

Stylistic and thematic changes in the Kurdish novel

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Abstract

Since its rise during the early 1930s the Kurdish novel has experienced many profound changes both thematically and stylistically. This paper aims to identify the main changes up to the first decade of the 21st century. By comparing the style and theme of the early Kurdish novels with recently published ones, the paper argues that there are radical changes in both their form and theme, and argues that these changes are the result of the destruction of the pre-modern ways of life and the penetration of modernity into Kurdish societies. While internal cultural and socio-political factors have been at play behind changes in the form and content of the Kurdish novel, the “global culture” has also been effectively influential in shaping it. Despite the fact that the Kurdish novel has been influenced by the transition of the Western novelistic discourse to the Middle East, it has, thematically, been functioning as a “national allegory” following the conceptualization by Jameson of the main feature of the “third world” literature.

The first Kurdish novel was published in 1935. During the relatively short period since then, compared with the four-hundred-year-old tradition of novelistic discourse in the West, the Kurdish novel has experienced a radical change both stylistically and thematically. In fact, change in the Kurdish novel is no exception to the rule. The novel in its Western context has also been the subject of profound changes. While the reasons behind the changes in the Western novel have been widely discussed by literary theoreticians and critics, there is no study devoted to the changes in the Kurdish novel. Do the same or similar factors cause the changes in the novel in both the Western and non-Western contexts? Literary theoreticians such as Fredric Jameson and Lucien Goldmann argue that the periodization of the development of the novel, and the changes that occur in the world of the novel in the West, are mostly related to the shifts and changes in the evolution and development of technological revolutions and capitalism as a mode of production.

A question relevant to this general paradigm is whether it can justify the changes to the world of the novel, both stylistically and thematically, in a non-Western context. Jameson (1991: 35), following Ernest Mandel, who, in his work *Late Capitalism*, outlines three quantum leaps in the evolution of

technological revolutions, namely, market capitalism, imperialism and postindustrialism,¹ postulates his own cultural periodization, namely, realism, modernism, and postmodernism. The cultural logic of each period differs from the others and Jameson (ibid.: 36) argues that “it would seem only logical that the relationship to and the representation of the machine could be expected to shift dialectically with each of these qualitatively different stages of technological development”. There is a similar approach in Goldmann’s view of the novel, when he divides the novel according to the position and destiny of its characters. The development of the novel is based on the destiny of individuality and individualism in the capitalist system and its changes. Changes in the position of the individual in the different periods of the capitalist system result in changes in the novel in accordance with the peculiarities of each period.

Goldmann (1975: 135-136), divides Western market societies into three systems: 1) the liberal economy as the dominant system “up to the beginning of the twentieth century”, 2) imperialism, i.e. “the development, at the end of the nineteenth century and above all at the beginning of the twentieth, of trusts, monopolies, and finance capital”; and 3) “the development, during the years preceding World War II and above all since the end of the war, of state intervention in the economy, and the creation, through this intervention, of self-regulatory mechanisms”. According to Goldmann (1975: 138), “the humanist creation that really corresponded to the reificational structure of liberal society was the history of the problematic individual as expressed in Western literature from *Don Quixote* to Stendhal and Flaubert”.² The emergence of monopolist capitalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries “is characterized by the dissolution of the character” (ibid.: 138). Novelists such as Joyce, Musil, Kafka and Sarraute produced novels with such dissolute characters. The third period finds its literary expression in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novels. This period “is precisely marked by the appearance of an autonomous world of objects, with its own structure and its own laws and through which a lone human reality can still to a certain extent express itself” (ibid.: 139). During the second and third periods the individual “as an essential reality” gradually disappears and correlatively the independence of objects increases (ibid.: 138).

It is worth mentioning that there is an essentialist approach to the way in which Goldmann relates the novel to the different periods of capitalism. This approach accepts an intimate relationship between the literary work, the novel, and social conditions. One can ask how this approach would justify and explain the destiny of the novel in the socialist system. Despite this flaw which is more or

¹ It should be mentioned that Jameson (1991: 35) avoids calling our own moment of capitalism postindustrial, “but what might better be termed multinational” capitalism. At the same time, Jameson (ibid.: 37) avoids “the implication that technology is in any way the ultimately determining instance either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production”. According to Jameson (ibid.) “such a thesis is, of course, ultimately at one with the post-Marxist notion of a postindustrial society”.

² Goldmann (1976: 53) argues that “the novel of the problematic character” implies “a positive element: the affirmation of the individual and of individual value”. But, despite this “positive element”, the novel of the problematic character “shows that the society in which its heroes live, founded exclusively on the values of individualism and the development of personal character, does not permit the individual to develop or realize himself”.

less common in the Marxist sociology of literature, Goldmann's idea denotes an important point in the theory of the novel, which after all is the narration of the individual's destiny. This point, i.e. "the individualization of the characters" has been highlighted as a feature which differentiates the novel from other literary genres. In fact the novel is "distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment" (Watt 1995: 17-18).

It seems that Jameson's and Goldmann's ideas are mainly related to the destiny of the novel in the West where the modes of production since the 17th century have been subject to continual change. These ideas do not justify the changes in the novel as a genre in non-Western societies where the history of the novel is significantly shorter. The social and economic changes in non-Western societies, for example Kurdish societies, are not in any way similar to the changes which have occurred in the West. So, one can ask what the reasons are behind the changes in the form and literary modes of the novel in these societies, including the Kurdish ones. Why, despite the significant differences in the socio-economic formations and structures between the Western and non-Western societies, are changes in the novel in both contexts more or less similar? It seems that the main reason behind this phenomenon is the fact that the novel has been subject to the globalization of culture, which has crossed national boundaries and transcended Western space. As a matter of fact, the rise of the novel in the Middle East has, from the very beginning, been clearly under the influence of the Western novel. "[I]n the countries of the Orient, literary realism developed not only as a result of internal social and literary evolution but also under the direct influence of Western and, subsequently, Russian literature" (Braginskii 1978: 526).

Moses (1995: x) argues that over the last two centuries "a world literature" has emerged. The existence of such a literature "implies the concurrent establishment of a world that in some important respects can be spoken of as a meaningful whole" (ibid.). He sees a "global hybridization" in the lives and works of authors such as Salman Rushdie, Shusaka Endo, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Jorge Luis Borges. However, the production of novels in the non-Western societies with forms similar to the Western ones is not only limited to those writers who have physically moved across these societies. There are authors who have never left their Eastern societies, but have been successful in creating novels along the lines of Western ones as far as their form and style are considered. The globalization of modernity is the main reason behind the formation of similar literary form and content amongst different national literatures. As Moses (1995: xii) argues, "modernity is not merely a transient or provincial Western phenomenon, but instead has become the universal and perhaps permanent condition of humanity and therefore the inevitable subject of any literature that would represent contemporary existence."

