# Roots and Routes: Kurdish Literature as World Literature

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**Zhila Gholami**
**BA, MA**

**School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences**

**Griffith University**

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**Abstract**

Over the last two decades, the literary world has seen many new works by Kurdish writers and poets who have authored works of fiction, memoir and collections of poetry in the English language. This thesis, *Roots and Routes: Kurdish Literature as World Literature*, is the study of this body of work. As the first comprehensive study to cover the existing and emerging Kurdish Anglophone writings, this study introduces these writings into the arena of world literatures in English. However, it also identifies these works as a new literary canon in the realm of Kurdish literature. This study is an attempt to investigate why and how these Anglophone Kurdish writings emerged, who their intended readers are, and what roles these writings play or can play. To find answer to these questions, this study examines both the contexts out of which and in which these writings have emerged. It positions them in the historical and geopolitical contexts they have emerged from and examines the new and broader cultural, literary and socio-political contexts in which they have been produced, circulated and received. Looking at these two contexts, this study finds that these writings have created and can continue to create new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question(s) and Kurdish people. It asserts that these writings entail a kind of activism and create an arena of struggle and Kurdish voice of resistance beyond their imposed national borders, in the wider context of the world. It is within this context that this study argues for this body of work as a new discursive space of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish questions and Kurdish people in global and transnational contexts. In its reading of the texts, this study, drawing on various theoretical frameworks and taking a reception-based or readerly pragmatics approach, aims to explore how these texts interact with their implied readers and the ways they might be read. It seeks to explore not only why but also and more significantly how these writings of different genres bear witness to Kurdish traumatic history and act as testimony. In short, it looks at both politics and poetics of witnessing and testimony in the emerging Anglophone writings by Kurdish diaspora authors.

**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.

Zhila Gholami

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**Dedication**

To Aras, for your love and support. This dissertation is as much as yours as mine.
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# Chapter One—Kurdish Anglophone Literature: An Introduction

## Introduction

Over the last two decades, the literary world has seen many new works by Kurdish writers and poets who have authored works of fiction, memoir and collections of poetry in the English language. This body of writings belongs to Kurdish diaspora authors, both first- and second-generation, and takes Kurdish oppressed history and identity as its subject. These include works by well-known and already established Kurdish authors such as Choman Hardi (2004, 2015) and Nazand Begikhani (2006), who have published several collections of poetry in the Kurdish language prior to their collections of poetry in English, and works of authors such as Behrouz Boochani (2018), Laleh Khadivi (2009, 2013, 2017), Qasham Balata (2010), Kae Bahar (2015) and Widad Akreyi (2019), whose Anglophone works are their first literary experiences. This literature emerged as the result of Kurdish mobility, migration and displacement, as well as recent Kurdish cross- and trans-cultural interactions and encounters with the world, and formed at the junctions of Kurdish culture and experience and the transnational and global world. This can also be seen as part of the larger cross-cultural connections and interactions that characterise our globalised world, where people and things travel across and between different cultures and have become more and more connected. With the changes in the contemporary world, the world of literature also has witnessed significant changes. Mass human migration, transcultural encounters and technological developments have given rise to new modes of writing, reading and circulating literary works. Thus, the new writings by Kurdish diaspora authors that this study addresses are also part of these processes.

What these Kurdish authors have done is not a new phenomenon, as there is a long history of production and circulation of English writings by non-English authors on the world literary scene. Authors such as Joseph Conrad, Chinua Achebe, Andre Brink, Vladimir Nabokov and J.M. Coetzee, and more recent authors from different parts of the world such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Mohsin Hamid, Azar Nafisi, Porchista Khakpour, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Amanitta Forna are only a few such prominent authors. Over the last several decades, this trend has become increasingly

popular, and world literature in English has witnessed the emergence and circulation of a growing number of such writings with new titles emerging every day. A glimpse at the array of recent world literature in English reveals that a large body of such writings belongs to migrant and diasporic authors, which represent stories and memories of home, and displacement and life in exile, as does the Kurdish Anglophone literature. Kurdish Anglophone writings are narratives of home, loss of home and making home elsewhere in the world. They are stories and testimonies of political and cultural oppression in their home country. They are personal and collective memories of oppression, suppression, domination, discrimination and injustice that are indexed to real historical events in the history of Kurds, and they include personal narratives of displacement, migration from home and life in exile.

Thus, contrasting with the global presence and circulation of Kurdish Anglophone literature is the strong and enduring connection of these writings with the authors' homeland and Kurdish people and their strong engagement with Kurdish history. These Kurdish writings have been produced and published beyond their culture of origin—beyond Kurdish geographical, national and linguistic boundaries—and circulate in the wider context of the world among a cosmopolitan and global readership. This is while the world written into these texts is confined almost exclusively to Kurdish homeland, history and identity. These Kurdish authors largely deal with their home, and their past and present lives, and shared the world in which they live. Although these writings all engage with recognisable Kurdish themes found across the breadth of Kurdish literature, particularly Kurdish diasporic literature, they are not and should not be viewed in the same way as the older Kurdish diasporic literature produced in Kurdish language. This is because this new body of writings have been consciously produced within an international setting and intended from the outset for a non-Kurdish readership and circulation far beyond the author's national sphere. This thesis is structured around the following questions: Why and how has this body of works emerged? Why have these authors brought the local to the global? Who are their intended readers? Why they have written themselves and their history for a non-Kurdish audience? What roles do, or can their writings play? How have these works been received, or might be received and perceived, in these new contexts by their implied readers?

Kurdish Anglophone literature is a newly published body of work. Some of these writings appeared in the last few years, and all others date back to less than two

decades. This kind of writing is a new phenomenon in the Kurdish context and in Kurdish literature. Kurdish Anglophone literature, compared to, for instance, existing Persian, Arabic and Turkish Anglophone literature, has had a late emergence and is far fewer in number. To give an example, Sanaz Fotouhi (2012) states that the number of Persian Anglophone literature published in the last several decades has exceeded 200 books,[1] while the Kurdish Anglophone literature has been nearly 20 books. Despite this, Kurdish Anglophone writings have gained considerable attention from writers, critics and scholars all around the world. They have attracted significant critical acclaim and garnered international praise. They have received international awards; multiple book launches of these works have been held in transnational contexts; some have been reviewed in international magazines or published in textbooks in Western countries; and there are a number of academic studies, reviews, and readings on these Kurdish-English writings.

The reception of these works can be divided into two categories: Kurdish and non-Kurdish readers, reviewers and critics. While this thesis provides an overview of both categories, what is at stake for this study is how these writings have been received in their intended contexts and how they have been read by their implied readers, since they are aimed at a non-Kurdish readership. As the literature review will show, the majority of this second category of reviews and readings on Kurdish Anglophone writings—of which there are not many, and only a few are on the writings of Hardi and Begikhani particularly—refer to these authors as the new voices of Kurdish people whose works witness Kurdish traumatic history. Kurdish experience of oppression and violence is the major theme of these writings' reception (Bengio, 2019; Crucefix, 2016; McDermott, 2005; McKane, in Begikhani, 2006; Williams, 2011). For instance, British poet Richard McKane asserts Begikhani and Hardi as 'true voices of the Kurds in English' (Begikhani, 2006, p. 7). Pakistani-British poet Moniza Alvi (2020) also names Hardi and Begikhani as two 'great exiled poets of the past' and remarks that together they 'carry the weight and diversity of experiences which their poems help us to confront'. Of Begikhani's *Bells of Speech*, she writes, 'Like bells, they sound clear musical notes and linger in the mind long after they have first been heard' (Alvi, in Begikhani, 2006). Nerys Williams (2011) also attributes Hardi's role as a 'fact-finder, gatherer of narratives and the speaker on

[1] For more information about Persian Anglophone literature see Fotouhi's (2012) doctoral thesis, *Ways of Being, Lines of Becoming: A Study of Post-Revolutionary Diasporic Iranian Literature in English*.

behalf of those who have suffered' (p. 80). Williams believes that Hardi's role is the 'chronicler of testimonies', particularly of the Anfal genocide, and she 'serves as an ethical witness' (p. 81). In his review on Hardi's *Considering the Women*, British poet, translator and reviewer Martyn Crucefix (2016) asserts that her work 'is unique and deserves as much notice as we can give it', and that it is 'the world's blindness to real events in Kurdish-Iraq that Hardi wishes to correct'. This study takes this set of arguments put forth by these non-Kurdish readers, reviewers and critics as points of departure and aims to explore the basis of their contentions. It asks how we can substantiate their claims through reading the texts. For instance, how do these poems 'confront' Alvi—or any reader—with the 'weight they or the poets carry', and what is in these poems and how they are articulated that the sounds and images 'linger in the mind of the readers long after they have first been heard' (Alvi, 2020)? What makes McKane think of these poets as voices—true voices—of the Kurds? How can the poems of Hardi and Begikhani and other Kurdish Anglophone writings act as voices for the Kurdish people and as testimonies of Kurdish history?

As the first comprehensive study to introduce and address these Kurdish writings as a body of work, this study aims to develop a greater understanding of these writings, individually and collectively, their nature and significance. It seeks to examine and contextualise these writings in relation to the historical and geopolitical contexts out of and in which they have emerged, to explore why and how they have done so. As much as it is concerned with the content of these texts, this study explores the condition of these writings' production, circulation and reception on the world literary scene. It believes that what needs to be explored about these writings—before looking at their content or comparing them with older Kurdish literature, which some existing literature on these writings has already done—is why and how they have emerged and how they have been received in their new contexts. Thus, before presenting the analytical chapters, this study will look at the historical and geopolitical contexts out of which these writings emerge in Chapter Three, and review the new and broader cultural and political contexts of these writings and the importance of this in Chapter Four.

By examining these contexts and exploring the processes that led to the emergence of these writings, this study contends that this body of writings contributes to the long history of Kurdish struggle for recognition and self-determination, and should be understood as a site of Kurdish struggle for recognition and justice. It

argues that these writings—with the exception of the works of second-generation author Khadivi—entail a form of activism that acts or creates an arena of struggle and Kurdish voice of resistance. To show this, this study will examine the life and works of these authors to see how they both individually and collectively act or create an arena of struggle. Much of the scholarship dealing with these works, by Kurdish scholars and critics, is framed in relation to the historical and socio-political contexts of these writings or comparative studies with older Kurdish literature. They often missed or rarely pointed to the nature and significance of these works. Almost all previous studies failed to acknowledge the emergence of Kurdish Anglophone literature as a body of work; moreover, they took the reader and reception of these works for granted. This is one of the central issues regarding these writings on which this study aims to shed light.

The current study not only looks at how and why these texts have been written for the world but, more importantly, how the world—the Kurdish world—is written into these texts, and how these texts interact with their implied readers. It is practically impossible to see the reception of these writings among and by public readers to gauge how these texts have been received and read as there are only a few readings and reviews on them. In its reading of the texts, this study aims to take a reception-based or readerly pragmatics approach to explore the ways these texts might be read and how these texts interact or can interact with their readers. This study argues that these texts act as testimony and bear witness to Kurdish history; thus, it seeks to explore how they bear witness in a way that engages their readers. It argues that these writings act or create an arena of struggle for Kurdish recognition; thus, it seeks to explore acts of recognition and interaction in the reader's text relationship. In other words, it tries to determine how recognition and interaction might occur through the employed elements, narrative forms, literary techniques, dominant voices, modes of attention these texts invite, and certain tropes and uses of tropes. As the analysis of the texts will show, the poetics and strategies employed within the texts reveal the politics surrounded these testimonial texts and their larger political and ideological objectives.

What needs to be mentioned here is that by political objectives this study does not mean that these texts are a sort of political writings, but writings that are politically engaged. As resistance writings and as a literature rising from oppression and struggle, these Kurdish writings are unavoidably politically engaged. As Elleke

Boehmer (2018) argues, ‘resistance literature is a politically determined writing’ (p. 50). The question that might be raised here is that how this study views these writings as resistance writings. This study views Kurdish Anglophone literature as resistance literature—a continuation of Kurdish long history of resistance—because in the condition that a regional project is the destruction of Kurdish identity, history and culture, and there is no significant global recognition of the Kurdish question, such attempts by Kurdish authors can be seen as a powerful form of resistance against the obliteration of their identity and culture, and acts of struggle for Kurdish recognition beyond their imposed national borders. What is significant about these writings is that they are not only and simply about the Kurdish question—the question of a homeland—but about Kurdish questions. Interestingly, traces of Kurdish claims of statehood or self-determination are rarely found in these writings. As will be seen, these writers at some points evoke their or Kurdish people’s desire of having a homeland of their own, but they largely write about Kurdish experiences of oppression and constantly evoke their personal traumas and Kurdish collective traumatic experiences. Their concern is not the question of and conflict over a piece of land, but the oppression and suppression against them and their political and cultural rights as human beings. Thus, the importance of this literature lies not only in the negotiation and recognition that happen through them but also in the ways they challenge the established frameworks of understanding the Kurdish question, as a question of and conflict over only and simply a land. It is within this context that this study identifies these writings as having a sort of political effect and argues for their possible political potential.

However, these writings should not be read exclusively as works of resistance and accounts of testimonies of Kurdish experience of violence and oppression. They are not solely voices of Kurdish resistance and an arena of struggle for Kurdish recognition. As the analysis of these writings will reveal, the accounts of these authors are full of personal loss and traumas. They reflect feelings of nostalgia, longing for home, and the pain of living away from home, as part of the authors’ exilic experiences. They also deal with issues beyond their homeland, such as human rights and global injustices. More importantly, they open up not only the four nation-states governing Kurds to the critiques of global readers but also Kurdish society through the critique of patriarchy and the constraints of religion and family in Kurdish society. Thus, these writings embody more than personal and collective memories and

testimonies, and they do more than testifying to Kurdish history of oppression. They deal with the multiple themes and issues mentioned above, which this study highlight in reading the texts.

The further importance of this body of works lies in its cultural dynamics and role as a mode of Kurdish cultural exchange and production that is circulated and consumed in a transnational and global market. The circulation of these writings, as well as some recent works of translation from Kurdish into English language, across the world and among a global readership, can be seen as a way for Kurdish literature, which has rarely had the opportunity of contact with Western literature and the literature of other nations, to enter the world literary scene and engage with the literatures of the world. Translating and writing in a powerful language such as English, can be seen as a medium through which Kurdish literature and Kurdish authors that are almost unknown in the outside world among a non-Kurdish readership, achieve 'literary recognition' and 'literary visibility' (Casanova, 2004, p. 133). Kurdish literature and Kurdish authors now inhabit 'the world literary space', and participate in the 'network' and the 'cosmopolitan space' Goethe believed in—*Weltliteratur*, or what is known today as world literature (Bielsa, 2016; Casanova, 2004; Damrosch, 2003a). These writings can be seen as a 'window' to the Kurdish world through which readers across the globe can see and experience by reading these texts. This idea of 'window to the world' is one of the definitions Damrosch proposed of world literature, which will be discussed in a later section. In what follows, this chapter will elaborate further on this cultural aspect.

## Kurdish Literature as World Literature

David Damrosch's (2003a) definition of world literature as 'all literary works that circulate beyond their cultures of origin' (p.4), and literature that 'transcends the boundaries of the culture that produces it' (p. 3), renders Kurdish writings in the English language part of world literature. Indeed, Kurdish Anglophone writings simultaneously fit into several categories in terms of their language, location or authors' national identity, including English literature, world literature or Kurdish literature, as well as other conceptual categories, such as migration or exile literature, diasporic literature, refugee literature or postcolonial writings. While each of these

categories is part of the current discussion, this study brings these writings together and classifies them as world literature, in light of Damrosch's definition, and introduces them as 'Kurdish literature as world literature'. Later chapters in this thesis consider the possible impacts these writings might have as works of world literature and works that move across cultures. However, looking at these writings as world literature does not negate their national affiliation and the culture and context from which they have emerged. Although theorists in the field of world literature like Damrosch emphasise these kinds of writings beyond their culture of origin and in the global contexts, this does not imply, as they argue, a negation or disconnection of national and local elements. For Damrosch, 'circulation into a new national context does not require the work of world literature to be subjected to anything like an absolute disconnect from its culture of origin' (2003b, p. 521). This is true also in regards to Kurdish Anglophone literature. As this study will reveal, these writings contribute to not only Kurdish literature and their culture of origin but also the long history of Kurdish struggle and resistance.

However, calling this body of English writings Kurdish literature might be controversial and raises the question of whether or not they should be considered as Kurdish literature. The question of inclusion or exclusion of these writings is certainly not due to the geographical distance and transnational production and circulation of these writings, since Kurdish literature is commonly characterised by its transnational and geographically dispersed character. Kurdish literature 'is shaped in multiple geographies in terms of writing and publishing processes, multilingual and transnational affiliations, constant mobility and diverse socio-political contexts' (Galip, 2016, p. 257). Even the works written and published at home circulate across internal and external borders and have their Kurdish audiences spread out in multiple geographies across the world due to the dispersal of Kurds across the globe. Rather, it is the language of Kurdish Anglophone writings that prompts this question of inclusion or exclusion. This same question exists and remains unsolved in relation to writings in Persian, Turkish and Arabic languages by Kurdish authors.

This study, however, identifies and approaches Kurdish Anglophone writings by classifying them as a new literary canon in Kurdish literature, and more specifically Kurdish diaspora literature, and asserts that it is true to think of them as part of Kurdish literary production. If Kurdish writings in English—particularly those of the first-generation authors—are excluded from Kurdish literature because they are

not in Kurdish language, they still cannot be excluded as part of the Kurdish struggle, a struggle that happened through literature. Thus, Kurdish Anglophone literature has added another layer to the diversity of Kurdish literary productions and makes Kurdish literature much more transnational—not simply in a geographical sense, but a cultural and socio-political sense. What needs to be emphasised here is that the transnational character of Kurdish literature is not simply related to the production, circulation and reception of Kurdish writings beyond geographical borders, and Kurdish literature, whether at home or in a diaspora, is inherently transnational and fragmentary due to the geographical and political state of the Kurds. Just as 'Kurdish national identity is fragmentary and transnational' (Vali, 1998, p. 82), Kurdish national literature is 'fragmentary and has a transnational character' (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, p. 126). However, as far as the very Kurdish transnational literature is concerned—meaning the large body of Kurdish writings produced beyond Kurdish geographical and political borders—they remain confined almost exclusively to Kurdish national, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Kurdish transnational literature has been largely produced in Kurdish language and directed towards Kurdish audiences, and it is strongly connected to Kurdish homeland, Kurdish culture and Kurdish identity. Thus, its transnational character relates more to a geographical sense. However, the current study asserts that this new body of writings in English by Kurdish diasporic writers has transformed the transnational character of Kurdish literature and can be seen as a transnational turn in Kurdish diasporic literature and Kurdish literary production. Through these writings, the boundaries of Kurdish literature have been extended into transnational and global spaces, and they give Kurdish literature a global presence. They have broadened the geography of Kurdish literature and stretched the imaginative geography of being Kurdish beyond their imposed national borders in the wider context of the world and as part of a larger imagined community.

Also, despite the dispersion of Kurdish authors across the world and a relatively long history of scattered diasporic Kurdish writings, it is only in recent decades that Kurdish literature has witnessed serious cultural and literary interactions and exchanges with other nations and languages across the world or in their diasporic spaces. These include works of translation from and into Kurdish, some of which will be introduced further below, as well as the Anglophone writings considered in this study. Indeed, for Kurdish authors, the diaspora has provided more opportunity to

revive their language and literature rather than connect with the languages and literature of other nations. Obviously, Kurdish authors and Kurdish audiences at home have rarely had the opportunity of being in contact with the literature of other nations, due to political and cultural barriers. It is through works that have been translated into the official languages of their resident countries—Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages—that Kurdish literature has come into contact with Western literature. As Ahmadzadeh (2003a) explains:

> While the translation of foreign novels into the main languages of the Middle East, i.e. Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, largely began in the second half of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century, the translation of foreign novels into Kurdish came much later. In the beginning the novels, like the short stories, were mainly translated from the official languages (Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and Russian) into Kurdish. Only in the last decades of the 20th century has the translation of novels from European languages into Kurdish begun to occur. As result of the diaspora Kurds, by learning the language of the host countries, succeeded in translating foreign novels into Kurdish directly from the original languages. During the 1990s many novels were translated into Kurdish and have been published in Sweden. (p. 156)

These, therefore, can be traced back to the minor and suppressed position Kurdish literature has occupied on the literary maps of the four nation-states among which the Kurds' homeland has been divided, and the cultural and political barriers imposed on them. These barriers even 'hinder the Kurds from sharing the literary products produced in different parts of Kurdistan' (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, p. 132). In the same way, Kurdish literature has rarely had the opportunity of being read or consumed in the transnational and global literary market. There is no significant trace of Kurdish novels or poetry in the international literary world. Kurdish novelists and poets are almost unknown in the outside world among non-Kurdish readership, and they have not enjoyed global recognition. No Kurdish novelist or poet has been awarded a significant international literary prize, and there are only a small number of works of translation from Kurdish into English and other languages. Yet in recent decades, world literature has witnessed the emergence and circulation of works of translation from Kurdish literature and English-language works by Kurdish writers and poets, through which Kurdish literature has entered into transnational literary and cultural spaces and the world literary space. Among them are Bachtyar Ali's novel, *Qezelnus u Baxekani Xeyal* (2008), translated under the title of *I Stared at the Night of the City*[2]

[2] This is the first Kurdish novel translated into English.

(2016) by Kareem Abdulrahman; *An Anthology of Kurdish Stories* (2012), including Northern and Central Kurdish short stories, published by the Erbil branch of the Kurdish Writers Union and translated by a group of translators; and Mohammad Qhazi's novel titled *Zara: The Shepard's Love*[3] (2008), translated by Taher Sarhady and Hamid Golpasandy. Also included are *Butterfly Valley* (2018), Sherko Bekas's collection of poetry, translated by Choman Hardi (one of the authors examined in the current study); Kajal Ahmad's poems, translated by Choman Hardi in 2018 in collaboration with Mimi Khalvati under the title of *Poems* (2008); Rebwar Fatah's *My Poetry Depicts You: An Anthology of Contemporary Kurdish Poetry* (2017), which contains the selected poems of 18 Kurdish poets over the last century; Barzanji's selected poems translated by Sabah A. Salih under the title of *Trying Again to Stop Time* (2015); and two collections of poetry, *In the Temple of a Patient God* (2004) and *How Abraham Abandoned Me* (2012) by Bejan Matur, translated by Ruth Christie with Selcuk Berilgen. Some Kurdish literary works have also been translated into other languages, such as German, Swedish, French, Chinese and Polish. For instance, the translation of Bachtyar Ali's novel in German, Mehmed Uzun's novels in Swedish, Nazand Begikhani's poems in French, Bejan Matur's poems in Chinese and the Polish translation of Memet Dicle's short stories.

These works of translation are not simply linguistic exchanges but cultural ones. They have become a tool to disseminate Kurdish literature, to make it go beyond the territories of its national and cultural domains and reach global readership and recognition. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova (2004) discusses the crucial role of translation and its importance, particularly for writers from 'minor literatures'. She does not view translation as a 'mere exchange of one language for another' and finds its true nature as 'a form of literary recognition' (Casanova, 2004, p. 133). For Casanova, translation 'constitutes the principal means of access to the literary world for all writers outside the centre' (p. 133). She discusses the importance of both translating from a minor language to the dominant languages in the world and vice versa, and states that for a language on the periphery, translating and importing major works of literature 'is a way of gathering literary resources, of acquiring universal texts and thereby enriching an underfunded literature' (Casanova, 2004,

[3] The original text of this novel is in Persian, not Kurdish. In Chapter Three of this thesis, I will discuss that there is still unsolved debate about whether or not Kurdish literary productions in Persian, Arabic, and Turkish can be considered as Kurdish literature.

p. 134). Casanova argues that the 'translation of important literary texts from dominant languages is a means of accumulating literary capital for small[4] languages, whereas the translation of a text from a small language into one of the dominant languages is a means of achieving literary existence, of acquiring a certificate of literariness' (p. 296). She remarks that translation into a powerful language is one of the main ways to achieve recognition on the world literary scene, to 'struggle against invisibility' (p. 136). In the Kurdish context, such attempts not only lead to worldwide literary recognition but also open up new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish people, Kurdish culture and Kurdish history. Kurdish literary outputs in English, which this study examines, can also be seen as a form of translation; to use Rebecca. L. Walkowitz's (2015) term, they are 'born-translated' works of literature. For Walkowitz, a 'born-translated' work is literature that is written for translation from the outset or literature that is born in translation. She contends that such literature 'approaches translation as medium and origin rather than as afterthought … Translation is not secondary or incidental to these works … [it is] a condition of their production' (Walkowitz, 2015, p. 3). Kurdish Anglophone writings best exemplify Walkowitz' idea of 'born-translated' as they have been written for and as a translation from the outset. According to Walkowitz (2015), there are different kinds of born-translated works; for instance, there are born-translated works that 'appear simultaneously or nearly simultaneously in multiple languages' (p. 1). One example is Akreyi's novel, *The Daughter of the Kurdland*, which has been published in multiple languages—English, Arabic, Norwegian and Danish—although there is no Kurdish version of it published.

This new body of works in English, whether in translation or written originally in English, also act as cultural translations through which a culture and group of people, in this case Kurdish people and the Kurdish culture, are translated into other cultures for readers across the world. As the analysis of these texts will show, these writings also represent Kurdish cultural elements and traditions, and the society in which Kurdish people live. Thus, these writings are a window to their world that readers across the globe can see and experience by reading these texts. They enable readers to imagine and see the world depicted by the authors. They open a world for their readers, one rarely represented and discussed in a global context. They bring the

[4] Small language and small literature are terms Casanova used to mean 'literarily deprived' (Casanova, 2004, p. 181).

local and global into conversation. It is within this context that this study finds these writings as a form of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism', a term Nikos Papastergiadis (2012) uses to define 'an open conversation between the local and the global … an imaginative engagement' with the other that happens through art or aesthetic (p. 9). In the case of Kurdish Anglophone writings, this happens through writing and translation.

However, as will be shown, more than being a translation of culture, these writings are translations of identity, history and geopolitics. What has been largely translated in and through these writings is Kurdish history of oppression, resistance and struggle. All these works—poetry, fiction or non-fiction—represent and evoke, in different ways and to various degrees, the historical, cultural and geopolitical oppressions and violence Kurdish people have experienced, and bear witness to the effects of this violence on their identity and culture. Through these works, non-Kurdish readers across the world witness Kurdish traumatic memories and testimonies of violence, war and genocide campaigns carried out against Kurdish people throughout history, and the devastating effects of violence and oppression on their homeland and its people. These writings take readers back and across Kurdish history, a history often unknown to world readers, and make them imagine, feel and see the miserable personal and collective experiences of the Kurdish people and the atrocities imposed on them. Thus, they can create new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question and recognition of the Kurdish people. As noted earlier, this has already happened to some extent. These writings have gained attention within and beyond a Kurdish readership and network of critics and reviewers, whose readings and interpretation of the works have been partially discussed above. Subsequently, these writings have created and can continue to create new spaces of global engagement and recognition for the Kurdish people.

This study asserts that these writings are characterised by their authors' deliberate attempt to articulate and negotiate personal and collective Kurdish experiences with non-Kurdish readers. It argues that these writers seem driven to write with a self-conscious attempt to bear witness to Kurdish experiences of violence and oppression that otherwise remain unwitnessed by the world. Translating themselves to the world and writing in English is a deliberate strategic attempt by these authors to resist the obliteration of Kurdish history, culture and identity, as well as Kurdish memory. The very act of writing themselves into the world, bearing

witness to personal and collective Kurdish experiences of violence and oppression, and opening up the nation-states governing Kurds to the critiques of global readers, is an act of resistance and struggle for Kurdish recognition through literature. This can be traced back to the role and task Kurdish literature has often had in the history of Kurdish struggles. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, literature and writing has been and remains a means of Kurdish struggle and site of resistance against the denial of their land, history, culture and identity. Kurdish literature has played an important role in raising and addressing issues of political justice and socio-political and cultural inequalities. It has been a platform of resistance and struggle in preserving Kurdish culture, language and memory, and a medium for inciting and empowering Kurdish people. Similarly, this new literature acts as a platform for Kurdish struggle and a voice of Kurdish resistance. However, as this study will discuss at large, the kind of struggle enacted through these writings is different from that of the older Kurdish literature, as it has happened in new transnational spaces and context—not simply in a physical and geographical sense—and has followed different purposes and politics.

The arguments regarding the politics around Kurdish Anglophone writings and the kind of activism they entail is only true for the first-generation authors under consideration in this study. This includes Choman Hardi, Nazand Begikhani, Kae Bahar, Qasham Balata, Widad Akreyi and Behrouz Boochani, and excludes Laleh Khadivi, who is introduced as a second-generation author in this study. It is proposed that first-generation authors consciously and deliberately bring Kurdish personal and collective memories and testimonies to global contexts—that is, they 'write local to the global' (Damrosch, 2018, p. 162)—as a way to make non-Kurdish readers aware of the traumatic and genocidal history of Kurdish peoples who have been denied their own nation-states. However, this argument does not hold for Khadivi's trilogy. Although Khadivi is strongly engaged with Kurdish history and the Kurdish homeland in her novels, it is more of an exploration of the self and her lost sense of identity and belonging. While her works can similarly function to create spaces of negotiation and recognition for the Kurdish people, they do not do so as consciously as the first-generation authors. In the same way, her choice to write in the English language is not a tool she employs to communicate with readers, as she has grown up in the United States so English is like her first language. Chapter Eight, which is dedicated to Khadivi's trilogy, will provide greater detail on how her writings are

linked to those of the first-generation authors and Kurdish history, and how they are different.

Finally, among the works of first-generation authors, Boochani's memoir embodies a context other than the Kurdish context, which is the main story of his work. It will be shown that Boochani's memoir, the process that led to its publication, and the way it has been written and translated into English, is different from the English writings of other first-generation authors examined. Boochani's memoir largely deals with the condition of refugees on Manus Island in Australia, and it bears witness to the systematic oppression employed against these refugees. However, what this study argues is that Boochani's memoir, as his mode of resistance against the oppression and injustice on Manus Island, also emerged as a Kurdish resistance voice. Despite their differences, Kurdish Anglophone writings can be viewed collectively as a body of work that reflects the shared intention of these authors to voice Kurdish questions as a way to be witnessed beyond their imposed national borders. They are sites of resistance and struggle by authors who wanted to foreground unwitnessed and forgotten narratives of oppressed Kurdish people, both victims and survivors, in the world.



**Scope of the Study**

As mentioned, this study takes the recent published Kurdish Anglophone literary works by Kurdish authors in the diaspora as its subject. The literature addressed in this study includes novels, memoirs, fictions and collections of poetry produced in the English language by authors with a Kurdish background. Two of these authors, Behrouz Boochani and Laleh Khadivi, are from Kurdistan of Iran, and the remaining five authors, Choman Hardi, Nazand Begikhani, Widad Akreyi, Qasham Balata and Kae Bahar, are from Iraqi Kurdistan. The literary works examined in this study are Boochani's *No Friends But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018); Khadivi's trilogy, *The Age of Orphans* (2009), *The Walking* (2013) and *A Good Country* (2017); Hardi's collections of poetry, *Life for Us* (2004) and *Considering the Women* (2015); Begikhani's collection of poetry, *Bells of Speech* (2006); Akreyi's memoir, *The Daughter of Kurdland: A Life Dedicated to Humankind* (2019); Balata's novel, *Run Away to Nowhere* (2010); and Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* (2015).

There are some other English writings by Kurdish authors that are not included in this thesis, such as Ava Homa's *Echoes from the Other Land* (2010) and *Daughters of Smoke and Fire* (2020); Amir Darwish's collections of poetry, *Don't Forget the Couscous* (2015) and *Dear Refugee* (2019), and his autobiography, *From Aleppo Without Love* (2017)[5]; Jalal Barzanji's prison memoir, *The Man in Blue Pyjamas* (2011); Gharib M. Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep: Coming of Age in Kurdistan* (2013); Huner Saleem's *My Father's Rifle: A Childhood in Kurdistan* (2006); and Golan Haji's *A Tree Whose Name I Don't Know* (2017). Both Homa's collection of short stories and Darwish's works were initially included in the list of the works examined in this study; however, upon reading their works, I decided to remove them, as they are not strongly related to the central concern of this study. Also, as I came across the works of Barzanji, Mustafa, Haji and Saleem during the final stages of writing the thesis, it was not possible to include them in the study. Finally, Homa's *Daughters of Smoke and Fire* was published at the final stage of this thesis, which is why it is also not included.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, there are also a number of Kurdish writings that have been translated into English and circulate among a non-Kurdish readership. Although the importance of translation and these translated Kurdish works are discussed later in this study, they are not included in the works examined because the main focus of this study is Kurdish writings that are written or published in English from the outset. Although the works addressed in this study can be seen as a kind of translation—that is, they are all 'born-translated' (Walkowitz, 2015)—this study finds them different from the above-mentioned translation works and sees them as a new literary canon in Kurdish literature. Moreover, there are a number of writings by Kurdish authors in other Western languages; such as Danish and Swedish, like the works of Sara Omar and Mehmed Uzun, that are not covered as they sit outside the scope of the study. I believe that works written in English, as an international language and the world's lingua franca, can play a different role and may affect further results than texts in the language of a particular country. Thus, language has played a significant role in narrowing down the scope of this study.

The novelty of these Kurdish writings also limited the scope of this study. As a first of its kind to introduce and address these Kurdish writings as a body of work,

[5] Amir Darwish is the only Kurdish Anglophone writer I found from Syria and I couldn't find any Kurdish-Turkish Anglophone writer.

this study aims to address some of the fundamental issues about these writings: how and why they have emerged, their nature, function and significance. Therefore, this study does not set out to provide a comprehensive and inclusive analysis of all the writings of the authors under examination. Indeed, a full discussion of all of these works lies beyond the scope of this thesis. The procedure employed for the selection of texts is based on the central concern and questions of this study and the analytical and theoretical framework within which this study is situated. Accordingly, what this study intends to do is select texts from the memoirs and fictional works addressed or a number of poems from the collections of poetry that align with the research questions and conceptual framework of the study. These works will be analysed using a close reading approach and reliance on a number of theoretical frameworks, such as those of world literature and postcolonial studies, and a number of theorists from cosmopolitan studies. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of how this study benefits from each of these frameworks and how they collectively facilitate a deeper understanding of these writings.

**Chapter Overview**

The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of nine chapters. Chapter One, this introduction, has set up the main arguments and objectives of this study regarding the body of work under examination. It includes the thesis introduction and scope of the study. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical frameworks and methodologies employed to conduct this research. Chapter Three provides the historical and geopolitical background of Kurdish Anglophone writings and gives an overview of the history of Kurdish literature. It also includes a review of previous studies on the body of work examined in this thesis to identify their shortcomings and the gaps this study aims to fill. The existing readings and reviews by non-Kurdish writers and reviewers on these writings will be discussed in Chapter Four, as this chapter deals with the circulation and reception of the writings in non-Kurdish settings and across the globe. This chapter examines the processes that have led to this body of work emerging, their function and the roles they play. The questions of language and translation and their importance are also among the key issues this chapter raises and discusses. Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this study are the analytical chapters of the

works of first-generation authors, with each chapter allocated to a genre. Chapter Five analyses Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry collections to show how their poetry can be a witness and act as testimony. Chapter Six examines the memoirs of Akreyi and Boochani to demonstrate how they bear witness to Kurdish history. Chapter Seven considers the fictional works of Bahar and Balata in terms of how works of fiction act as testimony. Chapter Eight focuses on the novels of second-generation author Khadivi; it contemplates her generational difference and how that distinguishes her works from those of the first-generation authors. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by drawing on the entire study to provide a summary and critique of the findings.

**Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the new body of work produced by Kurdish Anglophone authors and gave an overview of the main arguments and research questions of this study. It explained that this study is the first of its kind to introduce and address the existing and emerging Kurdish writings in English, and aims to explore how and why this body of work emerged and what roles it plays. While each of the following chapters deals with a set of arguments, they all seek to argue that this body of work should not be seen as simple evidence of Kurdish traumatic history, or an uncomplicated representation or documentation of Kurdish personal and collective stories. Rather, this body of work is a discursive space of negotiation and recognition for the Kurdish question and Kurdish people in a global context.

# Chapter Two—Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

## Introduction

Kurdish Anglophone literature occupies an ambivalent position; it is both national and transnational, both local and global. No fixed national and cultural location or identity can be attached to these writings and this is largely due to their diasporic nature and condition. These writings are characterized by displacement and dispersion. Indeed, displacement and dispersion do not only feature as themes explored by these authors in their writings, but also characterize their own condition. These writings emerged as the result of Kurdish mobility, migration, exile and displacement and they have been composed and published in different diasporic contexts around the world. On one level, this diasporic condition is nothing new for Kurdish writers, living as they are in what is considered by some to be 'the fifth part of Kurdistan, besides the four geographical parts Kurds inhabit' (Martin Van Bruinessen, 2015, p. 125). These works can be included among the already vast body of Kurdish diaspora literature, for in the Kurdish context, the diaspora is considered to be the main home of Kurdish novel (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, p. 126).

Importantly, however, among this writerly community of Kurdish people—displaced and dispersed across the globe as they are—there is a group of authors that have something else in common: their works have been produced, not in the language of their own lands, but in a diasporic language, in English. While stressing the diasporic nature and condition of Kurdish Anglophone writings and the importance of the term diaspora in describing them, and accepting the diasporic mode of analysis these writings invite, as diasporic Kurdish writings, this study finds the theoretical framework of diaspora studies insufficient in reading this literature. Diaspora studies is an obvious touchstone when reading Kurdish diasporic experiences, and it is useful in understanding Kurdish experiences and struggles as a diasporic nation, as it deals with the circulation of people, goods, information, and cultural works of diasporic people. As an analytical tool, diaspora studies provide a framework to understand people and cultures on the move, and their dynamic, unfolding relationships to their geographical homelands. There is a large body of scholarly works in Kurdish studies that have employed diaspora studies as an analytical framework, such as Wahlbeck

(1999), Hassanpour (2003), Alinia (2004), Hassanpour & Mojab (2005), Khayati (2008), Basher (2011), Akkaya (2011), Demir (2012), Bruinessen (2012), Galip (2012, 2014), Alinia, Wahlbeck, Eliassi, & Khayati (2014), to name just a few. However, diaspora studies as an approach offers an insufficient set of conceptual and analytical tools to fully account for emergent Kurdish Anglophone literature, despite its diasporic context. This is because the largely socio-cultural focus of diaspora studies is yet to consider literary texts in their own right, and not as subsidiary to the wider transnational social, political, and cultural circulations that diaspora studies has revealed so much about.

Instead, this study contents that these Anglophone works are not only and simply diasporic Kurdish literature, and but they also live another life as world literature. They go far beyond the diasporic spaces in which they have been composed and the diasporic space(s) that their authors inhabit. As mentioned at the very beginning of this introduction, these writings are local and global; they are national and transnational. To fully apprehend these ambivalences, we need to apply forms of analysis that attend to both national and transnational dimensions of this literature and its status both as a Kurdish diasporic literary production *and* as a world literature. This study finds the theoretical framework known as world literature and postcolonialism as suitable frameworks to approach these writings and ground its interpretations of them. In the following sections, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of what these theoretical frameworks reveal about this emerging body of literature, what they each offer this study theoretically and methodologically, and how combining these theoretical frameworks facilitates a better understanding of this body of work.

**Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks**

As works consciously produced in an international setting and intended to circulate far beyond the author's national sphere, Kurdish Anglophone writings fall into the category of world literature and thus invite a world literature reading. The theoretical framework known as world literature is one of the main frameworks this study relies on, both theoretically and methodologically. World literature and its theorists probe the production, circulation and reception of works of literature beyond their national

context and culture of origin. This field of study is centred on the analysis of transnational literary exchanges or textual circulations across cultures and between the local and the global. This study finds the theories of world literature, particularly those set forth by Damrosch (2003a, 2003b, 2014, 2018), Casanova (2004, 2010) and Walkowitz (2015), an effective framework for discussing the conditions of these Kurdish writings' production, circulation and reception on the world literary scene.

This study also adopts the methodological approaches world literature is identified with, particularly the circulation and reception approach elaborated in Damrosch's studies. Damrosch (2003a) approaches the texts not only as modes of writings but as a 'mode of circulation and of reading' (p. 5). He emphasises the phenomenology rather than just the ontology of the works, and states that 'to understand the workings of world literature, we need more a phenomenology than an ontology of the work of art' (Damrosch, 2003a, p. 6). Thus, one of the approaches the present study takes in reading Kurdish Anglophone writings is phenomenological. This study takes to account not only the actual texts but also and in equal measure, the production, circulation and reception of these works in their transnational contexts. However, this study finds Damrosch's approach incomplete for reading the content of the texts, as he 'does not engage closely with reading practice' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 17). In its actual reading of the texts, this study is guided by the methodological approaches of critics such as Wolfgang Iser (1974, 1978, 1980) as well as Elleke Boehmer (2018), who adopt a reception-based and readerly pragmatics approach to reading literature. As mentioned earlier, this study argues for the potency of these works and their potential for political, cultural and social effects. When talking about literature in terms of effects, it is not possible to claim specific effects without considering the reading process, how the text interacts with the readers, and the ways it can affect them. This is why this study in its reading of the texts takes a reception-based approach to explore how these texts can and do interact with the readers to whom they are directed.

Highly relevant here is reader-response theory or reception theory, and the concept of implied reader proposed by Wolfgang Iser (1972, 1974, 1978). Iser's formulation and understanding of the relationship between the text and its reader, and the dynamic process between them, function as a methodological guide in this study. According to Iser (1978), 'the reading process … must bring to light the operations which the text activates within the reader' (p. x). He believes that the effects a text has

on its readers, or the aesthetic responses it generates, is not entirely inherent in either the text or reader, but rather exists between them. He argues that the 'effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process' (Iser, 1978, p. ix). The concept of an implied reader is also based on this relationship and interaction. As Iser (1978) states, 'the concept of the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text'; thus, the notion of an implied reader is 'firmly planted in the structure of the text' (p. 34). My reading approach in this study aims to highlight how these texts interact with their implied readers. To do so, it looks at the structures of the texts, their poetics and the strategies employed by the authors. These lead to the construction of meaning, activating operations in the readers and thereby fulfilling the texts' potential. Iser's approach serves as a methodological point of departure in the reading of Kurdish Anglophone literature and this study more readily relies on the reception-based methodological approach employed by Elleke Boehmer, the postcolonial and world literature theorist, which she has applied to postcolonial writings. I found Boehmer's methods and theories particularly useful, as she deals with postcolonial writings; specifically, resistance literature or literature that arises from oppression and struggle. As this study deals with a similar body of work, her method and arguments greatly benefit this study in reading the texts.

Boehmer (2018) takes a readerly pragmatics approach in her readings of postcolonial writings from various contexts, such as Southern and West Africa, Black and Asian Britain, and India, and also various genres including poetry, fiction, life-writing and essays. She explores and introduces a number of creative devices as aesthetic aspects of postcolonial texts. Her aim is to indicate how the poetics of postcolonial writings in English can 'shape our readings' as readers of these texts. She sees reading as a 'border-crossing activity' and 'a conversation between a reader and a text' (Boehmer, 2018, pp. 1, 2). Her focus is:

> On the text as *something that is read*, and on the heuristic power of literature *as literature*, specifically on the verbal and structural dynamics, the poetics, through which our understanding of the particular postcolonial condition being represented (race, resistance, liberation, reconciliation, precarity, and so on) may be shaped and sharpened (Boehmer, 2018, p. 3, emphasis in original).

Boehmer believes that 'literary writing itself lays down structures and protocols to shape and guide our reading' (p. 1). She suggests 'consideration of the creative shape,

formal structures, and patterns of postcolonial writing might in fact sharpen rather than obscure our attention to those pressing themes' (p. 2). She 'not only engage[s] with literature as an instrument of social change, or even as a representation of certain geo-political conditions', but in 'the engagement' between a text and its readers (p. 2). She tries to show what these writings 'can do' rather than simply what they 'show' (p. 3). The present study takes a similar approach in the analysis of the works under examination, although it does not explore specific postcolonial poetics. Among the elements and tropes Boehmer discusses in her readings, some can be applied to the works addressed in this study. Thus, her theories also form one of the theoretical underpinnings of the reading of texts in this study.

Boehmer is not the only postcolonial critic this study relies on for reading Kurdish Anglophone literature. This research draws heavily on postcolonial studies, specifically the ideas and viewpoints of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (1994, 2000a, 2000b), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010), Bill Ashcroft (1989, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2015), Elleke Boehmer (2005, 2010, 2018) and Gillian Whitlock (2000, 2007, 2017). There are a number of reasons for engaging with postcolonial theories in approaching and reading Kurdish Anglophone writings that make it a suitable framework for this study. Considering the nature and function of these writings and the arguments made in this study, the theoretical framework of world literature cannot be the only one through which these writings are viewed and interpretations grounded. Relying only on world literature to approach these writings left many aspects uncovered. The study's overarching argument that this body of work, particularly those of first-generation authors, entails a form of activism that creates an arena of struggle and Kurdish voice of resistance. This study asserts that these writings arise from oppression and struggle, and they prosecute a form of Kurdish identity politics. This highlights the need to examine these works through a framework that can reveal these aspects.

A useful critical framework that makes a valuable contribution to the study of literature in these contexts is postcolonial studies. As Boehmer (2018) contends, postcolonial literary study is 'a primary avenue through which writing from the world's margins (cultural, geographical, racial) has been approached' (p. 13) and 'the view that writing entails a form of activism has informed critical procedures in postcolonial literary studies since its perception' (p. 39). However, this does not mean that because these Kurdish writings entail activism and create an arena of struggle,

they can be considered postcolonial writings. Kurdish literature and Kurdish experience can be characterised as postcolonial due to their experience of colonisation and domination. As discussed later in this chapter, Kurdish experience of colonisation and domination is quite different from other colonised people, and these Kurdish writers and poets do not share the same historical and political motivations as writers from current or former colonies. However, many of the common ideas that circulate in the field of postcolonialism—such as domination, marginalisation, identity, subalternity, resistance and struggle for independence, particularly those prosecuted by colonised or formerly colonised people, as well as the questions of cultural hybridity, assimilation, displacement, exile and migration—are among the most dominant themes and issues with which Kurdish literature has always dealt. In Kurdish literature, and in the body of works this study deals with, there are numerous direct recurring thematic and technical similarities with postcolonial techniques. By identifying these similarities, this thesis provides a significantly original perspective that necessitates engagement with postcolonial theories in its approach to these writings.

As a critical framework, postcolonialism provides this study with conceptual ideas and an analytical lens to interrogate multiple aspects of these literary works. Postcolonial studies and theories have been used often in reading Kurdish literary studies.[6] Postcolonial literary study, with its emphasis on nation and nationalism and 'its propensity for close readings of nation-narration' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 148), is a useful framework to employ in approaching Kurdish writings, as they are a narration of their nation. However, in the body of work this study engages with, this nation-narration takes a different form and follows a different target. These works are not narrated to a Kurdish audience, and they are not written back to the history and dominating forces that have oppressed Kurdish people, but to the world and a wider public audience in the world. Thus, rather than echoing the outmoded 'writing-back' (Ashcroft, 1989) paradigm, these writings echo a 'writing forward' that reflects the new routes and strategies these writers have employed to resist Kurdish oppression and the obliteration of Kurdish history culture, and identity. These writings show a new form of nation-narration and new forms of struggle. Accordingly, this demands a new and different reading beyond simple national contexts. That is why in

[6] For instance, Galip (2010), Ahmed (2015), Abdalrahman (2015), Rashidrostami (2016) and Hassan (2017).

approaching these writings through a postcolonial lens and relying heavily on theories that reveal the national, political and cultural aspects of these writings, it also relies on the ideas and theories that shed light on the new aspects of these writings, particularly the ideas of Ashcroft and Whitlock. In next sections, this chapter will give a detailed description of the theories this study relies on from the two main theoretical frameworks employed—world literature and postcolonial studies.

This study draws together insights from these two different, yet in some ways connected, theoretical frameworks to generate a deep and comprehensive understanding of this new body of work that has emerged in Kurdish literature. In diverse ways, both frameworks deal with the production, consumption and exchange of literary works across cultures and between the local and global, the national and universal. As Boehmer (2018) argues, 'postcolonial criticism and world literature critique look at the kinds of meaning-making that take place in zones of circulation and exchange between languages and between cultures' (p. 154). Further, 'postcolonial studies and world literature or world-systems studies in their different ways consider how literature might interrogate or expose oppressive systems' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 153). If world literature deals with the reason and condition of production, circulation and reception of 'all literary works that circulate beyond their cultures of origin' (Damrosch, 2003a, p. 4), postcolonial studies deal with these issues in postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial writings also function within a circuit of production, consumption and exchange; a dialectical exchange. While world literature can show how and through what strategies these writings enter the world literary scene, postcolonial criticism reveals more about the reason for the production of these writings and the cultural and geopolitical contexts reflected in them. Each of these critical frameworks reveals some aspects of these writings; thus, a combination of both offers a deeper understanding of these writings and the contexts of these acts of exchange.

This study aims to look at not only how and why these acts of exchange and communication have occurred and can occur, but also their importance and the roles they play regarding their national context and cultural origin in a global and cosmopolitan context. This study asserts that these writing do more than what has established so far. It argues that they not only put the local to the glocal, they also establish connections between them and link them together. They put the local and the global into conversation, and thus a kind of cosmopolitanism happens and forms

through them. It is within this context that this study also engages with cosmopolitanism in approaching these writings, and it is again the idea of exchange that links this framework to other theoretical frameworks discussed above. In this study, cosmopolitanism is understood as a mode of exchange with the world. As Esperanca Bielsa (2016) defines it, cosmopolitanism is 'an ethical and political commitment towards opening ourselves to others and sharing with them the world we live in' (p. 78). Bielsa, who places translation at the heart of cosmopolitan theory, argues that translation 'emerges as a crucial manner in which this commitment can be materialized' (p. 78). She looks at cosmopolitanism as 'openness to the world and to others' and finds translation, not as a linguistic transfer of information from one language to another, but as a process that can mobilise relationships, and through which cosmopolitanism can take place. As Bielsa affirms, world literature and works of translation play a significant role in forming cosmopolitanism and in the interaction and conversation between the local and the global. In these understandings, the current study argues for the roles these Kurdish Anglophone writings play. Thus, my use of this theoretical framework reveals more about these writings and the purposes they serve. It influences my exploration and examination of these writings in the broader contexts of the world and the impacts it might have beyond its national context. In approaching Kurdish Anglophone writings through a cosmopolitan lens, this study mainly draws on Bielsa (2014, 2016), whose main focus is world literature and translation in cosmopolitan contexts, and Nikos Papastergiadis's (2012) notion of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism'. It also draws partially on Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007), Gerard Delanty (2006, 2009), Carol. A. Breckenridge et al. (2002) and Hommi Bhabha (2019).

This study also relies on a number of theorists beyond these three theoretical frameworks, such as Carolyn Forche (1993, 2011, 2014) and Marianne Hirsch (1997, 2001, 2008, 2012). Forche's ideas and theory of 'poetry of witness' will be employed in reading Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry, and Hirsch's theory of 'postmemory' in reading Khadivi's novels, as this second-generation author occupies a different position and her experiences vary from the other authors examined in this study. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this body of work reflects the diversity of Kurdish experiences. Khadivi and her novels represent one of these diversities. As will be seen, this study provides an alternate reading of her trilogy, as its reason for and process of production, and the way this second-generation author

engages with Kurdish history, is different. In next section, this chapter gives a detailed description and explanation of the theories on which it relies.

## World Literature

The origin of what is known today as world literature, both as a canon of works and a field of study, is widely traced back to Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*. As Damrosch, one of the contemporary theorists in this field points out, the term pre-dates Goethe's use of it by several decades; however, Goethe is broadly credited as the person who popularised the term. In *World Literature in Theory*, Damrosch (2003a) asserts that 'though the term "Weltliteratur" had been coined some decades before Goethe took it up in the 1920s, it was his embrace of the concept that first brought it into general currency' (p. 15). He argues that through this concept, Goethe 'crystallized both a literary perspective and a new cultural awareness, and a sense of an arising globalized modernity, whose epoch, as Goethe predicted, we now inhabit' (Damrosch, 2003a, p. 1) What is at the centre of Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* is interrelations and exchanges between literatures of different nations; for him, world literature is 'less a set of works than a network' (Damrosch, 2003a, p. 3). Bielsa (2016) asserts that Goethe's view of world literature is 'a cosmopolitan space where national literatures are not abolished but are existing and growing through intensified contact and interaction with each other' (p. 76). It was in the first decade of the 21st century that the term re-emerged and developed as a literary field of study through the works of contemporary critics such as Damrosch, Casanova, Walkowitz, Franco Moretti and Pheng Cheah, among others. Their work has broadened the implication of the idea of world literature and its scope.

The term world literature, beyond its general and simple definition as the total of the world's national literatures or a collective body of all literary works ever produced in the world, is mostly applied to works that are circulated and read beyond their culture of origin. As Damrosch (2003a) defines it, world literature is a literature that 'transcend the boundaries of the culture that produces it—reach out beyond its own time and place' (p. 3). He believes world literature is 'all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language' (p. 4). In *What is World Literature?*, Damrosch describes three categories

or modes: ‘as an established body of classics, as an evolving canon of masterpieces, or as multiple windows on the world’ (p. 15). The third category refers to ‘works that would serve as windows into foreign worlds, whether or not these works could be constructed as masterpieces and regardless of whether or not these differing worlds had any visible links to each other at all’ (p. 15). If adhering to these definitions, Kurdish writings in English can be seen as world literature and as part of world literature. These writings fulfil the aim of world literature, which is opening a ‘world’ to ‘the world’.

Grounded by the ideas and theories of Damrosch (2003a, 2003b, 2014, 2018), Casanova (2004, 2010) and Walkowitz (2015), this study attempts to look at Kurdish Anglophone literature within both its local and global contexts. This study finds theories of world literature, particularly those of the critics mentioned, a proper framework for discussing the conditions of these writings’ production, circulation and reception on the world literary scene. This study benefits from Damrosch’s and Casanova’s conception of world literature and their proposed strategies through which writers can enter the realm of world literature. They posit a variety of ways and strategies that can be employed to enter a text into the realm of world literature to reach global audiences. As Damrosch (2018) asserts, writers have two routes: they ‘can go out into the world in person or send their works abroad’ (p. 135); they can also employ strategies such as ‘bringing the world directly into the text itself … even when the story has a purely local setting … [or] sending their characters abroad … [or using] foreign literary traditions’ (p. 107). Another strategy Damrosch proposes is ‘glocalism’, which he contends takes two forms: write the local for the global or bring the global home. That is, ‘writers can treat local matters for a global audience, or they can emphasize a movement from the outside world in, presenting their locality as a microcosm of global exchange’ (Damrosch, 2018, p. 162). Casanova (2004) also introduces two routes and strategies through which writers of the periphery can enter into the world literary scene: one is assimilation, or integration within a dominant literary, and the other is differentiation, or ‘the assertion of difference, typically on the basis of a claim to national identity’ (p. 180). The current study will investigate not only how and through what strategies these authors bring the local to the global, but also, and more significantly, why. It argues that what these authors seek through translating and writing in a powerful language such as English is not to achieve what Casanova (2004) claims; that is, ‘literary recognition’ or a ‘struggle against literary

invisibility' (p. 133). Rather, it can be seen as an attempt to achieve recognition for Kurdish people and a struggle against Kurdish invisibility and lack of recognition in the world. By bringing the local to the global, these authors open themselves to the world and share the world in which they live. By opening themselves to the world and sharing with them their experiences, they generate new ways of imagining recognition of the Kurdish people and Kurdish question. They subject the nation-states governing Kurds to critiques by a global readership, and this thesis contends that such literary acts create new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question. As shown throughout the analysis, these works also open Kurdish society to the critique of global readers through a critique of patriarchy and the constraints of religion and family in Kurdish society. It is within these contexts that this study finds these writings as cosmopolitan practices and gestures and argues for the role literature and translation can play in these processes.

