claim is supported by the following discussion of how effectively digital film technology impacted the way we make films.

In the twenty-first century, most digital still cameras have a movie option as well as a photo option. Most people also have a mobile phone that has both a still camera and a digital movie camera. Amazingly, the more

advanced products also have the capacity to edit and create visual effects. The majority of people in the world – especially in more advanced societies – therefore have the tools to become cinéma vérité filmmakers, or at least to become a fully independent newsreel presenters. Of course, thanks to YouTube, IPTV technology and other innovations, anyone can be a broadcaster as well. With the availability of these facilities to take photos or films, those who really want to work and contribute to the art society face few difficulties in creating artworks. This represents an enormous opportunity for those who want to develop a style and a language with which to communicate in the world of art and cinema.

Technically, for those who are in the field of visual art – especially those who are making films and want to experiment and explore a new method – this is their time. We are in a digital and high-definition era. It is the age of a "new cinema" – a cinema in which there is freedom to experiment and the impetus to create innovative art.

In an earlier age of cinema, some film producers changed direction from being simple entertainers to becoming creative filmmakers. For instance, Georges Melies started filming simple tricks using his camera, and ended up making powerful films that amazed spectators at that time. As Bordwell and Thomson (2013) explain, technology can constrain creative choices:

> One important pressure on genres is technology. The musical film crystalized with the arrival of synchronized sound, and the development of colour processes favoured genres of spectacle, for example, westerns, musicals, and historical dramas. Most recently, computer- generated imagery has made it easy to conjure up unreal creatures and imaginary landscapes (p.333).

A few questions arise from the above discussion. For instance, how much have filmmakers been affected by digital film technology? And how does this technology shift the way filmmakers use it to make films that lean towards a new kind of cinema? During my research, I came across a quote from Bertolt Brecht: “Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change” (quoted in Kilborn and Izod, 1997, p. 51). When reality changes, the whole environment around us changes with it. So the needs of the filmmaker and the audience would be different according to the changes. For example, a century ago there were no mobile phones or personal computers. But now the technology has changed even the way we used to watch and create movies. In this regard, the tradition of delivering movies to the viewers has changed too.

The Advantages of Digital Distribution

The biggest challenge for an independent filmmaker, after finishing a movie, is distribution. In contrast, Hollywood filmmakers who work for production companies such as 20th Century Fox or Paramount Pictures are influenced

by the distribution process from the moment they begin production. In this section, I explain the ways by which I am considering distributing my independent film. I also discuss the reasons why I believe we need to apply new methods with regard to building an independent Kurdish cinema.

While I was making *The Sultan and the Kings*, foremost in my mind were the issues of who constituted my target audience and how I would be able to distribute my film on my own terms. It would be true to say that the dream of almost every Kurdish filmmaker is to have their films exhibited on a big screen. Although this is not a real possibility for most of these filmmakers, due to political and financial difficulties, there are alternatives to deliver the movies to an audience – even with a small budget. Fortunately, digital technology has given us many opportunities to distribute our films. For instance, we can create DVDs and sell them via the internet, or use other channels of distribution, such as YouTube and Vimeo.

In this way, it is possible to use new technology, so we do not need to rely on a distribution company to do this job for us. According to *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2006–2010*, a report by Wilkofsky Gruen Associates Inc. and PricewaterhouseCoopers (2005), "Virtually every segment of the entertainment and media industry is being influenced by distribution of content online or to mobile devices or by digital technologies in general" (p.14). With a little research and a simple understanding of marketing strategies, we filmmakers can distribute our own films to a broader audience. These days, almost everyone is familiar with YouTube,

Facebook or other forms of internet broadcasting and distribution. According to Hope (2014):

> Low-cost digital cameras as well as distribution avenues like YouTube and iTunes are available to nearly everyone, and you can be exposed to the history of cinema or music or just about any art form at any time you want-all for free, or virtually so"(p.23

So, delivering our own self-made videos and movies to the public has become a common way of sharing our creative works.

While I was looking for some Kurdish movies to watch, I realised that it would be impossible to find such movies in the DVD stores or Blockbuster video rental shops. But as I was desperately continuing my search via Google, I found one of the movies on Vimeo. I discovered that I could either hire the movie for 48 hours for about AU$4.00, or buy and download it in HD for AU$8.86 (recently, the price has increased). So I decided to buy the movie and in less than 10 minutes it was on my hard drive ready to watch. According to Ulin (2010), "There is no question more and more people are online, and the Internet has become an important part of the marketing mix. It is a great and efficient way to reach specific targets"(p.401). The internet is a powerful marketing platform that can attract audiences all over the world. At the same time, it is a great place to deliver products like movies via virtual shops such as Vimeo, Amazon and Netflix, including for Kurdish

films. At the time of writing, Kurdish films have no chance of being screened in the cinemas of countries such as Iran, Turkey or Syria.

As digital cinema improves, the forms of distribution are also expanding and improving. Before advancements in digital cinema and the advent of the internet, there were only a few ways to deliver a movie to the audience, and these had considerable limitations in delivering the product to a global audience. For instance, showing movies on the big screen in cinemas and broadcasting on the small screen on television were the most common options for people to watch a film. But these means were not available to people living in many rural and remote areas, or in most poor countries. However, with the advancement in digital technology and distribution methods, almost everyone in the four national regions of Kurdistan can buy and watch any movies via the internet. As pointed out by Wilkofsky Gruen Associates Inc. and PricewaterhouseCoopers (2005), “People begin to access content more globally via online distributors, rather than wait for them to turn up on their local cinema screens”(p.27). In reality, no matter where you are located in the world, as long as you are connected to the internet or have a satellite dish, you are able to watch your favourite television shows or movies.

At this stage, my film is finalised and ready to be delivered to an audience. Given the various distribution choices available, I can reach my target audience anywhere in the world. According to Hope (2014), “With fewer barriers, fewer rules, and fewer conventions, filmmakers-and creators

of all sorts are freer to focus on developing new art forms, expanding beyond current modes, and discovering new ways of accessing and sharing content"(p.23). In this regard, I am willing to accept the challenge and start to market my film, distributing it using cheap or free digital tools. For example, I can distribute my films by employing DVDs, Vimeo, YouTube, IPTV Channel providers and other electronic delivery choices. I can also promote them via social networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

In addition to these strategies, I can use Kurdish satellite TV and news networks such as Rudaw that are willing to promote Kurdish cultural activities free of charge for Kurdish artists. For instance, the news about the making of my film *The Sultan and the Kings* was published on Rudaw in 2015, with the poster of the film featured at the top (Appendix 2). At the moment, many satellite TV stations are broadcasting Kurdish programs and news all over the world. For instance Rudaw and Kurdistan 24 can be seen in Australia with the aid of a satellite dish. Even more Kurdish TV channels can be watched via IPTV services or live internet TVs.

As mentioned previously, filmmakers faced many obstacles to distributing their films in Kurdistan due to the political and financial problems faced by filmmakers. But as these new ways of distribution are so cheap to use, the financial problem of delivering a movie to potential audiences is

solved. However, finding interested audiences for Kurdish films is still a challenge.

Still, the political issues are not so easily overcome in Kurdistan. Politically, Kurdish filmmakers are regarded as terrorists and agitators, who prejudice people against the government via their films. So censorship towards this group of filmmakers is extremely harsh. But, with the new ways of distribution, stopping these filmmakers reaching their target audience is now almost impossible. For instance, I found most of Halil Uysal's films via YouTube; without access to this platform, it would have been difficult, and even impossible, for people to watch his films or even know about their existence. According to Rojava Report (2014), Uysal was killed by the Turkish army in Besta while he was on a trip to film guerrilla fighters.

In Iran, where the government blocked websites like YouTube, people employed programs to crack the blocked websites. On the other hand, in autonomous Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan), with its Kurdish regional government, there is more freedom of expression, so filmmakers can distribute their films via the internet using available distribution methods. For filmmakers in northern Kurdistan (Turkey), internet distribution is as easy as it is in southern Kurdistan, but it still can be dangerous for both filmmakers and participants if the content is labelled terrorist act" or "supporter of terrorism" by the Turkish government. To clarify, you can be censored, discriminated against, persecuted and imprisoned if you represent the truth about Kurdish issues in Turkey via film or other media. At the moment,

Kurds in Syria (Western Kurdistan) are having a difficult time dealing with both ISIS (the terrorist organisation in Iraq and Syria) and the ruling regime of Bashar al-Assad. In practical terms, making movies in that area is extremely dangerous. But there are still people who are attempting to record and document the battlefield in order to make documentaries or self-made videos for broadcast on the internet, usually via social media websites.

My film is an Australian-Kurdish film, which by nature is a hybrid film. Demographically, it is targeting the Kurdish community in diaspora along with a broader audience of non-Kurds. I believe the hybridity of the film and hybridity of the audiences are two strong characteristics that shape this film. I am aiming to assist the unification and recognition of Kurdish culture by broadening awareness of Kurdish politics. A hybrid approach enables filmmakers to reach core audiences while at the same time using Internet distribution and community screenings, to give a wide range of potential viewers direct access to the films. In this regard my ultimate goal is to develop a core audience, a demographic that can support future projects worldwide. This strategy, I hope, will enable independent filmmakers to reach a broader variety of audiences while maintaining overall control of a distribution process.

Basically, given the political situation and financial difficulties currently being faced by Kurdish filmmakers, new digital[18] technology and internet distribution are the best options to reach Kurdish audiences. However, I must acknowledge that the problem of how to publicise these films remains and its study is outside the scope of the present thesis. Some options that need to be examined by Kurdish filmmakers include publicity tools such as free Kurdish satellite TV networks and social media like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

[18] For more information on new digital cinema, see Mckeman (2005), Baker (2006), Swartz (2005) and Sickels (2011).