The aim of this paper is to identify the main changes that have occurred in the Kurdish novel since its rise during the early 1930s.³ By comparing the style and theme of the early Kurdish novels with recently published ones, the paper argues that there are radical changes in both their form and their theme.⁴ In analysing these developments, it argues that the changes are not directly related to Goldmann's and Jameson's paradigms, but that these changes are the result of the destruction of the old social structures and the penetration of modernity. Moses (1995: xi) argues that "a multitude of distinct traditional societies have had the same historical destiny forced upon them, a fate necessarily marked by the tragic destruction of what are retrospectively understood as 'pre-modern' ways of life". While internal Kurdish cultural and socio-political factors have been at play behind changes in the form and content of the Kurdish novel, the "global culture" has also been effectively influential in shaping it. Moses (1995: x), referring to the developing nature of a global culture during the last two centuries, argues that in this global culture "the customary boundaries between different national literatures and distinct literary traditions are being steadily eroded". Nevertheless, due to the political reality of the Kurds as an ethnic group divided among the four main nation-states in the Middle East, namely, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, the Kurdish novel has been a medium reflecting this reality. The Kurdish novel, especially stylistically, is highly influenced by the novelistic discourse of these countries, but it differs from this discourse when its theme is considered.

The political and social discourses imposed simultaneously on the various Kurdish societies have resulted in a diversity and discontinuity in the Kurdish novel.⁵ Since "[s]ociety is the principal subject of the novel, that is, man's social life in its ceaseless interaction with the different social institutions or customs", social changes can affect the novel greatly (Lukacs 1962: 139). The novel, then, is not only the product of processes of social, political, and cultural changes, but it also contributes to these changes. As Armstrong (2005: 7) points out, Sir Walter Scott's historical novels "were shaped by and helped to shape a British nation". A narrative feature has been a determining factor in shaping individualism as the

³ Studying changes in the novels of a certain language does not necessarily mean covering every single novel published in that language in order to find out the literary and thematic changes that have occurred. In his study of the British novel and its changes from the 1970s to 2005, Bradford (2007) does not discuss all the novels published during this relatively long period. Instead he refers only to a certain number of novelists such as Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, David Mitchell and Ali Smith, who have been considered the main influential authors. To show the main changes that have occurred in the Kurdish novel, I have taken into consideration the divided reality of Kurdish societies across the borders and in the diaspora. Due to the increasing number of Kurdish novels I have found it necessary to limit the number of novels discussed in this article to the most influential ones.

⁴ In this article the application of stylistic is not in accordance with the strict definitions of the term, in which "hard" data" is provided "to support 'intuitions' about a literary work" (Barry 2002: 210). Instead, the article sees the style or "tone of voice" as "what makes a novel or a novelist distinctive" (Mullan 2006: 213). Thus, the article refers to the general structure of the novels discussed and their form, focusing, for instance, on their plain or complex styles. It does not describe linguistic data used in a certain text, but is mainly concerned with interpreting the texts referred to.

⁵ For the impact of the socio-political condition on the rise and development of the Kurdish novel resulting from the policy of the countries that host the Kurds, see Ahmadzadeh (2003).

main concern of the novel. Armstrong (ibid.: 10) rightly argues that “I seriously doubt that individualism could have taken shape and spread throughout the West as fast and as decisively as it did unless and until the novel had transformed the concept into narrative form.” Furthermore, Armstrong states that (ibid.: 3) “an individual was not only the narrating subject and source of writing but also the object of narration and referent of writing.” The rise of the novel in Middle Eastern societies was partly related to the internal social changes and the emergence of individualism, but the tradition of the Western novel as a genre played a crucial role in the spread of such a discourse to the Middle East. Despite the fact that the Kurdish novel has been influenced by the transition of the Western novelistic discourse to the Middle East, it has, thematically, been functioning as a “national allegory”, which has been conceptualized by Jameson (1986: 69) as the main feature of “third world” literature.⁶ In fact, the Kurdish novel has been a major source for the Kurds to “imagine” themselves as a nation based on their cultural roots. Anderson’s argument about the importance of the novel as “the technical means for ‘representing’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson 1991: 26), is highly relevant to the role of this genre in the Kurdish context.

The early Kurdish novels: Socialist realism

While the history of the Western novel, from its emergence in the early 17th century up to the late 19th century, is generally recognized to be one of “realism”, the early Kurdish novels are exclusively socialist realist novels. The reason behind this is meta-literary. In other words, the rise of the Kurdish novel, unlike the Western novel, was not in the first instance the result of the internal social and epistemological changes. Following the October Revolution in 1917 in Russia and the fact that the Kurds who were living there were able to benefit from certain linguistic and cultural rights, the early Kurdish novels were written by political activists who were members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Obviously these writers were aiming to highlight their ideological persuasions, and consequently the novels they produced exemplified the typical characteristics of socialist realism, i.e. “the author’s world view”, “*partiinst* (party spirit)”, “*narodnost* (close ties with the people)” and “artistic progress” (Anikst 1978:524). The socialist realist novels “sought the solution to eternal problems in social reality, active humanism, and progressive socio-political movements” (Anikst 1978: 525).

Erebe Shemo (1897-1978), the most famous Kurdish writer of the former Soviet Union, has been considered the “father of the Kurdish novel” (Kutlay 1996: 58). His first novel, *Shivane Kurmanja* (The Kurdish Shepherd) was

⁶ “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (Jameson 1986: 69).

published in Yerevan in 1935.⁷ With the exception of *Dimdim*, which is a historical novel and narrates the events of the war between the Kurds and the Safavid king Shah Abbas II in the 17th century, his five other novels deal mainly with the contemporary sociopolitical conditions of the Kurds of the former Soviet Union in accordance with the conventions of socialist realism.⁸

*Shivane Kurmanja*⁹ narrates the hard life of the Kurdish people in Russia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The novel is in fact an autobiography. Although it is mentioned on the cover of the book that it is a novel (and it has been widely referred as the first Kurdish novel), it has all the features of an autobiographical work. The author provides the reader with a close account of his childhood, his family, his village and the condition of the Kurdish tribes and the establishment of the Soviet system and its consequences among the Kurdish tribes. His participation in the First World War as a translator for the Russian army, his participation in the civil war as a Bolshevik, and his work as a high ranking member of the Bolshevik party among the Kurdish tribes in eliminating tribal and feudalistic traditions and structures, are narrated in detail. The condition of the women and their hard lives have been thoroughly described. It is through his failed love for his cousin, Kare, that we are able to understand how girls were nothing more than objects to be sold. The narration is delivered from a first-person perspective with detailed descriptions of the various social and cultural traditions of the Kurds.