**Cosmopolitanism**

The idea of cosmopolitanism might seem contradictory to some of the arguments made in this study, such as seeing this literature as part of Kurdish nation-building projects and contributing them to the long history of the Kurdish struggle for recognition and self-determination. Thus, this section first provides an overview of cosmopolitanism and whether it contradicts with Kurdish experience, Kurdish cause, and specifically this new body of Kurdish literature. Then, it looks at the cosmopolitan characteristics of this body of Kurdish writings as well as their cosmopolitan vocation as world literature. It discusses the role this literature plays regarding Kurdish identity and culture—such as creating a version of belonging and relating to the world, being in the world and inhabiting it, and participating in the world—as well as its role creating connections between the local and global, making cosmopolitan bonds, and enhancing cosmopolitan sensibilities among readers across the world as a world literature.

Cosmopolitanism comes from the Greek word *Kosmopolites*, which means 'citizen of the world'. Indeed, there is no single, unified definition of this term, and much has been debated both for and against it. Cosmopolitanism is 'a disputed concept' (Appiah, 2007, p. xiv) and 'exists in a variety of contexts and to a varying

degree' (Delanty, 2009, p. 219). The term has been applied in different contexts; it has moral, economic, cultural and political aspects, and it functions on individual, communal and national levels. The term is often understood as an anti-national notion that refers to a world in which nation-states and national and cultural boundaries are considered insignificant. It is seen as an affinity or outlook beyond familial, religious, communal and national boundaries—a transnational subjectivity, detachment from the particular, and an avowed sense of belonging to a larger collective. As Vertovec and Cohen (2003) argues, cosmopolitanism 'challenges the conventional notions of ethnic, racial, and national belonging and identity' (p. 1). Amanda Anderson (2005) also claims 'cosmopolitanism endorse reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures, and customs, and a belief in universal humanity' (p. 72).

Conversely, other theorists in the field believe that cosmopolitanism does not reflect the decline or demise of the nation, nor does it necessarily lead to the replacement of the conceptions of national culture within the global. Cosmopolitanism, they argue, does not negate national belonging and attachment to a specific community and culture. It can be viewed as a broader political and cultural community to which people can belong and where humans possess equal justice, respect, worth and care. As Delanty (2008) argues, cosmopolitanism 'does not spell the end of the nation', but 'refers to the end of the "closed society" of the nation-state' (p. 220). He believes:

> The nation-state itself is a demonstration of a cosmopolitan principle that people can imagine a political community beyond the context of their immediate world. So it is possible to see contemporary cosmopolitanism as an extension of the cosmopolitanism of the national community to an acknowledgment of a wider political community beyond the national community. (Delanty, 2008, p. 221)

Appiah also opposes the idea that cosmopolitanism and to be cosmopolitan requires transcending attachment to specific communities and traditions. He believes that cosmopolitanism 'begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association. And conversation in its modern sense, too' (Appiah, 2007, p. xix). He views cosmopolitanism primarily in terms of establishing conversations across differences and developing habits of coexistence. This idea of 'conversation' and 'establishing conversation' is significant and lies at

the centre of these Kurdish Anglophone writings. They are a form of conversation these authors tried to establish through their works. Seen in this light, these writings are acts of cosmopolitanism.

For Cheah & Robbins (1998), cosmopolitanism is not just a mode or state of detachment, but a 'state of detachment towards a reality of reattachment, multiple attachments, or reattachment at a distance' (p. 3). Thus, based on these definitions and understandings, to be cosmopolitan or to live, think and act according to the doctrines and principles of cosmopolitanism, does not necessarily mean a negation of national belonging or attachment to a specific community and culture. As Bhabha (2019) highlights, cosmopolitanism is not an identity; it is not what you are, but what you do. Bhabha (2019) does not think of cosmopolitanism as an identity, but as certain political, social and aesthetic practices, their effects, the agency they produce, the subject they construct, the norms they produce, and the various internal reverberation and contradictions within them. Similarly, Carol. A. Breckenridge et al. (2002) define cosmopolitanism as 'action, rather than idea, as something you do rather than something you declare, as practice rather than proposition' (p. 577). As it is not an identity but what one does, acts or practices, or what one declares, then cosmopolitanism is not against one's national and cultural identity. Cosmopolitanism does not negate and is not against belonging or being attached to a specific place, culture and identity. It does not negate struggling for national, cultural and political rights as well as claims of justice and equality. Cosmopolitanism does not mean an end to the loyalty to the nation-states, and it does not contradict with rootedness and nationalism.

However, cosmopolitanism and a cosmopolitan outlook oppose and are against national, familial, racial and religious prejudices. It is against social, cultural and moral divisions, and it combats conflict and injustice in all its guises. It criticises unfair moral and political practices against humans, regardless of their nationality, culture, race and religion. Human rights and global justice are two hallmarks of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is an ideal of human community, in which humans possess equal justice, respect, worth and care for everyone. It is an ideological standpoint that gives all humans equal moral value because of their shared belonging to humanity. Cosmopolitanism 'is based on a notion of shared belonging or shared responsibilities' (Srivastava, 2008, p. 158). It is 'an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences' and a 'willingness to

engage with the other' (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239). It is basically about moral obligations owed to all humans, not just in our own literal political community, for fellow world citizens.

Thus, from this standpoint, discussing Kurdish identity, their sense of nationalism, claims of justice and struggles for establishing their own territory and country, do not contradict with cosmopolitan doctrines. Rather, what Kurds have experienced—their experience of denial and exclusion, the violation of their political and cultural rights, the conflicts they live in, and unjust practices enacted against them in the four nation-states governing them—are all against the doctrines of cosmopolitanism. Opening these nation-states to the critique of global readers, and sharing with them stories, memories and testimonies of oppression and violence, these writings can be considered as acts of cosmopolitanism and moral, ethical and political commitments by these authors towards their fellow humans.

As the next chapters show, the writings addressed in this study are critiques of the injustices Kurdish people have experienced historically, culturally and politically at the hands of the nation-states governing them. They bear witness to a history of oppression, injustice, poverty and displacement. Through their works, these authors open these nation-states to the critique of their new readers across the world, and share with them the world in which they have lived and now live. Moreover, as the analytical chapters demonstrate, these writings also open the Kurdish community to review through critiques of Kurdish patriarchal society and familial and religious constraints and prejudices within the Kurdish community. This is itself a cosmopolitan gesture and key aspect of these writings. Although these writings largely engage with the cultural and political injustices Kurdish people have experienced, they also deal with and challenge global injustices. The most notable example is Boochani's memoir, which is an act of struggle against the human rights abuse in the refugee camps in Australia and a response to the global refugee crisis and oppressive immigration and border policies of countries like Australia. His work also critiques and challenges the West's ethics of hospitality—the welcome of the 'foreigner'—and respect and responsibility towards 'strangers' and 'outsiders', which are among the hallmarks of cosmopolitanism. These tendencies are also evident in the works of Nazand Begikhani, whose poems speak out against gender-based violence and honour killings. So too, in Widad Akreyi's memoir, is a strong engagement with global human justice and critique of human injustice all over the world. As the

analysis demonstrates, the texts reveal the cosmopolitan sensibilities and ethical preoccupation of these authors, or their characters in the fictional works, with the condition of their fellow world citizens and the universal human condition.

What this study and this section argue is that the national struggle that animates these writings does not contradict cosmopolitan sensibilities; rather, Kurdish nationalism appears to align with cosmopolitan doctrines, outlooks and causes. These authors are all engaged with their fellow humans' conditions, both at home and in the world. They critique injustice, oppression and inequality; they celebrate peace and freedom; they are preoccupied with questions of human cultural and political rights and justice (hallmarks of cosmopolitanism); and they participate in communal and global conflicts and crises, such as the refugee crisis or coloniality, through their writings.

As acts of cosmopolitanism, these writings also link the local to the global; they put the local and global into conversation; and they can play a role in forming cosmopolitanism. As Bielsa (2016) argues, world literature and works of translation play a significant role in forming cosmopolitanism, and the interaction and conversation between the local and the global. As noted above, Bielsa places translation and world literature at the heart of cosmopolitan theory and, relying on the idea of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and Papastergiadis's reflections on how art and aesthetics can produce cosmopolitanism, argues for the role of world literature and works of translation in cosmopolitan contexts. According to Bielsa (2014):

> In a cosmopolitan outlook where openness and interaction with others (and not universalism) assume a primary role, in which relationships between different cultures and modernities are underlined, translation can provide a means of conceptualizing and of empirically analysing this type of interaction' (p. 394).

Thus, Kurdish literature as world literature, and these acts of translations and 'opening the self' to the world and the other, can form conversations between the local and the global and generate interaction between the culture and the people represented within this literature with the cultures, and the peoples that receive it. They not only bring Kurdish identity into conversation with the world, but also enable readers to become conversant with the world and culture depicted to them, through reading these texts. In the analytical chapters that follow, I will identify how these texts interact with their readers and how these interactions can happen through the texts' strategies and poetics. These writings can also enhance cosmopolitan sensibilities among readers

across the world; they can alert readers of human injustices in a world far away from them and help them imagine the inhumanities of war and violence.

**Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism is a broad cultural approach and critical theory analysis that deals with historical and contemporary ideas of colonialism, imperialism, cultural and political domination, and their consequences on colonised people and their lands. As an inherently interdisciplinary field, postcolonialism covers various areas of study, such as history, geography, literature, philosophy, psychology and politics. Since its inception in the 1980s, postcolonial studies have brought waves of studies and scholarly critiques, and its contribution remains vital to critical discussions about nation and nationalism, identity and identity formation, and cultural and political struggles. Postcolonial criticism deals with and explores the representation of identity, geography and power in literary and artistic works, and examines elements such as language, form, style, aesthetics and poetics in such productions. As a critical framework, postcolonial theories provide conceptual ideas and analytical lenses with which to interrogate multiple aspects of literary and artistic works that deal with colonisation, oppression and domination. Postcolonialism it concerned with how the literature and art of subalterns and oppressed people engage with political and cultural struggles, and how they are used as instruments of social, political and cultural change. It is within this context that this study finds postcolonialism a useful analytical framework for approaching Kurdish Anglophone writings, which strongly engage with these ideas.

Before embarking on the details of what theories and ideas of postcolonial critics this study specifically draws on, two caveats need to be mentioned. First, reading Kurdish literature from the perspective of postcolonial studies and considering their experience as a colonial experience might be a point of disagreement, as they cannot be considered a straightforward colonial or postcolonial state. That is, it is historically inaccurate to categorise Kurds along with other colonised nations. The Kurdish experience of colonisation and domination is quite different from other colonised people, and these Kurdish writers and poets do not share the same historical and political motivations as writers from current or former

colonies. However, many of the most common ideas that circulate in the field of postcolonialism are among the most dominant themes and issues with which Kurdish literature has always dealt. Therefore, although it is historically inaccurate to categorise Kurds along with other colonised nations, the Kurdish experience could be considered a form of colonisation. Kurds' colonial condition, using the words of Turkish sociologist Ismail Besikci (2004), is internal and they could be considered an interstate colony. He describes the political situation of the Kurds within the states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria as internal colonialism due to the cultural and socio-political discriminations they experience. Since their division between these states, Kurds have experienced violent subjugation, both ideological and political, by their ruling governments. Each of these countries has pursued different policies to forcibly assimilate Kurds into the dominant ideology and culture. They have imposed their identity, culture and religion on Kurds and made significant attempts to abolish Kurdish identity and culture. That is why this study—like the majority of previous research in the field of Kurdish literature—finds postcolonial studies both applicable and a useful theoretical lens to study Kurdish cultural productions.

Another point to note is that approaching this literature through a postcolonial lens and in a postcolonial context is based in contemporary definitions and understandings of postcolonialism, not its original and traditional sense, which defines postcolonialism as the period after colonisation or a post-independence condition. In contemporary terms, postcolonialism does not necessarily mean 'after' colonisation and does not apply to a decolonised state and condition. Rather, it refers to the aftermath of colonisation, whether it has ended or still continues, on colonised geographies, peoples and cultures. This position is best complemented by Patrick Williams' (2010) definition of postcoloniality as 'not in any sense an achieved condition' but an 'anticipatory source, looking forward to a better and as yet unrealized world' (p. 93). In a similar argument, Elleke Boehmer (2005) states that postcolonial literature is not simply writing that '"came after" empire, it is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonial perspectives' (p. 3). Correspondingly, Kurdish literature, as postcolonial literature, is not simply literature that 'came after' colonisation, as Kurds are not yet in a 'post' 'colonial' condition and they still live under domination and oppression.

As already mentioned, postcolonialism is a broad area of study, and there are multiple postcolonial theorists and critics whose works make an important contribution to the study of literature in this context. The postcolonial theorists that influence this study are Edward Said (2000a, 2000b, 1994), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010), Bill Ashcroft (1989, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2015), Elleke Boehmer (2005, 2010, 2018) and Gillian Whitlock (2000, 2007, 2017). The origin of postcolonial criticism can be traced back to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). However, Edward Said is widely regarded as the founder of postcolonial studies, and *Orientalism* (1978) initiated what is known today as colonial discourse analysis. Said's *Orientalism* forms the basis of much of the studies in the field of postcolonialism. He is also renowned for *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and cultural Essays* (2000). The current study takes advantage of Said's ideas and reflections on exile to the exilic experiences of some of the writers addressed in this research, such as Hardi and Begikhani. In *Reflections on Exile,* Said argues that exiles who are 'cut off from their roots, their land, and their past', create 'a new world', similar to the world they have lost, to overcome 'the loss of home' and 'sorrow of estrangement', and 'reassemble their identity out of the discontinuities of exile'. Said (2000) believes that the life in exile is marked with the 'unbearable rift' that is 'forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' in exile (p. 173). These ideas are represented in the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani, as well as how their works represent a particular version of exile.

Moreover, this study benefits from Said's 'Invention, Memory, and Place' (2000) and his arguments regarding memory and its power to mobilise people around a common goal. As indicated in the next chapters of this study, Kurdish Anglophone literature is strongly engaged with Kurdish memory, both personal and collective, and memory is one of the key concepts repeatedly used and discussed in the course of analysing these writings. This study looks at memory in this literature 'not merely as a matter of the neutral recital of facts', but as a tool for political purposes or as a tool 'used' by these authors 'to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world' (Said, 2000, pp. 177–179). Chapter Three of this thesis will trace this strong engagement with memory back to the older Kurdish literature in which memory has played a significant role. Said's ideas of memory and how they can be used, misused or invented for political purposes, both by oppressors or the oppressed,

will be utilised in the discussion on Kurdish literature and the importance of memory in Kurdish writings throughout history. In his article, Said (2000) deals with the different ways memories can be 'used', 'misused', 'invented' or 'exploited' 'to serve political agendas'. Although much of his discussion in this work refers to Palestinians,[7] his arguments can be applied to similar contexts such as the Kurdish context. Again, it is important to note that while this study is concerned with what memories in Kurdish writings in English tell us and how they are narrated, it is also interested in the work and potential work these memories do.

Yet, Said is not the only postcolonial critic to discuss memory and how it works. Similar arguments can be found in Ashcroft's writings. He, too, looks at memory as one strategy or, as he notes, 'often the only strategy available to the oppressed' and marginalised people. Discussing the function of memory, he argues that 'memory is not about recovering the past but about the production of possibility'. According to Ashcroft (2009), 'Memory is a recreation, not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to horizon, somewhere "out there"' (p. 706). This is precisely what this study argues for the role memory plays in Kurdish Anglophone literature and its function. It finds personal and collective memory as a strategy to negotiate the past. They are more than a simple nostalgic remembering of the past; they are a medium of communication that can produce possibilities of recognition of the oppression and injustice they have experienced throughout history among the readers of these texts.

This study also benefits from Ashcroft's (2007) ideas on the role of language as 'a medium of power' in these writings, and how such writings 'may affect further results that texts in indigenous languages cannot do easily' (p. 16). In *Caliban's Voice* (2007), Ashcroft et al. discuss the political effect of choosing English as a medium of expression, particularly in challenging the colonial powers, and as a language that can reach the widest possible audience. English language in the writings of the first-generation authors in this study has a similar function. However, for second-generation author Khadivi, who grew up with English, the choice to write in English

[7] Said's main focus in this article is in regard to Palestinians and the manipulation of memory and history by the Israelis. Said (2000) brings examples of 'how overwhelmingly the Zionist memory had successes in emptying Palestine of its inhabitants and history' (p. 188). He criticises the lack of any serious attempt to institutionalise the Palestinian story, which can give it objective existence. He believes that Palestinians need to represent themselves and narrate their history. 'What we never understood', states Said, 'was a power of a narrative history to mobilize people around a common goal' (p.184). Said argues that it is through memory, especially in its collective forms, that people 'give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world' (p.179).

could be a natural choice, as it is for those whose mother tongue is English. Therefore, it is not correct to look at the element of language in her novels in the same way as the writings of first-generation authors. This will be discussed more in detail in Chapters Three and Eight.

This study argues that the writings of first-generation authors are a self-conscious and deliberate attempt to give voice to their homeland and its people. It also seeks to shed light on the role these authors play alongside the role of memory, language and literature. Particularly relevant here is the ideas Spivak proposes in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'(2010) and how the one with the ability to speak can speak for the voiceless. Spivak, who identifies subalternity as a disempowered position, believes that the characterising feature of the subaltern is being unable to speak. In response to the titular question 'Can the subaltern speak?', Spivak claims they cannot. She does not mean the physical act of speaking, but 'generating discourse' through speech about one's desires and self-identity. She asserts that the speech of a subaltern from a subaltern position never gets accepted as meaningful utterances, which carries the weight of socio-political agency and can articulate self-interest and self-identity (Spivak, 2010). Thus, her argument that the subaltern cannot speak means that the subaltern cannot be heard. Further, this question leads her to another argument: if the subaltern cannot speak, then it is the critical and ethical role of intellectuals, academics and those who have the agency to speak, those whose speech can be heard, to do so.

Considering the subaltern position of Kurdish identity and their position of disempowerment, oppression and marginalisation in the countries they have been divided into, and their lack of agency and inability to speak and be heard—both nationally and internationally—this study identifies first-generation Anglophone authors as speaking subjects, with agency and the ability to speak and be heard in broader political, cultural and academic contexts. As will be discussed in detail later, these authors feel responsible and seek to voice Kurdish oppression. Each of these authors—whether a poet, novelist, academic, journalist or human rights activists—due to their cosmopolitan position, are able to speak for the people of their nation in the wider global context, so their voices can be heard. As the analyses of the works will show, there is substantial evidence and multiple instances within the texts that prove these authors' purpose of being a voice for the people of their nation. The strong collective aspect of their personal stories, the presence of the voices of real people in

their works, and the polyphonic narrative form of these works are among the examples.

Closely related to Spivak's ideas is Kelly Oliver's (2001) concept of 'speaking subject'. In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001), Oliver argues that individuals, who experience discrimination, oppression and subordination, suffer from being considered as other, and this undermines their subjectivity. She believes that 'being othered, oppressed, subordinated, or tortured affects the persons at the level of their subjectivity, their sense of themselves as a subject and agent. Oppression and subordination render individuals or groups of people as other by objectifying them' (Oliver, 2001, p. 9). Further, 'oppression turns people into faceless objects or lesser subjects, and this renders them in any ethical or political sense' (p. 24). Oliver asserts that those othered can repair their damaged subjectivity by becoming 'a speaking subject' and this is done 'through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination' (p. 7). Kurdish identity has been historically oppressed, silenced and rendered 'other' in the four countries that rule over them and in the world; thus, Kurds have been turned into 'faceless objects or lesser subjects' in both a political and cultural sense. In the face of denial, suppression and oppression, Kurdish Anglophone authors, privileged with 'speaking positions', become 'speaking subjects' who aim to repair this damaged subjectivity through the 'process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination' (Oliver, 2001, p. 7). However, as the study demonstrates, this process is different for each of these authors and takes different forms in their work.

What this study attempts to indicate is not only and simply what these authors bear witness to or remember from the past, but also how and through what strategies and techniques they do so. In other words, it aims to look at how the poetics in these writings can affect the readers for whom these texts have been produced. Boehmer's recent study (2018) on poetics in postcolonial literature in English is very useful for thinking about the kind of engagement that exists or can be made between such writings and their readers. In the last decade, a number of postcolonial critics, such as Boehmer (2018), Ashcroft (2015) and Robert Young (Noske, 2013), have offered new debates in postcolonial literature and criticism regarding the poetics of postcolonial writings. In their recent studies, both Boehmer and Ashcroft attempted to develop a specific postcolonial aesthetic and poetics, as they believe postcolonial literature has its own distinctive aesthetic. They also both emphasise the centrality of the language in defining and exploring postcolonial aesthetic (Ashcroft, 2015; Boehmer, 2018).

However, while Boehmer focuses on the language of postcolonial texts, Ashcroft focuses on elements of the language; specifically, linguistic aspects. Yet Young is sceptical about these ideas. Similarly, he emphasises the question of aesthetic, which he defines as 'the literary and linguistic qualities of the writings' (Young in Noske, 2013, p. 613). However, as he claims in his interview with Catherine Noske, 'I don't think there is one postcolonial aesthetic'. For Young (Noske, 2013), the postcolonial 'is all about diversity, after all, so that must apply to its aesthetics as to everything else. There are many different ways in which writing can involve forms of critique and resistance' (p. 613). Indeed, Young is right in claiming postcolonial aesthetics as undefined and multiple; the writings addressed in this study can be seen as examples.

This study relies more on the ideas Boehmer puts forth in 'A Postcolonial Aesthetic: Repeating Upon the Present' (2010) and *Postcolonial Poetics* (2018). It also finds Young's viewpoint regarding the diversity of aesthetics in postcolonial writings apt in relation to the body of Kurdish writings addressed. In *Postcolonial Poetics*, Boehmer focuses on various contexts such as Southern and West Africa, Black and Asian Britain, and India, as well as various genres, including poetry, fiction, life-writing and essays. In doing so, she explores and introduces a number of creative devices as aesthetic aspects of postcolonial texts. Her aim is to indicate how the poetics of postcolonial writings in English can 'shape our readings' as readers of these texts, and her focus is on the 'reading' and 'reception' of these writings (Boehmer, 2018). As she states, it is 'a reception-based or readerly pragmatics' approach (Boehmer, 2018, p. 2). Boehmer sees reading as a 'border-crossing activity' (p. 1) and 'a conversation between a reader and a text' (p. 2). Her study centres:

> On the text as *something that is read*, and on the heuristic power of literature *as literature*, specifically on the verbal and structural dynamics, the poetics, through which our understanding of the particular postcolonial condition being represented (race, resistance, liberation, reconciliation, precarity, and so on) may be shaped and sharpened (Boehmer, 2018, p. 3).

She argues that 'literary writing itself lays down structures and protocols to shape and guide our reading', and suggests 'consideration of the creative shape, formal structures, and patterns of postcolonial writing might in fact sharpen rather than obscure our attention to those pressing themes' (p. 2). Boehmer (2018) 'does not only engage with literature as an instrument of social change, or even as a representation of certain geo-political conditions', but also the engagement between a text and its readers (p. 2). She reflects on 'what it is that postcolonial writing can *do*, rather than

consider only what it shows'; her interests are in 'pragmatics over pointing, in design over designation, and in reading defined first and foremost as communication' (p. 3). This study takes a similar approach to the analysis of the examined works. It looks at the poetics of these works, which represent a colonial condition, and how through these poetics, the readings of their readers may be shaped or sharpened. However, in reading these texts, the study examines both design and designation, and both pragmatics and pointing, unlike Boehmer, whose emphasis is only on design and pragmatics. This means the current study will also have an eye on the main themes and dominant motives in these texts but largely focuses on how the creative shape of these writings and formal structures can sharpen the attention of the readers to those pressing themes. However, this study does not look for or explore the specific postcolonial poetics Boehmer addresses in her study. Some of the elements and tropes Boehmer discusses in her readings can be applied to the works addressed in this study, such as 'juxtaposition' or 'reiterative poetics of trauma', or 'crisis-over-crisis narrative'. These tropes are among the devices used in the Kurdish writings examined here. However, as Boehmer (2018) herself points to 'the distinctiveness of the individual literary work' (p. 3), and as Young (Noske, 2013) rightly points to the diversity and multiplicity of postcolonial poetics, these Kurdish writings represent other and specific poetics too. Also, despite thematic and technical similarities between these texts, each or a number of them might be different from the other in terms of their poetics, which is largely due to the genre of these writings. Lastly, this study, like Boehmer's (2018), takes the term aesthetic and poetics in its broadest sense and looks at the general formal qualities of these texts, not in the way Ashcroft takes and articulates aesthetics elements, merely linguistic elements. As Boehmer (2010) explains, 'I take the term "aesthetic" broadly speaking as referring to a concern with the form and structure of a work of art over its raw content, or forms a critical part of its content' (p. 171). Thus, the elements this study examines are formal aspects of the texts, genre, narrative forms, literary techniques, dominant voices, modes of attention these texts invite, certain tropes and uses of tropes, characterisation, major themes, and sets of motives, images, metaphors and even sounds employed in the texts.

As far as the question of genre is concerned, this study relies on the work of a number of critics to see how each genre operates in the writings under examination. For the genre of memoir, its role and the elements at work in it, this study takes

advantage of postcolonial critic Gillian Whitlock, particularly her work *Soft Weapons: Autobiographies in Transit* (2007). Whitlock (2007), whose main focus is on women's life-writings, deals with 'cultural, social, and political work of autobiography' (p. 10). She believes that memoirs and autobiographical works can be picked up as a site of resistance and struggle—or 'soft weapons', as her title suggests—by authors, postcolonial or diasporic, as a way to foreground narratives of oppression, whether forgotten or suppressed. As she states, autobiography:

> Is fundamental to the struggle for recognition among individuals and groups to the constant creation of what it means to be human and the rights that fall from that, and to the ongoing negotiation of imaginary boundaries between ourselves and others (Whitlock, 2007, p. 10).

Further, 'the strategic importance of autobiographic writing is evident, for it is a way of reclaiming history, and presenting hitherto invisible histories of oppression and poverty' (Whitlock, 2000, p. 160). She discusses the role memoirs can play, particularly the memoirs 'on the transit', and the collective aspects of autobiographical writings. In her recent work, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (2017), Whitlock continues the work she began in *Soft Weapon* and looks at the testimonies of refugees 'on the move' across cultures, which are in search of 'witnessing publics', and have great potential for social justice. These ideas of 'autobiography in transit' and 'testimony on the move' are important in discussing Kurdish-English life-writings. As will be explained in detail in Chapter Three, a significant amount of Kurdish literature is memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, and these genres have long been among the dominant genres and modes of Kurdish writings. What makes Kurdish-English life-writing distinctive from older Kurdish writings is the transition that has happened through them and their 'transit' across geographies and cultures. What Whitlock proposes in *Soft Weapons* is useful in the analysis of not only Widad's memoir, *The Daughter of Kurdland*, but also that of Boochani, the male writer. However, as will be shown, the memoir of Boochani, as an imprisoned refugee on Manus Island in Australia, differs from Widad's memoir and has other aspects to discuss. Also, both Kurdish life narratives in English and works of poetry and fiction addressed in this study can be considered as Kurdish testimonies on the move in search of 'witnessing publics'; they are 'acts that summon and beseech' their readers to be witnessed. In my reading of these works, I will try to indicate how these Kurdish literary testimonies—poetic, autobiographical

and fictional—act differently as testimony, and how they interact with their readers. Among these genres, testimony, as an act of truth-telling/revealing and an evidentiary mode, is more closely associated with genres like memoir and autobiography. However, the analysis shows how fiction and poetry, each in its own way and through its own specific properties and techniques, can act as testimony.

As far as the genre of poetry and poems of Hardi and Begikhani are concerned, this study will also rely on Carolyn Forche's (1993, 2011, 2014) viewpoints and the idea of 'poetry of witness', which are extremely useful in understanding and analysing these poems. Both Hardi and Begikhani largely wrote on traumas of the past, both personal and collective, and their poems contain real stories of real peoples. Their poems bear witness to their personal lives and the lives of the people of their homeland, and are a perfect example of what Forche calls 'poetry of witness'. Forche coined this term in the introduction of her anthology, *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (1993), for poetry written in the aftermath of extremity. She finds 'poetry of witness' to be a poem 'against forgetting' that aims to give voice to the voiceless or those who otherwise might not be heard (Forche, 1993). These words bring to mind the ideas of theorists such as Spivak and Oliver, discussed above, and shows how the theoretical lenses used in this study are intertwined and connected.

Forche (2011) defines 'poetry of witness' as poetry that 'calls upon the reader who is the other of this work' (p. 161). For her, poetry of witness is 'a mode of reading rather than of writing'; 'its mode is evidentiary rather than representational—as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled' (Forche, 2011, p. 163). Poetry of witness is not simply reportage; rather, it is lived memory transformed within poetry. What is significant in Forche's ideas, and relevant to this study's arguments regarding Hardi's and Begikhani's poems, is that poetry of witness is not a mere documentation or symbolic representation; it is a call upon the readers. In Forche's (2011) own words, it is 'one's infinite responsibility for the *other one*' (p. 168). She explains:

> In the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us the experience of the other; the poem *is* the experience, rather than a symbolic representation. When we read the poem as witness, we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us. Language incises the page, wondering it testimonial presence, and the reader is marked by encounter with that presence. Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive. (Forche, 2011, p. 168)

In reading Hardi's and Begikhani's poems, this study will indicate how they bear witness to oppressions and traumas of themselves and others—as Forche believes there are multiple ways of bearing witness—and it will look at the elements within their poems that make their witness more dynamic and able to deeply mark their readers. For instance, Forche believes that poetry of witness becomes more dynamic when the person who is witnessing remains present within the poem. Further, it is through the inclusion of the personal that political poetry can to achieve the greatest influence over the reader (Forche, 1993). She believes that 'if we give up on the dimension of the personal, we risk relinquishing one of the most powerful sites of resistance' (Forche, 1993, p. 31). To give another instance, she finds 'loss' and 'evoking what has been lost' as a characteristic of the poetry of witness and argues for its importance as one way to verify the truth of poetry of witness and bring forth the real. Forche (1993) states that 'the poetry of witness frequently restores to paradox and difficult equivocation, to the evocation of what is not there as if it were, in order to bring forth the real' (p. 40). As will be seen, these elements, among others, are manifested in Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness. Moreover, Forche's insights into the nature of the language of the poetry of witness are also helpful in understanding the language of the poems of Hardi and Begikhani and how literature testifies differently from other modes. The analysis of their poems will also show 'the impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination' (Forche, 1993, p. 30, 2014, p. 18) of Hardi and Begikhani and how the 'language of their poetry bears the wounds' (Forche, 2011, p. 161). The characteristics Forche (2014) refers to, such as 'line breaks', 'ruptures of utterances' and 'silences and fissures of written speech' (p. 19), can be found in the poems of Hardi and Begikhani. As will be demonstrated, the language and the narrative of these poems are traumatised. What makes Forche's ideas more relevant to the arguments made in this study as well as connected to the ideas of Boehmer discussed above is her focus on how these poems communicate with the readers and how they can affect and mark them.

**Postmemory**

This study examines the trilogy of Laleh Khadivi, the second-generation Kurdish Anglophone novelist, through the conceptual framework known as 'postmemory'.

The term postmemory was first introduced by Marianne Hirsch (2012), through which she describes the inter/cross-generational transmission of historical and cultural memories. As briefly mentioned earlier, Khadivi is different from other authors addressed in this study due to her position and experience as a second-generation immigrant of Kurdish background. Unlike the other authors, whose works are primarily affected by their own personal memories of the past or present lives in the exile, Khadivi engages with memories of her father and stories of her ancestors in her novels. In her novels, Khadivi engages with memories and stories that are not hers but have passed to her through her parents, particularly her father. This study relies on Hirsch's idea of postmemory to explore how Khadivi has inherited memories of past generations, how and why she deals with the past, and how different her narratives are from narratives of the first-generation authors addressed in this study.

Hirsch's notion of postmemory was initiated in relation to the children of Holocaust survivors and the generational transmission of memories and traumas from previous generation to next generations. She developed this theory to describe the nature of memories, particularly traumatic memories, transmitted from one generation to the next. Hirsch herself belongs to the second generation of Holocaust survivors, and she has personal connections to this idea of postmemory. She states that the idea of postmemory came from a graphic comic novel, *Maus* (1980) by Art Spiegelman, in which the relationship of a father, who is a survivor from Auschwitz, and his son, whose life has been shaped by his parents' past (similar to Spiegelman's own life) is depicted (Hirsch, 2012). Hirsch first used the term in her article, 'Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory' (1992–1993) to describe the relationship that the generation after Holocaust bears to the personal, collective and cultural traumas that preceded their birth. She devoted most of her later works to refining her theory of postmemory and exploring its various dimensions and manifestations, mostly through her readings of the works of photographers, artists and writers of Holocaust post-generation. However, the term has now expanded to not only the subsequent generations of Holocaust survivors but also to many communities other than Holocaust and is discussed in relation to visual and material cultures like photographs, as well as other artistic and literary forms. As Hirsh (2001) asserts, she does not 'want to restrict the notion of postmemory to the remembrance of the Holocaust, or to privilege the Holocaust as unique or limit experience beyond all others' (p. 11). Moreover, there are many references to literary works of different genres in the

context of postmemory in her works, particularly *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012). Importantly, in relation to Khadivi and her work, calling her a 'second generation' and distinguishing her from other writers in this study is not an aged-based categorisation, as she is a similar age to other authors who are introduced as 'first generation' in this study. This categorisation is based on her different position, as the child of Kurdish immigrant parents—a Kurdish father and a Persian mother—who was raised in places far from their homeland, and the different relationship she bears to Kurdish history compared with other authors. Indeed, this categorisation is based on Hirsch's theory of postmemory, the theoretical lens through which this study approaches Khadivi's novels.

## Conclusion

Although Kurdish Anglophone writings are all engaged with recognisable Kurdish themes that can be found across the breadth of Kurdish literature, and although they contribute to Kurdish literature, they cannot be approached in the same way as older Kurdish diaspora literature produced in Kurdish language. These writings, their nature, and their function cannot be understood by looking at Kurdish historical and socio-political contexts only. Further, although these writings have been produced and circulated beyond Kurdish geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries, and not aimed at a Kurdish readership, their national and Kurdish context cannot be overlooked and needs to be considered in approaching them. To better understand these writings, both the context out of which and in which they have emerged need to be examined. Moreover, this study argues that this literature, as a literature rising from oppression and struggle, entails a form of activism and acts as a resistance literature. Given these factors, this study needs theoretical and analytical frameworks that enable it to understand and unravel different aspects of these writings, while also grounding its arguments and interpretations of the texts.

This study finds world literature, postcolonial studies and cosmopolitan studies useful frameworks in approaching Kurdish Anglophone writings. Each of these frameworks sheds lights on some aspects of these writings, and they collectively give a better and more comprehensive understanding of these writings, their

characteristics and the roles they play. World literature, which is concerned with the production, circulation and reception of works of literature and works of translations between and across the cultures, offers this study insight into the condition of Kurdish Anglophone writings' production, circulation and reception on the world literary scene. Postcolonialism helps in understanding the reason for the production of these writings as writings rising from oppression and struggle, and the importance of their circulation for the colonised people with whom the texts deal. Postcolonialism provides this study with conceptual ideas and an analytical lens with which to interrogate the cultural and geo-political contexts reflected within the texts. Further, by relying partially on the conceptual framework of cosmopolitanism in approaching these texts, this study shed lights on the ways these writings link the local to the global and put them in conversation. The methodology and s used in this study as the basis for applying the aforementioned theories to the texts are a reception-based and readerly pragmatics approach. This method relies on the analysis of both the texts, which are the primary data sources, and the contexts from which and into which these writings have emerged.

# Chapter Three—Historical and Geopolitical Backgrounds

## Introduction

This chapter examines the historical and geopolitical context from which this new body of Kurdish writings has emerged. As this study seeks to explore how Kurdish Anglophone writings contribute to Kurdish literature and a long Kurdish history of resistance and struggle, a chapter on Kurdish literature and its historical and geopolitical background is essential. In brief, this chapter aims to provide a short overview of the history and geography of Kurdish literature; it tries to indicate how the historical and geo-political conditions of Kurds have had numerous effects on Kurdish literature, the processes of its development, its boundaries, its structure, and its content. It also addresses the main characteristics and recurring themes and issues dominant in Kurdish writings, which Kurdish Anglophone literature also take as its subjects. Conversely, and more significantly, this chapter aims to discuss the roles Kurdish literature and Kurdish authors have played in Kurdish resistance and struggle, and how Kurdish literature has been a space and medium of both resistance and struggle in the history of Kurds. Moreover, this chapter will discuss how Kurdish literature has also taken up the task of preserving Kurdish memory and forming a memory of Kurdish history. In this study, the concept of 'memory' is used in its broad definition, both on a personal and collective level. Knowing these issues can help in understanding the new roles this new body of Kurdish writings in English play, and the new task it has taken up of forming a memory of Kurdish history beyond their national borders and in the wider context of the world. Indeed, this chapter seeks to trace the arguments it made back to older Kurdish literature and Kurdish history. However, it must be noted that it is beyond the scope of this chapter and this thesis to take the large body of older Kurdish writings into consideration to discuss their characteristics and their nature. Instead, I build on my own knowledge of Kurdish literature and the existing studies and research conducted on Kurdish literary writings to date, some of which will be referred to throughout this chapter.

## Kurdish Literature: An Overview

Kurdish literature and its history and geography are very much mixed up with the history and geography of its nation, which is why any discussion of it without discussing the historical and geopolitical conditions of Kurds seems impossible. In other words, any understanding of Kurdish literature requires an understanding of the historical and geopolitical contexts in which it has been produced. That is why in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, Kurdish literature is discussed largely in the context of Kurdish history and politics. This issue is not limited to Kurdish literature; it is true for other Kurdish cultural domains as well. In the Kurdish context, notions of history, geography, identity, politics and culture are closely linked and intertwined together, to the extent that none can be interpreted or understood without considering the others. This issue reveals the importance of this chapter in this thesis and its role in understanding and analysing the emerging Kurdish-English writings, which this study argues is a new literary canon in Kurdish literature that also contributes to a long Kurdish history of the struggle for justice, recognition and self-determination.

It is widely stated (Ahmadzadeh 2003a, 2005, 2015a, 2018; Allison 2005; Blau, 1996; Galip, 2012, 2016; Scalbert-Yucel 2011; Shakely, 2016) that Kurdish literature has been largely affected by the historical and geopolitical realities and condition of Kurds as a stateless nation. In the absence of a nation-state and lack of a fixed geographical territory, and in the face of division, displacement and dispersion, Kurdish literature has not had an independent state and lacks a fixed and stable geography. That is why it is hard to define Kurdish literature and its boundaries or its limits as a national literature (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a; Galip, 2010; Scalbert-Yucel, 2011). Kurds are the largest ethno-political minority in the Middle East and the largest stateless nation in the world (Mojab, 2006; Smets & Sengul, 2016). Denied statehood following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the Kurds have been divided among four countries: Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Despite their long history of resistance and struggle for self-determination and independence, they have not yet been successful at establishing an internationally recognised nation-state based on their national identity. However, the fact is, Kurds have been denied and divided not only geographically but also politically and culturally. The absence of a Kurdish nation-state and the division of Kurdistan into different nation-states has clearly shaped Kurdish identity, politics and culture. As Abbas Vali (1998) argues, ‘the

division of Kurdistan after the First World War and the consequent structural diversity of Kurdish societies, administrated by different political and economic regimes, have deprived the Kurds of political unity and cultural cohesion' (p. 83). Kurdish literature, as part of Kurdish culture and identity, has also been divided and marginalised to the literary maps of the four nation-states ruling over Kurds. In these countries, Kurdish literature has always had a minor position compared to the literature of the dominant cultures; that is, Arabic, Turkish and Persian literatures. It has been systematically excluded from the dominant literary discourses of those nation-states and has had a small or no presence in the literary history of those nations.

Each of these four countries has employed systematic attempts to marginalise and undermine Kurdish language and literature. The political and cultural policies employed against Kurds have differed from one country to another. That is why Kurdish literature has developed differently in each of these countries. Indeed, Kurds have experienced different degrees of oppression, discrimination, marginalisation and assimilation to the culture, language and nationality of the four nations governing them. To maintain their political and cultural unity, these countries have pursued policies to forcibly assimilate Kurds, like other minority groups, to their dominant cultures and languages. In each of these countries, many attempts have been made—at various degrees and in many ways—to suppress the use or development of Kurdish language and literature. Kurdish language has been officially prohibited in large parts of Kurdistan, and speaking or teaching in the Kurdish language is still not allowed in some regions. Similarly, Kurdish literature has been confronted with many restrictions and challenges in each of these countries; it has faced political restrictions, language bans and strict censorship.

Among these four countries, Turkey is considered to have been more repressive towards Kurdish culture and identity. In Turkey and Turkish Kurdistan, writing, publishing and speaking in Kurdish has been banned for many years: 'in Turkey even the term "Kurdistan" itself has been banned since the early 1920s and people using this term have been convicted' (Galip, 2012, p. 8). Under such circumstances, there is no doubt that Kurdish writings have been subjected to repression too. As Ahmadzadeh (2003a) argues, 'the active denial of any possibility of Kurdish identity in Turkey has created a lack of any considerable amount of Kurdish written literature' (p. 132). It was in 1991 that Turkey permitted use of the Kurdish language and during the 1990s, literary circles by Kurds from Turkey began

to form (Scalbert-Yucel, 2011, p. 172). As Galip (2012) states, there were no novels published in Turkish Kurdistan before the 1980s and only one published in 1988. Despite the ease of restrictions during the 1990s, just two novels were published. However, there was a striking increase in Kurdish publication in Turkey in the first decade of the 2000s with the ease in censorship (Galip, 2012). As discussed further below, it was mostly in the diaspora that the Kurdish Kurmanji novel[8] developed.

Similarly, for the Kurds of Syria, the socio-political and cultural circumstances have not been easy. Kurds in Syria have been denied Syrian citizenship; they were subjected to 'Arabisation', and Kurdish cultural activities were prohibited (Gunter, 2004, p. 203). Kurdish Syrian authors or Kurdish literature from Syria are small in number compared to other regions of Kurdistan. However, Kurds of Iraq and Iran, particularly Iraq, have had more freedom of writing and expression. The Kurdish population in Iran has had a measure of cultural freedom, particularly over recent decades; however, they have been politically suppressed and oppressed. 'Except for a short period during World War II and during the time of the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad in 1946', it was not until recent decades that Kurds from Iran 'began writing in Kurdish … It is only after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that an unprecedented publishing of Kurdish journals and books appears' (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, p.132). In the last few years, a department of Kurdish language and literature was established in the University of Kurdistan in Iran, although teaching the Kurdish language is not still allowed in schools in the Kurdish region of Iran.

In Iraq, largely due to the Kurdish Regional Government, which was established in 1992, Kurds have had more political and cultural freedom. This regional government led to the establishment of many publishing houses, both private and governmental, which have played a crucial role in the development of Kurdish literary production. Scholars in the field of Kurdish literature have noted the influential stand and vital role of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan in Kurdish literature and Kurdish literary production, of not only Iraqi Kurds but also Kurds of other regions (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, 2015b; Galip, 2010, 2016; Shakely, 2016). Many Kurdish writers from other regions of Kurdistan and from the diaspora have published their works in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, this does not mean that Iraqi Kurds have not been suppressed politically and culturally. Kurds of Iraq have

[8] Kurdish Kurmanji novels are Kurdish novels written in Kurmanji, the Kurdish dialect used by Kurds in Turkey. This dialect is also used is some parts of Kurdish regions in Iraq, Syria and Iran.

experienced severe atrocities, particularly under the regime of Saddam Hussein, and their political, linguistic and cultural rights have been severely violated.

It is clear that under such circumstances, the process of growth and development of Kurdish literary production and circulation have encountered multiple political and cultural barriers. Also, a large part of Kurdish literature has been destroyed, lost or remained unpublished in the history of Kurdish literature (Ghaderi, 2015, pp. 7–13). The majority of Kurdish publications have gone through either self-censorship so it can be published in the Kurdish language, or adoption of the official languages of the respective countries. There are many Kurdish authors who have launched their literary productions in Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages rather than Kurdish.[9] These writers may have written in the dominant languages due to the Kurdish language ban and publication ban, or as an opportunity to get published. There are still debates on whether literary productions of Kurdish authors in Persian, Turkish and Arabic are considered Kurdish literature. While some critics and literary scholars in the field believe that such writings should not be considered as Kurdish literature, others take a different view and include such writings as Kurdish literature, regardless of their language, if their content involves Kurdish identity and culture (Ahmadzadeh, 2003b). Kurdish literary outputs in English, which this study addresses, might encounter the same question as to whether are considered Kurdish literature when they are not written in Kurdish. Chapter Four responds to this question by arguing that this new body of work is a new literary canon that has emerged in Kurdish literature, and they should be thought of as part of Kurdish literary production. This study believes that even if Kurdish writings in English are excluded—particularly those of the first-generation authors—because they are not in Kurdish language, they cannot be excluded as part of the Kurdish struggle, a struggle that happened through literature. Thus, Kurdish Anglophone literature adds another layer to the diversity and complexity of Kurdish literary productions.

The diversity of Kurdish literary productions can also be seen in the various dialects in which Kurdish literature has been produced. In the absence of a Kurdish nation-state and as the result of the division of Kurds into different countries with different languages, Kurds have not had a single language as their formal language,

[9] Examples include Yasar Kemal, a Kurdish novelist from Turkey; Helim Yusif, a Kurdish short story writer from Syria; and Salim Barakat, a Syrian Kurdish novelist. Kurdish-Iranian authors who write in Persian include Ali Muhammad Afghani, Ali Akbar Darvishian and Mansour Yaghuti. Abdul-Majeed Lutfi and Muhyiddin Zangana, who are from Iraqi Kurdistan, have produced works in Arabic language.

and they speak and write in different dialects, such as Sorani, Kurmanji and Gurani. Thus, Kurdish literature has been composed in different dialects. Due to separation and restricted relationships of Kurds of each region with Kurds of other regions, speakers of one Kurdish dialect are not able to understand or read in other dialects unless they have learned or been exposed to them. In recent decades, some attempts have been made to translate literary works in Kurdish dialects into other Kurdish dialects; for example, the translation of novels of Bachtyar Ali (2002) and Ata Nahai (2012), which are in Sorani dialect into Kurmanji dialect. Such attempts can promote the cultural relationship between the four regions of Kurdistan and Kurdish people of different regions.

The different socio-political conditions Kurds have been subjected to also manifest in the content of the Kurdish writings of these four parts of Kurdistan. Kurds have been treated differently in the four countries they have been divided into, and they have been exposed to different cultural and political violence in these countries. Thus, despite having Kurds and the Kurdish question as the central issue in their writings, the writings of these four regions differ in terms of subject matter and the socio-political settings to which Kurdish writers are responding. This is not simply a matter of classification, but an influential and differential factor in the content of Kurdish writings. Indeed, so explicit and manifest are these differences that one can easily identify various political discourses and historical events Kurdish authors of each region engage with, challenge and respond to in their works. Thus, the divided and fragmented nature of Kurdish writings has led to the 'production of different literary discourse' (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, p. 135) in Kurdish literature. For instance, in the writings of Iraqi Kurds, writers and poets largely deal with the Anfal Campaigns and Halabja massacre, and the oppressions Iraqi Kurds have experienced, particularly during the period under Saddam Hussein's regime. This is while, Kurdish-Iranian authors largely respond to the oppression of Kurds under the two Pahlavi's reign, Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in Iran, and after the Iranian Revolution when the new regime came to power. The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, which was suppressed by the Shah's government and its leaders executed, and the Iraq-Iran War (1980–1988), are also among the dominant historical events to which Kurdish writers in Iran have responded. Kurdish writers from Turkey mostly deal with Turkey's colonialist discourses, the oppression Kurds experiences under the

Turkish government or the Ottoman Empire, and the military coup in 1980, which is why most Kurdish people and Kurdish writers from Turkey escaped to Europe.

This issue is also apparent in Kurdish Anglophone writings addressed in this study. As will be seen, although Kurdish-English writings all deal with Kurdish history and Kurdish questions, there are different discourses and various historical events and political discourses they challenge and respond to. For instance, Anglophone Kurdish authors from Iraq are largely engaged with the genocide campaign carried out against Kurdish civilians in Iraq. At the same time, Boochani, who is from the Kurdish region in Iran, deals with the Iraq-Iran War and the political and cultural violence he has experienced in Iran. Laleh Khadivi, the second-generation Kurdish-Iranian American novelist, also depicts three generations of Kurdish-Iranian people in her trilogy. Yet, notably, despite the different historical and socio-political settings Kurdish writers of each region deal with, they all have Kurdish traumatic history and Kurdish struggle and resistance at the centre of their work. They all condemn Kurdish oppression and raise their cultural, linguistic and political rights in their work.[10]

It is important to mention that the diaspora has played a significant role in the growth and development of Kurdish language literature, particularly the Kurdish novel (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a; Galip, 2012; Scalbert-Yucel, 2011). A glimpse at the array of books published by Kurdish diaspora writers and poets over the last several decades reveals that a large body of Kurdish writings have been produced and published in diaspora and across the world, largely in Europe. Due to Kurds' historical and geopolitical conditions, which have forced hundreds of thousands of Kurds to leave their homeland and disperse across the globe, a large number of Kurdish literary writings have been produced transnationally and outside their homeland. This is also because of the possibilities diaspora gave Kurdish writers and poets. As a result of diaspora, Kurdish authors found the freedom to write about their homeland and to write in their own language. Being suppressed, silenced and banned in their country of birth, Kurdish diaspora authors found in their new home an opportunity to revive their literature and language. In the diaspora, Kurdish novelists

[10] It happens in some writings that the author of one region writes about the condition of the Kurds in other regions too. Examples include the novels of Sidqi Hirori, who is from Iraqi Kurdistan, which refer to the political and cultural incidents that occurred in Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan; Helim Yusiv is from Syrian Kurdistan but deals with politics and events in Turkish Kurdistan; and Eyup Guven from Turkish Kurdistan, whose writings deal with the Halabja massacre in Iraqi Kurdistan.

and poets began to express their traumatic life stories, experiences of displacement and exile, and national and political demands through their literary productions. There are several Kurdish diaspora novelists and poets who have published multiple works in the Kurdish language, such as Sherko Bekas, Abdulla Pashew, Mehmed Uzun, Sherzad Hassan and Bachtyar Ali. Thus, the geography of Kurdish literature and literary production and circulation is much broader and beyond Kurdish imposed national boundaries.

Despite a relatively long history of scattered diasporic Kurdish writings and the dispersion of Kurdish authors across the world, and as a result of their forced or voluntarily displacement, Kurdish literature has rarely been in contact with Western literature and the literature of other nations. In the diaspora, Kurdish literature—which is further expected to be in contact with the literature of other nations and witness more cultural interactions—remained confined almost exclusively to Kurdish national, cultural and linguistic boundaries. For Kurdish authors, the diaspora and exile have been an opportunity to revive their language and literature rather than be in contact with the languages and literature of other nations. Moreover, due to the minor and suppressed position Kurdish literature has occupied in the four countries governing them, it has been almost impossible to be in contact with the literature of other nations. It has been indirectly and through the Arabic, Persian and Turkish translations of Western literature that Kurdish audiences and Kurdish authors came into contact with Western literature (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a).

However, over the last two decades, with changes in the condition of the Kurds—politically, culturally and as the result of academic developments, education in the West, and more contact with the languages and literature of other nations—Kurdish literature has witnessed significant quantitative, stylistic and thematic developments (Ahmadzadeh, 2015b). It has also witnessed some cultural and literary interactions and exchanges with other literatures across the world, such as works of translation into and from Kurdish. This has been more with European languages, as the majority of the Kurdish diaspora population live in European countries. Over the last two decades and more in the last few years, there have also been works translated from Kurdish into English. As outlined in Chapter One, these works are not many in number, but they indicate a promising development and change in the realm of Kurdish literature. Thus, the small number of Kurdish translations in English or other languages, and their late emergence, based on what has been discussed so far in this

chapter, has historical, cultural and political roots. The body of work this study examines can be seen as a new cultural interaction and exchange with the world, which formed at the junctions of Kurdish culture and experience, and the English language and Western cultures. However, as this study argues, these emerging writings are more than cultural exchanges, and there are ideological and political objectives behind their production. This study asserts that these work also contribute to the Kurdish resistance and struggle, and should not be read almost exclusively as works of translation or Kurdish cross-cultural experience and exchange. However, this is not something new, and as the following section identifies, Kurdish literature—both at home and in the diaspora—has been one of the sites of Kurdish resistance and struggle for justice, recognition and self-determination.

**Kurdish Literature: A Site of Resistance and Struggle**

In the history of Kurdish struggle and resistance, Kurdish literature, both oral and written, has been one of the means of Kurdish struggle and sites of resistance against the denial of their land, history and identity. It has been a medium through which authors not only represent Kurdish history of oppression, resistance and struggle, but also a medium through which their Kurdish struggle has been enacted, their homeland and Kurdish people's rights defended, and Kurdish people's unity, resistance and struggle invited. Literary critics and scholars in the field of Kurdish literature have widely acknowledged the role Kurdish literature has played in accompanying as well as inspiring Kurdish struggles and political movements throughout Kurdish history (Aminpour, 2016; Ahmadzadeh, 2003a; Ghobadi, 2019). Kurdish struggle is not summed up in their armed struggles, but also and more importantly, a great deal of it has taken place through Kurdish folklore, art, literature, cinema and music. As Said (1994) argues in *Culture and Imperialism*:

> Just as none of us is outside geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and intersecting because it is not only about soldiers and canons but also about ideas, forms, images, and imaginings. (p .7)

In the same way, Kurdish struggle over their land and identity has not just waged through military force or the pursuit of recognition in national and international law. It has also prosecuted through cultural productions in an expanded national geography

that vastly exceeds their homeland. Deprived of their political rights and in the face of denial, oppression and suppression, one of the few ways available for Kurds to resist and struggle was through their cultural productions. Interestingly, even a part of the national and political struggles of Kurdish military forces such as the PKK,[11] and Kurdish political parties such as KDP[12] and PUK,[13] have taken place through cultural activities. Allison (2016b) discusses the PKK's cultural programs and the cultural activities of other Kurdish parties in local governments in Iraq, which were employed not only as a way to preserve their culture and identity in the face of cultural invasion of the dominant cultures but also as a way to promote Kurdishness and articulate their claims of statehood. She states that the PKK's cultural program began in the mid-1980s with a musical group called *Koms* and Kom musicians who 'identified their mission as stopping the assimilation of Kurdish folk music by the colonies' (Allison, 2016b, p. 4). Much of their music was political and produced in the diaspora. Allison also identifies examples from Kurdish parties in local government that 'have devoted considerable resources to cultural activity' (p. 4). She explains that local Kurdish TV stations belonging to the dominant political parties, KDP and PUK, used Dengbejs (Kurdish folk singers) in their programs and through their performances, they 'articulate their claim to statehood' (Allison, 2016b, p. 5). Quoted testimony from PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is instructive in this regard:

> The art of the Turkish Republic is an act of invasion. The art of Turkish Republic is an act of suffocation, assimilation and clearance of the existing traditions and activities of people in Kurdistan by the bourgeois. So art is dead. Therefore emergence of the PKK is the resurrection of the art. It is the source of art. It is the foundation laid down. (Allison, 2016b, p. 5)

This statement shows how art is used as a response to cultural invasion and oppression from the oppressors and how it becomes a medium of struggle, not only by artists but also by political organisations and parties. Cengiz Gunes (2017) and Clemence Scalbert-Yucel (2017) also discuss the role of cultural institutions established by the PKK to spread Kurdish national identity, and show how a robust network of cultural centres, musicians, publishers and art festivals in Turkey and the diaspora have served as political and ideological apparatus for the PKK. Allison (2013b, 2016b) also argues for the role Kurdish folklore and oral literature have

[11] PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, is a Kurdish militant and political organisation established in 1987, led by Abdullah Ocalan.
[12] Kurdish Democratic Party, also known as PDK.
[13] Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

played and continue to play in Kurdish nationalism and nation-building processes. She asserts that Kurdish folklore is a serious national asset, 'a primary source for collective memory and Kurdish history' (Allison, 2016b, p. 1). She argues for the continuing political importance of folklore in Kurdistan and how 'it became part of the nation-building process of the late Ottoman Empire and its successor states, especially Turkey, which then influenced nation-building in Pahlavi Iran' (p. 1). Further, Kurdish nationalist movements 'have taken up Kurdish folklores', particularly in Turkey and Iraq, for national and political purposes (Allison, 2016b, p. 2).