Chapter 4

The Sultan and the Kings

The Sultan and the Kings

Ever since I started my new life here in Australia, I have been considering ways to make films independently. This is the dream for thousands of filmmakers all over the world – especially filmmakers from places like Kurdistan, with difficult political situations. According to Chris Kutschera (1983), "Yılmaz Güney refused offers from several big producers who wanted him to make films, because he wanted a free hand in his own film." This indicates how important it was for Güney to be free and independent from bureaucratic rules when he was making films. For the same reason, other Kurdish filmmakers have sought alternatives to enable them to have full control over their production whenever possible.

In order to fully understand the complexity of my movie *The Sultan and the Kings*, my audiences need to have some knowledge of the history of the Crusades as well as some understanding of Kurdish history. However, the overall story of the film can be understood and described in a simple way. Yusuf Ayyubi, an Australian-born Kurdish filmmaker, is in the process of making a documentary on ghosts. Yusuf believes he can capture the images of ghosts on his digital camera. While he and his small crew are preparing for the shoot in the basement of his house, Yusuf discovers a

small box that belongs to his family. The documents in the box can prove that Yusuf is royalty and that King Saladin is his ancestor. This exciting discovery grabs the attention of a terrorist group, which wants him to be involved in its activities. Yusuf is contacted by a member of the terrorist organisation and is told that he is “the chosen one”, and needs to act like his ancestor, Saladin, and destroy the infidels. Yusuf refuses to be involved, so the terrorist group kidnaps his girlfriend in order to force him to cooperate with them. But he is the “possible king”, and takes orders from no one.

Scripting such a story, and relating it to wider issues like Kurdish diasporic cinema, history, religion and terrorist issues in the world, was a very challenging process for me. The script evolved from three fundamental sources. The first was some obsessive images, such as horse, Saladin and pomegranate. The second was the historical and political story of the Kurds. The third was the particular circumstances in which I found myself and my people – for instance, what was happening in the Middle East at the time of writing, as well as the actors I had chosen and what they had told me during their auditions. The interplay of these things, which I explain next, shaped my script.

Fundamentally, the film started with several obsessive images in my mind, and I wanted to use them to tell the political story of the Kurds. In particular, the image of Saladin – about which I had been thinking for a long time – was a major motive. However, in writing the script I was influenced by what was happening to the Kurds – especially in Iraq and Syria, with the

appearance of ISIS and the atrocities it was were committing against Kurds and others. The strategy of using the horse was a great metaphor that took a year to shape and to fit into my script. From the beginning, I knew there would be a horse in my film, but I did not know how it was going to be placed in my script until I found the right horse. I looked on the internet, searched on eBay, visited second-hand shops and purchased a few wooden horses to give me some ideas. Finally, I found what I was looking for in an antique shop. It was a huge horse with detachable parts that helped me to figure out how to convey my idea through this metaphor. For instance, the horse in my film represents power and strength. As an object, the horse was not one solid piece; rather, it was assembled in three pieces. However, the characteristics of the horse enabled me to metaphorically use this object to convey the idea of power and harmony as I was employing each part of the horse to create a new scene.

As pictured in the movie, each king owned one part of the horse. So, as the kings sing in their own style, they demonstrate their power. For instance, King Richard declares his right to be the truthful king by holding the horse's head as a metaphor for having power. But as soon as Pinocchio the puppet appears, the whole idea of the kings being untruthful to their community or followers is revealed. The kings are not telling them the whole truth because none of them has the complete horse, so they cannot have absolute power. Each has just one piece of the puzzle that can only be completed when they assemble the parts together. Essentially, the

character of the horse shaped one of the overall themes of the story. Consequently the Nebula Song came into existence, as did the other characters: Richard the Lion Heart, King David and Pinocchio.

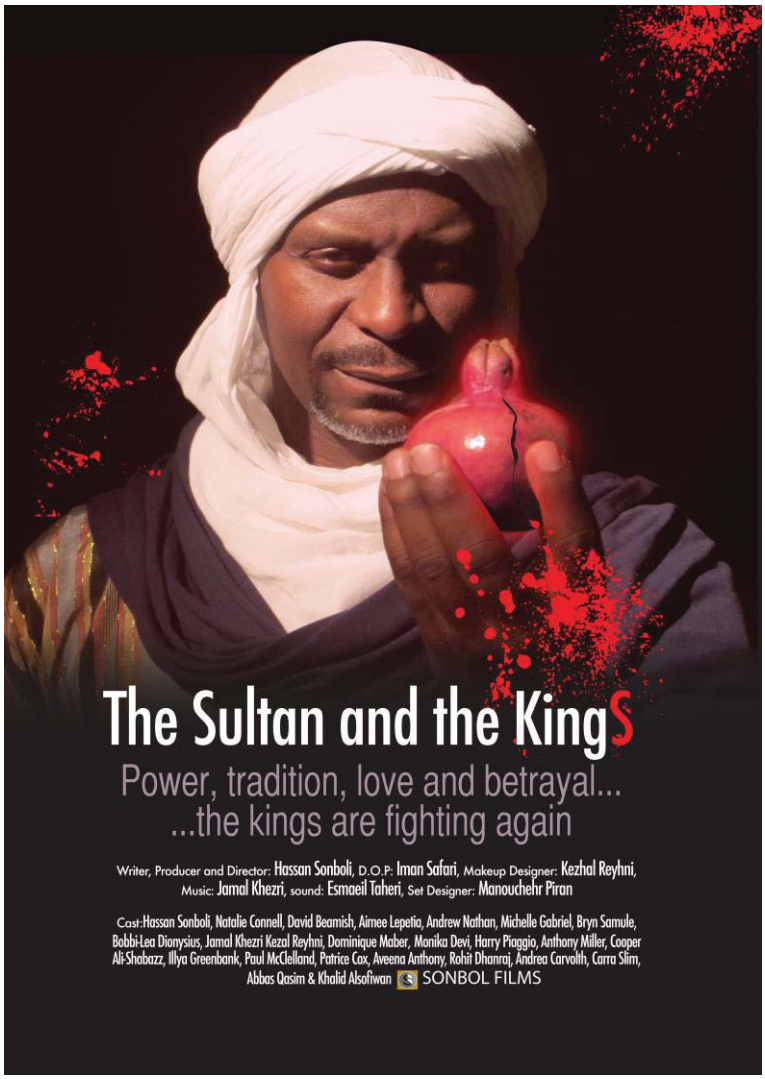


Figure 6: Publicity poster for *The Sultan and the Kings*

In addition, some of the actors who participated in the movie influenced the scripting indirectly through their special characters. For instance, the character of Ali, the terrorist, was developed during the

audition period. The result was dramatically interesting. Basically, I had tried to document a set of actors who have been given a set of instructions. In the same way, I developed my own “virtual character”. Further details of this are provided in Chapter 4.

Using Non-Actors as “Virtual Characters”

While I was preparing to shoot my film *The Sultan and the Kings*, almost every day I conducted auditions to choose talented people to act in my movie. My aim was to use non-actors in order to introduce my method of training actors as ”virtual characters” for the film. I trialled this method when I was making *A Woman with a Digital Camera*. It was then that I realised ordinary people can be educated to create a “virtual character” based on their hidden personality. This makes them feel comfortable in front of the camera, and when they perform it is often difficult for the audience to distinguish between reality and fiction. To achieve this, I always asked my actors to forget about whatever they had learned from acting school while they were working with me. Ultimately, I wanted someone with minimum skills in acting. However, a few applicants had some good experience in acting, but my intention was to make them follow my path. In this regard, several potential actors struggled with my intended style because they continued to act in their preferred and personal way, which was not appropriate for what I was proposing. But others who were fascinated with the method have participated in development as well as the performance of the work. For instance, the story that Ali (terrorist) tells Natalia (hostage)

within the car park scene was developed during the audition with Andrew Nathan (Ali). In reality, Ali is Andrew's virtual character who has got a little bit of Andrew's life experience. I had a very long conversation with Andrew explaining my method and the way he is going to act. Therefore, we started up from his life experience as the first step. I asked Andrew to act out a few things from his personal life to prepare him for the next stage, which was the development of Ali's character as a terrorist. I asked Andrew to visualize any experience from his real life and perform it for me. For my future reference, I was recording him with my small camera. Andrew was getting emotional as he was explaining about his life experience. My intention was to provide an atmosphere where this actor could do his best work. To achieve the best result, I realised that I needed to trust my actors and directly involve them into the process. They needed to know that their input was a very important element of the script. Therefore by encouraging them to be involved in the development of their hidden characters they started to recall memories and to find something to present. As the process continued, it sometimes became a very emotional procedure and this is where I would start to impose my tactic and ask them to act out their life story. Realistically, in this stage, the actor forgets about acting and goes into the mood of normality and relaxation. In Andrew's case, I immediately asked him to visualize himself as a terrorist and say something. Then without me saying anything about changing his accent he started to talk in an accent. Subsequently, we developed Ali's character through improvisation. In this regard, I have never talked about the actual story of

my film in full details, but I asked them to imagine themselves being in the story. Filmmakers such as Mike Leigh, Martin Scorsese, and many more, have used the method of improvisation. In this regard, we all have one thing in common, creating and developing some characters that fit well into the movie.