Memoirs from his childhood form the main part of the novel. He tells us how he once stole some potatoes and tried to cook them under a fire, and wolves attacked the sheep. He fights against the wolves and when the fight is over the potatoes are completely burned and the young shepherd has to put up with his hunger. He also narrates the story of his first encounter with knives and forks in his teacher's home. When he is served his lunch at his teacher's home he notices that there are knives and forks and a spoon beside his plate. He eats his food with the spoon and puts the knife and fork in his pocket as if they were gifts for him.

⁷ For detailed information about the Kurdish novel, its rise and development, see Ahmadzadeh (2003).

⁸ Erebe Shemo was born into a Kurdish family which had emigrated earlier to Russia from Ottoman Kurdistan. He spoke Armenian, Turkish, Russian and Kurdish. As a child, he worked as a shepherd. During the First World War when he worked as a translator for the Russian army he came across socialist ideas. After the Revolution he joined the Bolsheviks. He was one of the main organizers of the Soviets among the Kurdish tribes in Russia. In 1937 he was sent into exile in Siberia and had to stay there until 1954. He came back to Yerevan and died there in 1978. For more information on Erebe Shemo's political and literary life, and the general situation of the Kurdish language and the Kurds in the former Soviet Union, see Vanly (1992).

⁹ The Russian and Armenian translations of *Shivane Kurmanja* (Kurdish Shepherd) were also published in 1935. In 1946 Basil Nikitin translated the Russian version into French. In 1947 Nuraddin Zaza published the Kurdish translation of the French version in Beirut. In 1989, the Kurdish Institute in Paris published both the Kurdish and French version in one volume. In 2006, the Kurdish version in the modified Arabic alphabet was published by Aras Publishing House in Hewler. Muhsin Ahmad Omar has written an introduction and lexicon for this version and has transliterated it into Sorani. In 2009 Lis Publishing House in Istanbul republished the original version of the book in the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets in one volume. Mustafa Aydoğan wrote a long introduction to this volume. For a detailed history of the publication of this novel and its translations into other languages, see Aydoğan (2009: 5-47).

Later on he is accused of stealing them. However, he defends himself and says that he thought that they were only gifts for him. This event results in serious feelings of shame. These memories give a very satirical aspect to the novel and at the same time a sad feeling to the reader about how deprived the character was. The character is asked to work as the porter at a school for three roubles a month. He accepts the job while studying at the school at the same time. He also tells us about his first love for Marosya, the daughter of his teacher. Getting a book from her for the first time is described with great passion. The novel ends with the emphasis on the importance of the October Revolution, the election of the Soviets, the end of the Kurdish feudal lords and sheikhs (Shemo 2009: 127). The novel has all the characteristics of a socialist realist work. The fact that there had not been any significant prosaic output published in Kurdish prior to this novel shows how the first Kurdish novels were shaped by the obvious ideological motives and persuasions of their authors.

Other Kurdish writers from the former Soviet Union, for example Eliye Emdirrehman, Heciye Cindî, Seide Ibo and Egide Khudo, also published their novels in Yerevan. The main themes of these novels are love, Kurdish traditions, the powerful feudal and religious leaders, historical social movements, and the exploitation of the people and the spread of socialist and egalitarian ideas among the Kurds. In these novels, by comparing the conditions of life before and after the establishment of socialism, it is intended to highlight the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Seide Ibo in his *Kurden Revi* (The Migrating Kurds) tells the story of those suffering Kurds who, during the second decade of the 20th century, migrated to the former Soviet Union where the socialist revolution was to put an end to all their sufferings.

The first Kurdish novel published in the Sorani dialect, *Peshmerge* (Partisan), is also an example of a socialist realist work. It is a socialist realist account of the cultural, political and social conditions of Kurdish society in Iranian Kurdistan during the early years of the 1940s.¹⁰ The main theme of the novel is the formation of the first modern Kurdish nationalist organization, Komeley Jiyanewey Kurd (the Society for the Revival of the Kurds), known as JK, which was established in 1942 by a group of educated young men in Mahabad. The struggle of the Kurds for their national rights and the cooperation of the feudal lords with the Iranian government against the Kurdish nationalist movement are the other main themes of the novel.

The protagonists of the novel are two young villagers who become active members of the JK and later on the KDP, Kurdistan Democratic Party, in Mahabad. Pirot, one of the protagonists, at the head of a group of partisans goes back to his village where he finds out that his father has been killed by Qarani Agha, the feudal ruler of the village and a collaborator with the central regime in

¹⁰ *Peshmerge* was written by Rehim Qazi who, at the time of the Democratic Republic of Kurdistan, left Mahabad and went to the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Republic he stayed in the Soviet Union. The novel was first published in Yerevan in 1960. In 1961 it was published in Baghdad. This version had a subtitle: "A story of the struggle of the Kurds against the feudalism and the occupiers at the time of the Kurdistan national Republic." In 1980 it was reprinted again in Iran. In 1997 its Kurmanji version, translated by Ziya Avci, was published in Stockholm. In 2008 a new edition of the book was published by Aras Publishing Centre in Iraqi Kurdistan, in Hawler (Erbil).

Tehran. Pirot's father, Mamend, an old man who had lost all his harvest on a cold winter's day, had been trying to cut wood in order to sell it in the city and get some money to provide food for his family. He had stayed in a cave during the night. The next morning Qarani Agha, his men, and friends from the Iranian army were entertaining themselves hunting rabbits and Mamend was found in the cave. Qarani Agha takes him out of the cave and kills him. It is precisely on that day that Pirot, after three years of absence and working with the revolutionary Kurdish organization, arrives in the village with his partisans. Having heard this, Qarani Agha does not return to the village and two days later he and the head of the Iranian gendarmes flee to Tehran disguised as women in order not to be recognized.

One of the bitter social realities of Kurdish society reflected in the novel is the condition of the women. Mirot, the sister of one of the protagonists who joined the JK, was raped by a feudal lord and later hanged herself. In the novel there are clear references to the transnational features of the Kurdish nationalist movement. There are four Kurdish officers among the Iraqi Kurds who have joined the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad. These officers play a significant role in training the military forces of the KDP. The novel is clearly under the influence of socialist realism.

