The Case for Kurdish Cinema

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Abstract

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The Case for Kurdish Cinema

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Kurdish cinema represents a vital transnational and global art form that bridges the Kurdish community, uniting a stateless people through cultural expression. This dissertation explores common narrative threads of Kurdish cinema relating to identity, statelessness, trauma, and women's issues, despite the differences between Kurds of various nationalities in both the ancestral Kurdistan region and the diaspora. The first chapter examines how these artworks confront issues of identity, exile, and homeland. The second interrogates depictions of individual and collective trauma in Kurdish cinema, especially generational trauma resulting from racism, conflict, and displacement. Chapter 3 analyzes Kurdish cinema from a comparative perspective through the lens of Indigenous studies, examining how Kurdish cinema confronts settler-colonial oppression. The fourth and final chapter addresses the portrayal of Kurdish women's issues in Kurdish cinema, contrasting how male and female directors represent these issues and emphasizing the vital contributions of Kurdish women filmmakers especially with regard to telling Kurdish women's stories. Ultimately this work positions Kurdish cinema as a powerful artistic movement spanning national and international boundaries driven by the efforts of a distinct filmmaking community united in the desire to represent Kurdish identity and culture through cinematic storytelling

Dedication

To my parents, Jim and Nancy Story, and to Gabriel. I couldn't have done it without you.

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Introduction: The Case for Kurdish Cinema

The Kurds are divided among several countries in the territory that has been their historical homeland and are the world's largest stateless nation. The countries that encompass the Kurds' ancestral homeland include parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia ("Kurd"). The Kurds have faced acts of prejudice, racism, and genocide in their home territory but have continued to work to establish themselves as a distinct group in the region and to push for their own state (McDowall 1,2). The Kurdish struggle for recognition and national identity is reflected in numerous Kurdish art forms intended for international consumption, including visual art, literature, and particularly film.

For the purposes of this dissertation, Kurdishness is a self-defined category the filmmakers have claimed for themselves. While the films discussed in this dissertation do not express nationalism overtly, many of them convey frustration with national borders that inhibit movement by Kurds across what they view as Kurdish territory. A number of the films exhibit this sense of Kurdish nationalism that views the Kurds as a single people whether they have a separate state or not.

Anderson describes nations as "imagined communities" stating that even though most members of a nation will never meet, they still see themselves as a linked community (6,7). Moreover, recent conceptions of the diaspora have led to the positing of an "imagined diaspora" a community similar to what Anderson describes in which a large group of people who are mostly strangers share a community identity (Mahmod 34). However, this dissertation does not propose to delve into the complexities of the origins

and nuances of Kurdish nationalism but is rather interested in examining common thematic elements of Kurdish cinema, a category that is self-defined by Kurdish filmmakers.[1]

While this dissertation looks at Kurdish cinema as a trans-global and transnational cinema, the author is aware that there are many significant differences between subcategories of people who identify themselves as Kurdish. Different countries create different obstacles to Kurdishness, whether linguistic or cultural. Kurds' opinions on national unity vary widely, with some Kurds interested in pursuing a Kurdish state while others are more interested in protecting Kurdish identity within the established states encompassing the Kurdish ancestral homeland. Different dialects of Kurdish are not always mutually intelligible (Rubin, M. 6,7). The two main dialects are Sorani and Kurmanji. Sorani is written in Arabic script while Kurmanji is written using a modified Roman alphabet. These dialects have dialects within them. Additional dialects include Zaza and Gorani. Dialects are associated with specific regions (Rubin, M. 6,7) Moreover, not all Kurds can speak and/or Kurdish. Due to language restrictions in Turkey many Turkish Kurds do not speak Kurdish. Kurdish-medium education is forbidden in Iran which limits Iranian Kurds' abilities in the language. Additionally, diaspora Kurds may

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[1] For more nuanced discussions on Kurdish national identity see "Kurdistan Rising?" by M. Rubin, (especially Chapter 1: Who are the Kurds?), "New Online Communities and New Identity Making: The Curious Case of the Kurdish Diaspora." (Mahmod), McDowall's *A Modern History of the Kurds* (especially the Introduction), and *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Ed. Vali).

not have learned Kurdish or may have limited abilities in the language, something that is shown in numerous films explored in this dissertation. Larger Kurdish populations live in geographical locations that are not considered part of the Kurdish homeland, such as Istanbul. Reliable data on the exact Kurdish population is difficult to collect (Sirkeci 149). However, it is estimated that the largest Kurdish population in Turkey (and in the world) is currently in Istanbul (Rubin, M. 8 and "Kurds in Turkey"). However, there is some agreement on what constitutes Kurdishness or no sense of Kurdish unity would exist (Rubin, M.).

However, strong arguments have been made for Kurdish cinema as a global or international cinema that still holds elements of a national cinema. Çiçek reflects this by describing Kurdish cinema as "an international cinema" drawing attention to the fact that Kurdish films come from the nations where the Kurds' ancestral lands are located as well as the diaspora (5). However, the cinema of a self-defined stateless nation is also still a form of national cinema, described by Koçer as "a national cinema in a transnational space" (473). Kurdish cinema is of a transnational and global nature, reflecting the "imagined community" of the Kurds as a stateless nation. Additionally, the Kurdish filmmaking community has its own sense of community and shared identity, with filmmakers, actors, and crews coming together to create Kurdish films across national borders.

Kurdish filmmakers face substantial barriers to bringing their visions to the screen, with women filmmakers facing additional barriers and being greatly underrepresented as directors. Conditions in the Kurdistan region are often not amenable

to filmmaking. During interviews and prior recorded statements submitted by directors for the London Kurdish Film Festival 2020, the topic of the many barriers Kurdish directors face in creating films was raised again and again. Even the production and distribution of short films present great challenges, including but not limited to the costs of production and submitting to festivals, logistics, and casting. Feature films present similar challenges but to a greater degree, which explains the limited number of feature films from Kurdish directors. The most common issue raised by directors was that of finances, largely in terms of budgets for creating films, but one director also pointed out that even the process of entering the festivals was costly. Some filmmakers fund their own projects through other jobs. Others obtain backing from outside sources but often find those funds do not provide a generous budget. Filmmakers also expressed difficulties in finding locations. In addition, Kurdish films are not always a popular choice for viewing in Kurdistan, as many Kurds prefer films with a more escapist quality (Krastev). Despite these obstacles, Kurdish filmmakers persevere, and the number of Kurdish films continues to grow.

Since 2001, when the London Kurdish Film Festival (“About Us”) began, Kurdish filmmakers have been gathering regularly to showcase their films at Kurdish film festivals. Some of these festivals have changed over time, altering their programming or in other cases disappearing altogether to be replaced by other festivals. For example, the New York Kurdish Film Festival began in 2017 and is held annually for three days in the fall (“New York Kurdish Film Festival”). Most of these festivals do not occur on an annual basis. As of 2023, the London Kurdish Film Festival has completed

13 festivals (“Festival Booklet”). The Kurdish Film Festival Berlin has been ongoing since 2002 and will hold its 13th festival in October 2023 (“Kurdiches Filmfestival Berlin”*)*. The Duhok International Film Festival, while billed as an international film festival, gives pride of place to Kurdish films, situated as it is in the heart of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (“Duhok International Film Festival"). Additionally, the Rojava International Film Festival was founded in 2016 by Komîna Fîlm a Rojava/The Rojava Film Commune (Gilbert). This festival is particularly significant as it was developed in concert with a film school in Rojava and supports local Kurdish filmmakers and works to create transnational connections (Komîna Fîlm a Rojava). Kurdish films have also begun to be included at Turkish film festivals, something that would have been unthinkable not long ago. For example, one quarter of the films screened at the 31st Istanbul Film Festival were Kurdish (Santé). Kurdish film is growing globally, and Kurdish films are highlights of Kurdish cultural festivals and compete globally in film festivals around the world.

While many of the Kurdish film festivals highlight a few feature films by prominent directors, the bulk of the films shown are short films, typically created by emerging filmmakers. This dissertation is intended to highlight and examine the breadth of Kurdish films, including features by prestigious, world-renowned directors such as Bahman Ghobadi; features by directors who are less well-known outside of Kurdish cinema, but have produced multiple works, such as Jano Rosebiani and Shawkat Amin Korki; and features by directors who may have only had the opportunity to produce a single film, such as Miraz Bezar. Short films will also be examined, which will allow for

the inclusion of more works directed by women who are less represented as feature film directors and remain a minority even as directors of short films. Additionally, short film analysis will provide an opportunity to showcase some of the newest works by Kurdish filmmakers, thus adding breadth and depth to the discussion of Kurdish film.

The most prominent Kurdish film festivals target a broad audience and require submissions to be available with subtitles in at least one non-Kurdish language, typically English. For example, the London Kurdish Film Festival requires submissions to be subtitled in English ("London Kurdish Film Festival"). Additionally, the Berlin Kurdish Film Festival, the Duhok International Film Festival, and the Amsterdam Kurdish Film Festival all require English subtitles for submissions, which suggests that they are targeting an international audience ("13th Kurdish Film Festival Berlin 2023"; "AKFF Program"; "Duhok International Film Festival Rules & Regulations"). Thus, many Kurdish films are available to a broad audience, including a broader Kurdish audience since not all Kurds speak Kurdish, as well as a broad English-speaking audience. By contrast, few works of Kurdish literature are available in European languages and because Kurdish dialects are not always mutually intelligible, there are more barriers to access Kurdish literature both for Kurds and non-Kurds alike ("Kurdish Language"). Kurdish films traveling the international film festival circuit are more available to a broader audience and they are usually intended for one. Many Kurdish films are unavailable for viewing outside of film festivals and the majority of these festivals take place in Europe and the U.S., which means the films need to appeal to a broad audience.

This dissertation examines Kurdish cinema through a narrative and theoretical analysis, with each chapter focusing on a different theoretical framework. Kurdish films tend to share common themes related to the desire for nationalism, freedom to claim Kurdish identity (which has historically been suppressed), trauma relating to mass atrocities perpetrated against the Kurds as a group, and violence and racism against Kurdish individuals. The chapters of the dissertation are divided thematically, examining the following issues with regard to Kurdish film: nationalism, identity, trauma, comparative Indigenous studies, and the way Kurdish women are depicted in Kurdish films and how they take active roles as filmmakers. This dissertation argues for the importance of examining Kurdish cinema, rather than fragmented across different states created by European colonial powers. While distinctions are made according to the different regions of Kurdistan in which the films are set, this dissertation firmly asserts that these films are Kurdish rather than Iraqi, Turkish, or Iranian. The vital importance of identifying Kurdish films as a category is described by filmmaker Jano Rosebiani (two of whose films will be analyzed in this dissertation) in the following statement:

> When the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA) selected “One Candle, Two Candles” as a runner for the Golden Globe Award [in 2015], they listed it as an Iraqi film. I struggled to have that changed to a ‘Kurdistan selection’ and after considerable back and forth they agreed to the change ("Kurdish Cinema Part IV: Diaspora in film").

Rosebiani is not alone in his deliberate choice to classify Kurdish cinema as a category. Mustafa Gündoğdu writes of the London Kurdish Film Festival:

> ...the LKFF is not a festival organised merely to show films made by or about the Kurds; from the beginning of the discussions initiated by the founders of the LKFF, there was consensus that the festival should be a response to cultural domination. The basis of this focus was the realisation that the struggle for Kurdish films to attain their own identity is part of the Kurds' more general struggle for recognition. (192)

It is significant that Kurds choose to represent their films as distinctly Kurdish. *Memories on Stone* (Shawkat Amin Korki)), a film about the making of a Kurdish film set in Iraqi Kurdistan, opens with a group of Kurdish men watching the film *Yol*, a Kurdish film originating in Turkey. When the projectionist depicted in *Memories on Stone* introduces *Yol*, he does not call it a Turkish film or even a Kurdish film from Turkey. He simply calls it a Kurdish film, emphasizing the transnational nature of Kurdish filmmaking. This dissertation explores Kurdish films through a similar transnational lens, emphasizing the shared themes of Kurdish cinema across borders.

Prior Studies

The scholarly sources utilized for analysis of Kurdish cinema in this dissertation include works focusing on Kurdish cinema; works on exile, diaspora, and stateless cinema; works related to settler colonialism and Indigenous studies, works from the field of trauma studies; and works on women in cinema, particularly Kurdish and Middle Eastern women. Currently, the only extant book in English that focuses exclusively on Kurdish cinema is *Kurdish Documentary Cinema in Turkey: The Politics and Aesthetics of Identity and Resistance*, edited by Suncem Koçer and Can Candan. While this

dissertation focuses primarily on fictive works, one short documentary is included in Chapter 3. Moreover, while *Kurdish Documentary Cinema in Turkey* only examines Kurdish documentaries within a Turkish context, this dissertation is interested in Kurdish cinema as transnationally. However, the book includes valuable theoretical insight on making films that counter the narrative of the state as well as a chapter entitled "The Fictive Archive: Kurdish Filmmaking in Turkey" (Çiçek). Çiçek offers the following definition of Kurdish cinema:

> Kurdish cinema, categorized as such since the 2000s, is an international cinema that emerges from multiple geographic spaces although it is concentrated in counties with Kurdish populations, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, and European countries with Kurdish populations such as England, Germany, Sweden and Norway. (71)

While this dissertation supports Çiçek's definition of Kurdish cinema, there are currently no extant works of scholarship in English that treat Kurdish cinema in this way, despite the fact that Kurdish filmmakers and festivals operate on the transnational and global level that Çiçek describes. Indeed, her choice of timeframe for the establishment of Kurdish cinema as a category may be at least partially based on the London Kurdish Film Festival, which began in 2001 ("About Us").

In addition to *Kurdish Documentary Cinema in Turkey*, chapters on Kurdish cinema have been included in some English-language texts on the national cinemas of Turkey and Iran, as well as some collections dealing with cinemas of exile, diaspora, and statelessness. Moreover, an increasing number of English-language academic articles and

theses/dissertations highlight Kurdish cinema such as Danielle Mina Dadras's Ph.D. dissertation, *Circulating Stories: Postcolonial Narratives and International Markets* and Tim Kennedy's Ph.D. thesis, *Cinema Regarding Nations: Re-imagining Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian National Identity in Film*, both of which will be discussed further in this section.

This dissertation emphasizes viewing Kurdish cinema as one that crosses national boundaries, rather than dealing with Kurdish cinema in the fragmented fashion in which it has been approached in many texts and utilizes theories from trauma studies and postcolonial trauma studies as well as relevant prior studies specifically dealing with Kurdish cinema. While much of this dissertation focuses on feature films, a number of short films are also included, as short filmmaking is a vital component of Kurdish cinema. They are also the preferred mode of expression of some directors and as an art form unto themselves. For these reasons, it is important to give short Kurdish films their due. The short films featured for analysis in this dissertation will largely be chosen from the 2020 London Kurdish Film Festival, which will allow for the inclusion of some of the more recent works in Kurdish filmmaking and the possibility of comparison with older Kurdish films (although this dissertation is not a history of Kurdish film). This dissertation is limited to analyzing Kurdish films that are available with English subtitles and are available (or have been available in the past) to U.S. audiences.

Most of the extant Kurdish films available to an English-language audience have been created by filmmakers living in the diaspora. In *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, Özlem Galip points out that most of Kurdish modern literature developed in the diaspora,

but little of it reflects diaspora life. Instead, Galip observes, these literary works focus on events happening within Kurdistan. Similar statements can be made regarding Kurdish cinema. While many Kurdish films have been developed in the diaspora, few of these films are set in the Kurdish diaspora, but rather take place in Kurdistan.[2] The focus on films set in the Kurdish region suggests that even in the diaspora, Kurdish filmmakers remain concerned about matters related to homeland, identity, and preservation of cultural heritage. However, some Kurdish films are split between the diaspora and the homeland, such as *A Song for Beko* (Ariç 1992) and *House Without Roof* (Yusef 2016). However, the number of Kurdish films set in the diaspora is growing. Most of these are short films; thus, they are less likely to receive the attention given to features. As might be expected, they are being created by filmmakers of Kurdish or mixed Kurdish origin living within the diaspora. These exilic and diasporic films represent an important component of Kurdish cinema.

Treatment (or lack thereof) of Kurdish cinema and texts about Turkish and Iranian cinema tend to reflect socio-political conditions for Kurds in those countries. In Turkey, for many years identifying oneself as Kurdish was considered an anti-government act. Kurdish language was illegal. Kurdish-Turkish musician and filmmaker Nizamettin Arç faced imprisonment for singing Kurdish songs in public and fled the country for this reason. His film *A Song for Beko* (1992), sometimes called the first Kurdish film, was

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[2] (One exception to this is *Fratricide,* set in Germany, which examines the double oppression faced by Turkish Kurds who migrate to Germany.)

actually shot mostly in Armenia due to Ariç's status as an exile. Typically, even the most liberal Turk is vehemently against any arguments for a united Kurdistan or any kind of Kurdish nation-state. Kurdish films often reflect this desire, so it becomes difficult for Turkish film scholars not to let their politics influence their analyses of Kurdish films, though for the films to be acknowledged as Kurdish is a major step. In *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance, and Belonging*, Dönmez-Colin includes an entire chapter devoted to the films of Kurdish-Turkish filmmaker Yılmaz Güney, as well as a chapter entitled "Denied Identities" which deals to some extent with Kurdish cinema but only from a Turkish perspective.

Tim Kennedy's Ph.D. thesis, Cinema Regarding Nations: Re-imagining Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian National Identity in Film, includes a section focusing on Kurdish cinema. Kennedy's work is primarily concerned with the expression of nationalism through cinema for these three non-state groups. The Kurdish films Kennedy analyzes are mainly older works from the 1980s and early 1990s, such as the films of Yılmaz Güney, a Kurdish filmmaker from Turkey, Ümit Elçi's *Ehmedê Xanî'den: Mem û Zîn* (1991), Nizamettin Ariç's *A Song for Beko* (1992), Bahman Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horse*s (2000) and Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000).

Danielle Mina Dadras's Ph.D. dissertation, *Circulating Stories: Postcolonial Narratives and International Markets*, focuses on "narrative texts marketed to an international audience" (ii) and includes a chapter titled "Communicating Kurdistan: Non-State Cinema and the International Market." This chapter emphasizes that Kurdish films are intended for a broad audience. Dadras utilizes McClintock's article "The Angel

of Progress: The Pitfalls of the Term Postcolonialism" to make a case for including the Kurds in a dissertation on the post-colonial, citing McClintock's argument that the term postcolonial is "prematurely celebratory (McClintock 87) because it excludes large numbers of people who remain in a colonized state or who are members of non-state nations. Dadras describes the Kurdish situation as the, "...case of a non-state nation struggling for international recognition and political sovereignty" and describes the Kurds as "people [whose] experiences have remained largely on the margins of postcolonial studies" (154). Dadras makes a strong case for including the Kurds in the field of post-colonial studies, where they have traditionally received little attention. Dadras's chapter is largely concerned with the circulation and marketing of Bahman Ghobadi's films and how they may or may not help him achieve nationalist goals.

Included under the umbrella of circulation is the problem of classifying Ghobadi's films for international distribution. Are they Kurdish films or Iranian films? Dadras points out that while Ghobadi is outspoken about his Kurdish identity, he also does not wish to completely alienate himself from Iranian cinema (222). However, she states that "most Iranians would view [Ghobadi's] films with subtitles and would experience a degree of cultural distance from the films" (224), which is important to the case of classifying Kurdish films as distinct from the cinemas of the nation-states dividing the Kurds, as this dissertation argues.

Because one of the major concerns in looking at Kurdish cinema has been the way it has been left out or does not "fit" within existing cinematic analyses pertaining to the Middle East, this dissertation will also consider Kurdish cinema in a trans-Indigenous

context, as Chadwick Allen describes in his book *Trans-Indigenous Methodologies: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. Concerning his reasons for delving into the trans-Indigenous project, Allen states:

> The point is not to displace the necessary, invigorating study of specific traditions and contexts but rather to complement these by augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry. The point is to invite specific studies into different kinds of conversations, and to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts (xiv)

Allen does not wish to abandon the study of specific Indigenous groups in favor of the comparative but to look at Indigenous cultures on a global scale. In some cases, this means looking at interactions (both historic and artistic), but it can also mean looking at similarities. Throughout *Trans-Indigenous Methodologies,* Allen states that his goal is to engage with the question: "What can we see or understand differently by juxtaposing distinct and diverse Indigenous texts, contexts, and traditions?" (xix). With Allen's question in mind, this dissertation includes works related to settler colonialism and Indigenous cinemas and is grounded in the belief that "juxtaposing" other Indigenous cultures' cinematic production with Kurdish cinematic production will lead to a broader theoretical understanding of what is being accomplished within Kurdish cinema.

It is also useful to consider works that are somewhat troubling regarding Kurdish studies, particularly Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Issues around Said have been raised before by Kurdish academics, such as Barzoo Eliassi in his article "Leftist Intellectuals and the Kurds: The cases of Edward Said, Hamid Dabashi and Tariq Ali." Eliassi points

out that Said's works ignore the Kurds and other non-Arab or non-Jewish peoples in the Middle East and are more concerned with Western depictions of Arabs than with the oppression of non-Arab peoples in the Middle East. Eliassi also notes that Said's only statement on the Anfal genocide in Iraq was to point out that the "claim that Iraq gassed its own citizens has often been repeated. At best, this is uncertain." Said's prominence in post-colonial studies then leads to an erasure of the Kurds. Discussions that should be about Middle Eastern film and literature become instead discussions of Arab film and literature, ignoring and excluding the artistic production of other ethnic groups in the region. Awareness of these erasures helps to emphasize why books wholly devoted to Kurdish cinema are so important.

Theoretical Background

The films covered in this dissertation will be analyzed through the larger contexts of nationalism, identity, trauma, and Indigenous studies with a heavy focus on narrative analysis. Each of the first three categories is already a well-established methodology for cinema studies, and while trans-Indigenous studies is a relatively new methodology it is related to Indigenous studies and post-colonial studies and builds upon prior work in those fields. Including prior theoretical work on exilic and diasporic cinema will also be a key feature of the dissertation. Many prior studies of Kurdish cinema have been included in collections focusing on exile and diaspora, such as Hamid Naficy's collection, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* and Rebecca Prime's *Cinematic Homecomings: Exile and Return in Transnational Cinema.* Kurdish cinema is in many ways a product of diaspora and exile because it is in the diaspora that Kurdish filmmakers

have been freer to make the films that they want to make without fear of government reprisal and in many cases with financial support from their host countries.

Additionally, this dissertation will provide context for the films within Kurdish political history. Previous treatments of Kurdish film have been placed in the contexts of various nations or in collections about exilic and diasporic cinema, but Kurdish filmmakers are undoubtedly aware of each other and of there being a historical progression of Kurdish cinema. Given the absence of much extant English academic literature that looks at Kurdish films in this way that would help trace their development means that this dissertation will be looking at films from across national borders, and hence I need to be attentive to their different origins. While arguing that Kurdish cinema has its own history, this dissertation recognizes that films from certain countries are also part of the history of filmmaking in those countries and that those films also grow out of those nations. The Kurds have been oppressed across borders, but differences in the way that oppression operates effect film production, sometimes in terms of what is allowed within a given country (for instance, producing a film that uses Kurdish language) and sometimes in relation to content (films that focus on the situation of Kurds within a specific region.) Thus, it is necessary to provide some historical context with regard to the position of the Kurds in the nations where the films were created.

Issues relating to Kurdish nationalism and the free expression of Kurdish identity are present in most (if not all) Kurdish films. Romano writes, "A strong tribal element, a shared memory of a mountain pastoral-nomadic past, awareness of the homeland *Kurdistan…* and distinct social practices combine with language and history to form a

Kurdish culture and ethnicity" (*The Kurdish Nationalist Movement* 3). Kurdish identity is tied to Kurdish nationalism but may also be separated from it, depending upon the politics of a given individual. Issues relating to Kurdish identity include the right to express oneself in Kurdish, the right to mother-tongue education, the right to self-identify as Kurdish, and the right to the cultural expression of Kurdish identity (such as singing Kurdish songs in public, performing Kurdish dances, or celebrating Kurdish holidays). All of the aforementioned aspects of Kurdish identity have been outlawed or suppressed (usually violently) by the states encompassing Kurdish territories.

The oppression of Kurdish identity has been part of the impetus for a Kurdish state, but some Kurds would be content to keep present national boundaries if they were able to claim the aforementioned rights. Romano points out how in Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, the Kurds could assimilate and face little to no racism, so long as they did assimilate and stopped identifying as Kurds and gave up their language and distinctive culture (4). Rather than assimilate, multiple ethno-nationalist groups emerged, despite harsh state reprisals (Romano 4). The desire for a separate state is inextricably tied to the desire to retain a distinctly Kurdish identity. From its outset, Kurdish cinema has had at its heart the goal of expressing Kurdish identity as something separate and distinct from the dominant cultures of the various states dividing the Kurdish region. However, Kurdish cinema has generally been more ambiguous with regard to the politics of establishing a Kurdish state. Because the films typically do not overtly call for the creation of a Kurdish state and because to some extent the need for a Kurdish state is tied to Kurdish identity, nationalism and identity are grouped together here.

In addition to dealing with themes of statelessness, nationhood, and exile, Kurdish cinema also confronts issues of personal and national trauma related to acts of violence and genocide committed against the Kurds. There is a substantial body of English language literature dealing with depictions of trauma in literature and film, but none of it to date has dealt specifically with the situation of the Kurds. This dissertation models some of its discussion of trauma from other cinema studies works in the field, as well as important works in the field of trauma studies in general as well as incorporating relevant works regarding trauma and the Kurds. These include *Crazy Like Us* (Watters)*, Postcolonial Witnessing* (Craps), *Gendered Experiences of Genocide* (Hardi)*, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative* (Caruth)*, and History, Trauma and Cinema: Cross Cultural Explorations* (Kaplan and Wang), and *Trauma Culture: The Politics Terror and Loss in the Media and Literature* (Kaplan)*.* This dissertation utilizes a broad base of trauma theory including event-based trauma theory and cross-cultural and postcolonial trauma theory. While Caruth's founding work in the field of trauma theory has been criticized for its Eurocentrism, Craps writes, "I believe trauma theory need not be abandoned altogether...but can and should be reshaped, resituated, and redirected so as to foster attunement to previously unheard suffering" (37). Much of Kurdish cinema attempts to bring to light the suffering of people who have been ignored by the world at large. However, many of these films also deal with a character who has experienced a single traumatic event, so considering the event-based model still seems relevant. Other more recent films, such as the cinema of Rojava, fit better with postcolonial models.

Caruth argues that trauma, "…is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Her text is concerned with the hidden nature of traumatic memories in contradiction to the need for trauma to be addressed. Later in the text, Caruth refers to trauma's "…enigmatic testimony not only to the nature of violent events but to what, in trauma, resists simple comprehension" (6). Kurdish films that focus on traumatic events reflect Caruth's arguments in the sense that the traumatic event is depicted as a buried memory, difficult for the victim to access or even to understand.

Kaplan and Wang make a case for considering trauma in the context of history and society rather than overly focusing on the traumatic experience of the individual. This is an important lens for examining Kurdish films, which often focus on traumatic experiences shared by large groups of people. While event-based trauma is relevant to many of the films analyzed in this dissertation, in exploring Kurdish cinema through the field of trauma studies this dissertation expands beyond the early models of trauma conceived of as a "wound" and considers postcolonial models of trauma as well. Early models of trauma theory were conceived of for Western contexts and it is important to consider how other models may be more applicable to non-Western ones. In "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism", the problems of applying a Western model of trauma to minority and non-Western peoples are closely examined. Of particular interest are ongoing traumatic experiences, such as racism and shared historical trauma, that do not fit Caruth's wound model because they are not traumas that

occur at a precise moment in time but are continuous (in the case of racism) and shared (in the case of both racism and historical trauma). Andermahr writes that:

> ...postcolonial critics have been arguing for some time that trauma theory has not fulfilled its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. Rather than forging relationships of empathy and solidarity with non-Western others, a narrowly Western canon of trauma literature has in effect emerged, one which privileges the suffering of white Europeans, and neglects the specificity of non-Western and minority cultural traumas. (500)

Kurds are among this group that is likely to encounter racism on multiple fronts, both in their homeland and the diaspora. The films examined in the trauma chapter engage with traumatic experiences of individuals; those experiences are also shared traumatic experiences because as victims of war, racism, sexual assault, honor-based violence, and forced marriage taking place on a large scale and in a non-Western context, it becomes critical to consider a model of trauma that looks beyond the individual scars.

In addition to looking at Kurdish films thematically, the dissertation will also analyze them with inspiration from Allen's *Trans-Indigenous Methodologies*, the title of the book in which Allen proposes a new model for examining the cultural production of Indigenous groups from across the globe. While cautioning against creating a "hierarchy of oppression" (xiv). Allen makes a case for "juxtaposing" artworks from Indigenous cultures. Such methodologies may be a useful way to include Kurdish artworks in a broader conversation from which they have largely been excluded in the past. For example, studies of Middle Eastern film tend to focus largely on Arab, Iranian, and

Turkish film with Kurdish film being given little (if any) mention in spite of the historical importance of the films of Kurdish/Turkish filmmaker Yılmaz Güney or the significant body of work from Iranian Kurdish filmmaker Bahman Ghobadi.

These important works tend to be pushed to the margins of literature on Turkish and Iranian national cinemas but take on new importance when viewed as part of a larger body of cross-border Kurdish cinema. In addition, Kurdish literature and cinema have more in common with the Indigenous works Allen discusses, than they do with Turkish or Iranian cinemas. For example, Turks and ethnic Persians do not face violence and harassment based on their ethnicities within their own nations, but this is something Kurds face and it is something faced by other Indigenous ethnic groups who are minorities within a given state. When viewed in national contexts, such as Turkish or Iranian cinema, Kurdish cinema is often treated as an anomaly within a larger national tradition. In many cases, Kurdish films receive little to no consideration in texts focusing on Turkish and Iranian cinematic history, which may reflect continued discrimination towards Kurds in those countries. The articles that have been published on Kurdish cinema in collections are primarily included in works on diasporic and exilic cinema.

Many of the issues dealt with in Kurdish film are similar to those expressed in the art of other stateless nations, such as the cinemas of Palestine, the Māori, Indigenous Australians, and various Native American/First Nations peoples. These issues include national trauma, contentious borders and boundaries, as well as problems related to recognition and identity formation when one's nation is struggling for recognition. Work has already been performed in this area with regard to the Kurds in Kennedy’s Ph.D.

thesis, *Cinema Regarding Nations: Re-imagining Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian National Identity in Fil*m and Dadras's dissertation, *Circulating Stories: Postcolonial Narratives and International Market*s. However, discussing Kurdish cinema in a trans-Indigenous context brings attention to themes common between Kurdish cinema and the cinemas of other Indigenous groups that are not discussed in Kennedy's or Dadras's work. Kurdish cinema can be usefully contextualized when placed in a trans-Indigenous context and analyzed with a focus on issues pertaining to national trauma and statelessness.

The issues faced by other non-state peoples are often more similar to those Kurds face than issues that affect ethnic Turks in Turkey or ethnic Persians in Iran. Examining Kurdish cinema in a trans-Indigenous context also provides theoretical models for the type of work that could be done in Kurdish cinema. While there has been relatively little written in English about Kurdish cinema, there is a good deal of literature on the cinemas of stateless peoples, diasporas, and people under the influence of settler colonialism that is helpful in analyzing Kurdish cinema. These models offer better options for understanding and analyzing Kurdish cinema than simply looking at Kurdish films as a subset of Turkish, Iranian, Syrian, or Iraqi cinemas.

Finally, one chapter of this dissertation is devoted to women in Kurdish Film, which looks at how a few issues of vital importance to Kurdish women are portrayed in Kurdish films. These issues include 'honor'-based violence, forced marriage, and the depiction of Kurdish women militants. Additionally, this chapter looks at how Kurdish women are portrayed in Kurdish films in general and the way in which Kurdish women

are included in the creative process of filmmaking, with a primary emphasis on directors, but some important commentary on the role of writers and actresses as well. Kurdish women have been excluded from the director's chair as women have worldwide. This is a known concern in Kurdish filmmaking, and Kurdish film festivals regularly include panel discussions led by Kurdish women in the film industry to discuss what can be done to better include them. This chapter analyzes the films *One Candle, Two Candles* (Rosebiani) and *Memories on Stone* (Korki) to gain perspective on how two male directors portray independent female characters confronting forced marriage. This chapter also revisits *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar) as a film co-written by a woman and considers how this film makes exceptional use of female characters that another writer-director team might have simply substituted with males. Two short films by female Kurdish director Viyan Mayi are analyzed in this chapter, both of which deal with forced marriage and honor crimes, and compared with the way in which the male-directed films confront these same issues. Finally, it examines new works from the 2020 London Kurdish Film Festival, including those from the category Women in Film, which encompass films directed by both men and women, as well as women-directed films from other categories to look at what changes can be seen in the way Kurdish women are being portrayed on screen if there are any evident changes to women's inclusion in the creative process, and how women directors are telling women's stories in today's newest short films.