I believe my use of virtual characters, and the way in which this brought their lives into my film, is significant – particularly as this was a situation where non-Kurdish actors brought their particular life experiences into my film. In this way, was creating another mix of political analysis that was still to do with Kurdish issues, but from the perspective of non-Kurdish characters as well. I wasn't just telling a story about Kurds and Kurdistan: I was trying to meld several stories together. For instance, the story of the terrorist in *The Sultan and the Kings* refers to the contemporary world's response to similar problems. So I was trying to bring the Kurdish film style to bear on suburban life in Australia, and by doing this I was telling an Australian story as well.

As I mentioned above, during this process, I auditioned people with a great deal of experience in acting, and they loved my new approach. The atmosphere, which I created for my talents, was based on conviction. I trusted them and involved them into my process. In one stage, I asked the actors to improvise some characters for me while I was video-recording them. At another point, I asked them to put a given scene in their own

words, without relying on the written text. As they were improvising, I was rewriting part of the scene. For me, this practice was an attempt to find new and more truthful versions of characters for my film. Amazingly, I had some people who made great progress towards creating the “virtual character”, and for a few of them it worked like magic. The audition process was like a crash-course for the participants, and a laboratory for me to practise my method. I empowered them by boosting their confidence; in turn, this process enabled me to choose the most talented people for my film.

Figure 7: King David’s scene: developing process

Figure 8: King David's scene: after development

I believe I have trialled something that could be useful for other filmmakers. This kind of process would be helpful when we produce films in places like Kurdistan, where there is currently no cinema industry. The method can be implemented effectively in such places, where cinema is not yet accepted by society as a whole. My method can be used in any film with a small budget, employing enthusiasts – those who dream of acting in the movies. I believe I have now worked through some difficult stages, and that my strategies have shifted from idea to production.

The term "digital docu-fiction", as I use it here, is employed to introduce post-docu-fiction in digital filmmaking in contrast with mechanical filmmaking. Therefore, the digital docu-fiction is a form of filmmaking that uses fictionalised facts and real characters in combination with

documentarised fiction using fictional characters, all employing digital filmmaking tools. *A Woman with a Digital Camera* is a good example of a digital docu-fiction. For more details refer back to Chapter 3.

A number of techniques that can be brought on to the board and used with more control using digital film manipulation. For instance, the use of hand-held camera creates the feel of reality (cinéma vérité), especially with the use of new and portable digital cameras. In this form of filmmaking, we can also use non-actors (neo-realist and new wave Iranian filmmakers) or unknown faces – even CGI[19] characters – to tell a story, which could criticise a system, a person or an organisation through a new form of filmmaking. Furthermore, we can use any tool or technique to tell our story, to the extent that those tools and techniques help to increase the believability factors to introduce real-life stories. Even mobile phone cameras and other digital devices – such as computers and tablets – can be used to create moving pictures to simulate reality.[20]

The process of my film was as complicated as that for any feature film made in big studios like those in Hollywood, although for quite different reasons. The main filming process took about two months, and we had from 10 to 25 people working on the set every day. There were many locations in

[19] Computer- generated imagery, including 2D or 3D images.

[20] These days, with the help of software like 3dmax or After Effects, we can create many things, including camera simulation and camera movements.

our script, including a few green screen studio shoots, which were part of the key scenes. The major problem faced on this production was the financial aspect, but this could not be allowed to stop production. By employing digital film technology, the cost of the film dropped dramatically – indeed, without this powerful digital technology I could not achieve my goals. In this regard, the Griffith Film School's invaluable contribution in providing the facilities must also be acknowledged.

During the making of *The Sultan and the Kings*, I experienced a cinema experience that would have been a dream for many filmmakers. For instance, Jafar Panahi, an Iranian filmmaker, was banned from making films because of his alleged activism during the 2009 protests against the contested election. In the source countries where the Kurds live, it is not only the Kurds that face difficulties making films; other artists and filmmakers from non-Kurdish backgrounds – for example, Jafar Panahi – are also persecuted for expressing their thoughts. Unfortunately, he has been detained for years in his own home by the government of Iran. In all these years, he has not been permitted to leave Tehran. During his detention, Panahi circumvented the restriction on his filmmaking by employing digital cameras to make his new film, *This is Not a Film (In Film Nist*, 2011). Basically, this filmmaker, who used to make films with crews and substantial budgets, produced an astonishing film using just his mobile phone and a digital camera. *This is Not a Film* was "smuggled out of Iran … to be shown at Cannes and other international festivals" (Scott, 2012). The

film was screened in the official selection of the Cannes Film festival in 2011. This extraordinary example of employing digital film technology indicates that these powerful digital film tools have democratised the filmmaking process. Now a masterpiece can be produced even if you are jailed or forbidden to access elements of the film industry or major cinematic tools. This digital film technology is powerful enough to facilitate creative filmmakers to produce a moving image of high quality.

In other words, this "cinema of liberty", which I have termed digital docu-fiction, has become a concrete reality and one of the fastest growing forms of cinema in the world. One of the major challenges for filmmakers – especially in areas like Kurdistan – was the accessibility of cinematic tools and materials. These days, professionals and non-professionals are using this new technology extensively, whereas previously cinematic tools were only in the hands of some powerful companies, such as Walt Disney Studios, 20th Century Fox and Universal.

Digital film technology has made tremendous contributions to the film industry in the areas of production, post-production and distribution, and it has also contributed significantly to the new Kurdish cinema. However, despite the huge development in quantity of produced Kurdish films from the 1990s to 2016, we still need to work towards developing the language and styles of Kurdish cinema. As a Kurdish filmmaker in diaspora, I worked towards developing a method that enabled me to overcome some fundamental problems that could halt the whole process of producing my

feature-length film *The Sultan and the Kings*. It is true that cinematic tools are designed to help us to create or visualise our stories. But we should not forget that without accessing these tools, no visualisations would be seen on any screen. Moreover, the abilities and flexibility of these tools are important factors that connect directly to the imaginations of creative filmmakers. I believe my style of filmmaking is novel because, through its use of 'virtual characters', it draws on a particular hybridity of Kurdish and Australian culture and, unlike most Kurdish films, it conveys politics through humour and entertainment rather than through tragedy while maintaining maximum independence through the use of low cost digital techniques. My studio work examples would be great models for other filmmakers want to make independent films. I believe the formation of my studio work is a useful combination of theory and practical methods that enables independent filmmakers – especially Kurdish filmmakers – to develop styles that will enable this newborn form of cinema to stand strongly.

For the above reasons, and to answer my research hypothesis about new cinema appropriately, I employed this strategy to create a film based on a historical character, Saladin.[21] By highlighting the character of Saladin in my film, I was creating a fictional narrative based on historical facts. So I was reconstructing Saladin in modern times as having different ideas from

21 Salah al-Din al-Ayubbi, who is known as Saladin in the West, was born in Tikrit in 1138. This Kurdish warrior founded the Ayyubid dynasty and became the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, and a hero to Muslims.

those he would have had in the past. In Saladin's time, there was a mass campaign by Christians to claim the holy land, which Muslim leaders in their territories saw as an invasion. As James Reston states (2001):

> In 1098 Godfrey of Bouillon had stormed the walls of the Holy City and massacred the Muslim defenders by the thousands. The stone streets of Jerusalem ran with blood, through which the victorious Crusaders waded before falling to their knees in a mass of thanksgiving at Holy Sepulchre (p.9).

Perhaps Saladin emerged as the best leader because he was so strategic and won some important battles. For instance, the siege of Jerusalem happened in 1187 which Saladin finally captured the Holy Land honourably. According to John Man (2015):

> Muslims had had their revenge for the loss of Jerusalem, and it had all been achieved without the bloodshed and destruction unleashed when the Christians had seized it … the first Friday for prayers in the al-Aqsa mosque after the taking of the city was 9 October 1187, and it was the first *khutba* (sermon) in eighty-eight years (p.181).

At that time, the conflict was simply between the Christians and Islam, whereas now – as I point out in my film – Islamic countries are persecuting other Muslims. So the kind of injustice that Saladin would have to face in contemporary times would be a different kind of injustice, one of

internal repression within the Islamic world. For instance, in a dream scene where Saladin appears, as he is thinking and writing of history, he says:

> History remembers me as a hero, while my nation has been slaughtered savagely for hundreds of years by those who I saved and served. In the name of God they have imprisoned, killed, raped and destroyed even though God is the source of mercy and forgiveness. God became an excuse for those evil-minded people to gain power and kill the spirit of God. It's time to have a country of our own. Our children should live in peace and bloodshed should stop forever. I am Saladin the sultan of Egypt and Syria. (*The Sultan and the Kings,* 2005)

Moreover, the character of Saladin in my movie is a Kurdish nationalist. He believes in Kurdish freedom and unity, and he thinks it is time for the Kurds to have a country of our own.

An important aspect of the work is the way in which symbolic historical characters are combined with contemporary living characters. For instance, Yusuf is a symbolic character who carries the integrity and originality of his ancestor, Saladin. Yusuf, of a Kurdish background, lives in a modern Western society, and somehow he is facing the brutality of a terrorist organisation. Yusef blends not only the character of Saladin and his on-screen fictional character, but also elements of my own autobiography as a filmmaker. The story highlights some fundamental historical issues and

religious conflicts in today's world. The movie ends with a clear solution for all these issues.

The Sultan and the Kings has a number of objectives, each of which appears in one stage to take us on a different journey. To understand the main concept of the film, viewers should discover the relationship between the stories and the objects that are symbolically placed in the scenes. For example, the pomegranate appears in several scenes but on its own has little significance. However, when we examine this object in relation to other parts of the story and other elements of the scenes in which it appears, the meaning behind it is revealed. In this way, viewers gain an understanding of the pomegranate's significance. This suggests that a film like this, with so many symbols, cannot be a simple production that only wants to talk about Saladin or King Richard. *The Sultan and the Kings* is open to broad and varied interpretation, depending on how far the viewer is from the history (especially of the Kurds) in general, and how the new world is interpreted.