The rise of the Kurdish realist novel

Because of the political, linguistic and cultural obstacles the novels which were published in the former Soviet Union were rarely available to the Kurds in the other parts of Kurdistan. Some of these novels appeared in the Sorani dialect in Iraqi Kurdistan as late as the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, these novels did not result in providing the Kurdish novel as a genre with an established tradition. The socio-political changes in Iraqi Kurdistan during the second half of the 20th century were influential factors in the emergence of the Kurdish novel in this part of Kurdistan. Despite the fact that the Kurds of Iraq, from the time of the formation of Iraq as a nation-state during the 1920s, were given certain cultural rights, because of various political and ethnic tensions in this country the realization of these rights was quite problematic. In the field of literature it was not easy to publish in Kurdish, and these problems affected the publication of Kurdish novels. *Meseley Wijdan* (The Issue of the Conscience), written in 1927, *Agri Bin Ka* (The Fire under the Hay), written in 1966, *Rega* (The Road), written in 1971, *Jani Gel* (The Agonies of the People), written in 1956, were all published years, if not decades, later. Some of these novels, due to political conditions, avoid clear references to Kurdish names and places. Ibrahim Ehmed dedicates his *Jani Gel* to the Algerian revolutionaries and even, at the time of writing, gives Arabic names to his characters. In *Agri Bin Ka*, Seid Nakam defamiliarizes the place of the novel by replacing Kurdistan with Kashmir. He even adopts Indian names for his characters. Nonetheless, there are clear similarities between the events and characters of the novel and events in Kurdistan and its famous politicians and leaders of the Kurdish nationalist movement during the early decades of the 20th century. The similarities between the life of the main character and that of the author, Ehmed Mukhtar Jaf, in

Meseley Wijdan are so obvious that one can regard it simply as an autobiographical novel (Germiyani 2004: 24), in which the main theme is the depiction of a traditional Kurdish society which faces the outcomes of the First World War – outcomes which challenge the long established traditional values of the society.

Ibrahim Ehmed (1914-2000), an educated literary man and a political activist who was one of the founders of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party, wrote *Jani Gel* (The Agonies of the People) in 1956, but it was published as a book only in 1972. The novel is a story of the pains and agonies of the Kurdish people. In the words of Neriman, one of the characters in the story, the revolution is the pain which the people, in order to be free, need to suffer from, similar to the pain a mother suffers when she gives birth to a child. The names of the characters have mostly a revolutionary and national connotation: Jwamer (brave), Hiwa (hope), Bebak (brave), Aso (horizon), Shaho (a mountain in Kurdistan), Saman (property). There are clear references to the issue of identity with a focus on the “Patriotic Liberation Army” that fights against the enemy for the sake of the Kurds and their liberation.

The protagonist of the novel, after having been in prison for ten years, returns to his city. Ten years before, on the day that Jwamer’s wife was giving birth to their first child, he goes to fetch a midwife. On his way there he comes across a political demonstration in front of the government building where people were shouting radical slogans against the regime. Jwamer was shot and later on arrested and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Through his cousin, Lawe, he was informed that his family (his wife and his son, Hiwa) were safe and in good condition. He corresponded with Lawe regularly and Lawe used to send him money every month. In fact, on the day that he was arrested, his wife died in childbirth. Lawe did not want to tell him the truth in the beginning because he wanted Jwamer to have the strength to finish his imprisonment. Later, it is not easy for him to continue to lie. Once, in response to Jwamer’s insistence, he had sent him a picture of his own son, whom he introduces as Jwamer’s son, Hiwa, a son who was never born. Hearing this bitter truth Jwamer decides to join the “Patriotic Liberation Army”. This novel, contrary to the previous Kurdish novels that had been published in the former Soviet Union, has the typical features of a realist novel, which is, as Watt (1995: 9-34) argues, characterized by the rejection of traditional plots, particularity, temporality, individualism, spatiality, immediacy and closeness of the text.

In the 1980s some more Kurdish novels were published in Iraqi Kurdistan. These novels were mainly about the struggle of the Kurds against their enemies. Hisen Arif’s *Shar* (The City), published in 1986, is the story of a group of intellectuals and political activists against the existing socio-political conditions. Class struggle as the main theme of this novel does not exclude the question of “national identity” as one of the main concerns of the protagonists. During the same decade Kurdish writers living in the diaspora, especially in Sweden, published some novels which were also mainly about the political conditions of the Kurds in Kurdistan. In fact, the Kurdish diaspora, especially in the case of the Kurds from Turkey, has been a determining factor in the development of the

Kurdish novel.¹¹ In the wake of political changes following the Gulf War in 1991 and the fact that the Iraqi Kurds took control of a large part of Iraqi Kurdistan, more and more Kurdish novels were published both in the diaspora and in Iraqi Kurdistan. In the same decade a number of Kurdish novels were also published in Turkey and Iran. The first decade of the 21st century witnessed an unprecedented increase in published Kurdish novels, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey.

In Sherzad Hesén's *Pedeshti Karmamze Kujrawekan* (The Fall of the Killed Gazelles), published in 2001, the story of a poor man, Bayiz, who is in love with a girl, Hemin, and their hard and clandestine life reveals the highly patriarchal features of Kurdish society. Bayiz, because he is poor, is not allowed to marry Hemin. Together with Hemin, he flees from the village to the city, where they live far from the relatives of Hemin. By hunting sparrows and selling them to a restaurant, and by working in the homes of rich people, Bayiz and Hemin manage to sustain their life together. The narration of the story takes place over two days and one night. One evening Bayiz, happy at having done some productive hunting, comes home and waits for Hemin who never returns. It is through Bayiz's monologues during this lonely night that the story of their thirty years of living together is revealed. Bayiz rushes out madly and looks for Hemin without any result. The social structure of Kurdish society and its reactionary traditions regarding the free will of the young men and women to decide their own marriage is the main theme of the novel. In a symbolic and allegorical way the destiny of the loving couples has been analogically depicted alongside the habit of well-to-do men who spend their time hunting gazelles. A romantic and poetic language accompanies the intensive flashbacks in the novel, and the dream-like monologues of Bayiz are the main stylistic features of the novel.

Mihmed Uzun (1953-2007), who lived for twenty-nine years in Sweden, was the most active Kurdish novelist, with a total of seven published novels. Uzun contributed greatly to the development of the Kurdish novel in the diaspora. His main historical novels deal with questions of identity and the revitalization of a denied and almost lost language. By fictionalizing the lives of famous Kurdish literary and political figures, Uzun's novels are perceived by Kurdish readers as steps towards constructing an identity that has been deliberately subjected to elimination. In his *Roni Mina Evine, Tari Mina Mirine* (Light like Love, Dark like Death), published in 1988, Uzun, in an allegorical setting, narrates the story of the Mountain Country (an allusion to Kurdistan) and the Big Country (an allusion to Turkey). The main female character, Kevok (literally the pigeon) from the Mountain Country, and Baz (literally the eagle) from the Big Country symbolize the two sides of the conflict which has been going on in Turkey for decades. The tragic end of the lives of the characters shows the depth of the conflict in which the Big Country aims to eliminate any possible traces of the existence of the Mountain Country. The style of the novel is obviously

¹¹ The Kurdish diaspora has been the subject of many academic studies during the last two decades. Wahlbeck (1999: 179), applying the criteria for considering a certain group of people as a diaspora group, finds all the necessary requirements "for speaking of a Kurdish diaspora". For various academic accounts of the Kurdish diaspora and its peculiarities, see, among other works, Alinia (2004) and Emanuelsson (2005).

influenced by the postmodern novels. Through the novel the reader becomes aware of the hard lives of both characters and their constant search for their identity. Uzun is a typical Kurdish novelist whose long years of living in exile have resulted in a rich authorship influenced by contemporary styles of writing.