In the same way, Kurdish literature has played a significant role in this process, and it has been one of the prominent sites through which some Kurdish authors resist against oppression and struggle for justice and equality. For these Kurdish writers and poets—many of whom are involved in political activities and Kurdish resistance movements[14]—writing has been a space and platform through which they have expressed themselves and their political ideologies. They have challenged the historical, political and cultural oppression to which Kurds have been subjected. Through their writings they have defended Kurdish rights of justice and freedom, and attempted to invite Kurdish people as well as Kurdish fighters, to resistance and struggle. However, resistance and struggle is not just a matter of theme and subject matter in Kurdish writings. Rather, writing itself becomes an act of struggle, and a tool Kurdish authors and poets have picked up for resistance and struggle. As already mentioned, many of the Kurdish writers and poets have been involved in Kurdish political and national movements, and sometimes had leading roles in these movements. For instance, the poets Abdulrahman Sharafkandi, known as Hejar, and Muhammad Amin Shaykhul Islam, known as Hemin, were both active members of the Republic of Mahabad, a short-lived self-governing state established in Iran in 1946. As Aminpour (2016) explains, 'their poetry became a medium through which they introduced new nationalist ideas to the educated minority and the illiterate

[14] Among the prominent Kurdish authors who have been members of political movements are Sherko Bekas, Ferhad Shakely, Rafiq Sabir, Latif Halmet, Ahmed Hardi (father of Choman Hardi, one of the poets addressed in this study), Kamaran Mukri, Yunis Reuf Dildar, Dilshad Meriwani, Goran Meriwani, Hejar (Abdulrahman Sharafkandi) and Hemin (Muhammad Amin Shaykhul Islam), Mehmed Uzun, Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, Lokman Polat, Hessene Mete, Mahmud Baksi, Fergin Melik Aykoc and Abidin Zeynel. These writers and many others joined the Kurdish national movements and were involved with political activities. Many were arrested and detained because of their political activities and their writings. Some were executed and many others fled to Europe to save their lives.

masses at large' (p. 196). Another example is Ibrahim Ahmad, a famous Kurdish novelist and short story writer, and active member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party who experienced years of imprisonment during the Baath regime. He is known for his novel *Jani Gel*, which means the suffering of the people, in which he writes about the Kurdish war of independence. The novel was written in 1956 but was published 13 years later in 1972 due to his imprisonment and political censorship; it is widely considered as a political project.[15] Ahmad fled to Britain in 1975, where he sought asylum as a political refugee.

Many other Kurdish writers and poets from different parts of Kurdistan have been involved in Kurdish political movements and have been arrested, imprisoned and tortured for their political activities and their writings, and then finally fled their homeland. Most prominent are Sherko Bekas (from Iraq) and Mehmed Uzun (from Turkey), two well-known Kurdish authors who experienced years of imprisonment and fled their homeland. They settled in the diaspora, where they continued their political activities and writings. A pioneer of modern Kurdish poetry, Bekas has made a great contribution to Kurdish literature. He was also a political activist and a Peshmerga, Kurdish freedom fighter. He joined the Kurdish Liberation Movement in 1965 against the then Iraqi regime and worked in the movement's radio station as 'the voice of Kurdistan', reciting his poems for Peshmerga forces to agitate them against their enemy (Besson, 2019, p. 440). Bekas was also one of the founders of the political and literary movement *Rwanga* in the early 1970s. His love of Kurdistan and the agonies Kurdish people have experienced throughout history are at the centre of his poems. Hemin, Hejar and Bekas are prominent examples of Kurdish poets whose works have played a significant role in both the development of Kurdish literature and in national discourses. Kurdish poetry has had a crucial role in constructing and disseminating Kurdish nationalism.[16]

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[15] For more on this novel, see two doctoral theses: Ahmadzadeh's (2003a) 'Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse' and Amin Abdulqader Omar's (2016) 'The Kurdish Iraqi Novel, 1970–2011: A Genetic-Structuralist Approach, which discusses Kurdish novels, including Ahmad's *Jani Gel*, that 'were published more as political projects than as literary works' (p. 40).

[16] In her doctoral thesis, 'The Emergence and Development of Modern Kurdish Poetry' (2016), Farangis Ghaderi discusses how Kurdish poetry played a significant role in constructing and disseminating Kurdish nationalism. At the time of writing this thesis, Ghaderi's thesis was under embargo, but according to the abstract and conference papers she presented at conferences extracted from her thesis, such as 'Poetics of Resistance: Modern Kurdish Poetry as Aesthetic Resistance' (2019), Kurdish modern poetry from the outset has been 'a platform for the nationalist resistance movement and was employed as an effective tool in the official propaganda of the Kurdish political parties … [it] turned into a public space and poets were expected to take the new responsibility of

Uzun and his works also offer a good example of writing as resistance and literature as an arena of struggle. Uzun is a famous Kurdish novelist and political activist who fled persecution for political activities, like many Kurdish-Turkish writers,[17] and sought asylum in Sweden as a political refugee in 1977. Uzun is considered 'the defender of Kurdish in Turkey' (Ahmadzadeh & Allison, 2007). His writings, like those of some other Kurdish novelists from Turkey,[18] put him on trial in Turkey. For instance, in 2001, there was a court case surrounding Uzun's novel *Light as Love, Dark as Death,*[19] with 'charges of assisting illegal organizations' and accusations of 'inciting rebellion to separatism'. This led to protests from international writers, and he was finally acquitted (Ahmadzadeh & Allison, 2007; Allison, 2013). For the Kurdish people in Turkey, Uzun was more than a novelist and his novels were more than literary works. As Ahmadzadeh and Allison (2007) write:

> For the people of the Kurdish region of Turkey, Uzun represented far more. He was the first person from Turkey to write novels in Kurmanji Kurdish, a language forbidden for most of the 20th century in Turkey, and which even now has no official presence in the state education system, and is often decried as a 'patois', a farrago of mutually incomprehensible subdialects. Uzun's books celebrated Kurdish culture and focused on such themes as love, conflict, political struggle, statelessness and democracy, and memory and forgetting, always suffused with the nostalgia of exile. His protagonists were for the most part the Kurdish intellectual activists who had devoted their life to the revival of their nation. Uzun's books were banned in Turkey for many years. (para. 5)

For Uzun and other Kurdish writers before him, even 'writing in Kurdish was a marked and politicized activity' (Allison, 2013b, p. 203), let alone writing about Kurds and their rights. Thus, the very act of writing in Kurdish language, which was prohibited and banned, was an act of resistance and an act of struggle for their cultural and linguistic rights. These Kurdish authors resisted against oppression and struggled

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awakening the people'. According to Ghaderi, Kurdish modern poetry has been implemented in different stages of the Kurdish national struggle and has been very influential in Kurdish politics. She believes that 'modern Kurdish poetry was the literary form which accompanied the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, a phenomenon which can be equated with the role played by the novel in Europe' (Ghaderi, 2016, Abstract). She further asserts that contrary to the European context, in which the rise of nationalism coincided with the rise of the novel as a literary form, in the Kurdish context, modern poetry accompanied the emergence of Kurdish nationalism. Ghaderi argues that Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish poetry have a dialectical relation. To watch the full presentation, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VnmtOVKMX8

[17] Galip's (2010) doctoral thesis, 'Kurdistan: A Land of Longing and Struggle: Analysis of "Homeland" and "Identity" in the Kurdish Novelistic Discourses from Turkish Kurdistan and to its Diaspora (1984–2010), deals with many of these authors and their literary works.

[18] For more examples of the novelists and novels targeted by legal action in Turkey see Allison (2013b).

[19] This novel shows the conflicts between Kurdistan and Turkey and revolves around Kurdish national struggles and the stories of guerrillas.

for equality through their writings. Their works became a public domain and platform to show their oppositions and claim their rights. Moreover, as will be discussed further below, the writings of Kurdish authors like Uzun are often considered as archives of Kurdish personal and collective memory, as they have recorded the lives of many Kurdish figures. Writers like Uzun also made great attempts 'towards shaping a modern Kurdish literary language and reviving the Kurdish story-telling tradition' (Galip, 2012, p. 247). Their attempts to revive Kurdish language and literature in the diaspora, particularly the Kurmanji dialect, which was suppressed in Turkey, can be considered part of their Kurdish cultural struggle. Galip (2010) discusses the 'struggle in diaspora of Kurdish intellectuals and writers from Turkish Kurdistan to promote Kurdish language and literature' in her doctoral thesis and argues that such attempts have 'been to the benefit of novelistic discourse' (p. 15). Examining Kurdish novelists from Turkey and its diaspora, Galip shows that most of these novelists have been involved in political activities and many have been political activists, whose works act as a public space for political debates, particularly for those in the diaspora. She believes that literature is 'the main field for these political migrants to discuss or share their views' (Galip, 2012, p. 197). This is true not only for the writings of Kurdish authors from Turkey but also the novels and fictions of many Kurdish authors from different Kurdish regions and from the Kurdish diaspora. The reason why this is stronger in relation to Kurdish authors from Turkey is that among these four countries, Turkey is considered to have been more repressive towards Kurdish culture and identity. However, the majority of existing studies on Kurdish novels from different regions have discussed this issue,[20] and argue that the

[20] Galip's recent work, 'Writing across Kurdistan: Reading Social, Historical and Political Contexts in Literary Narratives' (2016), which covers works of Kurdish authors from all four regions of Kurdistan as well as Soviet Armenia and the Kurdish diaspora, can be useful to see how Kurdish writers are engaged with the condition of Kurds and Kurdish question. For more information on the history of the Kurdish novel, its characteristics, role in construction of Kurdish national identity, and contribution to Kurdish nationalism see Ahmadzadeh's doctoral thesis (2003a), 'Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse', which is a comparative study of Kurdish novels and Persian novels, Ahmadzadeh gives an overview of the relationship between Kurdish novel and Kurdish nationalism and how Kurdish novel has been a vehicle of nationhood. More information can be found in his 'The Kurdish Novel and National Identity-Formation across Borders' (2015), 'In Search of Kurdish Novel that Tells you Who the Kurds Are' (2007), and 'A Review of Kurdish Life-writing' (2003b). There are also a number of doctoral theses that focus on Kurdish novels of specific regions of Kurdistan, which all highlights the close relationship of Kurdish novel and Kurdish struggle and resistance, such as 'Kurdistan: A Land of Longing and struggle: Analysis of "Home-land" and "Identity" in the Kurdish Novelistic Discourses from Turkish Kurdistan and to its diaspora (1984-2010)' by Ozlem Galip, and 'Subjectivity in Contemporary Kurdish Novels: Recasting Kurdish Society, Nationalism, and Gender' (2015) by Kaveh Ghobadi. See Shakely (2016) about Kurdish short stories.

emergence of the Kurdish novel form has been largely engaged with Kurdish nationalism and a site for Kurdish resistance and struggle. Kurdish literary scholars believe that earlier Kurdish novels were exclusively dealing with Kurdish politics, and it was in the 20th century that aesthetic elements were added to Kurdish writings. For instance, in his essay 'Kurdish Fiction: From Writing as Resistance to Aestheticized Commitment', Ghobadi (2019) argues 'the earlier Kurdish writers primarily viewed fiction as a medium for cultural preservation and national liberation, around the turn of the 20th century a generation of Kurdish writers appeared who were as equally concerned with aesthetics as with politics' (pp. 18–27). Ghobadi also asserts that works produced in the diaspora have been overtly political and mostly verged on propaganda, such as the works of Siyamend Shekh Aghayi and Teyfur. However, authors living at home, such as Ata Nahai, they pay more attention to formal and aesthetic aspects in their writing. Thus, Ghobadi contends that literature 'is used as a medium for national awakening and cultural preservation' for the majority of these authors—both at home and in the diaspora (p. 25)—although those at home avoid overtly political messages due to the political censorship Kurdish authors have experienced within their resident countries.

The above examples show how Kurdish politics has become an inevitable part of Kurdish literature, and more importantly, how literature itself plays a role in these processes and becomes a space or a medium of resistance and struggle. This links to the main argument of this thesis regarding the first-generation writings addressed in this study, which claims that their English writings contribute to the Kurdish struggle. As examined in detail in the next chapter, these writings are aimed at articulating and negotiating Kurdish claims of justice and liberation beyond their imposed national borders and in the broader context of the world. What is important and makes this new body of work distinctive from older Kurdish literature is that these authors have ground their Kurdish struggle in a global context. Their works have created, and continue to create, new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question and new ways of imagining recognition of the Kurdish people and their questions, not just the question of land. This study identifies this new body of Kurdish writings as a new discursive space of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish question and for Kurdish people.

The following section discusses another important element of Kurdish literature, which is its strong engagement with personal and collective Kurdish

memory and testimony, and the significant task Kurdish literature has taken up to form the memory of Kurdish history. The body of works this study examines are strongly engaged with Kurdish memory, both personal and collective, and they largely bear witness to the traumatic historical events Kurdish people have experienced. Therefore, this chapter traces these notions back to older Kurdish literature and explores why Kurdish authors engage so strongly with these elements, and what roles memory and testimony play in Kurdish writings. This helps elucidate how Kurdish Anglophone literature contributes to Kurdish literature in terms of its strong engagement with Kurdish memory and history, and how memory in this new literature has taken up a new task of forming a memory of Kurdish history.

## Kurdish Literature: A 'Medium of Remembrance' and an 'Object of Remembrance'

This study borrows the terms 'medium of remembrance' and 'object of remembrance' from Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney's essay, 'Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction' (2006), which emphasises the role of literature as a medium in the production of cultural memory. According to Erll and Rigney, literature is 'a medium of remembrance' because it 'can help to produce collective memories by recollecting the past in the form of narratives'; it is also 'an object of remembrance' because it can 'circulate at later points in time, they provide an important bridge between generations' (p. 112). Rigney (2004) elaborates on the functions of literary texts 'as a social framework of memory' and their role 'in the formation of cultural memory'. She contends that 'literary texts play a variety of roles in the formation of cultural memory and that these roles are linked to their status as public discourse, to their fictional and political qualities, and to their longevity' (Rigney, 2004, p. 361). Further, they play roles in 'fixing, transmitting, and transferring memories across time' (p. 369). She states that literary texts are:

> Susceptible to being relocated, because they are valued as pieces of verbal art and hence preserved as a recognized part of cultural heritage and/or because they are fictional and as such not bound to any single historical context. Reactivated at a later point in time through the medium of such texts, memories can enter into new communications. (Rigney, 2004, p. 383).

Seen in this light, Kurdish literary writings have functioned as a way Kurdish personal and collective memories have been produced, recorded and preserved. Moreover, as part of Kurdish cultural heritage, Kurdish literature can serve as a historical record

and archive through which Kurdish history and memory can be passed to the next generations; or, using Erll and Rigney's terminology, it acts as 'an object of remembrance' through which Kurdish history will be remembered across time and place.

A review of Kurdish literature produced in the last century reveals that Kurdish writings largely deal with Kurdish personal and collective memories. They often provide testimonies and evidence of real historical and personal stories, and memories of oppression and sufferings of the past as well as the present. They include traumatic stories and memories of war, genocide and displacement; they evoke a long Kurdish history of resistance and struggle. A glimpse at Kurdish literature reveals that a considerable body of Kurdish writings are memoirs, biographies and autobiographies,[21] and these genres have long been among dominant modes of Kurdish writing and expression. Allison (2005) discusses the popularity of such genres among Kurdish writings and claims that 'in the Kurdish context, it seems that self-narrative is very important in the development of the novel' (p. 102) She finds this aspect so strong that 'it is often difficult to draw a line between autobiography and novel in the Kurdish context' (p. 102). Although Kurdish novel has witnessed remarkable stylistic and thematic changes[22] from the early 20th century and has moved on from what Allison claims, such genres remain popular forms of expression among Kurdish novelists. The Kurdish Anglophone memoirs and autobiographies in English listed in Chapter One are evidence of this, and it is an issue that has historical and political roots. As the dominant cultures have always attempted to exclude Kurds from the right of self-representation and self-expression, there has been a desire and need for self-representation and self-expression among the Kurds. In the face of denial of their homeland, history, identity and culture, and as a result of being subjected to censorship, Kurdish authors have tended to express themselves and their sufferings, to reconstruct their denied national and cultural identity, to construct their imagined homeland, and to resist and challenge the dominant powers governing them. As discussed, the majority of Kurdish authors have been political activists; narrating

[21] Examples include the first Kurdish novel, *Sivana kurmanci* (The Kurdish Shepherd) (1935), by Ereba Shemo; *The Yard and My Father's Dogs* (1996) by Sherzad Hassan; Mehmet Uzun's *Rojen Afirina Romane, the Diary of a Novel* (2007), *Tu* (You) and *Siya Evine* (In the Shadow of Love), Kakemem Botani's novels, and *Veger* (Return) (2001) by Resad Akgul.

[22] For more information on the development of the Kurdish novel see Ahmadzadeh's 'Stylistic and Thematic Changes in the Kurdish Novel' (2015b).

their lives in their works has been largely in the context of their political life, imprisonment or experiences of oppression.

Some scholars, like Galip (2010), believe that works of Kurdish authors from the diaspora are more autobiographical than the works of Kurdish authors at home. In her reading of more than 100 Kurdish novels from Turkey and its diaspora, Galip (2010) points to 'the intensive employment in both plot and characterization of autobiographical elements' in the novels from the diaspora (p. 230). As she states, 'diasporic authors make extensive use of both factual and memory elements in order to represent the Kurdish historical past, including crucial incidents, war, state oppressions, and personal traumas' (Galip, 2010, p. 56). Her argument about Kurdish novels in the diaspora—that they are more autobiographical than the works at home—aligns with Ghobadi's assertion that Kurdish diaspora novels are stronger and more overtly political than those at home. This shows how the personal and political are intertwined in the Kurdish context; that is, the personal is political. This is more evident in the writings of Kurdish authors in the diaspora, as they have had more freedom of writing and expression. Kurdish diaspora intellectuals and authors have not only made a significant 'contribution to the development of Kurdish literature' and 'an active contribution to the development of Kurdish culture' (Ahmadzadeh, 2003a, pp. 162, 164), but they have also contributed to 'revitalizing collective memory and history' (Galip, 2016, p. 264). As Galip notes, 'the Kurdish intelligentsia in the diaspora has used every opportunity to contribute to revitalizing collective memory and history' (p. 27). A significant part of this happens through Kurdish writings, particularly the Kurdish novel, which is a repository of Kurdish memory and history.[23] Thus, for Galip (2016), 'the process of constructing meaning within the Kurdish novel is shaped mainly by autobiographical and realistic elements intertwined with socio-political and cultural aspects of Kurdish existence' (p. 27). As will be discussed further below, this is not limited to Kurdish memoirs, biographies and

[23] A large part of this happens through Kurdish media. In her study, 'From Benedict Anderson to Mustafa Kemal: Reading, Writing and Imagining the Kurdish Nation' (2013a), Allison argues that Anderson's modular schema of 'print-Capitalism' does not fit the Kurdish context, and it has been the Kurdish media that has ascribed great importance to the emergence of Kurdish print as a marker of the beginning of the discourse of national rights. As she states, 'although the 1960s saw a large increase in localised Kurdish print cultures and one could argue for some evolution of "print-capitalism" at this point, it was the arrival of the Kurdish satellite TV station in the early 1990s which delineated ideas of Kurdish nation and homeland in a way fully consistent with Anderson's notions' (pp. 102–103). However, as she argues, Anderson's wider concept of 'the imagined community' and his notion of 'imagining the nation through discourse' are valid and useful in the Kurdish context.

autobiographies, as the traces of Kurdish personal and collective memories and testimonies manifest explicitly in Kurdish fiction and poetry as well.

Uzun's novels, which have been discussed above, can offer a good example here too. Uzun's works include not only autobiographical elements but also, and to a large extent, the biographies of historical, political and cultural Kurdish figures. As Allison (2013b) argues, 'memory, in various forms, pervades Uzun's work' (p. 203). Uzun has authored several novels based on biographies of significant figures in the history of Kurds. *Siya Evine* [In the Shadow of Love] is the biography of Memduh Selim Beg, a Kurdish political and intellectual figure who founded the Kurdish Student Union called *Hevi*, which means hope. In this Uzun novel, there are many references to the life of Celadet Bedir Khan, a Kurdish political activist, writer and journalist, and his family. *Bira Qedere* (2005), *Hawara Dicleye I* (2001) and *Hawara Dicleye II* (2003), three other novels by Uzun, are specifically on the Bedir Khan family. *Bira Qedere* also includes details of the life of other important literary figures, such as Ehmede Xani and Haji Qadir Koyi, who were both Kurdish poets and significant contributors to Kurdish literature (Galip, 2010, p. 109). Uzun has written enormously on the life of Kurdish Dengbejs—performers of folkloric genres of oral traditions—whom he considers 'bearers of Kurdish tradition and identity' (as cited in Allison, 2013b). Most of Uzun's novels 'are based on revealing Kurdish cultural and historical heritage through biographies and memoirs' (Galip, 2010, p. 219). Thus, his works have 'constructed a Kurdish collective memory' (Sievers, 2016, p. 443).

In 'Memory and the Kurmanji Novel: Contemporary Turkey and Soviet Armenia' (2013b), Allison finds Kurdish memory 'the dominant, almost exclusive, theme of Kurmanji novels' and explores why Kurdish writers like Uzun and Hecie Cindi are preoccupied with personal and communal memory. She argues that these novelists 'deal almost exclusively with personal recollections, past events in ancestral villages, family sagas, and episodes from tribal history' (Allison, 2013b, p. 187). Further, she suggests that the works of these novelists emerged either as a response to oppression, trauma and displacement, or a public sphere debate against the 'space for counter-memory' that 'has been opening up in Turkey since the 1990s' (p. 191). This brings to mind Said's (2000) viewpoints on how memories are and can be used, misused, or invented for political purposes, both by oppressors and the oppressed. In response to the 'counter-memories' used or invented in Turkey against Kurds, these Kurdish authors turn their writings into a space of 'counter-memory' and narrate their

real memories and history. Thus, memory is used for political purposes as a 'counter-memory'. As discussed in Chapter One, in 'Invention, Memory, and Place' (2000), Said outlines examples of 'how overwhelmingly the Zionist memory had successes in emptying Palestine of its inhabitants and history' (p. 188). He criticises the lack of any serious attempt to institutionalise the Palestinian story, which can give it objective existence. He believes that Palestinians need to represent themselves and narrate their history. 'What we never understood', Said asserts, 'was a power of a narrative history to mobilize people around a common goal' (p. 184). It is through memory, especially in its collective forms, that people 'give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world' (Said, 2000, p. 179). Examining the Kurdish experience and Kurdish literature in this context, it is clear that memory has been one of the tools Kurdish authors have used either as a way to prevent 'forgetting'—as a response to a 'counter-memory', as 'counter-narrative'—or a way of documenting Kurdish history, particularly the life of Kurdish historical figures and Kurdish collective experiences. Memory has been one of the ways these writers 'give themselves a coherent identity' and a place in the countries they live in, where their identity and history have been denied. Remembering, writing and narrating collective memory and history, which happens in their works and through their works, have been how these authors have constructed or reconstructed their denied identity and history. Examples like Uzun and other Kurdish authors from Turkey show us how memory becomes a tool and a medium through which these authors resisted and responded to suppression, and a tool for maintaining and forming Kurdish identity and culture. As evident in the writings addressed in this study, Kurdish personal and collective memories are also the dominant elements. The memories narrated and remembered in these writings can give Kurdish people and Kurdish history 'a place in the world'. Whether employed consciously or unconsciously, the use of personal memories or Kurdish collective memories in these English writings can 'mobilize' Kurdish people 'around their common goal', which is achieving justice and equality and being recognised as an independent nation. Thus, this study concurs with Said in asserting that memoirs 'do' or can do a 'work'.

Returning to Allison's work (2013b), her arguments regarding 'memory', 'the use of memory', and 'the work of memory' in Kurdish writings are somewhat similar to this study's assertions regarding the 'use' and 'work of memory' in Kurdish Anglophone literature. Allison (2013b) views the work of these Turkish-Kurdish

novelists ‘as part of the construction of a common memory and identity which is part of the nation building enterprise and thus consider them admissible for consideration as a broadly defined “work of memory”’ (p. 191). She uses Karin Barber’s notion of *instauration*, which ‘describes an act reaching out into both past and future’ (Allison, 2013b, p. 192). She believes that in the Kurdish context, ‘writing novels about memories is a conscious act of instauration’ (p. 192); that is, there is ‘a process of instauration at work in these writings’ (p. 214) that reaches out into not only the past but also the present and the future. Moreover, she states that the obsession of these novelists with the past and their preoccupation with personal and communal memory is a way of ‘prevention of *oubli* or forgetting’ (p. 205). However, ‘the work of memory’ in this new body of writings is different from older Kurdish writings, as it works beyond the Kurdish context and culture, and beyond the geopolitical contexts the Kurds have been struggling with for more than a century. In Kurdish Anglophone writings, Kurdish memories and testimonies are narrated to a new and wider reading public, and through them, Kurdish memories and testimonies of oppression, violence and suffering reach different geopolitical contexts and circulate across the world. They show that Kurdish memories are ‘on the move’ across cultures in search of new witnessing publics. They are ‘crossing boundaries and entering into new assemblages of fiction and non-fiction’ (Whitlock 180); they appear in new languages and new and broader literary geographies; and they call upon new readers to witnesses what Kurds have experienced. In these writings, memory and testimony are employed for a different purpose, and the work they do varies from the work memory and testimony does in writings in Kurdish.

If in Kurdish-language writings memory has taken up the task of documenting Kurdish history and has been a way of ‘prevention of *oubli* or forgetting’, as Allison (2013b) contends, in these new writings of Kurdish Anglophone authors, Kurdish memories become tools of communication, serving as testimonial evidence that bears witness to Kurdish history for new witnessing publics. Thus, these new works are forming Kurdish collective memory beyond their national borders, in transnational and global contexts. It is within this context that this study asserts that personal and collective memories in Kurdish Anglophone writings are not a simple recovery of the past or simple nostalgic remembrances. Rather, they are evidence and tools of communication that can produce present and future possibilities of recognition of the oppressions and injustices Kurds have experienced, and future possibilities of justice

and equality. In these writing, to use Allison's words, a 'process of instauration' is at work, and these memories are not only a reaching out into past but also to the present and the future. This similar to what Ashcroft argues in regards to postcolonial writers' engagement with memory and history. As discussed in Chapter Two, for Ashcroft (2009), memories are 'a recreation', 'a reaching out to horizon', and they are about 'the production of possibility'. In postcolonial writings, remembering the past and engagement with the past 'is not about recovering the past but about the production of possibility … [it] is a recreation, not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to horizon, somewhere out there' (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 706). This study argues that in the same way, memory and remembering the past in Kurdish Anglophone literature is not only a reaching out into past but also to the present and the future. It becomes a space negotiating the possibility of a 'transformed future' (p. 705); that is, a desired state of being in the present and the future. Moreover, it is a way to tell the world to 'remember us'; to remember a people against whom injustice has been persecuted and to recognise what happened and is happening to them in the world.

Kurdish authors' memories, both in older Kurdish literature and these new writings in English, are often ones of sufferings, loss, oppression and victimhood. In her 2016 presentation at the University of Oxford,[24] Allison (2016a) discusses how and why suffering and victimhood are emphasised so strongly in the Kurdish discourse, including Kurdish folklore and Kurdish writings. She argues that the reason Kurds constantly bear witness to atrocity and memories of victimhood and oppression is part of both a 'moral worth', and a strong 'fear of forgetting' and being forgotten. She proposes that in the Kurdish context, events of the past, sufferings and victimhood have been mediated into a discourse. Importantly, Kurdish writings in English similarly engage strongly with stories of victimhood and largely bear witness to atrocities Kurds have experienced. In doing so, these works support Allison's argument.

It should also be noted that the discussion in this chapter so far is not limited to Kurdish memoirs, biographies and autobiographies. Kurdish poetry and fiction also primarily engage with Kurdish collective memory and history. It is evident when reading Kurdish fictional novels that they often deal with Kurdish personal and collective experiences. This issue has been highlighted in existing studies on Kurdish

[24] The full presentation is available at https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/framing-the-past-through-suffering-and-victimhood

fictional works. For instance, in 'Fact and Fiction in Modern Kurdish Narrative Discourse' (2016), Ahmadzadeh examines Kurdish short stories and fictional novels. He discusses the relationship between fact and fiction and argues that in Kurdish fictional novels, 'fact feeds fiction' (Ahmadzadeh, 2016, p. 94). In her study on Kurdish novels, Galip (2010) argues that the fictional works she examines 'can be considered as authoritarian fiction, in most of which the novelists, either explicitly in the forewords of their novels or implicitly throughout the novels, express the notion that novelistic discourse is supposed to reflect reality and facts' (p. 90). The strong presence of Kurdish personal and collective memory has also been highlighted in studies on Kurdish poetry. For instance, in his doctoral thesis on poets from Iraqi Kurdistan and its diaspora, Hassan (2013) frequently refers to the autobiographical aspects of their poetry and the explicit manifestation of their tragic lives at home or in the diaspora and the historical tragedies of their people in their poems.

Many poets' works act as testimonies of Kurdish history and Kurdish collective memories. The poetry of Hejar and Hemin, mentioned earlier in this chapter as two of the leading figures in Kurdish political movements, are a good example. Their poems engage heavily with Kurdish history and Kurdish people and serve as a space for their political struggles. As Aminpour (2016) purports, 'their poetry became a medium through which they introduced new nationalist ideas to the educated minority and the illiterate masses at large' (p. 196). Thus, it is clear that their poems have close links with Kurdish history and Kurdish people. Many other poets also witness the traumatic history of the Kurdish people, whether prior to Hejar and Hemin such as Ahmadi Khani, contemporaries like Goran, or the new generation such as Latif Halmet, Sherko Bekas, Abdulla Pashew, Farhad Shakely and Rafiq Sabir. The works of Kurdish poets addressed in this study, Hardi and Begikhani, as well as the fictional works of Bahar and Balata also exemplify this function. The analytical chapters will show how much these works are replete with personal memories and Kurdish collective memories. In these writings, the authors bear witness to oppressions and traumas of themselves and others and evoke their homeland and the Kurdish question through different strategies, as testimonies of Kurdish traumatic history. The remaining part of this chapter offers an overview of the existing literature on Kurdish Anglophone works. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study divides existing readings on Kurdish Anglophone writings into two categories: those by Kurdish readers, scholars and critics, and those by non-Kurdish reviewers and critics.

The second category will be discussed in next chapter, which examines the reception of these writings in transnational contexts and by their implied readers.

**Literature Review**

There are a number of academic researches and scholarly readings on Kurdish Anglophone writings. However, there is no comprehensive study on these writings as a body of work, and most of the existing studies are either case studies of one or two of these writings, or comparative studies of some of these writings with older Kurdish writings, either at home or in the diaspora. These studies largely discuss the historical and political context of these works. It has already been noted that these are inevitable elements and aspects of the majority of Kurdish writings, and any discussion of Kurdish writings without discussing historical and geopolitical conditions of Kurds seems impossible. Among these studies, only a few point to the emergence of Kurdish Anglophone literature and their cultural and political significance in global contexts. For instance, Beyad, Ghorbani and Amiri's 'English Letters, Kurdish Words: Debunking Orientalist Tropes in Kae Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*' (2018) is a reading of Bahar's novel, in which the authors draw on Said's critique of Orientalism to investigate the novel's affirmation and negation of Orientalist tropes; particularly, gender, sexuality, masculinity and the portrayal of America and the oriental-occidental relationship it represents. By also employing the work of theorists in the field of world literature—such as Damrosch, Moretti, Casanova and Cheah—they discuss the conditions of Bahar's novel's production and circulation in a global context. Beyad et al. emphasise the element of the language in Bahar's novel and introduce his work as a 'born-translated' novel, a term Walkowitz conceived. Although they focus on the Kurdish context and Bahar's representation of the Kurdish society, they mostly approach the novel in terms of its Middle Eastern context and how it represents Orientalist notions about the Middle East and Middle Eastern subjects, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. Beyad et al. introduce Bahar as an example of a new generation of Middle Eastern authors in world literature, whose works have gained much attention in global literary markets. In the present study, Bahar's novel is read alongside other Kurdish authors who, like Bahar, have launched their careers in the English language, and create a discursive space for Kurdish homeland and Kurdish subjects to be negotiated in global contexts. In a

similar argument to Beyad et al.'s study, the present study also asserts the importance of employing English in Bahar's novel and other Kurdish Anglophone writings. However, the present study offers a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the role of the English language, as the world's lingua franca, in this emerging literature. The questions of English language and the circulation and reception of these works among non-Kurdish readers also highlights the need to examine the significant question of readership, which existing readings on these writings have not yet explored.

Persheng Yari's master's thesis, *Kurdish Narratives of Identity: A Comparative Reading of Novels from Turkey and Iraq* (2019), also emphasises the importance of the English language in Bahar's novel. Yari introduces Bahar's novel as the first Kurdish novel in English, which Bahar himself claimed in some of his interviews. However, as far as this research has found, this is not an accurate claim. As far as the genre of novels is concerned, there are several other Kurdish novels, memoirs and novellas published in English prior to Bahar's novel. In Yari's study, Bahar's novel is compared to *Memed, My Hawk* by Kurdish novelist Yaser Kemal from Turkey, through a postcolonial lens. She explores how these two novelists—one from Iraq, who lives in the diaspora and writes in English, and one who lived in Turkey and wrote in Turkish—represent Kurdish experiences of oppression and their resistance against oppression in different ways.

There are a few other comparative studies that look at one or two Kurdish Anglophone writings along with other Kurdish writings in the diaspora or at home. For instance, Balata's novel, *Runaway to Nowhere*, has been the subject of Lolav M. H. Alhamid's doctoral thesis, *You Can't Bury Them All: The Representation of Women in the Contemporary Iraqi Kurdish Novel in Bahdinan* (2017) and two of essays, 'Journey Women: Women's Resilience and Transformation in Qasham Balata's Runaway to Nowhere' (2018) and 'Kurdish Women and War-Related Violence in Iraqi Kurdistan' (2017). Hassan's thesis focuses on women authors from Bahdinan, a region in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the novel genre, examining Balata's English novel and one other novel in Kurdish. Both in her thesis and her essays, Hassan examines the way Kurdish women are represented in these novels and how the novelists represent various forms of violence against women during times of armed conflicts and political dispute. Hassan considers the language of Balata's novel as the main element that distinguishes her work from other novels she examines.

Based on her personal interview with Balata, Hassan (2018) claims that by writing her novel in English, Balata aimed to show the world what happened to Kurdish people, particularly Iraqi Kurds under Saddam.

Among the authors addressed in this study, Hardi and Begikhani are both well-known and already established authors, with several collections of Kurdish poetry that have an avid Kurdish readership and network of critics and reviewers. Their writings have been the subject of a number of studies, many of which have relied on their Kurdish collections of poetry. The few scholarships that include poems from their English collections rarely discuss how they are different or similar to their Kurdish writings, or how and why they have switched to writing poetry in English. For instance, Saman Salah Hassan's doctoral thesis, *Women and Literature: A Feminist Reading of Kurdish Women's Poetry* (2013), which investigates the poetry of Kurdish women writers both at home and in the diaspora, includes Hardi and Begikhani among Kurdish female writers in the diaspora. However, Hassan has not included the English collections of these two poets in his analysis, which he asserts is due to the focus of his thesis being exclusively on poems written in the Sorani dialect. Although Hassan used some translated poems of Hardi and Begikhani in his study, he failed to acknowledge why these two poets had translated their Kurdish poems into English and the political and cultural significance of their works, whether in translation or originally written in English. Similarly, in his essay 'The Role of Female Poets in Modern Kurdish Literature' (2018), Ferhang Muzzafar Muhamad investigates the writings of five Kurdish women poets, including Begikhani, both at home and in the diaspora, to indicate the significant role these Kurdish poets play in modern Kurdish poetry. However, Muhamad only mentions Begikhani's English collection among the poet's works, does not discuss Begikhani's writings in English. His focus in this essay is the poets, their biographies and their lists of works, rather than analysis of their writings and the roles they play.

Hardi's first collection of poetry, *Life for Us*, is also the subject of Hawzhen Rashadaddin Ahmed's doctoral thesis, *Internal Orients: Literary Representations of Colonial Modernity and the Kurdish 'Other' in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq* (2015). Hardi's English poems and the first and second novels in Laleh Khadivi's trilogy are among the works this study addresses. They are analysed along with a number of English writings by non-Kurdish authors about the Kurds, including *The Lost World* (2011), *The Registrar's Manual for Detecting Forced Marriages* (2011) and *The Sayings*

(2003).[25] Ahmed explores colonial discourses and practices by Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi nation-states against the Kurds, represented in those selected works. Her study focuses on the process of modernisation of Iran, Turkey and Iraq, and how Kurds have been marginalised, assimilated and discriminated against in the process. Although Ahmed emphasises that Khadivi and Hardi are different from other selected authors—due to their Kurdish background, and Hardi's direct and Khadivi's indirect experiences of Kurdish traumatic past—she discusses all these works together and does not distinguish between Kurdish and non-Kurdish authors. The choice of novels for study may align with her interest in colonial modernity and these works' strong engagement with discourses of colonial modernity. However, she is not clear why Kurdish Anglophone writings were chosen to represent this; why Hardi and Khadivi were selected among Kurdish Anglophone authors; or why both Kurdish and non-Kurdish authors were included.

While Ahmed (2003) claims that her study is the first step of research on Kurds in an Anglophone literary world, she only includes two of Kurdish Anglophone authors, Hardi and Khadivi. Also, it does not provide an overview of how Kurdish writings in English or writings about Kurds emerged in the Anglophone literary world; or how Anglophone writings by Kurds are different from those written by non-Kurds in relation to aspects other than the process of modernisation of Iran, Turkey and Iraq. Moreover, Ahmed considers the works examined, both by Kurdish and non-Kurdish authors, as a new literary voice for Kurds in the world. However, her study fails to acknowledge or reflect on how the voices of Hardi and Khadivi are different and act differently from writings about Kurds by non-Kurdish authors.

Khadivi, the second-generation author addressed in the current study, is examined in Karwan Karim Abdalrahman's master's thesis, *We Carry These Conflicts, These Ruptures of History: The Hybridity of the Self in the Conflict Between Tradition and Modernity in Laleh Khadivi's The Age of Orphans* (2019). In this study, Abdalrahman offers a postcolonial reading of Khadivi's first novel, *The Age of Orphans*. Drawing on Said and Bhabha, particularly the idea of hybridity, Abdalrahman shows the Kurdish hybrid identity represented in Khadivi's novel and

[25] *The Lost World* is by Turkish writer Oya Baydar, *The Registrar's Manual for Detecting Forced Marriages* is by German author Sophie Hardach, and *The Sayings* is a novella by American author W. C. Scheurer. As far as I know, there is another novel, *Love in a Torn Land* (2007) by non-Kurdish author Jean Sasson, which is based on the true story of a Kurdish female freedom fighter who escaped from Iraq.

how the Kurdish subject, as the result of forced assimilation into Persian nationalism during the reign of Reza Shah in Iran, is torn out between tradition and modernity. Although Abdalrahman used a direct quote from Khadivi as the title of his thesis, and shows how the character in Khadivi's first novel carries the conflicts and ruptures of Kurdish history, he does not demonstrate how characters of Khadivi's second and third novels, and Khadivi herself, have inherited these historical conflicts and ruptures. As will be discussed later in this thesis, Khadivi's statement is mainly about the protagonist of her third novel, Rez, and how as a second-generation Kurdish American, he has inherited Kurdish historical traumas of 'statelessness' and 'not belonging'. Chapter Eight will discuss this issue and Khadivi's trilogy in detail.

Among the works examined in the present study, Boochani's *No Friends But the Mountains* has been widely reviewed and received the most critical acclaim. However, it has been reviewed and read mostly in regards to its Manus context, not its Kurdish context. In the foreword to this memoir, well-known Australian novelist Richard Flanagan praises Boochani's (2018) words for 'their beauty, their possibility, and their liberating power' (p. viii). Flanagan asserts that through his work, Boochani has 'alerted the world to Australia's great crime' and proclaims it 'a profound victory' (p. ix). In his reading on Boochani's memoir in *The New York Review of Books*, J. M. Coetzee (2019) gives a thorough review of what Boochani narrates in his work and offers an analysis of his accounts of Australia's harsh policies against refugees on Manus. Similarly, Christina Houen's (2018) review elaborates on the main concepts introduced in Boochani's memoir regarding the Manus prison, concepts such as 'Kyriarchy' and 'Manus Prison Theory', and introduces the work as a 'decolonial intervention into the prison as a neo-colonial experiment' (p. 151). She considers Boochani's memoir a 'significant piece of prison literature, and a scorching critique of refugee policies here in Australia, and by extension, globally' (p. 149). This global dimension of Boochani's memoir has been highlighted and praised in some other scholarly readings of his work. They refer to his accounts' universal appeal, with which many across geographical and political divides can identify. For instance, Felicity Plunkett's (2018) review in *Australian Book Review* states:

> The work transcends memoir, especially because Boochani is often self-affecting. The blaze and flicker of his self-assessment limns a more empathetic project through which he examines larger questions of the nature of human behaviour and the search for an adequate way to name and anatomise the cruel experiment that is offshore detention. (para. 7)

Boochani's critique of Kyriarchy is mainly based on and directed towards the oppressive system of the prison. However, what he both challenges and struggles against is not just the oppressive system ruling Manus prison, but a kyriarchal ideology, which has had numerous manifestations throughout history, of which the Manus prison system is one. In his review of the book, Jeff Sparrow (2018) also points to this universal aspect of Boochani's accounts and asserts that in the memoir, Manus 'is a place of punishment' and the oppressions Boochani writes about are 'universal oppression'. In the 'Translator's Reflection', which comes at the end of the memoir, Boochani's long-time collaborator and translator Omid Tofighian asserts that Boochani's memoir evokes multiple kyriarchal systems of oppression articulated through the Manus prison and beyond, connecting it to formally discrete political systems and distinct geographies (Boochani 2018, p. 370). As Tofighian (2020) explains, 'Manus prison is a location but for Boochani it is also a concept that functions within a complex ideology and set of institutional cultures' (p. 1144). Here the theory Boochani and Tofighian develop through and beyond the memoir—Manus Prison Theory[26]—becomes relevant. This theory introduces Manus prison as a phenomenon or an ideology, not just as a location. It can be any place in the world where people are subjected to oppression.

Willa McDonald (2018) discusses this universal aspect of Boochani's work by focusing on the title of the memoir:

> The title Boochani chose for his memoir, *No Friends But the Mountains*, comes from a Kurdish proverb that speaks to the long history of persecution and isolation of Kurds. The application of the proverb to the situation of the refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island internationalizes and universalizes the writing. (p. 22)

Contrary to McDonald's argument, this study claims that Boochani's memoir title has nothing to do with the universality of his writing. Rather, it is specifically related to and directed towards his homeland and his Kurdish identity. Before telling us anything about Manus Island, the memoir title recalls a famous Kurdish proverb, which has a history of oppression, resistance and struggle behind it. As the title signals and as manifested within the text, Boochani is significantly engaged with his homeland and Kurdish history in his writing. As the analysis in the current study will show, Boochani consciously and constantly evokes his homeland and his past life; he

[26] For more on Manus Prison Theory, see Tofighian's 'Introducing Manus Prison Theory: Knowing Border Violence' (2020).

bears witness to the atrocities people of his homeland have experienced through his accounts of his present struggle against incarceration; and he voices Kurds' claims for justice and liberation. He challenges the oppressors and occupiers of his homeland, those who denied and marginalised Kurds.

Boochani's engagement with his homeland and the Kurdish context of his memoir remains unexplored or only briefly addressed in previous studies. In the existing readings and reviews of his memoir, there are few references to the Kurdish aspects of his work, his narratives of home, and the Kurdish cultural elements at work in his writing. Houen (2018) briefly refers to the elements of Kurdish folklore and resistance as well as Boochani's memories of his homeland in her review. In his interview with Boochani, which is partly included in the memoir, Arnold Zable raises questions about Boochani's homeland and his background. Zable and Boochani briefly discuss two important elements in Boochani's writing: how nature, as a space of freedom and source of resistance for Boochani, is rooted in his Kurdish cultural background; and the recurring presence of Boochani's mother in his work. The current study acknowledges the significance of these elements and aims to shed light on them in more details.

It is only in Tofighian's writings that questions regarding Boochani's homeland, Kurdish struggle and Kurdish traditions within his memoir have been raised and considered important. As Tofighian claims, 'Behrouz's book is a contribution to the Kurdish literary tradition and Kurdish resistance' (Boochani, 2018, p. 366). That is why Tofighian believes:

> Interpretations need to be situated within the styles and structures that have characterized Kurdish creativity for centuries, collective memories of historical injustice and Kurdish political history, and their relational concepts of being and becoming that are connected to the land (Boochani, 2018, p. 366).

He also states that 'it is important to indicate Boochani's complex and multidimensional connection to Kurdish language, heritage, and an indigenous Kurdish Knowledge system—elements that contribute both to structuring the book and characterizing its content' (p. 537). Although Tofighian has discussed the strong presence and importance of these elements of Boochani's background within the memoir, and their effects on its structure and content, he does not offer a comprehensive and inclusive reading of them. Like other readings on Boochani's work, Tofighian's writings largely focus on its Manus context.

As the above examples show, reviews and readings of Boochani's work mainly highlight its political importance and the crucial role his testimonies have played in bringing out the voices of imprisoned refugees on Manus. As argued, Boochani's memoir also acts as a voice for many oppressed people across the world, including refugees, immigrants and people affected by war, oppression, violence and displacement. Michelle Nayahamui Rooney (2020), who approaches Boochani's memoir from a Papua New Guinean perspective, also sees this work as a voice for Manus people. She observes that what happened in Manus is 'not an isolated issue only affecting asylum seekers and refugees'. Rooney looks at the way Boochani deals with the nature of Manus and Manusian people and how he brings this local context to life, and to a global arena. Later in this study, the element of nature will be discussed further, and the way Manus' nature becomes a source of inspiration and resistance for Boochani is explored. It is argued that this is rooted in his Kurdish background and Kurdish resistance.

Boochani's memoir has been reviewed from different perspectives, but not from a Kurdish perspective. While the existing readings show how Boochani's work provides a voice for the refugees on Manus, refugees and oppressed people in general, or local Manus people, this study posits that his work, as his mode of resistance, has emerged as a Kurdish voice of resistance. This study aims to explore questions of witnessing, oppression, injustice, resistance and liberation, not in regards to Manus prison and refugees imprisoned and oppressed on Manus, which is the main context of Boochani's memoir, but in relation to Boochani's homeland and his oppressed Kurdish identity. The Kurdish context of Boochani's work is important to address as it reveals Boochani's wider geopolitical objectives and offers a deeper understanding of his work. This Kurdish context connects Boochani's memoir and his attempt to evoke his homeland and Kurdish expression of oppression to other authors examined in this study. As the literature review has shown, these writings are previously unrecognised and unexamined as a body of work. As the first to address this emerging literature, this study aims to introduce them as a new literary canon in Kurdish literature and explore their nature, functions and significance.

## Conclusion

This chapter has positioned the emerging Kurdish Anglophone literature within the historical and geopolitical context out of which they have emerged. It has provided an overview of the history and geography of Kurdish literature to show how these new writings contribute to Kurdish literature and Kurdish history. It has not only identified how Kurdish literature has been affected by Kurdish historical and geopolitical condition but also, and more importantly, the role Kurdish literature has played in Kurdish history and Kurdish resistance and struggle. Kurdish literature has been one of the means through which Kurdish people resist against oppression and struggle for their territorial, political, cultural and linguistic rights. Kurdish Anglophone writings are a continuation of this resistance and struggle through literature that reflects changes in the ways Kurdish people seek solutions for Kurdish questions. By looking at the history and geography of Kurdish literature, this chapter has indicated how these new writings contribute to Kurdish literature and Kurdish history.

# Chapter Four—Kurdish Anglophone Writings: Production, Circulation and Reception

## Introduction

Over the last decades, the Kurdish people have witnessed and experienced considerable changes in the countries they inhabit and in the Middle East, as well as in the international arena. Having always had marginal space both in the region and in the world, in recent years they have changed to a prominent actor at the regional level and also evolved considerably at the international level (Bozarsalan, 2016; Smets & Sengul, 2016; Stansfield & Shareef, 2016). This is largely due to their significant role in defeating the Islamic State (IS) forces—'a common global threat', which the world faced. Kurds' fight against ISIS made them widely known and brought them an increased presence in the global world, particularly in the global media (Smets & Sengul, 2016). The changing condition of Kurds is also due to 'the shifting geopolitical situation in the Middle East and the new role the Kurds have assumed for themselves in the region' (Smets & Sengul, 2016, p. 248). Moreover, 'the significant changes in the status of the Kurds in contemporary affairs being mirrored by the considerable expansion in the study of them, across the full gamut of social science and humanities disciplines' (Stansfield & Shareef, 2017, p. xxvii). There are also various internal factors, such as the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and more recent autonomy in the Kurdish region of Syria, Rojava, which has given Kurds political mobility and brought political transformations. The political developments in Rojava have raised the status of the Kurdish struggle in recent years. In addition to political transformations, Kurds have also witnessed considerable changes in the social and cultural realms. As Stansfield and Shareef (2016) argue:

> There have also been concomitant and equally profound transformations occurring in the social and cultural realms, as Kurdish populations have reacted to the new and complex realities of the world around them. Naturally, there are also interactions across these realms, as social and cultural developments and political transformations meet and thus alter how Kurds engage between themselves, across imposed boundaries, and with the wider world. (p. xxvii)

These developments and political, social and cultural transformations have had significant impacts on not only the relationship and connection among Kurds of the four regions but also have led to the expansion of their cultural ties on a global level. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Kurdish populations of the four regions have been separated socio-politically and even linguistically, which has also impacted their cultural production and circulation. Despite the restrictions, 'Kurdish communities remained in contact with one another and were mutually influenced by developments beyond state lines' (Bengio, 2016, p. 78). However, in recent decades, with the political changes witnessed, Kurds have been able to be in more contact; their cultural relationships have been promoted, and their cultural productions and exchanges have extended to a notable level. This is also true for the relationship and exchanges between Kurdish diaspora and Kurds at home, particularly the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. At home and in the diaspora, Kurdish media and cultural productions have increased, including radio and television broadcasting, online communication, literature and cinema. There has been significant growth in Kurdish cross-cultural interactions beyond their imposed national borders in different areas, such as Kurdish media, cinema and literature (Smets & Sengul, 2016). For instance, as Smets and Sengul (2016) observe, Kurdish cinema 'has increased in volume mainly due to the transnational networks of the diaspora' and 'several international Kurdish film festivals have been organized' across the world (p. 252).

Kurdish literature has also seen significant changes and growth over recent decades (Ahmadzadeh, 2016, 2015b; Galip, 2016; Smets & Sengul, 2016). As Smets and Sengul (2016) assert, 'the growth of Kurdish literature is closely related to print culture and political and intellectual life in different parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora' (p. 251). Some studies within existing research outputs on Kurdish literature acknowledges the changes in the realm of Kurdish literature both at home and in the world. However, they either concentrate on the quantitative growth and thematic and stylistic changes, or they are far from offering a detailed analysis of changes that have happened in and through Kurdish literature. For instance, in their editorial introduction to a special issue on 'Kurdish media and cultural productions in the shifting Middle East', Smets and Sengul (2016) refer to the growth of Kurdish literature in very broad terms only, and with little detail. In the same issue, the only article on Kurdish literature, Galip's 'Writing Across Kurdistan: Reading Social, Historical, and Political Contexts in Literary Narratives' (2016), does not deal with

Kurdish literature in the context of the shifting Middle East, as the dedicated issue suggests. Its main focus is on the relationship between six Kurdish novels from different regions of Kurdistan and in the diaspora, and the boundaries they set. Galip (2016) compares the ways the texts respond to different socio-political contexts. While she argues that Kurdish literature 'has a role in the production of national, regional, local, global and local mental maps' (Galip, 2016, p. 271), she fails to acknowledge how Kurdish literature produced such maps, as she claims it does. Galip (2016) simply points to the fact that Kurdish tradition 'is shaped in multiple geographies in terms of writing and publishing processes, multilingual and transnational affiliations, constant mobility and diverse socio-political contexts', and how this 'challenges the idea of a unified national literature and cannot be united under the sound of a single voice or stable ground' (p. 257). While the present study agrees with Galip's claims, it further posits that the transnational affiliation and character of Kurdish literature has been largely geographical. It is only in recent years, and through Kurdish works of translation in other languages and this new body of works in English by Kurdish authors, that a transnational turn has happened in Kurdish literature and it appeared in transnational spaces and contexts. Thus, the transnational and cross-border character of Kurdish literature that Kurdish literary scholars like Galip (2010) and Ahmadzadeh (2003a) often refer to is more in a geographical sense than a real transnational sense.

Another example is Stansfield and Shareef's work, *The Kurdish Question Revisited* (2016), which explores how the Kurdish question has been revisited in the Middle East and the world over the last decades, as its title suggests. The book is comprised of 35 chapters and each addresses an aspect of Kurdish politics, culture and society. Yet the only chapter on Kurdish literature does not address how the Kurdish question has been revisited in Kurdish literature or how to examine the processes and changing politics that happened in the Kurdish question through the lens of Kurdish literature. The chapter on Kurdish literature in this book, titled 'Fact and Fiction in Modern Kurdish Narrative Discourse' by Ahmadzadeh, looks at Kurdish fictional works and how facts feed fiction in the Kurdish context. Ahmadzadeh (2016) only refers to the 'quantitative growth of Kurdish literature, which is also followed by a qualitative change in the literary and aesthetic features of the Kurdish novel' (p. 94). His work does not provide an overview of the changes Kurdish literature has

witnessed in the Middle East or the world, or its increased presence in the region or the international arena (which is the focus of the edited collection).