In *The Sultan and the Kings*, every major character fulfils several roles. So each character has more than one objective. For instance, the main character of the film, Yusuf, appears as Saladin in another scene and Richard, Yusuf's best friend, appears as King Richard in the same scene. So each main character functions differently at different times. Even props do this – for example, the old movie cameras that are placed in Yusuf's house are only decorating the place, and do nothing practical because the old movie equipment does not meet the demands of today's filmmakers. In contrast, the

digital camera that Yusuf is using in the basement has the ability to capture invisible light, so he uses it to capture the images of ghosts.

By juxtaposing the scenes or using parallel scenes, I cue the audience to compare two or more distinct elements by highlighting similarities. For example, immediately after finishing Pinocchio's scene we have the terrorist scene in the car park. By contrasting the two scenes, I am able to suggest that the terrorists cannot be trusted because they are liars. In the next section, I discuss the character of Pinocchio the puppet and its development process in more detail.

The plot of *The Sultan and the Kings* does not present the story segments in an entirely chronological order. For instance, the movie starts with a warrior examining a pomegranate that he is holding in his hand; he then starts playing a flute. In this scene, the timeframe is unknown, but it could be guessed as 500 years ago or more. The movie continues with a few black and white shots, showing the interior of an Australian migrant's house with a subtitle giving the year as 1971. Immediately after these scenes, the movie continues in the present time with the wooden horse scenes and with a long shot of a river, with the subtitle "Brisbane 2014". This cycle of juxtaposition and flashbacks is repeated throughout the movie. This special structure that forms the final style of my film allows me to convey multiple stories and multiple messages to viewers.

The structure of my film was inspired by hybrid genres, while using the codes and conventions of docu-fiction to produce a new digital form that is independent of political and economic interference. This means there could be no outside interference while we were producing our film and distributing it digitally. *The Sultan and the Kings* represented an attempt to find new and more truthful version of a digital film work that could fit into both art-house and commercial film genres while remaining both original and independent.

Figure 9: Hassan Sonboli directing the actor Cooper Ali-Shabazz

Figure 10: Cooper Ali-Shabazz holding the pomegranate

Unfortunately, the culture of going to the movies is dead among the Kurds in the constituent homeland states because of the harsh political repression imposed on the Kurdish people. The population of cinemagoers is so small because Kurdish people do not have that education or experience due to the shortage of cinemas in Kurdistan. For instance, in the city of Mahabad where I grew up, for the population of approximately 200,000 there is only one small cinema, and the movies screened there are of no interest to anyone, so the cinema does not attract people. The same problem exists in all the Kurdish populated areas. For instance, for the total Kurdish population of about 10 million in Iran, only four or five active cinemas are available. Currently, the best solution to reach our Kurdish audiences is digital distribution and internet streaming. However, the

distribution process is still being developed and is beyond the scope of this exegesis.

Developing the Script During Production

For me, the process of making a film is a way of discovering the world and revealing it to others. This is my personal reaction to the events or objects surrounding me. Like any visual artist, I imagine the stories behind objects in order to express my feelings about them and create an original work of art. Technically, my journey of writing a script might start with an object, a person or an event – anything that could connect me to the past, present or future. An idea could come to me, and it could take many months or even years to develop. However, with many ideas in my mind and many stories spinning around in my head, the final plot will remain unknown until real people come in to participate in the process of shaping the script. Improvisation plays a major role in this process.

I learnt this method of filmmaking while I was working with Super 8 films from 1986 to 1994, years before digital technology became readily available to filmmakers. During that period, I learnt to work with what I had, and my way of filmmaking was not about producing a perfect script. Moreover, I was very careful with film cartridges because they were very expensive to buy, and at the same time it was difficult to get sufficient cartridges for my script. The shortage of cartridges meant I could only have one or two takes. Thus I was never fully satisfied with the end-product. From the time I was introduced to digital filmmaking at the beginning of

2003, my filmmaking process changed direction. Thus the way I wrote a script and made a movie was revolutionised by digital technology and my style of filmmaking improved.

For me, digital filmmaking is about having the beginning of an idea, shooting it, looking at it, editing it and shooting extra footage until I get the best result. This is how I employ digital filmmaking – it is my style of working, which I feel is contributing to the development of Kurdish filmmaking, particularly in relation to what other Kurdish filmmakers in the diaspora are doing. During all those years, I went through a huge learning curve to make a film that could work for Kurdish as well as non-Kurdish audiences. In this regard, I enjoy complete artistic control over my films, and it is digital technology that gives me this freedom.

As mentioned already, *The Sultan and the Kings* is not a single-plot movie. The entertaining aspects of my film and the style employed to deliver the stories hold the audience's interest so they want to follow the plot to the end. However, there are many things happening in my film, and in order to really understand it, audience members need to comprehend the metaphors and the inter-scenes. For instance, the character of the puppet, Pinocchio, which appears chronologically in between the scenes is significant. Pinocchio is funny, informative and entertaining especially in the scene where an actor holds and controls the puppet as he is singing and dancing with it.

The combination character of Pinocchio as “puppet” and “human”, where both are dancing and singing, was developed during the process of writing and auditioning. At the beginning, I had the idea of animating the puppet and integrating it with the live action. As I was developing the idea, though, I changed my mind. I realised that Pinocchio had been used in many animation films and I did not want to follow the cliché way of employing that character in my film *The Sultan and The Kings*, so I decided to invent something different and unique. Eventually, I decided on having a symbolic puppet of Pinocchio controlled by an actor. After months of research and experimenting with various designs of Pinocchio, I decided on a puppet with two faces and a moving nose from both sides. This simple design of one happy face and one unhappy face enabled the actor to turn the puppet head around during the performance to show the emotion of the moment.

Figure 11: Hassan Sonboli with Pinocchio the puppet

I developed the main character of Pinocchio early in the audition process, and at that time I decided to use a female actress to play Pinocchio until I found the right applicant: Harry Piaggio, a young man who had a very expressive face and was a good dancer. He filled the role perfectly. Afterwards, I refined the written songs and I used my own voice to sing as Pinocchio. I pre-recorded every song and the actors, including the character of Pinocchio, rehearsed and lip-synched the songs during the filming process.

Figure 12: Harry Piaggio (Pinocchio) during the rehearsal

As I was developing the script, I realised that most of my audiences might not know about the history to which the film referred – especially the

history of Saladin – so I decided to use a narrator to convey this information. Surprisingly after screening the “first cut” of the film, I realised that the appearance of the narrator in between the scenes was more disturbing than it was informative. It also slowed down the movie. As the narrator was filmed against a green screen, I decided to manipulate the shots and use visual effects in order to make those scenes more interesting for the audiences, but this did not work. Subsequently, I realised a very important thing .The person who was playing the narrator was a professional actor. However, he did not enter into the spirit of the movie .So his delivery was not entertaining. In other words, he did not transform to a “virtual character”. Rather, he came over as just a person mouthing words. I wanted a direct connection with actuality through developing a unique “virtual character”. Consequently, I decided to remove the scenes featuring the narrator because they prevented the film from having the desired impact on the audience. However, the structure of the movie required some sort of explanation, and I needed some inter-scenes to hold the plots together in a logical way.

While I was looking through the footage, I realised I had filmed some extra shots of Pinocchio against the green screen to use for the credits at the end. Suddenly the idea of using the puppet as a narrator came to me. My creativity kicked in immediately, I wrote down in my notebook a new scene with some rhyming dialogue that explained the Crusaders’ journey to Jerusalem. I wrote “Oh yes, Crusaders went to Jerusalem / to kill infidels

and doing no harm / they thought of heaven, and joined the charm (Pinocchio is laughing)." Afterwards, I started to sing it and recorded my voice as Pinocchio using a ZOOM recorder, which is a small but powerful digital sound recorder. Next, I started to manipulate the recorded sound and the footage of the puppet using Adobe Premier. Finally, I inserted the puppet scene into the movie and the outcome was fantastic. Thus I decided to reshoot the puppet, as I was writing the songs for the other sections. Accordingly, I invented the extra puppet scenes in order to fill all the gaps that were made by deleting the narrator scenes. The whole process took place during the post-production period using digital film manipulation techniques.

Figure 13: Script development process

Figure 14: Dancing scene using green screen, *The Sultan and the Kings*, left to right, Aimee Lepetia, Kezhal Reyhani (makeup team), David Beamish, Hassan Sonboli

Chapter 5

Conclusion

With docu-fiction or digital docu-fiction, whether we make fictionalised documentaries or documentarised fiction, we have entered into a new form of filmmaking – one in which technological changes have played a fundamental role. Especially for Kurdish filmmakers, digital technology has given the ability to combine different styles of filmmaking to create a new form. As discussed in chapter two, this is a form that was developed and is still used by filmmakers inside Kurdistan during the period of "cinema under oppression" and it continues to be used by Kurdish filmmakers of the "cinema in diaspora". Digital filmmaking technology has democratised the way filmmakers make films and distribute them. In particular, independent Kurdish filmmakers are enjoying the freedom, accessibility, flexibility and affordability offered by these developments. To some extent I believe, this process looks uncontrollable and unstoppable, even by the bureaucrats of countries like Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

For me, producing my studio work was about imagination, creativity, and novelty. Producing *The Sultan and the Kings was* a conscious step towards developing an independent digital cinema. In this regard, I – as an independent filmmaker – controlled the whole process, from pre-production through to post-production. My next step in accomplishing my full mission

will be to work towards general distribution. However, as I mentioned previously, this is beyond the scope of this doctorate. In the near future, as well as my film being seen in movie theatres, I can envisage it circulating all over the world, employing available digital platforms such as Vimeo, Netflix, iTunes, YouTube and digital satellite TV, to reach my target audience.