A Note on Language

This dissertation focuses on Kurdish films with English subtitles and utilizes English-language research only. For the sake of simplicity film titles are provided with their English language title, sourced from IMDB. Many of the films discussed in the dissertation have titles in multiple languages. Sometimes the original title of the film may be in Kurdish, but not always. In one exception, *Ehmedê Xanî'den: Mem û Zîn,* (which translates to *Ehmede Xani's Mem and Zi*n) the title is only offered in Kurdish on IMDB and thus this is the title that is used in this dissertation. However, to avoid confusion titles are otherwise given in English although sometimes original language titles are commented on if they are useful in analyzing the film.

Importance of Kurdish Short Films

In 2020 the London Kurdish Film Festival premiered online for the first time in its nineteen-year history (due to COVID-19), making a wide array of Kurdish films available worldwide. For 2020, the LKFF organizing committee chose to forego the inclusion of feature films, and thus the program consisted entirely of short films. Many Kurdish films are not available through DVD or even online viewing and as a result, film festivals are the only option to view them. In recent years Kurdish films have been shown at festivals in Turkey, but when these festivals show Kurdish films, they usually only show films produced by Turkish directors and my interest is in looking at a broader range of Kurdish cinema. It is important to note that in the past, a film in Turkey could not have legally been designated as Kurdish or use Kurdish language in the film. This has changed in recent years, and films using Kurdish language with characters who identify as

Kurdish are now able to be shown in Turkey. A search for "Kurdish" on the Istanbul Film Festival website yields a lengthy list of results. Film festivals are also an important opportunity for viewing short films, which are typically more difficult to view elsewhere. There are more feature-length Kurdish films available through DVD or online, but for the purposes of this dissertation, short films are included to capture a broader sense of what Kurdish filmmaking is producing.

Chapter Outline

I. Chapter 1: In Search of Identity and Homeland

This chapter looks at issues related to nationalism and the desire for home in Kurdish cinema. It also includes other issues related to the distinctiveness of Kurdish identity The chapter examines aspects of several different Kurdish films and analyzes the way in which each film deals with the concept of homeland. This includes narrative depictions but also may include subtle actions on the part of characters that may not always be understood by a non-Kurdish audience. The primary films examined in this chapter include *Chaplin of the Mountain* (Rosebiani 2013)*, Jiyan* (Rosebiani 2002)*,* and *House Without Roof* (Yusef 2016). The following films are discussed more briefly: *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar, 2009), *A Song for Beko* (Ariç,1992), *Ehmedê Xanî'den: Mem û Zîn* (Elçi 1991), *Half Moon* (Ghobadi 2006), and *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi 2002).

II. Chapter 2: Trauma and Kurdish Film

This chapter focuses on depictions of trauma in Kurdish films, particularly as the result of genocide, torture, forced displacement, and grief/loss in relation to those

circumstances. Background information relating to prior studies in trauma cinema is included to help inform the particular study of trauma in Kurdish Cinema. This chapter utilizes postcolonial trauma theory, especially the work of Stef Craps, Ethan Watters, and Choman Hardi. This chapter focuses on the following feature films: *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi 2004), *Chaplin of the Mountains* (Rosebiani 2013), *Memories on Stone/* (Korki 2014), and *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009).

III. Chapter 3: Kurdish Film, Indigenous, and Trans-Indigenous Studies

This chapter is related to issues around statelessness and national cinema, but it is also distinct. It involves looking at thematic similarities between Kurdish cinema and various Indigenous cinemas. The concept of trans-Indigenous studies was developed by Chadwick Allen in his book *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, so much of the theoretical material in this section is based upon his work. This chapter looks primarily at the films *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre 1998) and *Half Moon* (Bahman Ghobadi 2006). Additionally, the short film *The Heavy Burden* (Yilmaz Özdil 2020) is analyzed. The following short films are briefly discussed: *A Dream Before Dying* (Fekri Baroshi 2018), *Daughters of the Light* (Jano Rosebiani, in development), and *Yar* (Aram Hassan 2020).

IV. Chapter 4: Women and Kurdish Film

This chapter looks at Kurdish women's issues as depicted in Kurdish films and also at films directed by Kurdish women. Background information on a few women's issues that have been prevalent in Kurdish cinema will be provided to give context. This chapter incorporates information regarding barriers faced by women who want to become

directors as well as particular barriers faced by Kurdish women (although there is less information on the latter). The chapter includes some comparison and contrast of how male and female directors portray Kurdish women's issues. In addition, this chapter considers relevant commentary from Kurdish women directors regarding their films and their thoughts on the current and future status of filmmaking for Kurdish women. This chapter looks at the following women-directed short films: Viyan Mayi's *The Kurdish Gir*l (2013) and *The White Dove* (2008), *The Window* (Rezzan Bayram 2018), *Rojek le Rojan* (Zhino Hadi 2019), and *Shouted from the Rooftops* (Beri Shalmashi 2017). A selection of these films is contrasted with male-directed short films with similar themes: *The Sprinkle* (Volkan Uludağ 2019), *Life Gone With the Wind* (Siavash Saed Panah 2019), and *Zhwan* (Kaveh Jahed 2019).

V. Conclusion

This section reiterates the importance of considering Kurdish Cinema as a distinct category, highlighting arguments towards this end from each section of the dissertation. This chapter also looks at new directions in Kurdish cinema and discusses in brief some of the short films from the London Kurdish Film Festival 2020 and directors' comments provide indicators of these developments.

Chapter 1: In Search of Identity and Homeland

Introduction: What is Homeland?

The Kurds are the world's largest stateless ethnic group, with an estimated population of 35-45 million people ("The Kurdish population"). While their ancestral homeland is divided between Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq, large numbers of Kurds are also living in the diaspora ("Kurdish Diaspora"). The division of the homeland across national borders as well as displacement due to violent conflict, often involving genocide against the Kurdish people, are harsh realities the Kurds continue to face and remain major topics in Kurdish cinema. These themes are shared with many other Indigenous or stateless peoples displaced by violent conflict and genocide and thus offer common themes for study. Moreover, they are useful in providing a theoretical framework to assist in the analysis of much Kurdish film. Additionally, the films themselves are texts that create meaning around the concepts of identity, homeland, return, and diaspora. Kennedy argues, "... in the face of external threats, stateless nations and their diasporas require repeated re-imagining to ensure their continued existence" (Kennedy 1). He believes cinema serves to aid in this "re-imagining." In his analysis of *Blackboards* (Makhmalbaf 2000) and *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi 2000), Kennedy pays particular attention to the depictions of national borders. When discussing these two films he states, "Crossing the border is an act of rebellion against the division of the Kurdish people" (Kennedy 155). Many Kurdish films depict border crossings as a means of confronting the division of the Kurds across nations and to depict the consequences individual people face due to that division.

While some films in this chapter are concerned with the division of Kurdistan, others address international borders and explore the nature of life as a diaspora Kurd. Marks delves into the depiction of sense memory in diasporic and exilic film. She writes about what she terms "intercultural cinema" stating that it:

> is characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge… To do this they must suspend the representational conventions that have held in narrative cinema for decades, especially the ideological presumption that cinema *can* represent reality (1)

This suggests that in order to depict the experience of life in exile and the diaspora, new means of expression must be explored. Kurdish films share some of the traits of intercultural films in how they deal with their material, especially Kurdish films that explore the differences between diaspora and homeland.

The themes of home and country are significant in many Kurdish films. In Rosebiani's *Chaplin of the Mountains* (2013) the song *Welat*, by Ciwan Haco, plays at numerous intervals throughout the film as the cinematography emphasizes the region's natural beauty by focusing on the mountains, fields, and rivers of Kurdistan, Iraq, thus suggesting a spiritual connection between the land and its people. *Welat* means "country" or "fatherland" in Kurdish. Onscreen it is sometimes translated as "homeland;" at other times as "country." The word invokes a strong emotional connotation, a sense of belonging, of home. Music also serves as an important indicator of home and identity in Yusef's *House Without Roof* (2016).

The importance of home and nation for the Kurds and in turn for expressions of desire for them in Kurdish cinema adds to the centrality of the word *welat* in current critical discourses. This chapter examines issues related to nationalism and the desire for a homeland in Kurdish cinema, as well as issues related to identity but not necessarily to the desire for a separate Kurdish country. These issues include the desire to use and be educated in Kurdish, the freedom to identify oneself as Kurdish, and the freedom to engage in Kurdish cultural activities, such as singing in Kurdish or celebrating Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, which takes place on the spring equinox. Newroz is the most significant Kurdish holiday, dating back thousands of years (Rashidi-Kalhur). More recently, Newroz has come to be associated with Kurdish identity and Kurdish nationalism (Chapman and Ali; Yanik). When Newroz is depicted in Kurdish films, it is typically used as a symbol of Kurdish identity.

In order to consider how concepts such as home, nation, and identity are integrated into Kurdish cinema, a number of films will be considered and analyzed in terms of how they deal with the concept of homeland and how their individual approaches to homeland compare with Kurdish films across borders. Homeland depictions not only may be narrative in nature but also may include subtle actions on the part of characters that often are more difficult to understand for a non-Kurdish audience, such as the repeated use of Haco's *Welat* in Rosebiani's *Chaplin of the Mountains.*

Many Kurdish films approach the complex question of the nature of Kurdish identity. A crucial aspect of this question is whether Kurds need a state of their own and if so, how can they obtain it. In the political sphere, these questions might be discussed

openly and directly, but Kurdish cinema takes a subtler approach, often presenting some of the darkest aspects of state-sponsored oppression of Kurds, which in some cases can be construed as an argument in favor of a Kurdish state. There are a number of ways these questions are dealt with in Kurdish cinema. Sometimes the need for a homeland is raised in response to a traumatic event depicted in a particular film. In other instances, the longing for home is expressed through song. In some films, the focus is more on the need to express a distinct Kurdish identity rather than on the need for a separate state. In all instances the need for identity is primary, but it is often complex, especially in films about diaspora Kurds, such as Soleen Yusef's *House Without Roof* and Jano Rosebiani's films *Chaplin of the Mountains* and *Jiyan*.

All of the characters in these films have experienced exile or displacement due to violent acts against the Kurds in their home countries. Repressive regimes have restricted the expression of Kurdish identity, including the use of Kurdish language, education in Kurdish, playing of Kurdish music, singing of Kurdish songs, the celebration of Kurdish holidays, and even the ability to state that one is Kurdish. The specifics of these restrictions have varied between states, but the Kurds as a whole have suffered from restrictions and often violent reprisals for expressing Kurdish identity. Filmmaker and musician Nizamettin Ariç was forced to flee from Turkey after being sentenced to up to fifteen years in prison for performing songs in Kurdish (Serinci).

While cinemas of diaspora and displacement have received a great deal of focus in English language scholarship, Kurdish cinema has received scant academic attention in English language scholarship, and when it is covered at all, it is often within the context

of another national cinema. These analyses generally do not consider Kurdish cinema in the context of other Kurdish films, which makes their analysis incomplete. In other cases, Kurdish films may be completely ignored. Bahman Ghobadi, for example, has received scant attention in books on Iranian cinema, despite the fact that his award-winning films are some of the most important works in Kurdish cinema.) One of the most thorough examinations of Kurdish cinema in English is Dönmez-Colin's *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance, and Belonging*, where the father of modern Turkey, Ataturk is particularly valorized, and there is no mention of his role in mass violence against the Kurds in Turkey, such as the Dersim Massacre, although the Armenian Genocide is brought up. Dönmez-Colin's argument does not consider that the division of the region and not giving the Kurds a state might be responsible for Kurdish unrest in Turkey, nor does she offer much consideration to the cross-border relationships between Kurds, united by blood, language, culture, and identity but divided by national boundaries. Instead, she classifies Kurdish cinema as a subset of Turkish cinema, lumping it with the cinemas of other minority groups within the Turkish border, rather than considering that cross-border identities lead to cross-border cinemas. However, while Dönmez-Colin generally looks at Kurdish cinema as a subset of Turkish, she does offer a brief comparison between Şerif Gören's Muleteers (1987) and Bahman Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), providing a link between cross-border Kurdish cinemas (92).

Dönmez-Colin brings up an important historical point about Kurdish cinema in Turkey, pointing out that up until the 1990s, Kurds were not identified as such in Turkish cinema, but were shown as Turks. She writes, "Commercial cinema used the Kurdish

characters and the geography of their homeland, not giving them a name or language, but rather with an Orientalizing gaze" (91). This statement helps to express the double-orientalizing of the Kurds and Kurdish cinema, where they are orientalized not only by the West but within the nations that encompass the Kurdish homeland. This double-orientalizing can create problems when attempting to place Kurdish cinema within academic discourse. For example, if one wants to present a paper on Kurdish cinema at a conference, there is often no clear category in which to place it. There are categories dedicated to Arab cinema, but not to the Kurdish one. Middle Eastern cinema is also not a category that can be easily located in relevant conferences. Although it is not ideal, a paper regarding works on Kurdish cinema can probably be best situated within Indigenous studies in academic film analysis.

Dönmez-Colin credits the 1968 film *Bride of the Earth* as the first film in Turkey to utilize Kurdish characters, with a woman named Keje indicated as Kurdish by her name (91). She pays special attention to the works of Yılmaz Güney, whose films often depicted Kurdish characters and Kurdish issues, but did not use the Kurdish language or refer to the Kurdish people directly due to restrictions by the Turkish state (92). While the chapter is meant to focus on minority cinemas within Turkey (it is a book about Turkish cinema after all), it provides important information on the history of Kurdish cinema within Turkey, which is relevant to Kurdish cinema as a whole and provides one of the few cross-border comparisons of Kurdish films.

Kurdish Road Movies

Borders, checkpoints, roadblocks, and the road itself are often key elements in the cinemas of stateless peoples. These films depict the struggles faced by ordinary people whose lives are thrown into chaos by the imposition of such borders and blocks. In *Palestinian Cinema: Landscapes, Trauma, and Memory*, Gertz and Khleifi write:

The borders have thus become a sign of oppression characterised by an Israeli definition of Palestinian as a nonexistent, split or broken identity. This, perhaps, may explain why so many new Palestinian films take place at borders and checkpoints, and have therefore been termed "roadblock movies". (320)

There exist similar "roadblock movies" within Kurdish cinema, films that emphasize the division of the Kurds by national borders, and thus express the desire for the Kurds to unite into their own nation-state. Kurdish "roadblock movies" are covered more thoroughly in Chapter 3, but their importance needs to be emphasized here, because the development of these types of films within Kurdish cinema shows emphatically that Kurdistan is a homeland divided and, as such, should be a cinema united.

Chapter Filmography

This chapter focuses on a selection of films that highlight the concept of Kurdistan as homeland. While some of these films are included in other chapters as well, the discussion here will focus on how the Kurdish characters in these films relate to Kurdistan as a homeland and to Kurdish identity. Many of these films revolve around diaspora: Kurds who are returning to Kurdistan or visiting for the first time. The reality of the diaspora is often used to emphasize the need for a homeland by showing a tension

between a character's connection to the home where they live in the diaspora and the home they have left. This split often leads a character to face an identity crisis, as they struggle to reconcile what often seem like dual identities, the diaspora identity and the homeland identity. The films primarily examined in this chapter include:*Chaplin of the Mountain* (Rosebiani 2013)*, Jiyan* (Rosebiani 2002)*,* and *House Without Roof* (Yusef 2016). The following films are discussed more briefly: *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009), *A Song for Beko* (Ariç 1992*), Ehmedê Xanî'den: Mem û Zîn* (Elçi 1992) *Half Moon* (Ghobadi 2006), and *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi 2002).

Identity and Language

In *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance,* Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that "To starve and kill a language is to starve and kill a people's memory bank. And it is equally true that to impose a language is to impose the weight of experience it carries and its conception of self and otherness" (20). The use of the Kurdish language in Kurdish cinema is especially important because the language has often been banned by various Middle Eastern states in which the Kurds live, resulting in the absence of the Kurdish language in both spoken and written forms in the public sphere. In this context, the complete absence of one's language from the cinema can be traumatic, including the absence of subtitles for foreign movies. In an interview with *Al Jazeera,* Devrin Kilic, a Ph.D. student at the time of the interview, said, "[People] used to cry. It was the first time they saw their language being spoken through the TV." He continued:

the Turkish government had been trying to tell the Kurdish people that they don't exist… If you think about the psychological effect of this, the Kurdish culture - Kurdish music

and Kurdish cinema - is bringing back that self-esteem to the Kurdish people. They can stand up and say they are Kurdish and they are proud of it. (Kestler-D'Amours)

Yet this issue of erasure is not confined to Turkey. It is an issue throughout Kurdistan and extends to Kurds in the diaspora, where maintaining a sense of identity is also a struggle, and the issue of language is complicated further.

Hassanpour writes, "…it needs a handful of experts to develop the *corpus* of a language. It requires, however, a revolution, a centuries-long struggle to enhance the *status* of a language." (52). Language issues are more often a background issue in Kurdish films rather than a major theme. Moreover, the use of Kurdish language in a film is of great importance both within the context of the film's narrative and for Kurdish cinema as a whole, due to the repression of the Kurdish language by nation-states. In Turkey many of the films that might have been considered the first Kurdish films were produced in Turkish, due to Turkey's barring of Kurdish and other non-Turkish languages. These include the films of Yılmaz Güney, a significant figure in the history of Kurdish cinema. Ümit Elçi's film, *Ehmedê Xanî'den: Mem û Zîn* (1991), adapted from a Kurdish epic love story passed down orally and developed into a nationalist fable by the poet Ehmedê Xanî' was delivered in Turkish in spite of its Kurdish origin. In Turkish Cinema, Dönmez-Colin observes that in Turkish films that depict Kurdish characters, their Kurdishness is sometimes identified by an imperfect use of Turkish.

In *Decolonising the Mind,* Ngugi argues that "...the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe" (4). The

choice of language is often not a choice in Kurdish films. Many of them have been produced in other languages due to the outlawing of Kurdish in the countries in which they were produced. One of the colonizer's central goals (of which Ngugi is well aware) is to wipe out the language of the colonized people and replace it with the language of the colonizer. Thus, it has only been in more recent years that Kurdish films have been produced in the Kurdish language and in a variety of Kurdish dialects. When watching and analyzing Kurdish films, it is important to ask: 1. Is the film in Kurdish? 2. Why or why not? 3. If the film uses Kurdish, is it produced entirely in Kurdish? 4. If the film is not produced entirely in Kurdish, what other language or languages are used, and what does the use of those languages signify?

Before Your Eyes (2009), directed by Miraz Bezar, a filmmaker of Turkish ancestry who grew up in Germany, makes use of both Kurdish and Turkish as befits the given scene in the narrative. The film is set in the Turkish city, Diyarbakir (or Amed to the Kurds), located in southeastern Turkey (or northern Kurdistan) and home to a large Kurdish population. The narrative concerns two Kurdish children who are orphaned after their newspaper-editor father and their mother are executed by the paramilitary JITEM. Bezar, who does not speak Kurdish, was aware of the importance of using Kurdish language in the film ("'Min Dit' Makes Waves at Antalya Film Fest"). Bezar wrote the screenplay in Turkish and had the Kurdish parts translated ('Min Dit' Makes Waves at Antalya Film Fest). The child actors Bezar cast in the film were local Kurdish children from the vicinity of Diyarbakir. Yet for the sake of realism, the film utilizes both Kurdish and Turkish, with the children often code-switching between languages, depending on the

given social situation. Awareness of which language is being spoken, and under what circumstances, provides a more nuanced understanding of the film. Bezar understands that this is background information the international audience may not possess and has woven much of this crucial information into the script; for example, when Firat is struggling with his homework because he does not understand Turkish well enough to complete it. The film does not include notes in the subtitles on when a character is speaking Kurdish or Turkish, though it is often important within the film's context to note when a character is speaking which language.

Diaspora films, such as *Fratricide* (Arslan 2005), can entail an even more complex use of language. Set in Germany, the film features a Kurdish protagonist from Turkey and his brother, pitted against two Turkish nationalist brothers. In the diaspora, and again as Ngugi states, "the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment" (4). The Kurdish struggle with language is a primary one in the creation of Kurdish cinema, as it has determined whether films could be produced in Kurdish at all. The struggle for Kurdish language rights is also sometimes depicted directly in films, such as when Firat struggles with his homework because it is in Turkish. However, it is usually not referred to directly.

Identity and the Nation

In *The Wretched of the Earth,* Frantz Fanon argues for the importance of recognizing a pre-colonial culture for colonized peoples (145). In Kurdistan, the issues are somewhat more complex. Arab, Persian, and Turkish domination have led to Kurdish

artists working to distinguish Kurdish art forms from those of the surrounding and sometimes intermixed ethnicities of Kurdistan. Kurdish scholars and artists are also interested in establishing examples of distinct Kurdish culture from the pre-colonial era. In the case of Kurdistan, the oppression is doubled, with the oppression of the state and its majority ethnicity added to that Western orientalism. Even Fanon makes the mistake of identifying the region that includes Kurdistan as "the Arab world" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 213-214). Prior to the establishment of states created by colonial powers, there was less incentive for the Kurds to distinguish themselves from Arabs, Turks, and Persians around them. The creation of states that repressed Kurdish language and culture also instigated a need to establish a distinct Kurdish identity. One of the ways this manifested was in a renewed interest in a Kurdish past, its folklore, musical traditions, and literature. The piece of historic Kurdish literature generally chosen to valorize the cause of an ancient Kurdish culture is Ehmedi Xanî's *Mem û Zîn*, sometimes called a Kurdish *Romeo and Juliet*. The story was an ancient folklore epic told in the oral tradition, but Xanî's version uses the two lovers to symbolize the division of the Kurds between regions or even between the two main dialects of Kurdish. Sometimes Xanî′ is credited as being the first Kurdish nationalist, though Bruinessen points out that the concept of modern nationalism did not exist during Xanî″s time (45). Xanî also expresses concerns about the Kurdish language. Bruinessen states, "He [Xanî] deliberately opted for the Kurdish language in order to raise the standing of Kurdish culture in the eyes of Kurds' neighbors" (42). While it is based on a Kurdish folk tale, Xanî's version of *Mem û Zîn* is a much more complex variation. Van Bruinessen writes that "Xanî made numerous

changes in the basic narrative, overlaid the story with layer upon layer of symbolic meaning, enriched it with mystical and metaphysical ideas and his views on politics, and wrote it in the poetic form of the Persian *masnavi*" (45). While van Bruinessen argues that Xanî is not a nationalist, he does concede that Xanî can be called "the father of Kurdish nationalism," because the ideas expressed in *Mem û Zîn* spoke to and influenced the thoughts of modern Kurds who were (and are) nationalists (56).

A film version of the epic was released in Turkey in 1992 (Elçi) and is one of the earliest films that can be identified as distinctly Kurdish. The film begins with a depiction of a Newroz celebration, a holiday often associated with Kurdish nationalism, so much so that Newroz celebrations have been banned or subject to heavy restrictions in Turkey. Newroz is an important festival in Iran as well, but some of the world's largest Newroz festivals take place in Turkey. Elçi's *Mem û Zîn* places great emphasis on the Newroz scenes.

Gertz and Khleifi argue for the olive tree as a symbol of a unified Palestinian nation (327). In Kurdish cinema, mountain imagery serves a similar purpose. There is a Kurdish saying that "the Kurds have no friends but the mountains." Mountains play a significant role in many Kurdish films. At the close of Ghobadi's *Half Moon,* the characters escape across the mountains. In *Chaplin of the Mountains*, the camera lingers on mountain tableaus. In *A Time for Drunken Horses,* the mountains are ever-present, providing both protection and an obstacle for the smugglers crossing and defying national borders to make their living.

Identity and the Diaspora

Concerning the term diaspora, it is vital to remember its origins. Its definition has expanded to include a plethora of meanings, some referring to the forced exile of non-Jewish peoples, while others do not have exile as a component. Living in the diaspora has often provided Kurdish filmmakers with greater opportunities to make films that they most likely would not have otherwise encountered. Funding, education in filmmaking, and freedom of speech are advantages available to diaspora Kurds that may be more difficult to obtain at home. Censorship and even imprisonment are issues faced by Kurdish filmmakers in their homelands and have led to exile in some cases. Such was the situation for Bahman Ghobadi, who was forced to flee Iran in 2009 (Saberi). He said of *Rhino Season*, the first film he made after fleeing Iran, "It feels very, very good to make a film freely, to work without having to wait years for script approval, without looking over your shoulder. I see calmness in this movie. It does not have the nervousness of my previous films." (Saberi)

War and mass atrocities have led many Kurds to become refugees and/or immigrants and many Kurdish films come from filmmakers who are living in the diaspora. However, few Kurdish films are set in the diaspora, even when the filmmakers are living there. Instead, the films focus on the homeland, and the return of a Kurdish person to that homeland. In other cases, the film itself is set in the Kurdish region, and the filmmaker returns from the diaspora to make the film, although the film does not depict such a return. Such is the case with Bezar's *Before Your Eyes.* Bezar immigrated to Germany when he was nine but returned to Turkey to make his film (Özbudak and

Gökçe). The film focuses on many issues that have led to Kurdish exile from Turkey, such as the lack of Kurdish-based education, persecution of Kurdish journalists, poverty, and extrajudicial violence and execution of Kurds who have spoken out against oppression.

As with other diaspora films, Kurdish films with characters from the diaspora often struggle with the theme of what it means to be Kurdish when you are exiled from your homeland or even born in another country. This theme is explored in films by Jano Rosebiani, a member of the Kurdish diaspora in the U.S., and these films may reflect his own experiences in the diaspora. *Fratricide* (2005) deals specifically with Kurdish characters living in the German diaspora. For most other diasporic filmmakers, the focus seems to be on the homeland itself.

Bezar states in the film's press kit, "There are many Kurds who would view Diyarbakir as the capital of their homeland, but I do not have this connection since I am a diaspora Kurd. But staying there for two years helped me fulfill my old longing to get to know the place that was a home to my parents and demystify my notion of it." Bezar's description of returning to a homeland he never knew resonates with the experience of the young characters in Rosebiani's *Chaplin of the Mountains*, Nazê and Alan, who each have a parent from the Kurdistan region of Iraq but have never lived in the country themselves. The film suggests the same need to reconnect with a lost homeland that Bezar describes, with an added sense of mystery as Nazê searches for her mother's village.

By contrast, Rosebiani's *Jiyan* is centered around a character returning as an adult to Iraqi Kurdistan from the diaspora in the United States, after his family fled Iraq when he was a child. The narrative is somewhat reflective of Rosebiani's own experience as a diasporic Kurd in the U.S. who has returned to Kurdistan to shoot films, television shows, and TV commercials. Soleen Yusef's *House Without Roof* also concerns adults returning from the diaspora, this time in Germany. However, the story is complicated by the refusal of two of the adult children to return with their mother and brother to Kurdistan, because they feel they have made a home in Germany. It is only after the death of their mother that they are willing to go back and their feelings about returning, even temporarily, are deeply ambivalent.

***Jiyan*: Reconnecting to the Homeland Through Memories of Collective Trauma**

In Jano Rosebiani's 2002 film, *Jiyan*, the return of diaspora Kurd, Diyari, to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq serves as an exploration of the power of confronting collective trauma to bridge the uneasy relationship between homeland and diaspora, enacting a poetic vision of shared healing. *Jiyan* investigates the challenges of returning to one's homeland after living in the diaspora, focusing on themes of exile, memory, and the complex relationship between those who left Kurdistan and those who remained. This analysis will examine Diyari's troubled insider-outsider status to show the difficulties of reassimilation and return for diasporic Kurds, investigating how the film utilizes contrasts between the past and present, and life and death to symbolize the wounds of collective trauma and the struggles of the healing process. Finally, Jiyan's depiction of communal

healing, where sharing traumatic memories helps reconcile homeland and diaspora, will be examined.

The film immediately establishes the contrast between past trauma and present resilience through its opening scenes, which depict Saddam Hussein's 1988 chemical attack that killed thousands in Halabja, a moment in history that has forever marked Halabja and its people. The first images are of silence and death, but the film quickly shifts to a shot of a baby alone in a bassinet, crying and full of life. In Kurdish, *jiyan* means life. It is also the name of the ten-year-old girl Diyari befriends, who helps him feel more at home in Halabja. Jiyan bears a scar from the chemical attack on one side of her face, while the other side is unmarked. Like Halabja itself, she is scarred by the signs of life and death. Her name and the film's title stand in marked contrast to its opening scenes, and this juxtaposition sets the tone for the entire film, which continues to alternate between painful signifiers of trauma and the endurance of the Kurds. The extent of this trauma becomes clear as Diyari navigates Halabja's scarred landscape and interacts with its inhabitants, leading to the first central question that drives the narrative: How can the Kurdish community heal from its inherited trauma?

The Anfal campaign was enacted by Saddam Hussein and his forces against the Kurdish population in Iraq from February to September of 1988 and was strategically tied to the Iran-Iraq war ("Genocide in Iraq"). The Kurdish political parties KDP and PUK had allied with Iran ("Genocide in Iraq"). However, genocidal actions against Iraq's Kurdish population on the part of the Iraqi government had been going on for much longer. Notably, while Anfal targeted male Kurds considered to be of fighting age, many

civilians, including women and children were also killed and displaced (“Genocide in Iraq”). According to Human Rights Watch, it is estimated that 50,000-100,000 people were killed during Anfal (“Genocide in Iraq”). However, Anfal was largely ignored by the international community, which continues to be the case. It has yet to be recognized as genocide despite meeting the UN’s criteria. Human Rights Watch makes a compelling case for labeling the Anfal campaign as genocide, stating:

> Like Nazi Germany, the Iraqi regime concealed its actions in euphemisms. Where Nazi officials spoke of "executive measures," "special actions" and "resettlement in the east," Ba'athist bureaucrats spoke of "collective measures," "return to the national ranks" and "resettlement in the south." But beneath the euphemisms, Iraq's crimes against the Kurds amount to genocide, the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." (“Genocide in Iraq”)

Such clear parallels between the Ba’ath party and Nazism make it difficult to understand how anyone could refuse to recognize the Anfal campaign as genocide. As part of the Anfal campaign, the city of Halabja was hit with mustard gas and other nerve agents in the largest such attack against a civilian area in history (“Saddam’s Chemical Weapons Campaign”). The chemical attack on Halabja, occurred on March 16, 1988, and killed approximately 5000 people, with an additional 10000 injured (Rubin, J.). Lack of recognition has led to greater struggles for survivors, as victims of the gas attacks have struggled to obtain adequate medical care and compensation (Mlodoch “The Indelible Smell of Apples” 356; Saeed).

The attack on Halabja has not been universally recognized as genocide. The term “genocidal massacre” was applied to the attack on Halabja by the Supreme Iraqi High Tribunal, and Ali Hassan Al Majid (“Chemical Ali”) was subsequently executed for the crime. In 2023 the city of Vienna, Austria recognized the attack as genocide with no additional caveats ("Council of Vienna Recognises Halabja Genocide”). In the years since the people of Halabja have continued to suffer from the aftereffects of the attack, which include high rates of cancer, respiratory illness, and birth defects (Strobel).

Jiyan also references the 1974 bombing of Qaladiza, the event that led to the character of Diyari immigrating to the U.S. when he was nine years old. The bombing of Qaladiza occurred in response to a growing desire for Kurdish independence. A branch of the University of Sulaymaniyah, located in Qaladiza, was targeted, and the town was also destroyed. It was not rebuilt until 1992 ("Barzani Renews Support for Qaladiza on Anniversary of Bombing").

Kurdish migration to the diaspora has occurred in waves, including one in the 1970s, which would have included Diyari, and another in the 1990s (Subagyo et al 5108). Diyari’s family was likely financially well-off to afford the journey, which would also create some distance between him and the people of Halabja depicted in *Jiyan*, who appear to be much less wealthy and likely unable to immigrate, if they so wished.

Jiyan explores the disconnection between diaspora and homeland in part by contrasting Diyari’s individual experience of trauma with the collective trauma of the residents of Halabja. While Diyari is also a victim of a collective traumatic experience, he

has been distanced from his community, which has made it more difficult for him to access his traumatic past. Kaplan and Wang write:

> The split between individual psyche and culture, between private and public, is very much with us today. The dissociation model in trauma studies reinforces this split, and with its insistence on the inaccessibility of trauma, shuts history out from the psyche. A more innovative approach is to reinsert history into the psyche, as Freud tried to do, so as to understand trauma as an historical and cultural phenomenon. (7)

In *Jiyan*, Diyari is divided from his culture of origin by physical distance, but he is also distancing himself through the repression of the trauma he shares with the collective. He is not suppressing his trauma because he wants to cut himself off from other Kurds, but to protect himself from pain. However, not accessing his trauma denies Diyari a chance for a deeper connection with the Kurds of Halabja. It is only by confronting his traumatic past that he is able to form a deeper relationship with the people of Halabja. The mutual support of Diyari for Halabja and of Halabja for Diyari is shown to be inimical to the healing process.