This is one of the aims of this study and this chapter in particular. This chapter sets out to examine the increased global presence of Kurdish literature and the production and circulation of Kurdish writings across the globe, but not in a geographical sense and not within Kurdish national boundaries. As just mentioned, it is widely acknowledged that Kurdish literature has been produced, circulated and read in multiple geographies, and it has transnational affiliations. However, Kurdish literature has rarely appeared in transnational and global literary markets, and there is no significant trace of Kurdish novels or poetry in the international literary world. While a large body of Kurdish writings has been produced beyond Kurdish geographical and political borders, Kurdish literature remains confined almost exclusively to Kurdish national, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Kurdish transnational writings have been produced mainly in the Kurdish language and directed towards Kurdish audiences. They have been produced by Kurdish publishing houses in Europe, and are strongly connected to Kurdish homeland, Kurdish culture and Kurdish identity. Thus, Kurdish transnational literature is more in a geographical sense, in terms of the places and spaces of production and circulation of Kurdish writings.

However, in recent decades, the writings of Kurdish authors, whether in the form of translation or written originally in English or some European languages, have appeared and circulated across the globe in transnational and non-Kurdish cultural and political spaces and contexts, beyond Kurdish national, geographical and linguistic boundaries. International publishing houses have published these writings; they circulate among a new and broader readership across the world, and are read and discussed in non-Kurdish cultural and political contexts. This study contends that this body of work has transformed the transnational condition and character of Kurdish literature. They can be seen as a transnational turn in Kurdish literature and Kurdish literary production. These writings have broadened the geography of Kurdish literature and stretched the imaginative geography of being Kurdish beyond their imposed national borders in the world, as part of a larger imagined community. Through these writings, the boundaries of Kurdish literature have extended into transnational and global spaces, giving Kurdish literature a global presence.

However, this study does not look at this emerging literature and these literary productions exclusively as cultural development and cross-cultural exchange. That is, it is not seen as simply the result of recent Kurdish cross- and trans-cultural interactions and encounters with the world or part of the larger cross-cultural connections and interactions that characterise the globalised world. Rather, it finds them contributing to a long history of Kurdish resistance against oppression and injustice and the Kurdish struggle for justice, recognition and self-determination. This study asserts that there are ideological and political motivations behind the production of these writings, and they act as new discursive spaces of negotiation and recognition for the Kurdish question and Kurdish people in global contexts. In what follows, this chapter examines the process of production, circulation and reception of these writings, and sheds light on the importance of these writings, the role they can play, and their possible potential impacts.

**Production**

Kurdish Anglophone literature emerged as the result of Kurdish mobility, migration and displacement, and at the same time formed at the junctions of Kurdish culture and experience and the transnational and global world. These writings have been produced by Kurdish exile and refugee writers and poets who have been in direct contact with the Western world, the English language and the literature of other nations. All of the authors discussed in this chapter, with the exception of Behrouz Boochani, are Western-educated individuals who have lived, studied and worked abroad for many years, and have been active in various political, social and cultural fields in different parts of the world in relation to the condition of Kurdish people as well as global issues. These authors all occupy international positions and affiliations, as academics, researchers, activists and filmmakers. They have had great success within and beyond their homeland, and they have established themselves as international individuals.

Choman Hardi, who left her homeland in 1993 and sought asylum in the United Kingdom, was educated at the universities of Oxford, London and Kent. She received her BA and MA in philosophy and psychology and her PhD in mental health on the effects of forced migration on Kurdish women. Her post-doctoral research also examined Kurdish-Iraqi women survivors of genocide, published under the title of

*Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq* in 2011. Hardi's second collection of poetry in English, *Considering the Women*, which is among the works addressed in this study, is mainly based on her post-doctoral research. Hardi is a famous Kurdish poet, writer, translator and academic researcher. Before writing and publishing in English, she published three Kurdish collections of poetry.[27] She started her career in English by translating her own Kurdish poems into English and then writing directly in English (Morris, 2005). In 2004, Hardi published her first collection of poetry in the English language, titled *Life for Us*. As mentioned above, Hardi's second collection, published in 2015, draws on her post-doctoral research and centres on women survivors of genocide in Iraqi Kurdistan. Hardi also uses her knowledge of the English language and experience of translation and writing in English to translate the poems of other Kurdish poets, such as Kajal Ahmad and Sherko Bekas. Returning home after 21 years of living in exile, she is now employed as Assistant Professor at the American University of Iraq (Hardi, 2004; Hassan, 2013). As a poet, translator and academic researcher, Hardi has taken important steps in the development of modern Kurdish poetry (Hassan, 2013). Her attempts in translating Kurdish poetry into English, particularly the poetry of Bekas, who is one of the most famous Kurdish poets, and her own writings in English, are all important steps in introducing Kurdish literature, Kurdish history and identity to her new readers. She is indeed one of the pioneers in her efforts to bring the Kurdish question to the attention of non-Kurdish readers through poetry.

Like Hardi, Nazand Begikhani is already an established Kurdish poet with an avid Kurdish readership. She has lived in exile for many years and is familiar with English and French languages, and other languages such as Danish, as she has lived in Denmark for many years. Begikhani took her BA in English language and literature and received her MA and PhD in comparative literature from the Sorbonne. Begikhani also began her career in English by translating her Kurdish poems into English as well as French. She then published her collection of poetry in English, *Bells of Speech*, in 2006. Like Hardi's *Life for Us*, this collection contains both poems translated from Kurdish and poems originally written in English. Prior to its

[27] Hardi's Kurdish collections of poetry are *Return with no Memory* (1996), *Light of the Shadows* (1998), and *Selected Poems* (2003).

publication, Begikhani published a number of collections of poetry in Kurdish.[28] She has also translated some of her poems into French, Danish and Arabic. She has translated the works of Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot into Kurdish, and is an academic researcher and active advocate of women rights, particularly in the areas of gender-based violence and honour killing. She now works as a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol (Begikhani, 2006; Hassan, 2013). Compared to Hardi and other first-generation authors, Begikhani's poetry is more inspired by Western authors, particularly Nietzsche, T. S. Eliot, Baudelaire, de Beauvoir and Octavio Paz.[29] This is most likely because she has studied and been more engaged with English literature and world literature.

Unlike Hardi and Begikhani, established authors in Kurdish literature who have published many works in Kurdish prior to their English writings, the other first-generation authors in this study—Qasham Balata, Kae Bahar, and Widad Akreyi—debuted with writings in English and their English works are their first literary experiences. Akreyi is an award-winning international human rights activist who fled Iraq after the first Gulf War and has been living in exile in different Scandinavian countries for more than 25 years. During her life in exile, she has fought against violence and advocated herself for justice and peace. She earned her PhD in global health and cancer epidemiology, working with Anfal genocide survivors. In 2019, Akreyi published her memoir, *The Daughter of the Kurdland*, in English, which documents her traumatic life story in Iraq, her journey of displacement, and her life in exile. Importantly, she published her memoir simultaneously in three languages: Arabic, Danish and English.

Kae Bahar, the author of *Letters from a Kurd*, is an internationally recognised Kurdish filmmaker who has lived in the United Kingdom since 1993. Arrested and imprisoned by the B'ath regime, he fled persecution when he was almost 14 and sought asylum in England as a political refugee. Bahar obtained his BA in film and media from Birkbeck College in London. He has produced several films for Channel 4, the BBC and Al Jazeera and won many international awards (Yari, 2019). His films include *Return to Kirkuk* (2006), *I Am Sami* (2014), *A Special Guest* (2016) and *No Friends But the Mountains* (2017). Most of his works are documentaries and revolve

[28] Begikhani's Kurdish collections are *Yesterday of Tomorrow* (1995), *Celebrations* (2004), *Colour of Sand* (2005) and *Love: An Inspired Absence* (2008).
[29] Poems such as 'It is Only in Love that the Body Turns into a Leaf', 'Here Me There', 'A Song for my People', 'Silence in My Ears'.

around the life of Kurdish people, his homeland and also his own life. For instance, *Return to Kirkuk* is based on Bahar's own life. It is the story of a 14-year-old boy who was arrested and tortured by the forces of Saddam Hussein. The central character, Karzan, fled his country and after 25 years of living in exile in Britain, returned to his home city of Kirkuk in Iraq, which is Bahar's home town. Also, *I Am Sami* is about a 10-year-old boy who lives in a war zone in the Kurdish region in Iraq and depicts the lives of many 'Samis' in Iraq and in the Middle East. In an interview on SBS Kurdish, Bahar stated, 'If I can't bring the world to Kurdistan, I will try to bring Kurdistan to the world' (as cited in Germian, 2017). Bahar's fictional novel, *Letters from a Kurd*, also depicts what Kurds have experienced in Iraqi Kurdistan and their traumatic past, and like his films, contains some autobiographical aspects. Mary, the novel's protagonist, is also from Kirkuk in Iraq. His dreams of going to America to be a filmmaker, and make movies about the people of his nation, which is what Bahar does in exile.

Qasham Balata, the author of *Runaway to Nowhere*, studied translation at the University of Mosul in Iraq and got her MEd from Cambridge College in Boston, USA. She now lives in Kurdistan and teaches English at the University of Duhok in Iraq (Alhamid, 2018). Her fiction centres on the Kurdish uprising in 1991 and its aftermath. It demonstrates how the conflicts during the Iraqi civil war affected the life of Nareen, the protagonist of the story, and her beloved Karwan, and led them to displacement, separation and finally Karwan's death. *Runaway to Nowhere* is Balata's first and only novel, published in 2010, and like the author, the novel's protagonist is from Kirkuk and studied translation in Mosul University.

Behrouz Boochani's case is different from the authors discussed so far. Boochani is a Kurdish-Iranian journalist who fled Iran in 2013 and attempted to seek asylum in Australia with hundreds of his fellow refugees. However, they have been incarcerated in Manus Island, where Australia's refugee detention centres were located, since their arrival. Boochani is the only author included in this study who was not educated in the West. He got his master's degree in political science at Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran, Iran, and worked as a journalist before fleeing Iran (Boochani, 2018). As will be explained later, Boochani's memoir, the process that led to its publication, and the way it has been written and translated into English, is very different from the English writings of Hardi, Begikhani, Akreyi, Bahar and Balata. As already noted, these five authors have all been in direct contact with the Western

world. They are all Western-educated, some have studied English language and literature, and almost all are involved with the Kurdish question and Kurdish issues in varying ways at an international level. The authors from Iraq, with the exception of Balata, have lived as political refugees in the West and been politically and culturally engaged with issues of home, the Middle East and global injustice. Exile gave them the possibility to write freely about the political violence they have experienced in their lives. They make a new home and new life in exile; they work and study there, and speak and write in new languages.

However, Boochani's contact with the Western world has been different. He was subjected to political violence and faced political censorship back in Iran as a journalist, but he also encountered political violence upon arrival in Australia. He has experienced another forced exile from Australia to Manus Island and suffered oppression, dehumanisation and censorship there also. As media access to the Manus refugee camps was heavily restricted, Boochani, through his testimonies, voiced out the critical situation of imprisoned refugees and sought international help for them. Using a smuggled mobile phone, Boochani shared accounts from Manus and reported on human rights violations by the Australian government on his Facebook and Twitter pages. In his memoir, *No Friends But the Mountains*, he bore witness to the critical situation in which he and his fellow refugees found themselves. The writings were also tapped out on his smuggled phone in Farsi and sent the memoir's translator, Omid Tofighian, in the form of hundreds of text messages. Thus, Boochani's experience of exile is different from the authors discussed above, which makes his works different from theirs. However, Chapter Six of this study will show how his work can be connected to the works of the other authors.

Khadivi's experience also varies from that of the other authors under examination in this study, as she has grown up in America. Khadivi was born in the city of Isfahan in Iran to a Kurdish father and Persian mother in 1977. After the Iranian Revolution, when she was only two years old, her family fled Iran. After three years of living in different countries, they arrived in the United States as refugees when Khadivi was five years old. Khadivi has grown up in a society and culture very different from the one in which her parents were born and raised. However, through her parents at home, and her travels back to Iran in early childhood, she has been exposed to her parents' cultural background. Khadivi had only been to Iran at a very young age and has never been to the Kurdish region in Iran with which her trilogy

engages. She graduated from Mills College in Oakland with an MFA. Khadivi is a short story writer, novelist and filmmaker. She made a prison documentary, *900 Women*, about the daily lives of women at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, which was released in 2000 (Donahue, 2011). Khadivi has grown up with the English language, so writing in English could be a natural choice, as it is for those whose mother tongue is English.

However, as far as the first-generation Kurdish Anglophone authors are concerned, living in Anglosphere, studying in English, or having knowledge of the English language cannot be the reasons for choosing to write and publish their works in English. The points mentioned above, such as being in direct contact with the West, education in the West, and benefiting from the freedom of expression in the diaspora are all important factors. However, it is not accurate to claim that poets like Hardi and Begikhani have turned to English from Kurdish in their literary careers, or that Akreyi, Bahar and Balata launched their careers in English because they live or used to live in Western countries and use English as a way of communication in exile. For instance, if these writings are the tools these authors use to communicate the self and their culture and identity in exile and their diasporic space, then why has Akreyi, who lives in Denmark, published her work in English, Norwegian and Arabic (the language of their oppressor in Iraq). Also, if this is a matter of freedom of expression, the authors from Iraqi Kurdistan—Hardi, Begikhani, Balata, Bahar and Akreyi—could publish their writings in the Kurdish language and in Iraqi Kurdistan, like many Kurdish diaspora authors. As noted in Chapter Three, in recent decades bans have eased on Kurdish publications in the countries they live in, particularly in Iraqi Kurdistan, due to the existence of a *de facto* Kurdish State. If a Kurdish author from Iran, such as Boochani, is not be able to publish his work in Iran because it is also about the political violence he witnessed there, Kurdish Anglophone authors from Iraq could publish their works in the Kurdish language at home, since they are mostly concerned with the oppressions enacted against them during the Ba'ath regime, which no longer exists. Thus, for these authors, the choice to write and publish works in English rather than Kurdish has not been a matter of restriction or being unable to write and publish in the Kurdish language. Moreover, in the Kurdish context, the Kurdish language is considered 'a marker of Kurdish identity' (Allison, 2013b, p. 197). It has been one of the main national and cultural elements Kurds have always fought for and tried to preserve by speaking and writing in it. Writing in the Kurdish

language and preserving it has been one of the missions of Kurdish writers and poets. In the condition of language ban and the general socio-political condition of Kurds, writing in Kurdish has been an act of resistance and struggle for their cultural and linguistic rights. That is why 'writing in Kurdish has been a marked and politicized activity' (Allison, 2013b, p. 203) by Kurdish writers in some parts of Kurdistan. Given this, why have Kurdish Anglophone authors moved beyond their linguistic boundaries and published their works in the English language? Why have these Kurdish authors written themselves, their past life, and Kurdish history and stories into the world? Is this also a marked and politicised activity too?

A review of the Kurdish Anglophone literature reveals that all these writings engage with recognisable Kurdish themes found across the breadth of Kurdish literature, including Kurdish traumatic experiences, Kurdish resistance and struggle, war, genocide, oppression, and Kurdish territorial, national and political claims. What is evident in these writings are Kurdish personal and collective narratives of oppression, suppression, displacement and exile, narrated in the English language. Certainly, this body of writings is strongly engaged with Kurdish stories and memories, and it embodies the subjects, themes and issues that are found in any Kurdish writing. However, having been produced in English and read by non-Kurdish readers make them very different from a piece of writing in Kurdish with the same themes and subjects. For instance, the Kurdish poems Hardi and Begikhani translated and published in their English collections of poetry cannot be seen in the same way as their Kurdish versions, and they are not a mere translation and exchange from Kurdish words into English words.

It is clear that these Kurdish authors, by translating themselves and by choosing to write and publish in English, aimed at English readers and have a non-Kurdish readership in mind. This study argues that employment of the English language is a conscious attempt and deliberate strategy by these authors (i.e., the first-generation Kurdish Anglophone authors) to communicate with the world and readers beyond their imposed national borders. As Bielsa (2014) asserts, 'people whose native language is not English are translating themselves into the dominant global language in order to communicate beyond their own locales' (p. 393). Thus, this language becomes a means and a tool of communication through which these Kurdish authors can reach the widest possible audience across the world. They have 'written world literature consciously' and 'have sent their works abroad' as a way to negotiate their

local concerns with the global. Translation and writing in English are strategies these authors have employed to 'bring local to the global' (Damrosch, 2003a, p. 5) and make a connection with the world. Damrosch (2018) believes that there is a variety of strategies that can be employed to enter a text into the realm of world literature to reach global audiences. As he affirms, writers have two routes: they 'can go out into the world in person or send their works abroad' (Damrosch, 2018, p. 135). They can also employ strategies such as 'bringing the world directly into the text itself … even when the story has a purely local setting'; 'sending their characters abroad'; or using 'foreign literary traditions' (p. 107). Another strategy is 'glocalism', which Damrosch (2018) claims takes two forms: write the local for the global or bring the global home (p. 162). He explains that 'to write for a global audience involves a conscious effort of cultural translation' (p. 162) and it can make effects and shape their readers' perceptions:

> Whether they can go out into the world in person or send their works abroad, writers who consciously write world literature are always involved in negotiating between home and foreign cultures. The stakes in this negotiation become particularly high when the work concerns relations between imperial power and its current or former colonies, since literary representations can profoundly shape public perceptions, for good or for ill. These effects can drive from the writers' own intentions or from latter readers' reception. (p. 135)

The strategy or the kind of glocalism these Kurdish authors take is 'writing the local for the global'. As mentioned earlier, among the authors addressed in this study, Begikhani has translated some works of Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot into Kurdish. Thus, she also utilises the other kind of glocalism, which is 'bringing the global home'. By bringing local to the global and sending their works abroad, these authors are 'involved in a negotiation' and what they have done is a 'conscious effort of cultural translation'. They have consciously written world literature that aimed at articulating and negotiating Kurdish history and identity with the global. These writings are concerned with colonial experiences, and they are literary representation of a colonial condition, just as Damrosch states above. Later in the thesis, the analytical chapters will show how the texts and literary representations can shape and sharpen readers' reception and perception of these works and the colonial condition and experience being represented. The texts, as we will see, also reveal the authors' intention, both explicitly and implicitly. They show that these authors seem driven to write and translate themselves and the past to the world with deliberate purpose and self-

consciousness. As mentioned earlier, authors like Hardi have also sent works of other Kurdish writers abroad in the form of translation. Hardi has translated some Kurdish writings into English, such as *Poems* (2008) by Kajal Ahmad and Sherko Bekas's *Butterfly Valley* (2018). Thus, she not only translated her own Kurdish poems and produced collections of poetry in English, but also produced and marketed English translations of other Kurdish writings into the world literary scene. Also, as identified in Chapter One, in recent years there have been further attempts by other Kurdish writers and translators who have translated Kurdish writings into English and other languages. These acts of translation are both 'a means of achieving literary existence' in the world (Casanova, 2010, p.296), and a means of achieving a Kurdish global existence. They provide international existence not only to these writers and Kurdish literature but also Kurdish identity and culture. These works of translations, whether from or into Kurdish, and Kurdish writings in English, are 'key mediators of intercultural communication'; they are not only a way for Kurdish literature to come into contact with the world, but also a way 'the horizon of Kurdish language, literature, and culture, can be evolved'. As Bielsa (2014) argues, translation is 'a key mediator of intercultural communication … [that] allows the global circulation of meaning and shapes the nature of the discourses that are disseminated in different localities' (pp. 392–393). Bielsa finds translation not as a linguist transfer of information from one language to another, but as a process that can mobilise our whole relationship to other. She defines translation as 'openness to the world and to the other' (p. 401), and this is true both for translation of the self to the other and translating the other to the self. As Bielsa states, 'translation can both help to enlarge the horizons of a language and a culture through the introduction of the new' (p. 369). In his introduction to Begikhani's collection of poetry, British poet Richard McKane makes a similar argument for Begikhani's translation of poets like Eliot and Baudelaire into Kurdish, stating that this 'would enrich Kurdish poetry and Nazand's own' (Begikhani, 2006).

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova discusses the crucial role of translation and its importance, particularly for writers from 'minor literatures'. She does not look at translation as a 'mere exchange of one language for another' and finds its true nature as 'a form of literary recognition' (Casanova, 2004, p. 133). She explains that translation 'constitutes the principal means of access to the literary world for all writers outside the centre' (p. 133). She discusses the importance of both

translating from a minor language to the dominant languages in the world and vice versa. For a language on the periphery, translation and importing major works of literature 'is a way of gathering literary resources, of acquiring universal texts and thereby enriching an underfunded literature' (p. 134).[30] Casanova (2010) argues:

> Translation of important literary texts from dominant languages is a means of accumulating literary capital for small languages, whereas the translation of a text from a small language into one of the dominant languages is a means of achieving literary existence, of acquiring a certificate of literariness (p. 296).

Further, translation into a powerful language is one of the main ways to achieve literary recognition on the world literary scene or to 'struggle against invisibility' (Casanova, 2004, p.136.).[31] Casanova (2005) also introduces two routes and strategies through which writers of the periphery can enter into the world literary scene: 'assimilation', or integration within a dominant literary; and 'differentiation', or the assertion of differences, typically on the basis of a claim to national identity' (p. 180). Kurdish Anglophone authors have not exclusively employed one of these two strategies but instead employ a mixture of both in their writings. However, this study argues that, for these Kurdish authors, translating or writing in English is more about achieving worldwide recognition for the people of their nation than worldwide literary recognition. Certainly, these authors might also desire such recognition, but their works should not be read exclusively as cultural attempts, as there are ideological and political objectives behind their production.

A number of these authors have even announced their intention of being a voice for the oppressed people of their nation in their writings or interviews. However, regardless of authorial intentions, the action of translating and writing their experiences of oppression to the world and opening the four countries governing Kurds to the critique of global readers, is an act of struggle against Kurdish oppression in these four countries, their policies against Kurds, and their attempts to obliterate Kurdish identity, culture and history. Rather than writing back to these countries and writing in Arabic, Persian or Turkish—the language of their oppressors—they have written in an international language to readers across the world, beyond these four

[30] Casanova (2004) brings the examples of Dailo Kis, who have translated Hungarian poets, Russian poets, and French poets into Serbo-Coroatian, or Vergilio Ferreira introduced Sartre to Portuguese readers, or Arno Schmidt who have translated Poe, Faulkner, and Joyce into German, and many other examples.

[31] She brings the example of the writers of the Latin American "boom", who gained international literary recognition with their translation into French and the universal recognition of Tagore through English translation of his works.

nation-states. Thus, their struggle against Kurdish oppression and for Kurdish recognition is globally directed not simply regional. Conversely, these writings can be seen as acts and voices of resistance, and they are prosecuting a form of Kurdish identity politics. Considering the socio-political and cultural condition of the Kurds and the regional attempts to obliterate Kurdish identity, history and culture, and exclude Kurds from the right of self-representation and self-expression, such attempts by Kurdish authors can be seen as a continuation of Kurdish struggle and resistance. Looking back at the history of Kurds, the Kurdish voice has always been a silenced and marginalised one. It has been suppressed, banned and censored by and through the dominant historical and political voices that in many ways, had not allowed it for expression and representation. Moreover, their identity, culture and the oppressions against them have been denied by these countries and remain unwitnessed by the world. They have a long history of resistance and struggle against the denial of their identity and for justice and recognition. The attempts Kurdish Anglophone authors made and their works can be seen as continued Kurdish sense of resistance against the denial of their identity and history, and continued persistence and insistence on their cultural and political rights as humans in the world.

As Oliver (2001) affirms, ‘oppression creates the need and demand for recognition’ (p. 9). This demand can range from the desire to be recognised by the oppressor or the dominant culture, a ‘demand for retribution and compassion’, or the desire to be recognised in the world and international communities, as in this new body of Kurdish writings in English. Oliver (2001) argues that individuals and groups who have been tortured, traumatised and discriminated against, and whose sense of agency has been taken, can regain their sense of identity and agency through the process of ‘bearing witness to oppression and subordination’ (p. 7). Kurdish Anglophone writers take up the position of ‘speaking subject’ (Oliver, 2001) and through their works they bear witness to their personal and collective Kurdish experiences of oppression and violence as a way to negotiate them with the world, and a way of being recognised by others—not the others that oppressed them, but others across the world.

These authors, privileged with ‘speaking positions’ as writers, poets, researchers, academics and filmmakers in international settings, aimed to ‘speak’ for themselves and the people of their homeland, and bear witness to their experiences of oppression and violence as part of their ethical and political commitments and their

continued Kurdish struggle in the diaspora, far from their homeland. As mentioned earlier in the short biographies of the first-generation authors, all these authors are politically and culturally engaged with the Kurdish question and the condition of Kurdish people in the different parts of the world they live in and different positions they have as writers, poets, academics, researchers, intellectuals, activists and filmmakers. For years, they do research, write and make movies, at both national and international levels, about what happened to Kurds, their history and traumas. They have devoted their lives to study and work on Kurdish issues and continued their struggle in the diaspora. Now they are purposefully continuing their struggle for Kurdish political and cultural rights in a new way and through a new language.

As far as the question of language is concerned, the use of English language in Boochani's work, its role as well as the process and reason of the production of his work, is different from other writings addressed in this study. The choice to write in English for Boochani is not only a decision to use an international language, which can make his voice heard across the world, but also part of a conscious decision to employ the coloniser's language to write against his oppressor, the Australian government. Boochani tapped out his memoir on his smuggled phone in Farsi and sent his writings to the memoir's translator, Omid Tofighian, in the form of thousands of text messages. Thus, his memoir exemplifies what Walkowitz (2015) terms 'born-translated', as it was 'written for translation' from the outset. Boochani has not published his work in Persian (the original language of writing) nor Kurdish (his mother tongue). Rather, he decided to publish in English, as an international language that can reach the widest possible audience for his testimonies from the prison, and also as the language of his oppressor and the country that imprisoned him.

The employment of English, or any other colonial language, is an important issue discussed in postcolonial criticism and postcolonial writings in which writers often employ the language of the coloniser and oppressor as a strategy to resist against them. As Ashcroft (2009a) states in *Caliban's Voice*, for postcolonial writers, the language of the coloniser and colonial languages can be 'instruments of radical resistance and transformations' (p. 4). Ashcroft (2009a) argues that for postcolonial writers and writers under oppression by a colonial power, 'the colonial languages have been not only instruments of oppression but also instruments of radical resistance and transformation' (p. 3). For instance, the choice to write in English—the language of the world's colonial powers—is part of a conscious decision to employ

and appropriate the coloniser's language, and 'make it to do a different cultural work from that of the colonizers' (p. 4) to advocate recognition between the self and the other. This is not always in response to a cultural work from the coloniser, but also political violence and oppressions, as in the case of Boochani. Boochani's memoir is his mode of resistance against the oppressive immigration policies of Australia against the refugees imprisoned on Manus, and it is through the very language of his oppressor that Boochani challenges and speak up against them. Accordingly, the same argument cannot be made for the element of language in the writings of Hardi, Begikhani, Bahar, Balata and Akreyi and their purpose of writing in English as for Boochani's text. However, for these writers and poets, the English language is both a tool of communication and a medium of power through which their voice can reach a wider potential audience. This does not necessarily mean an English-speaking readership, but a wide range of readers across the world, which can also include Kurdish readers.

In *Postcolonial Studies*, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2007) emphasise 'the political effect of choosing English as a medium of expression'. They remark:

> Non-English speaking writers who have chosen to write in English do so not because their mother tongue is regarded by them as inadequate, but because the colonial language has become a useful means of expression, and one that reaches the widest possible audience (p. 16).

Moreover, such writings 'may affect further results that texts in indigenous languages cannot do easily' (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 16). For postcolonial writers who use the colonial English language, the very language with which they had been denied or oppressed, could be a way through which their voice can be heard. Their works can be a form of counter-discourse that can be heard at the centre of the empire and by the oppressors or dominant culture. For authors like Kurdish Anglophone authors, for whom English is not the language of their oppressors, choosing English as their medium of expression can also be politically effective and offer these writers and poets a more powerful voice and it offers them a broader readership and wider recognition. English, as a lingua franca, could benefit them a wider readership and recognition across the world. Walkowitz (2015) also highlights that born-translated writing in the English language can reach a wide range of readers:

> To write in English language for global audiences is to write for a heterogeneous group of readers: those who are proficient in several languages, those who may be less-than-proficient in English, and those who may be

> proficient in one version of English but not proficient in another. This diversity creates an enormous range of English-language geographies, writers, and audiences. (p. 20)

Thus, the international aspect of the English language and its wide geographical and cultural reach adds to its importance in these Kurdish writings and writing similar to them that are aimed at reaching audiences beyond their geography and culture of origin. When asked in an interview with BBC World Service (2004) why she decided to switch from Kurdish to English in her poetry writings, Hardi explained that for her, English is a language of power and a tool through which she tells the stories she needs to tell. She reflects that when she started living in the diaspora, she realised there was hardly any translated literature about Kurds, and there was no awareness about Kurdish history and Kurdish people, which is why she felt a need to write about these issues in English. She started with translating her Kurdish poems into English and then publishing collections in English (Morris, 2005; Poetry Archive, n.d.). Rather than employing the languages of their coloniser (Arabic, Persian and Turkish) and writing back to the colonial powers governing them, Hardi and other Kurdish Anglophone authors have employed a powerful and international language to expose these oppressive regimes to the critique of a wider readership.

Walkowitz's (2015) concept of born-translated, as discussed above in relation to Boochani's work, can also be applied to the works of other first-generation Kurdish Anglophone authors. Born-translated work refers to literature that is 'written for translation' from the outset, or literature that 'is born in translation'. As Walkowitz (2015) notes, such literature 'approaches translation as medium and origin rather than as afterthought … Translation is not secondary or incidental to these works …[rather, it is] a condition of their production' (p. 3). Literature can be born-translated in many ways. It can be works that 'have been written for translation from the start … in the hope of being translated'; or works that 'are written as translations, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed'; or works that are 'written from translation' (p. 3). Walkowitz also cites examples of born-translated works that 'do not appear at first only in a single language. Instead they appear simultaneously or nearly simultaneously in multiple languages' (p. 1). Thus, Kurdish Anglophone writings best exemplify Walkowitz's notion of 'born-translated' as they have been written for and as translation from the outset. Boochani's memoir was written for translation and it was not published in a language in which it has been

composed. Hardi's and Begikhani's English collections of poetry include several of their Kurdish poems they themselves have translated into English. Their poems written originally in English can also be seen as 'born-translated'; 'they are born in translation'. Although Walkowitz's main focus is novels, she also references other genres of literature, such as poetry and digital art in her conception of 'born-translated', so the term is applicable to the poems of Hardi and Begikhani. In Akreyi's case, her memoir, *The Daughter of the Kurdland*, is born-translated in multiple languages—English, Arabic, Norwegian and Danish—and addresses multiple audiences of different languages. Her memoir circulates in multiple languages and across different geographies, while there is no Kurdish version of it. Thus, translation is a condition of the production of these writings, and they have been produced as and for translation in the service of ideological and political objectives. They are works consciously produced in the English language within an international setting and intended from the start to circulate far beyond the author's national sphere and be read by readers across the world.

The remaining part of this chapter examines the circulation and reception of these writings. This is important because what makes this body of work distinct from older Kurdish literature is not simply the language in which it is written. It is the new readers these authors have adopted and the broader contexts within which these Kurdish narratives, testimonies and memories are circulated and received beyond Kurdish imposed national boundaries, in the world. Based on the argument presented regarding the politics of Kurdish literature as world literature, and grounded by the Damrosch's (2003a) definition of world literature as 'a mode of circulation and of reading' beyond writing, the next section of this chapter explores the cultural, political and social contexts in which these writings have been circulated and how they have been received. It investigates how successful these authors and their works have been in reaching transnational and international contexts. As Damrosch (2003a) argues, 'a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture' (pp. 299–300). Thus, the section aims to show whether these writings have been actively present in non-Kurdish cultural, literary and political contexts.

**Circulation and Reception**

Kurdish Anglophone literature is a newly published body of works. Some of these writings appeared in the last few years and all date back less than two decades. Despite this, these writings have gained considerable attention from writers, critics, scholars and politicians around the world in different international contexts—literary, political, academic and educational. These writings have been introduced to the academy through a number of scholarships. Among them are Hassan's doctoral thesis (2017) and articles (2017, 2018) on Balata's fiction, Yari's master's thesis (2019) and Beyad et al.'s study (2018) on Bahar's novel, Ahmed's doctoral thesis (2015) on Hardi's and Khadivi's works, Abdalrahman' master's thesis (2019) on Khadivi's first novel, and Hassan's doctoral thesis (2013) on a number of Kurdish poets including Hardi and Begikhani. These academic researches have been carried out by Kurdish scholars and students in mostly Western universities, reflecting the introduction of these writings into non-Kurdish academic settings. These studies were discussed in Chapter Three but not detailed here since this section does not look at the reception of these writings by Kurdish readers and scholars. This section specifically takes into consideration how these writings came to the attention of non-Kurdish readers and scholars, and in what transnational and international settings and contexts they have been circulated and received.

Among the first-generation writers and poets addressed in this study, Choman Hardi and Nazand Begikhani have been more successful in achieving international recognition, and their works have gained considerable attention from writers and poets across the globe. This is because they are already established poets both at national and international levels, with literary careers in English and other languages spanning almost two decades. Hardi and Begikhani and their poems have been actively present in international literary spaces alongside poets from various countries, particularly exiled and refugee poets. These two poets are both members of *Exiled Writers Ink*, and Hardi is its former chairperson. Their poems have been published and discussed in not only *Exiled Writers Ink* but also many other leading literary magazines such as *Poetry London*, *Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Washington Square Review*, *Exiled Writers Ink*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Poetry Salzburg Review Ambit Magazine* and *Poetry Magazine*. Multiple book launches have been held on Hardi and Begikhani's works, and they have been read at several events and poetry festivals.

These two poets have also won or been nominated for several international prizes. For instance, Begikhani won the French Simone Landrey's Feminine Poetry Prize in 2012; was nominated for the Forward Book of Poetry Prize; three of her poems have been published in *Modern Poetry in Translation*[32]; and another poem selected by the UK Forward Poetry Prizes as one of the best 40 poems of 2007[33]. Hardi's second collection of poetry, *Considering the Women*, has been shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection and received a recommendation from the Poetry Book Society, and her translation of Sherko Bekas's *Butterfly Valley* received a PEN Translate Award (Hardi, 2004; Hassan, 2013). Four of her poems were included in the English GCSE curriculum in the UK[34]; another was featured on Poems on the Underground in London[35]; and another selected by London's Southbank Centre as one of the 50 greatest poems of the past 50 years[36].

Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry, thus, has achieved international significance, and they are active in regards to the works' Kurdish contexts as well as world literature. Being taught in the schools and used as teaching resources, Hardi's poems circulate in educational contexts and among students, which is a matter of great importance. As a piece of world literature, her poetry can raise these students' awareness of Kurds and what has happened to them, as well as the brutalities of war and how violence can ruin people's lives. Also, being published by international publishers, receiving international prizes, and being read by international writers, poets and critics give these writers and Kurdish literature a global literary existence and international literary recognition. Through them, Kurdish literature, which has rarely had this opportunity and has been almost unknown in the outside world among a non-Kurdish readership, reaches a wider audience and enters into transnational literary and cultural spaces and the world literary space. Hardi's and Begikhani's poems are incorporated into the study of world literature and have been read, analysed and discussed by international writers, poets and critics, including McDermott (2005), McKane (in Begikhani 2006), Williams (2011), Crucefix (2016) and Alvi (2020). They praise the literary merit and socio-political and international significance of Hardi and Begikhani's poems. Importantly, some of these studies also compare these

[32] These are 'Time', 'Dreams', and 'Words of Love'.
[33] The poem is An Ordinary Day'.
[34] These poems are 'At the Border, 1979', 'Invasion', 'Penelopes of my Homeland', and 'My Mother's Kitchen'.
[35] 'My Children'.
[36] 'Summer Roof'.

Kurdish poets with poets of other countries, or they discuss Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry in the wider context of world poetry. For instance, Williams (2011) discusses Hardi's poetry among the works of more than 60 poets from different parts of the world. McDermott (2005) reads Hardi's *Life for Us* alongside *Keeping My Name* by Catherine Tufariello, an American poet with an Italian background. British poet, translator and reviewer Martyn Crucefix (2016) also offers a comparative reading of one of Hardi's poems, 'Gas Attack', with Wilfred Owen's famous poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'.

Being read, analysed, discussed and compared with the literature of other nations, Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry seems to find a space on the world literary scene, although small and minor. They have entered into the study of world literature, and they circulate in transnational literary spaces and contexts, which shows that their presence is active and global. However, the circulation of these writings across the world is not simply the movement of actual works, but the dissemination of Kurdish narratives, memories and testimonies and Kurdish identifications. Through these writings, Kurdish people and their narratives reach readers across the world and thus, fulfil their authors' aim and objective of showing the world what happened to them by sharing their personal and collective experiences of oppression and violence. A review of the few existing readings on these two poets shows that Kurdish experience of oppression and violence is the major theme of these poems' reception and Hardi and Begikhani are considered voices of Kurdish people; their poems witnesses to Kurdish history. Although these reviews and readings are quite short and offer relatively little on these works, this study takes them and their arguments as points of departure to read and approach the whole body of works it addresses. As it is not practical to see the circulation and reception of these Kurdish writings among and by public readers, this chapter looks to reading by poets, writers and critics. It considers these readings and reviews as responses to and conversations around reading Kurdish Anglophone writings. In what follows, this chapter provides an overview of these readings and how Kurdish Anglophone writings have been received. In keeping with the emphasis on reception, the following analytical chapters reflect on how these works might be read and received by their implied readers, through a close reading of the texts.

The existing readings and reviews on Kurdish Anglophone writings—which are mostly on Hardi's and Begikhani's poems—find these works as witnesses of

Kurdish traumatic experiences and the authors as new voices of the Kurdish people. For example, Richard McKane's review of Begikhani's *Bells of Speech* purports that Begikhani and are 'true voices of the Kurds in English'. As he writes about Begikhani:

> In her poems she fights with the Anfal, the genocide campaign carried out against Kurdish civilians at the end of 80s; she fights against honour killings and she fights for the perception of the Kurds in the West. These are painful poems: but pain expressed, of women, of the Kurdish peoples, above all needs to be witnessed by poets and their readers: the politicians of all hues, western and eastern. It is to the exiled Kurdish poets Nazand Begikhani and the younger poet Choman Hardi that we must turn for the true voices (and now in English) of the Kurds. (McKane, in Begikhani 2006, p. 7)

The personal and collective experiences of oppression and suffering these poets bear witness to in their poems is the dominant theme of their reception. The reviews often refer to the unbelievably terrifying experiences these poets recount and point to the roles these Kurdish poets and their poems play. As seen, McKane finds traces of the fight for justice and equality in Begikhani's poetry, which 'needs to be witnessed' by readers, poets and politicians. He finds her and Hardi as 'true' voices of the Kurds. Pakistani-British poet Moniza Alvi (2020) also names Hardi and Begikhani as two 'great exiled poets of the past', and remarks that they 'carry the weight and diversity of experiences which their poems help us to confront'. On Begikhani's *Bells of Speech* she claims, 'like bells, they sound clear musical notes and linger in the mind long after they have first been heard' (Alvi, in Begikhani, 2006). Aside from this description of the poets and the poems, Alvi offers no reading of their texts. The question is how the poems 'confront' her or any reader with the 'weight they or the poets carry'. Also, what is in these poems and how they are articulated that the sounds and images 'linger in the mind of the readers long after they have first been heard'? Moreover, what makes McKane, for instance, think of these poems as bearing witness to Kurdish history and the poets provide a voice for the Kurdish people?

One of the main aims of this study, in its reading of the writings of not only Hardi and Begikhani but the whole body of works, is to examine how they evoke Kurdish history and Kurdish experiences of oppression and violence; how the texts interact with the readers, affect them and impress upon them. It does so by looking at the textual strategies and literary techniques employed in these works. Indeed, it is through the process of reading that these interactions occur. It is through the texts, the poetics, the language, and elements and strategies employed within the texts that

readers' perception and reception of the writings are shaped and sharpened. British poet, translator and reviewer Martyn Crucefix's reading of Hardi's poem 'Gas Attack' can be seen as an example. In this a short reading of the poem, it is compared with Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'. However, Crucefix's emphasis on the elements of the poem and the ways it can 'plunge' the reader is significant. He calls this poem poetry of witness and argues that 'Hardi plunges us into the gas attack and its aftermath', which he supports with a discussion on the language, tone, structure and elements in the poem that alert the reader. He points to the poem's witnessing tone, the language, repetitions and line breaks and states, 'Hardi's language is always sufficient to the task—plain, direct, raising the occasional metaphor, natural enough to suggest a witnessing voice' (Crucefix, 2016). He also asserts that Hardi 'allows the detail of this poem to speak for itself', stating that Hardi has 'the intention to elicit understanding and sympathy from her readers'. Further, he comments on Hardi's collection, *Considering the Women*, contending that this work 'is unique and deserves as much notice as we can give it'. He believes it is 'the world's blindness to real events in Kurdish-Iraq that Hardi wishes to correct' (Crucefix, 2016). Crucefix's reading of Hardi demonstrates how he, as a reader and critic, makes sense of Hardi's poems. His interaction with the text is as an example of how the present study aims to approach these writings. This study takes a similar, although more comprehensive, approach to the writings of the first-generation authors. It explores how these texts act as testimony and how they elicit understanding and sympathy from their readers.

This aspect of Hardi and Begikhani's poetry is so strong that it is the main theme of their reception. Both Williams and McDermott also consider their poetry as poetry of witness and testimonies of their personal and collective Kurdish experiences. In *Contemporary Poetry*, Williams (2011) argues that Hardi's poetry 'serves as an ethical witness' (p. 81), and her role 'is often one of fact-finder, gatherer of narratives and the speaker on behalf of those who have suffered' (p. 80). Moreover, she serves as a 'chronicler of testimonies' (p. 81), particularly of the Anfal genocide. In 'The Calms of Art and Life', McDermott (2005) also contends that in *Life for Us*, Hardi's 'subject is not a private, intimate one, but massive: ideological violence, the repression of an entire people, and how that impinges on the small, suffering individual trying to make the best of what they can' (p. 92). She asserts that the text 'has a hefty documentary force' and 'many of the poems are tinged with sadness, ghosted by wistfulness for a happy past' (p. 92). However, this thesis argues that

Hardi's and Begikhani's poems and the works of other authors addressed in this study are not a simple record or documentation of the past or mere recollection of historical events. It will show how the literature, and each genre, bears witness differently and what makes it an important form of communication that represents a different form of testimony. As seen, the above readings and reviews reflect on the testimonial aspects of these works, which constitute a large part of the writings, and point to the roles these poets play, recognising them as new voices of Kurds in the world and suggesting they need to be witnessed; they deserve our attention. They write about how they have been impressed by these poems and how they linger in the mind long after they are first read. While these reviews and readings are quite short and limited in the number of works considered, they are the first step towards a more profound understanding of these writings, and the ways they act and interact with their readers. This study takes the same approach with the works of memoir and fiction by Kurdish Anglophone authors.

The writings of other authors, such as Balata and Bahar, have been the subject of a number of academic studies, including Hassan's doctoral thesis (2018), Yari's master's thesis (2019) and Beyad et al.'s (2018) research, which were discussed in the literature review in Chapter Three. These studies belong to the Kurdish reception category mentioned earlier, and none discuss the question of reception and circulation of these works in new contexts for new implied readers. The only review by a non-Kurdish scholar on these two novelists is a reading by Ofra Bengio (2018) on Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*. Bengio largely discusses the story of the novel, the biography of the author, and the socio-political condition to which the novel bears witness and responds. She believes the novel represents the lives of the Kurdish population in Iraq. Bengio (2018) notes, 'through Mariwan's personal experiences Bahar tells the story of the Kurdish nation: its history, its myths, and the unique culture which distinguishes it from the surrounding Arab society' (p. 2). Akreyi's memoir is newly published, and as yet there are no specific reviews or studies on this text.

However, Boochani's memoir was published less than two years but has gained considerable attention among public readers, writers, critics, scholars and politicians around the world. Boochani's *No Friends But the Mountains* has garnered a huge wave of reviews and scholarly critiques, which all praise both its political importance and literary merit. His memoir attracted the attention of numerous human rights activists, academics and politicians. Multiple book launches and events have

been held in different countries, and his life and work discussed in prominent international newspapers such as *The Guardian* and the *Saturday Paper*. Many of his writings on Manus prison and Australia's border and immigration policies also appeared in these newspapers. Boochani's memoir has also received numerous awards, including Australia's National Biography Award, the Victorian Premier's Literary Award, the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, and non-fiction book of the year at the Australian Book Industry Awards. As discussed in Chapter Three, his memoir has been reviewed by well-known Australian novelist Richard Flanagan, which appears in the memoir's foreword, and J. M. Coetzee, among others. The reason why the readings and reviews on Boochani are not discussed here is that Boochani's memoir has been primarily discussed in relation to its Manus context. Boochani's international recognition and international achievements are mainly due to his attempts and success in giving voice to the oppressed refugees on Manus and human rights abuse there. It was due to its political importance as well as its urgency that his work created an avid readership.

However, this international recognition has also led to the recognition of his oppressed Kurdish identity, which is evoked in his work. As will be indicated in the analysis of his work, Boochani consciously and constantly evokes his homeland and bears witness to his colonial past in the context of his colonial present. In and through his memoir, Boochani connects his homeland and its oppressors to a formally discrete political system from distinct geography and deftly weaves these stories together as a way to foreground his oppressed Kurdish identity and the ongoing dispossession of Kurdish people, their experience of domination and oppression, along with his experience of domination and oppression on Manus. The circulation, reception and recognition of his work also led to the circulation and recognition of his home narratives in the political contexts into which his work was circulated and received. Through his work, Boochani's accounts from home and his historically oppressed Kurdish identity circulate among his readers, who are not only public readers but also writers, critics, scholars, activists, academics and politicians around the world. It promises insights into the political situation of the Kurds and opens up critical spaces for engaging with Kurdish people and the Kurdish question. The significance of Boochani's work is the ways it operates in political spheres, and not only literary and cultural ones. Although Boochani's past life and his Kurdish identity have been widely discussed in existing readings of his work or at book launches, festivals,

interviews and events, the Kurdish context of Boochani's memoir is rarely considered. This is the first study to shed light on this aspect of Boochani's work, and argues that his work—as his mode of resistance against the oppressive system of Manus prison and the Australian government—also emerged as a Kurdish resistance voice. This connects Boochani's work to those of other first-generation authors whose writings are conscious attempts to bear witness to Kurdish experiences of oppression and violence in the world. As seen, they have created and continue to create new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question and for the Kurdish people. They are actively present in the world and have been successful in creating a transnational discursive space of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish question and Kurdish people. They are also open to more readings and interpretations.

It is the global circulation and reception of these writings, in multiple cultural and socio-political contexts, that allow this thesis to identify these writings as having political potential and argue for the impacts these texts might have as they circulate globally. Their potential lies not only in the act of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish question and for Kurdish people that happened through them, but also the ways they challenge established frameworks of understanding the Kurdish question, as a question of and conflict over land. They promote readers' understanding of the Kurdish claim is not simply territorial but cultural and socio-political. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, in these writings, the authors largely engage with the oppressions and injustices Kurds have been subjected to, rather than Kurdish claims of statehood or self-determination. Thus, these writings serve as a possible way to invite new thinking about the Kurdish question(s). This is also one of the reasons this study argues for 'new' global engagement with Kurdish questions.

**Literature: Linking the Local to the Global**

Kurdish Anglophone writings do more than what has been argued so far. They do more than witnessing, resisting or struggling and—as world literature and works of translation—they have impacts beyond the Kurdish national boundaries. These writings not only put the local into the global; they create a connection between them that ties them together. They put the local and the global into conversation, and through them, interactions occur. Importantly, this happens through literature and

through translation. Literature becomes a space through which the global engages with the local; 'an imaginative engagement' (Appiah, 2006, p. 85). For Appiah (2006), the conversation between local and global takes the form of not only an actual dialogue, but also:

> As a metaphor for engagement with the experience and idea of others … the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or a movie or a work of art that speak of or from place other than your own' (p. 85).

Seen in this light, Kurdish Anglophone writings not only bring Kurdish identity into conversation with the world but also enable readers to become conversant with the world and the culture depicted to them, through reading these texts. As Bielsa (2016) affirms, world literature and works of translation play a significant role in the interaction and conversation between the local and the global and in forming cosmopolitanism:

> In a cosmopolitan outlook where openness and interaction with others (and not universalism) assume a primary role, in which relationships between different cultures and modernities are underlined, translation can provide a means of conceptualizing and of empirically analysing this type of interaction (p. 394).

Bielsa (2016) defines cosmopolitanism as an 'an ethical and political commitment towards opening ourselves to others and sharing with them the world we live in', and argues that translation 'emerges as a crucial manner in which this commitment can be materialized' (p. 78). She places world literature and translation at the heart of cosmopolitan theory, viewing them as a process through which conversation between the local and global takes place, and thus cosmopolitanism takes place. Adopting this standpoint, this thesis views these writings as acts of cosmopolitanism and, more specifically 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' (Papastergiadis, 2012).

Papastergiadis (2012) defines aesthetic cosmopolitanism as 'an open conversation between the local and the global' and an 'imaginative engagement' with the other (p. 9). Mainly focused on works of art, he posits that aesthetic cosmopolitanism does not refer simply to the aesthetic representations of cosmopolitanism in artistic works, but the ways 'art and aesthetic can produce cosmopolitanism' (p. 90). Bielsa utilises the concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism to understand the role literature, as an aesthetic, can play in forming the conversation between the local and global and in forming cosmopolitanism. Inspired by Theodor Adorno's rejection of reducing the notion of aesthetic to artistic, she applies aesthetic cosmopolitanism to literature—specifically, world literature—and identifies the

central role of literature and translation in a cosmopolitan context. For Bielsa (2014), aesthetic or artistic cosmopolitanism refers to 'the world-opening projects and experiences that are specifically the product of an artistic or literary endeavour' (p. 397). Based on these definitions and understandings, this thesis looks at Kurdish Anglophone literature as acts of cosmopolitanism and contends that a kind of cosmopolitanism happens and forms through these writings. Kurdish Anglophone writings can be seen as world-opening projects and experiences borne of a literary endeavour. By opening themselves to the world through their literary works, these authors initiated a conversation between the local and the global. Thus, in using the term aesthetic cosmopolitanism, this thesis does not refer simply to the representations of cosmopolitanism in these works, but the fact that they produce and lead to cosmopolitanism, to forming the conversation between the local and global and promoting understanding across cultures. As works of world literature that move across cultures, Kurdish Anglophone writings provide a mode of access for world readers 'to think about the problems of the world' and the inner conflicts of a culture and people. As Damrosch (2011) argues, 'literature provides a privileged mode of access to thinking about the problems of the globe and the inner life of a culture' (p. 171). When it moves across cultures, literature 'can open up new vistas, challenged our unquestioned assumptions, and promote dialogue and understanding across cultures' (Damrosch, 2017, p. 2). These writings are not merely reflecting knowledge in the world but producing knowledge in the world (Papastergiadis, 2012). They produce knowledge and make readers think about the problems of the world; they can alert readers to human injustices in a world far away and make them imagine the inhumanities of war and violence.

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism can also be used to look at the ways literature becomes a tool for creating a version of belonging and relating to the world; of being in the world and inhabiting it, as well as participating in the world. It is through literature and writing themselves to the world that these authors connect themselves, their identity and their culture to the world. Through their writings, they communicate with a world beyond their own and share with the other (and the world) the world in which they live or have lived. Literature becomes a way to be in the world and to be with the other. It becomes a version of belonging to the world and a medium of being in it. Thus, these works not only open up the world and the other, they open up engagement with others and oneness with the world. They are not only performances

of local belonging but also performances of belonging to the world. They are a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Appiah, 2006). Appiah's (2006) Concept of rooted cosmopolitanism is grounded in a 'dialogic universalism between the local and the global' (p. 8). It is defined as the creation of particular domains of commonality based on 'simultaneous rootedness and openness' to allow people to see themselves as belonging to the world (p. 8). Kurdish Anglophone writings are a mode of rooted cosmopolitanism; they are simultaneously rooted and open. They can be seen as ways of establishing a position that is cosmopolitan while also rooted and engaged with local attachments and concerns.

Although these authors primarily engage with the cultural and political injustices Kurdish people have experienced, analysis of their works show that they also deal with and challenge global injustices. The works reveal the cosmopolitan sensibilities and ethical preoccupation of these authors or the characters of the fictional works with the condition of their fellow world citizens and the universal human condition. Boochani's work not only deals with a global issue—the refugee crisis and human rights abuse on Manus Island—but also becomes a way through which he participated in the world and a global issue. His work reveals his commitment to a universalist ideal of human rights, not merely his national and local concerns. He also connects his local and universal concerns by addressing issues of inequality and injustice while using his memoir as his site of struggle. These authors are all engaged with their fellow humans' conditions, both at home and in the world. They critique injustice, oppression and inequality; celebrate peace and freedom; and are preoccupied with questions of human cultural and political rights and justice. The attempts they have made through their writings and engagement with the condition of Kurdish people can also be considered acts of cosmopolitanism, and moral, ethical and political commitments towards their fellow humans.

Notably, it is not only through literary writing that these authors fight and struggle for human justice and participate in the world. They also do so through journalism, in the case of Boochani; academic research, like Hardi and Begikhani; filmmaking, like Bahar; or political or social activism, like Akreyi, Hardi and Begikhani. As already noted, some of these authors have devoted their life in exile to defending the human rights of their nation's people as well as all oppressed people around the world. They have published books and carried out research on human rights and women's rights, and won international prizes and awards for their work,

research and activism. For example, Begikhani has received international awards[37] as a poet and also as an activist fighting against gender-based violence and honour killing (themes found in her poetry). Akreyi has also won a number of international awards as an activist for her worldwide efforts in support of peace and justice and for devoting her life to defending human rights.[38] As foreshadowed in the title, *The Daughter of Kurdland: A Life Dedicated to Humankind*, her memoir reveals her ethical and political commitment to the people of her homeland and universalist ideals of human rights. Thus, her local and global concerns are linked together.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the condition of Kurdish Anglophone writings' production, circulation and reception beyond their culture of origin and national sphere, in a global context. It reviewed the processes that led to the production of these writings and their circulation and reception in transnational cultural and socio-political contexts, as well as the potential impacts of these writings being circulated and read across the world. This chapter identifies these writings as a new discursive space of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish question and for Kurdish people beyond their imposed national borders and in the broader context of the world. It argued that these writings are characterised by their writer's attempts at articulating Kurdish experiences of oppression and injustice with the new readers they have adopted, as a way to give Kurdish people a voice that can be heard by the global Anglosphere. It argued for the cultural and political potential of these writings on the basis that they have created and continue to create new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question. More importantly, they establish new frameworks of understanding the Kurdish questions beyond those of statehood and independence. This chapter examined not only how these texts act as Kurdish literature but also how they act as world literature. It asserts that these writings not only put the local into the global but also create a connection between them that links them together. In short, this chapter explored how and why these texts have been written into the world and how they act in these new contexts both as Kurdish literature and world literature. The next

[37] For example, the Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize in 2000.
[38] Including the Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) Peace and Freedom Award in 2017, the International Women Harmony Award in 2018, and the International Pfeffer Peace Award in 2014 (Akreyi, 2019).

chapters will look at the ways the world—the Kurdish world—is written into these texts and how they bear witness to Kurdish history.