I used symbolic language to talk indirectly about terrorism, war, religion and the particular Kurdish political situation, to convey my political points to the world. I used aesthetics, not for their own sake but as a vehicle to enlighten my audience about the reality of political life of the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Through the use of my Idiosyncratic aesthetics, I highlighted political issues using my personal experience and the existing cultural, political and economic hardship of the Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan. I strongly consider The *Sultan and the Kings*, to be a hybrid genre, or digital docu-fiction. My use of symbols and the fictional side of the story reflect the reality of today's world in general and the Kurds' political position in particular. With this work of art, I expressed my feelings by blending fact and fiction through employing digital film manipulation and using digital film equipment.

Generally, through finalizing my studio project and my thesis, firstly I have drawn on elements of Kurdish filmmaking tradition through use of symbolism and coding. To these I have added many new influences, which I have internalised as an Australian-Kurdish filmmaker. Accordingly, I bring a unique local set of perspectives to the broader international politics of the

Kurdish nation. Secondly, I have drawn on western culture through developing the actors as "virtual characters". So the virtual characters also bring their unique local perspective to the film. In this regard some of the mise-en-scène reflects my immersion in western culture through long residence outside my homeland. Thirdly, I used humour, song, and romantic narrative to make the politics and culture entertaining. In particular, I used the Pinocchio character to enable people to question the truth or otherwise of the ideology behind all these religious figures. So I was casting doubt on ideology by having it come out of the mouth of a puppet. Finally I highlighted the internal conflict within the world of Islam and the effect of that conflict on countries all over the world.

In addition to providing an exegetical and theoretical background to my own work, this exegesis has provided the foundations of a wider filmography of Kurdish cinema. In so doing, I acknowledge that my work is not only my individual creation, but also part of a wider Kurdish filmmaking movement. I believe that this thesis has gone someway towards documenting the previous history and the current dimensions of that movement. My work in this regard is only a beginning. I expect and hope that others will build on this foundation to consolidate the growing awareness and acceptance of Kurdish filmmaking as a separate and unique voice.

Consequently, I feel I can state with certainty that I have enunciated in my thesis how I have developed a new form of hybrid filmmaking that enlightens the public about Kurdish politics and culture while at the same time being entertaining.

References

Arsalan, S. (2011). *Cinema in Turkey: A new critical history*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Baker, M. (2006). *Documentary in the digital age*. Oxford, England: Focal Press.

BBC News (2014). EU enlargement: The next seven. Retrieved 21 April 2016 from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11283616.

Bordwell, D. &Thompson, K. (2013). *Film art: An introduction*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Bondaneella, P. (1983). *Italian cinema: From neorealism to the present*. New York, NY: Frederick Ungar.

Benge, A. (1985). *Güney, Turkey and the West: An interview.* Race & Class, 26(3): 31-46. Doi: 10.1177/030639688502600303.

Brecht, B. (1949). A Short Organum for the Theatre. In Willett, J. (1964). (Ed. & Trans). *Brecht on theatre: The development of an aesthetic* (pp.179-205). London: Methuen.

Bruzzi, S. (2006). *New documentary*, 2nd ed. London, England: Routledge.

Bazin, A. (2009). The evolution of the language of cinema. In L. Braudy & M. Cohen (Eds.), *Film theory and criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Blakeney, K. (2009). An analysis of film critic Andre Bazin's views on expressionism and realism in film. *Inquiries 1*(12),1-1. Retrieved 20 November 2016 from http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/86/an-analysis-of-film-critic-andre-bazins-views-on-expressionism-and-realism-in-film

Dönmez-Colin, G. (2008). *Turkish cinema: Identity, distance and belonging*. London, England: Reaktion Books.

Dönmez-Colin, G. (2014). *The Routledge dictionary of Turkish cinema*. London, England: Routledge.

Di Stefano Pironti, A. (2015). Kurdish-Australian filmmaker realizes boyhood dream with first feature film. *Rûdaw*, 5 May. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from rudaw.net/English/culture/05052015.

Farzanefar, A. (2005). *Kurdish cinema really started out with Yılmaz Güney*. *Qantara*. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from http://en.qantara.de/content/interview-mehmet-aktas-and-bulent-kucuk-kurdish-cinema-really-started-out-with-yilmaz- Güney.

Forsgren, M. (2016). Halkawt Mustafa.Director. Cineuropa .Retrieved 21 November 2016 from http://cineuropa.org/it.aspx?t=interview&l=en&did=307374

Forth Duhok International Film Festival (2016). Brochure, 9-16 September, Duhok Kurdistan Region-Iraq: KRG. Retrieved 22 February 2016 from http://www.duhokiff.com.

Gunter, M.M. (2013). *The Contemporary roots of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq*, *Kufa Review*, 2(1), 29–47. Retrieved 26 February 2016 from http://www.uokufa.edu.iq/journals/index.php/Kufa_Review/article/viewFile/26/pdf_19.

Gundogdu, M. (n.d.). *An introduction to Kurdish cinema*. Retrieved 11 March 2016 from http://www.academia.edu/5773023/An_Introduction_to_Kurdish_Cinema.

Geiger, J., & Rutskyc, R.L. (2005). *Film analysis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Houston, P. (1963). *The contemporary cinema*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Hope, T. (2014). *Hope for film: From the frontline of the independent cinema revolutions*. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press.

International movie database (2016). Retrieved from http://www.imdb.com.

Jennings, M.W., Howland, E. and Smith, G. (1999). *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings*, vol. 2, part 2,1931-1934. Trans. R. Livingstone and others. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Kutschera, C. (1979). *Le mouvement national kurde* (The Kurdish National Movement). Paris, France: Flammarion.

Kutschera, C. (1983). Kurdistan Turkey: Yılmaz Güney's last film. *The Middle East Magazine*, 339, 56–58. Retrieved 20 March 2016 from http://www.chris-kutschera.com/A/Yilmaz%20Güney.htm.

Kutschera, C. (1997). *Le défi kurde ou le rêve fou de l'indépendance*. Paris, France: Bayard Éditions.

Kutschera, C. (1998). *Le Kurdistan, guide littéraire*. Paris, France: Éditions Favre.

Kutschera, C. (2003). Kurdistan Iran: Bahman Ghobadi and the pain of giving birth to Kurdish cinema. *The Middle East Magazine*, November. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from http://www.chris-kutschera.com/A/bahman_ghobadi.htm.

Kutschera, C. (2005). *Le livre noir de Saddam Hussein*. Paris, France: Oh! Éditions.

Kutschera, C. (2007). *Kurdistan Stories.* Paris, France: Éditions Favre.

Kutschera, C. (2012). *The Long March of the Kurds.* Paris, France: JePublie.

Kocer, S. (2013a). Rhino season is in exile, just like me: An interview with Bahman Ghobadi. *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, 74–79. Retrieved 25 March 2016 from https://www.academia.edu/5361132/_Rhino_Season_is_in_exile_just_like_me_An_interview_with_Bahman_GhobadiKocer.

Kocer, S. (2013b). Making transnational publics: Circuits of censorship and technologies of publicity in Kurdish media circulation. *American Technology*, 40(4), 721–733. Retrieved 25 March 2016 from https://www.academia.edu/5361138/Making_transnational_publics_Circuits_of_censorship_and_technologies_of_publicity_in_Kurdish_media_circulation.

Kilic D. (2007). Melbourne Kurdish film festival finalized, *Kurdish Cinema*, 23 March. Retrieved 25 March 2016 from http://www.kurdishcinema.com/MelbourneKurdishFilmFestivalFinalized.html.

Kilborn, R. and Izod, J. (1997). *An Introduction to television documentary: Confronting reality.* Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.

King, J. (1993). *Kurds*. London, England: Wayland.

Koohzad, M. (2015). Politics of Demography: Nearly 41 million Kurds. *Metro Jacksonville,* 20 September. Retrieved 25 March 2016 from http://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2015-sep-politics-of-demography-nearly-41-million-kurds/page/1.

Kardozi, K. (2012). *The poor state of Kurdish cinema*. Retrieved 25 November 2016 from https://themovingsilent.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/the-poor-state-of-kurdish-cinema/.

Korki, A. S. (2015). H. Sonboli. KRG: email, 21 December.

Lee-Wright, P. (2010). *The documentary handbook.* New York, NY: Routledge.

McKernan, B. (2005). *Digital cinema*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Meiselas, S. (1997). *Kurdistan in the shadow of history.* New York, NY: Random House.

Macdonald, F. (2006). *Saladin*. London, England: New Burlington Books.

Man, J. (2015). *Saladin: The life, the legend and the Islamic empire*. London, England: Bantam Press.

MacDiarmid, C. (2005). Lifting the commercial curse on Kurdish film. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved 25 November 2016 from http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/lifting-commercial-curse-kurdish-film-151206094601072.html.

Mohammed, J. (2010). Muslim cinema: An introduction. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from http://www.myfavoritereview.com/downloads%5C27999091-Muslim-Cinema-An-Introduction.pdf.

My sweet pepper land. (2013). Retrieved from Rohfilm, 21 November 2016.http://www.rohfilm.de/films/completed/AGA/.

Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Naficy, H. (2012a). *A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 3*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Naficy, H. (2012b). *A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 4*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Nichols, B. (2001). *Introduction to documentary*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Petkovic, V. (2014). Erol Mintaş. Director.Cineuropa. Retrieved 21 November 2016 from http://cineuropa.org/it.aspx?t=interview&l=en&did=262232.