Narratively and visually, *Jiyan* explores the contrast between life and death in Halabja and the struggle to continue after so much loss and trauma. The opening images of mass death in Halabja's past are contrasted with a shot of a crying baby in the present. The shots of Halabja are in black and white, but the baby is shown in color, alone in a bassinet, suggesting a transition from past to present. The girl, Jiyan, is introduced against the backdrop of a rocky (yet faintly green) landscape where she sits on a swing

hung from a dead tree. The dead tree and nearly barren landscape, filmed on location, display some of the long-term effects of the gas attack. The land is deeply scarred and so is Jiyan. The camera moves in for a close-up of her face and lingers there, allowing the audience to absorb the fact that this little girl has suffered a traumatic past as a victim of the gas attack. Yet Jiyan smiles serenely as she swings. Diyari sees Jiyan and stops the car, gets out, walks over to her, and asks her name. When she does not answer, he tries to guess. And when she still does not answer he returns to the car and brings her an apple. Jiyan smiles at him, but she does not speak. The scene suggests the lingering effects of death and despair tinged with hope, reflected in the not-entirely-dead landscape and Jiyan's partially scarred face. Her youth and the playful aspect of the swing are contrasted with the dead tree and the stark landscape, setting the stage for the contrasts between life and death that are a major theme of the film. Jiyan's half-scarred face seems to act as a metaphor for trauma, partially visible and partially hidden.

The film's color scheme adds to the sense of lifelessness; it is primarily drab, the sky hazy and gray, the primary color the dusty brown of the earth. Many of the villagers are wearing coats, suggesting cold weather and setting a mood that is not entirely despairing but also not hopeful. The lack of color suggests despair, contrasted with the bright red flowers on a magazine Diyari gives Jiyan, something beautiful and foreign. Funerals are a frequent occurrence. It seems to be a normal question for one townsperson to ask another, "How many funerals do we have today?" In the town, many of the people are disfigured or disabled, yet life continues.

As Diyari moves through Halabja, the signs of past trauma are everywhere. Many of the townspeople are scarred, blind, or missing limbs. Others are clearly suffering from psychological trauma. Buildings show damage from bombs. An early scene shows an open-air market, busy with people buying produce, but among them, we see an amputee who has lost the lower half of his leg. Throughout the film, many townspeople state repeatedly that those who died during the attacks are the lucky ones. Diyari's host says, "Those who survived are between life and death." He continues, "All the diseases of the world are here, and the newborns come out deformed…When I look at us, I yearn for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Being a part of the civilized world, their problems are dealt with. Here we're trapped between four monsters and our voice does not go far," reflecting the lack of attention Anfal received from the international community.

One of the main symbols of the persistence of life in Halabja is the character of Mela Rostem, a man who lost his entire family in the gas attack and who has not spoken since that time, but only plays his flute. His silence indicates his trauma at the tragedy that has befallen him, yet the persistent sound of his flute in the village is a sign of life. At one point a townsman begins throwing rocks at Mela Rostem, because he is annoyed by his music and because he claims music is against Islam. A fight breaks out between the conservative townsman and a female who wants to defend Mela Rostem. Through it all, Mela Rostem sits playing his flute. In another instance, a funeral scene, where a woman sits beside a grave singing a mourning song, cuts to an image of Mela Rostem in silhouette, playing his flute against the backdrop of a golden sunset. For a few seconds

the mourning song sung by the woman and the serene flute music of Mela Rostem are heard simultaneously, perhaps suggesting the coexistence of life and death in Halabja.

The scene where Diyari meets Jiyan on the outskirts of the city foreshadows Diyari's interactions with others in the village, where his kindness and good intentions are often not enough to overcome the fact that he has forgotten how to behave around his own people. This is also the start of his relationship with Jiyan, which is perhaps the most significant friendship he makes during his stay in Halabja. Clearly Diyari has a special place in his heart for children, shown through the gentle manner in which he interacts with Jiyan and his mission to build the orphanage in Halabja. His name means "gift" in Kurdish and one of his first acts in the film is to offer the small gift of the apple to Jiyan.

Throughout the film, Diyari's interactions with children suggest that they are better able to accept him as an insider-outsider rather than the adults, and that he in turn is able to offer them acceptance and love, with the added wisdom of an adult who has seen more of the world and life than they. However, much of the film focuses on Diyari's awkward interactions with the adult townspeople. He has forgotten the social norms of his traditional culture, leading to frequent embarrassment for him. Through Diyari's interactions with the people of Halabja, *Jiyan* explores the tension between diaspora and homeland, along with the struggle and the need for the exile to reconnect with home. During his time in Halabja, Diyari struggles, often comically, to remember the correct ways of doing things. *Jiyan* shows the diaspora as a place of privilege but also a place of estrangement from one's roots. Life is easier and there are more opportunities, but diasporic life comes at a great cost.

As an outsider returning home, Diyari struggles to reconnect with the people of Halabja. His awkward interactions with adults reveal how he has forgotten the social norms of his culture after years abroad. For instance, attempting to pay a woman after spilling her yogurt breaks a cultural norm, angering locals. Diyari builds easier relationships with children like Jiyan, who are more accepting of him, as well as others who are curious about his travels, such as his host. However, Diyari cannot connect with the people of Halabja without confronting his own repressed memories from the past. Only through this shared trauma can he reconnect to his Kurdish identity.

In one scene Jiyan is following Diyari at a distance because she is too shy to talk to him. Diyari knows she is there and decides to hide around the corner of a wall and surprise her when she comes around, but instead he jumps out and frightens a woman carrying a large bowl of yogurt causing her to spill the entire contents over herself and the ground. Later, Diyari goes to her home to offer to pay for the spilled yogurt. When he arrives, the woman, Fatim Khan, is sitting outside with a group of women making bread. She rushes into the house as soon as she recognizes Diyari. He says to the women, "Please tell her not to be scared, I'm one of you." This statement marks Diyari's interstitial status--he is a Kurd, but as someone who has been living in the diaspora, he has also become to some extent an outsider in his homeland.

The yogurt incident is not resolved by Diyari's visit to Fatim Khan's home. He gives Jiyan money and asks her to take it to Fatim Khan, and when Fatim Khan will not accept it, he tells Jiyan to leave it on the front stoop. Later in the day, Fatim Khan's husband comes to the home where Diyari is staying. He is furious. "Don't ever do this

again!" he shouts at Diyari and throws the money in his face. "Try to understand me, Mister," the husband continues. "We're Kurds, you have embarrassed us. Do not forget your roots. Goodbye." This exchange emphasizes Diyari's interstitial existence: he is Kurdish enough to understand the language when Fatin Khan's husband is shouting at him, but not Kurdish enough to remember all the social nuances of his people. He is returning home, but he has become in many ways an outsider.

However, because he is Kurdish and grew up in Kurdistan, his mistakes seem to be treated with less tolerance than they might be for a complete foreigner. His blunder in attempting to pay for the yogurt, while meant kindly, is met with anger. The anger seems to come from not only the insult of Diyari attempting to pay for the spilled yogurt, but also Diyari having forgotten the social norms of his people and behaving like a foreigner. The film does not offer much information about Diyari's life in the United States, but it is easy to surmise that he must retain a certain outsider status there as well. His English is excellent, but it is accented, and he bears a foreign name.

What Diyari does have in his favor is that he has not lost his language. Even though he has been out of Kurdistan since he was a child, he still speaks Kurdish fluently. When he is invited to lunch with the mayor of Halabja, his dining companions remark on this and praise Diyari for speaking Kurdish so well. The ability to speak Kurdish prevents Diyari from experiencing greater alienation during his stay in Halabja, as he is able to communicate without the aid of an interpreter and to understand the conversation around him that is not necessarily directed at him. At the same time, his status as a fluent English speaker marks him as different. Even the educated man with whom Diyari is staying

remarks sadly on his own poor command of the English language and expresses a longing for better English ability, so that he can read more books not available to him in Kurdish.

While Diyari struggles in his relationships with adults, he fares better with the town children. The incident with the spilled yogurt forges his first real connection with Jiyan. Diyari is sitting crouched in shame behind the wall, staring at the spilled yogurt, clearly appalled at what his attempted joke on Jiyan has done. Jiyan comes around the corner and he says to her, “See what you did?” Jiyan says nothing, but she starts to laugh, and slowly Diyari begins to laugh too. They walk away from the scene of the accident hand in hand, laughing. There are a number of possible interpretations for Diyari’s easier relationships with the children. They are clearly more accepting of his foreign behaviors than the adults are. One possibility is that the children are more comfortable with increasing globalization. They are the ones who are most curious about Diyari’s life in the U.S., and they ask the most questions. At one point, Sherko asks Diyari if there are Kurdish computers, and Diyari tells him that there will be if Sherko grows up to build them. Sherko’s interest in technology also suggests a relationship with the outside world and the changing nature of communication technology that is not expressed by others in the village. Yet the interest in a Kurdish computer suggests that Sherko is not planning to leave home, perhaps indicating that making connections with the rest of the world does not require leaving one’s home.

Sherko and Jiyan are far less judgmental of Diyari’s mistakes than some of the adults, and he is able to converse with them about sensitive subjects (such as the girl who has a crush on him) more openly than he probably could with adults. Both Jiyan and

Sherko are approximately the same age as Diyari when he left Kurdistan, so his knowledge of life in a Kurdish village would have been frozen around that age. The children are probably used to making their own fair share of social faux pas, so they may also find it easier to relate to Diyari in this way. This could be part of why Jiyan laughs at his mistakes. Diyari's game of hiding from her (which results in the yogurt accident) is like something a child would have done, made funny because he is an adult. He has made a fool of himself by behaving like a child, but it is this childish act that truly begins his friendship with Jiyan. Initially shy and fearful around him, Jiyan bonds with Diyari over the accident of the spilled yogurt. As Diyari is sitting on the ground next to the spill, he looks utterly crestfallen. But Jiyan bursts into laughter. Finally, Diyari laughs with her. Jiyan then takes his hand, and they continue down the street together, whereas before Jiyan was only following Diyari at a distance.

While part of Diyari's difficulty in relating to the adults in Halabja is his insider-outsider status, there is also a part of him that is shutting out his past experience during the time he lived in Kurdistan as a child. Early in the film, one learns that Diyari and his family were refugees, but Diyari does not offer much information about what events led his family to flee Iraq nor what the experience was like for him personally. The initial impression of Diyari is that he is a privileged diasporic Kurd who has returned to his homeland to help his people by building an orphanage in Halabja. The traumatic experiences of the people of Halabja are made clear from the beginning of the film, but Diyari's own traumatic experiences are hidden and are brought to light gradually as the narrative unfolds. Diyari seems determined to bury his trauma, while, in contrast, the

trauma experienced by Halabja is available for anyone to see in the devastation of the town, the landscape, the injuries inflicted on the people, and the frequent funerals. For Diyari, part of reclaiming his birthright and becoming more insider than outsider is by confronting his past traumatic experience and sharing it with others in the village. For Diyari, this traumatic experience is part of his Kurdish identity, so acknowledging and sharing that experience brings him closer to the villagers in Halabja.

The narrative is disrupted at numerous points by flashbacks, indicating the traumatic memories of the characters. Diyari experiences his first flashback when he encounters bombshells that have been repurposed as planters. Throughout the film, similar contrasts between life and death continue to appear. The bombshells were meant to deliver death, now they are a home for new life. Twenty minutes into the film, Jiyan hands Diyari a photograph. The audience is not shown the photograph, but as Diyari looks at it the scene is suddenly disrupted by the sound of explosions and cuts to an image of two children huddled in the corner of a building. When we return to the present, Jiyan runs from the room.

The second incident of traumatic flashback in the narrative occurs approximately thirty-one minutes into the film. Diyari has just left money to pay for the spilled yogurt when he spies bombshells lined up against a wall. They seem to have been used as planters, but now the plants are dry and brown. As he looks at them his face becomes troubled. There is the sound of an explosion, then in quick succession, the audience witnesses a window blown open and a group of children lying on the floor, either dead or unconscious. Intercut with these images are shots of the bombshell planters. Diyari shuts

his eyes and shakes his head in an attempt to block out the memory, and the narrative returns to the present. The sequence is repeated later as Diyari watches two men digging the foundation for the orphanage. Both men have amputated legs and use crutches to support themselves as they work. As Diyari watches them, the audience hears the sound of a blast. Once again, shots of the open window being blown open, and the dead or unconscious schoolchildren are intercut with shots of the scene Diyari is observing in the present.

Diyari's interactions with Sherko and Jiyan help him begin to approach his own past trauma by helping others to heal. Sherko tells Diyari he wants to become a pilot when he grows up, "So I can bomb Baghdad with chemicals." But Diyari offers Sherko another path, an alternative to revenge. In one scene Jiyan sits combing her hair in front of a paper mirror. The left half of the mirror has been cut away so that Jiyan does not have to see the scarred right half of her face. Like Diyari, Sherko and Jiyan are child victims of trauma, which is perhaps part of the reason Diyari relates to them so well and cares for them so deeply, even though he has only just met them.

Diyari's struggles to connect with the people of Halabja come to a head when he misreads the seriousness of a young Halabja woman's affections for him. The young woman, Tavga, is the daughter of one of Diyari's neighbors. She sees Diyari from a distance and becomes intensely interested in him romantically, so much so that she begins to express a desire to marry him, which she confesses to her sisters. As a female survivor of the chemical attacks, Tavga is more likely to face difficulty finding a marriage partner in Kurdistan than a male survivor (Moradi, F., et al). During Anfal,

Kurdish men considered to be of fighting age were executed, so there would have been fewer eligible men for marriage. Diyari would have seemed like a promising match. Tavga clearly finds him attractive, even though he is approximately twice her age. Diyari is also a kind man. He has come to Halabja to help build an orphanage. He has befriended Sherko and the shy, reclusive Jiyan. He is also in good health. The young men we do see in Halabja are often amputees, and many people in Halabja are dying due to ongoing side effects of the poison gas. Diyari even offers the promise of a better life--he could whisk Tavga off to the United States, far from a dead-end life in Halabja. She could travel. She could go to university. The viewer does not hear much about her dreams, but learns she loves popular music and dancing, like many young women. Tavga's future in Halabja is certainly not a bright one, but Diyari could change everything for her. Diyari fails to understand how deeply invested Tavga is in the idea of marrying him. When he learns of her hopes, he writes her a letter attempting to let her down gently, explaining that he is too old for her and already married with children. However, the letter does not soften the blow. Tavga is so distraught that shortly after receiving it she attempts suicide through an overdose of pills.

Diyari's misreading of Tavga's affections represents his most grievous breach with the homeland. He seems almost unaware of the plight of Kurdish women in post-Anfal Iraq. And while he left the country before Anfal, it would be inexcusable for him to be unaware of this issue. Yet he makes no mention of it in the film. While the letter he writes to Tavga lets her down as gently as possible, it also leaves her completely isolated by her loss, quite possibly overwhelmed at the thought of the grim future she faces with

little hope of escape. Her sisters, her only confidantes, have been constantly teasing her about her interest in Diyari, so there is no one she can turn to. On a more symbolic level, a marriage between the diasporic Kurd and a woman from the homeland would have offered a greater sense of reunification. But Diyari is already married with two children. He is firmly rooted in the diaspora.

Tavga's suicide attempt is the event that forces Diyari's confrontation with his past trauma. Diyari is the one who must drive her to the hospital. Up to this point Diyari has avoided the hospital because he knows how troubling it would be for him. Tavga attempts suicide after Diyari sends her a letter explaining that he is already married. At the hospital, he sees the ravaged faces and broken bodies of victims of the chemical attacks. As he looks at them, he experiences another flashback-- the sound of a bomb, the window blowing open, children lying on the schoolroom floor. This time he collapses and loses consciousness. When he wakes, we witness the memory in its entirety: bombs falling in a schoolyard full of children. The ones who are able, run, screaming in terror. The window blows open, children lie dead on the schoolroom floor, and the child Diyari screams silently. The scene cuts to the opening of the orphanage, where Diyari's host explains to a crowd that Diyari is a survivor of a bombing that occurred in 1974 at an elementary school in the town of Qaladiza. Diyari then announces he is naming the orphanage Jiyan Orphanage for the little girl and for the meaning of the word itself, life. The mayor of the town says, "We have preserved our identity for 5000 years and will continue to do so." While the mayor is speaking about Halabja and the Kurds of Iraq who have not been utterly destroyed by Saddam Hussein's genocide, the statement could refer

equally to Diyari and his preservation of his Kurdish identity as a diasporic Kurd. *Jiyan* is a film about reconciling the diaspora with the homeland, how that relationship is fractured, and how it might be reconciled.

In the final scenes of the film, there is a song sung by a child about the gift of the orphanage, as well as a scene of the orphans marching from their old orphanage to the new one, carrying their belongings on their backs. The last images are of Jiyan sitting in her swing. The land behind her is greener now and birds are singing. She is crying because Diyari is about to leave. While the scene indicates hope for Halabja, it is also a reminder that Diyari is returning to a better life, while options remain grievously limited for those who remain behind.

In Rosebiani's vision, the diaspora Kurd needs the homeland as much -if not more- than the homeland needs him. Diyari is able to provide the gift of the orphanage. He is able to forge a special connection with Sherko and Jiyan, but most significantly with Jiyan, who is reclusive due to her scarred face. Yet Diyari's presence creates upheaval. Minor disturbances when he forgets how to interact socially (the yogurt incident) and more grievous ones when he fails to understand the depth of Tavga's interest in him. The time spent in Halabja allows Diyari to confront his past traumatic experience and gain some measure of healing by sharing it with others who have lived through it. However, he is able to return to his comfortable life in the United States, while the residents of Halabja are only slightly better off than when he arrived. They have the orphanage and a few of them have the memory of his friendship. Jiyan has developed a new confidence, yet they are still living with the after-effects of the gas attack. The

funerals will continue. There will be no influx of eligible young men to offer Tavga a better marriage prospect than Diyari (and she is not alone in this situation.) Diyari (the gift) has received a great deal from the people of Halabja.

Ultimately, the film argues that the diasporic Kurd Diyari needs connection with the homeland as much as, if not more than, the homeland needs him. While Diyari provides some material aid by building an orphanage in Halabja, he gains something deeper from the people there. Bonding with young locals like Jiyan helps Diyari finally confront repressed memories from his childhood in Kurdistan. By sharing stories of trauma, he starts to heal. However, the people of Halabja remain stuck in the past, still reeling from the aftershocks of genocide. Diyari is able to return to his comfortable Western life, while Halabja continues to struggle. Through this uneven dynamic, the film suggests it is the diaspora that most needs reconnection with the homeland in order to recover from collective trauma.

Jiyan combines the themes of exile and return with an exploration of collective trauma, positing that both the Kurds who remained in the homeland and those who left for the diaspora need each other to heal. Unlike many Kurdish filmmakers, Rosebiani chooses to end his films on an optimistic note and despite its serious and sometimes tragic themes, *Jiyan* ends hopefully with the completion of the new orphanage. Diyari returning to Kurdistan to build the school suggests that Kurds need to work together to help each other in the recovery from violence and genocide, rather than overly relying on outside aid. However, while initially it appears that Halabja needs Diyari more than he needs Halabja, since the city is badly in need of the orphanage he has come to build, by

the close of the narrative, it is equally clear how much Diyari needs the people of Halabja. Through Diyari's journey, *Jiyan* posits that confronting collective trauma is vital for reconciliation between the fractured Kurdish homeland and diaspora. The contrasts between life and death in Halabja symbolize the deep scars left behind by genocide. Diyari's uneasy insider-outsider status shows the difficulty of assimilation for those in the diaspora. By accepting each other's painful memories, Diyari and the people of Halabja enact a poetic vision of healing. However, the bittersweet ending raises broader questions. While sharing trauma can bridge divisions, what responsibility does the diaspora have to those who remained behind? *Jiyan* offers a moving portrayal of a people working to rebuild their homeland. *Jiyan* presents the idea that the Kurds of the diaspora and the homeland need each other and makes a case that returning to the homeland is important to connecting with one's identity, especially when part of that identity involves a traumatic shared past. However, it is also important to consider that returning to Kurdistan is not possible nor desirable for every Kurd in the diaspora and that this does not make them any less Kurdish. These complex feelings about return are an important theme in the next two diaspora films in this chapter as well.

***Chaplin of the Mountains*: Children of the Diaspora Return Home**

Jano Rosebiani's 2013 film Chaplin of the Mountains reflects on the Kurdish diaspora experience through the quest of Nazê, a young woman searching for traces of her mother's Kurdish village and invites the audience to share in her journey of recovering her cultural identity by following the format of a road movie. The film

explores themes of ancestral connection, the power of memory, and the complexities of coming home for those estranged from their cultural roots.

Nazê, was born to a Kurdish mother and a French father. Her parents are both deceased, and she is returning to Iraqi Kurdistan for the first time, in hope of finding her mother's village. Nazê's mother was a survivor of the Anfal genocide, but she, along with other Kurdish women, was sold into sexual slavery in Egypt, where she was rescued by a French man who married her and became Nazê's father. Nazê's task is particularly daunting as she cannot remember the name of the village and does not know whether she has any living relatives in Kurdistan.

As she is about to give up the search and return to France, she encounters a film student, Alan, whose mother is Italian and whose father is Kurdish. Alan is accompanied by his friend, a fellow film student named David. They are in Kurdistan for a university project that they have concocted: to show Charlie Chaplin films in remote villages and document the villagers' reactions. They believe they can somehow recreate the early days of cinema if they can find people who are unfamiliar with Hollywood films. Alan and David are working with a Kurdish guide and interpreter, Reboir, who is assisting them in their project by helping them find the villages and communicate with the locals. The group invites Nazê to join them on their road trip with the idea that they can help her achieve her goal. Like Jiyan, Chaplin of the Mountains combines themes regarding diaspora, homeland, and return, with trauma and recovered memory. This section primarily focuses on themes related to diaspora, while trauma themes depicted in *Chaplin of the Mountains* will be explored in the following chapter.

*Chaplin of the Mountain*s features the intertwining stories of two Kurdish characters of mixed ethnicity, both born in the diaspora and both the children of immigrants. While the film is primarily invested in Nazê's story, much of the road movie structure is provided by Alan and his classmate David's project, as they travel to isolated Kurdish villages to screen Charlie Chaplin films. They are joined by Shireen, a Kurdish journalist, who is interested in reporting on their work. Nazê's journey through Kurdistan is also a journey through memory. As Nazê spends more time in the region, she encounters people, places, objects, and songs that remind her of her mother and bring back specific memories that help connect Nazê, to her Kurdish heritage and aid her in finding her family's village. *Chaplin of the Mountains* utilizes the structure of the road movie to depict both the practical and spiritual aspects of Nazê's journey to find her lost roots. The film's opening shot is of the road, filmed from the interior of a vehicle. Numerous conversations are shot within the vehicle, aiding in a sense of growing intimacy between Nazê and her companions.

While Nazê is clear in her intentions for returning to Kurdistan, Alan seems more conflicted. Unlike Nazê, Alan has not returned to Kurdistan to reconnect with his roots, at least that is what he claims. He is more interested in his film project. He mentions that he has an aunt in Kurdistan but that his Kurdish is not good enough to converse with her. However, as he spends time with Nazê, he starts to reconsider reaching out to his aunt.

In contrast to Nazê and Alan, who are returning to their ancestral homeland, Shireen is longing to leave. She feels that as a woman her opportunities in Kurdistan are limited and she expresses frustration with the way Kurdish men treat her. This is the other

side of diaspora films. Sometimes the departure is reluctant, but in other cases it may be enthusiastic. Yet it is Shireen who sits by Nazê's side and reads the list of village names to her and offers her unwavering support in Nazê's search.

One of the ways the sense of rupture with the homeland is underscored is through the way characters in the film utilize Kurdish language. Throughout the film, the characters mostly speak English because Nazê and Alan speak very little Kurdish. Alan understands Kurdish well but cannot speak it, aside from a few words and phrases. Nazê understands a little and yet she speaks more Kurdish than Alan does; most of the time she requires an interpreter. Her primary language is French but she also speaks English fluently with an accent. Alan seems to have grown up in the United States because he speaks unaccented American English. One of the reasons Alan is afraid to try and meet his aunt is that he cannot speak Kurdish well enough to converse with her. The struggles with language and the inability to communicate highlight one of the main issues that may be faced by children born in the diaspora who want to reconnect with their ancestral home. By contrast, Shireen, born in Kurdistan and longing to leave, speaks Kurdish and English fluently, suggesting she may have an easier time bridging the gap between homeland and diaspora.

The film speaks of the director's sense of pride in the beauty of his homeland, of the hospitality of its people, the richness of its music, and perhaps a longing for its food. The camera lingers on meals as a locus of Kurdish culture and social connection and makes a point of showing characters freely drinking wine and beer. Nazê's connection to her family is found through traces in the land, in the language, and even the food.

Throughout the film, Nazê's encounters with Kurdish culture trigger memories relating to her mother that ultimately lead to her finding her village. She rediscovers her ancestral homeland through traces in the land, in the language, and even the food. These encounters take place at different stages along the road trip, so that Nazê's memories resurface gradually.

The first connection Nazê finds is in the name of a mountain that shares the name of her grandfather. Shireen says it may be significant to their search and the fact that Nazê's grandfather shares the name of Mount Safeen could indicate that he was born nearby. This realization comes as the two women sleep outside together under the stars with Mount Safeen looming above them in the distance, suggesting the necessity of the land itself to return Nazê to her family roots. Not long after, Nazê attends a Kurdish wedding with her companions. As she is watching the dancing, she recognizes the song being played as well as the dance. She remembers that her mother used to sing that song and that as a child her mother taught her that dance, although she has forgotten the steps.

One of the most significant scenes in the film is shot at a fruit stand and focuses on a rope of ripe figs. It is the figs that finally trigger the memory of the name of Nazê 's village--the fruit seller is calling out that they are *hinjir* (figs) from Hinjirawa. ("They're not really from Hinjirawa," he explains, "It just sounds better.") Nazê recognizes the name Hinjirawa as the name of her mother's village.

The relationship of music to memory is an important theme in *Chaplin of the Mountains*. In addition to the song that triggers Nazê's memories of her mother, the song *Welat*, by Ciwan Haco, plays at various intervals in the background throughout the film.

The song is about the Halabja Massacre and not only links the past with the present but also serves as a reminder of the connection felt by Nazê and Alan with the country of their parents. The music reminds the audience of the mingled emotions Nazê faces on her journey: the sorrow of loss and the joy of return. The first time the song plays is when Shireen brings the list of villages destroyed during Anfal to Nazê so she can try to search the 4,000 for one she recognizes. In this first instance, only the instrumental version plays as characters take turns reading the names of villages in the list to Nazê. Its next iteration comes after another Chaplin screening, beginning with instrumentals as Shireen reads village names to Nazê and bringing in the vocals as the group traverses the roads twisting through the Kurdish mountains. It is the subsequent scene where Nazê finally remembers the name of her village. The song serves to signal how much closer she is to finding her ancestral home. It plays for the final time as Nazê and her companions enter Hinjirawa.

In the final scene of the film, the figs that helped Nazê recover her memory are invoked again, when Nazê finally connects with the last person living in her village–her great grandfather, Mam Cholly. They go together to look for figs. However, the audience never sees the fig trees. The viewer does not know whether they were destroyed in the gas attack and are now only a figment of the old man's fragmented memory. Regardless of whether the fig trees of Hinjirawa still exist, the memory of them is what reunites what may be the two sole survivors of Hinjirawa. Two people holding and sharing the memory of the fig trees, when the rest of the villagers are dead or scattered to parts unknown in an empty bombed-out village suggest the weight of all the other lost memories, lost stories and lost lives. Mam Cholly suffers from some sort of dementia, confusing Nazê with her

mother, unable to process that she is actually his great-granddaughter. But Mam Cholly serves as the last guardian of the village's history. Without him, Nazê would have had no one to come home to, no one to tell her who she was. Between the two of them, the history of the village is resurrected, if only a little, and it becomes a place where people with names and relatives and stories lived. Yet without the figs, this would not have been possible.

Nazê's story represents the struggle to preserve cultural heritage across generations after displacement, suggesting the power of memory and intergenerational connection to sustain cultural identity, even amidst tragedy and loss. Mam Cholly and Nazê sharing memories of the fig trees keeps the village's history alive. Additionally, the film depicts the variety and complexity of relationships between homeland and those in the diaspora, suggesting not only commonalities but also that the experience is not uniform, a theme that is carried even further in Soleen Yusef's film *House Without Roof*.

The Road Home: Kurdish Identity and Generational Trauma in *House Without Roof*

Soleen Yusef's road movie, *House Without Roof* (2016), is the story of three Kurdish siblings who grow up in Germany after their mother flees there with them during Anfal in the late 1980s. Their father, a *peshmerga*, or guerilla, died during the campaign. When news of Saddam's execution reaches the family, they are divided in their desire to return to Kurdistan. The mother, Gule, and her eldest son Jan want to return, but the younger siblings, Liya and Alan, feel that their lives are in Germany and have no desire to return to Kurdistan. Thus, the family is divided with Jan and Liya returning to

Kurdistan and Liya and Alan remaining in Germany. But when Gule dies unexpectedly, Liya and Alan are summoned to Kurdistan for her funeral. *House Without Roof* focuses on uncovering and healing the conflicts between the three siblings, especially when Jan reveals a terrible secret about their father that he has been keeping since childhood. The film additionally examines the relationships between the siblings who left Kurdistan and their large extended family that remained behind, and delves into questions related to tradition, family authority, and family conflict, with the crux of the strife centered around where the siblings' mother will be buried and whose right it is to make that choice. In an interview with Narîn Şevîn Doğan, director Soleen Yusef stated:

> "For the majority of Kurdish people, flight plays a defining role. The fleeing and arriving. But also the returning to one's homecountry. This 'forsakenness and search' is a Kurdish issue...Roadmovies are also coined by the spiritual journey the characters experience additional to the physical one. A journey which reveals questions that are meant to be answered throughout the movie. For Kurds, this has always been the question of identity."

House Without Roof is exactly the type of film Yusef is describing here, which makes sense since it is her film. On the road to bury their mother, the siblings each engage in a spiritual struggle, not only dealing with long-held conflicts with each other but also confronting personal wounds they have kept hidden. The spiritual journeys of each character and the physical journey on the road present great challenges for the siblings, and it is through overcoming both spiritual and physical blocks that they are able to accomplish their goals and to address the "forsakenness and search" Yusef refers to.

House Without Roof explores the division and struggle for identity that can define the diaspora experience. Through the format of a road movie, it depicts the conflicts and pain diasporic characters face in addressing their fragmented identities and inability to fully belong. The film works toward a transnational resolution, suggesting that characters can ultimately accept a hybrid identity that transcends divisions between homelands. Additionally, it delves into generational trauma inflicted on the Kurds–the final images draw attention to the fact that this trauma remains ongoing.

House Without Roof begins with a series of images in a photo studio, as the photographer captures multiple shots of a Kurdish family. The parents and children are dressed in their best clothes, the parents wearing traditional Kurdish clothing and the children in Westernized attire, which foreshadows the division to come. The photographer struggles with a generator as the lights flash the on- and off-signs of the regular power outages in Kurdistan. The audience is shown a series of photographs of the family and then the children, posing playfully and joyfully. The boys flex their muscles and then all three of them stick out their tongues and make faces. This opening scene establishes a sense of warmth and closeness in the family before the death of the father and immigration to Germany. The sense of family togetherness is sharply contrasted in subsequent scenes depicting Gule and her children in Germany.

The film cuts to an idyllic scene in the Kurdish countryside, a house where the mother from the photograph is hanging sheets to dry from a clothesline on the flat roof. The two brothers play together with a slingshot. The little girl swings slowly on a wooden swing from a tree, while her father sits in the shade playing a *saz* and singing to her. In

the background, the song “Zarokati” by Çar Newa is playing. Significantly, it is a song about the sadness of leaving one’s childhood behind and the children in the film are losing their childhood to war, shown as the film cuts to an image of the father in military fatigues holding a gun. The two brothers look worriedly at the sky, as a missile shoots across the skyline and explodes in the air. In the next scene, a voice is heard over a black screen giving a newscast about the Anfal and stating (in Kurdish), “Many people have already fallen victim to the regime’s ‘Al-Anfal Campaign’ and thousands are fleeing. Not even women, children, and the elderly were spared the brutality of the tyrannical military. According to estimates, the number of people missing are far over one hundred thousand,” thus establishing the time period and the reason for the family’s exodus.