# Chapter Five—Poetries of Witness, Reflections on Exile: Choman Hardi's and Nazand Begikhani's Collections of Poetry in English

## Introduction

This chapter examines Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry in the English language, *Life for Us* (2004) and *Considering the Women* (2015) by Hardi and *Bells of Speech* (2006) by Begikhani. Hardi and Begikhani are both from Iraqi Kurdistan, and they have experienced traumatic events and years of persecution and displacement in their life. Begikhani is a genocide survivor who lost four family members as a result of persecution and during the Anfal campaign in Iraq. She fled her homeland in 1987, and after living in different countries, settled in Bristol, England (Begikhani, 2006; Hassan, 2013). Hardi also experienced years of displacement and exile from early childhood and at different stages of her life; she left her homeland and took refuge in the UK in 1993 when she was 19 (Hardi, 2004, 2105). In their poems, these two poets bear witness to not only their personal experiences and past and present lives, but also, and in greater measure, the atrocities inflicted on Iraqi Kurds under the regime of Saddam Hussein, particularly the genocide of Halabja and the Anfal campaigns. They have largely written on personal and collective traumas of the past, and the continuity of those traumas and future consequences on their own lives and those of the Kurdish people who experienced violence and war. Hardi's and Begikhani's poems also bear witness to painful personal accounts of displacement, migration, loss of home and roots, and ultimately exile.

This chapter aims to indicate how the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani act as testimony. The analysis this chapter provides moves beyond the explicit historical, social, personal and political themes and subjects that preoccupies these writings and sheds light on how these themes have been articulated in these poems. It seeks to investigate the ways these poems interact with their readers and invite them not only read but also witness, see and feel what they or the people they are writing about have experienced. It explores the elements of these poems and strategies employed, as well as the language used to engage and affect their readers. Drawing on Forche's (1993,

2011, 2014) theory of poetry of witness and Boehmer's (2018) position on poetics of resistance and terror in postcolonial writings, this chapter considers how Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry bear witness to the past and the Kurdish history of oppression, and how they articulate trauma, terror and extremity. Importantly, the analysis will reveal the socio-political visions of these works, which are cemented in the themes and subjects, but also their figures and structures. The analysis will also reveal how poetry bears witness differently from other forms of testimonies and also compared to memoir and fiction, and what makes it an important form of communication that represents a different form of testimony. This chapter also relies on Said's (2000) reflections to discuss exile and its different manifestations in the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani.

**Poetry of Witness: Hardi's and Begikhani's Poetry**

Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry are perfect examples of what Forche calls 'poetry of witness'. They have been 'written in the aftermath of extremity' and they 'bear witness to extremity'. The majority of poems in their collection portray extremity in different forms, whether the extremities they or their families lived through and survived, or not survived in the case of Begikhani's family members, or collective Kurdish traumatic experiences. Their works arose from oppression and violence, and they are struggles or a space of 'struggle against oppression' and 'towards justice'. Forche uses the term 'poetry of witness' for poetry written in the aftermath of extremities such as war, torture and exile. For Forche (2011), poetry of witness is poetry that bears witness to conditions of extremity; it is a 'call upon the reader' (p. 168), and it is 'one's infinite responsibility for the *other one*' (p. 168, emphasis in original). Poetry of witness is a poem 'against forgetting' (p. 15) and aims to give a voice to the voiceless or those who otherwise might not be heard. Further, it is 'a mode of reading rather than of writing … its mode is evidentiary rather than representational—as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled blood' (p. 36). For Forche poetry of witness is not a simple reportage; rather, it is the lived memory transformed within poetry. When we read it, Forche argues, 'we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us' (2011, p. 168). Moreover, its language and structure are marked by extremity. The language and

structure of poetry of witness 'bears the trace of extremity' (p. 167), and as the analysis of poems in this chapter reveals, this characterises the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani too.

Forche distinguishes poetry of witness from personal poems and strictly political poems. She does not look at it only within the constructs of the personal and political. Instead, she believes that poetry of witness is a blend of the personal and political, but it also has a third dimension—'the social' (Forche, 1993, p. 31). The personal and political are both important dimensions of poetry of witness, as this category of writing is neither exclusively political *or* personal. As Forche (2014) explains, many poets have been 'considered by some to be engaged in writing documentary literature, or poetic reportage, and in the model of political confessionals' (p. 21), but their works cannot be considered poetry of witness. Poetry of witness 'is neither martyrdom nor the saying of a juridical truth' and 'it is not to be mistaken for politicized confessionals' (p. 26). Yet, while the personal dimension is one of the most important elements of poetry of witness and one of the most powerful sites of resistance (p. 31), according to Forche (1993), poetry of witness is neither a strictly personal poem, nor a strictly political one (pp. 31-32).

The third dimension of poetry of witness is 'the social'. She writes, 'the social is a place of resistance and struggle … where books are published, poems are read, and protest disseminated. It is the sphere in which claims against the political are made in the name of justice' (Forche, 1993, p. 9). Poetry of witness is both 'a location for the social as well as a vehicle towards the social. Hardi's and Begikhani's collections and their poetries of witness fall to this social space. They are a space in and through which the social has happened, and they are vehicles Hardi and Begikhani employed to struggle for and towards the social. The personal and the political dimensions Forche discusses also coexist in Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry. As detailed further below, their poetries of witness also defend the social from the political; that is, they 'reclaim the social from the political' (Forche, 1993, p. 31). In what follows, this chapter looks at the personal, political and social in Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry. It examines the other roles their poetry plays as poetry of witness, their characteristics and the roles Hardi and Begikhani play as poets of witness.

**The Personal, Political and the Social in Hardi's and Begikhani's Poetry**

Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry include multiple poems in which they bear witness to the traumatic experiences they or their families have endured. There are poems that are recollections or remembrance of their past life, their childhood, the war they witnessed, their displacement from home, and their life in exile. There are multiple poems about their scattered and lost family members and traumatic events they and their family have experienced. Forche (2014) argues for the importance of the personal dimension in poetry of witness and believes that the personal is 'one of the most powerful sites of resistance' (p. 31). This personal dimension is very strong in the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani. Begikhani largely writes about her lost brothers, who were executed at the hand of Saddam Hussein's regime, and her lost baby sister gassed during the gas attacks, for instance in 'Exile', 'The Wall', 'Absence: To My Brothers Who are No Longer in this World', and 'My Granny's Tales: To my late brother Qubad'. We also see the image of Begikhani's mother in most of her poems. The sense of grief and loss that permeates her collection is intensely personal, and her mother is seen as a figure defined by loss and grief in her poems. Begikhani's mother is central character of her poems and she constantly evokes her mother's deep sense of sorrow and loss of her children and her brothers. Some of her poems are specifically dedicated to her, including 'God is Not Dead for my Mother', 'My Mother's Prayers', and 'My Mother Pictured Amongst Tobacco Leaves'.

Similarly, Hardi's collections—particularly her first collection—are deeply rooted in her personal life and a great deal of her poems in this collection are her memories of childhood and memories of home and family. Examples include 'Journey through Dead Villages', 'What I want', 'One of Father's Absences', 'There was', 'Nights in the Cellar', 'Escape Journey, 1988', 'The Arrest', 'At the Border 1979' and 'My Mother's Kitchen'. In these poems, Hardi writes of her experiences of displacement as a child and her scattered family; how she and her family have moved constantly and been on the run all their life because of war; their journeys through destroyed villages, her life in exile, memories of the nights of the bombardment, her father's imprisonment, her brother's arrest, and her mother's life. However, Hardi's second collection is less autobiographical; it is more a location for 'the social' as well as a vehicle towards 'the social' (Forche, 1993, p. 31), while has both personal and

political dimensions as well. Her first collection, while social and political too, is less personal.

These three—the personal, the political and the social—are tied together in these authors' poems. The personal is sometimes political, and it is beyond the personal; they are merged together for the political and the social. Moreover, the personal is often connected or intertwined with the collective, and they speak of a larger collective experience. For instance, in 'The Wall', Begikhani describes a day in the refugee camp when she wakes up and finds herself faced with a naked wall:

> I found myself faced with a naked wall
> the silent stone of the refugee camp
> reflecting the faded face of my father
> the frozen laughter of my baby sister
> A naked wall was standing still
> reflecting the death of our brothers
> who were unable to flee
> the poisoning rain in Halabja
> to take refuge here
> in this cold corner of the earth. (2006, p. 15)

'Brothers' here are not her own brothers, as they have been executed, not poisoned in Halabja. Thus, 'our brothers' in the above poem refers to the people who were poisoned in Halabja and the Kurdish people in Iraq, who were subjected to that violence and oppression. In 'Ghazu', as another example, we see that she evokes the image of her mother with the image of '50 thousands widows of the Anfal', who are still waiting for their lost beloveds:

> No one dares say, 'They are dead.'
> It has been 13 years that
> My mother has carried the lantern of waiting
> On the step of loneliness
> weaving an encounter with her youngest son
> Lantern of waiting
> In the hands of 50 thousand widows (p. 29)

Similarly, we see that Hardi's recollections of her war-torn and displaced childhood, for instance, reflect the lives of millions of other Kurds, who, like her and her family, have been affected by oppression, violence and displacement. The following poem, which is a memory Hardi recollects from her childhood (Crucefix, 2019), tells more than a memory by a five-year-old girl, and it embodies critical and political themes. In 'At the Border, 1979', Hardi (2004) describes the time she and her family, returning home from exile, waited for check-in at the border:

‘It is your last check-in point in this country!’
We grabbed a drink—
soon everything would taste different.

The land under our feet continued
divided by a thick iron chain.

My sister put her leg across it.
‘Look over here,’ she said to us,
‘my right leg is in this country
and my left leg in the other.’
The border guards told her off.

My mother informed me: *We are going home*.
She said that the roads are much cleaner
the landscape is more beautiful
and people are much kinder.

Dozens of families waited in the rain.
‘I can inhale home,’ someone said.
Now our mothers were crying. I was five years old
standing by the check-in point
comparing both sides of the border.

The autumn soil continued on the other side
with the same colour, the same texture.
It rained on both sides of the chain.

We waited while our papers were checked,
our faces thoroughly inspected.
Then the chain was removed to let us through.
A man bent down and kissed his muddy homeland.
The same chain of mountains encompassed all of us. (p. 30)

This poem signifies more than a personal memory; it stands for collective Kurdish experiences of division and displacement. The poem deals with themes and ideas of home, border, division and displacement, which are connected to the history of Kurds. The image of the chain, which is ‘thick’ and ‘iron’, signifies both the physical and political boundaries that divided their land and their people. We see her family with ‘dozens of families’, who were displaced and are returning home. The image of the sister, whose right leg is in one country and left leg in another, reinforces the poem’s themes of displacement and division, which are not just spatial but also embodied and affective. The dialogues happened in the poem, and the images used show the ardent desire of these people to return home: the sister puts her leg on the other side of the chain; the italicised words of the crying mother informs the little girl ‘*we are going*

*home'*; someone smells home, and another bent down and kissed the land when the chain was removed. Unlike these people, the little girl/Hardi seems to have a different perspective, which is resistant to the enchantment of the land. That is, the strong emotional bond suggested by the man kissing the muddy earth fails to register with the girl, who just sees both sides of the chain as similar, the same dirt on either side: 'the land under feet continued', 'the autumn soil continued on the other side', 'it rained on both sides of the chain'. The continuation of the land and the image of the chain implies the continuation of oppression and suggests that nothing is going to change at home, as Kurds are oppressed and persecuted on both sides of the chain. The last sentence, 'the same chain of mountains encompassed all of us', can have a dual meaning. It implies natural boundaries, which is consistent with one of the poem's central themes, which is borders; or it may refer to the fact that on both sides of the chain, there are mountains that protect Kurds. This brings to mind the famous Kurdish proverb, no friends but the mountains. However, the child/Hardi's perspective is also ironic as the dirt on both sides is the same, and yet one side is kissed and wept over. As seen, the above poem goes beyond a simple poetic remembrance; it embodies themes and ideas that are reflective of Kurdish collective memory and experiences. There are several other examples like this poem by Hardi, such as 'There was…' 'Journey Through the Dead Villages', 'Nights in the Cellar' and 'Escape Journey, 1988'. These should not be read simply as witnesses of the personal; they are indeed witnesses to larger collective experiences and a larger discriminatory historical and socio-political pathos.

This collective dimension of their poetry is so strong that it has been the theme of their reception and they, themselves, are seen as the witnesses and voices of the Kurds among their readers and reviewers in 'the social'; that is, 'where books are published, poems are read, and protest disseminated' (Forche, 1993, p. 9). For instance, in her review on *Life for Us*, McDermott (2005) argues that although her writing is intensely personal, Hardi's 'subject is not a private, intimate one, but massive: ideological violence, the repression of an entire people' (p. 92). McKane (in Begikhani, 2006) also contends that in her poems, Begikhani 'fights with the Anfal' and she and Hardi are 'true voices of the Kurds' (p. 7). The Anfal campaign, the genocides Kurdish people have experienced, the mass graves, and the gas attack in Halabja are the dominant and recurring themes Hardi and Begikhani deal with and respond to in their collections of poetry. What is significant is that Hardi and

Begikhani, in their poems, testify to not only the traumas they themselves and Kurds have experienced but their impacts on individuals and the whole community, and the continuation of the trauma. This is one of the poetics employed in their poems—'the poetics of continuity'—which will be discussed more in detail in the later section. For instance, 'Ghazu', which Begikhani dedicates to the widows of the Anfal, bears witness to the years of trauma and sorrow for women survivors. In 'Mass Grave', Begikhani portrays the blood-covered face and burning body of Kurdistan and the mass graves that contain the dead bodies of children and people. As shown in the next sections, in Begikhani's poems, which bear witness to extremity and trauma, the language and structure also 'bears the trace of extremity' (Forche, 2014, p. 25). While this is also evident in Hardi's poetry, it is more apparent in the poetry of Begikhani, who is a genocide survivor.

Hardi's collections of poetry bear witness to multiple traumatic events in the history of Kurds and include several references to real places and exact dates in the history of Kurds, evident in titles such as 'Lausanne, 1923', 'Dropping Gas: 16th March 1988', 'The Spoils, 1988', 'Exodus, 1991', 'The 1983 Riots in Suleimanya', 'Pyjamas 1983' and 'Escaping Kanitu, March 1998'. Each of these poems narrates one part or a story of Kurds long history of oppression and suffering, and each is about a story that has a history behind it. Hardi's selective approach—whether employed consciously or unconsciously—and this form of representation, is a kind of emplotment of Kurdish history through which readers witness and recognise multiple oppressions and injustices experienced by Kurds. It makes readers imagine how a nation experiences 'crisis over crisis' and shows them how a large part of the history of a nation is marked by oppression and violence. This 'crisis over crisis' is a feature of Kurdish writings, particularly the writings this study examines. It is not limited to Hardi's and Begikhani's work. As will be seen in the next chapters, the memoirs and fictions addressed in this study have the same feature; they all have a 'crisis narrative' or 'crisis-upon-crisis narrative' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 96). Boehmer has used this term for the writings of contemporary South African novels and asserts that crisis defines the nation's writing. This also suggests that traumatised cultures share common features across their literature.

In Hardi's second collection of poetry, *Considering the Women*, a change is observed, and the kind of testimonies she produces through and in her poems is different from her first collection. Also, her voice is only one of the many voices

heard in this collection. *Considering the Women* is less autobiographical. It centres on the testimonies and traumas given by real survivors of the Anfal genocides; mostly women, whom Hardi interviewed for her post-doctoral research. This set of poems comes in a sequence called 'Anfal', which consists of 13 poems. The sequence begins and ends with the speeches of the poet/researcher, which bookend 11 poems in the voice of women survivors, as well as a boy and an elderly man who survived death. In the first poem of the sequence, 'Preface: Researcher's Speech', the poet addresses the survivors and tells them she wants to document their sufferings and makes their voices heard:

> I have come to learn about your pain
> fill me up with your words, I have not been
> gassed, nor imprisoned, not mothered children
> to watch them starve or wither away, don't
> know what widowhood feels like. I have not
> lived in a shack, nor worked hard in
> fields and factories to bring food back.
>
> I want to document your sufferings, make sure
> your voice is heard. I cannot promise redress
> or direct help. But I promise to listen
> with all that I have, stay true to your story,
> not distort or edit your grief. I will write
> a book, try to bring you acknowledgment.
> So let's begin, tell me about your life. (Hardi, 2105, p. 27)

This poem seems to be written before Hardi's research and interviews. She asks these women to tell her their stories and promises to document and be faithful to them. However, the whole sequence shows that Hardi gives it a narrative and a story. She begins with the above poem, and then 11 people bear witness to these survivors' traumatic and horrific experiences. Then, in the last poem of the sequence, we see Hardi deeply affected and traumatised by hearing these harrowing life stories. The above poem reflects what the poet hopes to achieve through the writing of poetry, and this poem in particular. She tells what she can and cannot do: 'I cannot promise redress or direct help'. All she can do is 'listen with all she had', 'document their sufferings' through her academic works and poetry, 'be faithful to their stories' and 'try' to 'bring them acknowledgement'. While the poem suggests what a poem and a poet can achieve, it also suggests lowering expectations about what that might actually be. In the last poem of the sequence, titled 'Researcher's Blues', we see Hardi deeply haunted by the traumatic stories of these women, and their voices

constantly appear in her life and her dreams, even those she has not interviewed. This is how she begins the poem:

> Every day I try to lose them in the street,
> leave them behind in the road and keep on
> walking. But they follow me everywhere, their voices
> combining into a hum from which sentences rise and fall.
> The woman I never interviewed cut the string of my sleep
> at dawn, whispering: 'I am not well'.( Hardi, 20015, p. 42)

The poem contains the signs of secondary post-traumatic stress, and although she tries to 'lose them in the street' 'they follow her everywhere'. Hardi has not expected the extent of these women's sufferings and trauma. As she states at the end of the poem, 'when I started, it was all clear. I knew/ what had to be done. All I can do is keep walking/ carrying this sorrow in my soul' (p. 42). Hardi is 'marked' by what she has witnessed. Her poetry has also been marked by her experience, and as we see, she takes a new approach in her poetry writing in her second collection. Forche (1993) believes that for people who have been through extremity and suffering, of any kind, their life, their psyche, their poetry—in the case of poets—and the language of their poetry are all 'marked' by that experience. This is what happened to Hardi, her poetry writing, and also her life. As we see at the end of her collection, Hardi's experiences and constant returns home for testimony finally led to her divorce from her husband, who was 'fed up with victimhood' and 'fed up with her because she could not be happy' (p. 58). Hardi returned home after 26 years of exile.

Hardi shares these stories of victimhood and suffering with her readers and uses her poetry as a space to give these women a voice; to document their sufferings and bring them acknowledgment, as expressed in the first poem of the sequence. But in these poems, it is not Hardi who bears witness but the survivors themselves. She puts these people in the position of the witness and lets readers hear the voices of the real survivors, whose names are often stated in the poem or poem title. Most of these poems also contain the exact dates and names of places where the traumatic events occurred, such as 'Escaping Kanitu, March 1988: Najiba Ahmad and Fatima Muhammad Amin', 'Arrest at Milla Sura: 14 April 1998', 'Dibs Camp, the Women's Prison: Nabat Fayaq Rahman', 'The Child at the Pits: Taymour Abdullah, the twelve-year-old boy who survived'. The poems bear witness to unbelievable, terrifying experiences and contain shocking images and scenes that can traumatise readers. For

instance, in 'Arrest at Milla Sura: *14 April 1988*', a woman describes the day their men were buried in a mass grave:

> We were transported to Topzawa camp
> by IFA trucks. The whole of Kurdistan was
> stranded there. Caught up in its filth and fear,
> its selections: women and children to one side,
>
> old people to the other. Men and teenage boys were
> stripped-down, their pockets emptied, eyes covered,
> hands tied behind their backs. If you had seen
> how they were kicked into the windowless trucks
>
> you would have known where they were taking
> them, you wouldn't have wondered whether they
> were coming back. What was left of them? Combs
> beads, mirrors, IDs, piled, soaking in the rain. (Hardi, 2015, p. 32)

What is significant about these poems is that they offer readers not just documented facts, dates and places, which can be found in history books, but facts as lived. More significantly, this set of poems—as poetry of witness—bear witness to not only what happened in the past and those who were murdered, gassed or buried in the mass graves, but to the life of survivors and the effects of those traumas on their lives. In these poems, we often see how these survivors are still suffering from traumas of the past and are physically, mentally and emotionally damaged. The continuity of terror and trauma, as discussed the next sections, is one of the poetics employed in both Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness, not only thematically but also formally. For instance, in 'Dibs Camp, the Women's Prison: *Nabat Fayaq Rahman*',[39] the woman, whose name comes in the subtitle, bears witness to the day her husband was taken to the mass grave, her son died in her lap, and her teenage daughter was kidnapped (Hardi, 2015, p. 33). Nabat, for 'the rest of her life left to wonder' 'does she still live' and 'the rest of her children grow fed up with her black garments, secret tears, headaches' (p. 33). In another poem, titled 'Dispute Over a Mass Grave', we see two Kurdish women still wishing after many years, to have back the dead body of their son who was buried in a mass grave, to bury him. The poem is about an argument between these two women fighting over the remaining corpse of a 15-year-

[39] *The Guardian* chose this poem as the poem of the week in the second week of November 2015. They compare Hardi's sequence to the sequence of Jewish poet, Charles Reznikoff, titled *Holocaust*, which contains survivors' testimonies from transcripts of the Eichmann and Nuremberg trials. Indeed, there are many differences between the way these two poets represent survivors' testimonies, which itself can be a subject of study.

old boy and they both desire to bury him as their son: ‘I Know she too has been looking for her son/ but you have to tell her that this is not him’ one of the women says. ‘That one is mine! Please give him back to me. I will bury him on the verge of my garden’ (p. 39). One of the issues Hardi (2011) raised in her research monograph is many of the survivors were still not able to have the dead bodies of their loved ones who were killed in the mass graves. She recommends that serious attempts should be made to bring back the bodies of the victims as a way of closure or remedy for these people. As Hardi (2011) asserts, these mass graves remained uncovered as it costs a lot for the government (pp. 195-197). Thus, ‘Dispute Over a Mass Grave’ addresses this need and demand of these survivors. What is so significant about Hardi’s poetry of witness is they even go further than merely showing the life narratives of a group of people who have been subjected to violence and still suffer from traumas of the past. Importantly, they address their demands and needs, and also what they suffer from beyond those traumas. Her poetry of witness goes beyond simply witnessing the extremities these women went through and still suffer from to show the other forms of sufferings they experience and the ways they are treated in society. They bear witness to and speak out against the way people, society, government, media and researchers approach these survivors and use them and their traumas to their advantage for political purposes. For instance, in the following poem, ‘The Angry Survivor’, we see how an angry survivor is complaining about political and social violence and the way she is treated in the society:

> I am fed up with documentations of my grief—
> journalists asking me to sing a lullaby for my
> dead children, to broadcast during commemorations,
> government officials using my story as propaganda
> during elections, women activists forcing me to talk
> about rape only to prove that women are oppressed,
> researchers claiming to record history when
> all they do is pick my wounds. (Hardi, 2015, p. 41)

The poem shows how these women’s identity is whittled down into victim, and they are only seen as conveyors of grief and trauma. The society, the people and the government expect and force them to witness and restage their traumas, which in itself is a painful and traumatic experience. They ‘pick their wounds’ for their own purposes: ‘journalists asking me to sing a lullaby for my dead children to broadcast during commemorations’, ‘government officials using my story as propaganda during elections’ and ‘women activists forcing me to talk about rape only to prove that

women are oppressed'. They are used 'to record history' and they, as survivors, have the responsibility of being a witness, even on behalf of those who have been killed. The woman in the poem is sick of this; she is 'fed up' with the performance of her grief and the awful experience of constantly performing the role of a witness.

Interestingly, as poetry of witness, the above poem addresses the question of witness, witnessing and the responsibility of witnessing for not only the survivors who witness but also those who are witnesses or pretend to be a responsible witness: journalists, women activists and the government. It gives us a different understanding of the responsibility to witness on behalf of these survivors who have or take or are forced to play the role of witness. It allows for other aspects of what it means to be a witness of a collective and having the terrible burden of witnessing. Conversely, it defends these women from different forms of 'coercions' from society and government officials in the name of responsibility, help or redress. It subjects them to critique through the critique of their approach towards these survivors, their purposes, and the ways they use them and their traumas. As poetry of witness, this poem 'reclaims the social from the political and in so doing defends the individual against illegitimate forms of coercion' (Forche, 2014, p. 45). It makes 'claims against the political' in 'the name of justice' for these survivors (p. 31), and makes ethical claims on its readers, who are invited to witness and recognise what the poem, and whole sequence of 'Anfal', bears witness to.

The 'Anfal' sequence and the above poem particularly, reveal the role, ethical responsibility and consideration of its poet. What matters for her are the survivors. She turns her poems for a location for the social as well as a vehicle towards the social. As an ethical and responsible witness poet, she tries to write of the events and experiences as they have happened; she tries to be loyal to these people. She raises this at the very beginning of the sequence in the first poem, where she addresses the survivors and promises to be loyal to them and 'not distort or edit their grieves' (Hardi, 2015, p. 27). The language in the poems in this sequence is plain, simple and quite straightforward, with broken words and lines. It is less poetic and metaphoric compared to other poems of witness in the same collection and those in the first collection. As she explains in her poetic manifesto, Hardi (2018) added nothing to these stories, not only to be loyal to those people but also to avoid overwhelming the readers:

> The stories we want to tell are already full of force, pain, and strong feelings, and we do not need to add another layer of emotion by adding our own. We need to hold back our anger and pain and let those stories speak for themselves. We must communicate the truth without alienating the readers and shouting in their faces, without being self-righteous and making them want to shut us out. We are trying to make comprehensible that which seems incomprehensible, to rebuild connections and facilitate understanding and empathy. We must stay loyal to the truth without overwhelming the reader with too much detail, stay loyal to the person's voice and maintain her style of telling the story as much as we can.

As a poet of witness who 'calls upon the reader' to witness what she is bearing witness to, she is also careful about the reader, because this poetry is written to be witnessed by the reader. As Forche (2014) states, 'witness begets witness' (p. 26). Hardi, who wants to 'build connection', 'facilitate understanding' and evoke 'empathy' in the readers of her poetry, tries to communicate in a way that makes this happen, rather than overwhelm and alienate readers. In her poems, Hardi employs other strategies to engage the readers in the process of witnessing. In poems discussed from the sequence above, we saw that she puts the survivors in the position of witness and in each poem the reader hears the voice of a real survivor who is bearing witness to their traumatic experiences in their own voice. It also happens that Hardi puts the reader in the position of the witness and compels them to witness and relive the moments of trauma with the speaker who narrates the trauma. In the next section, this chapter specifically looks at the poetics of poetry of witness, the strategies employed by Hardi and by Begikhani to bear witness to both personal and collective traumatic experiences, and the language and structure of their poetry of witness.

Both in her poetry and research, Hardi attempts to give voice to the survivors of Anfal, who 'have received minimal support from their own community, government and the international communities' (2011, p. 120). Through her research monograph, she brought these women's stories to academia, and her poems can bring recognition for them in other non-academic contexts around the world. She tries to be faithful to the stories of these women (as she promised them) because their 'stories and lives have been exploited by many sections of Kurdish society, including the government, media, researchers, employers and others' (Hardi, 2011, p. 1). Hardi plays the role of a 'speaking subject' whose voice can be heard and can raise the voice of these women, bringing them recognition in national and international contexts. As an international poet, researcher and activists, she can assertively speak on their

behalf and make their voice heard. These poems and her research bring forward the survivors' silent voices through Hardi's gained ability to speak.

As discussed in Chapter One, Spivak (1983) argues that since a subaltern's voice cannot be heard, it is the critical and ethical role of intellectuals, academics and those who have agency to speak and whose speech can be heard, to speak on their behalf. Likewise, as an academic, researcher and poet who is known at both national and international levels, Hardi has that agency and a voice that can be heard in different contexts. Yet Spivak suggests that this act has possible dangers as well since what gets represented through them might not be the voice of the subaltern but the voice of the speaker, representing their own identity and desires. According to Spivak (1983), such an attempt leaves the subaltern speechless. As we saw, this is one of the main issues Hardi herself deals with and challenges. She speaks up against how the stories of these survivors have been exploited by government, media and researchers for various purposes without considering the suffering and needs of these women. Both Hardi and Begikhani turned their poetry into a space through which they give voice to these oppressed people.

**Poetics in Hardi's and Begikhani's Poetry of Witness**

As poetry of witness, Hardi's and Begikhani's poems are not simple documentations of the past or mere recollections of historical events. Their mode 'is evidentiary rather than representational—as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled' (Forche, 2014, p. 36). However, the evidence in poetry of witness is unlike what we see in other forms of testimony, such as testimony published in a newspaper. These evidences are creative, poetic, metaphoric, symbolic and multi-layered: they are visual and sensory evidences that produce a sense of witness in the reader and bring them into the sphere of witness. For instance, the following poem by Hardi, titled 'Dropping Gas: 16th March 1988', takes readers back to when the Halabja is gassed and thousands of civilians are killed. It thrusts readers into the very moments of that traumatic and horrifying experience and exposes them to shocking images, scenes and sounds:

> There are screams and cries everywhere
> of those discovering the bodies of their loved ones –
> children who managed to escape their courtyards
> and died outside on the steps,
> a man's back and the face of his baby under his arm.

My neighbour says, *They are all dead*.
He wants to show me his family.
There are some journalists taking photos,
some men robbing the dead bodies
and a clear sky—
it's all dead now, cannot be killed any more.

I stand detached from everything,
observing, believing and not believing
My neighbour will lose his mind and kill himself next week,
a woman who does not find her daughter
will search for her till the day she dies,
the man who left his family behind
will live in a hell of his own
and the Imam who always called for prayers
will soon take to drink.

I stand here watching, crying and not crying.
I know that I don't know anything,
that I will never know anything
and I know that this ruin
is the only knowledge I will ever have. (Hardi, 2004, p. 19)

The poem provides a shocking and profound testimony of the day Halabja is attacked, and the horrific situation the people—and the speaker—are in. We see them surrounded by dead bodies and people who are extremely shocked and traumatised. In the first stanza, we see fragmented images of people, screaming and crying, and dead bodies, including children. In the next stanza, the poem moves into a kind of transcriptive mode, transcribing the voices of others—a neighbour showing his family, saying '*They are all dead'*, italicised as if he is shouting. At the beginning of the third stanza, we see the speaker in a very traumatised position, 'believing' and 'not believing'. The trauma she witnesses exceeds her capacity to believe and forces her into a position of not believing. This juxtaposed condition and states of being and the kind of contradiction that exists here represent the heart of a traumatic experience. Finding the speaker in that traumatised condition and witnessing their inability to comprehend what has happened, readers can imagine the intensity of that trauma and the difficulty of its comprehension.

The poem then moves the reader around in time, projecting forward a few days or into a future, and the devastations of war. It anticipates how the lives of the people who are left behind will be destroyed in a slower time frame, and how the whole community will be affected, mentally, psychologically and culturally: 'a

neighbour will go mad and commit suicide' from the loss of his family, 'a mother will die with the desire of finding her lost daughter', and an 'Imam[40] will soon take to drink'. Thus, in this poem, the poetic of the continuity of trauma and terror takes the form of future anticipations. The poem also suggests that those who live and survive the attack are not living in the sense that they lived before; they are living dead. The last stanza further emphasises the devastation of war, as it evokes the interior corruption the speaker talks about and anticipates that it will be with them forever: 'I know that I don't know anything/ that I will never know anything/ and I know that this ruin/ is the only knowledge I will ever have'. Hence, this poem does only not bear witness to an act of violence, but the devastations that come with violence and the furtherance of those devastations. It is a traumatised poem, and it is traumatising for readers too. The poem also has a traumatised narrative and language. The lines and sentences cut off and spill over into the next line. It has repeated words and sentences, mostly in the last stanza, which further emphasise the traumatised position and condition of the speaker and the continuity of her trauma. These two elements—language and 'continuity' of trauma—are two of the dominant poetics in Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness. The language and the structure of their poems are damaged and 'bears the trace of extremity' (Forche, 2011, pp. 164, 167). It bears the wounds they bear witness to and is 'evidence of *that-which-occurred*' (p. 167). Also, their poems record not only the past and traumatic experiences—which are, as mentioned above, not a simple record—but also the 'continuity' of those traumas and their 'future consequences and repercussions' on their own personal lives and the lives of the people who went through extremity and violence. Their poems bear witness to not only the traumatic experiences and traumatic historical events but also the ever-present effects they have on the lives of the survivors. Their poems 'compel the readers to relive the traumatic experiences', but they also draw them into the 'continuity' of those traumas.

In her study of the poetics of postcolonial writings, Boehmer's (2018) chapter on 'terror and continuity' argues that in writings of terror, writers 'evoke both its moments of violent rupture *and also* the experience of endurance and recovery that can, for those who survive, lie beyond' (p.12). Boehmer asserts that such writings 'register not only the history but also the future consequences and repercussions';

[40] Clergy man

‘they represent terroristic events, but also engaged with and embody the experiences of survivors’ (p. 66). This poetic of continuity, which can take different forms, can ‘prompt in the reader or addressee an engagement or involvement that takes them *through* the spirals of history and *on* from the terror-stricken situation or unhomely home in which the speaker finds or found themselves’ (Boehmer, 2018, p. 66). As seen in the above poem by Hardi, the poem takes us ‘through the spirals of history’, into the past and into the future; it ‘registers not only the history’, but also its ‘future consequences’ on the whole community. This aspect of Hardi’s and Begikhani’s poetry is so strong that it is rare to find a poem in which they record trauma and sufferings without addressing its continuity and devastating effects. Hardi and Begikhani write about victims of genocide and war. They write on and about survivors, whether those of family members or people they may or may not know. They evoke survivors’ years of sorrow, pain and waiting for their lost beloveds. More importantly, their poems draw the readers into what Boehmer (2018) argues, is ‘the difficulty of articulation’ of terrors and traumas. Boehmer believes that writings of terror also draw readers ‘into the difficulty of its articulation and comprehension’ (p. 12). In the above poem by Hardi, ‘Dropping Gas: 16th March 1988’, we see the speaker witness their inability to comprehend what has happened: ‘I stand detached from everything/ observing, believing and not believing’, ‘I know that I don’t know anything/ that I will never know anything’(p. 19). These poetics—‘continuity’ and ‘the difficulty of articulation and comprehension’ of terror and trauma—are expressed either directly or indirectly through formal and aesthetic features, and in the language of Hardi’s and Begikhani’s poetry.

There are many examples of poems in which Hardi and Begikhani evoke the continuity and ever-presence of traumas of the past. For instance, in Begikhani’s (2006) ‘Hide and Seek in Bergalu’, we see the image of an old woman who, after ‘eighteen years’, is still ‘chasing the shadow of two children’ who were killed by the bombardment of the aeroplanes while they were playing hide and seek in their village of Bergalu (p. 24), or in ‘Ghazu’, the image of 50 thousand widows of Anfal holding ‘lanterns of waiting’ for ‘13 years’ for their beloved who were buried in the mass graves or gassed during the Anfal campaigns. Readers also repeatedly encounter Begikhani’s mother, who appears in many of her poems and continues to suffer from the loss of her children and her brothers. In ‘The War Was Over’, Begikhani writes of many years after the war, when she returned home with her son, Nawzad, named after

one of her lost brothers. Her mother hugs Begikhani's son, 'struggling to hide her tears'—'No-one will know/ if they were tears of joy/ or of grief for the loss of my brother/ who carried the same name' (p. 59). Thus, the poem's title, 'The War Was Over', juxtaposes what the poem tells us, as the war does not end for her mother. Begikhani constantly evokes her mother's deep sense of sorrow and loss, and her desire to reunite with her lost sons, her daughter and her brothers. As she tells us in her poem 'My Mother's Prayers': 'Nothing consoles my mother's s soul/ apart from one tiny wish/ the wish for afterlife', 'meeting again with her sons/ holding the hands of her baby daughter/ hugging her brothers' (Begikhani, 2006, p. 37).

The continuity of the sufferings and traumas of the past is also seen in the way Begikhani ends her poems; often with no punctuations and often with continuous verbs and words such as waiting, returning and reunion. The endings also link the past to the present and the future. For instance, in 'My Granny's Tales', a poem for her brother Qubad, the ending is about how life can be 'a habit of absence', 'a habit of another waiting', 'waiting for the opening of a new window', 'the size of our reunion' (Begikhani, 2006, p. 33). Here, 'habit of absence' is paradoxical and represents a diminished kind of life. Combining 'habit'—which is a continual situation, gesture, or behaviour—with 'absence'—which is exactly the opposite—is the kind of paradox the poet uses to describe her life. 'Ghazu' also ends with no punctuation and the continuous verb, 'waiting': 'The lanterns of waiting/ Are glowing blue/ Glowing blue/ The lanterns of waiting' (p. 30). The repetition of words and sentences at the end also emphasises the endlessness of their sorrow. Such endings imply the continuity of trauma and symbolise its never-ending effects and its eternal presence.

As already seen, Hardi's poems largely bear witness to the lasting effects of violence and trauma on the life of the people affected. This not only occurs in her second collection, which centres on the women survivors of the Anfal. Her first collection, *Life for Us*, includes one of her famous poems, 'The Penelopes of My Homeland: For the 50000 Widows of Anfal',[41] which bears witness to the emotional and psychological distress following loss, and the aftermath of depression and emotional suffering of the genocides experienced by women survivors: 'The waiting mother of my homeland grew old and old/ without ever knowing that they were

[41] This poem was included in the English GCSE curriculum in the UK, with three of her other poems, 'At the Border, 1979' (discussed above), 'Invasion' and 'My Mother's Kitchen'.

waiting/ without ever knowing that they should stop waiting' (Hardi, 2004, p. 21). All the stanzas of this poem, except the last one, begin with the words 'years and years': 'years and years of silent labour', 'years and years of widowhood they lived', 'years and years of avoiding despair, not giving up', 'years and years of raising more Penelopes and Odysseuses', and 'years and years of youth that was there and went unnoticed'. This repetition conveys the continuity of terror, trauma and loss, as well as capturing the years of 'endurance', 'silent labour', 'avoiding despair and not giving up', and holding onto hopes and dreams and God. Moreover, the poem evokes not only the impossibility of 'recovery' from trauma by these women survivors—'recovery that can, for those who survive', as Boehmer (2018) argues, 'lie beyond' (p. 12)—but also the reproduction of trauma and loss over generations: the Penelopes of my homeland 'raising more Penelopes and Odysseuses'. 'The Penelopes of my homeland died slowly/ carrying their dreams into their graves/ leaving more Penelopes to take their place', ends the poem. It conveys the multiplicity of trauma and loss by the idea of multiple Penelopes, rather than a singular Penelope. Here, Hardi brings the classical myth of Penelope and Odysseus into her poem and compares women of her homeland to Penelope—who waited for the return of Odysseus from the Trojan War—with the difference that Odysseuses of the Penelopes of Hardi's homeland never returned from war. Unlike Homer's epic poem, in which Odysseus is the protagonist, in Hardi's poems from her second collection, the Penelopes of her homeland are the protagonists and the heroines, for their years of suffering and endurance.

'The difficulty of articulation' that Boehmer (2018) identifies, along with the poetics of 'continuity' (p. 12), also manifests in the poetry of Hardi and Begikhani, seen mostly in the language and through elements such as words, line breaks and repetition. In a chapter on repetitive poetics in *Postcolonial Poetics*, Boehmer introduces South African writings as instances of 'a reiterative poetics of trauma'. She finds repetition and some other elements, such as 'breaks' and 'hesitations', as poetics of trauma. She argues that the poetics of trauma 'is marked by hesitations, breaks, and repetitions, not only compelling the reader to relive the traumatic experience along with the speaker or writer, but also drawing them into the difficulty of its articulation' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 88). This is similar to Forche's (2011) contention that the language of pottery of witness is a 'damaged language'; the language itself becomes 'a site of the wound' that the poem bears witness to (pp. 166,167). Language bears the

wounds and is ‘evidence of *that-which-occurred*’ (Forche, 2011, p. 167). She remarks that extremity leads to ‘shattered, exploded, or splintered narrative’. ‘The narrative of trauma is itself traumatised, and bears witness to extremity by its inability to articulate directly or completely’ (1993, p. 42), due to ‘the impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination’ (p. 30). Like Boehmer, Forche refers to characteristics such as ‘line breaks’, ‘ruptures of utterances’, ‘silences and fissures of written speech’ (2011, p. 161), which characterise the language of the poetry of witness. She also refers to other devices and features such as ‘questions, aphorisms, broken passages of lyric prose or poetry, quotations, dialogue, brief and lucid passages’ as ‘traces of extremity’ on the language of poetry of witness (Forche, 2011, p. 167). The following stanzas from Begikhani’s (2006) ‘Ghazu’ provide an example:

> A n f a l, A n f a l
> A voice blew, the voice of a wretched conquest
> Voice of desert storms and
> tempest of Fall
> It blew voice
> a voice of rage, a voice of wrath
> It blew Anfal
>
> My mother on the steps of waiting
> continuing her prayer beads
> weaving the necklace of hope
> when the body of her son
> fell into her arms
>
> A n f a l, A n f a l
> It blew a voice
> voice of wrath, voice of conquest
> Conquest of garden
> Conquest of colour
> Conquest of flight
> Howls pour from the silence of waiting
> No one dares say, ‘They are dead.’
> It has been 13 years that
> My mother has carried the lantern of waiting
> On the step of loneliness
> weaving an encounter with her youngest son
> Lantern of waiting
> In the hands of 50 thousand widows
> In the narrow lanes of hope
> The lanterns of waiting
> Are glowing blue
> Glowing blue
> The lanterns of waiting (p. 29)

The language of this poem is a traumatised language; it articulates the suffering and trauma with which the poem engages. The poem takes the form of lines in enjambment—cutting off lines mid-sentence—and phrases that cut off and spill over into the next line or, at times, next stanza. The sentences come with no punctuation. The only punctuated sentence is 'They are dead.', which conveys the reality that survivors cannot or do not want to believe: 'No one dares say, "They are dead."' There are many line breaks and short repeated sentences—'It blew voice', 'It blew Anfal'; 'Conquest of garden', 'Conquest of colour', 'Conquest of flight'—and repeated shattered words—A n f a l, A n f a l—all creating a sense of difficulty in articulating those lines. The word 'A n f al', the way it is composed and its repetition, highlight both the difficulty of articulation trauma as well as its intensity. 'A n f a l' is written in a way that is difficult for the poet/persona to utter. Also, the typography of the word and the space between the letters interferes with and slows down its articulation by the reader. These devices affect textual meaning and can intensify and enhance the impact of the poem. Such poetics 'draws readers into the difficulty of its articulation of trauma and terror' (Boehmer, 2018, p. 12). The title of this poem, 'Ghazu', which is an Arabic word meaning conquest—as it is translated for readers in the endnotes of Begikhani's collection of poetry—is used ironically and juxtaposes what readers are told throughout the poem, which is destruction and loss. The title is used ironically to acknowledge that 'conquest' for the enemy or the oppressor, is simply destruction for the people affected by violence and war. Theirs is a conquest of 'garden', 'color' and 'flight'; it took lives and left many 'on the step of loneliness' and 'on the step of waiting all their lives'. Thus, it is a 'wretched conquest'. Anfal is compared to a wind and a storm—as it 'blew'—which has destroyed everything—'hope', 'garden', 'colour' and 'flight'. The destruction of the Anfal is also conveyed with its alliteration with 'Fall' (in 'Tempest of Fall') and 'fell' (in 'when the body of her son/ fell into her arms'), which both anticipate the sound and effect of the Anfal. This poem has already been discussed for its poetics of trauma and continuity and the way it was articulated through the form and language.

Among the literary genres, poetry might be the only one capable of conveying the nature of trauma and traumatic experience and its intensity, effects and continuity by its very form and poetic devices. Poetry can express extremity and suffering, felt by sufferers and survivors, and the impacts upon them, through language and structure. It can describe the indescribable and represent the unrepresentable through a

figurative language and figures of speech. It can articulate sufferings and captures the horror and subsequent effects of trauma using traumatic, disrupted and repetitive poetics, form and language. Poetry can use the language of trauma and can take the form of trauma memory; it can act like a trauma memory. Trauma memory speaks through compulsion, break and repetition. It returns to the past and comes back to the present. It evokes specific images, scenes and words, and gives a fragmented and incomplete picture or narrative of the traumatic event or experience. Poetry can do and reflect the same by its very form, nature and own specific qualities. It can craft repetition, fragmentation and disruption; it can capture extremity, compulsion, interruptions, and an inability to articulate traumatic experience as well as a fully formed narrative that is central to the traumatic experience. This is while other genres, like memoir, give detailed accounts of trauma and traumatic experiences. Among the literary genres, poetry has the added value of offering readers a physical and tangible sensation of what it bears witness to. In poetry of witness, the reader reads, feels, hears and even sees the impacts of trauma. Having this textual ability and possibility to articulate trauma and its impacts, poetry creates a broader avenue for readers' engagement and adds to the effects it can create. It increases the space for readers to empathise with the survivor, poet or whole community whose experience the poem bears witness to.

This is also a possibility and added value that poetry offers the poet, or the poet of witness, through which they can articulate trauma, its intensity and its impacts beyond thematic representations. Seen in this light, poetry is a privileged means for a critical witnessing that entails more than just documenting and recording traumatic events and experiences. Critical and effective poetry of witness 'is not simply reportage' and it is not 'representational'; rather, it is 'evidentiary', 'as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled blood' (Forche, 2011, p. 163). A critical witness evidences not only the extremity but also its aftermath and the tremendous devastations extremity and violence can make—physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically and culturally. Poetry's ability to convey this both thematically and formally, makes it a critical arena of witnessing. Its form and poetics open a broader space from which the poet can convey trauma through multiple elements, such as the language and imagery—visual, sensory and auditory—and thus affect their readers.

In the poems discussed above, we saw that Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness thrust readers into the heart of traumatic experiences, produced a sense of

witness in them, and put them in the sphere of witness through visual, sensory and auditory evidence. The traumatised language and structure employed draw readers into the intensity of the extremities they bear witness to and their impacts upon them or Kurdish people. The trauma and sufferings are articulated through a damaged and wounded language—through shattered words and sentences, line breaks, repetitions of words and short, broken, unpunctuated sentences—that make their poetry more affective and can 'mark the readers as they have themselves been marked' (Forche, 1993, p. 32). The figures, language and structure employed in the poems increase their potential to impact their implied readers and can instigate the kind of recognition the poets seek and aim to accomplish through witnessing. This chapter argues that the figures and structure of Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness meet their works' larger objective, which is a struggle for achieving recognition of the injustices and oppressions Kurds have been subjected to in the world. In other words, 'the political vision' of Begikhani's and Hardi's poetry 'is sedimented or concentrated within its figures and structure' too (Boehmer, 2018, p. 4). They are articulated and designed in a way that stimulates recognition in the readers and sharpens their feelings, emotions and understanding of Kurdish experiences of oppression and suffering.

This discussion has connected the chapter's initial focus on the politics around Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness with the poetics employed in their poems. It identified how poetics meet the works' larger political, ethical and moral objectives, and how form and content together prosecute a form of Kurdish identity politics. They act or create an arena of struggle for achieving recognition and a Kurdish voice of resistance. They call upon readers and invite them to witness the traumas and sufferings of these people to make their voice heard across the world. Raising these voices in wider global contexts, witnessing the personal and collective Kurdish experience of violence and oppression, and trying to reach a new and broader audience to be heard and recognised, Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness pursues a kind of resistance 'against forgetting' Kurdish history and Kurdish memory, particularly of the genocides carried out against Kurdish people. It is within this context that this chapter and this study argue that Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry entails a kind of activism, and they act as a Kurdish voice of resistance.

## Exile in the Poetry of Hardi and Begikhani

One of the central themes running through Hardi's and Begikhani's collection of poetry is exile. Exile is one of the traumas these two poets have experienced and examine in their poems. Both Begikhani and Hardi have been exiled from their homeland forcibly and spent many years away from home. In their poems, they engage with the homeland they were forced to leave and life in exile, which is marked by the 'unhealable rift' that Said (2000) asserts 'forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' in exile (p. 173). They both have been dealing with strong 'senses of loss' of home, 'miserable loneliness', and 'crippling sorrow of estrangement', which are central to the experience and life of exile (Said, 2000, p. 173). Hardi and Begikhani who have been 'cut off from their roots, their land, and their past', have created 'the new world' Said (2000) believes exiles create to overcome 'the loss of home' and 'the sorrow of estrangement' to 'reassemble their identity out of the discontinuities of exile' (pp. 173–179).

In *Reflections on Exile*, Said (2000) argues that exiles feel 'an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives' (p.177) and 'much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule'; 'a new world that somewhat resembles an old one left behind' (p. 181). This can take different forms and happen in different ways, either as a 'triumphant ideology'—such as 'an exaggerated sense of group solidarity and a passionate hostility to outsiders' (p. 178)—or in the works of exile novelists, political activists and intellectuals (p.181). Cut off from their homeland and their roots, Hardi and Begikhani have created that new world in exile through their activism, their writings and their poetry, both in Kurdish and English.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Hardi and Begikhani have studied, worked, researched and written poetry on the home they lost and the people of their homeland. During her life in exile, Hardi has published collections of poetry in the Kurdish language and translated Kurdish writings into English. Hardi's doctoral studies examined the effects of forced migration on Kurdish women, and her post-doctoral research explores Kurdish-Iraqi women survivors of genocide. Similarly, Begikhani has worked as an academic researcher and active advocate of women rights, particularly in the areas of gender-based violence and honour killing, and with a focus on Kurdish women's experiences. Begikhani's doctorate interrogated the image of Kurdish women in European literature. She has published several collections of Kurdish poetry in exile and, as mentioned, translated works from and into Kurdish too

(Hassan, 2013). Both Hardi and Begikhani have been dealing with their homeland, their language and culture, and the life of Kurdish people, particularly Kurdish women, during their lives in exile. Their activities, writings and poetry are part of their attempts to overcome the loss of home in exile and reassemble their denied, fragmented and silenced identity back home. Their recent collections of poetry in English is a new route these poets have taken and a new voice they have adopted to reassemble their denied, fragmented and silenced identity back home, in a global context. As shown further below, both poets, but particularly Begikhani, are doing more than coping with painful exilic senses, emotions and nostalgia; they are coping with their past pains and oppressions, denial of their homeland and identity, and their homelessness as Kurd.

Hardi's and Begikhani's life in exile is marked with the 'unhealable rift' (Said, 2000, p. 173). Although away from home, home is always with them—in their dreams, their real life and their poems. They regret what they have lost, and after many years of living away from home, they still live with the desire to return. The question Begikhani (2006) asks herself, after many years of travelling and living in different countries, as she writes in her poem 'Question', is 'Will I return home? Will I return? Will I?' (p. 55). Exile for Begikhani is like winter; a cold, sad season. This is the image she mostly uses for describing exile in her poems: 'a threshold of winter' (p. 55), 'a sad island' (p. 13), a 'cold corner of the earth' (p. 15), a place 'full of uncertainty', where 'the shadow of silence lies/ on the cheeks of togetherness' (p. 40), and where 'days are full of emptiness' (p. 16). The picture she presents of herself in exile is the picture of a sad, lonely woman: 'alone/ like many afternoons, with an old book under my arm/ I walk on the shore of the Loire' (p. 16); 'an exiled poet/ walking by/ with an old book under her arm/ saying "bonsoir" to the Loire'(p. 17). This brings to mind Said's (2000) observation that 'Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness' (p. 176). Loneliness in exile is a theme often referred to in Begikhani's poems. Begikhani does not feel at home in exile, and she always laments the loss of her real home. Her sense of belonging to where she lives is rarely be found in her poems; instead, they show she is largely engaged with home and her past life. Like any exile, she deals with the sense of loss and nostalgia for the self and home she left behind. In 'Exile', which is the first poem in her collection of poetry, she cried for 'the self she left behind' 'on a fresh silvery hill/ which no longer belongs

to me/ but always breathes inside me' (Begikhani, 2006, p. 13). Further, she tells us she is looking for a new voice in exile: 'in an unknown city /in search of a new voice/ to chant for a wandering nation' (p. 13). Her activities, academic research and poetry in English might be this 'new voice'.

Conversely, we also see that Begikhani is torn between home and exile; between East and West. As she writes in her 'Here Me There', 'I am a white shadow/ between here and there', 'My past/ was a goddess in the past', 'My present/ in Paris', 'My future/ is sleeping between East and West/ dreaming of both' (Begikhani, 2006, p. 21). As both the title and poem suggest, exile is a sense and condition of in-betweenness, and it is reflective of Begikhani's dual feelings, senses of belonging and multiple attachments as an exile. As she predicts, this will be the same in her future: 'my future/ is sleeping between East and West/ dreaming of both' (p. 21). This further emphasises the 'unhealable rift'. Seen in this light, exile cannot be considered as simply a geographical place; exile is and can be an identity and state of being. Begikhani writes in 'Celebration' that 'exile, like grass/ grew softly/ between our hands' (p. 40).

Further to coping with painful exilic senses and emotions, Begikhani deals with her past painful memories and the violence she and her family experienced. Her poems reflect feelings of nostalgia, longing for home, and the pain of living away from home as part of their exilic experience, but her accounts are often mixed with traumatic events and memories of the past. Her remembrance and recollections are more traumatic than nostalgic. This issue is evident in 'The Wall':

> I woke up one day from a deep sleep
> And found myself in a cold corner of the earth
> Brimming with uncertainty
>
> I looked for the soft face of the sky
> For the fresh smell of the sand after summer rain
> And I looked for the lullaby of the trees
> The serene silhouette of mother
> And the subtle silence of the father
> I looked for the laughter of my baby sister
> And for the peaceful presence of my mother
>
> In a cold corner of the earth
> brimming with uncertainty
> I found myself faced with a naked wall
> the silent stone of the refugee camp
> reflecting the faded face of my father

the frozen laughter of my baby sister
A naked wall was standing still
reflecting the death of our brothers
who were unable to flee
the poisoning rain in Halabja
to take refuge here
in this cold corner of the earth. (Begikhani, 2006, p. 15)

Here, we see the poet/speaker, in 'a cold corner of the earth'; looking for her family and a place she might have been before, a place with a 'soft sky' and 'fresh smell of the sand'. However, in the third stanza, we find her faced 'with a naked wall' and haunted by images of those she was looking for and those whom she has lost. Although she has escaped and took refuge in this 'cold corner of the earth', she is deeply sad and also feels guilty that her brothers are not with her. As noted earlier, here 'brothers' are not her brothers (as her brothers were executed), but the people who were poisoned in Halabja and the people of her nation who were subjected to that violence and oppression. The alliterations used in the third stanza—'silent stone', 'faded faces of my father' and 'frozen laughter'—additionally emphasise the meaning contained in those words and her deep sense of loss. Begikhani's past traumatic experiences of childhood, and the death of her beloveds, are constantly evoked in her poems set in exile or the poems on exile. Her personal accounts and memories from exile reveal that she, like to the survivors whose lives she bears witness to in her poems, still suffers from traumas of the past. Although she has survived, she is a living dead or as she describes in 'At a the Symposium in Wales', she is a 'grave yard':

A psychologist said
Graveyards may help you feel happier,
Visit a graveyard when you are depressed

There is a thin line between life and death, my friend
And I am a graveyard

I am happy to be alive, my friend
After Halabja and Anfal
I am happy to become the voice
of a land
That contains the mass graves of our brothers

There is a thin line between life and death, my friend
There is a thin line between life and death. (Begikhani, 2006, p. 14)

The traumas of the past are so deeply buried in Begikhani's soul that she sees herself as a graveyard: 'I am a graveyard', she tells the psychologist. For her, the psychologist's advice seems ridiculous—they recommended an encounter with the graveyard to sharpen the abstraction of death to make Begikhani value life: 'visit a graveyard when you are depressed', 'Graveyards may help you feel happier'. The advice to visit the site is absurd for her because she is already a graveyard. In this poem, Begikhani asserts that she wants to be a voice for the victims of those mass graves and this is what satisfies her, what she does through her poetry of witness. This poem also refashions what is made of happiness—from apparent Western trivialities around gratification, wellness and contentment, to the deeper satisfactions of testimony. It also speaks of the difficulty of communicating within exile and the lack of understanding of the depth of what people like Begikhani went through by non-exiles. This theme can also be found in Hardi's poems in different forms, such as her struggle with her 'non-exile' English husband, his failure to properly understand and sympathise with her, and their subsequent divorce and her return to home after 21 years of living in exile.