Rombes , N. (2009) *Cinema in the digital age*. New York, NY: Wallflower Press.

Rhodes, G.D. & Springer, J.P. (2006). *Docu-fictions*. New York, NY: McFarland and Co.

Rosenthal, A. (1995). *Writing docudrama*. New York, NY: Focal Press.

Rabiger, M. (2009). *Directing the documentary*. New York, NY: Focal Press.

Reston, J. Jr (2001). *Warriors of God*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Ridge. S. (2015). Mass graves of women “too old to be ISIL sex slaves” – this is what we're up against. *The Telegraph*. 17 November. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-politics/12000148/Islamic-State-sex-slaves-Sinjar-mass-graves-show-what-were-fighting.html.

Rojava Report (2014) 6th Anniversary of guerrilla and filmmaker Halil Dag's death. *The Rojava Report*, 1 April. Retrieved 20 March 2016 from https://rojavareport.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/6th-anniversary-of-guerilla-and-film-maker-halil-uysals-death.

Sickels, R. (2011). *American film in the digital age*. New York, NY: ABC-CLIO.

Swartz, C.S. (2005). *Understanding digital cinema: A professional handbook*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Scott, A.Q. (2012). A video from Tehran: It's not what it isn't, but what it is. *New York Times*, 29 February. Retrieved 18 March 2016 from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/29/movies/hes-jafar-panahi-but-this-is-not-a-film.html? _r=1.

Saeedi, E. (2015). H. Sonboli. Iran: email, 22 December.

Smith, L.V. (2014). *Post-war treaties (Ottoman empire/middle east).* Retrieved 20 March 2016 from http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/post-war_treaties_ottoman_empire_middle_east/2014-10-08.

The Age Company (2005). Reel life, real stories . Retrieved 20 February 2016 from http://www.theage.com.au/news/film/reel-life-real-stories/2005/08/22/1124562799974.html.

Treaty of Lausanne (1923). 24 July. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne.

https://rojavareport.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/6th-anniversary-of-guerilla-and-film-maker-halil-uysals-death.

Treaty of Peace with Turkey (1920). 10 August. Retrieved 20 February 2016 from http://treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1920/TS0011.pdf.

Ulin, J.C.(2010).*The business of media distribution*. New York, NY: Focal Press.

Wilkofsky Gruen Associates Inc. and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (2005). *Global entertainment and media outlook, 2006–2005*. New York: PricewaterhouseCoopers. Retrieved 20 March 2016 from http://www.eikenlex.net/images/stories/recursos/datos_estadisticas_estudios/Global%20Overview.pdf.

Yadali, Y. (2014). Independent Iranian cinema: Iranian film works within the limitation of censorship to receive international acclaim. *Sampsonia Way*, 31 October. Retrieved 20 March 2016 from http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2014/10/31/independent-iranian-cinema.

Filmography

Avatar (2009). Directed by James Cameron.

A Time for Drunken Horses (2000). Directed by Bahman Ghobadi.

A Death in Tehran (2009). Directed by David Fanning. Producer: Monica Garnsey.

Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (1896). Directed by Auguste Lumière & Louis Lumière.

A Woman with a Digital Camera (2012). Directed by Hassan Sonboli.

Bekas (2012). Directed by Karzan Kader.

Close Up (1990). Directed by Abbas Kiarostami.

Citizen Kane (1941). Directed by Orson Welles.

Long Live the Bride … and Liberation of Kurdistan (1997). Directed by Hiner Saleem.*Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Directed by Dziga Vertov.

Memories on Stone (2014). Directed by Shawkat Amin Korki.

Rhino Season (2012). Directed by Bahman Ghobadi. *This is Spinal Tap* (1984). Directed by Rob Reiner.

Time Code (2000). Directed by Mike Figgis.*Turtles Can Fly* (2004). Directed by Bahman Ghobadi.

The Bicycle Thief (1949). Directed by Vittorio De Sica.

The Blair Witch Project (1999). Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez.

The Last Season: Shawaks (2009). Directed by Kazim Oz.

The Dark Wind (2016). Directed by Hussein Hassan.

The Sultan and the Kings (2016). Directed by Hassan Sonboli.

Yol (The Way) (1982). Directed by Yılmaz Güney.

Zara (1926). Directed by Hamo Beknazarin (Amo Bek-Nazaryn).

Zapruder Footage (1963). Filmed by Abraham Zapruder.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Filmography of Kurdish Films 1926-2016

Title		Director	Genre	Funder	Cost	Language
Zara* (can be considered a movie with a Kurdish story, not a Kurdish film)	1926-1927	Hamo Bek-Nazarin	Drama	Armenia- Soviet Union	NK	Silent
No Kurdish movies produced	1927 1981	None	None	None	None	None
Yol*	1982	Yılmaz Güney	Feature-drama	Turkey, Switzerland, France	NK	Turkish-Kurdish
Duvar* (The Wall)	1983	Yılmaz Güney	Feature-drama	France	NK	Turkish
A Song for Beko*	1992	Nizamettin Aric	Feature-drama	Armenia, Germany	NK	Kurdish
Rawe Jinoke*** (Exorcism)	1993	Made Omed	Feature	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
De zwijgende reiziger* (A Silent Traveller)	1994	Ibrahim Selman	Feature-drama	Netherlands, filmed in Greece	NK	Kurdish-Dutch
Long Live the Bride and The Liberation of Kurdistan***	1997	Hiner Saleem	Feature	France	NK	Kurdish-French
Khola Piza	1998	Jaleel Zangana	Feature-Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
The Burning Paradise***	1999	Araz Rashid	Feature-Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
A Time for Drunken Horses*	2000	Bahman Ghobadi	Feature-Drama	Privet investors	NK	Kurdish-Farsi

Beyond our Dreams	2000	Hiner Saleem	Feature-Drama	France, Armenia, Italy	NK	Kurdish-French
Fotograf * (The Photograph)	2001	Kazim Oz	Feature-Drama	Kurdish Community funded the production	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Iro-Sibe*** (Today-Tomorrow)	2002	Sarbast Rasol	Drama	Sweden Russia	NK	Russian
Marooned in Iraq*	2002	Bahman Ghobadi	Feature-drama	Private investor Mij Film Co	NK	Kurdish-Farsi
Jiyan* (life)	2002	Jano Rosebiani	Drama-Romance	Iraq-USA	NK	Kurdish
Tiraj***	2002	Halil Uysal	Docu-fiction	Kurdistan-Mountain Film	NK	Kurdish
Eyne Bejne*** (Tall Mirror)	2002	Halil Uysal	Feature- Docu-fiction	Kurdistan - Mountain Film	NK	Kurdish
Gejaw*** (Whirlpool)	2002	Hawrey Mustafa	Feature-Drama	KRG-Xak	NK	Kurdish
Yellow Days	2002	Ravin Asaf	Feature-Drama	Turkey, Germany	NK	Kurdish
War is Over*	2003	Bahman Ghobadi	Documentary	Miffilm	NK	Farsi
Vodka Lemon*	2003	Hiner Saleem	Comedy-Drama	France,Italy, Switzerland, Armenia	NK	Kurdish
A Little Bit of Freedom*	2003	Yüksel Yavuz	Feature-Drama	Germany	NK	Kurdish-Turkish-German
Xewnen Rangin*** (Colourful Dreams)	2003	Mano Khalil	Feature	Switzerland	NK	Kurdish
Mama Risha	2003	Jaleel Zangana	Feature-Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Before Dawn***	2003	Anwar Sindi	Feature -drama	Denmark	NK	Kurdish
Jana Zirav*** (Delicate Pain)	2004	M. Sait Alpasian	Feature -drama	NK	NK	Kurdish

Turtles Can Fly*	2004	Bahman Ghobadi	Feature -drama	Iran, France, Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Hello Holland***	2004	Akram Sulayman	Feature drama	Holland	NK	Kurdish-English-Dutch
Follow the Feather*	2004	Nurray Sahin	Drama-Romance	Germany	€500k	Kurdish-German
Kilometre Zero*	2005	Hiner Saleem	Comedy-Drama	France, Finland, Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish Arabic-French
Narcissus Blossom*	2005	Masoud Arif Salih & Hussein Hassan Ali	Feature- Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq), France	NK	Kurdish
Requiem of Snow*	2005	Jamil Rostami	Feature- Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq), Iran	NK	Kurdish
Fratricide*	2005	Yılmaz Arslan	Feature- Drama	France, Germany	€1,500k	Kurdish-Turkish-French
David and Layla*	2005	Jay Jonroy	Romance	USA	NK	English-Kurdish
Bekhal's Tears*	2005	Lauand Omar	Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	US$60k	Kurdish
Night of Many Years***	2006	Made Omed	Feature	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Half Moon*	2006	Bahman Ghobadi	Drama	Austria, France, Iran,Iraq	NK	Kurdish-Persian
Crossing the Dust****	2006	Shawkat Amin Korki	Feature-Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	US$350k	Kurdish
Beritan***	2006	Halil Uysal & Dersim Zeravanr	Docu-fiction	Kurdistan-Mountain Film	NK	Kurdish
Jani Gal*	2007	Jamil Rostami	Drama history	Kurdistan (Iraq) Suli Film Jamil Rostami Mazhar Khaleghi	NK	Kurdish