There is a rapid leap in time, and we see a television set running another newscast, this one about the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein. Gule, the mother of the children from the opening scenes, is holding a party for her friends in Germany to celebrate the fall of Saddam Hussein. But the party is also designed as an occasion for her to announce to these friends that she has decided to leave Germany and return to Kurdistan. Conflict erupts between the family members because while Jan knew this announcement was coming, Liya and Alan did not. Gule and Jan withhold vital information from Liya and Alan and the hurt and estrangement this withholding creates is the core source of conflict within the film. At the party, a vicious argument breaks out between Alan and Jan, while guests look on in the background. Jan says to Alan (speaking German), “Do you know how embarrassing you are right now, you loser?” In retort, Alan spits in his face and they start grabbing at each other. Gule tells Alan to get

out and says, “You’ll never amount to anything.” These are the last words we hear her say to Alan in the film, and while other aspects of the film suggest Gule and Alan remain on speaking terms after she returns to Kurdistan, the audience is left with the impact of these words as the last on-screen exchange between the two of them, indicating a deeply fractured relationship.

The early scenes in Kurdistan and the forward jump in time to Germany all take place in the first few minutes of the film. The audience is transported jarringly from the idyllic images of the happy family to images of war, and then to images of celebration. Yet the celebration of Saddam’s fall is punctuated with deceit and conflict between the family, no longer the idyllic young family of the opening images. The children are adults and based on the timeline of events (from the worst years of Anfal around 1988 to the toppling of the Saddam statue in 2003), it can be estimated that around twenty-five years have passed. The children have now lived longer in Germany than they have in Kurdistan.

Internal family conflict is a central theme of *House Without Roof*, and all of that conflict is instigated by issues surrounding return to Kurdistan, even when the person who wants to return home has already passed away. However, while it is the issue of return that instigated the conflict, it is not the root cause. The issue of estrangement from homeland is reflected through issues of estrangement within the family, especially the estrangement between Liya, Alan, and Jan, the estrangement between Gule and Liya and Alan, and the estrangement between Liya, Alan and their extended family in Kurdistan. Within the first few minutes of the film, conflict erupts between mother and siblings

about returning to Kurdistan. When Gule dies, the siblings are in conflict with their extended family about where their mother will be buried. The journey to bury their mother is fraught with conflict and danger for the three siblings, as they deal with their conflicts with each other as well as their own internal conflicts, face dangers along the road, and are hunted by their own family members. Through these struggles, each of the characters grows spiritually, and their relationships with each other, with their memories of parents, and with Kurdistan change over the course of the film. At first, the three siblings bicker in an almost childish manner, but as the film progresses the deeper causes of their conflicts with each other rise to the surface and their arguments become more intense.

Interwoven with these family conflicts are Liya and Alan's complex feelings about returning to a homeland they never wanted to come back to. The rejoining of siblings and the conflict between them, as well as the conflicted feelings Liya and Alan have with their parents, are part of the spiritual journey that connects directly to the spiritual journey that is the return to homeland. For the characters in this film, family and homeland are deeply intertwined, unlike Diyari in *Jiyan*, who never mentions having any family living in Kurdistan.

When the family splits at the beginning of the film, it is easy to see why Liya and Alan want to stay in Germany while Gule and Jan choose to return to Kurdistan. Gule, as the mother, has not become accustomed to German life in the way that her children have, and the rest of her family is still in Kurdistan. She wants to go home now that Saddam has fallen. Jan is a loyal son in a very traditional way--he supports and cares for his

mother. He is the responsible sibling and expects the others to fall in line. But Alan and Liya are different, and while the film suggests that they may not have fully found their place in German society, neither of them feels they will be at home in Kurdistan either. Liya is a singer and a pianist. She is not famous, but she seems to be getting small-time gigs. Performing her music is important to her, as shown later through her bitter reactions to Jan when he calls Liya "selfish" for pursuing her music. And in Germany, no one will tell her that there is anything wrong with a woman singing and playing the piano in public. But in Kurdistan of the time, she cannot expect to have a future as a performer, and she can expect her extended family to exert influence over her life. Alan wants to play the role of a rebel, yet in truth he deeply loves both his parents and is very attached to the memory of his father. When he returns for his mother's funeral, Alan arrives in Kurdistan wearing his father's old *peshmerga* jacket, suggesting that he wishes to honor the memory of his father and what he represented to Kurdistan, even though Alan appears more interested in assimilating into German culture. Marks describes how female directors in three separate films utilize specific imagery to help show a connection with their mothers from whom they are separated, since the daughters live in the diaspora and the mothers remain in the homeland (xi). Allen's jacket serves a similar purpose, except that his father is no longer alive, so there is no way to bridge the gap. Marks writes, "By contrast, [to mainstream cinema] intercultural cinema needs to appeal to embodied knowledge and memory." Alan cannot seem to find his place in life. He has a son in Germany, but Alan has abandoned him with his mother. He is angry and does not want to be controlled by his family, not in Germany and certainly not in Kurdistan.

But when Gule dies, everything changes--now Alan and Liya will come to Kurdistan for their mother, if only to pay their last respects. In spite of the rifts between them, the one thing the siblings have in common is their love for their mother and their determination that her final wishes should be fulfilled. And Gule's last wish is to be buried beside her *peshmerga* husband. Of the three siblings, only Jan knows the terrible truth about their father--that he betrayed his unit and revealed their position to Saddam and afterward committed suicide. Gule knew that her husband was a traitor, and the rest of the family knows it too. Only Liya and Alan remain unaware. When it comes to the question of where Gule is to be buried, her brother Ferhad wants to deny her wish to be buried with her traitor husband and lay her to rest with her birth family instead. But even though Jan knows the truth, his deep loyalty to his mother drives him to fulfill her last wishes, and together the three siblings steal her away inside her coffin in the middle of the night, to drive across the country and lay her to rest beside their father near their old village near Halabja. But when their uncle Ferhad learns what they have done, he sends his son, Ako, and another cousin, Jeger, after them to find Gule's body and return her to him. Raising the stakes even further, Ako calls a family friend who is a high-ranking military officer and tells him that thieves have taken his aunt's body in order to blackmail his father. Now the siblings are being hunted not only by their cousins, but also by the military, and every checkpoint they come to puts them in further danger of failing to accomplish their goal.

Yet while much of the film is focused on the deep conflict and estrangement between Jan, Alan, and Liya, Yuseff punctuates the film with moments of tenderness

between the siblings. For instance, Jan comes to meet Alan at the airport, and when they first see each other, they embrace. There is another moment of connectedness, when the two find Liya in the sewing room, asleep at the sewing machine with her head on an unfinished dress, possibly one her mother had been making and never completed because of her death. Jan and Alan each embrace Liya in turn. Then Jan tells Liya they must leave now. She is confused, and Jan explains that they need to "bury Mom in the village next to Dad. That was her last wish." Alan is crying. Liya says, "The village does not exist anymore. We don't even know if the grave is still there." Jan replies, "It's still there." Liya says, "I'm not coming." Jan says, "Liya, she wanted us to do this together," showing the audience that Gule's last wish is not only for burial with her husband but also for reconciliation with her children. These moments suggest what might have been (indeed, Liya herself says so) if Jan and Gule had not kept Alan and Liya in ignorance about their father. Moments of kindness also suggest the possibility of healing. Intermixed with all the bitterness there is still enough love that the family might come together again, a promise fulfilled at the close of the film.

In addition to struggling with their estrangement from their family, Liya and Alan also struggle with issues of Kurdish-German identity. In many ways, this struggle is less overt than the struggle of Diyari in *Jiyan.* However, from the moment they arrive in Kurdistan, Liya and Alan show signs of their insider-outsider status. For example, Liya chooses to sit in the front seat of the taxi she takes from the airport, and uses a seatbelt, both of which the driver tells her are not normal (first for a woman to sit in the front seat and second for anyone to wear the seatbelt.) In fact, to emphasize how strange it is for

Liya to use the seatbelt, the belt itself is so dirty that the driver warns her not to get dirt on herself. Further, her female relatives admonish her for taking a taxi alone all the way from the airport at night, saying, “How could you come here alone from Erbil in the middle of the night? This is Kurdistan, not Europe. We were worried sick.” However, during the ride, her driver is surprised when Liya speaks Kurdish to him, a moment which draws emphasis to the fact that Liya can, in fact, speak Kurdish. While the timeline of the film remains somewhat unclear for much of the film, by the end it is solidified, based on comments from the characters and real-life events that occur during the film, so that we know Liya and Alan have spent approximately twenty-five years in Germany without returning to Kurdistan during that time period. That the two of them both still speak Kurdish is highly significant, even though they switch to German when speaking to each other.

Alan’s outsiderness in Kurdistan might seem to receive less emphasis than Liya’s, but it is also noticeable. With his near shoulder-length hair, he looks distinctly different from all the short-haired Kurdish men in the film. Additionally, the film suggests it is strange for Alan to be wearing his father’s camouflage military jacket when he is not himself a soldier. Jan comments on it when he meets Alan at the airport, and Omeed asks Alan whether he is a soldier when they are attempting to pass through the checkpoint. Eventually, Alan stops wearing the jacket, even though he has not yet discovered the truth about his father. Like Liya, Alan is able to speak Kurdish, but he speaks German to his siblings. Of the three siblings, Alan might suffer the most from Yuseff’s “forsakenness”. Even though all three of them struggle with finding an identity and sense

of place that feels right to them, Alan is the least grounded. In Germany, he is a troublemaker.

His mother and brother both think he is a “loser,” and after they leave, things do not seem to have improved. In the scene leading to Jan’s phone call to inform Alan that their mother is dead, Alan is thrown out of a club by a bouncer. The bouncer asks Alan, “What did you take?” implying that Alan is on some kind of illicit drug. About midway through the film, the viewer discovers that in the time since Gule and Jan relocated to Kurdistan, Alan became a father, but it does not sound like he is a very good one. Jan asks him whether Alan’s son, Leo, even gets the money Jan sends, which indicates that Alan is not able to provide for his son. He tells Jan he “never wanted to be a father,” yet he is visibly hurt when Jan implies that he does not think Leo does not receive the money he sends. Alan’s journey is about becoming responsible and learning to care for himself and for other people in his life. A crucial aspect of that journey is reconnecting with his Kurdish roots. Two major components of this reconnection are reconciling with his extended Kurdish family and with Jan, a vital component of Alan’s roots, even as they struggle with mutual hurt and resentment. Ultimately, Alan’s journey leads him towards reconciliation with his family and his roots in Kurdistan, and the film suggests he also develops a better relationship with himself through this process.

The three siblings are in conflict with each other from the onset of the trip, but the conflict is directed between Jan versus Liya and Alan, the two of whom do not seem to harbor any resentment against each other. It seems the only thing they can agree on is the necessity of fulfilling their mother’s last wish, and together they struggle to carry her

coffin from its resting place in the mosque to the back of Jan's white pickup. But after this brief cooperation, they quickly descend into bitter arguments. Throughout the film, the goal of laying their mother to rest is placed in jeopardy by the siblings' own bitter feelings toward each other. Liya and Alan feel that Jan is very judgmental of them. There is a sense that this is a burden that they have carried for many years. Jan seems to see his siblings as somehow beneath him. First, he banishes Alan to sit in the truckbed for smoking in the vehicle. Then Liya goes to join Alan after Jan calls her "selfish" for choosing to pursue her music. However, when they approach their first checkpoint, Jan tells his siblings to get back in the truck and they obey without question. They are pulled out of the vehicle, especially because Liya has been mumbling complaints about the guard under her breath. This seems a further indication of her outsider status, something an insider would not do because they would know better than to take the risk. Indeed, Jan warns Liya to be quiet. The guard makes a phone call and learns that the trio has allegedly stolen the body to blackmail the family. But in the meantime, the siblings convince another guard to fetch water for them; they make a run for it in the truck while his back is turned. But they also lose their passports because the first guard (whose name we later learn is Omeed) takes them. This sets the stage for the siblings to be forced together into a precarious position. Not only are they dependent upon each other to deliver their mother's last request--they are thrown together to outrun their cousins and the law to make that happen no matter how deep their conflicts with each other. Furthermore, having lost their passports, Liya and Alan are now trapped in Kurdistan, the place they never wanted to return to.

To make matters worse, not long after the checkpoint incident, the truck runs out of gas because there is a hole in the gas tank. The siblings are forced to cooperate because they have to push the truck to a gas station. When they finally arrive at a gas station, they learn that the only repairman is away on business, but the family of the teenage boy running the gas station offers to let them stay with them until he returns. The forced stop leads to a number of crucial turning points in the film, including the theft of Gule's body by the cousins and the revelation of their father's betrayal to Liya and Alan.

Notwithstanding, the forced rest creates a brief bonding time for the siblings as well as a chance for Liya and Alan to experience the hospitality and traditions of their homeland. Until this point in the story, Liya and Alan's experiences in Kurdistan have mainly involved conflict with their family and then conflict with the law, without a real chance to remember Kurdistan as the home they left. During the time Liya, Alan, and Jan are guests of the Kurdish family, which includes a scene showing the hosts preparing traditional Kurdish food (including kebab and bread) outside for their guests, recalling the style of the idyllic family scenes at the beginning of the film. The scene highlights Kurdish hospitality and traditional food and is similar to some scenes in *Chaplin of the Mountains*. There is also a scene wherein Jan buys watermelons. The scene suggests that Alan and Liya actually enjoy some things about being in Kurdistan once more. There are also some scenic shots of distant mountain landscapes across green fields. Jan and Alan make a little peace sleeping under the stars together. Alan says to Jan (speaking German), "See that star there? That's you. It's bigger than all the others," Jan replies, "Oh, really? You're the star that's falling," Jan replies. "Now shut up." "Wait, those aren't stars…

They're planes. Listen" Alan says. There are two possible interpretations of the planes. One is that if they represent Alan and Jan then they are not stars, either a "big" star or a falling one. Rather, they are in motion, on a journey to a specific destination. However, a less symbolic reading is that the planes indicate military activity related to the incursion of the Islamic State (*Daesh*) into Iraq. The film is peppered with references to these events, so it is reasonable to suggest this is what the planes refer to and are serving as an ominous portent of things to come.

The peace between the siblings is short-lived, utterly disrupted when Liya accidentally discovers the secret Jan has been keeping about their father. That same night, Liya gets her period and must walk back to the truck to get her bag, taking the younger sister of the gas station attendant with her, as well as Jan's coat. She takes her bag from the truck, but on the return walk, she discovers the letter Gule left for all three siblings in the pocket of Jan's coat. Significantly, Liya's ability to read Kurdish is so limited that she is unable to read her mother's letter as well as she would have liked and is forced ask the young girl to read it for her. Therefore, to read her mother's last wishes and learn that her father was a traitor, Liya must rely on a stranger, who then becomes a party to this deeply personal information. When Liya returns to the house, she says nothing. She crawls onto her bedroll next to Jan's and curls up with her back to him. Jan reaches out as if to touch her, but Liya pulls away. She goes to sleep beside her brothers, crying. It is a poignant scene indicating that Jan does indeed care for his siblings through his simple gesture of reaching out, but the secret he has kept from them has divided the family, shown simply through Liya turning away from his touch.

The scene cuts to the next morning when Jan and Alan are at the gas station and the boy attendant tells them that their car repairs are not finished but the vehicle might make it through half a day's driving. Jan asks Alan to stay with the car while he checks to see whether there is a faster route back to the village to take gifts to their hosts. Alan asks the boy if he can get him a cigarette and something to drink but he responds, "Do I look like your servant? Get it yourself." This simple choice causes a cataclysm of events and an eruption of conflict between the siblings.

There is a rapid cut to Liya and Jan walking together to the gas station. Liya confronts Jan for not telling her and Alan the truth about their father. Jan tells them he did not tell them because he did not know how, and because he did not want them to feel the way he did when he found out. The confrontation is interrupted by a shot in the distance and Liya and Jan run toward the gas station.

The confrontations and revelation are the first step towards healing between the siblings, even though it is deeply painful for all of them. It is necessary for them to have the truth of their father's betrayal shared between the three of them before they can begin to connect again. However, healing is not an easy process, and Jan, Liya, and Alan are still carrying difficult feelings for each other. Additionally, Liya and Alan are now processing the burden of knowing their father, whom they loved, betrayed his unit and killed himself, rather than die the hero they believed him to be. They suffer a dual sense of loss--the loss of their mother and the loss of the person they believed their father to be. At this point, the road movie is divided from one journey to three separate but related journeys, as each sibling takes their own path, literally and figuratively. They traverse

different roads, ultimately to the same destination, yet each of them also takes a separate journey to process their grief.

After the truck is repaired, Alan is supposed to be watching it and guarding his mother's body, but he goes to purchase some cigarettes because the gas station boy refuses to get them for him. While he is doing that, his cousins come and steal the body and shoot up the truck. All three siblings explode into a massive argument and go their separate ways. Their anger with each other has reached its peak and they need time apart to process their grief in their own way, especially Liya and Alan who are now grieving the memory of their father and struggling with additional resentment towards Jan for keeping the secret from them.

Walking along the roadside, Liya is discovered by the same taxi driver who gave her a ride from the airport. However, they are stopped at a checkpoint by the same officer who stopped the siblings and took their passports. But while Liya is locked up in the guardhouse, she has a conversation with the officer about music. She tells him about the song "Ay le Gule" and how her father used to sing it for her mother. He tells her she reminds him of his sister who went missing during Anfal and decides to let her go. He and the taxi driver both go with her to find her mother's grave. This scene shows Liya struggling with her conflicted feelings about her father. She remembers him as a man who loved her mother and his family. She cannot make sense of his treason and there is no one alive who can explain the choice he made to her. But while Liya struggles with feeling betrayed by the men in her family, she finds two male strangers who are willing to help her finish the journey after her brothers seem to have failed her.

While Liya is taking her own route to their father's grave, Alan and the gas station boy hitchhike until they find Ako and Jeger. Finally, Jeger convinces Ako that what they are doing is wrong enough that Ako decides not to stand in the way. He will not go with them, but he gets out of the truck and lets them take the body. It is a decision of his own, even if it seems passive. It is a huge step from always following his father's opinions, which Jeger accused him of earlier.

From the beginning of the film, Jan has struggled with the weight of responsibility. He is the sibling who had to live with the knowledge of his father's betrayal, withholding it from his brother and sister not through a sense of malice but a desire to protect them. It is not clear why Gule decided to entrust Jan with the painful truth about his father (he would have been a child when they buried their father) and withhold the information from his siblings. Possibly, it was because Jan was the eldest sibling and because he had a closer relationship with his mother. The film never gives an explicit reason. Still, their mother wanted to be buried beside their father. When the crisis between the siblings takes place and Gule's coffin is lost, the viewer learns that Jan does not want to fulfill her final request at all. He is angry at their father. But he wants to honor his mother's last request anyway. Jan is also the sibling who receives his mother's will. Ferhad hands Jan the envelope saying, "The responsibility is yours now," little knowing what the envelope confers in terms of responsibility (fulfilling the mother's wish to be buried beside her traitor husband). On his personal journey, separated from his siblings, Jan struggles to resolve his feelings of responsibility and what that entails. His journey is a humbling one and illustrates the way Jan has repeatedly put down his brother

and sister. Jan finds an elderly shepherd who agrees to lead him to the village, but he has to not just help herd the sheep but even carry the shepherd on his back. For Jan, who has been treating his siblings like he is better than they are for years, this experience is humbling. He struggles with the task. But he is willing to endure it for the sake of his mother, to ensure that her last request is fulfilled.

As Jan and Liya make their way toward their old village, Alan takes their mother's body to a mosque where last rites are performed. It is significant that it is Alan, perhaps the unholiest of the three siblings who is tasked with this job. The rebel, the absent parent, the sibling who seems to have fallen the most, is lifted up to help perform a sacred duty.

Finally, the three siblings meet at their father's grave, along with a few additional new friends for a burial service (the shepherd, gas station boy, Jeger, Omeed, and the taxi driver, whose name we finally learn is Kaval). There is nothing left of the siblings' village as it was destroyed in the Anfal campaign. They bury their mother next to their father. Then they return to the family home.

In the subsequent scene, Alan and Jan are talking to Liya over the internet. Jan is holding his new baby girl, whom he and Vin have named Gule. Alan and Liya say this is bad luck, as Jan insists. A short time later, the extended family gathers around the TV. There has been an attack on Sinjar, and Uncle Ferhad has gone to fight. The family members huddle together in shock as news events unfold, somewhat graphically showing ISIS executing Yezidis. The film closes with the shocked expressions of the family as yet another disaster erupts in Kurdistan. There is a sense that while this family has healed

from their personal conflicts and will support each other through this new crisis, other families will now be torn apart and forced from their homeland as history repeats itself, creating new generational trauma and most likely exacerbating generational trauma that was already present. Ultimately, there is no resolution, as the cycle of violence begins anew. And now Ako, like his cousins, may lose his father to war. The final shot closes in on Jan and Vin, holding baby Gule. The focus on the young family standing witness to the fresh onslaught of mass violence suggests that a new cycle of generational trauma and dispersion has begun.

Conclusion

Kurdish films that focus on Kurdish identity often deal with characters who are struggling with what Kurdish identity means because they are either in conflict with a state that represses Kurdish culture or are living abroad in the diaspora and are torn between dual identities. Films about diaspora Kurds are particularly strong vehicles to confront these identity issues, as they tend to deal with characters who are split between the culture of the country they are living in and the culture of Kurdistan. These films also often demonstrate the variety of ways different characters connect (and sometimes disconnect) with their Kurdish heritage. The theme of struggle, of being split between two worlds and figuring out how to live in them both, is strongly prevalent in these films. Additionally, there are Kurdish films that take place in contested territory (Brubaker looks at this as diaspora), such as parts of Turkey and Iraq. These films also present issues of struggling to establish Kurdish identity, such as being able to speak Kurdish, to attend Kurdish language schools, and to celebrate Kurdish holidays (particularly

Newroz). These films present the struggle to claim one's identity when a government represses and expressly forbids aspects of cultural identity, an issue common among many Indigenous peoples, which will be explored further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Depictions of Trauma in Kurdish Cinema

Introduction

The Kurds have been the victims of mass atrocities, including the Anfal genocide in Iraq and the Dersim massacre[3] in Turkey as well as continuous state-sponsored acts of aggression and persecution, all resulting in experienced and inherited trauma. Atrocities have led to many Kurds becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) or refugees. Kurdish artists of all genres have responded to these events through their creative works, which has been true for many marginalized and oppressed peoples. Bell hooks writes, "We black people see our history as counter-memory and use it as a way to know the present and invent the future" (130). Kurdish films often operate in a similar fashion, working to provide a Kurdish artistic perspective on Kurdish history and Kurdish issues, to engage with the present, and to move toward the future by processing past events. Concerning the question of Kurdish unity, it is helpful to note that Kurdish artists across borders have addressed and responded to each other's traumatic experiences. Iranian Kurdish director Bahman Ghobadi's film, *Turtles Can Fly,* looks at the Anfal genocide in Iraq. The song "Malan Bar Kir Le", which is about the Dersim massacre and subsequent

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[3] The Dersim massacre took place in 1938 in response to a rebellion by Kurds in the Dersim province of Turkey (now referred to as Tunceli). The rebellion was a reaction to Turkey's 1934 Law of Resettlement, which legalized the forced displacement of Kurds from Kurdish regions and resettled them in areas with a higher concentration of Turks. The number of deaths is estimated at 40,000 (over 50 percent of Dersim's population), including many women and children, some of whom were suffocated and burnt alive. (Ashly "The Massacre in Dersim Still Haunts Kurds in Turkey")

forced removal of much of Dersim's Kurdish population has been performed by Kurdish musicians and singers from all parts of the Kurdish region. Iraqi Kurdish musician, Tara Jaff, created "Music for Wan" ("Pêşkeşî ji bo Wan'ê") after the earthquake which took place in Wan/Van, Turkey. While this in itself was not a mass atrocity, the Turkish response or lack thereof to the disaster was attributed to anti-Kurdish racism. Much of Kurdish cinema has been devoted to depicting and confronting the traumatic past of the Kurds. In this chapter, a few of these films will be examined in the context of contemporary trauma studies, specifically trauma studies in cinema; postcolonial trauma studies; Indigenous trauma studies; and trauma studies with regard to systemic issues such as racism. Moreover, it considers the role of event-based trauma in the films.

Chapter Filmography

This chapter focuses on the feature films, *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi 2004), *Chaplin of the Mountains* (Rosebiani 2013), *Memories on Stone* (Korki 2014), and *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009).

Trauma Studies and the Kurds

When Kurdish cinema deals with trauma, the experiences presented tend to be complex and multi-layered, often presenting event-based trauma from the point of view of an individual character or characters that relate to a larger event or condition of systemic oppression. Events include genocide and specific aspects of genocide, such as wartime sexual violence, mass killings, and forced relocations. Systemic oppression includes racism, cultural and linguistic suppression, political imprisonment, and systemic oppression of women, including forced marriage and honor killing, themes that are

covered in Chapter 4. While some characters in these films experience what Western audiences would view as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, that terminology will not be employed here due to its highly contested nature (Craps 25). Nor is it within the scope of this author to diagnose psychiatric disorders, fictional or otherwise. Instead, this chapter observes closely the way a few features and short Kurdish films depict trauma, both in terms of trauma that seems to spring from a particular event and trauma that springs from more complex long-term conditions. While some comparison with other Indigenous cinemas may be useful, the perspectives to trauma theory employed here consider non-Western contexts, such as Stef Craps' *Postcolonial Witnessing;* relevant Kurdish literature on the topic, such as Choman Hardi's *Gendered Experiences of Genocide*; and a close reading of the films themselves. As a non-Kurdish outsider, there are limits to this scholar's understanding, especially in this highly sensitive area, so particularly close attention is paid to Kurdish voices on these topics both in terms of what the filmmakers sought to convey through their films and Kurdish writing regarding trauma.

Watters states, "...we are flattening the landscape of the human psyche itself. We are engaged in the grand project of Americanizing the world's understanding of the human mind" (1). Watters is particularly concerned with exporting American diagnoses and treatments for mental illnesses. Among those included in his book are anorexia, PTSD, depression, and schizophrenia. Filmmakers may also be influenced by Western concepts of mental health. Watters also states that American concepts of mental illness are not necessarily better or worse than local or Indigenous concepts of mental health and treatment but may not be appropriate in a particular context. Watters provides multiple

examples of cases in which American mental health concepts and interventions proved to be detrimental in an international context. However, Watters further states, “All cultures struggle with these intractable diseases with varying degrees of compassion and cruelty, equanimity and fear. My point is not that they necessarily have it right--only that they have it different” (254), based on a point made by his psychiatrist wife that “...mental health professionals in the United States and elsewhere had little choice but to do the best they could with the knowledge and technology they had on hand” (Watters 253). Very few of the films discussed in this dissertation depict characters receiving any kind of mental health treatment. However, many of the films depict characters in various states of psychic distress. Audiences familiar with American DSM psychiatric diagnoses may find themselves inclined to attempt to diagnose the characters, and it is possible filmmakers have been influenced by the exportation of Western concepts of mental health, as Watters describes. However, no character in any of the films is ever given a psychiatric diagnosis. The films provide a depiction of experiences that audience members (and sometimes the directors) might describe as trauma. Looking at the field of trauma studies requires that trauma is defined but does not require that film characters be identified with specific psychiatric disorders, such as PTSD (nor is it desirable to do so). Addressing the films through trauma studies raises many questions of its own, related to Watters’ concerns of pathologizing and treating mental health through American models.

Watters gives an in-depth case study of how well-intentioned Western mental health ‘experts’ caused a great deal of chaos and even harm by exporting Western conceptions of PTSD to Sri Lanka Watters serves to dismantle the idea that Western

conceptions of traumatic experience are the 'right' way to react to trauma by showing how Western methods of addressing mental health issues did not work for the Sri Lankan people. In terms of considering trauma in Kurdish film, this case study is a further warning to avoid pathologizing fictional characters and/or reducing their reactions to traumatic experiences to Western terminology like PTSD or being "in shock" or "in denial." Watters gives examples of Westerners misapplying these terms to the situation in Sri Lanka. Having arrived in the country with no knowledge of its culture, language, or religious history Western counselors struggled to understand when Sri Lankans did not react to traumatic experiences the way they expected. They attempted to force a familiar paradigm on them (77). They were warned against doing so by experts at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka, who stated, "A victim processes traumatic events as a function of what it means. This meaning is drawn from their society and culture, and this shapes how they seek help and their expectation of recovery" (Watters 77). Watters further points out that Sri Lanka is a collectivist society, meaning that the good of the group is emphasized over the welfare of the individual. Kurdish culture is also traditionally collectivist in nature, although it should be noted that Kurds who have immigrated to individualistic societies may have adapted and developed a more individualistic mindset. It is important to avoid enforcing a paradigm of Western trauma theory on the depiction of trauma in Kurdish cinema without question. Although it is possible that with the heavy exportation of Western concepts of mental health, some Western concepts may have influenced the films. Overall, the films depict trauma in complex ways that may reflect

more traditional Kurdish society. Thus, it is important to at least question Western diagnostic labels such as PTSD.

Watters further argues that "Without social mechanisms to cope, we've become increasingly vulnerable and fearful. Indeed, many have pointed out that we [Americans] are now a culture that has a suspicion of resilience and emotional reserve" (125). "Resilience and emotional reserve" are qualities that are often displayed by characters in Kurdish films dealing with trauma, and in many cases, these qualities are emphasized in the characters while at the same time they are juxtaposed against the enormity of the trauma the characters face, because trauma in Kurdish films is typically not tied to a single traumatic incident. Instead, many Kurdish films depict trauma from a specific incident that reflects larger systemic trauma. These films deal with trauma in a complex and nuanced fashion. The films examine various types of trauma and how the characters who undergo trauma experience both strength and vulnerability.

However, the resilience of certain characters may feel unexpected for some viewers. For example, the children in *Before Your Eyes* quickly return to the business of survival after their parents are shot in front of them. They are never seen crying themselves to sleep over their lost parents, although the audience witnesses moments of quiet mourning at other times, such as Gulistan listening to the cassette tape of her mother reading a story and later burying it at her mother's grave. The film suggests that the children mourn for their lost community as well. One way this loss of community is depicted is by showing how the children miss going to school. In one scene, Firat gazes longingly at his former school as he stands outside the gate and peers in through the bars.

Watters describes a foreign trauma counselor who is concerned "that the local children appeared more interested in returning to school than discussing their experience of the tsunami" and stated that the children were "clearly in denial" (77). The Western counselors had no other viewpoint for considering the reaction of the Sri Lankans to the tsunami other than their own criteria for PTSD, and they were unable to conceive that other valid psychological reactions might exist. Watters writes, "There was, of course, an alternative possibility, that the Sri Lankans--because of the intimate familiarity with poverty, hardship, and war--had evolved a culture better able to integrate and give meaning to terrible events" (88). While it does not necessarily follow that because the Kurds have also experienced horror and are traditionally collectivist that their reaction will be similar to the Sri Lankans. However, it is important to point out that Kurdish characters in films may react differently to trauma than what audiences from individualistic societies expect based on their own cultural background with trauma.

Moreover, the depiction of trauma in a Kurdish film will be subject to the director and writer's cultural background as well as what they are trying to say artistically in the film, which may not necessarily be an accurate depiction of trauma but a symbolic one. Therefore, it is vital to avoid looking for 'inaccuracies' in the depiction of trauma in Kurdish films based on a Western view of what trauma 'should' look like. In *Before Your Eyes*, Firat and Gulistan seem to react to the traumatic experience of their parents' murder in a way that might cause some viewers to think they are underreacting or are in denial. However, when considering the experience of the Sri Lankan children described by Watters, Firat's and Gulistan's reactions make sense. They have been living with

trauma their entire lives, and the film suggests that they need their community and each other to survive this new trauma, much like the Sri Lankan tsunami survivors Watters describes.

Sonya Andermahr makes similar points to Watters, but this time in the field of literary trauma studies and its origins in the West. The Western origins of literary trauma studies have led to problems when considering non-Western and BIPOC subjects through the lens of trauma. Andermahr states that "The field of Trauma Studies emerged in the early 1990s as an attempt to construct an ethical response to forms of human suffering and their cultural and artistic representation" (1) However, Andermahr argues that trauma studies has largely failed in this mission due to its focus on white European subjects, neglecting the particular types of ongoing trauma inflicted by such issues as postcolonialism and systemic racism (1). While trauma studies originally theorized that trauma originated from a single event, Andermahr argues that this model has very limited applications.

In the case of the Kurds, as with other groups who experience collective trauma, people experience traumatic events as individuals. However, they also experience collective trauma, similar events experienced by multiple people that are ongoing during the same timeframe, including genocide, war, racism, forced relocation, displacement, and forced cultural assimilation. In terms of Kurdish films, they often depict the traumatic experience of a single person, but that experience is meant to represent the traumatic experience of the Kurds as a whole or a sub-group of Kurds (such as the street children of Amed, the survivors of Anfal, and victims of systemic racism in Turkey).

Moreover, multiple traumas may be depicted within the same film. And while some Kurdish films deal with specific historical events, others are purposely left ambiguous so that they can reflect on similar events throughout the history of the Kurds. This occurs in a number of short films and when asked in interviews about the historical basis of their film's events, the directors have explained that they have been left ambiguous by design. A few examples of such films are discussed later in this chapter.