The idea of migration from Kurdistan to the West is among the main themes of Kurdish novels during the past two decades.¹² *Seferi Mirduwekan* (The Trip of the Dead), published in 2002, by Karwan Ebdulla, tells the story of a young man, Bawel, who finds himself in a hospital. Here, the reader gets a clear understanding of his background and the events that he faced while he was travelling alongside many other Kurds in a boat in the Eigen Sea, where the boat becomes the victim of strong waves. Bawel and four other passengers save themselves while the rest of the passengers perish. In order to save himself Bawel kills the captain of the boat to get his life jacket. The mentally and physically destroyed Bawel narrates his own story by writing letters to his brother.

Helim Yusiv, a Kurdish novelist from Syrian Kurdistan, has lived in Germany since the early 1990s. He has published three novels. In his first novel, *Subarto*, published in 1999, he provides readers with a historical account of being a Kurd in Syria. In his second novel, *Tirsa be Diran* (The Toothless Fear), published in 2006, a more or less similar theme is followed up. The main idea in this novel is the formation of a kind of fear that permeates the whole existence of the Kurds in Syria. The chief protagonists are well educated young Kurds who, following the uprising of March 2004 in the Kurdish city of Qamishlu, have left Syria to seek asylum in a Western country. It is not accidental that the centrality of this issue in Syria motivates one of the characters in the novel to write a book on the history of fear. The constant contradiction between knowing yourself as a Kurd and the fact that you have to present yourself publicly with another identity, causes psychological problems for the protagonist, Musa, who finally, after fleeing from Syria and living in Germany for a while, finds himself in London. In London, suffering from his paranoia and hallucinations, he attacks a man who he thinks must be Sykes.¹³ Qado, the second protagonist of the novel, has a similar destiny. After living for some years in Germany and not being granted asylum he ends up lost. Yusiv's novels are good examples of a polyphonic text. By means of various literary devices there is a complicated interaction between the characters and the different applied points of view.

Hesene Mete, a Kurdish author from Turkish Kurdistan living in Sweden, deals with the encounter of modernity and tradition in his novels. In *Labirenta Cinan* (The Labyrinth of Evils), published in 2000, he depicts the encounter of an educated Kurdish man, Kevanok, from the city with the life in a village where he is employed as a teacher. Neither the city nor the village has a name. Instead, they are referred to as X and E. The villagers treat the teacher as a symbol of change and modernity. However, the events of the novel show that it is the

¹² The return of Kurdish refugees from the West to Kurdistan has also been the theme of some Kurdish novels, e.g. Sherzad Hesên's *Temi Ser Xerend* (The Fog on the Canyon), published in 2003, Jebar Jemal Gherib's *Penjemin Kiteb* (The Fifth Book), published in 2009, and Bekhtiyar Ali's *Shari Mosiqare Spiyekan* (The City of the White Musicians), published in 2005.

¹³ Sykes was the British Foreign Secretary who, together with the French Foreign Secretary, Picot, in 1916 planned the division of the Ottoman Empire among the allied forces of World War I.

teacher who, by adopting the traditions and the superstitious world of the villagers, becomes the subject of the change. In the end, after teaching for three years, Kevanok stops teaching and becomes insane. In *Gotinen Gunabkar* (The Sinful Talks), published in 2005, Mete narrates the story of his main character, Behram, who is a theology student. During a journey full of incidents and imaginary events, Behram falls in love with Nagina, the daughter of Lulu Khan, who lives a mysterious life in a remote village. Behram, seeking for truth, becomes skeptical about his earlier beliefs and in a spiritual, mythical, and surreal journey, experiences a Manichean battle between good and evil and the question of original sin.

Tragic events since the establishment of the Iraqi state and the story of various ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, with a focus on the Kurds, are the main themes of Ismail Mihemmed Emin's novel, *Kewtne Xwarewey Gurgek* (The Fall of a Wolf). A series of interwoven stories in this novel serve as the main theme in which the formation of the Iraqi state and decades of its history up to the 1990s have been closely followed through the internal conflicts of two tribes and their shifting relations with the government and its opposition groups. The world of this novel is quite dark and a deep pessimism dominates the lives of greedy tribal leaders and their cruel attitudes towards each other and their opportunistic attitudes towards the existing powers in the society.

Serhed Tofiq Meruf in *Tewni Mejuwe Sutaweke* (The Web of the Burned History), published in 2004, simply narrates the lives of his family members alongside his other relatives who have become the victims of Anfal. In fact Anfal has become a central theme in many novels published since the Kurdish uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991. As examples the following novels can be listed: *Behari Resh* (The Black Spring) in 1998 by Ehmed Mihemmed Ismayil, *Gorstani Lim* (The Cemetery of Dust) and *Elebeste* by Hesên Jaf in 2001 and 1999, *Kochi Sur* (The Red Migration) by Kerim Arif in 1999 and *Evin Awi Zhiyane* (Love is the Water of Life) by Mehabad Qeredaghi in 2004.¹⁴ In *Mosiqay Mergi Nawexte* (The Music of an Untimely Death), published in 1999, Selah Jelal tells the story of the death of the characters through a combination of fantasy and reality. Political conditions and the oppression of the Kurds which results in hangings, murders and the displacement of people, provide the narration with an existential approach to death as a part of being.

Mihemmed Mukri's novels from the 1980s and 1990s – *Tole* (Revenge), *Segwer* (Barking of the Dogs), *Heres* (Defeat) and *Ejdiha* (The Dragon) – narrate the struggle of the Kurds against the Iraqi regimes. In Hekim Kakeweys' *Tewni Jaljaluke* (The Spider's Web), we see the effects and consequences of the defeat of the Kurdish nationalist movement in 1975 in Iraqi Kurdistan. The migration from the villages to the cities, due to socio-political reasons, is among the themes that have been elaborated by some of Kurdish novelists. For instance, Teha

¹⁴ A main change in the Kurdish novel during the last two decades is the shift from a dominantly male authorship to a female one. While until the threshold of the 21st century there were only a few Kurdish novels by women novelists published, during recent years more Kurdish women have published their novels, albeit not necessarily distinguishable from the novels written by men as far as their style and content are concerned. For more information about Kurdish women novelists see Ahmadzadeh (2008).

Ehmed Resul's novel, *Rebendan* (Closed Roads) is a symbolic narration of the destiny of some villagers who, because of the oppressive situation in the villages, migrate to a city where they experience hard times in the hope of returning to their village. In Enwer Mihemmed Tahir's *Geryan le babi berze* (Looking for the Lost Father), published in 2001, which is a historical novel, we simply see the wanderings of the main characters in search of a Kurdish liberator, who will come and liberate the Kurds by establishing a Kurdish state for them. In this novel the pre-modern and modern history of the Kurds and their tragic destiny are mainly narrated by the main character, Husen, who is looking for his lost father. In fact, by referring to historical events at the time of the Ottoman Empire and later on its decline and the arrival of colonialism, the novel symbolically reconstructs the history of the Kurds, their lack of unity and the absence of "the King of the Kurds" whose return is the only means for the formation of a Kurdish state.