Bahoz (The Storm)	2008	Kazim Oz	Drama	Turkey	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
The Smell of Apples*	2008	Ravin Asaf	Drama	Germany	NK	Kurdish
My Marlon and Brando*	2008	Huseyin Karabey	Drama	Turkey, UK, Netherlands	NK	Kurdish-Turkish-English
Min Dit* (Before Your Eyes)	2009	Miraz Bezar	Drama	Bezar Film Corazon International (Germany)	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Kick Off****	2009	Shawkat Amin Korki	Fiction	Kurdistan (Iraq) Japan	US$500k	Kurdish
No One Knows About Persian Cats*	2009	Bahman Ghobadi	Doco-drama	Independent	NK	Farsi
The Last Season: Shawaks*	2009	Kazim Oz	Documentary	Co-production with ARTE-France	NK	Kurdish Turkish
All My Mothers *****	2009	Abbas Ghazali & Ebrahim Saeedi	Documentary	Private funding	US$80k	Farsi
Min Dit**	2009	Miraz Bezar	Drama	Turkey, Germany	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Efsaneya Kawaye Asinger* (The Legend of Kawa the Blacksmith)	2009	Stuart Palmer & Havi Ibrahim	Feature-CGI Animation	UK	£80k	Kurdish-English
Mandoo*****	2010	Ebrahim Saeedi	Feature- Drama	Ministry of Culture of Kurdistan (Iraq) & Privet funding	US $300k	Kurdish
The Quarter of the Scarecrows**	2010	Hassan Ali	Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish Arabic
Shadow of a Bullet**	2011	Masoud Ari	Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Doz**	2011	Viyan Mayi	Drama	KRG	NK	Kurdish
Min Kiyim** (who am I)	2011	Esin Akgul	Documentary	Turkey	NK	Kurdish
The Guerrilla Son**	2011	Zanyar Adami &	Documentary	Sweden, Norway	NK	Swedish Kurdish

		David Herdies				
Ek Momik Du Momik** (one Candle two Candle)	2011	Jano Rosebiani	Feature	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Si Tu Meurs, Je Te Tue** (If you Die, I will Kill you)	2011	Hiner Salem	Drama	France	NK	French-Kurdish
Şirîn** (Shirin)	2012	Hassan Ali	Drama	KRG, France	NK	Kurdish-French
SeguseyMerg** (Death Trangle)	2012	Adnan Osman	Drama	KRG	NK	Kurdish
Helana** Sotawakan (Burning Nests)	2012	Shahram Maslakhi	Drama	Iran	nk	Kurdish-Farsi
10 Çirke** (10 Seconds)	2012	Ako Aziz	Drama	KRG	NK	Kurdish
Avalin Roze Barani** (First Rainy Day)	2012	Najia Salimi	Feature	Iran	NK	Kurdish
Rhino Season*	2012	Bahman Ghobadi	Feature- Drama	Turkey, Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Turkish-Farsi
In the Lion's Den*	2012	Fekri Baroshi	Frama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	US$350k	Arabic-Kurdish
Bekas*	2012	Karzan Kader	Feature- Drama	Sweden, Finland Location: Kurdistan (Iraq)	€2,000k	Kurdish
Where is the Land*	2013	Hushyar Nerwayi	Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	US$k	Kurdish
Before Snowfall*	2013	Hisham Zaman	Drama	Norway, Germany Iraq	NOK 19,000k	Kurdish
Leave to Stay*	2013	Awat Osman Ali	Drama-Romance	UK Kurdistan (Iraq)	£30k	Arabic-English-Kurdish
Samyan*	2013	Mohammad Jano	Action-Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	Nk	Kurdish

The Last Winter*	2013	Salem Salavati	Drama	Iran	Nk	Kurdish
My Sweet Pepper Land*	2013	Hiner Saleem	Drama	Germany, France, Kurdistan (Iraq)	**€2,600k****	Kurdish
1001 Apples*	2013	Taha Karim	Documentary	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Derbuyina Ji Bihuste* (The Fall From Heaven)	2014	Ferit Karahan	Drama	Turkey, Italy	NK	Kurdish-Turkey
Letter to the king	2014	Hisham Zaman	Feature- Drama	Norway, U.A. Emirates	NK	Kurdish-Farsi-Norwegian-English
Song of My Mothers*	2014	Erol Mintas	Drama	Ministry of culture Kurdish Community-Cinemas du Monde-1000 VOLT-Turkey-Germany-France	**€300K***	Kurdish-Turkish
Once Upon a Time*	2014	Kazin Oz	Feature Documentary	Turkey	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Mua ye be Asa* (Moses without Rod)	2014	Aydin Orak	Documentary	Turkey	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
The Fall from Heaven*	2014	Ferit Karahan	Feature drama		NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Mardan*	2014	Batin Ghobadi	Drama	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Come to My Voice*	2014	Husein Karabay	Feature- Drama	Turkey, Germany, France	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Memories on Stone****	2014	Shawkat Amin Korki	Feature drama	Kurdistan (Iraq), Germany	US$1,000k	Kurdish
Helin***** (The Nest)	2014	Ebraim Saeedi	Documentary	Privet funding KRG	US$80K	Kurdish
Semay Espekan* (The Dance of Horses)	2015	Sardar Khalil	Feature- drama	KRG	NK	Kurdish
Balanja*	2015	Ali Raheem	Documentary	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish-Arabic

El Clasico*	2015	Halkawt Mustafa	Drama	Norway,Iraq	**€2000k**	Kurdish-Arabic-Spanish
The Sultan and the Kings*	2015	Hassan Sonboli	Docu-fiction	Australia	A$20k	English-Kurdish
Flag without a Country*	2015	Bahman Ghobadi	Drama-Doco	Kurdistan (Iraq)	NK	Kurdish
Mikael	2015	Kurdo Doski	Feature-Documentary-Drama	KRG, USA, UAE	NK	Kurdish-English
Malawa Analog (Farewell Analog)	2015	Hiwa Aminnejad	Comedy-Mystery	Iran	NK	Kurdish-Farsi
Heft Rojen Li Ciya** (Seven Days in Mountain)	2015	Nabaz Ahmed & Zmanko Kareem	Documentary	KRG	NK	Kurdish
Li Kive Dadem** (Where to Land)	2015	Hakar Abdulqadir	Documentary	KRG	NK	Kurdish-Persian
Bîranîna Hespa Reş** (Black Horse Memories)	2015	Shahram Alidi	Drama	Iran,Turkey	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Maryam the last Season**	2015	Tayebe Babaei	Documentary	Iran	NK	Kurdish
Toz Bezi** Dust Cloth**	2015	Ahu Ozturk	Drama	Turkey, Germany	NK	Turkish-Kurdish
Çinara Sipî**	2015	Kazim Oz	Documentary	Turkey	NK	Kurdish-Turkish
Veşartî**	2015	Ali Kemal Çınar	Drama	Turkey	NK	Kurdish

Pako**	2015	Welid M. Taher	Feature	KRG	NK	Kurdish-Arabic
Hechecik** (The Swallow)	2016	Mano Khalil	Drama	Switzerland	NK	German-Kurdish-English
Mala Be Ban** (House Without Roof)	2016	Soleen Yusef	Drama	Germany, KRG	NK	German-Kurdish-Qatar
Reşeba** (The Dark Wind)	2016	Hussein Hassan	Drama	KRG, Qatar ,Germany	NK	Kurdish-Arabic
The Kurdish Dream-War or Peace**	2016	Kae Bahar&Claudio Von Planta	Documentary	KRG, UK	NK	Kurdish-English
Bihuşta Min** (My Paradise)	2016	Ekrem Heydo	Documentary	Kurdistan (Iraq) ,Germany	NK	Kurdish-Arabic
Gulîstan**, Land of Roses	2016	Zaynê Akyol	Documentary	Canada, Germany	NK	Turkish-Kurdish
The Girl Who Saved My Life**	2016	Hogir Hirori	Documentary	Sweden, KRG	NK	Kurdish
I Dance With God**	2016	Hooshang Mirzaee	Documentary	Iran	NK	Kurdish

Note. Data with (*) from IMDb (2016), for data with (**) from Duhokiff (2012 to 2016), for data with (***) form Kurdishcinema (2010), for data with (****) from Shawkat Amin Korki (2015), for data with (*****) from Ebrahim Saeedi (2015), bold headed data from Cineuropa (2016), bold headed data with (*) from Cineuropa (2014), bold headed data with (**) from rohfilm (2005). KRG stands for Kurdistan Regional Government.

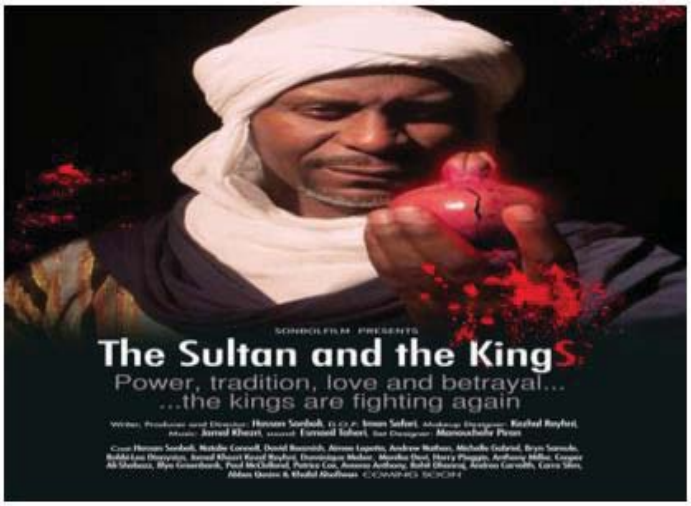
Appendix 2: Kurdish-Australian filmmaker realizes boyhood dream with first feature film

rudaw.net/english/culture/05052015

Culture & Art

Kurdish-Australian filmmaker realizes boyhood dream with first feature film

By Alexandra Di Stefano Pironti 5/5/2015



Picture of movie poster courtesy of director.