Because Kurdish films often depict multiple types of trauma there may or may not be a "healing" type of event that occurs in the film's narrative, or healing may be partial with a recognition that ongoing systemic issues (including, but not limited to, racism, refugeeism, living in a patriarchal society, living with the after-effects of war) that surround the event prevent full healing from taking place. It may not be possible for the characters to return to a pre-trauma state (Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing* 33). While the films of Jano Rosebiani can often be characterized by characters dealing with traumatic situations and finding a measure of happiness by the end of the film, most Kurdish films that confront issues of psychic trauma take a different approach, and by the end of the film, characters are unlikely to have achieved what Western audiences would recognize as healing. If healing has occurred, it may be much more ambiguous than what most Western audiences are probably used to, with the recognition that the trauma will never fully be resolved.

There also tends to be a strong sense of community involvement in any healing that takes place in the films. Indeed, community support is often shown to be vital in helping trauma survivors in combination with the survivors' own strength. Some films

also end quite bleakly, suggesting that there may be no hope for healing from trauma, often with the implication that healing cannot take place because the ongoing systemic issues that caused the trauma are inescapable. Thus event-based trauma may be a major aspect of a Kurdish film, such as the war-time rape and subsequent pregnancy of Agrin in *Turtles Can Fly.* But while Agrin lives with flashbacks of the attack on her village, she also lives in post-war Iraqi Kurdistan, in dire poverty, caring for the child of her rapist, with no adult support, a situation that defies Western conceptions of trauma studies because Agrin is not only traumatized by the initial event but by the circumstances in which she continues to live. She knows that society would not accept her if they knew that Riga is her son and not her baby brother. Craps writes that "for many disenfranchised groups. trauma is a constant presence, 'a continuous background noise rather than an unusual event' (L. Brown, "Not Outside the Range' 103), meaning there is no pre-traumatized state of being that can be restored in any straightforward manner" (33). Many Kurdish films do not depict any pre-traumatized state at all. If an event-based trauma is included, there are often indications of other, ongoing traumatic situations that contributed to the event. Kurdish films that depict trauma also show an awareness that trauma is experienced as individual psychic pain but that it is often the result of larger systemic issues. Craps writes that one of the flaws with traditional trauma theory has been that it has not considered that,

> ...in collectivist societies individualistic approaches may be at odds with local cultures. Moreover, by narrowly focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse,

> such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination. Problems that are essentially political, social, or economic are medicalized, and the people affected by them are pathologized as victims without agency… (28)

However, Kurdish films do typically not utilize this type of medical model when it comes to depicting trauma. Even when a character, such as Agrin, seems to be depicted as a "victim without agency," the film suggests that larger, systemic issues are at work, rather than the singular traumatic event acting alone on the character's psyche. In Agrin's case, post-war poverty and a patriarchal culture combine with the trauma of the rape, the death of her parents, and the birth of and subsequent responsibility for Riga to create a situation in which she feels there is no hope.

When examining depictions of trauma and healing in Kurdish cinema, it is important to begin with a close reading of the films themselves in order not only to observe how Kurdish filmmakers depict traumatic experiences and but also to apply a sensitive analysis, utilizing the tools of trauma studies with full awareness of their Western origins. Utilizing trauma studies through an Indigenous perspective, with an eye toward the way the field has been questioned and reshaped to include perspectives that are more global and inclusive provides a more effective framework for analysis of Kurdish films. For some of the films, the directors have also made statements about depictions of trauma in their films, and this dissertation takes these into consideration as well. This means looking at traumatic events that may fit the Western definition of causes for PTSD, but also considering how trauma can be complex and interwoven, possibly

including event-based trauma, collective trauma, intergenerational trauma, and ongoing systemic issues which perpetuate the trauma.

With such complexity, the concept of "healing" becomes difficult to address. This dissertation asks: 1. Do any of the characters in a given film experience healing from their traumatic experiences? 2. If so, what form does this healing take? 3. If the character or characters experience healing from trauma, what events in the film enable this to take place? 4. If the character(s) are unable to experience any type of healing, what prevents this from happening? In seeking to answer these questions, this dissertation finds some commonalities between the ways the films depict (or do not depict) healing from trauma. Generally, Kurdish films about characters who have suffered or who are suffering trauma end with some type of partial healing or in tragedy, with no healing in sight, in which case the traumatized character may not survive.

Kurdish Cinema and the Anfal

In order to understand the context of *Chaplin of the Mountains* and *Turtles Can Fly,* it is necessary to have some background about the Anfal genocide campaign in Iraq and the mass atrocities committed against the Kurds in that country. Anfal ("the spoils" in Arabic) is the name given to a specific genocide campaign against the Kurdish population in Iraq during 1988. The campaign resulted in an estimated 182,000 deaths, mostly of male civilians of "fighting age" who were rounded up and shot by the Iraqi army and buried in mass graves in the desert (Hardi 5, 13). Women, children, and elderly people were sent to internment camps where they were kept in unsanitary conditions on starvation diets and many died in these camps (Hardi 48). The Anfal genocide is

sometimes described as a "gendercide" because it mainly targeted men and boys between ages 15-50 for execution. It has been estimated that 70% of those killed in Anfal were men of this age range. This means the survivors were mostly women and children in a patriarchal society where they had lost their primary means of support (Mlodoch 72,73 "We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women"). Examples of post-Anfal films depicting female survivors include *Turtles Can Fly*, *Chaplin of the Mountains*, and *Memories on Stone.*

After Anfal, the two main Kurdish political parties, the KDP and the PUK, were essentially in a state of civil war between 1994 and 1998. This situation placed further strain on the genocide survivors, who had greater difficulty receiving assistance unless they aligned themselves with one of the two major parties (Hardi 122). Currently, Anfal widows receive a pension from the government (Hardi 148). Some have also received housing and land. However, in many cases it is too little too late. The social and economic problems faced by the Anfal women have been carried over to their children, who often grew up poor and with little access to education (Hardi 135). The women were often socially stigmatized for their poverty, lack of a male protector, and the menial jobs they performed, a burden also placed upon their children (Mlodoch "We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women" 74). Moreover, people mistakenly believed that the illnesses of the gas attack victims were contagious, which led to ostracization (Hardi 118). The social stigmatization of the women also seems tied to the way the women are portrayed by the Kurdish media, an issue explored in more depth.

Problems related to the depiction of women survivors of mass atrocities are not unique to Kurdish films. In *Gendered Experiences of Genocide,* Hardi draws many parallels between the experiences of Jewish women during and after the Holocaust and Kurdish women during and after Anfal. It is also possible to draw a similar comparison between depictions of trauma experiences in Holocaust films and depictions of Kurdish women's trauma in films dealing with Anfal. In addition, it is also useful to look at other representations of women in what Hirsch terms "posttraumatic cinema" (Afterimages: Film 28, Afterimages: Post-Holocaust 407). Hirsch describes an attitude of apathy and irritation toward French survivors of Nazi concentration camps similar to the attitude toward Anfal survivors Hardi describes in *Gendered Experiences of Genocide*, which suggests that this is a problem common to the depiction in media of survivors of mass atrocities. In much of the public discourse related to mass atrocities against the Kurds, and especially the Anfal genocide campaign in Iraq, the focus has been on the number of dead, rather than on the lives of survivors. However, the suffering inflicted on Kurds during the Anfal did not end when the killings ended, particularly for women and children, who were the main survivors since men were targeted for execution.

Hirsch describes two stages in the depiction of mass traumatic experience through media: one that occurs as the traumatic experience is occurring and another that takes place once the mass trauma has been relegated to the past (407-08). Of the second phase Hirsch states, "In societies in which the traumatic event is in the past, a second phase may occur, in which the images themselves no longer traumatize, and the text – or film in this case – must, in a sense, work harder. It must overcome defensive numbing" (408). The

nature of film is that it typically falls into the second category where the traumatic event depicted is in the past. Released in 2004, *Turtles Can Fly* is much closer to the immediate experience of mass trauma and while *Chaplin of the Mountains* (released in 2013) is further removed in time. Additionally, it should be noted that *Turtles Can Fly* depicts scenes of brutality that were part of the Anfal genocide and the characters who survived it, while *Chaplin of the Mountains*' protagonist is the daughter of a survivor and no scenes representing Anfal are depicted in the film. Yet each of these films works to circumvent the "defensive numbing" Hirsch describes through showing the effects of a large-scale collective traumatic event through the fresh perspective of unique characters.

Representations of Trauma: Analyzing Depictions of Women in *Turtles Can Fly* and *Chaplin of the Mountains*

Turtles Can Fly is primarily the story of a teenage Kurdish boy nicknamed Satellite because he helps set up satellite dishes, but it also tells the story of a teenage girl named Agrin, for whom Satellite has begun to develop romantic feelings. Unbeknownst to him, the youngest child in her family, Riga, is not her brother as she claims, but her son, born when Agrin was raped the night Iraqi soldiers attacked her village and killed her parents during the Anfal genocide. *Turtles Can Fly* depicts Agrin's struggle to continue living in post-Anfal Iraq as an orphan and a survivor.

C*haplin of the Mountains* combines two plots. One storyline concerns a pair of NYU students, one American, the other Kurdish-American, who want to travel to remote Kurdish villages and screen Charlie Chaplin films. The other is the story of a woman, Nazê, whose Kurdish mother was sold into sexual slavery during Anfal. While both films

raise questions about the lives of Kurdish female survivors of Anfal, *Chaplin* is successful in presenting Nazê as what Choman Hardi terms a "strong survivor". By contrast, *Turtles Can Fly* depicts a female survivor whose suffering becomes unbearable and ends in her committing suicide, thus pointing out the failures of Kurdish society and the world to assist Anfal survivors.

In both films, the female genocide victims, Agrin in *Turtles Can Fly*, and Nazê's mother, Besê, in *Chaplin of the Mountains,* survive attacks perpetrated upon them by Saddam Hussein's government. However, Agrin commits suicide, while Besê (who is not depicted in the film) dies of cancer as a result of the poison gas attacks that took place during Anfal. These depictions raise questions about the way in which women survivors of the mass atrocities against the Kurds are portrayed, particularly in films written and directed by men. Hardi argues that while there are not many feature films that deal with the Anfal and other mass atrocities against the Kurds, those that do tend to portray the women in a continual state of victimhood (191). In *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors,* Hardi repeatedly refers to the women as "strong survivors" and stresses the strength and resourcefulness of women, in many cases widowed by Anfal, in the wake of genocide. When *Turtles Can Fly* is discussed in reviews, much of the focus is on the character nicknamed Satellite, as he is the "hero" of the story. Yet the film opens with an image of Agrin approaching the edge of a cliff. She slips off her shoes and stands at the cliff's edge, her hair blowing in the wind. She looks back once and leaps. From there the film proceeds to the opening credits and then flashes backward from Agrin's suicide to an image of men and boys struggling with television antennas on the hills outside a

Kurdish village. Agrin is the only female character in *Turtles Can Fly,* and she is treated as secondary to Satellite. She is an orphaned refugee from Halabja, struggling to survive along with two boys, Hengow and Riga, who are introduced as her brothers. Later, the audience learns t that the younger "brother," Riga, a toddler, is actually Agrin's son and the result of her being raped by Arab Iraqi soldiers. At best, Agrin is distant with Riga, but at other times she is violent toward him, slapping him when she gets frustrated with his crying. Ultimately neither Riga nor Agrin survives, as Agrin abandons Riga in a minefield before she leaps from the cliff, a grim ending for them both.

In *Turtles Can Fly,* the "strong survivors' ' seem to be the boys, who work in the fields and disarm mines. In one scene Agrin's brother Hengow, an amputee who has lost both his arms, disarms a mine with his lips as Agrin watches tensely from beside him. Agrin carries a basket of disarmed mines on her back, the only girl in a field of boys. Throughout the film, the audience witnesses Agrin either contemplating suicide or making suicide attempts. At one point in the film, Agrin stands in a pool of water and douses herself in kerosene. She strikes a match, then lights a piece of cloth on fire. In the distance, silhouetted against the horizon, she sees Riga. She drops the burning cloth in the water and returns to the tent, only to find the child asleep beside her brother. In the morning Hengow awakes to find Agrin slapping Riga for pulling her hair. Angrily Agrin calls Riga a bastard, even though Hengow scolds her. "If he is not a bastard, then what is he?" she asks "is not he the child of those who killed our family and did this to me? Now he's my child?" Throughout the film, Agrin is depicted as helpless and angry or cold and numb. There is nothing in the film to indicate her strength. She is surrounded by boys;

there is no one who can remotely comprehend not only the initial trauma of the rape but the trauma she continues to endure, with Riga as a continual reminder. The film highlights Agrin's solitude.

Satellite, on the other hand, is a far more active and cheerful character. And why shouldn't he be? He is not restricted by the limits that his patriarchal culture places on women. He does not have to be the caretaker of an unwanted child. However, he is still little more than a child himself and is completely unaware of the truth of Agrin's situation. He likes Agrin in the way that a teenage boy would like a teenage girl--an innocent first crush. He can see that she needs help, but he has no way to fathom the depth of help that Agrin needs nor is he in a position to offer it. He tries to ingratiate himself with Agrin by helping her and her brothers, but she does not want his help. Nevertheless, Satellite refuses to give up and continues to offer Agrin his unsolicited assistance. Satellite is unable to help Agrin and she is unable to help herself. When discussing depictions of women in trauma films, Narine writes, "Looking promises pleasure. But it also fosters subject positions that are not pleasurable but plagued by experiences of impotence and guilt" (120). The "impotence" Narine describes is expressed in *Turtles Can Fly* through the male characters of Satellite and Hengow, both of whom fail Agrin. Hengow is unable to prevent the soldiers who attack their village from raping her. Satellite is unable to convince Agrin to accept his offers of assistance. Ultimately both Hengow and Satellite are unable to prevent Agrin's suicide and Riga's death. Agrin is also unable to help herself. While Hardi wants to see Anfal women portrayed as "strong survivors", Ghobadi's depiction of Agrin's trauma, grief, and

ongoing psychological torment could also suggest that women survivors need each other. Agrin, surrounded by boys, has no one who really understands what she needs.

In fact, Satellite is so preoccupied with attempting to help Hengow and Riga, in order to earn Agrin's favor, that he is actually busy assisting them while Agrin is contemplating suicide, standing alone at the edge of a cliff. Agrin wants to abandon Riga, something she discusses with Hengow while Riga is sitting beside them. She wants to leave Riga for someone else to find, so that she and Hengow will be free of him, but Hengow will not agree to this. Towards the end of the film, Agrin walks into a fog with Riga on her back. The world is silent except for the sound of her footsteps. She ties one end of a rope to a tree as the roar of aircraft echoes overhead and ties the other end of Riga's leg. She wraps a blanket around Riga, who reaches up to play with her hair, and she leaves him. He calls after her, "Dayi!" (Mother!) as she walks away into the fog. Riga has been abandoned in a minefield, but it is unclear if Agrin knew this when she left him. Satellite saves Riga from the minefield but is badly injured by a mine explosion in the process. Yet Satellite's sacrifice is a failure because, finally, Agrin kills Riga by tying a stone to his leg and drowning him in the pool. Afterward, she commits suicide. Satellite and Hengow are thus proven "impotent" in Narine's terms.

In *Turtles Can Fly* the boys are depicted as "strong survivors" while the only female character commits suicide. This is not to suggest that people who commit suicide are weak or that the story of the boys is not important, yet the invisibility of women and girls in the film raises questions. Where are the female survivors? Where are the stories of their strength and their resourcefulness and their continued survival in the face of mass

atrocity and traumatic experience? The only other women depicted in the film are silent, faceless characters in the background. Narine offers some insight into depictions of male and female characters in trauma films:

> Depictions of trauma are often discussed in terms of their ability to disrupt spectators, and challenge inherited assumptions, but they may also risk galvanizing regressive notions of masculinity and femininity. In the face of trauma, for instance, the men in the films feel guilty over their failed attempts to be active while a range of women are rendered guilty due to their willing passivity (122)

Narine is concerned here with Western films dealing with non-Western subjects and utilizing male Western protagonists to tell those stories. However, there are similarities between these films and *Turtles Can Fly,* where Satellite and Hengow attempt to take a more active role and yet fail to save Agrin and Riga. Agrin is depicted as a more passive character, a victim who is unable to help herself; her actions in the film are mostly centered on her own destruction, as well as Riga's.

Agrin's brother Hengow appears less emotionally wounded than she does. He has suffered from the loss of his parents and his failure to protect Agrin, but he is occupied in working on the installation of satellite televisions the local people use to keep abreast of what is going on in the war. Agrin is left to tend to Riga and gather the landmines the children sell so that they can buy food. Agrin hates Riga and at times she physically abuses him. There are no resources to assist Agrin in dealing with the trauma of her rape or to help her with her unwanted child. Agrin's abuse of Riga is her only outlet for the

violence she has experienced, but Satellite rebukes her and refuses to address what has happened. In Caruth's language, Agrin's violent behavior toward Riga is her own traumatic "wound" that is "crying out" to be addressed. The only person Agrin has available for support is Hengow, yet he is absent most of the time, and, as a child and a victim of violence himself, he is incapable of helping Agrin cope with what has happened to her. After Agrin and Riga die, Hengow is left with fresh traumatic wounds from their deaths.

At a screening of *Turtles Can Fly,* director Bahman Ghobadi once stated, "My country, Kurdistan, which lies over Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, has been raped by many countries like the girl in the film" (Kaneko). This is a disconcerting statement, since it relegates women to symbols of nationalism, much in the way Hardi and Mlodoch describe the use of the image of the Anfal women by the Kurdish government and made more disturbing by the fact that Agrin is the only female character in the film. Mlodoch writes:

> Anfal women are largely represented as weak and helpless victims and symbols of the suffering of the Kurdish nation. Behind this representation, not only are their concrete experiences of violence and loss hidden but their crucial contribution to the Kurdish insurrection… is also ignored. ("We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women" 80)

In a number of ways, Agrin appears to be exactly the kind of symbol that Mlodoch is describing, carrying the entire burden of representing the Kurdish nation. Mlodoch continues the line of this argument by stating, "... the representation of Anfal women as

passive victims reflects the hegemonic patriarchal discourse among the Kurdish political elite and the dominant gender concepts of strong active men and weak passive women" ("We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women" 81). This statement raises grave concerns about the portrayal of women in both *Turtles Can Fly* and *Chaplin of the Mountains,* but more so the former, since Agrin is the only female character and the only character in the film who commits (or even appears to consider) suicide as a result of her traumatic experiences.

Chaplin of the Mountains also deals with the issue of war and sexual violence against women, although in a less direct way than in *Turtles Can Fly.* As examined in Chapter 1, *Chaplin of the Mountains* is primarily the story of Nazê, a young woman who is the daughter of a Kurdish mother and a French father and who is attempting to find her mother's village in Kurdistan. The film is structured as a road-trip movie, the journey of Nazê and her companions as they screen Charlie Chaplin films in remote villages and search for clues to discover the name and location of Nazê's mother's village. The theme of memory is central to the narrative, as Nazê struggles to confront her grief over her mother's death and uncover memories that may lead to finding the village.

Nazê's mother, a fictional character, is represented in the film as one of a group of Kurdish women who were sold to be brothers in nightclubs in Egypt. The sale of the women in fact took place--a document was discovered giving the names of the women and eyewitnesses to the sale of the women (Hardi 6, 62). Other Kurdish women were also sold or given as gifts to Arabs in Iraq and Kuwait (Hardi 62). Some of the missing women have been found but are either unable or unwilling to speak about their

experiences, sometimes due to restrictions placed upon them by their husbands or other male relatives, while in other cases possibly because there is shame and the possibility of death ('honor' killing) if they speak (Hardi 62). In *Chaplin of the Mountains,* Nazê's mother was rescued by a Frenchman, who married her and became the father of Nazê. However, when Nazê's mother learns that the bodies of her father and brothers were uncovered in one of the mass graves in Iraq, she stops eating and drinking and dies within a few days. Nazê's father dies shortly thereafter. This is not depicted in the film but is something that comes out gradually, when Nazê begins to recount memories of her mother.

While both films depict women who commit suicide as a result of violence enacted upon them, *Chaplin of the Mountains* takes a different route than *Turtles Can Fly* in that it also depicts a woman who has suffered a trauma and shows her strength and her path to recovery. Thus, *Chaplin of the Mountains* gives women a far more central role than *Turtle*s *Can Fly*. Nazê has experienced a traumatic event through her mother's suicide, something she has difficulty recounting to her traveling companions. Over the course of their journey to show the Chaplin films, Nazê gradually reveals more about her past. She also begins to remember. A song she hears at a wedding triggers a memory of her mother singing a lullaby. A rope of figs at a roadside stand brings back the name of a village, her mother's village, famous for its figs. When Nazê and her companions finally reach her mother's village, they find only one inhabitant, Mam ("Uncle") Cholly, an elderly man who appears to be suffering from dementia. At first, Mam Cholly does not acknowledge Nazê. She sits beside him as he sews a patch onto his worn clothes. Nazê

speaks to him, hesitantly, in Kurdish, a language she does not speak well. When he looks up at her, he does not see her-- he sees her mother, his granddaughter Besê. Mam Cholly's confusion seems to suggest that Nazê's mother has returned home through her daughter, and there is a cathartic moment at the end of the film, as Mam Cholly, alone in the village, holds Nazê and the two of them weep together. The film ends joyfully, as Mam Cholly takes Nazê's hand and invites her to go with him to pick figs. The narrative of *Chaplin of the Mountains* suggests hope for the Kurdish future, a much different tone than the tragic and uncertain ending of *Turtles Can Fly.*

Both *Chaplin of the Mountains* and *Turtles Can Fly* deal with genocide victims, sexual violence against women, and suicide. Both films depict female characters who are struggling with a traumatic event, although Nazê's genocide-related trauma differs from Agrin's in that it is a type of secondary trauma; Nazê is not a direct victim of the Anfal genocide, but because her mother's suicide was a result of trauma related to Anfal, Nazê has suffered a traumatic event that is tied to the original genocide. *Chaplin of the Mountains* and *Turtles Can Fly* present a stark contrast in their inclusion of female characters, even though both films are centered on female stories. There are no female characters with speaking roles (or even names) in *Turtles Can Fly* other than Agrin. Throughout the film, she never speaks to another woman or girl. By contrast, in *Chaplin of the Mountains,* Nazê develops a friendship with Shireen, a female Kurdish journalist who joins her and the two young men on their journey. Shireen and Nazê have a number of conversations, and most of them are not about men but about helping Nazê reconnect

to her lost Kurdish heritage. In general, women are more visible and more vocal in *Chaplin* than in *Turtles,* even as extras in the background.

Hardi expresses concern that the Kurdish media continually depict the Anfal women as victims, with no attention given to how hard they have worked to survive, often as single mothers of young children with little or no family support. Hardi's criticisms of media depictions of the women are that they not only perpetuate a negative image of the Anfal-surviving women, making it more difficult for them to reintegrate into society and develop meaningful lives for themselves, but that these depictions are reflected in the way the women see themselves (154). Hardi describes three results leading from the fashion in which the media depicts the Anfal surviving women, writing: First, the repetitive transmission of these images is counterproductive… Secondly, representing women as grieving widows who are always lamenting the loss of their loved ones makes them look like eternal and powerless victims… The third consequence of showing is that, like all other horrific images of mutilation and violence, they enter the social psyche and become normalised. (191)

Hardi's statement about the depiction of the Anfal women in Kurdish media holds true for film in some ways as well, although the issue of repetition is less severe. In *Chaplin of the Mountains,* these issues are less of a problem than they are in *Turtles Can Fly*. *Chaplin of the Mountains* does not replay any of the horrific images; rather, it recounts some events of the genocide and their consequences, such as the selling of Kurdish women and the destruction of thousands of villages but not giving them visual representation. This seems like it would serve Hardi's purposes better, in terms of the

way the Anfal women are depicted; the tragedies of the past are not forgotten, but the images of violence are not thrust upon the viewer. However, it is important to remember that *Chaplin of the Mountains* is further removed in time from the genocide than *Turtles Can Fly* is, so at the time *Turtles Can Fly* was released the images in question had received less exposure. Part of Ghobadi's intent was to show the suffering of the children in Iraq so that the world would know about it. In an interview with David Walsh, Ghobadi stated through an interpreter, "I like to give my audiences a shock. The same shock I received from these children in Iraq. I want to reflect that shock to my audience." At the time it was released, Ghobadi's film served an important purpose–informing the world about the living conditions of children in post-Anfal Iraq. In the Walsh interview Ghobadi explained how he used child survivors as actors in his film and attempted to depict their actual living conditions. The narrative he crafted, however, portrays the male characters as the active survivors in contrast to the sole female character.

Turtles Can Fly does not represent Agrin as living in a perpetual state of grief for her lost parents; the only emotion she seems to exhibit in the film is anger. Yet she is very much a "powerless victim" who is ultimately unable to take any action to save herself. *Chaplin* of the Mountains does not actually portray Nazê's mother; rather, it describes her grief as being the cause of her death, so the character of Nazê's mother matches with the second category of grief-stricken women. The grief of Nazê's mother has become frozen in time because she died grieving. However, Nazê, who has lost both her mother and her father, is not frozen in a state of mourning and thus offers an alternative to this depiction of the Anfal women.

Hardi discusses some Kurdish television spots that portray the Anfal women as perpetual victims. She writes that when these television spots air, people change the channel to avoid watching them (Hardi 191). Furthermore, she states that there is a prevalent attitude in Kurdistan today that it is time to forget the past and move on (191). Newer Kurdish films seem like they may take a similar view, and the Anfal genocide has been relegated to the past as a subject. Yet the subject of its survivors has not really been dealt with through film in a way that addresses the women survivors' strength, courage, and their continued resourcefulness in providing for themselves and their families. This suggests that there is a gap in the types of stories that are being told about these women and an opportunity for filmmakers to tell a story that needs to be told. Both *Chaplin of the Mountains* and *Turtles Can Fly* are excellent films in many respects. They each serve a purpose in their depictions of Anfal survivors, yet they also leave something to be desired in the way they portray female survivors of genocide, particularly in light of Hardi's critique of the way female Anfal survivors are so often represented in media. Ghobadi's film seems to use its sole female character as a symbol of national suffering, while if Nazê is in any way symbolic, she is symbolizing a second-generation of genocide survivors who are carrying on with their lives without forgetting the tragedies of Kurdish history. This is certainly a stronger and more positive image of the children of genocide survivors and one that is reflected in the reality of those Anfal children who were able to receive education and have gone on to advocate for themselves and for their mothers (Mlodoch "We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women" 77).

The suicides of the women in *Turtles Can Fly* and *Chaplin of the Mountain*s can be construed as an attempt by the filmmakers to represent the suffering of the women, to show in an external fashion how much the female victims of the Anfal genocide were suffering internally. Yet these fictive suicides also serve to silence the women and thus do not offer any window into the lives of those who have continued to survive in spite of the harsh, post-genocide living conditions. However, with Nazê, *Chaplin of the Mountains* successfully portrays a female survivor of Anfal-related trauma who goes through the process of confronting her grief and finding a way to address her traumatic experience and to integrate it into her life, thus offering an image of a woman as a "strong survivor."

Memories on Stone, **A Film Within a Film: Depicting Intergenerational Trauma and Personal Sacrifice in Kurdish Filmmaking**

Like *Chaplin of the Mountains,* Shawkat Amin Korki's *Memories on Stone* (2014) presents themes of intergenerational trauma and healing. *Memories on Ston*e is the story of Hussein, a Kurdish director who has returned from Germany to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to make a film about Anfal. Hussein has loved cinema since he was a child, but as a child, he also heard his father and a group of other men being executed for attending a secret screening of the 1982 Kurdish film *Yol* (Yılmaz Güney). Now Hussein is struggling to make a film of his own with a limited budget, untrained actors, and multiple setbacks that lend a darkly comic element to *Memories on Stone*. Unbeknownst to Hussein, his lead actress, Sinur, is dealing with a traumatic experience of her own, the loss of her father during Anfal before she was even old enough to remember him. So

committed is she to making Hussein's film that she agrees to marry her hated cousin, Hiwa, to obtain her uncle's permission to act in the film, something he will not give her as long as she is unmarried or at least unpromised. *Memories on Stone* casts a darkly comic eye on the struggles of Kurdish filmmaking while exploring the need to confront a traumatic, intergenerational past and find a path to shared healing.

The inciting incident of the film, the execution of Hussein's father for viewing a Kurdish film, coupled with Hussein's desire to make a film about Anfal, links cultural genocide with the physical element of genocide. Cultural genocide is defined as:

> a legal concept in international law, cultural genocide was devised as a sub-category, or aspect, of genocide – the attempt to systemically and wilfully destroy a group – alongside physical genocide and biological genocide. It denoted the destruction of both tangible (such as places of worship) as well as intangible (such as language) cultural structures (Bilsky and Klagsbrun374)

Memories on Stone emphasizes the techniques of *mise en abyme* and metacinema, by utilizing the overarching narrative device of a film within a film (*mise en abyme)* and also incorporating visual cues that often remind the audience that they are watching a film (metacinema). *Memories on Stone* opens on a dark, rainy night, as young Hussein knocks at the padlocked gate of the local movie theater. In spite of the padlock, the theater is not empty; the projectionist is there along with a small audience. Inside, Hussein gapes at the movie posters for a moment before he is told to hurry up and get in. He enters the projectionist's booth, and the projectionist, his father, tells him he will be late today because he has guests. He is showing the Kurdish film, *Yol*, from Turkey.

"Don't talk about this film anywhere, okay?" he warns Hussein. The boy takes a seat in the balcony section. Suddenly the theater is invaded by armed men, accusing the theatergoers of watching "forbidden films". Hussein runs back to the projectionist's booth to see two soldiers attacking his father. He turns away to see a similar scene playing out on the movie screen, as Kurdish prisoners are captured by Turkish soldiers, reflecting what is happening to the moviegoers and Hussein's father as well as the ongoing genocide of the Kurds carried out across national borders. Hussein also begins to see the importance of telling Kurdish stories through film.

The film cuts to the exterior of a prison, with multiple shots of the exterior and interior. Through a camera, the audience is invited to participate, as Hussein interviews potential Kurdish actors who answer questions: "Where are you from?" "Do you like films?" What type of films?" "What factual films have you seen?" "Did you witness the Anfal genocide?" Some of the actors say they had relatives killed in the very prison in which they are now sitting. A young man says his grandparents were imprisoned there. An older man says his brother died there. The interviewer asks him if he would like to play his brother and he says he "would love to." The scene is a reversal of the prior one, where the audience witnessed a movie theater screening a 'forbidden' Kurdish film, *Yol*. As the characters in *Yol* were being taken prisoner, the characters in *Memories on Stone*, who are watching *Yol*, are also taken prisoner. Now the viewer is in a former prison, watching the beginnings of a new Kurdish film being made.

Hussein asks one of the potential actors how he would respond in a certain scenario. Many of them respond awkwardly, one offering the rote response of "Biji

Kurdistan!" ("Long live Kurdistan!") as his response for every scenario he is presented with. Many of those auditioning are not gifted with acting talent, but their desire to be part of the film is deeply sincere. However, a problem quickly arises regarding the casting for Lorin, the female lead. The woman who was scheduled to screen test for the role will not be coming because her family will not let her. Hussein is furious that the casting director had him waste the whole day screen testing extras. The male roles in the film do not seem to be all that important, which is interesting because Anfal is often labeled a gendercide because most of those killed were men. Lorin's role is critical to the film, but her role is never clearly defined. She is a romantic lead in some capacity, as she plays opposite a soldier. There are other women in the film, but the viewer never sees their screen tests. However, as the narrative of the meta-film and the film-within-a-film unfold, there are hints that the character of Lorin is meant to be one of the "strong survivors" Hardi describes.

In the subsequent scene, a young woman, Sinur, is browsing the racks at a video store. Her careful perusal of the films suggests a love of movies that parallels Hussein's. As she is browsing the videos, she hears about the film and the need for a lead actress on the news and decides to answer the casting call. Sinur arrives in the prison as the crew is erecting a gallows. A large prop depicting a massive image of Saddam Hussein rolls by before she has a chance to speak to anyone. The first person she sees is an actor dressed as a Baathist soldier. She jumps back, visibly alarmed, but he smiles and takes off his beret, apologizing for scaring her and directs her to the film crew. The set is terrifying, haunted by past atrocities that are being brought to life again for the purpose of the film.

Hussein is mesmerized by Sinur and casts her immediately after her screen tests. As she leaves the prison, she walks through the decrepit halls, searching for something. Returning home, Sinur finds that she has the full support of her mother, who lends her a traditional dress, but also reminds her of a crucial problem--Sinur must obtain the permission of her uncle to act in the film. She returns once more to the set to show the dress to Hussein and tell him about the problem of her uncle. Once again, she walks the hallways of the fort, this time penetrating more deeply into the prison. She enters one of the cells, gently touching the wall, blinking back tears.