Hardi is also strongly engaged with her homeland in exile in her poetry. As she writes in 'Country', from her first collection of poetry, which was published during her life in exile, she always carries her homeland with herself, in her bag, in her books, and in her memories:

> I carry it in my handbag every day
> in books about genocide—
> pictures of mass graves, of leaders hanged,
> children mutilated by chemical weapons.
>
> I carry it in my memories of levelled villages,
> cemented springs, polluted land,
> in all the cancers, miscarriages, sterility.
>
> I sing my country for the silence that surrounded it.
> I remember a country forgotten
> by everyone else. (Hardi, 2004, p. 23)

Hardi sings her country through her poetry to break 'the silence that surrounded it'; she remembers it and bears witness to its history 'against its forgetting'. As mentioned earlier regarding Begikhani's exilic poems, these poets are more engaged with traumatic memories and suffering than nostalgic remembrance of their homeland. This is more intense in Begikhani's poems. However, as evident in the above poem,

as an exilic poet, Hardi carries her home with her every day and everywhere. But it is not the beauty of home or the good memories from home that she carries or evokes in her poem, but painful memories and terrible images of ‘genocide’, ‘mass graves’ and the people persecuted, including children.

Another important point for these two exiled and displaced poets is the added complication of their sense of homelessness as Kurds. Leaving their home behind, they were faced, like any other migrant group, with a sense of loss and the emotional pain of being cut off from their land and their roots. Again like anyone in exile, they deal with senses of estrangement, isolation and alienation. However, the loss of home they suffer from and express in their poems is not only the one they have experienced through exile but also what they have experienced historically. Their poems articulate not only the desire to return home but also their desire to have a home of their own. As Hardi (2004) writes in ‘What I want’: ‘And I imagine what it would be like/ to have what my father struggled for’ (p. 11). ‘My father never had what he wanted/ and we still don’t have the homeland he taught us to love’ (p. 11), states Hardi. Also, in ‘Lausanne 1923’, she briefly describes the history of her country and how the great powers divided Kurds’ homeland and denied their statehood:

> Sitting around an old table
> they drew lines across the map
> dividing the place
> I would call my country (p. 22).

Hardi’s homeland, as she expresses in ‘My English Years’, finally enchanted her and she left exile to return home. She writes for her husband:

> I didn’t know that the past
> was sleeping inside me, gathering strength,
> waiting to strike. I didn’t think a day would come
> when homeland would wake up in my heart
> and like a beast in a childhood dream
>
> it would summons me to its ruins
> and enchant me. I couldn’t imagine
> that I would leave you and not turn back. (Hardi, 2015, p. 59)

Hardi leaves where she does not belong and returns the homeland that ‘was sleeping inside her’. In exile, Hardi feels out of place and alienated. This feeling of alienation and estrangement is something she feels not only in exile, in society and among people, but at home with her husband and children. ‘My Children’ reveals how she feels alienated in ‘her own home’:

I can hear them talking, my children
fluent English and broken Kurdish.

And whenever I disagree with them
they will comfort each other by saying:
Don't worry about mum, she's Kurdish.

Will I be the foreigner in my own home? (Hardi, 2004, p. 63)

Hardi's 'English children' disregard her. As a Kurdish mother, she is worried about her children's loss of their mother language and tries to preserve her roots, culture and language in her home. The rhetorical question the above poem ends with—'Will I be the foreigner in my own home?'—implies its own answer and reveals Hardi's main concern in the poem. In 'To Kurdistan', she expresses that she wants to go back and visit her homeland, and wishes to bring some Kurdish books back from Kurdistan to teach her children Kurdish. She remembers 'all the Kurdish alphabet books that were torn and trodden-on at that border' and the repeated advice she took: 'You teach your children Kurdish in the West/ that is where the problem lies/ you teach your children Kurdish" (Hardi, 2004, p. 48). Hardi's point here is not about simply maintaining the mother language but also their cultural identity, roots and heritage. This is a fear and concern of most migrants. Hardi struggles to maintain her identity and culture and also desires that her children maintain their mother language; however, they seem reluctant to do so or are more interested in speaking their home language, which is not the language of their mother, and it is not her home. Hardi also finds her world very different from that of her English husband and complains about his failure to properly understand and sympathise with her. In 'Our Different Worlds', Hardi explains why she keeps going back home to listen to these women, but her husband does not understand:

And I took the bumpy unpaved roads
to villages full of ghosts of the lost
to listen to women I didn't know
talk about how it all happened,
why it continues. You didn't understand

why I kept going back to the dust and ruin,
to all the broken hearts that broken my heart.
you were fed up with victimhood,
you said, fed up with me because
I could not be happy. (2015, p. 58)

The title of this poem reflects the different worlds Hardi believes she and her husband belong to and resonates with Said's (2000) contention that exiles are 'clutching differences' and look at non-exiles 'with resentment' (pp. 180, 182). In the above poem, Hardi seems to complain or feel resentment against her husband's lack of understanding of her pain and his failure to properly sympathise with her: 'you were fed up with victimhood', 'because I could not be happy'. In her first collection of poetry, which includes some love poems for her non-exile husband, there are signs of these two different worlds that Hardi feels and her husband's lack of understanding of her real senses and feelings. For instance, in 'The Songs', Hardi (2004) writes about old Kurdish songs from home she played in her room in Britain to remind Hardi her of the past and the lost homeland. Her husband simply says: 'they are nice songs/ He says he likes listening to them' (p. 49), but these songs are painful and quite nostalgic for Hardi. This poem also expresses misunderstanding between Hardi and her husband, and a failure of communication between exile and non-exile.

This is not limited to Hardi's husband, and we can see how she explores these differences in the world and the life of her mother and her mother-in-law, by considering their different kitchens. In 'My Mother's Kitchen', which Hardi wrote after visiting the tidy kitchen of her British mother-in-law in the UK, she describes her mother's messy kitchen and the furniture she kept leaving each time they escaped from home. Hardi (2004) finds her mother-in-law's kitchen elegant, while her mother's kitchen is described as an immigrant kitchen: 'her glasses, some tall, and lean, others short and fat/ her plates, an ugly collection from various sets/ cups bought in a rush on different occasions', 'At 69 she is excited about/ starting from the scratch/ it is her ninth time' (p. 15). This messy and moving picture of Hardi's mother's kitchen is indeed a picture of their life and their homeland—chaotic and in conflict—which Hardi finds very different from what she sees in her new home in the West. The peaceful kitchen of her English mother-in-law represents the peaceful conditions in which they live. Hardi, as she writes, 'will inherit her mother's kitchen': 'don't buy anything just yet', Hardi's mother told her, 'soon all of these will be yours'(p. 15). Hardi has inherited her mother's kitchen and her faith. She has experienced years of exile and displacement from early childhood in different stages of her life, and after 21 years of living in exile, she divorced her husband and returned home, where she belongs.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry; mostly their poetry of witness and also their poems of exile. It began by examining their poetry of witness in the context of 'the personal', 'the political' and 'the social' dimensions Forche believes poetry of witness embodies. Their poems reveal that while their poetry has both personal and political dimensions, it also provides the dimension of space. Their poetry is 'a location for the social and it is a vehicle towards the social'. They also circulate in the social, 'where books are published, poems are read, and protest disseminated' (Forche, 1993, p. 9). Through their poems, Hardi and Begikhani write against the political in the name of justice for the social, for the oppressed civil society. As poetry rising from oppression and struggle, and as a resistance voice, their poems are also 'political'; that is, they are politically engaged. As this chapter demonstrated, the social and political vision of these and the objectives they follow, are embedded not only in their themes and subjects but also in the poetics, language, structure and strategies employed within the poems to bear witness to personal and collective experiences of extremity and violence. Importantly, the analysis revealed that both form and content bear witness to not only the experience of trauma and its intensity, but also, and in a greater measure, to its impacts and consequences. In the second section, this chapter more specifically looked at how the poetics, figures and language of Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry of witness meet their works' broader objectives. As the final section shows, even their exilic poems and the poems in which they are dealing with exile, act as poetry of witness. Exile is itself an extremity these two poets have experienced. Forche (1993) also considers exile as an extremity and the poems written in the aftermath of exile as poetry of witness. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, exile and displacement from home is an added complication to their sense of homelessness as Kurds. In their poetry, the loss of home they suffer from and deal with is not only the one they have experienced through their exile but also one they have experienced historically. Their poems bear witness to a larger historical and socio-political condition.

# Chapter Six—Kurdish Autobiographies in Transit, Kurdish Testimonies on Move

## Introduction

This chapter is a reading of English memoirs produced by Kurdish authors, *The Daughter of Kurdland: A Life Dedicated to Humankind* by Widad Akreyi and *No Friends But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* by Behrouz Boochani. It seeks to identify how each of these two memoirs bears witnesses to Kurdish history. This chapter also endeavours to show how the genre of memoir acts differently—as testimony—to poetic testimonies discussed in the previous chapter and the fictional accounts that will be discussed in the next chapter. In the previous chapter, Hardi's and Begikhani's collections of poetry were analysed together, as they are biographically, thematically and poetically very similar. However, in this chapter, each author and their work will be analysed separately. This is partly due to these authors' different country of birth. As noted in Chapter Three, there are some different discourses in the Kurdish writings of each of the four countries Kurds inhabit due to the varying socio-political conditions they have been subjected to and different levels of oppressions enacted against them. For instance, in this chapter, Akreyi, who is from Iraqi Kurdistan, largely bears witness to the history of Iraqi Kurds, particularly during the Ba'ath regime and the genocides Kurds have experienced. Meanwhile, Boochani bears witness to the political violence he witnessed in Iran as well as the war happened during his childhood. However, the main reason this chapter looks at these two memoirs individually is the different context of Boochani's work and his testimonies of Manus prison, which constitutes a large part of his work. Boochani's memoir, the process that led to its publication, and the way it has been written and translated into English, is different from not only Akreyi's memoir but also the English writings of Hardi, Begikhani, Bahar and Balata. Before embarking on the analysis of Akreyi's and Boochani's works, this chapter first provides a discussion on how these writings and some other memoirs by Kurdish authors not included in this study are different from the existing Kurdish memoirs and life narratives by Kurdish authors, and why this study calls them 'Kurdish autobiographies in transit' (Whitlock, 2007). Moreover, this chapter examines how

memoir bears witness and acts as testimony in ways that are different from other genres, and identifies the particular characteristic or literary/aesthetic properties of memoir that makes it a particularly powerful means of testimony and expression.

**Kurdish Autobiographies in Transit, Kurdish Testimonies on the Move**

As Chapter Three indicated, a significant amount of Kurdish literature is memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, and these genres have long been dominant modes of Kurdish writing. As discussed, the reason for such writings' popularity among Kurdish authors has historical, cultural and political roots. In the denial of their homeland, identity and history, writing about homeland, the self and Kurdish history has been a means to maintain and reconstruct their denied national and cultural identity. It provides an opportunity to construct their imagined homeland and resist and challenge the dominant powers governing them that sought to obliterate their identity, history and culture. Kurdish life narratives, autobiographies and memoirs should not be read exclusively as personal accounts, but a means of public discourse. Moreover, a glimpse at Kurdish history and the socio-political condition of Kurds in all four regions reveals that Kurds have been excluded from the right of self-representation and self-expression, and they have been subjected to strict censorship. Thus, this strong tendency of self-representation and self-expression among the Kurds and Kurdish authors stems from a desire to respond to such restrictions. Also, a large body of Kurdish writings—particularly Kurdish life-writings and memoirs—are memories and testimonies of oppression and victimhood. As noted, this is because Kurdish identity is associated with suffering and victimhood, and writing and documenting their stories and memories of victimhood is a means of 'prevention of *oubli* or forgetting' (Allison, 2013b, p. 205).

However, over the last decade, Kurdish authors have produced works of memoir and autobiography in English, and we see Kurdish traumatic personal and historical narratives 'in transit' and 'on the move' beyond their imposed national boundaries, across the world. The memoirs addressed in this chapter and some other works that are not included in this study—including Amir Darwish's *From Aleppo Without Love* (2017), Jalal Barzanji's *The Man in Blue Pyjamas* (2011) and Huner Saleem's *My Father's Rifle: A Childhood in Kurdistan* (2006)—can be seen as examples. This kind of writings can be considered as a new mode of Kurdish life-

writing. These life narratives, similar to the poems discussed in the previous chapter and the fictional works discussed in next chapter, bring Kurdish personal and collective narratives of home and Kurdish history of oppression, resistance and struggle to the forefront of the public's mind and the attention of non-Kurdish readers across the world. They act as a new discursive space of negotiation and recognition for the Kurdish question and Kurdish people in global contexts. These authors seem driven to write their life narratives with a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to bear witness to personal and collective pains and experiences of oppression to new readers, beyond their homeland. This can be linked to the roles Kurdish language life-writings have often played as spaces of resistance and struggle. In *Soft Weapons*, Whitlock (2007) argues for the role genres like autobiography can play as a space of struggle:

> Autobiography is fundamental to the struggle for recognition among individuals and groups, to the constant creation of what it means to be human and the rights that fall from that, and to the ongoing negotiation of imaginary boundaries between ourselves and others. (p. 10)

Whitlock argues for the 'cultural, social, and political work of autobiography' (p. 10), and believes that memoirs and autobiographical works can be picked up as a site of resistance and struggle—or 'soft weapons', as her books' title suggests—by authors, postcolonial or diasporic, as a way to foreground narratives of oppression, whether forgotten or suppressed. She asserts that 'the strategic importance of autobiographic writing is evident, for it is a way of reclaiming history, and presenting hitherto invisible histories of oppression and poverty' (p. 106). Whitlock's main focus in her work is on the English life-writings of Middle Eastern women, and also the internet diary of Salam Pax, an Iraqi blogger. She deals with autobiographies and refugee testimonies from and about the Middle East and explores the cultural and political implications of their processes of production and reception in the West. She calls these life narratives 'soft weapons', as 'they can empower writers by offering them an opportunity to intervene in discussions about political conflicts and social and ethical justice' (Costantino, 2010, p. 114). However, Whitlock asserts that these writings 'can also be manipulated to foster particular feelings and elicit politically motivated opinions from their western audiences' (Costantino, 2010, p. 114). This might also be true in regards to Kurdish memoirs in English; however, this study does not examine these works in the context of the Middle East and the West. Rather, it argues for the importance of the transition that has happened through these works in Kurdish life-

writings—their 'transit' from Kurdish imposed national boundaries—and the new and broader geopolitical and cultural contexts into which they have emerged. If older Kurdish memoirs, biographies and autobiographies have been a way of 'prevention of *oubli* or forgetting' and are sites of resistance and struggle (see discussion in Chapter Three), then these new Kurdish life-writings in English, as this study argues, is a way of reaching a new witnessing public. They are 'in search of a witnessing public' (Whitlock, 2017) across the world for their memories and testimonies, which remained unwitnessed by the world. Thus, these new Kurdish life-writings have taken on a new task and provide new spaces of global engagement with the Kurdish question and new ways of imagining recognition of the Kurdish people. These authors pass on their memories and testimonies, both personal and collective, to others and the world, and share their life narratives as a way to be remembered and recognised in the world.

In her recent work, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (2017), Whitlock continues the work she began in *Soft Weapon* and looks at the transnational movement of 'testimonies', transactions of testimonies, and their potential for social justice. As she states, the key theme of this book is 'the making of the human in and through testimonial transactions' (Whitlock, 2017, p. 1). In this work, she addresses 'moving testimonies' across the world and cultures, particularly refugee testimonies in search of 'witnessing publics'. As she writes:

> Refugee testimony is on the move, travelling on routes that are as contingent as the passage of refugees themselves, crossing boundaries and entering into new assemblages of fiction and non-fiction that address these questions of the ethics and aesthetics of recognition that recur across the *longue duree* of postcolonial life narrative. (Whitlock, 2017, p. 180)

We can also see writings of Kurdish refugees and exiles in the English language in this mainstream and as part of this movement of testimonies. As a nation on the move, Kurdish memories and testimonies have moved with them, and they have been remembered and narrated across the globe for several decades, as evidenced by Kurdish diaspora literature (as discussed in Chapter Three). The movement happened through these new Kurdish life-writings, and also other non-fiction and fiction works; however, it is a new and different movement, as they are mediated in a new language and aimed at new readers. Kurdish testimonies in English, whether in the form of life narratives or poetry, are 'acts that summon and beseech' the readers, and they 'compel the reader to bear witness to what is happening to others' (Whitlock, 2017,

pp. 8, 181). For Whitlock, that movement of testimony is ‘embedded in global networks of traumatic memory and witness, campaigns of social justice, recollection, and reparation’ (p. 70). However, for that transaction to occur or that social change to take shape, testimonies need readers and critics, as ‘testimonial life writing makes ethical demands on readers and critics, reaching out to precarious lives, where narrative falters’ (Whitlock, 2017, p. 203) To see how that transaction can occur, this chapter looks at the texts, strategies and literary/aesthetic properties that can facilitate that transaction between the text and its readers, similar to the previous chapter’s analysis of Kurdish poetry of witness in English.

One question this study addresses is how literature acts as a testimony in a way that is different from other forms of testimony and the distinct ways each genre testifies. The previous chapter revealed how poetry bears witness differently, and what makes it such an important form of communication that represents a different form of testimony. Before embarking on the particular elements and aspects of memoir that make it a powerful means of testimony, it is first worth mentioning Whitlock’s ideas on literary testimonies and their potential. Whitlock (2017) considers literary testimony as ‘performative, rhetorical acts’ that are ‘generically rhetorical and dialogic: an appeal to an addressee, a text in search of a witness, a desire invoke witnessing publics’ (p. 8). She posits that ‘testimonial life narrative is a powerful tool in campaigns for social justice’; it is ‘a “soft weapon”—easily used in propaganda, readily commodified as “the postcolonial exotic”, a target for literary hoax, historically connected to benevolence in colonialism’s cultures’ (p. 203). It can be an act of or a space of resistance. She states that ‘testimonial life narrative is embedded in the history of anti-colonial resistance’ (p. 203) and argues that memoir has played a significant role in these processes. As she claims, ‘from the very beginnings of postcolonial life narratives, memoir and testimony coexist in proximity, different yet contiguous “fixes” on narrating a self’ (p. 97). Thus, it is the memoir’s preoccupation with ‘narrating the self’ and its emphasis on recalling and engaging with personal experiences, as well as the communal, that make it similar to testimony.

Memoir is a genre that focuses on personal accounts of individuals. Memory, testimony and history are intrinsic to this genre. By the nature of its form, it is a testimonial genre in which individuals recall or bear witness to their past and present life. The process of writing, the very act of narrativity, and the act of narrating the self, the past and history, make the genre of memoir contiguous with the act of giving

testimony. Due to this contiguity and its structural properties, memoir seems to be a preferable literary genre of testimony. Moreover, as memoir offers its writers multiple possibilities of expression of realities, it facilitates testimonial creation, and this makes it a perfect formal space for testimony. This 'reality' is another element that links memoir and testimony together. Although there are debates on the 'truthfulness' and 'authenticity' of the memoir genre, there is a general assumption that the memoir brings the reader the truth about certain things, and it is inherently linked to a sense of authenticity and truth. Thus, for a reader, memoir is a reliable story or account through which they witness realities.

However, what needs to be emphasised is that memoir should not be read exclusively as one individual's experience; rather, it operates on multiple levels. On a personal level, it allows the narrator to bear witness to the past and present personal experiences and traumas they have faced, and it offers readers the story of the life of an individual. On another level, it functions on a broader social, cultural and political level, and bear witness to—and give readers—something beyond the narrator's life story. That is, through the narration of their personal story, the narrator is bearing witness or responding to larger historical, political and cultural oppressive forces. Readers also witness the wider world in which that narrator lives or lived. Memoir is a space of both private and public. As Whitlock (2007) argues, one of the significant elements of memoir is that it can mediate 'between the public and private' (p. 16). It 'is a cultural space where relations between the individual and society are thought out intensely and experienced intersubjectively' (p. 11). This feature of memoir is also significant because it that makes it a perfect literary genre for testimony, at least in regards to works of memoir or autobiographies that function as testimonies to certain collective experiences. This is also true for Kurdish life-writings. As will be seen in the analysis of Akreyi's and Boochani's memoirs, they are simple narrations of the life of these authors, but witnesses to something beyond the personal to larger oppressive and discriminatory collective experiences. Thus, as a site where private mesh with public issues, memoir offers its writers a space to witness beyond the personal story. Notably, although this collective aspect is a significant feature of 'memoir as testimony', it is 'the personal' that plays a dominant role in this process. It is 'the personal' that can involve the readers and draw them into the larger historical, political and cultural contexts of what the narrator bears witness to. The personal can gives history a more human context, and it is through the personal that readers can

make sense of a history, a community and a society. The vividness of personal experiences in life narrative testimonies also facilitates readers' understanding of the larger story.

### Widad Akreyi's *The Daughter of Kurdland: A Life Dedicated to Humankind*

Akreyi is a Kurdish human rights activist and novelist from Iraqi Kurdistan. She fled Iraq after the first Gulf War and has been living in exile for more than 25 years. She is more known as an activist and has received several international awards for her worldwide efforts in support of peace and justice. In 2019, Akreyi published her memoir, *The Daughter of the Kurdland*, in English, which documents her traumatic life story in Iraq. She bears witness to the plights and crises she, her family, and Iraqi Kurds experienced, particularly under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Akreyi's memoir is imbued with multiple traumatic experiences from her childhood to the present, and traumas that developed from those events and their ongoing presence in her life. The poetics of continuity of terror and trauma discussed in Chapter Five in relation to Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry, also characterises Akreyi's memoir.

Akreyi's memoir opens with a prologue in which she falls to the floor in a bathroom, unable to breathe, suffering from an incurable disease. She tells us she wants to share her memories of the past before she dies: 'a new rushes of images bombarded my brain, all the while the voice insists on telling my story' (Akreyi, 2019, p. 1). Akreyi begins by narrating her fragmented childhood, affected by frustration, hopelessness and a deep sense of sorrow that stayed with her in later life: 'no, the sorrow didn't vanish. It stayed instead contained within me. With time, it turned into scars on my memories, just like the physical scars on my body' (p. 7). In the first two chapters of the memoir, Akreyi gives details of her childhood, what happened to her family and how their lives, like other Kurdish families, have been ruined and affected by war:

> My family shared this fate with other Kurds who for generations had been exposed to wars despite their desire for peace. Every time a war had passed and destroyed almost everything, and all hope seemed lost, we had to rebuild our lives in the midst of suffering and sorrows. (p. 17)

The themes discussed in the poems of Hardi and Begikhani are also present in Akreyi's memoir. She represents how oppression, violence and war have massively

impacted the lives of people—physically and psychologically—and how individuals and communities remain affected by those traumatic experiences and events throughout their lives. As Akreyi writes, they will never get rid of those sufferings and pains:

> We who have witnessed wars and genocides will never stop reliving those days of darkness and sorrow. In the deep solitude of the mountains or that of the reflective mind, we will always recall the roar of bombs accompanied by the deafening bursting of shells and the sharp shouts mingling with the cries of anguish from fellow human beings.

Although the memoir largely details Akreyi's personal memories and stories, it also exposes the lives of millions of Iraqi Kurds who were subjected to violence, oppression, war, genocide and displacement. At the very beginning of her memoir, in the prologue, and before starting to narrate her story, Akreyi states that the story she is going to tell is the story of the people of her homeland: 'this is their story I am documenting. Well, their story which is, in part, mine as well' (p. 5). As her story unfolds and moves from her childhood memories, accounts of war, genocides, violence and oppression appear more and more. Throughout the memoir, from her childhood to the time she fled her homeland, she gives multiple accounts of oppression, discrimination, and traumatic and horrifying experiences. Chapter after chapter and page after page, her memoir records and testifies to horrific situations she and the Kurdish people went through and many historical traumatic events. Her memoir exemplifies what Boehmer (2018) calls 'crisis narrative' or 'crisis-upon-crisis narrative' (p. 96), an argument made for South African writings. Boehmer suggests that crisis has come to define South African writing at large, and they have a 'crisis-upon-crisis narrative'. This feature can be found across the breadth of Kurdish novels and also in the Akreyi's memoir and the fictional works discussed in the next chapter. Reading these works, one can see that crisis follows crisis and trauma follows trauma. There are multiple traumatic experiences and events Akreyi bears witness to throughout her memoir; multiple local conflicts and crises. For example, in Chapter Three during the years of studying at university, she and her friends faced oppression and discrimination; in Chapter Four, the horrific years during the Anfal campaigns, genocides and gas attacks, when thousands of people were killed and hundreds of villages were destroyed; in Chapter Six, the uprisings in Iraq and Kurdish regions in particular; in Chapter Seven, the exodus in 1991 after the first Gulf War; and her escape from home, and the difficult journey she took in Chapter Eight. The rest of the

story is also imbued with the many crises she has faced during her life in exile as a refugee and the ever-present traumas of the past.

Along with her story, her memoir bears witness to the lives of many other people; it embodies multiple oppressed voices and multiple experiences and stories. These other voices each represent an experience of violence or oppression, whether war, political violence, or patriarchy. For instance, they represent family members, such as her grandmother, who recounts her real stories of the past, and her mother, who narrated her difficult life to Akreyi. They also include relatives, neighbours and friends; the people Akreyi meets in the aftermath of chemical attacks in the targeted areas; and those she meets while leaving her home and in the refugee camps. As discussed through an example later in this chapter, Akreyi's accounts have too many details and too much information on historical events she has witnessed and writes about in her memoir. Witnessing too much trauma, and providing too many details of these experiences can be overwhelming for her readers, which can evoke an emotional response in them. Also, witnessing too much trauma can put the reader in the position of the narrator who has witnessed too much trauma. The readers are compelled to experience the same conditions and emotions through the process of reading. Thus, it can enhance the reader's understanding and empathy towards what they are witnessing in the process of reading.

Another element that can shape, sharpen and affect the reader's reading and feeling is the way the narrator feels, thinks and acts. Throughout the memoir, we see how Akreyi is emotionally affected by what she witnesses; we see her anger towards the Iraqi government and her feelings of responsibility towards the survivors. Her memoir shows us that Akreyi is an empathetic witness, with a sense of responsibility. Her senses, feelings and concerns can affect her readers and evoke or enhance the same senses and feelings in them. For instance, after the chemical attack during the Anfal campaign, she and a few of her friends went to the villages to help people. When she witnesses the people she says:

> I was angered at first by what was happening to the survivors. I cried with anger and had imagined the anguish of these victims and yet had not been able to fully imagine it. I felt guilt at not having helped them although it would have been impossible. How does it all end for such monsters with countless kills on their non-existing conscience? For those who are thoroughly evil? For those who ought to take responsibility for their actions, for having killed entire families, for theft, for the starving, for the wasted nature, for all the destructions? They are guilty of it. (p. 200)

Here, for instance, Akreyi's deep senses of sorrow for the survivors and her anger and hatred towards the then Iraqi government and the 'monster' Saddam Hussein, can evoke the same feelings in her readers. Her ethical and moral concerns for her fellow humans, the victims and the survivors, and even the nature destroyed represented in the above lines and throughout the memoir, can evoke her readers' sensibilities towards the oppressed and against the oppressors. This is not only concerning the oppressed Kurdish people and her homeland. We see that Akreyi speaks up against and shows her opposition to oppression in any form, against any individual and group of people. In the course of her memoir, we see how she is deeply concerned with oppressed people, irrespective of their nationality, and condemns violence against any community and individual. She writes:

> I have sympathy with all the victims of violence worldwide, no matter the cause of the suffering they have been exposed to. Sympathy with all the victims of war, with all the children who never got to grew up without their parents. With all the women who were not allowed to enjoy a family life, with the widows and the barren, with all the mothers who did not get to see their children grow up, and with all those who lost relatives and friend, with those who saw others bereft. I have compassion for all those who have been subjected to collective punishment in all the world, irrespective of their nationality or residence. (p. 240)

The way Akreyi thinks and her ethical and moral concerns towards her fellow human beings can enhance cosmopolitan sensibilities in her readers and can lead to cosmopolitan bonds. It can raise the knowledge and understanding of her readers of equality and justice and raise their passion and sensibilities towards oppressed people across the world, including the people of her homeland. This also shows Akreyi's cosmopolitan concerns and the cosmopolitan ethical standpoint she takes in her struggle for Kurds' justice. Although she is mainly and strongly engaged with the injustices Kurds have been subjected to, both in her memoir and in her life, she speaks up against global injustice and inequality. As mentioned in previous chapters, Akreyi has devoted her life in exile to defending the human rights of her nation's people and all oppressed people around the world. She is an international human right activist and defender, an icon of freedom and peace, who won several international awards (see Chapter Four) for her lifelong commitment to peace and justice and her worldwide efforts in support of peace and freedom. Conversely, this cosmopolitan concern and sensibility interacts with her national concerns and fight for Kurds' justice.

Throughout her memoir, she is not at all biased against Iraqi people and only condemns the then government of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and those Iraqi people who oppressed Kurds and other minorities in Iraq. Also, there is no sign of racial or national prejudice in her memoir, and she finds all humans equal. At its core, her memoir is a cosmopolitan act and gesture, as it is a cry and hope of justice. Akreyi's memoir stems from her sense of responsibility and a need she feels to document the story of the people of her homeland, who have been subjected to multiple violences and oppressions. Through her testimonies, she aims to be a voice for these people and bring their stories to the forefront of the public's mind and the attention of non-Kurdish readers across the globe. She passes these stories and testimonies to readers around the world through her memoir, which has been published in multiple languages (English, Arabic, Danish and Norwegian). Her memoir in English can reach a wide readership. Through her memoir in Danish and Norwegian, she can communicate with and pass on her stories to the places she has been living and lives now. Her memoir in Arabic, the language of her oppressor, can be a medium through which she writes against them. Thus, while there is no Kurdish version, publishing her memoir in multiple languages is a conscious attempt and deliberate strategy to address multiple readers and reach the widest possible audience.

Akreyi highlights her desire and intention in writing her memoir a number of times in the course of the book. She tells her readers that she has forced herself to write these stories: 'my life story was intertwined with the story of countless victims and survivors. I forced myself to write, knowing there was a chance that I might die before I had completed that mission' (p. 232). For Akreyi, documenting these stories and memories is a mission and a responsibility she feels was necessary for the people of her homeland. She believes that Kurds must remember those traumatic events to not to forget them, although, as she says, they can never be forgotten:

> The ruthlessness of especially the years of the Anfal Genocide can never be forgotten. Nor can the malicious deeds that bore witness to a thirst for blood. We must remember all the events that made innocents suffer and always be on our guard. The tormentors who caused such huge and unforgettable pains paint a picture of the bloodied history of the regime. We must remember the meaninglessness felt all the time by innocent people in order to not see it repeated. (p. 230)

This is rooted in what was mentioned briefly earlier in this study (see Chapter Three), which is the intense preoccupation of Kurdish authors with the past, and with personal

and communal memory as a way of 'prevention of *oubli* or forgetting' (Allison, 2013b, p. 205). Similarly, Akreyi asserts that Kurdish memories should not be forgotten. We can say that her memoir, which is a witness to Kurdish history, is a conscious and deliberate strategy that allows her to both remember the past—to not forget the past—and give voice to the oppressed people of her homeland, to the victims and survivors of these genocides, beyond their homeland. As we see, she has had this dream of writing and documenting these stories even before leaving her homeland while she was young. During the Anfal campaign, when she and some friends went to help people in the villages, in witnessing the lives of people and hearing their stories, Akreyi thought that one day she would write their stories: 'all of them had a story to tell, all of them were victims. I got the feeling that one day I would collect all the horrid stories in a book aimed at honouring them and their fallen family members' (Akreyi, 2019, p. 159).

Akreyi's impulse is also embedded within the narrative structure of her memoir and the way she narrates it. Readers can easily recognise that it is largely informative and it records details of the traumatic events Kurds, particularly Iraqi Kurds, have experienced. In the course of her story, there are several instances of the narration of her stories and memories being interrupted by historical accounts, detailed information, and evidence she gives on different themes and historical events. For instance, in Chapter Six, 'The Anfal Genocide', she provides lots of information about the genocides enacted against Kurds. As the following passage shows, even the tone and the language is quite informative:

> Another form of horrific violence we as Kurds experienced in Saddam's Iraq was a full-blown genocide, the Anfal Genocide. This dreadful direct violence sedimented as massive structural violence, producing and reproducing appalling cultural violence. When the regime began this campaign of chemical weapons, I was undecided as to who I feared most would suffer: My parents, myself or the Kurdish people in Bashor as a whole. I heard my inner voice telling me there must be justice and fairness for all. This was the worst time of my life. Even today memories are still in my mind, unflinching and fresh.
>
> Al-Anfal is the name given by the Baath regime to a genocide in which hundreds of thousands of Kurds perished, millions of Kurdish residents in oil-rich areas were deported to concentration camps in south Iraq and over 4,500 villages and towns were systematically destructed. The series of military operations took place in the late 1980s. The word Anfal itself is an Arabic word for booty of war. Each phase of Anfal covered a specific area that included series of exterminations and attacks which chemical weapons. It was primarily Mustard gas (formula C4H8SCL2), and nerve agents: Sarin (formula

> C4H10O2P), Tuban (formula C5H11N2O2P), and VX (formula C11H26NO2Ps). To give an idea of the level of toxicity of nerve agents it is sufficient to say that a single milligram of Sarin is more than enough to kill an adult person. (p. 143)

As I have tried to demonstrate by quoting at length here, Akreyi gives details of the operation of Anfal, the affected areas, and even the type of chemical gas used in the operations. There are many examples similar to this passage in which she records exact details of the events, the number of people who died, and the villages and towns targeted by the Iraqi regime. For instance, she outlined the names of nearly 50 villages of the targeted areas during the Anfal campaign in the same chapter (p. 150). Akreyi's memoir also includes a postscript that contains more information about Kurds and Kurdistan in general; who they are, how they have been divided between four countries, their population, their religion and their beliefs (pp. 253–254). Because her memoir is about Iraqi Kurds, this postscript on might be aimed at giving her readers a broader context of the history of Kurds. There is also a map of Kurdistan, which shows readers the geographical situation of Kurds and names some of the main cities of Kurdistan. These peritextual elements provide the author with a way to 'guide the reception of the text':

> The autobiographical narrator in minority genres speaks on behalf of a collective, a subordinate speaking truth to power, with the rhetoric of truth, and witnessing trauma in person. For this reason, minority life narratives are surrounded by 'peritexts': endorsements and authorizations in the form of introductions, prefaces, appendixes, and blurbs that guide the reception of the text. These narrators are not left to speak for themselves. (Whitlock, 2007, p. 20).

By providing this information, Akreyi attempts to answer readers' possible questions about Kurds, who they are and where they live. Other authors examined in this study similarly use peritexts; for instance, Hardi's preface before the 'Anfal' sequence in her second collection of poetry provides readers with information about the Anfal genocide and the context of the stories narrated in the sequence. She incorporates information about the Anfal campaign, its duration, the targeted areas, the number of civilians who were gassed, and those who ended up in the mass graves of Kurds before starting the sequence (Hardi, 2015, p. 25). Balata's fiction, *Runaway to Nowhere*, which is examined in the next chapter, also includes a preface, which gives a history of Kurds and more information about them, as the novel revolves around one

specific historical event, the Kurdish uprisings during the Gulf Wars and their subsequent mass exodus to the borders of Turkey and Iran.

The peritexts in these Kurdish writings in English—in the form of a map, preface or postscript—serve a clearly informative and explanatory function, and indicate these authors' intention and purpose of representing Kurdish traumatic history to their new readers. Moreover, as these narratives and testimonies are narrated cross-culturally and move transnationally across cultures and languages, there is a gap between the reader, the texts and the world depicted in them. These authors are aware of this gap and try to fill it through peritexts. Interestingly, such elements could be found in some of the older Kurdish life-writings—written in Kurdish language—too; they provide prefaces or postscripts of information about the history of Kurds as well as documents and reports. Ahmadzadeh (2003b), in in *A Review of Kurdish Life-Writing,* states that Kurdish autobiographers often include documents in their works, mostly at the end of their works. As he writes, "these writers have included documents in their books, for example documents of the political parties or their own private correspondence" (p. 8) or "documents and descriptions of political meetings and reports" (p. 4). Despite these common features among Kurdish life-writings written in Kurdish language and those written in English, there might be also differences, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study. This could be a potential subject of further research, to compare these Anglophone Kurdish life writings with older Kurdish life writings, which may reveal more accurately how they are similar or different and how memories and testimonies are narrated differently across cultures and languages.

### Behrouz Boochani's *No Friends But the Mountains*

Among first-generation Kurdish authors addressed in this chapter, the only author from Kurdistan of Iran is Behrouz Boochani, while the other five authors are from Iraqi Kurdistan. As seen in the above analysis of Akreyi's novel and the poetries of Hardi and Begikhani in the previous chapter, these authors they largely deal with the history of Iraqi Kurds, particularly during the Ba'ath regime. War, genocide, the Anfal and Halabja massacres, Kurdish mass graves and political oppression have created the dominant discourses in the writings of these authors. However, Boochani's memoir, as that of a Kurdish Iranian, deals with the political oppressions

he witnessed that made him flee from homeland and the Iraq-Iran War that took place through his childhood. However, this is not the only factor that makes Boochani and his work different from the other authors discussed in this chapter and their writings. As already noted, the main story of Boochani's memoir is Manus Island and the refugees who have been imprisoned there for nearly six years. His memoir emerged as a voice of witness and resistance to the oppression perpetrated against refugees' imprisonment on Manus Island by the Australian government. Thus, his work predominantly deals with the condition of refugees on Manus Island and bears witness to the systematic oppression employed against them. However, what this study posits in this chapter is that Boochani's memoir, as his mode of resistance against oppression and injustice on Manus, also emerged as a Kurdish resistance voice. This section seeks to identify how his work acts as a Kurdish resistance voice and how Boochani evokes his homeland and oppressed Kurdish history in his memoir. In what follows, this chapter will first give an introduction of Boochani's memoir and its main plot and themes related to Manus; then, it will identify how Boochani's homeland and his Kurdish identity are evoked in this text.

### *No Friends But the Mountains: Writing from Manus*

In 2013, Kurdish-Iranian journalist Behrouz Boochani, after days of an insecure and difficult journey across the ocean to reach Australia in search of asylum, with hundreds of his fellow refugees, were forcibly exiled, under a new law[42] legislated by the Australian government, to Australia's refugee detention centres on Manus Island.[43] In his first years on Manus, Boochani began his struggles against their imprisonment through his journalism. He bore witness to the critical situation he and his fellow refugees found themselves in, and the injustices and abuses of human rights they suffered in the Manus detention centre. Using a smuggled mobile phone, Boochani shared accounts from Manus on his Facebook and Twitter pages, in which

[42] In July 2013, while Boochani and his fellow refugees were at sea, the Australian government announced a new law that people who arrive in Australia by boat will no longer be settled in Australia and will be sent to Manus and Nauru detention centres. For more information see Boochani's writings published in *The Guardian* and *Saturday Paper*.

[43] The Manus Island Detention Centre is one of the Australia's offshore processing centers, originally established in 2001 and located in Papua New Guinea, one of Australia's former colonies. The centre was formally closed on 31 October 2017 and remaining refugees relocated to Port Moresby. There is a significant amount written on Manus Island and Australia's offshore detention centre. Boochani's writing, published in *The Guardian* and *Saturday Paper*, are also helpful.

he documented and decried repeated human rights violations by the Australian government. Soon, his writings appeared in *The Guardian* and *Saturday Paper*, and his voice reached the world and drew the attention of people and human rights activists both within Australia and across the world. In a condition whereby media access to these camps was heavily restricted, Boochani, through his testimonies, voiced out the critical situation of these disconnected and desperate refugees and sought international help for them. In July 2018, he published his memoir, *No Friends But the Mountains*, in which he chronicles his journey across the sea and his six years of imprisonment on Manus.[44] He tapped out his memoir on his smuggled phone in Farsi and sent his writings to Omid Tofighian, the translator of the memoir, in the form of hundreds of text messages. Boochani has also co-director of a feature-length film, titled *Chauka, Please Tell me the Time*, which is also about Manus prison. He has also authored a poetic manifesto, 'A Letter from Manus Island', manifesto, translated by Tofighian and published in the *Saturday Paper*.

Boochani's memoir is an act of witness and resistance. It provides traumatic testimonies from Manus and exhibits the ways Boochani and other refugees resist and struggle against the oppressive system of the prison. In his memoir, Boochani bears witness to multiple oppressions and traumatic experiences endured by imprisoned refugees, from human rights abuses established in the detention centre, to suicides and acts of self-harm by the refugees, and the despair, intense hostility, and animosity that the prison system generated among the refugees and between the refugees and the locals on Manus. Boochani sees the system ruling the prison as an oppressive structure that employs systematic oppressions against the imprisoned refugees. To make some sense of this oppression, he employed the term 'Kyriarchy',[45] derived from Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Boochani, 2018, pp. 124, 370). Fiorenza used this term as an alternative to patriarchy, to indicate how multiple forms of oppression operate and intersect, beyond gender-based oppressions, in various interconnected

[44] Boochani has also co-director of a feature-length film, titled *Chauka, Please Tell me the Time*, which is also about Manus prison. He has also authored a poetic manifesto, 'A Letter from Manus Island', manifesto, translated by Tofighian and published on 9 December 2017 in the *Saturday Paper*.

[45] This term comes from two Greek words: *kyrios*, meaning 'master' and *archein*, meaning 'to rule'. Fiorenza (1992) defines Kyriarchy as a 'socio-political and cultural-religious system of domination that structures the identity slots open to members of society in terms of race, gender, nation, age, economy, and sexuality and configures them in terms of pyramidal relations of dominance and submission, profit and exploitation' (p. 8). She finds Kyriarchy as a more appropriately and inclusive adopted term, alternative to patriarchy, since it signifies the multiple and intersecting structures of power that shape individuals' experiences of oppression (Natalie, 2015).

contexts. Boochani conceptualises the structure that governs the Manus prison camp as a 'kyriarchal system', and through his testimonies, he demonstrates how diverse but intersecting forms of oppression produce the oppressive structure manifest in the camp. Thus, Boochani identifies the structural and systematic use of various interlocking forms of violence and oppression on imprisoned refugees.

When *No Friends But the Mountains* appeared, it attracted the attention of numerous human rights activists, academics and politicians. Its publication has generated a wave of reviews and scholarly critiques, which almost unanimously offer praise for its political importance, literary merit and the way it challenges the oppressive system of the prison. While Boochani's memoir has been interpreted through an *in situ* lens, and the critical receptions of his work largely views it as a located struggle against the system of the prison and Australia's immigration policies, it has also been celebrated for its universal aspect and scope beyond Manus Island. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Four, among the existing readings of Boochani's memoir, some critics have rightly pointed to and celebrated the universal aspect of his work. They assert that Boochani's memoir not only bears witness to his then conditions on Manus, and should not be read exclusively as a critique of the refugees' incarceration on Manus and the denial of their human rights at the hand of Australia's government. Rather, they believe Boochani's work is a decolonial text that represents and challenges a 'decolonial way of thinking and doing' (Tofighian in Boochani, 2018, p. xxv).

However, what is often missed or briefly addressed in the existing readings of Boochani's memoir is its Kurdish context and the significant role it plays in this work. While agreeing on what previous studies have emphasised, this study aims to shed light on this Kurdish context of Boochani's memoir and offers a reading that accounts for the transnational and diasporic nature of his suffering, struggle and resistance. This reading of Boochani's memoir reveals the strong presence of his homeland, his past life, and Kurds' collective experiences of oppression, injustice, domination and colonisation in his work. As will be demonstrated, while bearing witness to the injustices and oppressions taking place on Manus, Boochani gives testimonies of his colonial past and bears witness to his historically oppressed identity as a Kurd, and Kurdish oppressed history. In Boochani's work, there are multiple references to his past memories of oppression and injustice back in Iran and Kurds' oppression under colonial and kyriarchal conditions, as well as the effects of oppression, domination

and colonisation on his native homeland, its people, their culture and identity. Throughout his writing, Boochani constantly evokes his Kyriarchally oppressed Kurdish identity and writes back to his colonial past from the context of his colonial present. Several times he takes his readers back to his difficult life in Iran, to his childhood and the mountains of Kurdistan among chestnut oak trees, through different literary techniques and strategies, which the following section will demonstrate. What this chapter aims to argue is Boochani's obsession with his colonial past and memories of his past life, mean more than a simple recollection of the past or nostalgic remembering. This study finds Boochani's memories of the past, and the Kyriarchally oppressed Kurdish history with which his memoir is engaged, as important elements within the text. It looks at Boochani's memoir through a lens that accounts for the ways he is also writing back to the struggle of Kurdish people and reimagining Kurds' claims of justice and liberation while making claims for justice and liberation for the imprisoned refugees on Manus.

### The Kurdish Context of Boochani's Memoir

The very first thing that draws the attention of Boochani's readers is the memoir's title, *No Friends But the Mountains*. As briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, this title is a famous Kurdish proverb, which recalls Kurdish history of oppression, resistance and struggle. The title of the memoir and its subtitle, *Writing from Manus Prison*, individually and jointly reveal that there are two contexts within Boochani's text—apart from the universality of the text discussed earlier and Rooney's PNG perspective—the Manus prison context and a Kurdish context. Boochani could have used the memoir subtitle, *Writing from Manus Prison*, as the title, but he did not. This study asserts that the title he chose is a conscious attempt and deliberate strategy to draw readers' attention to the Kurds and Kurdish question. The title first alerts readers, who in the course of the memoir, find out why Kurds have no friends but the mountains. As the title signals and as manifested within the text, Boochani's memoir is strongly engaged with his homeland and Kurdish history. Throughout his memoir, as indicated with examples from the text further below, Boochani constantly evokes the ongoing dispossession of Kurdish people, their history of displacement, their

sufferings, and how violence and oppression devastated their native homeland, and ancient culture and identity.

In and through his memoir, Boochani connects his homeland and its oppressors to a formally discrete political system from distinct geography and deftly weaves these stories together as a way to foreground his oppressed Kurdish identity and the ongoing dispossession of Kurdish people, their experience of domination and oppression, along with his experience of domination and oppression on Manus. He evokes his Kyriarchally oppressed Kurdish identity and writes back to his colonial past from the context of his colonial present as a way to be a voice for the people of his homeland, whose voice has been silenced, whose identity and cultural and political rights have been denied and violated, and whose place in history has been marginalized. Boochani's memoir, while aimed at giving voice to the oppressed refugees on Manus with the hope of transforming their condition, and made claims for the justice and liberation of imprisoned refugees, also provided a voice for Kurdish people and re-imagined Kurdish claims of justice and liberation. In his memoir Boochani, while speaking up against and challenging Australia's government, also subjects Kurdish oppressors into critiques of its readers in Australia and across the world, readers who are not only public readers but also writers, critics, scholars, activists, academics and politicians around the world. By doing this Boochani created the possibility of creating spaces of global recognition for Kurdish people and spaces of transnational and global engagement with Kurds' claims of justice and equality.

As mentioned earlier, Boochani's work, due to its political importance and urgency, attracted attentions of numerous human rights activists, academics and politicians; it has received international awards. It has circulated and received in different literary, academic, and political contexts; multiple book launches and events have been held across the world on this memoir; and there have been considerable amount of academic studies, reviews, and readings on his work. His work gained a worldwide recognition. As Richard Flanagan writes in his preface to this memoir, Boochani's words "came to be read around the world, to be heard across the ocean" (p. viii). This worldwide recognition has also led to the recognition of his oppressed Kurdish identity, which is evoked in his work. Although Boochani's past life and his Kurdish identity have been widely discussed in existing readings of his work or at book launches, festivals, interviews and events, the Kurdish context of Boochani's memoir, however, is rarely considered, what this study aims to shed light on.

Circulation and reception of Boochani's memoir across the world, this study believes, means circulation of the stories of his homeland too. His work promises insights into the political situation of the Kurds and opens up critical spaces for engaging with Kurdish people and Kurdish question in the new and broader cultural and geo-political contexts his memoir circulates, beyond the geo-political borders imposed on them. It is within this context that this study argues that Boochani's memoir acts or creates an arena of struggle and Kurdish voice of resistance too. His work, this study believes, also contributes to the long history of Kurdish struggle for recognition and justice and resistance against the obliteration of their history, culture, and identity.

In its reading of this context of Boochani's memoir, this study looks at the ways Boochani evokes his homeland and his past life while narrating the central story of the memoir. It looks at the strategies and poetics used in the text through which readers come to identify 'the particular postcolonial condition being represented' within the text—not the main one, which is related to Manus context, but Kurdish colonial experience—, and how readers' 'understanding may be sharpened' through the poetics (Boehmer, 2018, p. 3). If Boochani's work is resistance writing, not only in the context of Manus but also in its Kurdish context, as this study argues it is, then this study aims to indicate what textual strategies creates resistant effects in the readers in relation to this Kurdish context of the memoir. It also examines the sets of motives, images, and metaphors employed in the text as well as the underlying themes that reveal the works' larger socio-political arguments and visions in its Kurdish context.

Boochani's memoir and the central story begin when he and his fellow refugees, sitting on a truck, head towards Indonesian coast to take a boat to Australia. Then, it moves to the sea narrative and it narrates days and nights of an insecure and difficult journey across the sea and the refugees' arrival to Christmas Island, from where they are exiled to the Manus Island. The rest of the story centres on Boochani and other refugees' six years of imprisonment on Manus. Boochani does not begin his memoir with his past life in Iran and his war-torn childhood, which are evoked constantly throughout the memoir. Instead of being told as part of the plot or the central story, Boochani's narratives from home and his past life break and merge into the main narrative repeatedly throughout the memoir through multiple forms of cross-cutting, flashbacks, dream, repeated nightmares, and interior monologue. Boochani, several times, takes his readers back to his difficult life in Iran, to his childhood, and

to the mountains of Kurdistan among chestnut oak trees, where people took refuge during war. What Boochani mostly remembers and recollects, particularly in the heart of the sea narrative and during traumatic times he experienced in the prison, is the destructive war he had witnessed in his childhood, the war between Iraq and Iran, two of Kurds' oppressors. As will be discussed more in detail later, the war Boochani bears witness to and its memories signify more than just a war happened in the past and refers to an oppressive condition millions of Kurds were subjected to. These memories and stories of homeland and of past life, and its accompanying images and motives, turn to a narrative line within the main narrative—an embedded narrative—that continues to exist till the end of the story. This story within story not only discloses Boochani's background for the readers but also opens up another colonial and geo-political condition, with which, through their reading, readers come to identify. However, as will be indicated further below, in this process, poetics also plays a role and generates effects. It engages the readers and sharpens their focus. In other words, poetics make this process of engagement more dynamic.

While reading Boochani's memoir, readers experience multiple flashbacks to the past and flash-forwards to the present and to the main story, and sudden cross-cuttings between different scenes and settings, either in form of fragmented images and sometimes in form of vivid memories and stories Boochani recalls from the past and from the homeland. The readers' dominant experience in the memoir is of shifting rapidly between past and present, between different worlds, different images, and different settings; readers sometimes occupy them simultaneously. With these shifts, the language also often shifts; prose turns to poetry and poetry turns into prose. For instance, when the sea narrative reaches its terrifying climax, the time the boat is near to be sunken, the readers' attention is called out, captured, and held by a set of images, sounds, and settings that emerged suddenly within the sea narrative, and which are different from the ones the reader is witnessing on the boat in the middle of the sea. In the heart of the sea narrative, which is one of the climaxes of the story, the text resists to taking the readers forward to follow the rest of the story. It holds the readers there on the sea among the oppressive waves and exposes them to images of war, tanks, mountains, the chestnut oak trees, and the image of a mother, crying and dancing, all appeared suddenly and mixed with the present setting and images on the sea. Although this happens a few more times after the sea narrative and readers encounter these images and themes and they experience interruptions and break from

the main narrative, this narrative line appears to be suspended for the rest of the story. The text builds a suspense in the middle chapters and keeps readers intrigued and in wonder till near the end of the story; it is in the final chapters that readers finally discover why no friends but the mountains.

As mentioned, this is more intense in the first few chapters of the memoir, particularly in the sea narrative, and in the last chapters and narratives of Manus prison camp. For instance, in the following passages, which is from the sea narrative, a scene where the refugees' boat is close to be sunken, we see how readers are forced to move between past and present, prose and poetry, reality and dream, and between familiar and unfamiliar—the main story and what merged suddenly. Here Boochani speaks:

> I accept death, and while engulfed in this maelstrom of noise and oppressive anxieties…
> I drown in the vortex of sleep.
>
> *The ruckus of our terrified group/*
> *The sound of weeping in the background/*
> *The beating of waves/*
> *The petrified, silent screaming/*
> *The tormented wailing/*
> *Waves rocking a cradle containing a corpse/*
> *All within a domain of death and darkness/*
> *My mother is present/*
> *She is there alone/*
> *Travelling over the ocean or emerging from within the waves? /*
> *Where is she? /*
> *I don't know/*
> *I only know she is there/*
> *Alongside me/*
> *She is afraid/*
> *She is smiling and she is weeping/*
> *Shedding tears from years of sorrow/*
> *I don't know/*
> *Why is my mother cheerful? /*
> *Why is she weeping? /*
> *I witnessed a wedding celebration with rituals of dance/*
> *I witnessed lamentations that dictated demise/*
> *Where could this place be?*
> *Grand mountain peaks covered with snow, full of ice, abounding in Cold/* (pp. 29-30)

Then the readers go back to the main scene and into the main story. The poetry also turns into prose again:

> …I am in one of the sleeping chambers, asleep. I can see myself; I am looking from alongside the Sri Lankan woman. No, from the perspective of her

> embrace. I can see my skeleton smoking a cigarette in the corner of the room. I am sure this place isn't Kurdistan. The location is the ocean, the boat is crumbling, it is filled with empty buckets, and full of punctures with water spurting out. (p. 31)

As we see, the reader sees that even the narrator is confused between these two places, the ocean and Kurdistan. "Where could this place be?", "I am sure this place isn't Kurdistan. The location is the ocean". Then, the prose turns into poetry again and the images of mountains, chestnut oak trees, and Boochani's mother returned:

> *Again the vision of mountains upon mountains/*
> *There are so many mountains/*
> *A series of mountains together/*
> *Mountains within mountains/*
> *Mountains that carry on and on/*
> *Mountains that are hiding chestnut ok trees/*
> *The mountains are barren/*
> *There is not even a tree in sight/*
> *The mountains transform into waves/*
> *Transform into aggressive waves/*
> *No, this place is not Kurdistan*
> *So why is my mother here?*
> *Why is a war going on in that place?*
> *Tanks, rows of tanks, and helicopters*
> *Blades of battle and dead bodies*
> *Piles of the dead and women's cries of mourning*
> *A children's play swing hanging from the branch of the chestnut oak tree*
> *Girls wearing flower-patted dress, with musical instruments*
> *A war is taking place*
> *Shedding of blood and playing of music*
> *Mountains and waves*
> *Waves and mountains*
> *Where is this place?*
> *Why is my mother dancing?* (pp. 31-32)

As seen, in the above passages, the text cross-cuts between the war-like scene on the boat, bodies of the refugees fallen on the boat, the waves, and women and children crying and the scene of a war happened in Boochani's homeland, the mountains, and the dead bodies of people killed in the war. Here, 'readers are committed to repeated acts of going back and forth between the layers of narratives' (Boehmer, 2018, 54), which also involves moving between different modes of writing, prose and poetry, and moving between past and present, between different worlds, different settings, and images. This continues for a few pages and there are multiple flashbacks to scenes of the war and the mountains and flash-forwards to the oppressive waves and the boat.