Kurdish novelists from Iranian Kurdistan have also been contributing to the flourishing of the Kurdish novel during the last two decades.¹⁵ Among the most influential Kurdish novelists from Iranian Kurdistan one can name Ata Nehayi who has published three novels up to now, in which the question of identity has been clearly highlighted. In these novels the main protagonists do not feel as if they belong to a specific country. The vague idea of country or "homeland" causes a crisis of identity in the characters' perception of themselves. Las, the main character in Nehayi's first novel, *Guli Shoran* (Shoran Flower), published in 1998, having fought for his country, ends up in exile and when he returns home after fifteen years, nobody, not even his mother, welcomes him back. He has no option other than death. Mehraban, the protagonist of Nehayi's second novel, *Balindekani Dem Ba* (The Birds in the Wind), published in 2002, having returned from exile, finds his paternal home ruined, and tries to motivate his existence by digging up the past and writing down the unwritten stories of his countrymen. Stylistically this novel provides the reader with a highly developed polyphonic text with significant traces of a well structured metanovel. Helala, the female protagonist of Nehayi's third novel, *Grewi Bexti Helale* (Betting on Helale's Fortune), published in 2007, distancing herself from her traditional culture, is murdered by her husband who acts under the pretence of preserving his honour and culture in exile. The protagonists of Nehayi's novels do not belong anywhere. They do not feel at home either in their "homeland" or in "exile".¹⁶

Magic realism, surrealism, postmodernism, and the "New Novel"

Since the late 1990s, the Kurdish novel has been experiencing a radical development. During these years a radical change has been occurring both in the

¹⁵ For a detailed account of the Kurdish novel in Iranian Kurdistan see Ahmadzadeh (2005).

¹⁶ In another article I have discussed the conflicting identities in Nehayi's novels. See Ahmadzadeh (2009).

form and in the content of the Kurdish novel. There are two main reasons behind these changes. Following the takeover of Iraqi Kurdistan by the two main Kurdish political parties, namely, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, in 1991, the Kurds have been experiencing a more or less autonomous self rule. Kurdish self-rule results in changes to the themes chosen for Kurdish novels. If earlier the protagonists of the Kurdish novels in the first instance were facing the tyrant regimes which governed the Kurds, now the Kurds' own administration was the subject of confrontation for them. However, due to the fragmented features of the Kurdish question and Kurdish society, this situation was limited to Iraqi Kurdistan. Further, due to their long-standing lives in exile, the Kurdish novelists of the diaspora faced the question of "homeland" and their origins with a more nostalgic and critical approach.¹⁷ At the same time, the occasional return of some of the diaspora Kurds to their "homeland" created a new context for the protagonists of the Kurdish novel.

Since the early 1990s Bextiyar Ali has been considered one of the most prominent writers among the Kurdish reading public both in Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora. He has published six novels,¹⁸ and copies of his recent novels have been published in their tens of thousands in Kurdistan. One of the publishers of his novels in Kurdistan, namely Ranj, has paid him an advanced percentage of the indicated price of his published novels, something without precedent in Kurdistan.¹⁹ It is the first time that a Kurdish novelist has officially been paid for his writings. By means of various social, historical and political references in Bekhtiyar Ali's magical realist novels, one can easily appreciate that the setting of his works is linked to the reality of Kurdistan. Bekhtiyar Ali's novels take place in a world that is regarded by the readers as a real one. The fact that there are elements in these novels that transcend natural laws, without surprising the readers and making them lose their trust in the otherwise realistic aspects of the novels, makes his novels typical examples of magical realism.

In most of Ali's novels there are several ontological questions, for example the nature of existence, and the relationship between life and death, discussed by the characters. These ontological insertions, though not necessarily fitting the cultural and intellectual capacity of the characters, can be seen as one of the typical features of magical realist texts. They function as a means of scrutinizing reality. Faris and Zamora (1995: 3) argue that "[i]n magical realist texts ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize

¹⁷ The concept of "homeland" has a crucial place in most Kurdish novels. While some of the characters are aware of not having an officially and juridico-politically recognized "homeland", due to the lack of a Kurdish state, they refer to their country of origin as a "homeland", albeit without specifying its actual location and boundaries.

¹⁸ For a detailed list of Bakhtiyar Ali's works see his website: <http://www.bakhtiyar-ali.com>. The website also contains many articles that are published about his works.

¹⁹ In a report published in the BBC's website it has been noted that "Ali has been paid \$25,000 by a publisher in the Kurdish region of Iraq who has printed 10,000 copies of *Ghezelnus* and the *Gardens of Imagination*". See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7535854.stm, accessed 18 February 2009. In an interview with Khebat, Ali talks about his *Ghezelnus u Baghekani Kheyal* and says that it is published in 10,000 copies. See <http://www.xebat.net/article.php?id=13326>, accessed 23 August 2009.

accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation.” As far as the balance between natural and supernatural events in Ali’s novels is considered, it is verisimilitude that dominates their world. A close reading of Bekhtiyar Ali’s novels shows that the real and the magical coexist in their worlds side by side, and the magical elements effectively contribute to highlighting the verisimilitude and the implausibility.

Through a clear mixture of verisimilitude and elements of the fantastic, Ali’s novels contribute to the familiarization of the incredible events and realities in Kurdish society. In fact, the modern history of the Kurds is full of paradoxes, and the impossible events depicted in Ali’s novels can be understood through what Lodge (1992: 175) states: “[T]he impossible event is a kind of metaphor for the extreme paradoxes of modern history.” Bekhtiyar Ali, as a writer, who has experienced the hardships of the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and as an observer of the plight of the Kurds during the cruelty of Saddam Hussein’s brutal Anfal campaigns, has justified reasons to use magic realism as a literary mode for his authorship. Referring to writers such as Marquez, Gunter Grass, Salman Rushdie and Milan Kundera as magic realist novelists, Lodge (1992: 114) argues that they “have lived through great historical convulsions and wrenching personal upheavals, which they feel cannot be adequately represented in a discourse of undisturbed realism”. The unprecedented interest shown by Kurdish readers in Bekhtiyar Ali’s novels demonstrates how a discourse of disturbed realism can be successful in highlighting the realities of a suppressed people.

Of the distinguishing features of Ali’s novels one can identify their polyphonic structure. In the opening pages of *Ghezelnus u Baghekani Kheyal* (the Lyrist and the Gardens of Fantasy), published in 2008, the reader is informed by the narrator about the way the book is written through: 1) the report of an agent about three men who work in a remote mountain village; 2) reports that have been given to a veteran guerrilla, Shibir, who has been paralysed during years of fighting against the enemy; and 3) the notes of one of the characters who is the master mind behind the government. The narrator has arranged the reports and the notes, and the result is this novel; the time, purpose, location and motives of the narration have all been indicated by the narrator.