Meanwhile, Hussein struggles with explaining to his German wife why he needs to spend so much time away from their young son, who is barely more than an infant. Hussein's and Sinur's stories move in a parallel fashion, but they cannot confide in each other. Sinur's uncle does not understand her need to act in *Anfal*. Hussein's wife does not understand his need to make the film. Both characters are suffering underlying trauma from the loss of their fathers and the intergenerational trauma of genocide.

Hussein and the film crew visit the home of Sinur's uncle in an attempt to gain his approval for Sinur to act in *Anfal*, but he refuses because he wants nothing to do with cinema. He lived through Anfal himself, but he does not see any purpose or connection between cinema and telling Kurdish stories, unlike the potential actors Hussein interviewed. He also deems it inappropriate for Sinur to act in a film as an unmarried woman. Even an attempt to have Alan (one of the members of the film crew) have his father negotiate with Sinur's uncle fails. There is a conflict between deeply entrenched patriarchal values that threatens Hussein's vision for the film as well as the health and

safety of the film crew. Immediately after the interview between his father and Sinur's uncle, Alan is punched in the face by an unseen assailant, later revealed to be Sinur's cousin, Hiwa, who feels dishonored by the repeated requests for Sinur to act in *Anfal*. Meanwhile, Hussein has the option to cast a Kurdish Iranian actress instead, but this means casting a woman who has no direct connection to Anfal. What Hussein is unaware of are the lengths Sinur is willing to go to act in the film. The stakes are rising for everyone involved in filming *Anfal*. Basheer says, "By the time the film is finished, Hussein will have lost his mind." Alan replies, "Well, in Kurdistan, filmmaking is not a job for sane men," foreshadowing the struggles to come.

Shortly after Sinur visits the prison cell, Hussein returns to the theater where his father was once the projectionist, emphasizing the parallels between the two characters. He wants to show *Anfal* there once it is completed, but the owner says the theater is not making money and he is planning on turning it into a Turkish restaurant, adding another barrier to completing Hussein's vision. Alone, he climbs the stairs to the projection room and experiences a flashback of his father being attacked and beaten by soldiers. Hussein is revisiting the site of his father's death within days of Sinur revisiting the site of hers. Both Hussein and Sinur have a compelling need to make *Anfal* based on the film's relationship to personal and intergenerational trauma related to the genocide.

Sinur carries additional potential for trauma as a woman, which is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 4. Hiwa, her first cousin, wants to marry her and intends to do everything in his power to keep Sinur from acting. Sinur is disgusted by the idea of marrying him, because of his character and the fact that he is her first cousin. A heated

exchange takes place between them in which Hiwa tells her he will not let her act in the film and the marriage will most certainly take place. “I told you repeatedly it’s not going to happen,” Sinur says, referring to the potential marriage. “It definitely will,” Hiwa says. A short time later, Sinur is seated on a park bench with dark circles under her eyes as if she has been crying. She has agreed to marry Hiwa on the condition that she can star in *Anfal.*

Sinur’s coerced engagement to Hiwa is a devastating personal sacrifice she makes so that she can participate in the film. This sacrifice is closely mirrored by Hussein’s increasingly fractured relationship with the wife he has left in Germany, who does not understand his need to return to his homeland and make *Anfal*. The son he leaves behind appears to be less than two years old, but Hussein is wracked with guilt for leaving him, and his wife lays the guilt on in increasingly heavy doses every time they speak. Like the private personal losses of their fathers, these ongoing interpersonal conflicts play out privately, so that both Sinur and Hussein suffer in silence. However, there is a distinct power differential between Hussein, who can choose to travel independently from Germany to Kurdistan to direct a film, and Sinur, whose conservative family will not allow her to act without forcing her into marriage. Both characters are suffering in silence, while their wife and fiancé, respectively, inflict psychological wounds on them, but Sinur’s situation is far worse than Hussein’s because she has been forced into marriage, essentially selling the rest of her life and her body to act in the film. Hiwa treats Sinur as if he owns her, attempting to control her every move, while Hussein is largely free to do as he wishes without his wife’s interference.

Anfal itself is plagued by troubles, representing the challenges of Kurdish filmmaking. The many setbacks that beset the film are both comic and tragic, thus instilling *Memories on Stone* with its aura of dark comedy. Hussein does not have the proper permits to bring the film equipment across the border from Iran and it would take two weeks to get them, so instead, he attempts to smuggle the equipment and the actress he was going to use to replace Sinur via a donkey. But the group is shot at by border guards. They escape with most of the equipment but lose the actress who is taken prisoner by the guards. To help draw an audience for the film, Roj Azad, a famous Kurdish singer from Germany is cast as the male lead; but he is a buffoon, an egomaniac, and a terrible actor, constantly interrupting the shooting for his personal business. The film is constantly short of money. The extras are bused in from refugee camps and some days there is not enough to pay them.

Finally, Alan sells his house to finance the film, another massive sacrifice showing how far Kurdish filmmakers are willing to go to tell Kurdish stories through film.[4] Alan sells the house, banking on the film's success and believing so deeply in *Anfal* that he tells his wife, as she cries over the sale, that he will buy back the house after the film's completion. He also tells his family not to tell anyone what he has done. Like Sinur and Hussein, he keeps this deeply personal sacrifice a secret.

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[4] The mother of Kurdish filmmaker Miraz Bezar also sold her house to help finance his film, *Before Your Eyes*) (*Film Movement*).

One day as Sinur is shooting an intense torture scene, her uncle shows up unannounced on the set. He attacks Sinur before anyone can stop him and strikes her in the face, claiming that her acting is dishonorable. Surprisingly, Hiwa comes not only to the defense of Sinur but to the defense of the film, attempting to stop his father before he crashes onto the set and defending Sinur's choice to act in the film ("It's because of her father…"). Even Hiwa, who in no way has become a good person, has begun to see the merits of *Anfal*. Despite the fact that he bullied and spied on Sinur on the set and also assaulted the director, Hiwa has come to believe in the film. Hiwa's name means hope, which seems an unlikely choice for the film's villain. The name choice might indicate that marrying him is Sinur's only hope of being able to act in the film. Alternatively, Hiwa's growing interest in *Anfal* may show that there is hope for him to learn and become a better person.

However, as Hiwa grows more supportive of the film, his father, Uncle Hamid now decides that if Sinur continues to act in the film, he will no longer be her uncle and her engagement to Hiwa will be terminated. This arrangement apparently suits Sinur and her mother because the next day Sinur is on set again, even though no longer having a male guardian could potentially cause problems for her. She is also free of the abhorrent engagement. However, she is not free from Hiwa, who wants to remain engaged despite his father's wishes and despite Sinur's obvious disinterest in him. He comes to her the next day asking to talk, but she says there is nothing to talk about. Sinur is more concerned about other things. Free from Hiwa, she can act unmolested in one of the most intense scenes of *Anfal*, when she is brought to the fort with a large group of prisoners.

Her character, Lorin, is searching desperately for her mother as men, women, children, and even babies are delivered into the camp. Violent scenes are enacted by the camera, include a teen boy being crushed with a large cinder block by a Baathist soldier and a hanging. After what must have been an emotionally exhausting day of shooting, Hussein goes to look for Sinur to give her a ride home and finds her in one of the prison cells; he does not see it, but she has discovered her name carved on the wall. As Hussein drops her off, he asks her, "Why destroy your life for a film?" In answer she hands him a blue notebook, telling him, "I wanted to give this to you for a long time, but I never had the chance." From a distant vehicle, Hiwa is watching, too far away to hear what is being said.

Immediately after this scene, Hiwa's father demands he break the engagement, but Hiwa refuses, saying, "I'll neither marry nor divorce her. She'll be in limbo forever. I won't marry any woman." Hiwa is falling deeper into obsession. The next day, the final day of shooting, he shows up on set and shoots Hussein, as Roj Azad hammily acts out his role as one of the *peshmerga* freeing the prisoners. Hussein does not die, but his injury is so severe that he may be unable to walk again.

In the hospital, Sinur sits at Hussein's bedside as he tells her that he read what was in the notebook: when she was seven years old, her parents were imprisoned in the fort where Hussein has been filming, and her father died there. Sinur says, "A few days ago, I saw my father's handwriting on the wall…"

The fate of *Anfal* is now uncertain. The filmmakers are running out of time on their rental of the camera equipment. Winter is coming. And Hussein is unable to direct

the film due to his injuries. Money is short. Roj Azad's manager tells Alan that they will get all the money they need to finish the film if only Roj Azad is allowed to direct, but Roj Azad is clearly incompetent and would never follow Hussein's instructions. Instead, Hussein accepts blood money from Hamid, in exchange for agreeing not to send Hiwa to prison, so he can finish the film, and Basheer takes over under Hussein's instructions. Alan asks, "Hussein, are you trying to be Yılmaz Güney, he directed his film from prison, you from the hospital?" (referencing the director of *Yol*, the film Hussein was watching when his father was arrested). Alan is furious when he finds out that Hussein accepted the money, but Hussein says, "I cannot accept that Hiwa destroyed me, and now you want Roj Azad to destroy the film?" Alan replies, "So you just sold out?" Hussein responds, "Yes, I did. My blood money is better than Khalid's money." These scenes help bring Sinur and Hussein's stories together. They show the stakes rising for completing the film and what the two are willing to sacrifice to see it completed.

As the final scenes of the film are shot and the actors cheer the last day of shooting, Hussein sits alone in his apartment watching his young son on his laptop. He picks up a revolver and holds it to his temple. The little boy, too young to speak, begins to cry. His wife comes into the frame, "Enough already, she says. "If you want to see your son, come and see him at long last." The video call ends. Hussein begins to cry. He lights a cigarette with the revolver, which was not a revolver after all. The scene suggests the power of image and illusion. The 'gun' Hussein was holding to his temple was a cigarette lighter and not a gun at all, but to his son, seeing through the laptop's camera it looks real and the emotional effect is the same as if it had been.

Opening night for the first screening of *Anfal* arrives. Newroz Cinema has apparently become a Turkish restaurant by this time, because the screening is held outside at the fort where the film was shot. Hussein arrives in a wheelchair. A good-sized crowd has assembled for the premier, among them Hiwa. Within the first few minutes, the generator goes out and the backup generator will not start. The audience begins to leave. When the power comes back on, almost no one is left. And then it begins to rain. The rain comes down in sheets. Finally, no one is left in the audience except the lead actors, Sinur's mother, the principal film crew, and far towards the back--Hiwa. The film closes on a shot of them sitting in the pouring rain watching *Anfal. Memories on Stone* thus highlights the challenges of the filmmaking process for Kurdish filmmakers, while exploring intergenerational trauma.

Lost Childhoods: Exploring Trauma, Racism, and Revenge in *Before Your Eyes*

Miraz Bezar's 2009 film *Before Your Eyes* (*Min Dit*--literally "I Have Seen" in Kurdish) is a complex film that confronts issues of systemic racism against the Kurds in Turkey, a multi-faceted topic that the film approaches in a variety of ways. The film examines such issues as Kurdish language suppression, censorship of media, the disappearing of Kurdish activists, child poverty, trauma, and revenge. *Before Your Eyes* is primarily concerned with racism, trauma, and revenge as personal and systemic issues. The film focuses on child characters, Firat and Gulistan, the son and daughter of a politically outspoken Kurdish newspaper editor and a homemaker. Gradually, *Before Your Eyes* brings to light the day-to-day racism experienced by these children and their family. *Before Your Eyes* is a film about trauma, especially the trauma inflicted on

Kurdish children, but it also speaks to the traumatic experiences of the Kurds in general and the legacy of such experiences. *Before Your Eyes* includes an event-specific trauma, the assassination of Gulistan and Firat's father for his political views. This is quickly followed by their mother when she attempts to assist him, which is the event that drives the main plot of the film, combined with other (sometimes) more subtle indications of Turkey's systemic racism against its Kurdish population. Overall, the film is a complex depiction of trauma that suggests hope but refuses to offer easy answers.

The film opens with the depiction of an old blind man selling parsley on the streets of Diyarbakir. His poverty is countered by a mother and her three children, all neatly dressed and well-cared for. They pause near the blind man, and the oldest of the children, a young girl named Gulistan, hears him calling for his granddaughter, Zelal, who is nowhere to be seen. Gulistan walks down an alley to look for her and finds the girl crouched in a garbage heap, brushing dirt off a piece of food. Zelal is hostile. She yells at Gulistan to stop staring at her, and when Gulistan does not move, she picks up a rock to throw at her. Zelal's life is foreign to Gulistan, and the visual contrast is very clear. Zelal's hair is unkempt, while Gulistan's hair is neatly brushed; Zelal's clothes are dirty and rumpled, while Gulistan's clothes are clean and smooth; Zelal behaves like a threatened animal--she is ferocious, while Gulistan is calm and unafraid. The scene foreshadows what is to come for Gulistan and her siblings by sharply contrasting the life of a street child with that of a child with a stable home life.

The inciting incident featured in *Before Your Eyes* is the assassination of Gulistan and Firat's parents. Their father, a newspaper editor, has been publishing pro-Kurdish

articles that are critical of the Turkish government, and as a result becomes a target of the extra-military group JITEM (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, which translates to Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism). The assassination takes place in front of the children, as the family is driving home from a wedding in the country. There is a lengthy sequence showing the family dancing at the wedding, establishing that, yes, Kurds are people too. Their parents/ deaths ultimately force Gulistan, Firat, and their baby sister Dilovan to become street children, and Zelal is instrumental in guiding them through this process. The children are simultaneously confronted with two traumas: the murder of their parents and homelessness. This terrifying incident is quickly followed by the death of their baby sister, Dilovan, who has become sick. As a result of their poverty, Firat and Gulistan cannot obtain medicine or the help of a doctor to treat her illness, and so she dies.

The children's slide into poverty is a gradual one. At first, their aunt, Yakbun, gives them money to buy food, and a kind neighbor woman assists Gulistan when she struggles to get Dilovan to take her bottle. But a complex network of systemic problems drives the children to homelessness. Initially, Yakbun plans to leave Turkey and go to Stockholm where the children's grandfather lives. But the organization she works with (the film hints but never says outright that Yakbun works with the PKK) has only provided her with a single airline ticket--no tickets for the children. Yakbun gives the children enough money for a few days' worth of food and says she is going to work on getting plane tickets for all of them. She gives them the name and address of a man to ask for help if she does not return in a few days, but when they go to the address, the man is

not there; his sister tells them that he is missing and that Yakbun is not welcome. The kind neighbor woman leaves with her family to look for work in Istanbul. Yakbun's resistance work has left the children alone, just as their father's work did. The men who murdered their parents do not care what becomes of the children; the murderer looked directly into Gulistan's eyes before shooting her father in the back of the head. The children sell all of their household possessions to buy food. Their parents' death is not just a single, horrific traumatic event, but a traumatic event that was brought about through the traumatic conditions in which the Kurds live in Turkey. This leads to a series of further traumas for the children because there is no one to support them either financially or emotionally after they lose their parents (which circles back to the systemic issues such as poverty and racism that plague the city of Amed). Dilovan dies because the children cannot afford her medicine, and when they come home from burying her, they find the landlord casting their belongings into the street.

On the street, Gulistan and Firat finally find a network of support. While digging through the garbage looking for food, Zelal finds Gulistan and puts her to work, along with Firat, selling tissues and cigarette lighters. It is here that Firat encounters their father's killer again. He does not remember Firat, but when he calls Firat over to purchase a lighter from him, Firat is frozen with fear. The killer thinks Firat does not answer him because he does not speak Turkish, although in truth Firat speaks both Kurdish and Turkish and frequently code-switches. Faced with his parents' killer, he is stunned into silence. The killer curses him and drives away. Firat wets himself. This is the first sign we see of the children's traumatic reaction to their parents' murder.

Heretofore, they have been so preoccupied with their own survival that they do not seem to have had a chance to feel the loss or the trauma of how that loss occurred. Of Firat's response to encountering his father's murderer, Bezar states, "Firat's reaction is actually very similar to known adult Kurd reactions towards their past aggressors. They become paralyzed, shocked into either helpless submission or an act of violence" ("Before Your Eyes Press Kit").

In the subsequent scene, the audience is introduced to the killer in his home. He has a wife and a son, a little younger than Firat. They live in a modest but beautiful apartment. The killer, whose name is Nuri, is kind to his wife, and he adores his son. He is friendly with his neighbors. Notably, even though he is introduced in the film's first few minutes, it is approximately 50 minutes into the film before the audience learns the killer's name. But far from humanizing him, the scene makes the murderer, Nuri, seem that much more of a monster. While his son, a Turkish child, is worthy of parental love, a stable home and food to eat, Nuri does not think Gulistan, Firat, and Dilovan deserve the same. He murdered their parents and abandoned them in the car on a deserted roadway, after looking directly into Gulistan's face. To Nuri, Kurdish children are less than human.

From the warmth and safety of Nuri's home-life, the film cuts to a shot of Gulistan and Zelal washing Firat's pants and underwear in a stream, a reminder of the consequences of Nuri's actions. As they wash Firat's soiled clothing, Zelal tells him that he does not need to be ashamed, and that her brother frequently wets himself too. Zelal mentions this casually, as though such things are perfectly normal for a boy of 8 or 9 years old. She goes on to explain that this started happening after their village was burned

by Turkish soldiers and their parents perished in the fire. The childhood of these Kurdish boys is contrasted sharply with that of Nuri's son, safe in the comfortable home of his father, the murderer who destroys the lives of other children. The audience soon learns that not only has Nuri ruined the children's lives by murdering their parents, he is also involved in torturing their aunt, who has been apprehended and imprisoned.

Gulistan and Firat respond to life on the street very differently and begin to separate. Gulistan is befriended by a Kurdish prostitute, Dilara, who pays her for distributing her ads. Dilara takes Gulistan shopping for new clothes while Firat falls in with some pickpockets who teach him how to steal ATM numbers. They steal a wallet and cash from an ATM and spend a day of fun together at an arcade and a soccer field. But in the evening while they sit in the countryside enjoying a campfire, the police come, not, it turns out, to capture the thieves, but to dump bodies of people they have killed extrajudicially. When the boys go for a closer look, Firat sees the beaten face of the young man who hid for a day in his home and helped him with his math homework. His eyes are open and he is dead. Firat just stares. He says nothing to the other boys. One more adult who was kind to Firat, who helped care for him, who was part of his secure former life, has been brutally murdered. *Before Your Eyes* may appear at first glance to be about a single traumatic event in the lives of Gulistan and Firat that leads to a spiral of trauma and suffering, but the reality is they were always living under systemic oppression, a type of trauma unto itself. Their parents protected them from some of this, but even if they had lived, they could not have shielded them from state-sponsored systemic racism. The film is a series of traumatic events. Caruth's singular "wound" does

not seem applicable at all, as the children are wounded over and over. While Firat is engaged with his new friends, Gulistan encounters Nuri again. This time, it is because he has answered one of Dilara's ads. Gulistan stares directly into his face, but as with Firat, he does not remember her at all.

As the film closes, Gulistan and Firat leave for Istanbul in a car full of children destined to be pickpockets and thieves. Gulistan has made a choice that the film suggests will shatter the life of her parents' killer, but her life and Firat's life have not improved. Yakbun is still missing, and the children will probably never see her again. They won't return to school. The final words of the film dedicate it to the street children of Amed, but it is translated in English to Diyarbakir, with no explanation that the city's name was rendered in Kurdish in the dedication.

Conclusion

Depictions of trauma in Kurdish cinema support Watters' arguments that reactions to trauma are not a universal human experience, but one that is deeply affected based on one's socio-cultural background (77) Rosebiani's *Chaplin of the Mountains* also deals with uncovering a hidden traumatic past. *Chaplin* tells the story of Nazê, a French-Kurdish woman whose mother was sold into sexual slavery during the Anfal genocide campaign. The film is structured as a road movie and at its outset Nazê meets a pair of American film students, hoping to screen a Charlie Chaplin film in remote Kurdish villages. Together they travel the countryside of Iraqi Kurdistan, attempting to screen Chaplin but also uncovering Nazê's past. Trauma and memory are highlighted in this film, as Nazê struggles to unearth memories of her mother and confront her mother's

suicide. Similar to *Turtles Can Fly,* initial traumatic events of genocide and sexual violence are transmitted from mother to child. While Nazê is not abused by her mother as Riga was in *Turtles Can Fly,* she suffers as a result of her mother's suicide. For Nazê, the suicide is the traumatic memory she is struggling to uncover, buried along with other memories of her mother which she needs in order to find the village her mother came from. However, unlike *Turtles, Chaplin of the Mountains* depicts the trauma survivor addressing the traumatic memories and healing from them by opening up to other people. The climax of the film takes place when Nazê and her friends return to her village, mostly destroyed by bombings, and find its sole remaining inhabitant, an old man, who turns out to be Nazê's grandfather. Nazê speaks only the most basic Kurdish, but the old man sees his daughter's face in Nazê, and the two are able to make a connection. As he does in *Jiyan*, Rosebiani creates in *Chaplin of the Mountains* a film that suggests that the Kurds can acknowledge and address their traumatic pasts, while moving forward and developing the means of creating a better future.

Before Your Eyes, 2009 (*Min Dit* in Kurdish, which translates as "I Have Seen") is a film about two Kurdish orphans, Gulistan and Firat, in Turkey, whose parents were murdered in front of them by the paramilitary Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele or Gendarmerie İntelligence and Counter-Terrorism (JITEM). The film focuses on trauma and breaking the cycle of violence as well as issues related to Kurdish identity and nationalism. In Turkey, state-sponsored and private violence against the Kurds resulted in the creation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party **(**Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, or PKK), labeled as either guerilla fighters or a terrorist organization, depending on

perspective. The film deals with issues particular to the Kurds of Turkey, such as the lack of Kurdish-medium education in Turkey, state oppression of the press, and the plight of Kurdish street-children. It is important to note that all of these issues are prevalent to varying degrees within the states dividing the Kurdish region.

The film is deeply critical of the Turkish government's oppression of the press, which has long been and remains an issue in Turkey. Bezar attempts to depict the street children without romanticizing them. Firat undergoes a drastic change in personality after beginning life on the street. He becomes tougher and more violent. In one scene Firat is shown with a group of other street boys using a slingshot to shoot rocks at a frog they have pinned to a clothesline. Gulistan, his elder sister, steps in front of the frog to block the shot. As the elder sister, she takes on the role of leader and provider, also acting as Firat's moral compass. Filmmaker Miraz Bezar deliberately wrote the lead role to be played by a Kurdish girl, rather than creating a male-centered film.

Chapter 3: Kurdish Cinema Through an Indigenous Lens

Introduction: Kurdistan and Indigeneity

Before discussing Indigenous methodologies, one should first ask, who qualifies as an Indigenous person? In the case of the Americas, it can be relatively clear, but what about the Middle East? The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues offers the following definition, stating that Indigenous people are those who are: Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live… who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means. ("Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices")

The document also claims that "there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide" (1). Furthermore, the article states that while there is no official UN definition to determine indigeneity, the following criteria are often used:

> • Self- identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member. • Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies • Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources • Distinct social, economic or political systems • Distinct language, culture and beliefs • From non-dominant groups of society • Resolve to maintain and

> reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. (“Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices”)

According to these criteria, the Kurds are an Indigenous people, and this term is often employed in describing them. However, within the context of Indigenous studies in the U.S. the Kurds are not typically the first people who come to mind, yet the Kurds face issues that are common among Indigenous peoples, which makes Indigenous studies theories and methodologies useful in the study of Kurdistan, and of course, Kurdish cinema. The UN concludes:

> Indigenous peoples often have much in common with other neglected segments of societies, i.e. lack of political representation and participation, economic marginalization and poverty, lack of access to social services and discrimination. Despite their cultural differences, the diverse indigenous peoples share common problems also related to the protection of their rights. They strive for recognition of their identities, their ways of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources. (“Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices”)

Every issue described in the preceding statement is applicable to the Kurds and many of them are highlighted in Kurdish films, which often work to assert the uniqueness of Kurdish culture.

“Trans-Indigenous” is a term developed by Chadwick Allen, which grew out of his work in Māori and Native American literary studies. Allen carefully this term. He describes how when writing the proposal for his dissertation he used a surplus of “ands” to describe a project that would delve into Māori literature, Native American literature, as

well as Māori and Native American cultures. He pokes fun at the awkwardness of his own construction but develops his ideas into a more serious discussion of what "Trans-Indigenous" might actually mean.

Allen wishes to move beyond traditional comparative literature, which historically has pitted non-European texts against European works. Instead, he describes "trans" as a "juxtaposition" placing related yet distinctly different artworks from different Indigenous traditions next to each other. Allen is concerned with avoiding the reproduction settler models that might lead to looking at Indigenous works in a hierarchy of oppression. He argues that in utilizing this new trans-Indigenous model, it is vital to consider the aesthetic and literary traditions of the various cultures the artworks originated in, as well as the way they interact with each other, and how they act on a global scale. Allen looks at a range of different art objects, including literature, sculpture, textile, and film to expand upon his thesis, but primarily he analyzes works from Native American and Māori peoples because he acknowledges those are where his strengths lie. However, he states that he believes the "trans-Indigenous model" he developed can be applied to any and all settler-colonial peoples.

Allen also pays special attention to Witi Ihimaera's novel and film, *Whale Rider.* Not only does Allen examine the differences between the novel and the film, but he looks at the original novel Ihimaera wrote in English in comparison with the later version (released globally after the film gained worldwide recognition) as well as a translation of the novel into Māori. Allen argues that each of these works is distinct from the other in relation to the audience each is intended for, and the various changes made to the work in

each incarnation. A similar argument could be constructed around Doris Pilkington's novel/memoir, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence.* This book tells the story of Pilkington's mother, aunt, and their younger cousin, young half-Indigenous and half-white girls in Australia during the early 1900s. It was reimagined as a film, and, as one might expect, certain adaptations were made to present the film to an international audience in much the same way changes were made to *Whale Rider* when it became a film. Overall, Allen is more interested in discussing what trans-Indigenous can do rather than what post-colonial or settler-colonial studies cannot. I think in large part this is due to the historic tensions between post-colonial and Indigenous studies. Allen is more interested in developing a new branch of Indigenous studies, rather than revisiting old tensions with post-colonialism.

While there is a historical rift between post-colonial studies and Indigenous studies, it seems like a separate field of settler colonial studies might have a better relationship with Indigenous or trans-Indigenous studies areas than post-colonial studies have had. Veracini characterizes settler colonialism as being in many ways very different from other forms of colonialism and that other texts on colonialism and postcolonialism often pay scant attention to it. For example, Ashcroft et alia pay more attention to describing the literary development in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand after they declare independence from Britain rather than looking at the development of arts and literatures of Indigenous peoples in response to colonization (*The Empire Writes Back*). Typically, Arabs (or Ottoman Turks, for that matter) are never mentioned as colonizing forces and are only described as being peoples colonized by Europeans. While

it is true that the literature of the colonizers in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand developed differently than the literature of the mother country, it is hard to argue for the literature of the colonizers as "post-colonial." Attention should be given to the Indigenous peoples who were colonized, rather than considering settler-colonizers as "post-colonial."

The grievous lack of attention paid to Indigenous peoples by Ashcroft et alia is a strong point in favor of Veracini's argument that settler colonialism is in need of special consideration, and it is an argument that others have made to criticize whether the post-colonial model is useful, such as Anne McClintock (85-87). It is also the reason why Indigenous studies seeks to distinguish itself from post-colonial studies. However, there is also an important distinction that Indigenous studies as a field grew out of activist movements and has always been tied to social and political action, as described by Simpson and Smith (7). Simpson and Smith devote a significant portion of their introduction to addressing concerns that theory is a Western mode of thought incompatible with Indigenous studies, pointing out that Native communities are actively engaged in theorizing of their own and that theory is tied to practice (3-7). Concerns about this issue are addressed in some of the book chapters as well, particularly Teresea Teaiwa's chapter "The Ancestors We Choose." Glen Coulthard also deals with problems particular to settler colonialism in his book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Politics of Colonial Recognition*. Clearly, he is evoking Frantz Fanon in his title (although he actually engages most with Fanon's "On National Culture" from *Wretched of the Earth* rather than arguments specific to *Black Skin, White Masks.*) Coulthard explicitly states

that while his book deals with the situation of First Nations people in Canada, he believes his ideas would also be applicable to other Indigenous peoples in settler colonies.

While postcolonial studies, settler colonial studies and trans-Indigenous studies are related, there are important distinctions between the three. Historically, post-colonial studies tended to exclude Indigenous peoples from its theoretical models, as in the case of *The Empire Writes Back.* Looking at settler colonial studies as its own particular field the way that Veracini suggests would help to rectify the situation to some extent. However, from Veracini's description, it seems that much of the activism inherent to Indigenous studies would be absent from a field of settler colonial studies. "Trans-Indigenous" can be seen as a reframing of "settler-colonial" in that it shifts the focus away from the colonizers and the act of colonization to the colonized people, returning primacy to the Indigenous, while also carrying on the tradition of activism in Indigenous studies, described by Simpson and Smith. Allen believes that "*Trans* could be the next *post*…" and suggests that this reframing could open up new methods of analysis, new debates, and theoretical tools appropriate to analyzing collaborative and global Indigenous artworks that he describes in his book.

While the Kurds are not mentioned in any of these works, their continued oppression in their homeland bears resemblance to that of other Indigenous peoples. Like other Indigenous groups in settler-colonial situations, the Kurds are often marginalized in favor of post-colonial models that exclude their specific oppression by non-European ethnic groups. Moving away from a post-colonial or even settler-colonial framework to a

trans-Indigenous model would better accommodate peoples like the Kurds (or even the Yezidis) who have been marginalized by post-colonial models.

Allen posits a way of approaching Indigenous artworks on a global scale. While Allen focuses primarily on Indigenous cultures of the Americas and the Māori, his theoretical work is meant to be applicable to Indigenous peoples from around the world. It is useful to consider Kurdish cinema from an Indigenous perspective, rather than through strict post-colonial studies or Middle Eastern studies interpretation. In "Repressed Representations of Suppressed Indigenous Cultural Memories: The Communities of Sami of Finland and Kurdish of Turkey" Adél Furu takes a trans-Indigenous approach to Kurdish cinema, although she does not use the term "trans-Indigenous" by framing her argument to look at the similarities between two oppressed Indigenous groups. Furu compares the Finnish ban on Sami language to the Turkish ban on Kurdish. Forbidding the use of the mother tongue is common among many -if not most- repressed Indigenous cultures. Often this repression is related to colonization.

While there are aspects of post-colonial studies that are useful in an analysis of Kurdish cinema, this dissertation argues that the trans-Indigenous method is a stronger approach. The Kurdistan region was divided by colonial powers.

Considering the Kurds from an Indigenous perspective requires questioning the repeated, unapologetic use of the term 'Arab world' to describe an ethnically diverse region. The term usually seems to be favored by Arabs (unsurprisingly) and liberal Westerners. One is faced with the choice of referring to the region with the Eurocentric term "Middle East" or the ethno-centrist term 'Arab world.' The use of the latter is

arguably more troubling than the former. It erases large groups of people, as though they do not exist. And in many of these so-called Arab countries, the Kurds have historically been treated as if they do not exist. This is also true for Turkey, even though this country is clearly not part of the 'Arab world.' Genocidal atrocities against the Kurds, such as the Anfal and the Dersim massacre go even further, attempting to deny the existence of a distinct ethnic group. In this vein, the use of the term 'Arab world' seems to suggest that the greatest concern for postcolonial scholars is to stop positioning the Arabs in relation to Europe, rather than considering racism that occurs within the region and is typically perpetrated by Arabs. Jihan A. Mohammad discusses this issue, writing:

> The emergence of the Arab supremacy was a reaction to the Western powers, Western colonialism, and imperialism in the early 20th century. Western domination was/is heavily critiqued and rejected by the Arab states, yet the Arabs do not acknowledge their supremacy over minorities living within their States. Very few Arabs critique the Arab supremacy, the exploitation of the minorities in the Arab states. Amazighes in North Africa, Black-Sudanese, the Kurds, as well as many other minorities are victims of forced assimilation (Arabization), genocide, displacement, and ethnic cleansing.

Attempts to assimilate the Kurds are an aspect of this oppression and another type of erasure in many ways similar to attempts to assimilate the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. This chapter is especially focused on this comparison through a side-by-side analysis of Bahman Ghobadi's 2006 film, *Half Moon* and Chris Eyre's 1998 film, *Smoke Signals*.