BARCELONA, Spain - For Hassan Sonboli, a Kurdish immigrant in Australia, the completion of his first independent feature film is the realization of a dream nurtured since boyhood in Iran.

The Sultan and the Kings is ready for its debut since completing post-production in March, said Sonboli, who was born in the city of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan in 1970.

"During my filmmaking career I have made more than 20 short films and

Tags : Hassan Sonboli, The Sultan and the Kings, film, Australia, Iran, Kurds, Saladin

A A

Like 256

Send

Tweet

G+1 1

Share this

+ add to watchlist

Related Stories

» Iran will not tolerate Kurdish independence, 'ISIS and Israel benefit only'

» Iranian FM warns Saudis

RÛDAW

Culture & Art

Kurdish-Australian filmmaker realizes boyhood dream with first feature film

5/5/2015

BARCELONA, Spain - For Hassan Sonboli, a Kurdish immigrant in Australia, the completion of his first independent feature film is the realization of a dream nurtured since boyhood in Iran.

The Sultan and the Kings is ready for its debut since completing post-production in March, said Sonboli, who was born in the city of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan in 1970.

“During my filmmaking career I have made more than 20 short films and documentaries, and The Sultan and the Kings is my first independent feature film made in Australia,” Sonboli told Rudaw.

He wrote, produced and directed the 77-minute English-language film. The Kurdish-Australian production was facilitated and sponsored by the Griffith Film School in Brisbane, Australia.

It is the story of Yusuf, a freelance filmmaker who discovers a small box in the basement of his home. He finds documents proving he is related to the great King Saladin, the heroic 12th century founder of the Ayubbid dynasty, who was a Kurd. The adventure begins when Yusuf’s find attracts the attention of a terrorist group.

Sonboli called the film part history, part docudrama and partly a musical.

Through symbols and iconic historical figures such as Saladin and King Richard the Lion Heart, Sonboli addresses current issues in the Middle East, including the problem of terrorism in the region and the world. He juxtaposes religion with Kurdish liberalism and independence.

“I worked on this film for about two years,” said Sonboli, who is part of the movie’s Eastern and Western cast of actors.

As a boy in Mahabad, it was through acting that Sonboli became smitten with filmmaking.

“I was attracted to movies when I was about eight-years-old, so I started acting in the only local theater, which was available through the only library in our city,” he recalled. “At that time, I thought that movies were made by the actors themselves. That is why I decided to join the local theater.”

Before getting any studies or training in filmmaking, he decided to make a film. He bought some film, borrowed a Super 8 camera from a local photographer and shot his first short piece.

“Surprisingly, it was accepted at a film festival and this was my first attempt and experience to get into a film festival,” Sonboli recalled.

When the Iranian Youth Cinema Society opened in his city he was the first person to excitedly enroll. He began studying filmmaking and photography, later earning awards and achievements in both fields, while also remaining busy with scriptwriting.

“Later on I migrated to Australia to start a new life. So I decided to study film academically,” he said.

For his Master’s degree in filmmaking, which he completed with honors, he made a 14-minute film called Pawana, a Girl from Halabja.
“It has been about four years now that I am studying for my Doctorate, which I am about to finish soon,” he said, explaining that he has been busy making films during that time.

First he made a 14-minute docudrama called A Woman with a Digital Camera and now he is waiting for The Sultan and the Kings to debut.

Print

Appendix 3: The Plot of *The Sultan and the Kings*

1. An overview of SALADIN's life Via opening commentary.
2. An AFRICAN WARRIOR is sitting on the floor and looking directly at a pomegranate, which is in his hand. He plays flute.
3. 1971 – Australia. YUSUF's father, ISHMAEL, is holding a baby (Yusuf) in hand and whispering into his ear.
4. Ishmael is adding Yusuf's name to the family tree.
5. DAVID purchases a wooden horse.
6. A truck loaded with a wooden horse is passing by a few streets.
7. The horse is standing in the corner of an antique shop.
8. Yusuf is dreaming. A lady is dancing. It is Yusuf's birthday and his friends RICHARD, SARA, SHERKO and David visiting him. Yusuf introduces his girlfriend NATALIA to them.
9. Sara is sitting at a dressing table. Richard is still in bed. He wakes up. They have a conversation.
10. Richard and Sara are dancing in a palace. It is the twelfth century and they are dressed as a King and Queen.
11. Sara and Richard are dancing in the bedroom (present time).
12. Sara, Natalia and Yusuf are sitting around a table with coffees and scripts on the table. They have a conversation.
13. Yusuf and Natalia are in the basement. They are setting up the filming equipment. They are having a conversation about ghosts.
14. Shirko is playing Setar. His GIRLFRIEND, dressed in Kurdish clothing, is enjoying the music.

15. Yusuf and Natalia are in the basement. Sara arrives. Yusuf finds a box.
16. Shirko and Yusuf are having a conversation on the phone.
17. Basement. Yusuf, Sara, Natalia and Shirko are looking at the mystery box. They talk about the contents of the box.
18. ALI (Terrorist 1) is watching the news on TV. The news is about Saladin's treasure box. Ali is talking on the phone. He is having a strange conversation with his friend (Terrorist 2) about the mystery box.
19. Yusuf is cooking in his kitchen. He is having a conversation with Ali over the phone.
20. Dream scene. Sara and Natalia are fighting in a cage.
21. Sara is waking up from her dream. She is having a conversation with her husband, Richard.
22. Antique shop. David and Yusuf are talking on the phone.
23. Yusuf's house. Yusuf is bargaining to get a wooden horse from his friend David over the phone.
24. A theatrical show, King Richard and his followers are appearing. They sing the Nebula Song. Richard is holding a horse's head.
25. Richard is getting into his car.
26. Two BAD GUYs are chasing a DRUNKEN GIRL. The drunken girl asks for help.
27. Richard helps out the drunken girl. He is fighting the two bad guys.

28. Richard rescues the drunken girl. He is driving towards the city. The drunken girl goes to sleep. The police are approaching them. The police take them both to the police station.
29. Yusuf is dreaming. Saladin is in the dream. Saladin is thinking and writing.
30. The doorbell rings. Yusuf wakes up.
31. Sara interrupts Yusuf's dream. Sara, who is in love with Yusuf, is trying to seduce him. Richard is calling from police station and leaves a message on the phone. Sara is dissatisfied with Yusuf. She slaps Yusuf and leaves.
32. Yusuf drops Richard at his house. Sara is watching them from behind the curtain.
33. Yusuf and Natalia are filming around the river. Natalia invites Yusuf for dinner at her place.
34. AUNTY ROSE is cooking. Natalia and Aunty Rose are having a conversation. The bell rings. Yusuf arrives.
35. Aunty Rose, Natalia and Yusuf are having dinner. They are having a conversation.
36. The theatrical show (2). King David and his WIVES are singing the Nebula Song while David holds a horse's tail.
37. Yusuf is sitting in front of the computer typing a story. The doorbell rings.
38. Yusuf opens the door. He is face to face with Richard.

39. Richard and Yusuf are having a fight.
40. KING RICHARD and Sultan Saladin are fighting. Sara and Natalia are dressed like queens. They react, as both are watching the fight. Saladin strikes Richard with his sword. (Dream)
41. Richard and Yusuf's fight is finished. Both are exhausted. Sara arrives. (Present time)
42. (Unknown time) A candle is burning. Someone is writing with a quill under the candlelight. (Voice over)
43. A lantern is alight. An unknown writer is typing a sentence with an old typewriter. (Voice over)
44. (Unknown time) A person is typing with an old typewriter. (Voice over)
45. Yusuf is in front of his computer. He is writing. (Voice over)
46. The theatrical show (3). Sultan Saladin and his followers are appearing. They are singing the Nebula Song. Saladin sits on the back of a wooden hors with no tail or head.
47. Coffee shop. Yusuf and Ali are having a conversation.
48. Dream. Natalia and Yusuf are sitting in a circle of pomegranates.
49. Pomegranates are everywhere. Yusuf is sleeping on the couch. Yusuf rolls over. He falls down and crashes on to the pomegranates.
50. The theatrical show (4). Pinocchio is dancing and singing the Nebula Song.
51. The car park. Ali has kidnapped Natalia and holds her as a hostage.
52. Yusuf is receiving a call from the kidnappers.

53. Yusuf is going to Natalia's house. He is having a conversation with Aunty Rose. He finds out that Natalia has been kidnaped. He leaves.
54. Ali is having a conversation with his hostage, Natalia. He is feeling sympathy for her. Ali changes his mind about keeping Natalia as a hostage. He calls Yusuf and asks him to come and take her back.
55. Yusuf is driving around. He shouts while having a conversation on the phone with Ali. Yusuf is so angry about the situation.
56. Ali's collaborator (Terrorist 2) finds out about his plan to free Natalia, so he decides to kill Ali (Terrorist 1).
57. Yusuf is doing his best to get to the address given to him by Ali to get Natalia.
58. Terrorist 2 kills Ali with a gunshot. He points at Natalia to kill her as well. Yusuf arrives on time and kills Terrorist 2 with his gun.
59. The theatrical show (5). Everyone on the theatre stage is singing and dancing. King Richard attaches the horse's head to the body. King David attaches the tail to the horse. They assemble the body parts. Everyone is dancing and singing around the wooden horse. They sing the Nebula Song together.
60. The African warrior holds the pomegranate. He whispers "UNITY".

The End

Appendix 4: *The Sultan and the Kings* (DVD)

A Woman with a Digital Camera (DVD)