In *Shari Mosiqare Spiyekan* (The City of the White Musicians), published in 2005, the author, with a slight change in the form of his own name, tells us that he has agreed with one of the characters to share the narration of the novel. The protagonist, Jeladet, will report his part of the narration to the author, Sherefyar, who has the right to interfere in reconstructing it. Here we see a circular time-frame in which the narrators go back and forth to narrate the events outside a linear perception of time. The main characters of the *Dwahemin Henari Dunya* (The Last Pomegranate of the World), published in 2002, take part in narrating their own version of events throughout the novel. Long paragraphs (sometimes a paragraph runs to more than ten pages), no mentioned or specified time and place, a mixture of points of view, the presence of amplification, and strong

rhetorical and passionate passages, are the typical stylistic features of Ali's novels.²⁰

Jebar Jemal Gherib with his four published novels has contributed significantly to the development of the Kurdish novel. In his novels we see the influence of the French new novel and novelists such as Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet who "have distanced themselves from what they see as a comforting fictional world which allows us to 'label' characters and their appearance, and where objects or landscapes become controllable because they are always endowed with a human significance" (Finch 1997: 44). Gherib, being influenced by the "nouveau roman", the new novel, challenges "the continuing hegemony of classic 'Balzacian' realism" (Gratton 1997: 243). There are no clear plots in his novels. Instead of human characters there are mainly animals, objects and trees, which through the novelist's descriptions reveal the fantasy world of the novels. The few human characters are mainly those who play a mythical and symbolic role in the novel. The highly poetic and descriptive language used in his novels is far from the language used in everyday life. The existential questions posed by sexual deprivations and desires form the main concern of the narrator.

In his *Dinya le Kitebekda* (The World in a Book), published in 2002, Gherib creates a fantastic world full of ideas based on combining myths, legends, dreams, reality and ideas. The narrator of the novel aims to get hold of a heavy dusty book which is located in a mosque, a book that symbolizes the whole world. By aiming to make the content of the book available to the people, the narrator wants to let them become aware of the secrets of their city and restoring it. He wants to make a Kurdish miracle out of this book and showing it to the world. Alongside the fantasies there are clear references to the suppression of the Kurds, Anfal and the sad story of girls who are killed because they express their love. By means of intensive monologues and flashbacks, the narrator, as well as being the main character of the novel, finds himself in regular dialogue with all the objects around him, e.g. a tree, a stone, a spring, or a book.

In *Leser Baran Denuşim* (I write in the Rain), published in 2006, the main protagonist is looking for his father without success. His mother is having relations with many men. The protagonist, who frequently masturbates, feeling himself to be the loneliest boy in the world, is even doubtful about himself and thinks that he is only a photograph. Pessimism dominates the lives and memories of the characters. In fact, no change occurs in their lives. References to "country" or "homeland" are quite dark and pessimistic: "A wrong country", "a bitter country", "an unmapped city". In the words of Surinjan the female and gipsy character of the novel, "the soil of this country can only comfort one who is dead". Abdulla Seraj in *Kawlash* (Cottage), published in 1997, uses the technique of the metanovel in which the author, in an ongoing discussion with the reader, informs him/her of the techniques used in the process of writing the novel. Despite this radical change in style, Seraj like most of his predecessors highlights

²⁰ Amplification is a way of saying something and repeating it in a different way: sentences with the same beginning, but with different endings (Mullan 2006: 234). In another article I have discussed the magic realist features of Ali's novels in detail. See Ahmadzadeh (2010).

the idea of Kurdistan and explicitly talks about the country, its divided geography and his love for it.

In Firat Ceweri's *Payiza Dereng* (The Late Autumn), published in 2005, Ferda, the main character in the novel, decides to go back to his country after 28 years living in Sweden. Because of his dialogue with his son we learn about the hard years of exile and his longing for his country. Through the letters he sends to his friend we learn more about the problems he faces after his return to his homeland. Ferda, who used to complain about life in exile, now finds himself alone and a stranger even in his own country. Here in his "homeland", the whereabouts of which is never explicitly mentioned, but one can easily understand from the descriptions that it is Kurdistan in Turkey, he finds out that two of his childhood friends have each joined different sides of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish guerrilla movement. After a while of living in his "homeland" he develops an acquaintance with a Kurdish woman whose husband, a guerrilla, has been killed by the Turkish army, and he is subsequently pursued by the security forces. The author of the novel, Firat Cewery, appears in the novel and intends to go to visit Ferda to interview him about his return. However, later on, this appointment is cancelled as Ferda mysteriously disappears, and instead the author decides to write about his disappearance.

In his second novel, *Eze Yeke Bikuji* (I Shall Kill Somebody), published in 2008, Ceweri presents another story of life in exile and the return home after many years. This novel is clearly under the influence of postmodern novels. There are certain traces of surrealist elements in the novel, especially in Temo's conversations, dreams and behaviour. The fact that we see Salvador Dali's "Melting Clock" on the wall of Temo's room is an indication of the surrealist mode of the novel. The three main characters all suffer from various pains due to their individual problems. Temo, a forty-two-year-old man, has spent 15 years of his life in prison for defending the rights of the Kurds. After being released from prison, he suffers from constant nightmares and consequently decides to kill somebody. Diana, a young Kurdish girl who joined the Kurdish guerrillas, was arrested following a fight against the Turkish soldiers and village guards, who then raped her and later on made her work as a prostitute. On one occasion Diana meets Temo who after making friends with her, stabs her. The third character, the writer, who has been living in Stockholm for many years and used to be Temo's friend in his childhood, returns home to take part in a conference on Kurdish literature. Accidentally Temo is killed by the car that is taking the writer to the conference hall. These events give a tragic tone to the narration of the novel which is shaped around Temo's monologues, Diana's narration of her life to the writer, and the writer's first-person narrative.

Sherzad Hesen's *Temî Sar Kharand* (The Fog on the Canyon), published in 2003, is the story of a Kurdish refugee who has been living in Europe for a long time and now comes back to his village. There is a nostalgic approach towards the past and Ferhad, the protagonist, visits different places in his village recalling memories from his childhood. His relationship with one of his classmates, Shirin, whom he is very fond of, and his relationship with his goat play a major part in the story. Events in school, and in the family, and the role of his grandmother who used to tell him stories, are precisely described. In one story Ferhad became

sick as a child. It was said that he would be cured by going to a mountainous area. Ferhad, in his grandmother's arms, listens to her stories as they travel on horseback to the mountain. As they get closer to the mountain, Ferhad notices that his grandmother is becoming more and more silent and he feels that there is an increase in weight. It seems that she is dying. The whole novel is a dream-like remembrance of the past, and this has made it a surrealist work. As Ferhad passes the road to his village, he sees dead horses along the side of the road and dead fish in the rivers. There are references to animosity among cousins, to the father's power and the mother's weakness, and to the cruelty of the teachers at the school. Ferhad does not know whether the present is a dream and a fantasy or whether or not the past was a dream. He asks if the whole of his story is his own dream full of pleasant and unpleasant things, or if it is a false fantasy that has been created by the fact that he has been away from his people and land for many years.