Chapter Filmography

This chapter departs from the others to take a comparative look at a Kurdish film in concert with other Indigenous films. There are numerous Indigenous issues raised in Kurdish films, such as loss of language, assimilation, racism, loss of land, and more that are shared with other films of Indigenous peoples. This chapter focuses on those issues through a comparison of a specific type of film: the road movie (or as described by Gertz and Khleifi, the "roadblock" movie) with emphasis on comparison of Kurdish and Native American issues as depicted in these particular films, specifically, Bahman Ghobadi's 2006 film, *Half Moon* and Chris Eyre's 1998 film, *Smoke Signals*. Additionally, this chapter includes Yilmaz Özdil's 2020 short film *The Heavy Burden*, which focuses on the devastating results of restrictive borders. Also discussed are the short films, Fekri Baroshi's *A Dream Before Dying,* Jano Rosebiani's upcoming *Daughters of the Light,* and Aram Hassan's *Yar.*

Metamorphosis, Daughters of the Light, and *Yar*

One of the most interesting aspects of Allen's work is his analysis of Fred Graham's sculpture *Metamorphosis.* The sculpture was part of a show that featured work by Māori artists and Indigenous artists from the Pacific Northwest, a collection of works developed over a long collaboration between the two groups. Graham's sculpture features a carved three-dimensional whale decorated with paua shell against a steel background decorated with traditional Māori and Indigenous Pacific Northwestern symbols. The whale seems to be in a diving position, head down and tail up. In the background, a red line symbolizes the equator and the movement of the whale between the territories of the

Pacific Northwest and Aotearoa New Zealand. The whale is an important figure in both cultures and to demonstrate this Graham has carved the upper half of the whale in the style of the Pacific Northwest and the lower half in the style of the Māori. In designing the whale, Graham collaborated with two artists from the Pacific Northwest to develop the drawing that he eventually developed into the final sculpture. Thus, the work is trans-Indigenous not only in its symbols and aesthetics but in the collaboration of the artists who created it. Allen's "trans-Indigenous" not only offers a new framework for considering Indigenous art, but also offers a framework for considering Indigenous artwork that is transnational in nature, or perhaps could be said to transcend nations, since it forges connections with other Indigenous artists beyond the bounds of the settler nation-state. This situation is similar in some ways to Kurds working together not only across the national borders dividing the Kurdistan region and but also from the diaspora to collaborate on films and film festivals. Although they are "one people" in terms of ethnicity, they are one people divided, by governments and sometimes by continents. Although their backgrounds may be different due to where they were born and raised, one might venture to consider a kind of trans-Kurdishness, created through shared identity. *Metamorphosis* was created by two different Indigenous groups -who, unlike the Kurds, are not one people, yet they share cultural similarities beyond their indigeneity and experiences of settler colonialism, particularly a relationship with whales.

The collaborative effort Allen describes in the creation of *Metamorphosis* suggests numerous possibilities for collaboration in Kurdish cinema. Efforts between Kurdish-speaking peoples that could be considered trans-Indigenous are already taking

place. In some cases, this includes collaboration between Kurds and Yezidis. Yezidis, a Kurdish-speaking minority, are a religious minority residing within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but due to persecution by Muslim Kurds they do not necessarily consider themselves Kurdish. The Yezidis suffered particularly brutal treatment under Daesh attacks and there has been an ongoing urgency to tell their stories through multiple means.

Fekri Baroshi's 2018 film, *A Dream Before Dying,* tells the story of Kurdish deminers and includes a Yezidi actress in the main female role. The actress, Dejin Jamil Khidir, spoke emphatically about the importance of the role at a panel at the Duhok International Film Festival, and the difficulties actresses face in obtaining roles in the region due to the overall conservative culture surrounding women on screen (Robinson). Jano Rosebiani is also in the process of making a mini-series about Yezidi women entitled *Daughters of the Light*. The level of trans-Indigenous collaboration in these films is not clear since one is unavailable outside of the film festival circuit and the other is unfinished. However, Rosebiani's series is a documentary-style work from the promo available on IMDB, which would require extensive collaboration from Yezidi women. He begins the promo by identifying the Yezidis as an Indigenous people, stating, "The Yezidis have suffered 73 genocides over the centuries. Most recently at the hands of ISIS." Multiple women are shown with hidden faces, given first names, dates of capture, and the number of times they were sold by ISIS. A few give interviews describing what happened to them, their faces darkened. Stef Craps writes:

> Insisting on the distinctiveness and difference of one's own history can indicate a kind of blindness, a refusal to recognize the larger historical processes of which that history is a part. Moreover, claims for the uniqueness of the suffering of the particular victim group to which one belongs tend to deny the capacity for, or the effectiveness of, transcultural empathy. (*Postcolonial Witnessing*, 84, 85)

The Yezidis are both Kurdish and other. They are part of some of the same atrocities suffered by the Kurds and they are victims of racism at the hands of the Kurds. In this particular discussion, Craps is referring specifically to the problems of claiming the Holocaust as distinct from other genocides, and thereby rather than having trauma work as a bridge across cultures, as Caruth suggested it would, it does the opposite. By contrast, Rosebiani appears to be looking for pathways to trans-Indigenous healing, by using his position in film and television to give voice to Yezidi women who were captives of ISIS. Whether or not the Yezidis are Kurds, they are still "other" by their distinct religious difference, so in this case, there is a shared indigeneity and a need to reach across, which the suffix "trans" implies.

While it is not a film about trauma or tragedy, Aram Hassan's 2020 short documentary film, *Yar,* could also be considered a trans-Indigenous project. In his interview with Zelah Latteef for the London Kurdish Film Festival, Hassan stated that he worked with the Yarsanis for four years to create the documentary. Hassan collaborated with a group of Yarsanis in the Rojhelat region due to the fact that they are more open to working with outsiders. Specifically mentioned is Hassan's deep interest in the *tanbur*, a long-necked stringed instrument, and how the nations that occupy the Kurdistan region

have tried to erase Kurdish history and claim the *tanbur* as their own. Hassan makes it very clear in the interview that the *tanbur* is holy to the Yarsanis and has been part of their history of 6,000 years and also establishes it is a Kurdish instrument. Hassan states that state attempts to erase the Kurdish history of the *tanbur* were the reason he wanted to make the documentary. Throughout the interview and through *Yar*, Hassan conveys a sense of deep respect and admiration for the Yarsanis. He briefly describes the gatekeeping process that was required for him to be able to make the documentary, stating that due to being betrayed by other filmmakers in the past, the Yarsanis are quite distrustful of letting people make films about them. He needed references from people trusted by the Yarsanis and from his university, the University of Sulaymaniyah. This pattern of betrayal and distrust is common among Indigenous peoples when encountering outsiders who come in to portray their way of life. Making a documentary film about a group of people is not collaborative in the way that creating an artwork together is, such as in the case of Metamorphosis. However, there is a vast difference between a Kurd like Hassan approaching the Yarsanis to film Yar and, (for instance) a white American attempting to do the same thing. There is no possibility of trans-Indigenous connection in the second instance. Hassan is still Kurdish and while that is not enough to automatically gain him access to make his film, the film would not resonate with both difference and unity the way it does if anyone but a Kurd had made it. Hassan's future project plans are to continue to make documentary films about Kurdish minority groups to introduce them to Kurds in the diaspora or anyone else who is interested in learning about the Kurds. He wants to show the Kurds as a people with a rich culture rather than as victims.

While the Yarsanis and the Yezidis are not as different in terms of indigeneity from the majority of Muslim Kurds as the Māori and Inuit artists in Allen's example of Metamorphosis, in many ways, *Daughters of the Light*, *Yar*, and the casting of a Yezidi actress fit the concept of trans-Indigenous collaboration, the context just works differently for this particular set of circumstances. The states occupying Kurdish territory would like to see Kurds divided as much as possible, whether by language (different Kurdish dialects), religion (Christianity, Islam, Yezidism, Yarsanism, Judaism), state borders, or exile. It is in their interests to divide and conquer. In such a context, artistic collaboration across any of these boundaries becomes an act of resistance.

However, one should be careful not to stretch the concept of trans-Indigenous collaboration too far in order to make it fit. Documentaries are limited in how much collaboration there is with their subject and a subject generally is not an equal creative partner. While Yarsanis and Yezidis consider themselves to be distinct groups, they are still considered ethnically Kurdish. Perhaps it makes more sense to look at these projects as pre-trans-Indigenous. The Yarsanis, who are shown in the documentary asking permission of the trees they harvest to make their instruments, seem particularly close to other Indigenous cultures who perform such rites of respect when taking the life of a living plant or animal. Hassan's documentary seems like a possible gateway to introduce a Yarsani artist to an Indigenous artist outside of Kurdistan.

Crossing Borders in *Half Moon* and *Smoke Signals*

One of the greatest challenges faced by Indigenous peoples around the world is the challenge of borders. Typically, Indigenous people are forcibly barred from

determining their own borders, and often when they try to cross boundaries imposed upon them by nation-states into what was traditionally their own territory, they are met with violence. This is a global phenomenon, and it is another reason why utilizing trans-Indigenous methodologies in the case of Kurdish cinema makes so much sense. In all cases where this dissertation looks at Indigenous people crossing borders, the focus is on Indigenous people crossing borders in what was previously their own land in which they had unrestricted access. However, in some instances, those restrictions are tighter and more confining than in others. Such is the case in Palestine, which led Gertz and Khleifi to coin the term "Palestinian roadblock movies", a concept that is highly applicable to other works of trans-Indigenous cinema. Gertz and Khleifi apply the term to a particular period in Palestinian cinema, writing, "In the films made in the 1990s and 2000s the public space is blocked, the private space is missing or destroyed, and the only place left intact is the border" (316).

This chapter intends to expand upon this concept of "roadblock cinema" and to utilize it in a comparative analysis of a Kurdish film and a Native American film, in which the characters also lose access to the "public space" and "private space" Gertz and Khleifi describe and are left with no alternative but wandering between borders (although in each film this wandering comes to different conclusions.) Each of these films deals with the traditional road movie in a way that is distinctly Indigenous and viewing them collectively helps to shed light on commonalities between the films. Much of the argument rests on utilizing Gertz and Khleifi's conception of the "Palestinian roadblock

movie" as a model and building on it to offer a trans-Indigenous comparative analysis of Native American, and Kurdish cinemas.

Perhaps the most vital concept in examining films from these three Indigenous peoples is the concept of space; how it is controlled, restricted, blocked, and forbidden. Over time the situation in Palestine has become more and more restricted. Gertz and Khleifi describe Khleifi's films, including and following *Fertile Memories*, stating:

> While they depict the local space, centered on and around, the family home and the village or town in which the heroes' daily lives come to pass. They also portray a national place that encompasses the horizon of what is considered 'the Palestinian space'. On the one hand this space is divided between families, villages, genders and classes, while on the other it is unified around memories of a common, national past, the one that preceded the war of 1948 and the creation of the State of Israel. (318)

These films are set in a less restricted period before the extreme roadblocks and checkpoints were put in place. However, these films serve as a starting point for comparison to *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon.* The depiction of space will, of course, vary for the situation of each group of Indigenous people. Yet both *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon* begin in what would be considered (respectively) the Coeur d'Alene and the Kurdish space and move into the national space. For the Coeur d'Alene characters in *Smoke Signals*, this means leaving the reservation, traveling across boundaries established by the U.S. government over land that the Coeur d'Alene would once have traveled freely. Likewise, in *Half Moon,* the characters begin to leave private spaces and

move towards contested national spaces from the onset of the film. The concept of a "common, national past" is explored in both films as well. *Smoke Signals* is laced with references to colonialism, but a shared past is also explored and created (and recreated) through Thomas's stories. In *Half Moon,* the shared past is symbolized in the very reason for the musicians' journey: to headline a concert celebrating the fall of Saddam Hussein.

In both films the community life taking place in the Coeur d'Alene and Kurdish spaces fosters a sense of unique identity, helping to shield the community from complete assimilation. Throughout *Smoke Signals*, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on frybread, particularly at the beginning of the film. Early on we learn that Arlene, Victor's mother, makes the best frybread on the reservation. Yet frybread, while often viewed as a traditional Indian food, was not available on the American continent until the arrival of Europeans, when the ingredients were distributed as part of a government food aid program, as Dana Vantrease observes:

> Thus, although frybread is a cultural symbol, it also reflects governmental dietary assimilation efforts. After generations of consuming and in large part subsisting on government food aid, American Indians have developed complex ethnic food symbols related to food aid that evoke both ethnic pride and deep sorrow. (55)

Frybread is a motif that is carried throughout the film and serves to emphasize the resilience of the Coeur d'Alene people. Initially, frybread was cooked and consumed for survival, but it has developed into a food that many people love. There are frybread competitions across the country to this day. The symbolism of frybread in *Smoke Signals* provides an example of an Indigenous people changing, reminding viewers that

Indigenous people are not frozen in time, a common view held by non-Indigenous people. Vantrease writes, “Although frybread is still commonly made from FDPIR ingredients, it has grown from last resort to an esteemed food.” (59) Vanrease mentions *Smoke Signals* directly in her essay. Gertz and Khleifi describe a marked shift in the Palestinian films of the 1990s and 2000s. Of these films, they write:

> The borders have thus become a sign of oppression characterised by an Israeli definition of Palestinian as a nonexistent, split or broken identity. This, perhaps, may explain why so many new Palestinian films take place at borders and checkpoints, and have therefore been termed “roadblock movies” (320).

In Palestine, daily life requires crossing borders and checkpoints. Such is not the case for the characters in *Smoke Signals* or *Half Moon.* In each film, the characters are placed in circumstances that compel them to undertake dangerous border-crossing journeys. In *Half Moon* there are actual checkpoints, with armed guards, harassment, humiliations, bribery, and violence. In *Smoke Signals* there are no checkpoints as such, but the idea remains, most significantly symbolized through the act of leaving the reservation and the police encounter on the journey to return.

Both *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon* also make use of humor, often very dark humor, to reflect the realities of Indigenous life. In, “Elia Suleiman: Narrating Negative Space” Refqa Abu-Remaileh writes, “Elia Suleiman is a pioneering filmmaker who has captured the absurdities of Palestinian life with a twist of humor and a deep dose of irony.” The three main aspects of this description are not unique to Suleiman. Like Suleiman’s films, *Smoke Signal*s and *Half Moon* also reflect on “absurdities… humor…

and irony" of life for Indigenous peoples living under colonial conditions. *Smoke Signal*s and *Half Moon* take an absurdist approach to the Indigenous road movie, pointing out the absurdity of not being able to travel freely around the region traditionally belonging to one's people. Both films have a character who is more optimistic and humorous, countered by a more serious character. In *Smoke Signals*, Thomas is cheerful, full of hope, and funny (sometimes unintentionally). By contrast, Victor is dour, pessimistic, and angry. When Victor is funny, his sense of humor has a biting edge to it. He is often annoyed, frustrated, or angry with Thomas. In *Half Moon*, Kako is the eternal optimist, his cheerfulness unperturbed for most of the film until the Turks cut his hair and roast his cockerel. Kako and Thomas both exhibit kindness and optimism and when they are hurt and their optimism is crushed, the pain is much greater. Mamo is Kako's foil, representing the darker, more serious aspects of the journey like Victor in *Smoke Signals*. Mamo is hopeful about the concert, and he has high expectations for his musicians. However, he has been having premonitions of his own death since the beginning of the film. He rarely smiles and seems more aware than Kako of the perils of the journey. His emotional reaction to Kako is similar to Victor's responses to Thomas; Mamo often expresses annoyance with Kako's buoyancy and sometimes outright anger although the anger is directed at Kako's foolishness more than his lighthearted optimism. These personality pairs reflect the conflict of the road trip for the Indigenous travelers.

On the one hand, there is a sense of joy from setting out on a journey in good company, the "freedom of the road." On the other hand, there is a sense of trepidation. In each film, the travelers are aware that in leaving their homes they are placing themselves

in danger. As Thomas and Victor are walking along the road to the bus station, from where they will leave the reservation, they encounter Lucy and Velma, driving backward (the only direction their car will go) down the highway. The following exchange takes place between them:

> Velma: You guys got your passports?
>
> Thomas: Passports?
>
> Velma: Yeah, you're leavin' the rez and goin' into a whole different country, cousin.
>
> Thomas: But… but it's the United States.
>
> Lucy: Damn right it is! That's as foreign as it gets. Hope you two have your vaccinations.

The mention of vaccinations may be a reference to the fact that many Native Americans died as a result of being exposed to European diseases during colonization, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes not. Lucy's and Velma's warning serves to foreshadow the difficulties Victor and Thomas will face on the road, where they are often treated as foreigners by the descendants of colonizers.

No such warnings are directed toward Mamo and his companions before they set out on their journey. Instead, Mamo is faced with a vision of his impending death. The vision and his farewell to his only daughter portend Mamo's death at the close of the film. The first hints of the foreignness of the Kurdish travelers in their own territory come at the first checkpoint. The group of traveling musicians is treated as extremely suspect. Here the severity of the situation is lightened through Kako's sense of humor.

The behavior of Mamo's son, Sherko, at the start of the journey also serves to foreshadow impending danger. When the bus arrives at Sherko's drum workshop, Sherko at first refuses to join his father and brothers on the bus. He makes numerous excuses. A little later, when the bus makes another stop, Sherko makes a run for it. Mamo shoots him in the ear by accident--he was aiming to kill--as if to say it is more dangerous for Sherko to disobey his father than to face whatever dangers lie ahead. The shooting incident is treated with humor, not unlike Thomas and Victor's encounter with Lucy and Velma. Yet there is a dark aspect to both situations. It is bizarre to see Mamo, who has been portrayed as a very gentle man up to this point and remains so for the rest of the film, attack his son with the intent to kill. It suggests a deep anger hidden within him. Yet after Sherko returns, the anger disappears. Velma and Lucy seem more silly than angry or fearful, but their warning seems to come from a place of knowledge. When the two girls encounter Victor and Thomas, they are driving in a car that only goes in reverse. It is as if Velma and Lucy have encountered the foreign country called the United States and are now in full retreat. In both films, the warnings not to proceed come before the heroes have stepped across the threshold into the unknown, adding a sense of mythos to the respective narratives.

Likewise, both films utilize humor as a way for the characters to mitigate the fear of venturing into hostile territory. In one of his stories, Thomas suggests that the United States considers it a crime to be "an Indian in the 20th century". When Thomas and Victor leave the reservation, their Indianness challenges the culture of white supremacy. They make white Americans uncomfortable by their mere presence and visible otherness.

Leaving the reservation is an act of defiance, even though Victor and Thomas are not doing so for the purpose of defying the U.S. government. Likewise, for Mamo and his troupe, crossing national borders created by colonial powers in order to engage in a cultural activity can be viewed as a nationalist act (performing Kurdish music, singing in Kurdish). This may be why the border guards break the musicians' instruments. Whether Mamo's intent is to defy national governments or not, his music asserts Kurdish culture and is thus viewed as a threat.

Bans have been placed on the Kurdish language and on the languages of Native Americans/First Nations peoples, and in some cases, this has led to the Kurds and Indigenous peoples of the Americas not knowing the language of their heritage or having a limited ability in said language. In *Half Moon*, the Kurdish characters seem unaffected by this problem, although some of them struggle when confronted by Iranian police who do not speak Kurdish. In *Smoke Signals,* the audience never hears the characters speak in Coeur d'Alene. Even the name of the language and tribe, Coeur d'Alene, is clearly of European origin. The true name of the language is *snchitsu'umshtsn*. In their own language, the Coeur d'Alene people are *Schitsu'umsh* or *Skitswish* (Frey). Currently, the Coeur d'Alene tribe is working to revitalize their language through computer-based teaching/learning tools. According to the Endangered Languages Project, Coeur d'Alene currently has two speakers worldwide. Kurdish, by contrast, still has millions of speakers, despite government efforts to wipe out the language (Coeur d"Alene). However, this does not mean that the Kurds have not suffered language loss. In *Half Moon*, because the Kurdish characters are Iranian, where Kurdish has not been restricted as in Turkey, they

are able to speak their language. The theme of language arises only when border patrol guards cannot speak Kurdish and expect that the Kurdish musicians will all be able to speak Farsi, and some of them cannot. The border guards become angry about this. They are the guardians of the national boundaries, and the use of Kurdish language threatens the narrative of the border.

Both *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon* deal with the deaths of fathers. However, the tone of *Half Moon's* ending and the way it deals with death feels much darker than the way that *Smoke Signals* confronts the subject. *Half Moon* focuses on the father figure of Mamo more than on his sons, who receive little or no character development. By contrast, *Smoke Signals* is much more focused on the lives of Arnold Joseph's biological son, Victor, and Thomas, who in many ways Arnold Joseph treats as a son, at least in part due to the fact that he caused the deaths of Thomas's parents. The final scenes preceding Mamo's death depict the last-ditch attempt of the musicians to reach the concert. Niwemang (whose name means "half moon"), the mysterious young woman who falls from the sky, has arrived with others to escort the men across the border, hiding the instruments in coffins. For the sons there are sleds, but for Mamo, she has a horse and a wooden coffin. She escorts him personally over a mountain, but as they climb, he is failing fast. He climbs into the coffin and with a final glimpse of the half-moon, he dies. This scene seems to indicate Mamo's final defeat. Despite his great dedication to his art form and his determination to reach the concert, Mamo dies during the last leg of the journey, and the audience does not discover what happens to his sons. However, the last moments of the film depict Mamo, who seems to be ascending, perhaps to heaven, to the

sound of wild applause, giving the sense that after all his suffering, he is finally being rewarded. He is going home at last.

In *Smoke Signals* the death of Arnold Joseph, Victor's father, occurs much earlier in the film, before the journey even begins, and long after Arnold abandoned his family. The road trip serves in part to help Victor and Thomas deal with their feelings about Arnold, who was instrumental in both their lives. Both *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon* deal with death from early in their respective narratives, but *Half Moon* has a single character dealing with his own impending death, while *Smoke Signals* is largely concerned with deaths that took place before the main events of the film and how Victor and Thomas are dealing with the repercussions.

Characters in *Half Moon* and *Smoke Signals* face potentially dangerous confrontations with law enforcement or the military. In *Half Moon* the encounters are with Iranian border guards, American soldiers, and the Turkish military. Although they are traveling within what could be considered Kurdish territory, because of the way the land was divided between nations, the Kurds are cut off from each other. The musicians are repeatedly harassed by border guards despite the obvious truth that they only wish to reach their concert. An aura of fear pervades the entire film from the threat these border patrols pose. In both films, there are encounters with law enforcement, and the Indigenous travelers are only 'saved' by the help of a friendly insider. In *Smoke Signals*, this role is filled by the wife of the man who accuses Victor and Thomas of assaulting him in an attempt to escape responsibility for a car accident he caused. In *Half Moon,* it is the Iranian-Kurdish border guard who tries to use his influence to help Mamo and his

companions cross the border. The actual injustice of the characters' predicaments appears to be less important than having someone with insider status to appease the lawmen. Neither Victor and Arnold nor Mamo and his sons seem to have any expectation of being treated fairly. In each case, the confrontations with the law serve to show the particularly vulnerable position of Indigenous people traveling in occupied lands. In *Half Moon* these confrontations represent the main obstacle to the musicians obtaining their goal of reaching the concert. In *Smoke Signals* the police have the power to prevent Victor and Thomas from returning to the reservation, which, despite its privations, is still a sovereign territory and their home.

Both films deal with the pasts and futures of Indigenous peoples. In *Half Moon* the past is represented primarily by Mamo and to a lesser extent by Hesho. The future is represented by Niwemang and to a lesser extent by Hesho's daughter as a teacher of children. Hesho is the female singer and the "celestial voice" that Mamo insists he needs to make his troupe complete, even though she has no papers and cannot legally cross the borders. However, Hesho is not as young as she used to be, and her voice has lost some of its former strength and beauty. After Hesho is taken by border guards, Mamo begins to hear another "celestial voice," and a young woman falls from the sky and lands on top of his bus. The younger woman, Niwemang, replaces Hesho when all seems bleak for the musicians and their quest, thus representing a younger generation and offering a glimmer of hope for the future. In *Smoke Signals* the past is represented by Arnold Joseph and the future through Victor and Thomas. Arnold, Victor, and Thomas are all members of the

Coeur d'Alene tribe. The tribe's official website opens with the following remarks on its homepage with regards to the tribe's future:

> Because there was always a commitment to the future, so will there always be a commitment to the past. The modern Coeur d'Alene Tribe is the sum of uncounted centuries of untold generations. In the tribe's own ancient language, it is called Schitsu'umsh, meaning 'Those who were found here' or 'The discovered people'. In this remains a land abundant in beauty and resources, a legacy of leadership, and a lineage that continues from the time immemorial. The Coeur d'Alene are who they always were and who they will always be. (The Coeur d'Alene Tribe)

This statement addresses two major concerns of Indigenous peoples: 1. Assimilation and assimilationist policies have cut them off from their past. 2. The settler culture sees Indigenous people as unchanging and tied to the past, without being able to advance into the future.

In *Smoke Signals*, storytelling is a means of claiming identity. In *Half Moon*, music performs a similar function. Both films utilize magical realism, although in *Smoke Signals* this aspect appears through Thomas's stories, while in *Half Moon* the magical elements are integrated with the linear progression of the narrative. When Thomas tells a story, the question that often arises from the listener is "Is that true?" or "Did that really happen?" (Interestingly, when Thomas talks to the gymnast on the bus, Victor also discards her story in the same way he discards Thomas's stories, for not being true.) The "untruths" in both films speak to some greater truth, a reality beyond what may or may

not have actually happened. For example, Thomas's stories often portray Arlene and Arnold Joseph in a heroic light, reflecting both the way Thomas sees them and perhaps also a level of heroism Thomas wishes they had been able to accomplish in reality. The stories can also serve to illustrate Thomas's opinions on a subject in a way a simple phrase never could. When Thomas tells the story of Arlene's frybread and the feast, the story carries much more weight than if Thomas only said that Arlene makes the best frybread in the world. Even though Victor says what happened in Thomas's story never actually took place, Thomas's story reflects his true feelings about Arlene and her frybread and portrays Arlene as a Native American hero. Thomas even compares her to Jesus because in his story Arlene is able to feed more people than should be possible with her limited frybread, which is similar to the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 in the Bible. In many ways, life on the reservation is one of privation and disenfranchisement. Everyone is living in poverty. They have lost their language and much of their land. But Thomas, who always wants to see the best in everyone, paints his people as heroes.

Music serves as an act of defiance in both films. There is a history of suppression of Kurdish music in the region and of female musicians in Iran, but Mamo insists that he must have Hesho, a female Iranian singer to accompany his ensemble. He goes to the Village of 1334 Exiled Women Singers to fetch her. In one of the most striking images of the film, the women stand atop their roofs drumming and singing. Ghobadi's support for female Iranian musicians is evident, as Mamo leads Hesho through the throng of chanting women, defying the ban on women singers, as over a thousand women perform before a man and anyone who can hear their song echoing across the mountains. Attempting to

reach the concert is also an act of defiance, a celebration of the fall of Saddam Hussein, who enacted the Anfal genocide. Two of the most crushing incidents in the film are when the musicians' instruments are destroyed by guards, and Hesho is taken away by the border patrol. These incidents are painful to watch in themselves and, considering that they will prevent Mamo from taking part in the concert to celebrate Saddam's fall, they are even more deeply disturbing. But when Niwemang first appears on the scene, as a disembodied voice so beautiful it can stir the dead, the audience sees a sign of hope. Gertz and Khleifi argue that in *Rana's Wedding:*

> ...the home is no longer a safe refuge, and the landscape is in ruins, the most meaningful place in the film is the roadblock; it separates lovers, comes between family members who need to meet each other, separates the different sections of Jerusalem, and even divides houses into separate spaces. (321)

The same could be said for *Half Moon.* The most significant events of the film take place at borders, checkpoints, roadblocks, and forbidden spaces, such as the Village of 1,334 Exiled Women Singers. These are the places where one is likely to meet death, which the audience first sees with certainty as Mamo and company sit waiting for hours at the Iraqi border. Gertz and Khleifi describe a similar situation in terms of camera work in Tawfik Abu Wael's *Waiting for Sallah A-Din*: "The camera's lack of motion is intensified by long takes and the immobility of the people." (322) As they wait at the Iraqi border, Mamo and his sons are sitting on a low stone wall, with Hesho occasionally peeking out from the bus. A vast desolate plain lies before them, flanked by bare brown mountains. Nothing moves. There are no sounds except for distant gunshots. Then suddenly in the

distance, through a long take like the one Gertz and Khleifi describe, two men are running across a vast plain. “What are you carrying?” Mamo shouts to them. “Corpses!” they yell back. There is no further exchange. The wait continues. No one comes. The audience learns that the border means death and hopelessness. Continuing their discussion of roadblocks and borders, Gertz and Khleifi write:

> As symbols became the main way of expressing Palestinian identity many recent films use them as the axis of their plots: they start with cars breaking down, stopping, losing the way, or getting stuck in roadblocks, but they end with kites, flags, birds or horses crossing borders and reaching distances and heights, thus indicating that the power of imagination, dreams and longing can reclaim the blocked national space. (327)

This description stands in marked contrast to *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon,* although neither of these is a recent film, unlike the Palestinian films mentioned above. *Smoke Signals* offers no suggestion that the characters will continue to challenge borders set by the U.S. government. The narrative is focused on the characters' making peace with their pasts and being able to return home. However, part of being able to return triumphantly is only possible through victory in an altercation with a branch of the U.S. government (the sheriff's office) after Victor is wrongfully accused of causing a car accident. There is no hope of reclaiming the land taken by the U.S. government. Yet Victor lays claim to the river when he throws his father’s ashes over the bridge in the final shot of the film. Ultimately, while *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon* both wrestle with what it means to be an

Indigenous person living in a colonized land, neither film has a nationalist agenda. Palestinian director Elia Suleiman states of his own films:

> I don't want to relate the story of Palestine; I want to open the way to a multiplicity of spaces that allows for different readings… I try to construct an image which lies far beyond any ideological definition of precisely what it means to be a Palestinian, one that is far from all stereotypes … Cinema was not designed to strengthen the national image or its opposite: the negative image of the other.

Similar statements could be made about *Smoke Signals* and *Half Moon.* Each film "allows for a multiplicity of readings." No longer are "the Indians" reduced to one homogenous group of people. In *Smoke Signals,* the audience is introduced to primarily Coeur d'Alene Indians (all except for Suzy) and only gets to know a few of them well. The film itself makes fun of the homogenization of Indians in America when Victor tells Thomas he needs to look like he has just come back from killing a buffalo. Likewise, *Half Moon* contains a multitude of stories, some only hinted at (Mamo's numerous sons, the 1,334 exiled women singers). *Half Moon* presents issues that are deeply nationalistic, such as the fall of Saddam Hussein and the division of Kurdistan, but for Mamo these issues are deeply personal rather than nationalistic abstractions. Celebrating the fall of Saddam Hussein with a historic concert is so important to Mamo that he knowingly risks his life to attend. *Half Moon* is Mamo's story. It is Hesho's story. It is Kako's story. It is Niwemang's story. It is a Kurdish story. It is a "multiplicity" of Kurdish stories. But it is

not *the* Kurdish story just as *Smoke Signals* is not *the* Native American Story or *the* Coeur d'Alene story.

The Heavy Burden

Similar to *Half Moon*, *The Heavy Burden,* a short film by director Yilmaz Özdil, confronts the absurdity of arbitrary rules that do more harm than good and the damage inflicted by the many national borders dividing Kurdistan. The narrative follows an elderly Kurd and his family who reside on the Turkish side of the border not far from Syria. Their small Turkish town places tight restrictions on donkeys that can be used for work in the city and forces him to retire the donkey he needs for his livelihood. He cannot afford a new donkey that will meet the city's criteria. He goes from seller to seller but is unable to find a suitable donkey. His nephew, Jiro, a Syrian refugee, goes behind his back to the town's mayor and presents a photograph of a donkey to ask whether this donkey will be acceptable. Unfortunately, this donkey is in Syria. The only option is to cross the border illegally into Syria and retrieve the acceptable donkey; otherwise, the family will not be able to survive. Salih, the nephew, goes to fetch the donkey and ends up in a minefield just across the border wall with the donkey. His uncle and brother stand just on the other side. The film ends in darkness, the last words of Salih are "We will soon leave here" and the audience does not know whether the pair survive or not, but it seems unlikely that they will. The credits play to a mournful melody.

This is a film about the foolishness of arbitrary laws and how they oppress the neediest people. For most of the narrative, it oscillates between comedy and tragedy. The law about the donkeys seems ridiculous, but for the family, it is a matter of life and death,

so much so that Salih is willing to risk his life by crossing the border, back to the country that is home, where *his* donkey is waiting for him. The true horror of the situation and the potential consequences of national borders dividing Kurdish land are only fully realized in the film's final scene.

Conclusion

According to the UN definition of Indigenous people, all Kurds fall under its definition. However, some Kurdish minority groups are certainly more vulnerable than others and have suffered at the hands of other Kurds, such as the Yezidis and the Yarsanis, Kurdish religious minorities. The Yezidis do not necessarily consider themselves Kurdish, due to this persecution. When one considers Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigenous methodologies, one can look at Indigenous artist collaborations and also compare Indigenous works of art to lead to greater insight on the works being compared. Comparing Kurdish films with other Indigenous films offers a chance for greater insight into wider Indigenous issues.