These repeated acts of going back and forth that the readers experience, the flashbacks and flash-forwards, cross-cuttings, the interruptions and breakage that the narrative enacts, sudden shifts and return, as well as the textual suspense employed in the next chapters, can be seen as formal modes of resistance and as textual resistance that, as Boehmer (2018) argues, can 'create resistant effects' on the reader. Boehmer (2018), in her study on the poetics of postcolonial writings and resistance writings in postcolonial contexts, argues that devices such as 'juxtaposition and other intercalated modes of writings, such as layering, cross-cutting, and intertextuality' (p. 53), by making readers move between and across different images, themes, and figures, create resistant effects. She believes that this poetics allows:

> the reader to question and break down yet also think beyond the divisive postcolonial realities they inhabit. Especially where our attention is directed at one and the same time to different contiguous items (images, themes, figures), and to their interstices between them or the spaces through which they relate, we are invited to work *between* and *across*, and to read in differential ways. (p. 53)

Boehmer's main focus in her study is the device of juxtaposition, however, as she argues, this is also true for 'other intercalated modes of writings'. What happens in Boochani's memoir can be seen as a form of juxtaposition, as his colonial past and his colonial present and two formally discrete political systems from distinct geographies are juxtaposed and combined in an through his memoir. This 'demands Boochani's readers a constant imaginative bridging across and zigzagging back and forth' between these two worlds, while forced to read onwards both to try to make sense of them and also to return to the main story. As Boehmer argues "juxtaposition in writing demands of the reader a constant imaginative bridging across and zigzagging back and forth" (p. 11); juxtaposition, she believes, "can work to jolt the reader, pushing them back in shock or dismay or (at times) wonder, encouraging them into imagine or infer what till now has been silenced or suppressed" (p. 41). That is why Boehmer finds juxtaposition as an instance of structural resistance. The embedded juxtaposition in Boochani's memoir as well as other textual strategies employed, such as flashbacks and flash-forwards, the interruptions the text enacts, and the suspense, on the one hand put the readers in wonder an make them question about these images and themes they confront in the status quo and, on the other hand, direct their attention towards the particular postcolonial condition—Kurdish colonial

experience—being represented in the texts. These elements engage the readers and sharpen their focus.

The images of Boochani's mother and the mountains, which we see in the above passages, are among the most significant and recurring images present in Boochani's remembrances and recollections of home. Although his obsession with these images, particularly the image of mountain, goes back to his childhood experiences of war and displacement, their symbolization is indeed rooted in Kurdish culture and history. Mountains are one of the significant cultural and political symbols among Kurds. Mountains symbolize Kurdish displacement, their victim statue, and their protectors. Throughout the history, Kurds, in the face of violence, conflicts, and war have escaped to the mountains surrounded them in order to survive. For them, mountains signify survival because they have provided safety, refuge, and protection for Kurds. That is why Kurds believe mountains are the Kurds' only friends, which housed them and witnessed their sufferings. As Boochani says in his memoir "it was these very mountains that witnessed the spectacle / It was these ancient chestnut oaks that lamented" (p. 261).

As Maria T. O'Shea (2004) points out, the strong attachment of Kurds to their homeland is usually expressed through their love of its natural landscape, particularly its mountains. Mountains, she asserts, holds nostalgic value for exiled Kurds and even those who grew up in the cities at home (p. 5). O'Shea emphasizes the importance of rural and mountainous landscape for Kurds and 'the intimate man-mountain relationship' among them (p. 5). She draws attention to the ways this is manifested in their culture; for instance, how Kurds use the name of Kurdish mountains to name their children', as well as Kurdish legions that are used to depict Kurdish victim status and mountains role in protecting Kurds, legions such as 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains' and 'level the mountains and in a day the Kurds will be no more' (p. 5). The statement O'Shea quoted form a Kurdish writer is instructive to show 'this intimate man-mountain relationship among Kurds: "to a Kurd the mountain no less than the embodiment of the deity: mountain is his mother, his friend, his protector, his home, his market, his mate, and his only friend". (p.5) The title of Boochani's memoir, as mentioned earlier, also refers to this belief among the Kurds that mountains are Kurds' only friends.

The image of Boochani's mother, crying and dancing on the sea, the corpse, and the wedding celebration, which are evoked in the above passages, are also

significant and rooted in Kurdish culture too. In some parts of Kurdistan, when someone dies, particularly sons at the young age, close family members and relatives cry and dance in the funeral, which shows the deep sorrow at the loss of the loved one. Mothers are at the centre of this dancing ceremony. Facing death on the sea, Boochani sees his mother in the dream crying and dancing as if she is mourning the death of his son on the sea. Right at the beginning of the memoir and his journey, before the sea narrative begins, Boochani, sitting in a truck heading towards Indonesian coast, while imagining the possibility of death on the sea, tells his readers how unjust it is if he dies thousand kilometres away from the land of his roots:

> I always felt I would die in the place I was born, where I was raised, where I have spent my whole life till now. It's impossible to imagine dying a thousand kilometres away from the land of your roots. What a terrible, miserable way to die, a sheer injustice. (p. 4)

The injustice Boochani is talking about here is indeed a historic injustice that he and millions of displaced Kurds like him have been subjected to. Boochani, who cannot imagine dying away from the land of his roots, paradoxically cannot imagine returning home as well, as having return to his home would be a death return. "I was condemned to traverse over the ocean, even it meant giving up my life" (p. 74), Boochani writes later in the memoir. "My past was hell. I escaped from that living hell"; "I never had the courage to return to the life I once endured"(p. 75), he adds. Boochani's experience of oppression and injustice, thus, goes back to before what he experienced on Manus. He has been subjected to political violence and faced political censorship back in Iran, where he worked as a journalist. Like many Kurdish/Iranian exilic writers and journalists, he may have felt compelled to leave Iran for political reasons. As Zable says in his interview with Boochani, "he fled Iran in fear of his safety, as a result of his advocacy on behalf of Kurdish people". It was due to his journalism for a Kurdish magazine, *Werya*, in support of Kurdish independence that Boochani fled Iran and made his way to Australia in search of freedom. However, his journey towards freedom ended in another form of political violence and oppression. What Boochani encountered upon his arrival to Australia, his forced exile to Manus, and the oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization he experienced there, he has experienced them in another forms in his past life. The political borders, displacement, and dispossession is part of Boochani's identity and the history he comes from. In his interview with Zable Boochani says, "My whole life has been impacted by this concept of border". "Border is part of my identity", he says.

The idea of Kyriarchy Boochani challenges in his memoir, one can say, is embedded in the history of Kurds. Throughout history, Kurds have experienced multiple forms and varying degrees of oppression and have been systematically repressed, tortured, prosecuted, and displaced from their homeland by the oppressive systems governing them. They have been denied and marginalized not only geographically, but also in terms of their identity, politics, and culture. Repression of Kurdish political and cultural rights continues and they are still in struggle with their 'occupiers' to be seen and recognized as individual human beings. Boochani's experience, knowledge, and understanding of the oppressive system of the Manus prison, thus, are rooted in his Kurdish background and his past life. Also, Boochani's strong sense of struggle on Manus and against Manus prions and his s non-violent mode of resistance, his memoir, could be traced back to his struggling background and his non-violent ideology. As he writes in the memoir, Boochani has been dealing with the war against his homeland for years and he believes in the power of the pen, rather than gun, for liberation of his homeland:

> *For years I had pondered the mountains/*
> *For years I had dwelt on the war involving occupiers of Kurdish homelands/*
> *A war against those who had divided Kurdistan between themselves/*
> *An occupation that has devastated an ancient culture/*
> *An invasion that has decimated what was of cultural value to the Kurds/*
> *Destroyed what was cherished by the Kurds/*
> *What was necessary for the preservation of Kurdish identity.* (pp. 70-71)

> When I was younger, I had wanted to join the Peshmerga. I wanted to live my life away from cities. I wanted to live my life in the grip of apprehension, out there in the mountains, and participate in the ongoing war. On many occasions we were on the verge of a revolution; a great rebellion was gathering momentum. But every time I was impeded by some kind of fear masked by theories of non-violence and peace. On many occasions I reached as far as the colossal mountain ranges of Kurdistan. However, those theories about non-violent resistance drew me every time to the cities where I took up the pen. (p. 71)
>
> I truly believe that the liberation of Kurdistan couldn't be achieved through the barrel of a gun. (p. 71)

Boochani pursued what is at the core of his Kurdish resistance, which is non-violence, for his resistance and struggle against the oppressive system of the prison too. It was through his creative endeavours, both his journalism and his memoir that he resisted and struggled against oppression on Manus. And we see how successful he was in giving voice to the refugees on Manus, through, his non-violent mode of resistance, his memoir. Throughout the memoir, Boochani also depicts different forms of

strategies of resistance employed by the prisoners, both violent and non-violent, and celebrates the non-violent ones[46]. He believes that "the only people who can overcome and survive all the suffering inflicted by the prison are those who exercise creativity" (p. 128). Boochani did Journalism for years at home and defend Kurdish people's cultural and political rights. His attempts to provide a voice to the people of his homeland in his memoir can be seen as part of his continued sense of Kurdish resistance and struggle. By evoking Kurdish historical and political realities as well as his past memories of oppression and sufferings, Boochani makes sense of—and writing towards—the ongoing dispossession of Kurdish people, their experience of domination, and oppression, along with his then experience of domination and oppression on Manus, and thus creating a space of global engagement and recognition for Kurdish people and their claims of justice and equality.

As mentioned earlier what Boochani mostly bears witness to in his memoir is the war happened in his childhood. While this takes the form of fragmented remembrances and recollections throughout the memoir, in the last few chapters, particularly in chapter ten of the memoir, readers discover more about Boochani, his past life, and why no friends but the mountains. Boochani, as a child of war, has grown up witnessing miserable years of terror, violence, displacement, and death. As he write: "My earliest childhood memories are of warplanes ruthlessly raiding the skies. Warplanes splitting the sky over a village nestled within forests of chestnut oak trees; my earliest childhood memories are of the fear that ran deep within our bones" (p. 264). Through Boochani's remembrances of his childhood, readers witness the sufferings he himself, his family, and the people of his homeland have experienced during years of war. He recollects when people ran to the mountains from fear of the warplanes and found asylum among chestnut oak trees; the horrified mothers holding their children, men of old ages, innocent children all displaced in the mountains, many of whom were died of hunger and thirst, corps on the grounds, and Peshmergas[47] fighting against enemy (pp. 257-268). "It was these very mountains that witnessed

[46] For instance, the character named Maysam and his peaceful strategy of survival and resistance. Boochani introduces Maysam as a brave and creative guy who challenges the Kyriarchal system in form of artistic performance of dance, music and acting. For more on the character of Maysam and the power of his performances, see Chapter Six of Boochani's memoir. Also, Boochani shows how a simple act of violence annihilates a two-week peaceful non-violence protest of the prisoners and promotes more violence from the power system. The last chapter of his memoir is dedicated to the two-week protest of the prisoners and how Reza, the Gentle Giant, was killed at the end.

[47] Peshmergas are Kurdish military forces and freedom fighters.

the spectacle / It was these ancient chestnut oaks that lamented" (p. 261), Boochani writes. We also see Boochani's laments of the destructions the war left, its sacrifices, and how it destroyed their homeland and its beauties:

> I am a child of war, Yes, I was born during the war. Under the thunder of warplanes. Alongside tanks. In the face of bombs. Breathing gunpowder. Among dead bodies. Inside silent cemeteries. These were the days when war was part of our everyday lives and ran like blood through our identity. A meaningless war: a pointless war. Absurd. A war with ridiculous objectives. Like all wars throughout history. A war that devastated our families and sizzled and incinerated all of our vivid, green and bounteous homeland. (257)
> I am a child of war. I don't mean to say I've been sacrificed. I never want to be labelled with this word. That war has taken its sacrifice….and continues to make sacrifice.
> *Sacrificing out of blazing fires of war/*
> *Sacrificing out of the desolate ashes of war/*
> *On the threshold of life and death/*
> *Smiles enamoured with staying alive; mothers waiting and soaked in blood/*
> *A region full of storehouses of affliction. Suffering and starvation/*
> *I have to say it. Hear me as I cry out: I am a child of war/*
> *A child of an inferno. A child of ashes. A child of the chestnut oaks of Kurdistan*/…

Then he continues:

> Where have I come from?
> From the land of rivers, the land of waterfalls, the land of ancient chants, the land of mountains.
> In the past, we were weary from the war. The war elephants from the neighbouring lands had decided to wage battle for many years inside our vibrant and luscious planation. Their heavy legs and bulging bellies rampaged; every place was crushed underneath them. That war wasn't our war, that violence wasn't our violence. The theatre of war wasn't our production….
>
> A time when people run to the mountains from fear of the warplanes. Everything they had and could carry they took with them. They found asylum within chestnut oak forests.
> *Do the Kurds have any friends other than the mountains?* (pp. 257-259)

As seen, Boochani, here, addresses his readers and demands a listening from them: "*I have to say it. Hear me as I cry out*". His bearing witness to his past life, one can say, emerged from a necessity and a need he feels to share and pass on these stories with others, with his readers of the story of Manus all around the world. What is important to note is that the war Boochani bears witness to signifies more than just a war happened in the past. It refers to an oppressive condition millions of Kurds were subjected to. In other words, the war and its memoirs is an indication of an oppressive condition. As Tofighian argues: in Boochani's writing "memory of war acts as a

culturally and politically specific trope that works to convey something distinct about the oppressive conditions" (p. 536). In the above quoted passages from Boochani's memoir, he tells us that in that war Kurds played no role. He sees the war between Iran and Iraq, two of Kurd's occupiers, an unjust war, in which Kurds have played no role, but were one of the greatest victims of, as they live at the border of Iraq and Iran. As the result of that war millions of Kurds were displaced from their homes, thousands were killed, and their homes were all ruined. Boochani accuses the oppressive regimes of Iran and Iraq of Kurds' eight years of suffering and displacement; of destruction of their homes; and of death of their loved ones. According to Boochani, for Kurds, that war was an oppression imposed on them. This could be linked to the memoir's portrayal of oppression and oppressive conditions, which, as discussed early in this paper, Boochani speaks up against it. We see how Boochani depicts an oppressive condition he and Kurds were subjected to during history, while he bears witness to the oppressive system of the prison.

Kurdish experience of dispossession, oppression and displacement is also represented in Boochani's descriptions of other Kurdish refugees on Manus and the Kurdish woman who worked there as an interpreter. Boochani writes of a Kurdish interpreter he had seen in the first days on Manus, a woman with large dark eyes, a typical eye of Kurdish women, from which Boochani can recollect her pain:

> I sense pain in her dark eyes. It is the same affliction that separates me from my past and my homeland. For sure, she is also a Kurd who has suffered. Suffered—because of the stigma attached to her—because of the stigma attached to being a Kurd…. Her fate is like mine; she has left everything behind and come to Australia. It doesn't matter on what vessel she has travelled to get to this land: whether on a rotting boat or by plane. I feel that when she looks at me she recollects her pain. I feel she remembers the days when she was perceived as someone out of place; and it is this that provokes her look of simultaneous disdain and empathy. (p. 98)

What connects Boochani's fate to the fate of the Kurdish interpreter is a shared history of oppression and suppression. His identification with that Kurdish interpreter, and vice versa, reflects a shared sense of being a sacrifice of injustice and oppression; of being denied, marginalised and stigmatised. Boochani's representation of Kyriarchally oppressed and suppressed Kurdish sense of belonging is also evident in his descriptions of other Kurdish refugees in Manus prison, who all live together in corridor M of the prison. He describes these Kurdish refugees as follows:

> Corridor M is on the other side of the prison. It is close to the fences opposite the ocean. It has become known as Little Kurdistan. Kurdish prisoners live in the rows of rooms alongside these fences. They have brought their repressed political aspirations with them into the prison and adorned one of the rooms with the tricolour flag: white, red, green, with the image of the sun painted brightly on it. It is interesting how even though they have been deprived of even a single pen, on one morning they awake to find the Kurdish flag emblazoned on the door. Something akin to a miracle. Maybe an officer with a Kurdish heritage has drawn it there. But regardless of who has put it there, the existence of that flag means that this small region is no longer identified by a number.
>
> Right there, right by the fences, a mango tree with the most magnificent trunk grows straight up. (pp. 235–236)
>
> The Kurdish prisoners promote themselves as the sole proprietors of the mango tree. In the first days there were times when the prisoners would loiter there in hope of grabbing some fruit. But the Kurdish prisoners stared condescendingly. They drew kicks at anyone who came over and wouldn't let them even look at the fruit, let alone allow them the pleasure of waiting there in anticipation. They blocked out any competition for eating fruit. They preferred the competition to remain within their small community rather than permitting others to the tiny table. They had no tolerance for anyone who wanted to enjoy the offerings of the mango tree. (p. 239)

The above passage shows a Kurdish continued and collective sense of identity. Living together in that region of the prison and the solidarity and fraternity developed among Kurdish imprisoned refugees represents how their Kurdish identity and sense of collective belonging is maintained and practised among them. Conversely, making that corridor their own, where non-Kurds refugees are not allowed to live, and taking ownership of the mango tree and protecting it from the invasion of other prisoners, is reflective of their historically suppressed sense of belonging and Kurdish history of dispossession. Kurdish refugees struggle over that space and making it their own territory could be seen as a symbolic resonance of a long Kurdish history of struggle and desire to rule their own territory. Building an imagined liberated space as their homeland within the prison and resisting any invasion to this space from other prisoners represents their unfulfilled desire of having an independent and liberated homeland and their struggles against external forces who invaded and dominated their homeland.

This continued sense of identity and resistance among Kurdish refugees on Manus aligns with the main argument of this chapter regarding Boochani and his memoir, which shows Boochani's continued sense of Kurdish resistance and struggle

in this text. Like the Kurdish imprisoned refugees with whom he shares the same background, Boochani redraws his homeland and suppressed political aspirations in his writings and constructs a space, within his memoir, through which he continues his Kurdish struggle for justice and liberation. This space takes an earthly physical form in the case of the Kurdish refugees on Manus; however, in Boochani's case, it is formed imaginatively and in the realm of his resistant literary geography. In his memoir, Boochani remaps his resistant literary geography—on Manus—and links it to his homeland and creates a literary narrative space through which his homeland and oppressed Kurdish identity is reflected and negotiated. This study asserts that this space is constructed consciously and serves Boochani's Kurdish political purposes. By evoking his homeland and Kurdish history in the context of his imprisonment and struggle for liberation from Manus, Boochani seeks to prompt his readers' attention towards his Kyriarchally oppressed identity. He brings recognition, not only for the imprisoned refugees on Manus but also for Kurds and their oppression under the condition of Kyriarchy. Thus, Boochani's memoir, as his mode of resistance against Kyriarchy, can also be seen as a Kurdish resistance voice.

The last point to consider is what elements from Boochani's Kurdish background and his Kurdish resistance is at work in his memoir and how they represent themselves in his resistance against the oppressive system of Manus prison. The first one, which is his Kurdish struggling background, his ethic of resistance, and his non-violent approach, is already mentioned. Another element this study argues for its important is the element of nature and Boochani's strong association with the nature of his homeland and that of Manus. Nature is an element that connects Boochani's homeland to Manus. It is also a source of resistance and inspiration in both the Kurdish and Manus contexts of the memoir. As the analysis in this study has shown, one of the dominant elements in Boochani's narratives and memories of home is the nature of his homeland. His accounts reveal the strong engagement of Boochani with the nature of Kurdistan and its beauties. His relationship with the nature of his homeland is so strong that he even introduces himself through this nature: 'where have I come from? From the land of rivers, the land of waterfalls, the land of ancient chants, the land of mountains' (p. 258). The dominant images in his descriptions of the homeland are mountains, trees, birds, rivers and the 'most tender element of nature' in Kurdistan, its sun, which 'radiates over the beautiful mountain slopes' and 'graces the centre of Kurdish flag' (p. 258). Also, as Boochani tells us through his

narratives of home, this is the nature—the mountains and the chestnut oak trees—that provides safety, refuge and protection for Kurds. They are the Kurds' only friends. Nature appears as an important element in Kurdish resistance and struggle, and as seen, the images and symbols that evoke the Kurdish resistance and struggle in his memoir are nature-centred.

A similar relationship can be found between Boochani and the nature of Manus, from which he gets the spirit and inspiration to resist against the horrors of the prison and the oppressions he experienced. It is clear from Boochani's writings that he also has strong ties with Manus' nature. The beauties and purity of Manus Island are constantly evoked in his writings. There are many references and descriptions of the Manusian ecosystem that emphasise its beauty: the Manusian sun and moon; the jungle; the sounds of the birds, crickets and frogs; the flowers resembling chamomile, which he dedicates Chapter Eleven to; the sea and its beauties; the music of the waves and the smell of the ocean. The nature of Manus becomes a source of peace, inspiration and resistance for Boochani. During days and nights, he spends hours among the flowers resembling chamomile, where he finds tranquillity away from other prisoners (p. 296). For him, the nature of Manus is not only a source of comfort and escape in the face of the horror of the prison, but also a source of resistance:

> I sit there on that strip of tree, sit there among those flowers. I feel full of life. (p. 110)
>
> We can find comfort that we are in the company of the sea everyday. (p. 111)
>
> *I love those flowers/*
> *A Zeal for resistance/*
> *A tremendous will for life bursting out from the coils and carves of the stems.* (p. 293)
>
> Now here I am, a creature outside the prison enclose. And I am now part of the Jungle. I am the jungle, like the snakes, like the frogs, like the insects, like the birds. I am the jungle itself. (p. 301)

The relationship Boochani has with the Manus nature, and the sense of freedom, solace and resistance he gets from it, can be traced back to his Kurdish background and Kurdish culture. As we see in the memoir, Boochani also indicates the effects of Manus prison on Manus nature and how it led to the destruction of ecosystem there.[48]

[48] For more on Boochani's engagement with the nature of Manus, see Michelle Nayahamui Rooney's (2020) reading of Boochani's memoir, *No Friends But the Mountains: An Oceanian Lens.*

He raises the same issue in regards to the nature of his homeland and how that destructive war destroyed its beauties. In his interview with Zable (2018), Boochani states that 'Manusians are similar in some ways to Kurdish people, for example, in the way colonialism has had an impact on them'. Boochani's memoir, in addition to the refugees on Manus, provides a voice both for the Manusians, as argued by Rooney, and for the Kurds, as argued by this study.

**Conclusion**

This chapter looked at Kurdish memoirs 'on the move'; Kurdish life narratives that are read across cultures and languages. While it gave a short overview of Kurdish life-writings and how these modes of writings have been a form of resistance and struggle for many Kurdish authors, this chapter argued for new acts of Kurdish life-writings and new forms of struggle that happened through them. It showed why Kurdish life narratives are on the move and seeking new witnessing publics for the testimonies they provide. Then, it looked at the memoirs of Akreyi and Boochani to investigate how each bears witness to their personal life and Kurdish history of oppression and violence. As seen, Akreyi's memoir bears witness to her traumatic life and Kurdish traumatic history. The reading her work revealed that writing and documenting these stories emerged from her ethical and political commitments towards the people of her homeland. Her memoir is a space of struggle for the recognition of Kurdish people, although different from the struggle that has happened through Kurdish life narratives in the Kurdish language. It is an attempt to give voice to Kurdish people beyond their homeland, across the world.

Also, Boochani's memoir, which is itself an act of resistance against oppression and his mode of struggle for justice and liberation of the refugees on Manus, embodies his Kurdish resistance voice too. By evoking his homeland and past life in his writings about Manus, he struggled to give a voice to his oppressed Kurdish identity as well. In and through his memoir, Boochani also wrote back to the struggle of Kurdish people, reimagining Kurds' claims of justice and liberation while making claims for justice and liberation for the imprisoned refugees on Manus. It is within this context that this study argues that Boochani's memoir, as his mode of resistance against injustice, is also a Kurdish resistance voice. It can be concluded that Boochani

and Akreyi’s memoir both, each in its own way, act as testimonies of Kurdish history that aimed at reaching transnational and global contexts.

# Chapter Seven—Fictional Testimonies of Kurdish History in English

## Introduction

Kae Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* and Qasham Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere*, which this chapter examines, are the last of the works of first-generation authors addressed in this study. These novels are both works of fiction about war, conflict and its impact upon all involved in the stories. Bahar and Balata are both from Iraqi Kurdistan, where their stories are set, and they deal with war and political turmoil in the political history of Iraqi Kurdistan in their works. Like other Kurdish-Iraqi authors this study addresses, they portray what happened to Kurdish people in Iraq and how war, violence and oppression have had great impacts on the lives of Kurdish people through their fictional accounts. Balata's novel, *Runaway to Nowhere*, is about the period before and during the Persian Gulf War (1990–1991) and the Kurdish uprising in 1991, which led to Kurds' mass exodus to the Turkish and Iranian borders and the death of a large number of people. The story is narrated from the viewpoint of Nareen, the protagonist of the novel, who has witnessed traumatic moments in her life. Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* also revolves around the difficult and traumatic years that Kurdish people lived under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Bahar links the historical and political situations of the Iraqi Kurds to the story of the novel's protagonist, Mary. Bahar and Balata both re-narrate the lived history of the people who were tortured and massacred during the Ba'ath regime. Their works are witnesses to the atrocities Kurdish people in Iraq have been subjected to and record a traumatic history experienced by these people, mediated through fiction. The question this raises is how a work of fiction, which is a work of imagination and a story made by an author, can be a witness and how it acts as a witness or testimony. As an act of truth-telling/revealing, and as an evidentiary mode, testimony is more closely associated with genres like memoir. Testimonies are facts; they are not imaginative or fanciful; they are real, not made. Therefore, this chapter explores how works of fiction, such as Bahar's and Balata's novels—which are made, imaginative and fanciful—can be a witness to history or historical events and how they act as testimony.

While undeniably fictional, Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* and Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* bear witness to larger collective experiences and a larger discriminatory historical and socio-political condition; they are speaking to the realities of Kurdish people's history, beyond the stories of Nareen and Mary. These two novels represent Kurdish national tragedies, political turmoils and their experiences of violence and oppression through fictionalised testimony. It is true to claim that fiction is not testimony and cannot be testimony—in a juridical and legal sense—however, it can be a way of telling it, and a way of seeing it. Fiction can be a medium through which an author reconstructs realities, an imaginative reconstruction, and can base their story on historical realities. A work of fiction can act as a witness and embody testimonies, whether consciously employed or not, which readers conceive through the lens of fiction. Fiction is not fact, but it can represent a factual experience or make a similar experience or situation. The word fiction comes from the Latin word *fictus*, which means 'to form' and 'to make'. Thus, a work of fiction can make or remake events and stories from the outside world. Fiction can give insights into the real world and 'tells us something about reality' (Iser, 1975, p. 7). As Wolfgang Iser (1975) argues, 'fiction is a means of telling us something about reality … [it] is not reality, this is not because it lacks the attributes of reality, but because it tells us something about reality' (p. 7). He believes that 'if fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms of not opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other' (p. 7). Fiction asks the readers to live imaginatively within its worlds, to travel via this representation of the past and imagine what happened or what might happen. Truth is not always in the facts, and non-fiction works are not truly without fiction. Fiction is sometimes freer to do its work and to tell or represent a truth.

Works of fiction can and may afford alternative representations of real worlds and real people and can even break down the boundaries that memories, for instance, cannot entertain. Fiction can reveal realities or bear witness to traumatic events and experiences rarely found in a work of memoir, like the experience of rape. For example, as will be seen in the next chapter, there is a scene in Khadivi's novel, *The Age of Orphans*, in which readers witness an act of rape of a Kurdish girl by the soldiers of the Shah, which the author describes in detail. Also, in Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*, the character Abu Ali, a member of Iraqi intelligence service, raped and killed Aida, Mary' first love. These stories, these characters, and these experiences are

fictional but can be indicative of real accounts, which have happened throughout history. Also, fictional testimony gives a voice to the experiences of people who are not in a position to speak. Thus, the genre of fiction gives its writers a kind of freedom to write not necessarily bound to an actual experience of a specific person and not necessarily bound by the same legal and moral requirements of testimony. Fiction enables a much more exploratory and innovative process, compared to a genre like memoir, where the expectations of the truthfulness of the form limit the ability of the author to write beyond certain boundaries. Moreover, as fiction gives its writers a wider space, they can create a world larger than what they have experienced or witnessed. They can make multiple stories and link them together. Fiction writers can also record events or experiences not necessarily of their own time, place or even their generation. For example, Khadivi's fictional trilogy represents three generations of Kurds in Iran in three fictional novels, through which readers can witness Kurdish traumatic experiences over history, yet Khadivi has experienced none of them. The next chapter will elaborate on Khadivi's fictional novels and how she has inherited these stories from previous generations. Also, it will indicate what elements make her works connected to or different from the two fictional works of first-generation authors addressed in this chapter and the works of other first-generation authors under examination in this thesis.

Another characteristic of fiction that can link it to testimony is its engagement with storytelling, events, actions and characters. For instance, in poetry, these are images and symbols that are at the centre and reveal the realities. In a work of fiction, characters, stories and events are central and matter most. This itself can be a shared characteristic between fiction and testimony. Chapter Five of this study discussed how poetry has its own formal and literary/aesthetic properties that make it an important form of communication that represents a different form of testimony. Each of these genres—poetry, memoir and fiction—can be employed as a medium of giving testimony, or they can be a witness even if they have been written with no intention of giving testimony, although each in its own way. In the Kurdish context, we can also say that these are testimonies that found their way to fictional works. As a nation whose 'writings are defined by crisis'—the term Boehmer uses for South African writings—and as a nation whose writings are defined by memories, stories and testimonies of oppression, sufferings and victimhood, these all have been mediated into a discourse in Kurdish contexts (Allison, 2016a). Therefore, we can say that

these are testimonies that find their ways into Kurdish writings of different genres of not only autobiographies and memories but also poetry and fiction.

While undeniably fiction, Bahar's and Balata's novels cannot be read exclusively as fiction, as they largely deal with the historical and political experiences of the Kurdish minority in Iraq, mediated through fiction. They are a mixed construction of a fictional world and historical realities—war, conflicts, Kurdistan and Iraq. There are also some autobiographical aspects in both novels, which further emphasise the factual and personal aspects of these works. For instance, like Nareen, the protagonist of her novel, Balata studied translation at Mosul University in Iraq. Like Nareen, she is from Duhok, a small city in Iraqi Kurdistan. Balata (2010) herself notes in the book disclaimer that the story is based on real events and the name of the cities, camps and some characters are real in the story she narrates. Also, in Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*, like the novel's protagonist Mary, Bahar is from Kirkuk, a city in Iraqi Kurdistan. He works internationally as a documentary filmmaker and actor, which Mary dreams of doing, and makes movies about the people of his nation, the same reason Mary wants to go to America to be a filmmaker.

However, in reading these two fictional works, this chapter does not aim to explore the facts but uncover the meanings of the fictional world and stories under their description. It attempts to indicate how fictions can bear witness to a history, that in its own way is different from poetry or memoir, or any other form of testimony. It analyses what elements of these fictions and in these fictions can construct realities and make readers imagine and feel that these have been based on real stories. It will focus on the plot constructed in these novels, their narrative structure, narrative voice, characterisation, and other elements of these fictions that shape readers' understanding and perceptions of the world depicted in them. Also, it will look at the underlying themes that supplement the works' larger political and social visions.

## Fictional Testimonies of Qasham Balata and Kae Bahar

In Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* and Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere*, the plots revolve around historical events, and the novels are based on historical realities that readers are already familiar with or can get familiar with through reading these works. These historical events include the Gulf Wars, the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran, and

the Anfal campaigns. The stories are also set in real places, and they take readers to Iraq in the Middle East, particularly its Kurdish region, and to specific times in the history of Kurds. Thus, the setting of these novels, which is an important element of a work of fiction, is real; they are places and times that have existed. Also, while most of the characters are fictional, like the protagonists, readers also see real historical figures, such as Saddam Hussein, the then president of Iraq, the president of the United States, George W. Bush, or Clint Eastwood, an American actor to whom Mary writes letters in Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*. As far as the narrative is concerned, Balata's novel is a third-person narrative, and the traumatic story of Nareen is narrated from the viewpoint of a third-person omniscient narrator, which gives the narrative a more authoritative and reliable voice. In the case of Bahar's novel, although it is a first-person narrative—which is a form of narrative in fiction that is often faced with the question of whether the narrator is reliable—we see that Mary appears to be a reliable narrator as he even narrates and reveals the most intimate details of his life, such as his sexual affairs with Papula, his uncle's wife. He also reveals his life secrets, such as his gender (he is transgender) and the money he has stolen from his father to go to America, in the letters he sends his favourite actor, Eastwood, whom Mary calls 'my Gringo'. These are elements through which a work of fiction can construct realities and make readers believe that something similar to these stories could have taken place. They can make readers imagine and feel the details of those traumas and the inhumanity of war, genocide and abuses of human rights depicted in the novels. It can also make them question how these people could face those events in their lives and promote empathy towards them.

Both of these writings embody traumatic events and show how the life of Mary in Bahar's novel and Nareen in Balata's novel, and all their surroundings, have been affected by war, conflict and political crises during the Ba'ath regime in Iraq. They both narrate critical times in the political history of Iraqi Kurds and their experiences of oppression, discrimination and violence. For instance, Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* demonstrates how war interrupts an innocent girl's life, her family and all her surroundings, leading them to displacement. It shows how war separates Nareen from her beloved Karwan and ultimately leads to his death. However, Balata's novel is beyond a love story. As she writes in the novel's preface, 'this is a story of love and loss, in a distant corner of this earth'. The central part of the novel's plot is the 1991 exodus; however, Nareen's story before the exodus and

after it reveals the difficult situations for Kurds in Iraq. Nareen's story begins during the time Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait, which resulted in severe economic sanctions being imposed on Iraqis by international communities. After the liberation of Kuwait, US President George Bush, who promised to support Iraqis, urged them to revolt against Saddam Hussein to put him aside from power. This led to a series of uprisings in northern and southern Iraq (Balata, 2010). Balata chronicles the Kurdish uprising in northern Iraq and its collapse, which led to the displacement of thousands of Kurds who fled to borders of Turkey to seek asylum.

Throughout the course of the novel, there are multiple stories narrated alongside Nareen's story, through which readers see how each individual, family and the whole community were in conflict and how their lives were shattered by violence and oppression. Along with the story of the Nareen, readers see the very difficult condition people experienced in the mountains on their way the camps on the Turkish border. The narrator describes how people left their homes and set towards the Turkish mountains on foot, and how many children and elderly people among them lost their lives on the way:

> Some people were wearing sleeping clothes and some were barefoot. The further they went, more people joined them. Nobody knew where they were going…. They only knew one thing: the farther they ran from Saddam, the slimmer the chance of the bombs reaching them. The fear of a repetition of the chemical bombardment drove the entire population into a panic and the whole mass moved together as one toward the Turkish and Iranian borders. (Balata, 2010, p. 32).

> People continued walking toward the border. They weren't planning to taking chances with the same Saddam who only a few years earlier had attempted to exterminate the Iraqi Kurds. (p. 42)

> The people walking to the Turkish border were exhausted, hopeless, and miserable. Everybody looked aged. Most of them had bare feet and clothes covered with mud. A woman was encouraging her little daughter to walk, but the little girl was screaming that she couldn't. Many people were holding their sick and elderly relatives on their backs and were sweating under their loads. The blind and crippled were falling down and their relatives would help them to stand up again. (p. 57)

As seen in the above passages, the novel goes beyond an individual's personal experience, adopting testimonial traits to present the story. In the novel, the voice of the narrator is often testimonial and the narrative often takes the form of testimonies that inform about a collective traumatic experience. While narrating Nareen's life

story during the uprising and the exodus, the novel creates a portrait of an entire community amid a predicament and violent situation. It ties Nareen's traumatic experience to what the whole community experienced. Nareen and her family, like thousands of other people, had to flee their home to save their lives. Nareen's beloved, Karwan, decided to stay in Duhok to fight with the Iraqi forces and we find him killed at the end of the story. She found her parents in the camps. On the way to the camps, Nareen lost her parents and had to save her six-year-old brother. On their journey, Nareen and the people endured terrible pain for days. Nareen witnessed the death of children, whose parents had to bury and leave them on the way, and many elderly people. When she and her brother arrived at the camp, Nareen has witnessed a human catastrophe and tragedy; she finds Kurdish people completely abandoned and in a horrendous situation. Nareen sees people die from the cold, lack of food and medicine and how Turkish soldiers, who tried to push Kurdish refugees back towards Iraq, killed many people. As narrated:

> People were desperate with sickness, and many people were close to death. Some were screaming with pain inside or outside the tents as their relatives gathered around them. (p.178)

> Every morning the moans of women crying for their children were the first sounds heard in the camp. Nareen woke up each day at dawn to the sound of their screaming. (p. 184).

Finally, after weeks of hardship and sufferings, the Kurdish population displaced at the border of Turkey were allowed to return to their homes. Many were killed and many took refuge in Turkey and European countries. 'After such a long absence spent in that horrible camp, everybody was filled with joy at the thought of going home' (p. 200). And while they were happy about going home, they were extremely traumatised by what they experienced in the camps and the death of their loved ones:

> A woman started crying for her daughter who died in the camp; she kept repeating she had left her daughter in a strange place. Her husband told her in a soft voice, 'You are not the only one who left your loved one over there. Almost every family left one or two of its members there.' (p. 203)

The novel tries to portray the depth of the traumas and hardship the people, particularly women and children, experienced. It depicts ordinary people's lives in the context of the Gulf Wars and shows how their lives were shattered. Similarly, Bahar's novel deals with characters whose lives have been affected by political turmoil, particularly the protagonist of the story, a teenage boy, Mariwan, who is called Mary.

Mary's stories are full of accounts of oppression, discrimination, execution, imprisonments, mass murders, mass graves and gas attacks, the majority of which are witnessed by Mary. Beyad et al. (2018), in their reading of Bahar's novel, rightly observes that *Letters from a Kurd* 'is not only the story of a teen, or a family, but the story of a people and a country at a critical time in its history' (p. 8). Similarly, Ofra (2018) notes, 'through Mariwan's personal experiences Bahar tells the story of the Kurdish nation: its history, its myths, and the unique culture which distinguishes it from the surrounding Arab society' (p. 2). Mary is in love with cinema and dreams of going to America to be a filmmaker there and make movies about his homeland and what happened to Kurdish people. He writes letters to his favourite American actor and filmmaker, Clint Eastwood, in which he narrates his life story, and many of the events that happened to him and his family. He asks Eastwood to take him from Iraq and save him from the agonies of life there. Through these letters, and through the main plot of the story, readers witness both Mary's personal tragedies and the larger tragic story he narrates. Mary gives details of what happens around him to Gringo in his letters and asks him to respond to his letters and help him to leave the country: 'Please Gringo, my best friend and my hope: my life is in danger. Please don't leave it too long to come and take me with you to America' (p. 57). He writes several letters and in each describes his city Kirkuk, an oil-rich province, whose people live in poverty and conflict. He writes about his homeland, Kurdistan, and Kurdish people, whose identity is denied by Iraqi government: 'I live in Kurdistan, but I am not allowed to say my country's name. The Arabs in power hate us, and would happily wipe us out' (p. 80). What is significant about these letters is that they refocus on the main story narrated in the novel and make the reader re-experience and re-read the accounts. The content of the letters is what the readers read throughout the novel, which is not only Mary's personal experiences but also the condition of the people in his homeland. This textual strategy—re-presenting these accounts and making readers re-read them in a shorter form in the letters—doubles the influence on the reader and draws the readers' attention back to the suffering and oppressions Mary testifies to in his letters to Gringo.

Moreover, Mary's letters are beyond simple letters of a Kurdish child to his favourite actor and filmmaker. Mary's act of writing letters and narrating his tragic life story and stories of his homeland to Gringo is similar to what Bahar, the author of this fiction, has done through his novel. Mary tries to reach Gringo with stories from

his homeland and inform him of what happened to him and the people of his nation in Iraq. Mary has the desire to share his stories with the world outside his homeland and go to America to make movies about Kurdish people. This desire and tendency reflect those of Bahar in his real life. Thus, these letters act like Bahar's novel itself, through which Mary/Bahar tries to reach to Gringo/America or the world outside Kurdistan. Mary's American dream is indeed a Kurdish dream; he dreams of making movies in Hollywood about Kurdish people and Kurdish history of struggle. As he writes to Gringo:

> Dear Gringo, my first feature film will be an epic in three parts starting from the First World War, through the days British colonialism first reached Kurdistan, then on to Mahabad, the first Republic of Kurdistan in 1946. The last of the trilogy will tell my people's struggle for freedom against Saddam.

Nareen, the protagonist of *Runaway to Nowhere*, has the same desire: to have the voices of the oppressed people around her reach the world. While working voluntarily in the clinic of the camp at the Turkish border, Nareen meets two journalists from America, a man and a woman, Emily. When Nareen found out they were foreign journalists, she asked them to tell the world about the tragedy happening in the camps. Nareen tells Emily her life story and what has happened to her and the Kurdish people: 'We need journalists to tell our tragedy to the world' (Balata, 2010, p. 185). Nareen's attempts to tell her stories to Emily and pleas for her to tell these tragic stories to the world also resemble the author's desire. In an interview with Hassan Alhamid (2018), Balata states that her purpose for writing her novel was 'to show the world the reality of the Kurdish historical and socio-political situation, at least in Iraqi Kurdistan' (p. 11). Alhamid writes that Balata:

> Describes her novel as a kind of tribute and an expression of her feelings of responsibility to record and depict some of the miserable experiences of the Kurdish people and the atrocities and violence imposed on them, particularly Kurdish women (p. 11).

We see that the protagonist of her novel, Nareen, has the same desire as she tells the international journalists in the camp her stories. However, when Nareen found that these two journalists were American, she told them she blamed their president for their tragic condition: 'Can you please tell your president Bush that I'm a simple Kurdish woman telling him he could have avoided this tragedy?' (p. 205). She also tells Emily, 'I hate your president Bush—he is responsible for all of this' (p. 205), because he betrayed Iraqis:

> We heard President Bush asking us to rise up against Saddam, so we did. We would never dare to rise up against someone like Saddam Hussein, who is famous for killing people in mass graves by chemical weapons. But when somebody like Bush asked us…we found it a good opportunity to get rid of a criminal like Saddam, and we never thought President Bush would leave us alone in Saddam's hands. (p. 206)

Characters in this novel, particularly Nareen, condemn not only Saddam Hussein's regime, but also the United States' role in the conflicts in Iraq and what happened to Iraqi Kurds, as well as the economic sanctions imposed on them. This can be seen as the novel's critique of international communities, such as the United States, and their role in some historical events Kurds have experienced. In *Letters from a Kurd*, also, we see Mary disillusioned with his Gringo and his American dream at the end of the novel when he learns more about America's support of Saddam Hussein and its role in the condition of Iraqis and Kurds. When Mary found that the monster, Saddam Hussein, received money and weapon from America, his strong passion and desire gave its way to disillusionment and even exasperation, and he decides to stay at home and be a Peshmerga (freedom fighter) in his homeland instead of a filmmaker in Hollywood. In his last letter to Gringo, titled 'I am not going to America', Mary writes:

> I should have learnt not to generalize, but your American government's support of Saddam Hussein's tyranny makes me believe that little or no good will come out of your part of the world. You should know that your American money and weapons, given to your beloved monster, are used to spread terror in my country, and to take away the lives of many innocent women and children of all faiths and races: Kurds, Arabs, Turkman, and Christians. Your American Government has surely proved that the mountains of Kurdistan are our only true friends. (p. 331)

With the truths revealed for Mary and his disillusionment, readers also discover the truth and come to understand the realities behind the events that happened to the people whose stories Mary narrates. Readers are also left with the suspense of why Mary receives no letters from Eastwood until near the end of the story when it is revealed that Mary's letters never reach Eastwood. Mary finds out that Mukhabarat, the Iraqi intelligence service, intercepted his letters from the outset, and it was through the information in the letters that the government identified people with political motivations and arrested or killed them. This implies both the harsh socio-political situation in Iraq as well as people's lack of freedom of expression under oppressive forces and government.

In the above passage from Bahar's novel, we see he is concerned with not only the life of Kurds but also other Iraqi peoples, such as Arabs, Turkman and Christians, whose lives have been affected by terror and violence. As indicated in these lines and throughout the story, Bahar's novel, while it raises and speaks of the Kurdish experience of oppression in Iraq, it also raises the experiences of other Iraqis, whether the Arab majority or other minorities, such as Turkmans, Shias and Christians. The novel glorifies human justice and freedom, not only for Kurds but also for all human beings, people of all faiths and races. For example, we see Mary and some other characters in the novel, such as Mary's father and Abu Rasul, a number of times praise King Sherzad, Mary's grandfather, who was hanged by Iraqi soldiers for his belief in justice and equality for all human beings: 'King Sherzad was one of the most patriotic men of this land. Not only for the Kurds, no! He cared about everyone's freedom equally' (p. 147). Another indication of this is how Mary, who learned about American history through the movie he saw, *Soldier Blue*, becomes depressed when he finds out how Native Americans were treated by Americans. Mary also writes about Native Americans to Gringo in his letter: 'I believe your people treated the Native Americans atrociously. They suffered terrible injustices, just as many people and I are suffering now at the hands of the occupying powers in our land' (p. 237). This was one reason for Mary's disillusionment and decision not to go to America. Bahar's novel is also a harsh critique of the patriarchal society of Iraq and Kurdistan and the treatment of women. We see that Mary is always angry with the prejudiced, narrow-minded men around him, like his own father, Darwesh Rashaba, who treated his mother badly; his uncle Arsalan, who enslaved his wife, Papula; and Abu Ali, a member of the Iraqi intelligence service who raped and killed Aida, Mary' first love. Aida was a Christian girl Mary wanted to marry after he resolved his confusion over his gender identity, even though he knows his family will not let him marry a Christian girl as it is against the norm of that society. Thus, the novel is a critique of the society and culture in which Mary lives. We see Mary suffers from having to hide his gender identity; Mary cannot even tell the truth about his gender to his family, particularly his strict religious father. Thus, Bahar's novel not only revolves around political themes and political violence; it also challenges the male-dominated patriarchal and religious Kurdish and Iraqi society.

Similarly, Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* represents a male-dominated, patriarchal society, which the protagonist of the novel, Nareen, fights against. Nareen

always tries to help and raise women's awareness about their rights, whether relatives like her aunt or the women she meets in the refugee camps. We also see that at the end of the novel, Nareen and her friends from university establish a Kurdish Women's Centre, where they help women in need and try to educate them. 'I think it is our responsibility as educated women to help women who had no chance for an education' (p. 240), Nareen tells her friends.

Thus, these novels critique not only an oppressive regime like the Saddam Hussein regime that oppressed Kurds but also Kurdish society and community, through a critique of patriarchy and the constraints of families and religion. Indeed, this is a cosmopolitan gesture and can be seen as a cosmopolitan practice, as seen in previous works of memoir and poetry discussed in this study. This chapter showed how a work of fiction deals with such themes and issues through fictional elements, including the characters in the novel and the society and culture depicted in it. We see that the protagonists of these novels feel an ethical and moral responsibility towards their fellow humans—Kurds and non-Kurds, male or female, Muslim or Christian. They believe in humanity and reject any oppression against human beings. These reveal both the cosmopolitan sensibilities of these characters and the novel's ethical and moral preoccupation with human rights and justice, which aligns and interacts with their claims of justice for Kurdish people. This shows the broader scope of these writings and different aspects and layers of these texts beyond their embedded political themes and struggles to give voice to oppressed Kurdish history. These texts bear witness to Kurdish traumatic history and their sufferings, which can raise their readers' knowledge of Kurdish people and Kurdish history. They call on the human heart to see and feel the inhumanity of war, genocide and abuses of human rights. By engaging with these works, readers can make sense of what Kurdish people have experienced, and imagine and feel the details of the traumas, which can also make readers sympathise with them. These fictional accounts can also open the Iraqi government and any oppressive system to the critique of readers and evoke their sense of anger toward them, as they see the horrific and traumatic lives of the people in these stories. Conversely, beyond the underlying political themes discussed above, these novels embody other issues and themes, social and cultural. These novels could be seen as critiques of Kurdish and Iraqi society and community, and certain aspects of their culture and their norms. They open Kurdish and Iraqi society to the critique of

their readers too. Thus, the fictional worlds depicted in these works do more than testifying to oppressed Kurdish history.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter has demonstrated, fiction can also act as testimony and can bear witness to history and historical realities, although in its own way. I showed how works of fiction grapple with ethical and political issues and how readers of a work of fiction experience and witness the world beyond the fictional world they are offered. Balata's *Runaway to Nowhere* and Balata's *Letters from a Kurd* both bear witness to Kurdish traumatic history and offer global readers a sense of what Kurdish people in Iraq have experienced through their fictional accounts. However, this chapter also indicated that these novels do more than testifying to Kurdish history and are not relentlessly and exclusively political. Rather, as the chapter discussed, the social and cultural details and critiques are also observed throughout their works, which further emphasises that fiction can be a form of critique and activism, not only with political vision but also social and cultural vision.

# Chapter Eight—Laleh Khadivi's Trilogy

## Introduction

This penultimate thesis chapter is dedicated to the writings of Laleh Khadivi, the author who is introduced as second-generation in this study. This novelist and her works are different from the authors and works addressed so far. This is largely due to her generational difference and experience. However, as will be indicated in this chapter, while Khadivi's works are examined separately, they are also connected to previous writings and Kurdish history. As seen so far in reading Kurdish Anglophone writings, these writings bear witness to Kurdish traumatic history and they act as testimony. Khadivi's novels play a similar role, and can also open up a space of global engagement with Kurdish people and Kurdish history. However, looking at Khadivi's life and reading her works, it became apparent that the reason and processes of her trilogy's production are different from other works addressed in this study. Her trilogy was not produced with the aim of being or giving a voice to Kurdish people, and it does not entail any activism. First and foremost, for Khadivi, who has grown up in the US, the choice to write in the English language could be as natural a choice as it is for those whose mother tongue is English. That is why this study believes it is not accurate to look at the element of language in Khadivi's novels in the same way as the writings of the first-generation authors. Second, although Khadivi strongly engages with Kurdish history and Kurdish homeland, she does so in an exploration of the self and her sense of identity and belonging. For the other authors examined, engagement with the past and with Kurdish traumatic history becomes a way of negotiating their individual and communal identity and history with their new readers. Further, the history Khadivi is dealing with in her works has not been experienced first-hand, contrary to what we saw in the writings of the first-generation authors. As seen in the narratives of each and every author discussed in previous chapters, while representing the Kurdish collective memory and history, the works were largely formed from the authors' personal memories and experiences. These authors recollected their personal lives either directly in the form of memoir, or indirectly through fictional and imaginary stories, which were largely re-imagined based on their real-life experiences. Also, some authors, such as Hardi and Begikhani,

recalled their memories, stories and narratives through the language of poetry. Meanwhile, Khadivi's works engage with stories that are not her own, which she has not experienced. Rather, they have been passed to her through her parents, particularly her father, and relatives, or created through her own historical and archival research and interviews. Additionally, Khadivi deals with the experiences and conflicts of second-generation immigrants, as well as issues such as identity crisis and sense of belonging of second-generation immigrants. It is within these contexts that this study finds Khadivi's writings different from other Kurdish Anglophone writings and argues that these features and particularities need to be considered when reading her work.

Thus, this chapter does not aim to read her works in the same way as the previous works. It does not look at how her texts can stimulate an imaginative exchange with readers and the strategies employed to make her readers imagine what happened in the history of Kurds. It does not look at how readers might interact with those representations or how they feel drawn by the language, poetics and structure of her writings. This set of questions provided the framework for examining the works in previous chapters, as the first-generation authors adopted new readers and sought to articulate their stories and memories with them. Thus, in reading their works, this study has identified how that happened within the texts and how these texts interact with their readers. However, in reading Khadivi's works, this chapter does not ask the same questions. Rather, it explores why and how she engages with the past and Kurdish history as a second-generation novelist, and what aspects and characteristics of her works make them similar to or different from other Kurdish Anglophone literature.

The conceptual framework upon which this chapter grounds its interpretations of Khadivi's trilogy is postmemory studies and the ideas of Marianne Hirsch. Drawing on Hirsch's idea of postmemory, this chapter looks at Khadivi's works as practices of postmemory and examines how historical, cultural and traumatic memories have been transmitted to her and how they are articulated in her writing. To do so, this chapter looks beyond her texts to her personal life story. Further, this chapter considers the question of genre and the genre Khadivi's trilogy is produced in to see how her fictional works are different from Bahar and Balata's fictions.

**Postmemory of Landlessness and Not Belonging: Laleh Khadivi's Trilogy**

Khadivi's trilogy, *The Age of Orphans* (2009), *The Walking* (2013), and *The Good Country* (2017), traces the lives of three generations of Kurdish men, starting from Rez's grandfather, Reza, in Iran in the first novel, Rez's father, Saladin, on his escape journey from Iran to the United States in the second novel, and finally Rez himself in California in the third novel. *The Age of Orphans* (2009) begins in the Zagros Mountains in the Kurdish region of Iran. It is the story of an unnamed Kurdish boy, who is named Reza later in the story, under the name of Reza Shah. The story of *The Age of Orphans* happens between 1921 and 1979, the period Iran was under two Pahlavi's reign, Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. It is constructed around themes of landlessness, loss of home, oppression, forced assimilation and longing for the lost home; themes that were also central to the writings of the first-generation authors discussed in previous chapters. Khadivi's second novel, *The Walking*, follows the life of Saladin and Ali, sons of the first novel's protagonist. The novel begins when the new regime comes to power in 1979 when these two brothers decide to flee Iran as they are forced to take part in a massacre against 11 Kurdish rebels to prove their loyalty to the new regime. *The Walking* shows how these two brothers inherit their father's landlessness and displacement. The journey the brothers take and the final decision of each to continue or return home is central to Khadivi's second novel. Saladin leaves his homeland and Ali, the older brother, decides to return in the middle of his journey. This novel is about leaving home or staying home; it is about making home elsewhere, and the tensions between old attachments and new ones in new homes. Khadivi follows this family's chronicle in the final piece of her trilogy, *A Good Country*, in which she recounts the life of Rez, Saladin's son and Reza's grandson. Born and raised in California, where his Kurdish-Iranian family migrated before his birth, Rez sees himself as totally American and has no sense of his Kurdishness or being Iranian. However, as the story unfolds, we see Rez feels out of place and like he does not belong in the place he calls home, America, as the society treats him as a 'foreigner' and 'outsider'. The sense of not belonging and landlessness Rez experiences connects his story to those of his father, his grandfather, and a historical trauma inherent in the history of his family, which is transmitted from one generation to the next.