Selah Umer in *Wilatiy Tarmayi* (The Land of the Spectres), published in 1998, tells the story of an imprisoned man who imagines that he escapes from prison and lives with nature and the birds. In his imagination he sometimes finds himself as a pious man very close to God. The development of time and changes in the characters in this novel reveal a clear influence of the French new novel on the author. As Ermarth (1998: 1078) points out, in Alain Robbe-Grillet's works which are representative of the French new novel, we do not see the passing of time, or even its existence. If there are any characters in such works, they do not develop at all. In *Tarikistani Lim* (The Darkness of the Desert), published in 1997, Umer tells the story of a man who has been obliged to live for many years in the desert. When he comes back from the darkness of the desert to his city, nobody recognizes him and nobody gives him any shelter. The novel reminds the reader of those displaced Kurds who were taken to the deserts of southern Iraq by Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s. There are certain episodes in the novel that can be categorized as magic ones. For instance, in one story, the owner of a tea house sees the main character in the novel flying on a prayer mat over a mosque, which is a sign of being a pious man. The events of the novel, as with the previous novel, are narrated from a mixture of different viewpoints. In his third novel, *Metamorfofos* (Metamorphosis), published in 2001, Umer shows that he is completely influenced by the French new novel. In this novel we see how the different characters change their roles and the bloody setting of the story shifts from the earth to the sky and even to the moon. Various animals take part in the process of the story and the masked characters do not avoid committing crimes against the main female character, Firishte (literally the angel).

Conclusion

Though the Kurdish novel has been significantly shaped by the internal socio-political changes in Kurdish societies and the Kurdish diaspora, "the very process of global modernisation" (Moses 1995: xii) has been a determining factor in influencing its stylistic and literary mode. The Kurdish novel, being the product of social and cultural changes, in its turn influences its socio-political context. As Walder (2001: v) argues, "every literary work inevitably draws from, as it also influences its social environment". The early Kurdish novels, especially the novels

from the former Soviet Union, were written in accordance with socialist realist conventions. The emergence of the Kurdish novel in the former Soviet Union, where there was no tradition of writing in Kurdish, shows how extra-linguistic and extra-literary factors, namely the relative freedom of the Kurds in expressing themselves and the existence of an official patron, can contribute to the production of literary works. Until the early 1990s, the dominant style and literary mode in the Kurdish novel, except for the novels that were written by the Soviet Kurdish authors, was realism. The early Kurdish novels are dominated by the omniscient point of view, but in recent Kurdish novels there are successful examples of polyphonic narrations. As far as the language of these novels is concerned there are clear endeavours to adopt the language that is used by the people. This is again a main feature of the “realist style”, which is characterized by refraining from rhetorical ornamentation and replacing it with everyday language and the standards of conversational speech (Anikst 1978: 526). Plain prose is a common feature of realist novels. This kind of prose “restricts itself almost entirely to a descriptive and denotative use of language” (Watt 1995: 29). While the titles of the early Kurdish novels were mainly straightforward ones such as *Peshmerge* (The Partisan), *Shivane Kurmanja* (The Kurdish Shepherd) and *Jani Gel* (The Agonies of the People), the recent titles are very abstract, e.g. *Le Ser Baran Denusim* (I Write in the Rain) and *Ghezelnus u Baghekani Kheyal* (the Lyrical and the Gardens of Fantasy).

During the 1990s and later on, new literary styles and modes, for example magic realism, the metanovel, surrealism, stream of consciousness, and fantastic novels, enter the domain of Kurdish novel writing. With the arrival of these techniques the Kurdish novel achieves a more complicated form in representing more complicated and “round” characters instead of the simple and “flat” characters.²¹ By applying stream of consciousness, for instance, Kurdish novels took a step towards becoming a kind of narrative which is “supposed to follow not just the unvoiced thoughts of a character [...], but the leaps of association that connect those thoughts” (Mullan 2006: 247). Contrary to the early Kurdish novels in which the protagonists had a decisive and straightforward character, the protagonists of recent Kurdish novels stress a significant degree of ambivalence in the way they face the world around them. While in the early Kurdish novels the influence of Arabic, Russian, Turkish, and Persian is quite visible through the presence of a high number of loan words, the recent Kurdish novels adopt a more purified Kurdish language which attempts to avoid using loan words. While in the early Kurdish novels, there is a clear existence of “collocation”, i.e. “the habitual expected co-occurrence of words” (Barry 2002: 217), in the recent Kurdish novels there are, due to the use of a more poetic language, unexpected breaks in collocation. Recent Kurdish novels have also achieved a significant cohesion by applying more pronominalization compared with earlier works. However, the Kurdish novel, regardless of its form and techniques, is generally characterized by responses to political and social issues. Hence, there is no

²¹ Forester (1955: 135-136) divides the characters of the novel into “flat”, which is “constructed round a single idea or quality”, and “round”, “when there is more than one factor in them”.

Kurdish detective novel, no science fiction, and no pulp fiction. Similarly one cannot find any satirical novel among the Kurdish novels.²²

The arrival of modernism and postmodernism in the field of the Kurdish novel does not mean that there are no longer any Kurdish realist novels. In fact, nowadays the coexistence of different novelistic styles and schools is a global phenomenon. Bradford (2007: 78) rightly argues that

[t]he battle between realism and modernism/postmodernism is now, in the early twenty-first century, effectively over. Neither side is victorious but the middle ground of fiction is shared by hybridized versions of both.

Despite all stylistic changes, the dominant theme of the Kurdish novel is still affiliated with the question of identity and Kurdish politics. The dominant political aspect of the Kurdish novel is further evidence in support of Fetterley's argument that "[l]iterature is political" (Fetterley 1978: xi). While in the early Kurdish novels the protagonists mostly find themselves in a battle against the non-Kurdish "others", in some of the recent Kurdish novels the protagonists face Kurdish authorities who hinder their development and the fulfillment of their ideals. The political feature of the Kurdish novel also supports Jameson's idea, which suggests that "[a]ll third-world texts [particularly the novel] are to be read as" "*national allegories*" (Jameson 1986: 69).

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²² The only exception is a novel by Kemal Sedi who published his *Seid Zeboki Lay Xoman* (our own Seid Zebok) in 1997. This novel is clearly influenced by the famous Turkish satirist Aziz Nesin.

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