In Khadivi's trilogy, similarities can be recognised in the subject, themes and issues with writings of the first-generation authors addressed in this study. Although her trilogy also engages with other specific issues and themes, such as second-generation immigrants, its central theme—the trauma of landlessness and not belonging and transmission of this from one generation to the next—and other themes, such as historical oppressions against Kurds, the loss of home, dispossession, assimilation, displacement, longing for home and identity crisis, link her trilogy to the writings of first-generation Kurdish authors. As the analysis of her works will reveal, Khadivi's trilogy also includes specific Kurdish cultural and political themes and motives. It also shows how these themes and motives, which are usual in Kurdish literature, cut across time, space and generations, and appear in writings of a second-generation Kurdish American author.

However, in her novels, except for the third one, which is set in her current time and location and deals with the life story of a second-generation immigrant in the United States like herself, Khadivi articulates stories, historical events and memories of distant past, of which she had no first-hand experience. She brings her readers to places and times she has never been, narrates stories and events that preceded her birth, and portrays traumas she has not been the direct victim of or witnessed. The stories Khadivi narrates and the Kurdistan she envisions in her novels are the stories and images she has grown up with at home; the stories her Kurdish father recalled at home or those she heard from her father's siblings. Khadivi's experience, her knowledge of the past and the kind of relationship she has with the past, resonate with Hirsch's notion of postmemory generation. 'Postmemory' is a term coined by Hirsch (2008) to describe the inter/cross-generational transmission of historical and cultural memories. She uses this term to describe the relationship that the generation after the Holocaust bears to the personal, collective and cultural traumas that preceded their birth. As Hirsch (2008) remarks, the postmemory generation inherit memories of the past indirectly and 'by means of stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up' (p. 106). She contends that postmemory's 'connection to its object or source is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22). Similarly, Khadivi's connection to the past and the history she reconstructed imaginatively in her trilogy, has been indirect and mediated. The history and stories Khadivi is engaged with in her trilogy belong to previous generations; they have been transmitted to her in the form of family memories and stories and her own

historical research. Khadivi's first novel goes back to a distant past, long before her father's generation, and represents a historical rupture and trauma inherent in his father's nation; a rupture and trauma that continues and is transmitted from one generation to the next in the three novels. Khadivi is part of this process and has experienced these ruptures and continuities. As Hirsch (2008) argues, postmemory reflects an 'uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture' (p. 6). Before embarking on further analysis of Khadivi's novels and how these ideas of 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation' as well as 'rupture' and 'continuity' are manifested in Khadivi's trilogy, it is important to know a bit more about Khadivi. That is, more about her quest to further explore the stories she has grown up with and the way she creates or recreates connection with the past and with her inheritances.

Khadivi was born in Isfahan, a city in Iran, to a Kurdish father and Persian mother in 1977. She was only two when the new regime came to power. Her family fled Iran and, after three years of living in different countries, they arrived the United States as refugees when Khadivi was five years old (Yari, 2019; Donahue, 2011). As a child of an immigrant family, like many other second-generation immigrants, Khadivi grew up with two different worlds and cultures: one belonging to her parents' cultural background inside the home, and the one she experienced outside the home. Growing up in a society and culture very different from the one in which her parents were born and raised, Khadivi was exposed to her parents' cultural background and senses of belonging and identity when at home and through her parents, as well as her travels back to Iran. In addition to this hybrid condition that shaped her identity, Khadivi's identity as a Kurdish-Iranian also bears another hybridity, due to the culturally and historically diverse backgrounds of her mother and father. As already mentioned, Khadivi was born to a Kurdish father whose stories of Kurdistan and Kurds were always recalled in their home, and to a Persian mother from Isfahan, which Khadivi became familiar with through her travels back to Iran in her childhood. However, even in her travels to Iran, Khadivi did not have access to the Kurdish region. As she explains in her interview with Newslaundry (2013):

> In all of my travels back to Iran, it has been with my mother, with her family. I do not have access to the Kurdish experience…. The Kurdish experience has been one that I have had outside of the country with my extended family in Germany, and the United States who are Kurds, who left.

However, as her trilogy reveals, she became obsessed with her Kurdish background and the stories she heard from her father and his siblings. In a conversation with Suzette Grillot and Nick Aguilera (2014), when asked about what drew her to write about Kurds, Khadivi states:

> My father is Kurdish. So I grew up in a household full of stories about what it is to be a Kurd and having recognized myself as an Iranian I was wondering what is this other layer that holds so much tension and beauty for my father and his siblings. So, I did a little bit investigation into the Kurds that wasn't folkloric and wasn't just the stories my family was telling and I was realizing that 40 million people without country in constant flight is really interesting.

In her investigations of the past, Khadivi found a deeper ancestral story, the historical trauma inherent in the history of her ancestors. She goes back as far as she can and finds that the nation she belongs to is historically marked by a sense of loss and not belonging. She finds what links her to the past and the people with whom she shares a similar sense or fate of landlessness and not belonging. This may be why Khadivi was more drawn to her father's Kurdish background than her mother's. Khadivi has experienced displacement from early childhood and has been in constant states of leaving and moving all her life. Also, as a second-generation immigrant who has grown up dealing with questions of belonging, home and a sense of loss and not belonging to where she grew up, her Kurdish background might be the one with which she identified more than her Persian background. Elsewhere, Khadivi explains why she deals with her background and not her American self in her writings:

> These are my inheritances. As a writer you want to go to the deepest well to begin. My American self was not a deep well, partially because I was not born here and also because Americans did not give me in their history a place for myself. So I could not write from that. So I went back as far as I possibly could to which I have access to. (San Francisco Public Library, 2017).

Feeling out of place where she grew up, while growing up with stories, memories and images of another place and her inheritances, Khadivi began a quest to uncover her real sense of identity and her place of origin; a quest of self-discovery and belonging. She sought a connection to what she has been separated and disconnected from, and states, 'I descended from those people … for all my life, I've wanted to belong to something, and now I am creating that connection. I am easing out of that disconnect. Even among the dead, I have company' (Donahue, 2018). This connection is created through her trilogy. In other words, her trilogy came into being from her desire to connect with her inheritance and her roots.

What is important is that this act of recreation and connection Khadivi made through her trilogy is in the form and language of fiction. In Khadivi's trilogy, history is reconstructed imaginatively, which further emphasises the imaginative nature of her relationship and engagement with history. As already discussed, Hirsch (1997) contends that 'postmemory's connection to its object or its source is mediated not through recollection, but through an imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (p. 22). This resonates with Khadivi's experience since her knowledge and experience of the past and Kurdish history is indirect and mediated. Compared with the first-generation authors, whose historical accounts are mediated through recollection, Khadivi's is mediated through imagination. This affects the way history is represented and reconstructed in her work. Comparing her trilogy with the fictional works of Bahar and Balata discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that Khadivi's fiction—particularly her first novel, which is the story of a more distant past even before her father's generation—is richly imaginative and less bound to realist fictions. Further, her accounts incorporate symbolism, allegory and metaphors, and even the language is a poetic language, which is not seen in the fiction of Balata and Bahar. Khadivi's work is an imaginative projection and fictional recreation of history, an act of invention; indeed, it is her own version of history. In her trilogy, history is reconstructed in a stylistic blend of history, fiction, historical research, familial history and Kurdish collective memory. Fiction has offered her a creative domain and enables her to recreate her own version of history and her inheritance; one that is representative of her generational experience, knowledge and relationship.

Another important point to note is that Khadivi's trilogy is itself engaged with this idea of generation and cross-generation transmission of trauma, both thematically and structurally. Her trilogy not only traces historical ruptures and traumas but also shows how one generation after another inherit these ruptures and traumas. Also, as will be seen in the analysis, each novel invokes several acts and moments of ruptures and their continuity and transmission over generations. Thus, these ideas are also modelled within the trilogy and in the plot of the story. This is further manifested structurally. Each novel of this trilogy is engaged with one generation, and while each novel ends with a return to the place of origin, its story remains unfinished and continued in the next novel. The last piece of the trilogy also leaves us with an open ending. While the protagonist, Rez, returns to his place of origin, the readers do not know what finally happened to him. It is also interesting that the very form of trilogy

enacts rupture and continuity. Structuring her novels in the form of a trilogy, Khadivi has been able to represent this continuity. The term 'generation' itself points to both continuity and rupture, and for second-generation immigrants, this is not just a rupture in time but also a rupture of place, culture and tradition. In Khadivi's case, for instance, we see that her connection with her place of origin and with her cultural background has been disrupted as the result of a generational move as well as immigration. Khadivi's trilogy becomes a means through which she recreates that connection, as she says, 'and now I am creating that connection. I am easing out of that disconnect'. Similarly, within the fictional world, she creates characters who suffer from a sense of loss; they feel disconnected, and they yearn for connection and to return to their real place of origin.

### *The Age of Orphans*

*The Age of Orphans* begins in an unknown distant village in the Southern Zagros Mountains, in Kurdistan—or 'Courdestan' as it is written in the book—in 1921. It is the story of an unnamed boy, who is in love with his mother and his motherland, its mountains, its birds and its beautiful sky:

> He is just a boy, young, useless, and kept from the tasks and play, the chiming world of women and the dark room of men. And every afternoon he takes to the periphery of the village in search of birds to watch and want to be, birds without limitations of mamans and babas, yes and no, mountain and fence. (Khadivi, 2010, p. 4)

Soon the boy is separated from his mother/land and taken to the cave with his father and other men of the tribe to be circumcised; to become a man for their land, like the other boys of the tribe. On the way, his father shows him the land and tells him, '"this land is yours", just as I am your father you will one day father and the land has fathered us, the lines of Kurd blood do not cross but flow together from their time to ours' (p. 11). The boy's father tells him old stories of the Kurds, their braveries, and their fight for their lands. However, on the way and in the cave the boy constantly remembers his mother and longs for her lap and her milk: 'Farther from home than he has ever been, the boy feels it too, at once in possession and at once dispossessed' (p. 8). This is his first experience of separation and dispossession. In the cave, the boy sees the ancient drawings of the men before them on the rock walls: 'the figures

dressed in wide pants and turbans, each with a long beard of stiff coils, are linked hand to hand, shoulder to hand, bead to hand in a posture of victory' (p. 8). There, the boy became a man, through 'the game of manhood'; he was circumcised.

After a three-day trip, they prepare to return home. On the way back home, the boy, now a man, rides first and front on his own horse to get home, to the world he knew, to the mother/land he loves. He, who feels pain because of the circumcision, 'curses his father and ache desperately for his mother's teat' (p. 20). When they arrive home, all the women and children come to greet the boy who is 'now man, now Kurd, now Kurdish man to reign over Kurdish land' (p. 21). They all celebrate the boy's return and his manhood; the men of the tribe carry him on their shoulders and place him on a cushion in the divan and give him gifts. Sitting among other men in the divan and listening to the stories of battles, although he is happy with the ceremony and the gifts, the boy tries to keep himself close to his mother to take from her the milk he feels his new man needs.

After the cut, the boy has to 'take all of his baba's commands': 'clean the pipe of grit, wash my turban clean, dig for the wax in my left ear!' (p. 34), and he is banned by his father from having his mother's milk. We see the child has a strong desire and love towards his mother and sense of rivalry and sometimes hatred towards his father, who banned him from being with his mother and drinking her milk. This part of the story is framed as an Oedipal problem. The boy competes with his father and breaks his rules. He constantly asks his mother for milk and 'without chiding him she allows' (p. 35), and each time the boy asks for more milk and mother allows him to drink from 'her dead garden': 'Drink, jounam, drink as your motherland sours and dries' (p. 32). 'Now you stand before me to beg for milk and I want to say yes and yes and yes again, and hold your soft-haired head to my breast and sing my songs to you' (p. 31). While feeding her son with her milk, the mother mourns and tells him her sad life story. She recounts for the boy the stories that happened before his birth, the stories of their doomed land, and feeds him with the milk of her dead garden. The dead garden and the dried motherland here signify the land they inhabit and its lifelessness.

The image of the mother and the boy's strong desire for her and her milk is one of the recurring motifs of the story, which has a symbolic significance. As seen throughout the story, the boy's strong passion and love towards his mother's body and his desire to return to his mother's lap and drink her milk symbolises his love for his

land. Later in the story, when the boy is violently taken from his mother and his motherland, we see him constantly longing for his mother and her milk, which represent his sense of loss and desire to return to his mother/land. The milk, as Khadivi (2009) writes, 'ties the boy to the mother and mother to land and land to the bodies of all boys before' (p. 35). What is going to happen to the boy and his land in the rest of the story is similar to what happened to Kurdish boys before him. Thus, the boy can be seen as a collective protagonist who stands for each and every boy who has the same destiny as the boy in this story. The boy's namelessness significantly conveys this collectiveness. As we will see, the Kurdish boy in this story, like the boys before him and like his father and other men of the tribe, is doomed to landlessness and dispossession. That is why the mother sings her sad songs for him and knows that the boy is not hers anymore: 'you are no longer my boy, but a man, their man' (p. 31). When the boy drinks his mother's milk, she whispers in her ear:

> I knew you when you were a nothing. Not a Kurd. Not a boy or a girl. Not even your father's seed and not the beast in my belly. I knew you when I planted fields that grew greener than God's eye and the birds flew in Oval's above to admire my work. When my mother screamed and my father spit and cried as the Kurds were cursed I knew my simple body would birth a doomed man … We are part of the cycle of land and love, have and have not … Go. Follow your men from one silly battle to another; claim this pebble-strewn plot or that and know this land grows and dies with little care for the men who try to hold it. Drink my thirsty boy, drink. (pp. 31–32)

The boy, as the mother expects and as we see in the story, is destined to loss and dispossession; he becomes a doomed man, like his father and the men before him. He joins the men of the tribe in the battle over their land. He who 'knows nothing of battle' is ordered by his father to keep watching for the soldiers of the Shah coming with tanks and armies of horses and men for the battle with the men of his tribe: 'you must have lucky eyes, boy of mine, to keep such strong soldiers so far away. You will make your ancestor proud' (p. 34). After a while, there is news of a battlefield in Kermanshah, in which the Hero Simko—a real and famous Kurdish fighter—has been killed and Kurds' houses burned by Shah's soldiers. The boy 'is in line of warriors to war, in love with the land that spreads out around them' (p. 63). 'We are Kurds and this is our land … we must push the soldiers back off our land' (p. 61), his father tells him. 'Yes! We must go! To defend the land for the Kurds!' (p. 37), says the boy's father. Separated from his mother/land again, on the way to the battle the boy mutters his mother's name quietly and longs for her milk. But he 'tries to remember the man

he has been made into: a Kurd to sit straight backed and stern and listen carefully to the call of the land' (p. 39).

In the battle, the boy's father and other men of the tribe are brutally killed before his eyes. The army of the Shah destroys their village and massacres the people. The boy becomes orphaned, not just with the loss of his father but also with the loss of his land, and is conscripted to the army of the Shah. He is taken from his mother/land and his place of origin where he belongs. The invasion by the soldiers of the Shah ruptured the lives of the boy, his family and the whole community. The boy is ruptured from his family and his tribe, the happy life he had, the birds, the mountains, the rooftops, and as we will see, he is also ruptured from his culture, identity and language. In the army of the Shah, they turn him into a modern Persian man. As evident throughout this novel and in the next novels, these ruptures continue, and the next generations inherit them. For instance, at the end of the novel we see the orphaned boy's children are taken from their father's roots and their identity; this rupture is mostly imposed on his children by their modern Persian mother, Meena, who hates her husband's Kurdish roots and identity. His children are part of the cycle 'have and have not'; they inherit their father's landlessness and dispossession, and this continues in the next generations too.

In the Shah's army, the orphaned boy is given the name Reza Khourdi. Reza, as the name of Reza Shah, and Khourdi, for Kurdish, denoting his Kurdish background, which will haunt him throughout the story. His surname, also denotes the word 'khord' in Persian, which means small, minor and inferior. Soon, Reza's body, his clothes, his identity, his language, and his dreams change:

> Day after day for the first year, he is shorn of the boy from before and cannot remember the pieces of that other life—heartbeat, sapling, cold carp—so that even the mother tongue grows sticky on his lips and he answers to all call with the crisp Farsi (pp. 82-83).

Now he is their size; he grows strong in the army of the Shah, he is given a new uniform and a gun to learn how to fight in defence of the nation of Iran. Within the army, Reza is forced to participate in history classes, in which he and the other soldiers are taught about the history of Iran and trained to be loyal to Iran's new nation, to love it and to defend it from outside enemies like England and France and inside enemies like Kurds and other minorities. Now Reza rarely remembers his mother or dreams about her. The first time he sends a letter to his mother, he writes of the greatness of

the Shah and his love to Iran: ‘Agha Reza Pahlavi. The king of kings. He is great enough to be the God himself’ (p. 110). In the letter, he apologises for not writing earlier as he is very busy, since ‘making a great Persia will demand thick arms’ (p. 109). He asks his mother to pray for Reza Shah when she goes to the mosque. The orphaned boy, whose father is now ‘Baba Shah’ and mother is ‘Maman Iran’ (p. 115), ‘melds into a man for them’ (p. 114), for the new nation. As he says, ‘I am the new man of this new nation’, ‘I have no history, no family, and could be a king. Loyal as I am to Iran’ (p. 154).

It is apparent from the above points that the Kurdish boy’s identity and his tribal culture are erased, and he is forcibly assimilated to the identity, language and ideology of the dominant culture. The army of the Iranian Shah indoctrinates him in a new ideology and purges the Kurd in him. They kill his real sense of identity from the outset, and they alienate him from his roots and cultural background. They even make him a traitor to his Kurdish people. Reza is also forced to marry an educated Persian girl, Meena, who attempts to erase Reza’s Kurdish identity in their children and separate them from their father’s roots.

However, despite his surroundings’ attempts to purge his Kurdish identity and his own radical changes, we see the tensions within him between his Kurdish identity and the new identity he has been assimilated to forcibly. We see that his oppressed and suppressed Kurdish identity, his homeland, the mountains, the birds of his childhood, and his mother haunt him constantly and appear in his dreams and nightmares. During his first months in the Shah’s army, we see that life was extremely difficult for him. He always remembers the scene of his father being brutally killed and dreams of his mother and her milk. Throughout the story, the images of his mother/land return constantly, and this becomes more intense when he is sent back to Kurdish regions to suppress Kurdish revolts and uprisings in those regions. He, who has been very much loyal and faithful to the army of the Shah, is chosen to control Kurdish regions and silence the voices of Kurdish independence. For instance, when he arrives in the Kurdish town, Saqqez, the sight of the town captivates him for reasons he cannot discern, and everything is familiar. Back in the Kurdish region, the images of the past come back to haunt him again and again. When he sees the Kurdish people, he remembers the people of his tribe, and this makes him more furious and brutal towards the people he is charged with controlling. During his stay in Saqqez, he engages with some of the most brutal acts against Kurds as a Shah royal soldier and

becomes an oppressor against his own people. He suppresses the revolts and uprising of the Kurdish commanders and their movements for independence, the most famous being the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. He also rapes a Kurdish girl when encouraged by his fellow Iranian soldiers to do so.

When Reza returns to Tehran, due to his 'victories' in the Kurdish regions, he is promoted to a colonel and sent back to the Kermanshah and Zagros Mountains—the land of his birth—to push the Kurds into submission. Reza is tasked with controlling the Kurds and bringing them firmly under the yoke of the Shah. He is sent to Kermanshah with his wife, Meena. The day they arrive, as Khadivi describes, was a difficult day for Reza:

> [He] cannot bring himself to look at the new land…the very sight of it makes him nervous…he feels the pressure from above and below as distinctly as a dreamer feels held up and down by the floors and ceiling of sleep (p. 206).

However, he tries to suppress all the memories of his mother and father that return to him. Meena is very racist towards his background and very unhappy with the new land and new home. Dedicated to Shah and the new Iran, she tries to make her children as modern as the new nation of Iran. She does not let their children speak Kurdish or wear Kurdish clothes and tries to plant the seed of hatred towards Kurds in their children. This irritates Reza and makes him violent towards her. Meena always shows the map of Iran to their children and tells them of the greatness of Iran, while each time the boys ask their father about Kurdistan on the map, she does not let Reza tell them anything about his homeland. She shows her children the country of America on the map and tells them of her desire to go there and be a modern educated Iranian. As we will see in *The Walking*, the second novel of Khadivi's trilogy, Saladin, the protagonist of the story, has been assimilated towards his mother. He leaves his fatherland and follows his mother's dream to go to America.

Thus, Reza's children experience the same thing their father has experienced. They are forced to assimilate as Iranian, and this happens through their Persian mother. Reza's children are doomed to homelessness and rootlessness, just like their father, and they are condemned to their father's fate. When Reza looks at his children, he sees them as homeless as himself:

> He looks to the faces of his boys and gains strength at the thought that they too will live on the land and hunt it, know its shapes and designs, for it is theirs, and it was once his. He thinks of their faces and how they are no different from the faces of cousins he has long forgotten, the faces of the boys

> in Kermanshah and Saqqez. He thinks of how easily his six children could slip into the fold of the land if only their mother would allow it. She will not. And so they are damned to remain as homeless as he. (p. 251)

Reza's children, we can say, 'are part of the cycle of have and have not' (p. 31), which is what Reza's mother whispered in his ear at the beginning of the story before he became orphaned. This cycle of landlessness is repeated; the cycle that started with the Kurdish boys before Reza, then Reza's forced displacement and uprootedness from his land by the Shah and now his children who are forced to assimilate to their mother's identity, culture and language. Reza's wife symbolises an oppressor, like the Shah and his regime, who forcibly and violently suppresses Reza's identity and his roots. As Reza muses in the above passage, the opposite would happen, only if 'their mother would allow it'. However, we see Reza attempts to plant the seed of his Kurdish identity in his children and makes them aware of the existence of a place called Kurdistan. While every night Meena stand in front of the map of the world on the wall and shows her children where Iran and other countries are located, once Reza, without his wife knowing, 'had taken a piece of coal and circled the area where Iran, Turkey, and Iraq met and scrawled Kurdistan' (p. 268) for his children. We see him suffer from his wife's behaviours and the way she tries to wipe out the Kurdish sense of identity both in Reza and their children. Near the end of the story, we see Reza is torn between conflicting selves—his Kurdish self and the one who betrayed the people of his nation.

The tensions within his family, particularly with his wife and his own inner tensions, finally lead him to revolt. Near the end of the story, Reza poisons his wife's tea while she is pregnant with their seventh child. This results in her death and orphans his children: 'I have orphaned them just as I was once orphaned' (p. 286). The novel ends with Khourdi—no longer 'Rez'—now a lonely old man, sitting in the Taqibustan, Kermanshah's famous rocky mountains, looking at the land before him, his real land where he has returned. In the last episode of the novel, while walking from cave to cave in the mountains—similar to the caves his story begin with, where he became a man—he addresses Shah of Iran and tells him: 'yes, here, in these very caves, I was taught to hate you, Shah oh Shah, and the state you devised to harness our freedom' (p. 282). With a pen and paper in his hands, Khourdi tries to draw a map, 'to return the boy home, to take his place in his Maman's lap and wait for the next battle and victory, to be a hero on his land' (p. 287). As he says: 'no matter how

much we move, how far we pledge our loyalties, how long the distance to our desire, we will forever step and die in the same spot' (p. 298). Though he is returned to where he belongs, he is still that orphaned boy: 'still I am an orphan on this earth' (p. 298). He still bears the marks of those traumatic ruptures. They are part of his identity now, which, as the novel shows us, is also inherent in his ethnic identity and the history of his ancestors. We also see that this dialect of rupture and continuity and the transmission of this historical trauma do not conclude with the story of Reza Khourdi, nor with the story of his sons in the next novel. Rather, they spill over into subsequent generations in the third novel, the story of which, as we will see, remains open-ended.

As demonstrated so far, this theme is strategically employed for rewriting and reconstructing the history in Khadivi's trilogy, the history that Khadivi herself belongs to and the traumas she has inherited. In rewriting this history, Khadivi goes to generations before her and traces the historical ruptures that occurred before her birth. She imaginatively reconstructs the history, brings it forward and links it to a generation closer to her: her father's generation in the second novel, and her own generation in the third novel of the trilogy. While her first novel revolves around narratives of distant pasts—'narratives that preceded her birth or her consciousness' (Hirsch, 1997, p. 5)—the second novel engages with a generation closer to her, that of her father. In this novel, Khadivi deals with stories that coincide with her birth and her early childhood; stories with which she has personal connections. Thus, her relationship with *The Walking*'s story and her understanding of it varies from the stories of her first novel. The story she narrates in this novel, although it is not her father's specific story, it resonates with his life story. That is, his abandoned world and the journey he took from Iran to America after the 1979 revolution—another historical rupture and disruption evoked in Khadivi's trilogy—which led to the mass migration of millions from Iran. The journey Saladin, the second novel's protagonist takes, and his new life in America, resonates with the journey Khadivi's father made in the year Iranian Revolution took place. Khadivi's father, a boy from Kermanshah and in love with cinema, like Saladin, left Iran in the aftermath of the revolution and after a long journey arrived in the United States with his family. Growing up in a home and family disrupted by revolution and exile, among stories and memories of the home they left and the journey they took, and as a second-generation migrant who experienced migration from a young age, Khadivi is personally familiar with such

journeys of leaving and making home elsewhere. Khadivi reconstructed the disruption caused by the revolution, its aftermath and the lives of those who stay and those who left, like her family, in her second novel. Saladin and Ali do not want to be traitors to their land like their father. They decide to leave Iran, while their father tries to convince them to show their loyalty to the new regime so they are not killed.

The character Khadivi has created in the first novel, a Kurd who betrays the Kurds, and the themes, motives and images she employs in her narratives—the image of the mother as a symbol of the land, and the Kurdish mountains—are among the themes and motives often seen across the breadth of Kurdish writings. Khadivi's engagement with such historically constructed themes, images and symbols is significant and shows how ideas, metaphors and motives move across time, places and generations. For her, as a second-generation immigrant novelist who has been geographically and generationally distant from her cultural and national roots, these ideas and images are transferred to her through the stories she has grown up with at home and her own research into the history. Her novel embodies Kurdish cultural and political motives, and it deals with historical and political experiences of the Kurdish minority in Iran. While undeniably fictional, the plot elements and characters of *The Age of Orphans* are from deep Kurdish history, and they represent Kurdish traumatic history and experiences. The orphaned boy and his family represent Kurdish people who have been the victims of oppression and suppression, those whose identities have been denied, lands have been occupied, and culture and language forcibly assimilated. The very opening traumatic battlefield of the novel in which the boy is orphaned, recounts the invasion of Shah's army in the early 1920s when they recaptured control over Kurd-controlled land and many Kurds were killed and arrested. There are several other references to various Kurdish revolts and uprisings that have been suppressed in the course of Khadivi's story. Among these, the most known is the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, which was suppressed by the Shah's government and its leaders were executed, as seen in the story. Her novel also includes real historical characters, such as the Shah of Iran, Hero Simko (a famous Kurdish fighter who was killed by the soldiers of the Shah) and the commanders of the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad, such as Gazi Mohammad, whose movement was suppressed by the then government. Thus, in the course of the story of the family Khadivi chronicles in her fictional trilogy, the reader sees traces of real stories of the people and historical events she might have heard from her family or have read in history books. What is also

significant about Khadivi's trilogy is its employment and depiction of the family as an allegory of the nation. Although her trilogy is a family chronicle, it operates beyond merely offering a family history; family acts as an allegory of the Kurdish nation in Khadivi's trilogy, and their traumas represent collective traumas in the history of Kurds.

### *The Walking*

*The Walking* begins right after the Iranian Revolution when Shah's oppressive regime collapsed and the new regime came to power. It commences with the news on the radio about the exiled Shah and the new governor that takes his place, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini. The old Khourdi, the protagonist of the first novel, appears with two of his sons, Ali and Saladin, at the beginning of the story, while his sons are forced to escape the country. These two brothers were forced to take part in a massacre against 11 Kurdish rebels by the new regime to prove their loyalty to them: 'If your sons complete this task, we will know all is well … we must know that there are only devoted men under the Ayatollah' (Khadivi, 2013, p. 15). Their father tries to persuade his sons to obey the order; otherwise, they will be killed. However, the boys refuse: 'It is against my blood', Ali tells his father. 'Ali jaan. Do you love this land? His father asked with cold control. Yes, Baba. More than you' (p. 16). Saladin and Ali were forced to shot the Kurdish men, but Ali also shots three of the guardsmen and escapes with Saladin. The two brothers decide to escape the country, 'the fated escape' (p. 18). They begin their long journey from the mountains of their homeland in the borderlands west of Iran, in search of a new and unknown home. Ali tries to persuade Saladin, who is reluctant to leave: 'Don't you remember the stories the old men told? Kurds have always escaped through these mountains', Ali tells his brother. 'We are no different', 'we will follow in their footsteps' (p. 33). These words impress how history repeats and journeys continue. Thus, the journey these brothers embark upon is a continuation of the journeys made before; they go on a route taken by many before them.

However, for each brother, the journey has its own end. In the middle of the journey Ali, the older brother, decides to leave Saladin and return home despite the danger of arrest and being killed in Iran. Along the way, Ali 'moves slower' than his brother and constantly remembers the mountains of the homeland, its rivers, his

beloved and their siblings. Although he has physically left home, his heart is still attached to it. With each step away from the mountains of home, 'Ali's step had been heavy and every push forward was Sal's heave' (p. 203). Ali, who was the one urging Saladin to leave, now tries to convince him to start planning a way back: 'Two brothers on the way to nowhere. We belong to that town, to our sisters, to the life there. Only the weak leave at the first sign of danger. The strong stay, with their people. Their homes' (p. 71), Ali tells Saladin.

Saladin, who warns Ali of the dangers of return, ensures him that the new home, no matter where, will be safer:

> Ali, it doesn't matter where we go. We can't stay here. Wherever the boat takes us, we will not be as guilty as we are here. We will be strangers, but not witnesses or murderers. We will still be Khourdi brothers. Together. (p. 106)

However, Ali's heart is at home, where he feels he belongs: 'Why do you think the farther we go the safer we will be?' Ali asks Saladin, 'Are you safe in a place where our names mean nothing? A place where we will be no one?' (p. 105). Eventually, Ali returns home and Saladin continues his journey alone to go to America, a country he became obsessed with through his Persian mother and the movies he had seen in the screen of the small cinema of their village.

The journey these two brothers take, the tension between them, and the final decision of each of them—to continue or to return—is central to the first half of Khadivi's second novel. What is significant about the novel's journey theme is its demonstration that this journey is not simply a physical journey, but an emotional and spiritual one. These two characters are both on an emotional and physical journey, and there are many borders and thick layers they have to cross and traverse while crossing the physical borders. We see that the mental and emotional ties felt by the older brother stopped him from continuing his journey. He deals with a range of issues and emotions from the very beginning of the journey through the mountains that makes him more uncomfortable the longer the journey progresses, which even makes him move more slowly. Ali, who feels detached from the place where he belongs, does not want to be on this forced journey, which is why he decides to return. Moreover, the uncertainty about the future and the new home make him more uncertain about his decision to leave his existing home. By juxtaposing these characters and their conflicting feelings, Khadivi highlights the emotional challenges and the internal conflicts and turmoil individuals deal with when leaving home. The allegorical story

of Ali and Saladin stands for the true story of millions of people who have been displaced from their homes, whether voluntarily or forcibly, not only in Iran and in the aftermath of Iranian Revolution, but across the world. Further, by juxtaposing these two brothers and their journeys, Khadivi presents her readers with not only the stories and feelings of those who cross borders and have the courage to leave but also those who have the courage to stay. 'There are those of us who cannot leave' (p. 73), Khadivi writes. She also dedicated her second novel 'to those with the courage to leave, and those with the courage to stay' (2013). In these kinds of immigrant narratives and migration literature, it is mostly the story of those who leave that are narrated; those who cross borders and make homes elsewhere in the world. However, Khadivi's *The Walking*, particularly the first half, draws its readers' attention to not only those who leave but also those who stay. Yet, as the second half of the novel shows us, even Saladin, who appears to have no emotional and internal conflicts and easily decides to leave his home, experiences those conflicting feelings and emotions throughout the story. As we follow his journey, readers see him conflicted, uncertain of the decisions he has made, and even at times feeling guilty for leaving his family and his homeland. Although we also see him finding new attachments. The second half of this novel revolves around questions of belonging and loss, as well as the internal tensions and conflicts of Saladin. In the next half of the story, Khadivi shows her readers what happens to an individual's sense of home and belonging when they move and cross borders, and how their roots can be lost when they move away from their place of origin.

After Ali's return home, *The Walking*'s story continues with the journey Saladin goes on, and he becomes the only protagonist of the rest of the story. After tough weeks of travelling alone, Saladin finally arrives in America:

> It is not as he imagined, this Los Angeles, the America on the other side of the fence, and Saladin walks away from the airport with quick steps, hungry for some sign to convince him he has arrived—a nice car, women in short skirts and lipstick, a sandy beach—anything to welcome him as California's newest son. (p. 70)

For Saladin, the new home is very different from his mountain town. The night he arrives in Los Angeles he is overwhelmed with a sense of wonder, loss and displacement. Days and nights away, everything is still new and strange for him: he sees mountains shorter than the mountains he has known, a brighter sun than in the mountain town, streets full of traffic and sounds, tall buildings of clean glass, and

people with strange and new faces. After days of hunger and homelessness, he finds a job in the rug store of an Iranian man and a place to sleep. ‘Two months pass, and Saladin is certain he does not like it’ (p. 207). But little by little, things change, and he makes a new life for himself in America. Saladin, who is named after a Kurdish warrior, is now called Sal by his surroundings and he makes a new life. Soon he learns English and falls in love with an Afghan girl, Nafaz, whose family were killed under Russian bombs, and finds new friends. Saladin’s name, language and identity change; however, many things are not changed for him. He still deals with his past life, his real sense of identity, and his homeland. He often feels guilty for abandoning his homeland and his family and constantly remembers them, particularly his father and his brother, Ali. The scene of the shooting constantly returns to him, and he is pained by what he was forced to do:

> I was forced to take the gun. I was my father’s son. He was told by the mullah to gather the guilty, arrange a trial….an execution, to show his loyalty. Eleven men. Kurds I knew. The mullah ordered the guns fired, and just like that the men were dead. Almost dead. When I shot again, I might have killed them. My brother shot three guardsmen. They fell. We escaped into the mountains, my brother and I.
>
> My father is a coward. I was too. (p. 50)

Sal is also torn between his attachments to the home he left and his new attachments. The tensions and opposite forces of sense of belonging Sal undergo continue until the end of the story. He feels uprooted and yearns for the home he left. In the concluding episode of *The Walking*, Sal, who seems unwell and walks all day on a beach in California, finds small, dark caves and walks into one of them. There he remembers caves in his former life and the life of his brothers and their father: ‘it is not his first cave’ (p. 248). While he looks at the beach and the sea from the cave, he is overwhelmed with memories of home, his brother Ali and his father. He remembers playing as a child when the Khourdi brothers released the pigeons on the roof of their home with their father and waited for their return:

> They spent the afternoon in wait.
> And Saladin did not hesitate to ask
> But how, Baba? How does the pigeon know where our house is?
> How do they remember?
> Instinct.
> What is that?
> It is the knowing of where you belong. (p. 251)

Although Sal never returns after fleeing his home, we see his tribal and ethnic instinct is with him throughout his life in the new home. The image of the cave and the return of memories of the past show the internal return of Sal to his place of origin. Sal's story ends similarly to the story of his orphaned, displaced, uprooted father—in a cave, overwhelmed by memories of home and the past. As the continuation of the first novel, this story shows how Sal inherited his father's traumas of landlessness and not belonging. Like his father, Sal was destined to be uprooted and displaced from his home and place of origin. As we will see in the third novel, his son, Rez, also inherits this continued historical dislocation.

### *A Good Country*

In the last instalment of the trilogy, *A Good Country*, Khadivi follows this family's chronicle through the life of Rez, Sal's son. Rez was born in America, and he is in direct conflict with his father and his values and expectations, and there is great tension between them. Khadivi introduces Rez as a typical American teen, in love with surfing, playing soccer, going to the beach, drinking, smoking and spending most of his time with his friends—called apostles in the novel—and his American girlfriend, Sophia. From the very beginning of the story, we see him in direct conflict with his parents, particularly his father. While Rez's father is happy to have given his son the opportunity to live in America, 'a good country', and expects him to be a good American, he tries to raise his son according to their family's cultural values. However, Rez resists what his parents want. He finds the courage to tell lies to them. He goes to Mexico with his friend without their permission and goes out most of the time to smoke with his friends while he tells his mother he is at Mathew's home studying. Rez belongs to the world outside their home and never feels good inside it.

Rez, who lives in a very different world than his parents, has no feelings towards his parents' attachment and their values at home. He does not enjoy the things his parents enjoy, and he does not care about the issues they consider important. He never feels he belong to what his parents belong to. He is entirely uninterested in his family's background, culture and past. He never thinks of his name, his family name, where his parents come from or why they are in America. He shortens his name Reza, the name of his grandfather, to Rez and asks his family and friends not to call him

Reza. He even rejects identity as a Kurd or an Iranian and insists on his Americanness when asked about his name:

> What is your family name? Your last name?
> Courdee.
> You Kurdish?
> Nope. American. Born Here.
> Yes, but your father or maybe your mother, they immigrated.
> A long time ago. Before I was born. So I could be born here. (p. 85)

Rez belongs to where he was born, not where his parents originate. His rejection of his background and lack of belonging to his family's past shows a gap and distance that has been built even before his birth. Reza's sense of belonging to his place of origin is taken from him before his birth, and even long before that. It is the result of the familial and historical ruptures that occurred before his birth. Indeed, there is a rupture between him and his roots. However, as the story unfolds, Rez, being excluded from where he feels he belong to, is faced with an identity crisis and suffers from traumas of rootlessness and dispossession. In the second part of *A Good country*, the story of Rez changes, and we see him faced with the questions of home and belonging and traumas of not belonging. In the middle of the story, there are two bombing attacks: one in the Boston marathon, in which some of Rez's friends from school were injured and died, and the other Southern California's largest mall, close to Rez's home. Following these attacks, Rez and his friends from the Middle East are treated badly and told by their American friends to go back to their home country. Rez, who sees America as his country, is now told to leave. His friends call him and other students with Muslim backgrounds terrorists. For Rez, who has no idea of Islam and never thought of his Middle Eastern or Muslim background, being called a terrorist Muslim and the way his friends treated him was a huge shock. Rez soon finds himself alienated among those with whom he feels he belongs and feels excluded from the place he calls home. Gradually, his friendship with the apostles and other schoolmates comes to an end, and he befriends two Muslim students, Arash and Fatima, with whom he feels more comfortable, as they share the same background and have the same skin colour and face. Rez slowly starts up a relationship with the Muslim community and goes to the mosque with them. Among them, he receives respect, love and brotherhood: 'The face thy called a monkey yesterday. A face they called brother. A face inherited from his father and from the father of his father and maybe even further back' (p. 186).

His new friends constantly remind him that they are all from somewhere else. Fatima, his new Muslim girlfriend, constantly tells Rez ‘this is not your home’ (p. 99). Faced with discrimination and exclusion, Rez’s perception of who he is and where he belongs changes. He is slowly distanced from his American self and questions, ‘Am I American?’, ‘Do I belong here?’ To find answers to these questions, Rez decides to go to Indonesia to see the real Muslims. There, he finds himself in a different world, where he feels good when he experiences a sense of acceptance and inclusion with a group of people who respect him. Back to America, we see Rez’s new soul in his ‘American-born body’ (p. 150). For him, America is not ‘a good country’ anymore: ‘the country he’d left ten days ago was the same as the country he returned to now, but he, Mr Reza Courdee, was different’ (p. 151). Rez, who now prefers his complete name, Reza, completely rejects his American self and imagines himself in a place where he is accepted. Excluded from where he was born, Reza now longs to find a place to belong to. Finally, after months of searches to find that place, he decides to go to Syria in the Middle East to find his identity and sense of belonging. Reza, who thinks he finds the good country, makes his way to Syria with Fatima. At the end of the story, we find him separated from Fatima and joining a radical group in Syria without knowing it.

Although Khadivi surprises her readers with the way she concludes her trilogy, what is important is the conflict of belonging and not belonging that emerged in Rez. This study argues that what Khadivi intends to shed lights on through Rez’s experience is twofold. First, through this character, she represents and simultaneously criticises the discrimination and racism against children of immigrants and the risk of their radicalisation. She shows us how children with Middle Eastern backgrounds who experience racism and discrimination may become radicalised. Second, and more connected to the theme of the trilogy, she raises the question of home and belonging in the Rez’s story, although in a different way, unlike his ancestors, to show how traumas of not belonging manifests in his life, as a child of a family who has inherited those traumas historically. As we saw at the beginning of the story, Rez, as the result of the spatial and temporal distance between him and his place of origin, has no sense of Kurdishness and his ancestral background never occupies his mind. However, with the event and experience of discrimination and exclusion, internal tensions were ignited within him. Regardless of the event and regardless of where Rez finally returns to—which are both important themes of the novel—what is significant in the analysis of

the novel here, is the process this character has gone through, his traumas of not belonging, his desire to find the place of origin, and his final decision to return. This is also what matters most for Khadivi. When asked in an interview why Rez joins an imagined group instead of a real one like ISIS, Khadivi answers:

> That's right, he doesn't join a group that exists now. It's based on a million different groups. I wanted to avoid echoing what we read about in the newspaper because that comes with all kinds of connotations, and I wanted to tie this story more directly to my notion of belonging…It's mostly tied to the idea of a call home. (in Khan, 2017).

The sense of not belonging and landlessness Rez experiences connects his story to those of his father, grandfather and the trauma inherent in the history of this family, which is transmitted from one generation to another. In each of the novels of her trilogy, Khadivi is engaged with one of these generations and the trilogy, as a whole, is speaks to the historical trauma and the continuity of this trauma across time and spaces. Structuring her novels as a trilogy, Khadivi has been able to represent this continuity. As she notes in an interview with Jennifer Kaplan (2017):

> The idea of the trilogy is really important to me, to be able to place Rez in a historical context. I wanted to show how he's inherited the trauma of landlessness and not belonging. This robbing of a person's sense of belonging and identity is the first scar. Rez's father inherits the damage, the ways in which men are made vulnerable by nationalism and by that kind of citizenship and that kind of desire for belonging to a nation. For me to see the ways in which—over generations, especially through generations of men—a sort of tragedy plays out was very important. Rez feels the need to find his origins and to be in a place where his persona is not questioned or discriminated against. I wanted Rez's desire to move back to the Middle East to be a kind of circle, a return.

Looking at Rez in the context of history, we can see the roots of both the cultural gap and emotional detachment he experienced in the first half of the story, and his sense of loss and not belonging to where he was born that emerged in the second half. Rez, who has been inter-generationally displaced and dislocated from his place of origin, has no sense of belonging and attachment to his Kurdish heritage. What can be seen from Rez' story and also that of his father and his grandfather is how roots of individuals can be lost when they are oppressed and suppressed, like his grandfather and what happened to their tribe. Similarly, when people move away and leave home, as Rez's father did, or when they are moved by previous generations, as with Rez. However, as argued, the three generations of men in Khadivi's trilogy operate beyond merely offering a family history. Rather, this family and what they experience is an

allegory representing the Kurdish nation, historical oppressions and suppression enacted upon them, as well as the transmission of Kurdish historical sense of loss of home and identity from one generation to the next. Khadivi skilfully depicts Kurdish history over the course of one family's story and shows us the ongoing impacts of Kurdish historical traumas on subsequent generations.

Khadivi's above statement also reveals that her trilogy, despite its chronological order from the past to the present, actually begins with the story of Rez in the third novel and he could be seen as the protagonist of the trilogy. As Khadivi explains, Rez is placed in a historical context in this trilogy to see how traumas of the past are passed onto him. This brings us back to the story of Khadivi herself, her journey into history and her quest of self-discovery. In her trilogy, Khadivi is engaged with a character that shares a strikingly similar position, life story and experiences with her. Growing up in a Kurdish-Iranian immigrant family in the United States, Khadivi, like Rez, has possibly dealt with similar challenges of cultural issues and tensions within the family and discrimination and racism in society. Thus, she is well aware of Rez's sense of loss, uprootedness and not belonging to where he grew up. Like Rez, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, she finds her American self not deep enough to feel that sense of belonging. That is why she began to explore her past and her real self, as Rez did in the story. Khadivi's return to history, however, is not physical but imaginative, in and through her trilogy.

## Conclusion

This chapter identified how historical, cultural and traumatic memories, stories, images, metaphors and senses of identity have been transmitted to Khadivi, as a second-generation author with a Kurdish background who has grown up far from her place of origin, and how these are represented in her trilogy. Notably, the trilogy is itself engaged with transmission and continuity, of not only the sense of identity and belonging but also ruptures and not belonging. Khadivi herself and the stories of the people in her trilogy showed how ruptures—from home and from the place and culture of origin—continue and transmit from one generation to another and how senses of belonging and identity are affected as humans are cut off from their roots. Conversely, Khadivi's own experience and the life of the protagonists of her trilogy

indicate how senses of identity and belonging to the place and culture of origin continue to exist even across time, place and generation. As seen in Khadivi's trilogy, although it has some specific themes different from other Anglophone writings this study has addressed, like them, it is strongly engaged with Kurdish history and Kurdish homeland and the discourses and narratives surrounded them. Importantly, the central theme of the trilogy is the trauma of landlessness and not belonging; the historical rupture that happened in the history of Kurds and continues. Her works portray a history of oppression and violence, denial and suppression of Kurdish identity, and how these continue over historical periods and across generations. This and other thematic and subjective resemblances tie her works to the works of others examined in this study. As discussed, the process and reason for the production of Khadivi's trilogy are different from other Anglophone Kurdish writings. It cannot be seen in the same way as other Anglophone Kurdish writings; that is, as part of a conscious and deliberate attempt to address and invite non-Kurdish readers to see what Kurdish people have experienced. However, being read across the world, Khadivi's trilogy can play a similar role and open up a space of transnational engagement for Kurdish people and Kurdish questions of justice, equality and liberation.

# Chapter Nine—Conclusion

This thesis, *Kurdish Literature as World Literature*, was a study of the existing and emerging Kurdish writings in the English language. As the first comprehensive study of Kurdish Anglophone writings, this thesis has revealed the existence of these works as a new literary canon in the realm of Kurdish literature. It also introduced these Kurdish writings in English into the arena of world literature in English. More importantly, it identified this body of work as a new discursive space of negotiation and recognition of the Kurdish question and for Kurdish people. It argued that these writings entail a form of activism, and they act or create an arena of struggle and a Kurdish voice of resistance. The basic questions addressed in this study were why and how this body of works has emerged? Why have these authors written themselves and their homeland to the world? Who are their intended readers? What roles do their writings play, or can they play? And how have these works been received or how might they be received and perceived in their new intended contexts, by their implied readers? More importantly, this study aimed to explore not only how and why these writings have been written to the world but also how the world—the Kurdish world—has been written into these texts. To find answer to these questions, this study took two major theoretical frameworks, world literature and postcolonialism, while also drawing partially on cosmopolitanism. Chapter Two provided an overview of these frameworks, explaining how each, and a combination of all three, benefits this study and facilitates a deeper understanding of these works and their different aspects. Considering its research questions and objectives, this study employed a reception-based and readerly pragmatics approach to reading and examining both the texts and the contexts from which and in which they have emerged. As seen, this study has been as much concerned with the texts as with the historical and geopolitical contexts out of which they emerged, and the new contexts in which these texts circulate and are received. It asserts that these writings need to be contextualised accordingly, to explore their nature, significance and functions. It further contends that looking at these contexts is crucial in understanding the texts and their content, particularly the historical and socio-political contexts these writings have emerged from and respond to.

In Chapter Three, this study situated Kurdish Anglophone literature in relation to the historical and socio-political context out of which it has emerged. By looking at the history and geography of Kurdish literature and the ways Kurdish literature has been affected by the historical, cultural and socio-political condition of Kurds, this chapter traced back the characteristics, dominant discourses in these texts, and the transnational and diasporic condition of their production to older Kurdish literature. Conversely, by demonstrating the roles Kurdish literature and Kurdish authors have played in the long history of Kurdish resistance and struggle, this chapter argued for the contribution of this new body of works to the older Kurdish literature and more importantly its contribution to Kurdish resistance and struggles. As this chapter demonstrated, Kurdish literature has been one of the spaces and means of both resistance and struggle for justice, recognition and liberation in the history of Kurds. As argued, these writings inform the continuity of trend, although in new forms and new transnational contexts. Chapter Three also highlighted the task Kurdish literature has taken up of preserving Kurdish memory and forming the memory of Kurdish history to trace back the new task this Kurdish literature—in its English manifestation—has taken up in forming a memory of Kurdish history beyond their national borders and in the wider context of the world.

Chapter Four discussed how Kurdish Anglophone writings act as a new platform of Kurdish struggle and as a new voice of resistance. It examined how they have taken a new task of forming Kurdish memory as they circulate and are received in new and broader contexts. The chapter also took a step back and investigated the processes of their production and the reason for their production. By looking at the life and works of Kurdish Anglophone writings, it discovered that the writings of first-generation Kurdish Anglophone authors are characterised by their authors' deliberate attempt to articulate and negotiate personal and Kurdish collective experiences with others and with the world. It found that for most of them, these writings are the continuation of their national, political and cultural struggles in the diaspora for Kurdish human rights and their cultural and political rights. It argued that their works had been consciously produced within an international setting and intended from the start for a non-Kurdish readership and to circulate far beyond the author's national sphere. Then, this chapter looked at the transnational cultural, political, literary, academic and even educational contexts in which these writings have circulated and been received, and the importance of this transnational circulation

and reception. As seen, these works have created and continue to create new spaces of global engagement with and recognition of the Kurdish question and Kurdish people. These authors deliberately brought Kurdish personal and collective memories and testimonies to global contexts. They have produced their works consciously within an international setting with the intention of them circulating far beyond Kurdish imposed national borders as a way to provide a voice for Kurdish people around the world.

As discussed, the circulation and reception of these works are equal to the circulation and recognition of Kurdish identity, circulation of Kurdish memories and testimonies of oppression and violence, and recognition of Kurdish questions, not just the question of land and independence, beyond their imposed national borders. Writing themselves to the world, bearing witness to the Kurdish history of oppression and injustice to readers across the world, and inviting the world to witness what happened to the Kurds can be seen as new acts of resistance and struggle against the obliteration of Kurdish history, culture and identity. These authors subjected the four nation-states governing them to the critique of a global readership, and shared personal and collective memories and testimonies of oppression and violence with them. They asked the world to 'remember us', to remember a people against whom injustice has been persecuted. To communicate with the world, they employed a language through which their writings can reach to the widest possible global audience. This chapter highlighted the importance of utilising the English language as a lingua franca that could benefit these works' international reach. This chapter also looked at the few existing readings and reviews on Kurdish Anglophone writings by non-Kurdish readers, reviewers and critics to see how they have been received. As seen, the major theme of these works' reception is the oppressions and sufferings the authors bear witness to in their writings. They found these authors to be voices of Kurdish people, and they argued for the collective aspects of these works and affirmed that they go beyond the authors' personal accounts. Some also argued that these works have impressed them and they linger in their mind even long after they have first been read.

As there are only a few short readings by non-Kurdish readers, critics and reviewers on these writings, and as it was practically impossible to see the circulation and reception of these writings among and by public readers, this study, in its reading of these texts, took a reception-based and readerly pragmatics approach to explore

how these texts interact with their implied readers. In Chapter Five, Six and Seven, the analytical chapters of the works of first-generation authors, this study indicated how these writings bear witness to Kurdish history of oppression and how they act as testimony. However, it goes beyond the explicit historical, social, personal and political themes and subjects that preoccupied these writings and sheds light on the ways these themes have been articulated in these works. It looked at the strategies and techniques employed by these writers to bear witness to these realities, the ways they engage their readers, and how they and shape and sharpened their readers' understanding, reception and perception of these traumatic accounts. In doing so, these chapters also highlighted how each genre bears witness and act as testimony differently from other genres. For instance, in Chapter Five, which was a reading of Hardi's and Begikhani's poetry, we saw how these two poets by employing certain elements of poetry, poetic devices, figures of speech and language to articulate not only trauma but also its impacts and consequences. In Chapter Six, we saw how Akreyi's and Boochani's memoirs, witness something beyond their personal past life to larger oppressive and discriminatory collective experiences. This chapter identified the highly informative narratives of Akreyi and the peritexts she has used in her memoir. It also looked at the ways Boochani evoked his homeland and colonial past in the context of his then colonial experience on Manus Island. For instance, it looked at the use of constant flashbacks and sudden shifts from the present to the past in his narrative as ways to evoke his past experiences of oppression and his oppressed Kurdish identity. In reading the fictions of the first-generation authors, Bahar and Balata, Chapter Seven showed how their works of fiction could be seen as witnesses to the Kurdish history of oppression. It discussed strategies and techniques employed within these texts, such as the use of testimonial voice and the ways narratives often took the form of testimonies that inform of a collective traumatic experience, beyond the story of the protagonists.

In Chapter Eight, this study showed how the fictional novels of Khadivi, a second-generation-author, was different from, yet connected to, not only the fictional works of Balata and Bahar but also from works of other first-generation authors, due to her different generation position and experience. When I started my research on Kurdish Anglophone writings in the English language, and while searching for English productions of Kurdish authors, I discovered Khadivi's trilogy. As I read more about Khadivi—her life story and her works—I discovered that her experience as a Kurdish

writer and the reason for the production of her trilogy is different from the other authors. However, her engagement with Kurdish history and representation of Kurdish trauma of landlessness and not belonging was interesting, and I decided to include it in the list of the works under examination in my study. It was interesting to see how these stories moved across time, place and generation and are represented in the works of a second-generation Kurdish American novelist. As discussed, Khadivi's engagement with her Kurdish ancestors, her Kurdish homeland, and with Kurdish history was a kind of exploration of the self and her real sense of identity and belonging. Her works were a medium of connection with her real sense of identity and her real place of origin, which is why this study approached her works differently. However, it ultimately argued that Khadivi's novels, regardless of the purpose of production, can play a similar role as other Anglophone Kurdish writings in opening up spaces of global engagement for Kurdish people and Kurdish history. Kurdish Anglophone writings, individually and collectively, by first- or second-generation authors, or in the form of poetry, fiction or memoir, might be the beginning of a new and larger body of work that will expand and broaden not only the boundaries of Kurdish literature to the world but also Kurdish identification, inhabitation and participation in the world, the study of which will have to remain for another time. Future studies could also continue to explore other unexamined aspects of the existing Kurdish Anglophone writings, the discussion of which was beyond the scope of this study.

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