Chapter 4: Women and Kurdish Cinema

Introduction: Kurdish Women's Films and Kurdish Women in Film

This chapter approaches women's representation in Kurdish cinema from two perspectives. The first part examines the way in which female characters and women's issues are portrayed in Kurdish films directed by men vs. films directed by women. The second part looks at how Kurdish women are included as creators in the filmmaking process, and mainly focuses on Kurdish women as directors and writers. This section also focuses on films created by female Kurdish filmmakers, including a number of short films, because Kurdish women are represented in greater numbers as short filmmakers rather than feature filmmakers.

Male filmmakers dominate Kurdish feature filmmaking. However, many of these filmmakers have highlighted women's issues in their films and created female characters with compelling narratives, depth, and agency. Some such characters have already been discussed in previous chapters, including Gulistan in *Before Your Eyes* and Nazè in *Chaplin of the Mountains.* This chapter revisits *Before Your Eyes* from a feminist perspective, because the film not only creates compelling narratives for multiple female characters, it also was co-written by a woman, the Kurdish journalist and short fiction author, Evrim Alataş, the aunt of the director, Miraz Bezar. *Before Your Eyes* is a film co-created by a man and a woman that is centered on female characters and is therefore a departure from the other films examined in this chapter.

In the United States, numerous studies have pointed to a massive gender and racial imbalance for film directors. White males are disproportionately represented in

feature film directing in the U.S. While male directors dominate Kurdish feature filmmaking, while many short films were made by women. While not conclusive, this evidence suggests that there could be similar roadblocks for Kurdish women when it comes to directing feature films, thus impeding Kurdish women from becoming feature filmmakers, since there is a significant drop-off between the number of short films directed by women in the United States vs. the number of feature films. In 2015, a study entitled "Gender & Short Films: Emerging Female Filmmakers and the Barriers Surrounding their Careers" (Smith et al.) examined the exclusion of women from directing, primarily within the U.S., but also with some comparison to non-U.S. women directors. The study begins by examining the inclusion of women short film directors at the top ten international film festivals. The findings show that nearly one-third of the short film directors at these festivals were female, with 37 percent directing documentary shorts, 31 percent animated shorts, 28 percent narrative shorts. Forty percent of the documentaries came from outside the U.S. (versus 30 percent from within). As of the time of data collection, the number of female directors had not changed in the past five years ("Gender & Short Films").

In "Gender & Short Films" Smith et al. do not include any information about the countries of origin of the non-U.S. filmmakers in their study, nor any racial demographic information about the U.S. women filmmakers. However, even without any exact data on the number of female Kurdish filmmakers worldwide, this data begins to raise an obvious question: If women, as a group, face so much exclusion as film directors, how much greater are the barriers facing Kurdish women directors? The study continues to describe

a downward trajectory for women who wish to pursue directing careers outside of the film festival circuit. The figure provided shows a decline in women's inclusion as directors in the film industry, from 28% of narrative short films, 18% of independent narrative feature films, 16% of episodic television, and finally 4% of top-grossing feature films (Smith et al.). Based on these figures, one would expect to see a minority of women directors in Kurdish filmmaking and even fewer of them directing feature films.

In 2020 Smith et al. published another study ("Inclusion in the Director's Chair: Gender, Race, & Age of Film Directors Across 1,000 Films from 2007-2016"). However, the only racial categories included were Black and Asian. As the title states, gender and age were considered as well. This study is mentioned here to provide a sense of how Indigenous peoples are far outside the mainstream filmmaking pipeline. The study seems to indicate they are too small a percentage to be included in this type of analysis. While the Kurds are an Indigenous people when it comes to the classification their films, they are more likely to fall into categories like Middle Eastern Cinema at film festivals or disappear into a more general category. Kurdish film festivals have the obvious advantage of drawing attention to Kurdish films as a category. Well-established Kurdish film festivals include the London Kurdish Film Festival, the Duhok International Film Festival, and the Kurdish Film Festival Berlin. While the festival in Duhok is billed as an international film festival, it gives pride of place to Kurdish films, as is befitting for a festival in Kurdistan, Iraq. Each of these film festivals has made a point of including special panels and categories for women filmmakers and women's issues, and some of the proceedings of these events will be included in this chapter's discussion.

While many studies on women's representation in the film industry focus on top-grossing films in the United States, a 2022 study by Ehrich et al. looks at women's representation in major film festivals. Unlike many studies on women's roles in filmmaking, this one looks at women's representation in what the authors term "core creative teams" rather than only focus on women as directors. The authors found that their results varied when they accounted for the power different roles on these teams have in the filmmaking process (23). Additionally, the researchers found that, "In fact, a small, but relevant number of films made by men-only or men-dominated core creative teams travel the circuit much more successfully in terms of screenings from one festival to another" (23). By contrast, the authors discovered that:

> …films made by women-only or women-dominated core creative teams tend to circulate quite differently in the film festival sector. Festivals that screen films made by women-only or women-dominated core creative teams do not tend to screen the same films as much as festivals that screen films made by men-only or men-dominated core creative teams. (23)

Further study would be required to discover whether this pattern holds true for films made by women-only or women-dominated teams for Kurdish films, and how those films circulate in the Kurdish film festival circuit vs. the film festival circuit in general. The authors note that their study is limited by a focus on Europe and the Global North and the types of film festivals they chose to analyze, which are general rather than specialized. They also note that other areas of inequality need to be considered in analysis as well, including race and migration background, a category which would be applicable for

Kurdish women filmmakers in the diaspora. The aforementioned studies serve to highlight the structural inequalities for women filmmakers in general, many of which carry over to Kurdish women filmmakers.

Awareness of the structural inequalities facing women filmmakers has led to the creation of women-centered categories in film festival competitions. For example, the London Kurdish Film Festival has a category entitled Women in Film. This category features films that focus on female characters, but it is not required that the filmmaker be a woman in order to place an entry in this category. For the 2020 festival, there were eleven films in this category, with four of them directed by women, echoing the statistics described by Smith et al. in their 2015 study. Furthermore, the London Kurdish Film Festival does not require its entrants to be of Kurdish ethnicity, only that they either be of Kurdish origin or, if they are not Kurdish, that their film be about Kurdish issues (https://filmfreeway.com/LondonKurdishFilmFestival). It is not clear whether all of these women are Kurdish, nor is biographical information readily available for many of the filmmakers. Their names suggest Kurdish origin, however. What is clear from this example is that a minority of women are represented as filmmakers even in a category entitled Women in Film. Of the eight feature films shown in competition at the 2018 London Kurdish Film Festival, two were directed by women.

Sidar Aslan, a Kurdish filmmaker from Diyarbakir, Turkey argues that the issues keeping Kurdish women from making films are systemic, gender-based problems facing cinema across the globe (Robinson). At a 2018 panel entitled *Women in Cinema & Cinema by Women* at the Duhok International Film Festival, she stated, "'We can tell that

men actually control cinema, it's more in their hands. This is how it is worldwide" (Robinson). However, she continued saying, "If we look in the past and now in Kurdish cinema, we can see that women are more active than before" (Robinson). Later in the panel, multiple women creators argued that the way in which Kurdish media portrays them has been detrimental to their careers. Robinson reported:

> [Viyan] Mayi also challenged Kurdish media, saying it is not as supportive as it could be. Other panelists touched on this topic, saying the media often portrays women in cinema or arts in a negative light, hindering their ability to grow in society.

It is important to examine the way women and women's issues are portrayed on screen by both male and female creators, but it is also important to consider what keeps women and other marginalized populations from participating in Kurdish cinema. As a minority group, Kurdish men are already at a disadvantage when it comes to making movies when compared to their Western counterparts, and Kurdish women face even greater obstacles. Yet Kurdish women are making their voices heard as filmmakers, even if they are still a minority.

While considering the creative contributions of Kurdish women to the cinema, it is also important to examine their work as actresses. In the past, Kurdish women have been much less likely to make their artistic mark as actresses. Female Kurdish characters depicted on screen have not always been portrayed by Kurdish actresses, due to conservative family values. Indeed, Shawkat Amin Korki's *Memories on Stone* has a major arc that revolves around the problem of casting the lead actress. Filmmaker Jano

Rosebiani states, “On the production front, the implanted mores have posed obstacles to a degree for us filmmakers, especially in South Kurdistan where actresses are scarce” (“Kurdish Cinema Part III: Kurdish women in film”). In describing the casting of his own films, Rosebiani elaborated:

> In *One Candle, Two Candles* I enlisted a German actress (Katrina Enders) for the lead role, and in *Chaplin of the Mountains* (2013) I cast a French/American (Estelle Bajou) and a German/Iranian (Taeis Farzan) due to lack of Kurdish alternatives.

Rosebiani goes on to say that this has become less of an issue over time, particularly in television, where Kurdish women presenters are much more common than they were in the past. However, Dejin Cemil, the first Yezidi actress, suggested ongoing barriers when speaking at the *Women in Cinema & Cinema by Women* panel at the Duhok International Film Festival. Cemil stated:

> The culture does not allow women to be in cinema, to be in front of the camera. They put names on them and say it’s a shame. They say you shouldn’t be in movies. You shouldn’t be somebody’s wife or girlfriend in movies. (Robinson)

Thus, it seems that Rosebiani may be somewhat premature in his assessment regarding the acceptance of Kurdish actresses as a matter of ‘honor’. The disparity between Cemil and Rosebiani’s statements highlights the importance of interviewing Kurdish women in the film industry about their experiences, goals, and what they need to reach them, rather than relying solely on the word of (well-meaning) men.

Rosebiani further states that women are becoming more prominent behind the camera ("Kurdish Cinema Part III: Kurdish Women in Film"). However, he does not name a single specific female Kurdish filmmaker or Kurdish actress in this article. Notwithstanding, it is clear from perusing the names of short film directors at the 2018 London Kurdish Film Festival that Kurdish women are participating in filmmaking. Worth noting is that Miraz Bezar, director of *Before Your Eyes*, shares writing credit for the film with his aunt, the female Kurdish journalist, Evrim Alataş. The filmmakers also chose for many of the important roles to be filled by women in *Before Your Eyes.* The lead character, Gulistan is female, but she is supported by numerous other female characters who play a far more substantial role in the narrative than most of the male characters. These include Zelal, the Kurdish street girl who helps teach Gulistan and Firat how to survive after they lose their home. Another of these is Gulistan's aunt, a PKK guerilla. Another is the Kurdish prostitute who befriends Gulistan on the street. This network of female characters in *Before Your Eyes* adds a female-centric element to the film.

In addition to considering the inclusion of Kurdish women as creators in film, it is also important to examine how Kurdish films portray women's issues. This analysis is performed through examining the way in which Kurdish women's issues are depicted in multiple films, looking for common themes related to these issues, and comparing and contrasting the way these issues are portrayed, particularly in films directed by men vs. films directed by women. Two major (and intertwined) themes dealt with in films focusing on Kurdish women's issues are forced marriage and honor killing, and while it

is important to note that these crimes are not exclusively targeted against women and girls, they are the ones most victimized by them. Director Viyan Mayi confronts honor killing in her short films, *The Kurdish Girl* and *The White Dove.* Jano Rosebiani and Shawkat Amin Korki tackle forced marriage in their respective films, *One Candle, Two Candles* and *Memories on Stone.* Rosebiani also deals with a very specific Kurdish women's issue in *Chaplin of the Mountains*, the selling of Kurdish women into sexual slavery in parts of the Arab world as an element of the Anfal campaign, a tragedy that is often erased or simply unknown to many people.

Chapter Filmography

This chapter looks at films made by Kurdish women directors and films that depict Kurdish women's issues, including some films directed by men. The male-directed films examine and, in some cases, call into question how Kurdish men depict Kurdish women's issues. The female-directed films for this chapter were selected because they also confront Kurdish women's issues. However, they are not the only films directed by women examined in this dissertation. The selection of these films is not meant to suggest that Kurdish women only make films about women's issues or that they should do so. The male-directed feature films include *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009) which was co-written by a woman, *Memories on Stone* (Korki 2014), and *One Candle, Two Candles* (Rosebiani 2014). This chapter includes a significant number of short films in addition to features. Special emphasis is given to short films in this chapter, due to the fact that women directors have been shown to receive less opportunity to direct features than men. The women-directed short films discussed in this chapter are as follows: Viyan Mayi's

short films *The Kurdish Gir*l (2013) and *The White Dove* (2008), *The Window* (Rezzan Bayram 2018), *Rojek le Rojan* (Zhino Hadi 2019), and *Shouted from the Rooftops* (Beri Shalmashi 2017). A selection of these are contrasted with male-directed short films with similar themes, including *The Sprinkle* (Volkan Uludağ 2019), *Life Gone With the Wind* (Siavash Saed Panah 2019), and *Zhwan* (Kaveh Jahed 2019).

Kurdish Women in Film and Feminist Theory

Kurdish women are even more excluded than Kurdish men in terms of representation in English-language academic literature on cinema. Anthologies of Middle Eastern women's cinema are typically very narrow in recognizing the multi-ethnic nature of the region, and films by Kurdish women have been excluded. Similar to Kurdish films in general, Kurdish women's films are typically not discussed in scholarly works where it would be appropriate to include them, particularly books about the cinema of the region/countries that include Kurdish women, such as women's cinema of the Middle East, women's cinema of Turkey, and women's cinema of Iran. For instance, *Gender and Patriarchy in the Films of Muslim Nations* (Owen) includes a few films by Kurdish men but none by Kurdish women and it does not offer a thorough analysis of films it looks at. However, *Kurdish Documentary Cinema in Turkey: The Politics and Aesthetics of Identity and Resistance* (Koçer and Candan) does include women's films. This may be in part due to the fact that there are few feature films directed by Kurdish women and that those films are in limited distribution. However, there are numerous high-quality short films making the rounds of the festival circuit, and it seems inexcusable that Kurdish women's films are not represented in scholarly collections pertaining to Middle Eastern

women's cinema. Many of the issues Kurdish women face are similar to the issues faced by Muslim women, although not all Kurdish women are Muslim. Forced marriage, honor-based violence, virginity testing, head-covering, and other issues related to living in a highly patriarchal culture are shared by Kurdish women and women of other ethnicities in the region. However, these experiences will be shaped by each woman's community, and of course, not every woman in the Middle East or of Middle Eastern heritage experiences them. Moreover, Kurdish women's experiences are different from those of other women from the Middle East. They are also Kurdish, and, as Kurds, they have a unique culture and linguistic heritage, which is why it is important to include their films in scholarly works about not only Kurdish films but also in scholarly works that claim to broadly represent the cinematic works of Middle Eastern women more broadly. Kurdish film festivals are clearly advocating for women Kurdish filmmakers, and the representation of Kurdish women in film by including special panels for women filmmakers and separate categories for women in film, However, it remains troubling that books claiming to represent the cinema of Middle Eastern women once again treat the Kurds as if they do not exist.

In positioning the theoretical basis for this chapter, the arguments will take a multi-faceted approach. Much of what has been written about women in cinema and feminist film theory developed around popular Hollywood films. These films were and continue to be intended for a very different audience than Kurdish films. Most of the Kurdish films being produced today are short films intended for film festivals. Film festival films are often meant to reach an international audience with an interest in film as

art. Kurdish films are already a Third Cinema. Moreover, Kurdish women's films have developed from a completely different context in which feminist film theory originated. Shohat writes:

> In cinema studies, for example, what has been called "feminist film theory" since the 1970s has often suppressed the historical, economic, and cultural contradictions among women...Universalizing the parameters for feminism and using ahistorical psychoanalytical categories like "desire," "fetishism," and "castration" led to a discussion of the female body and the female spectator detached from the conflictual diversity of women's experiences, agendas, and political visions. (292, 293)

Western concepts of feminist film theory are largely inapplicable to Kurdish women's films because those films grew out of a completely different context and thus express vastly different "experiences, agendas, and political visions". In addition, the "desire" and "fetishism" of women are rarely present in the films of Kurdish men. One alternative is to utilize concepts from Third Cinemas and especially women's Third Cinemas to assist in analyzing Kurdish women's films.

Kurdish cinema and Kurdish women's cinema might also be considered a cinema of opposition. Eylem Atakav pursues a brief but focused discussion of feminist film theory, concentrating on the framing of women's films as minor and oppositional. Yet she concludes that neither of these frameworks is appropriate for her context. Referring to the concept of women's cinema as minor cinema, she states, "...it would have drawn me into an extensive discussion of Deleuze and Guattari, thereby detracting from the close

historical and textual analysis I have chosen to pursue" (17). Similarly, the goal of this dissertation is to pursue a close examination of the text of the films, with relevant socio-cultural context. One aspect of the latter is including a feminist perspective on the films. However, as Kurdish women's filmmaking is difficult to position in terms of feminism, even more so than that of Turkish women, Atakav does not extend her discussion of Turkish women's filmmaking contributions to include any minority women in Turkey, probably because during the period she covers in her book, which only extends to the 1980s, virtually none of these women would have appeared on screen.

Unlike Turkish cinema, Kurdish cinema is in many ways a counter cinema and Turkish cinema would be one of the cinemas that Kurdish cinema positions itself in opposition to. However, Kurdish cinema is not placing itself in opposition to depictions of Kurds by other cinemas because those depictions mostly do not exist, unlike depictions of Blacks and Native Americans in the United States. The opposition occurs simply in the act of telling the stories of Kurdish people through film which otherwise would not be told at all. Therefore, Kurdish women's films may be more about telling Kurdish stories than about confronting issues of patriarchy in Kurdistan. Moreover, female Kurdish filmmakers have referred to Kurdish filmmakers as "a family," despite expressing frustration with men making films about topics that are deeply personal to women. Therefore, it may be useful to conceive of Kurdish women's films in light of Alice Walker's concept of "womanism, especially the part of the definition where Walker states that a womanist is, "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (xi). Kurdish women's films

do not operate against patriarchy in the same way Western women's films do, but in a number of instances they do operate separately "for health," meaning that at times women (and especially minority women) may need to separate themselves from men and even other groups of women for the purpose of self-preservation. Additionally, there are a significant number of male-directed films that focus on women's issues in Kurdistan in what seems a clear attempt at ally-ship, and these films relate to issues vital to women's survival. However, other Kurdish women's films are more parallel with rather than opposed to Kurdish men's films, where what is important is telling the stories of women rather than opposing patriarchy.

For example, *Window* (Rezzan Bayram) is the story of two Kurdish women prisoners. The theme of Kurdish political prisoners is somewhat common, but they are usually male. In *Window* the only male character is the unseen prison guard, represented only through his voice. Part of Alice Walker's definition of womanism is, "A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength" (xi) *Window* is a film primarily about exactly what Walker is describing here, a film about the deep sisterly love between two women who give each other strength to endure their imprisonment.

The landscape of Kurdish women's filmmaking is very different from the Hollywood environment feminist film critique grew out of. One of the major concepts of Hollywood-centered, feminist film critique is that of the male gaze. However, in Kurdish

cinema Mulvey's conception of the male gaze is almost completely absent. Mulvey writes:

> The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*...The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film. (62, 63)

For the most part, nothing like this exists in Kurdish cinema, at least nothing on par to match the phenomena of the gaze in Western cinema. Intensely eroticizing Kurdish actresses would be at odds with Islamic values. It may be said that smaller instances of the gaze exist, however. For example, in *One Candle, Two Candles,* Botan is singularly focused on Viyan's beauty upon their first meeting and never learns anything more about who she is as a person before he marries her. One might make an argument that the film is a sort of fairytale and as such does not require too much development for its leading couple, but it spends a great deal of time on the stories of unimportant minor characters and might have chosen instead to give some dimension to its female lead. *The Sprinkle,* a film about a woman who knows her husband is going to his death, contains a near-nude scene of the woman bathing that seems designed for the viewing pleasure of heterosexual men. However, the camera does not linger gratuitously on the woman's body in the fashion typically associated with the male gaze. In Kurdish cinema, the male gaze simply is not a factor on a par with what occurs in Western cinema and therefore is not a

particularly useful construction for analyzing the portrayal of Kurdish women in Kurdish cinema.

In some films, such as *Half Moon*, Kurdish female characters may be given great importance in the story but are at the same time reduced to simple tropes or symbols. Owen provides a brief summary of *Half Moon* in which she describes the titular character stating, “Mamo meets or (hallucinates) a muse who supplies him with an instrument, promises to take him to the concert in Iraq, and agrees to sing with him” (*Gender and Patriarchy in Films of Muslim Nations* 187) No further analysis of Niwemang as a character and her complexities is provided; all the analyses in this book are quite brief. While there are aspects of the muse in the characters of Niwemang and Hesho in *Half Moon* and Sinur in *Memories on Stone*, there are subtle details that complicate the characters. Mamo treats Hesho as a muse in many respects, saying that he cannot perform without her "celestial voice." However, when that voice is damaged, he treats her as a partner and fellow artist, practicing with her and encouraging her when she feels that her voice is not up to the task. Niwemang may represent young Kurdish women assuming leadership roles. She appears after the men have repeatedly proven incompetent. In *Memories on Stone,* Sinur, while inspiring Hussein with her talent, also has her own agenda that has nothing to do with him. She is there for herself, not to be his inspiration. While there is a quality of inspiration and seductive artistic beauty in Hesho and Niwemang’s singing and Sinur’s acting, as well as the beauty of the three actresses, the characters are more than muses.

At the same time, while Western concepts such as the male gaze and the muse may not fit neatly into analysis of women's roles in Kurdish films, a heterosexual male perspective remains dominant in Kurdish cinema. During interviews at the London Kurdish Film Festival 2020, when Kurdish women pushed back regarding the issue of Kurdish men making films about Kurdish women, they expressed discomfort with men making films about sensitive women's issues (Yusef). It was not stated directly what these issues were, but one can surmise that virginity testing, honor-based violence, forced marriage, and other issues relating to women's sexuality were likely among them. At times, Kurdish women's cinema acts in opposition to Kurdish men's cinema, but it is not always oppositional. For example, Beri Shalmashi's short film *Shouted From the Rooftops* acts in opposition to the trope of the grieving woman left behind when her husband is killed by military violence. In many instances, Kurdish women's films simply do a better job of portraying women's issues than men's films do. They show a better understanding of the issues. They offer better characterization to women. They include more women, and they complicate even the minor female characters. While it is important for male filmmakers to include female characters in their films, it is also important that women are given the opportunity to create narratives about themselves that offer their unique perspectives. The following sections look at some prominent women's issues in Kurdistan and examine the way they are portrayed in select films.

Portrayals of Kurdish Women in Film

In terms of how they are portrayed on screen, Kurdish female characters are less often given the role of the protagonist. Contrary to one of the major issues of Western

cinema, they are unlikely to be sexualized or subjected to the male gaze due to the generally conservative nature of Kurdish culture. However, this also puts limits on the types of stories that can be told about Kurdish women, or that Kurdish women tell about themselves. Kurdish female characters may be powerful and independent, but they still are used to prop up stories that are centered on men. They may be victims for men to save, such as the girls in *A Song for Beko* and *Jiyan*. They may be victims of brutal sexual violence, and even then, their experiences may be given to male characters to relate. In *Turtles Can Fly*, it is Agrin who has been raped and forced to carry the child of her rapist, but the story is told from her brother's perspective as if his trauma takes precedence over hers. They may be muses, such as Sinur in *Memories on Stone.* They may be love-interests or mothers. These characters all carry varying degrees of complexity and development within their respective films, but ultimately serve as support for the main plot of a male lead. Of these, Agrin in *Turtles Can Fly* and Sinur in *Memories on Stone* have the most complex subplots, but they are still secondary to a primary male character. This is not to say that the stories of Kurdish men do not deserve to be told, or that Kurdish films always need to feature a primary female character in order to be worthwhile, but rather to establish that men are disproportionately centered in the more internationally known Kurdish films, sometimes even in films that are primarily about women's issues.

When Kurdish female characters are given the role of protagonist, it is often with a particular intent to show Kurdish women at their strongest and their most independent. There are few feature films with international recognition that truly center Kurdish

female characters, and some of those are not films made by Kurds nor do they feature Kurdish actresses, such as *Girls of the Sun*. Miraz Bezar's film *Before Your Eyes* features an exceptionally resourceful heroine in Gulistan, along with a strong female supporting cast. Nazê, in *Chaplin of the Mountains,* while not played by a Kurdish actress, faces intergenerational trauma with courage and is clearly the main character of her own story. Because Kurdish women are less represented in feature filmmaking, they have fewer opportunities to reach audiences who may be more interested in watching features than shorts. However, since COVID-19, the London Kurdish Film Festival has taken an entirely online format in 2020 and opted not to show a single feature film, offering more opportunities for filmmakers who do not have the means to create features to share their work, including women.

This chapter examines three feature films directed by Kurdish men that deal with forced marriage and honor-based violence. These films were chosen because they focus more particularly on the female character's point of view than other such films made by male directors, and because they take some creative approaches to depicting Kurdish women as independent and free-thinking on screen. At the same time, each film is critiqued for falling back into male-centered perspectives that do not do justice to their female characters. This section is followed by a comparison of these two male-directed feature films to a pair of short films by female Kurdish director Viyan Mayi and concludes with a section on recent female-centered and/or directed works from the 2020 London Kurdish Film Festival to see how these new shorts stand in comparison.

Kurdish Women's Military Service Onscreen

There have been a number of (relatively) prominent feature-length films focusing on the stories of Kurdish female fighters, such as Eva Husson's 2018 film *Girls of the Sun*, Daphne Charizani's 2020 film *Sisters Apart*, and Zaynê Akyol's 2016 feature documentary *Gulistan, Land of Roses*. Of these three films, *Gulistan: Land of Roses* was directed by a Kurdish woman while the other two were directed by a French and Greek woman respectively. *Girls of the Sun* was a Cannes Film Festival nominee and received a great deal of publicity because of this. Additionally, in recent years Kurdish female fighters have become a popular subject for Western media, although, as Santoire and others have pointed out, this interest is relatively recent given the length of time in which Kurdish women fighters have been active (Santoire 1610). The Western fascination with Kurdish female fighters has led to the making of films like *Girls of the Sun* and *Sisters Apart*, both helmed by Western women.

Additionally, Kurdish women fighters are often depicted in films where they are not the film's primary topic, such as the character of Yakbun in *Before Your Eyes.* Kurdish women fighters are generally viewed with pride throughout the region. These include the female units of the PKK in Turkey as well as the Women's Protection Units (Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Jin or YPJ**)** that combated Daesh (or the so-called Islamic State). Kurdish women fighters have appeared in numerous documentaries, but they make appearances in fictional films as well. Even the choice to include a minor character who is a woman militant rather than a male one seems significant, especially when compared to Western cinema where the default choice would generally be for a male

character. For example, in *Before Your Eyes,* Gulistan and Firat's aunt is secretly working for the PKK. There was no special reason this character needed to be cast as female, only to show that women are active in the organization. In Viyan Mayi's short film, *The Kurdish Girl,* the young woman in danger of being murdered by her male relatives runs away from them during a bombing and stumbles across a group of female fighters.

Four films at the LKFF 2020 dealt with spouses or lovers left behind when husbands or lovers are killed through military violence. In two of these films, the partner leaves to join a fighting force and in two the partner is killed by an attack. Three of the films are directed by men and all of these films depict the death of a husband in which the wife is forced to take up either the role of fighter (in two of the films) or family provider (taking on the same dangers the husband faces). Only one of the four films, Beri Shalmashi's 2017 short *Shouted from the Rooftops,* depicts a Kurdish woman leaving home to fight while her fiancé remains behind, in stark contrast to the more typical trope of the woman being left behind while the man goes off to war. These films were all entered in different categories, with only one of them included in the category, Women in Film. It is striking that the theme of war and abandonment was a common thread, yet when the woman was depicted as abandoned, this interpretation was only shown through the perspective of a male director. Shalmashi's upending this trope and depicting the man as the abandoned one is therefore particularly relevant to the topic of Kurdish women's filmmaking.

Shouted from the Rooftops is a complex film, working to reverse the trope of women being left behind while men go off to make sacrifices, dealing with themes of grief and loss not only for a lover but for one's home and the dream of a nation, as well as making a brief but a poignant statement about the plight of refugees. The film is also artistically ambitious, working with a limited set (rooftops, views from rooftops), precisely chosen camera angles, and dialogue that often implies a double meaning to suggest both the loss of love and the loss of country. Additionally, the film utilizes a non-linear timeline, opening with the male character in a state of grief after his fiancée has 'abandoned him' by going off to war and dying, but only gradually revealing to the audience that this is what has occurred through a series of flashbacks.

Shouted from the Rooftops opens with a young man staring up at a gray sky, observing a flock of birds. The birds imply a contrast of restriction and freedom, with their flight above the rooftops showing that they possess a freedom that humans do not, while the male character is trapped by the war. The camera is intimate, close to the man's face, very focused on his eyes. The first words come from a voiceover in a man's voice: "I never thought we'd reach this point of never speaking." This line of dialogue suggests that the woman he loves has broken up with him, that she no longer loves him. The voice-over continues as he looks out from his rooftop across the city: "You were talking about a revolution. My love. Please tell me, when everything is ruined, then what's the point of a revolution?" It is a cryptic beginning. What is it that it is ruined? His relationship? Or his country? Shalmashi has opened her film by introducing a male character who seems to care more about the woman he loves than the political situation

of his country. It is a purposefully opposing narrative to male-directed films where the man is the one who makes the decision to go and fight, and the woman is left behind ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film").

The film cuts to a shot of rooftops. The streets are empty, and from the lighting the audience can surmise that the time is around sunrise. The young man is looking down on the street. He is wearing the same black pullover he was in the last scene. He sees a woman going out from the house across from his own, dressed in military clothing and carrying a gun on her back. “Sherin! He calls out to her, but she does not answer, even though she looks back at him and has clearly heard him. As he calls out to her again and again and she leaves him behind, the sense of forsakenness and powerlessness grows stronger, emphasizing the reversal of roles between the male and female characters.

The camera returns for an intimate close-up of his eyes and then a long shot. The young man is standing alone in the midst of a ruined city. Black smoke and fire rise from the building next to his home. In the distance, more fires burn. Rooftops are covered in rubble. Everything is ruined, just as he said. Then a woman’s voice whispers his name, as though she is a ghost or the voice is traveling across a great distance: “Ferhat…” The perspective of the camera is now from the rooftop opposite Ferhat’s. He says, “Do you remember how we blew kisses, unashamed, from roof to roof?“

From the roof, he watches as two men carry a bundle to Sherin’s home, evidently reliving a memory, as the images of the men fade out and then reappear at the door. A woman, who from her age seems to be Sherin’s mother, takes the bundle, calling Sherin’s name and weeping. Ferhat watches from the roof. The scene goes dark.

Once again, the audience finds Ferhat on the rooftop in his black pullover. The choice of costume and the fact that the film was shot during dawn and dusk make it difficult to get a sense of what is happening in the past and what is happening in the present, suggesting that Ferhat is a man out of time, living in the past, when Sherin was still alive. Shalmashi leads the viewers in circles, alluding to Ferhat's own confused mental state. When a woman approaches Ferhat from behind, it seems like she might, in fact, be Sherin, especially when she says,

"Wasn't it beautiful while it lasted?" as if she might be alluding to a romantic relationship that she shared with Ferhat. The language is obtuse--is she talking about the love affair or the revolution? Or both? In answer, Ferhat says, "I still choose to stay." In reply, the woman says, "You can let her go now," crushing any hopes that this might be Sherin. "What for?" Ferhat says. The woman tells Ferhat, "My sister really loved you." She holds out a green patterned scarf striking in an otherwise nearly colorless scene. From below, a car horn honks, and the woman calls out, "I'm coming." Ferhat is left alone, holding the scarf to his face. He looks down at Sherin's family in their packed car, and her sister looks up at him. The scene goes black.

Music plays over an image of Ferhat's hands caressing the scarf. He says, "Who leaves turns into someone who wants to return. I'd rather stay." The final shot is of Ferhat standing against the pale gray sky, birds fluttering around him, the scarf around his neck, and he brings it up to his face, a symbol of absence and longing. As Ferhat stands against the background of birds and the open sky the audience is reminded that he does not have the freedom to come and go as he pleases. If he leaves and wants to return, he may not be

able to. He has nothing to stay for except his memory of Sherin, but in his grief, he feels he has nothing to go to either. And perhaps, also, a burden of guilt weighs on him for not joining her in the revolution.

Shouted from the Rooftops was the only film in the LKFF 2020 where the central focus was a man's love for a woman. There was only one other film where the reverse was true, *The Sprinkle* (although in Zhwan the titular heroine appears to love her fiancé, the distance that grows between them over the virginity test makes it difficult to gain a sense of their emotional connection.) There are also two other films where the husband is killed through military violence and the wife is then forced to either become the provider or the defender, but the emphasis is less on the love between the couple and more on the husband's role as provider or protector. The names chosen for *Shouted from the Rooftops* are significant in the folklore of the region and also reflect the reversal of roles in the film. In the legend, Ferhat is the one who dies.

The Sprinkle is in many ways the complete opposite of *Shouted from the Rooftops.* In *The Sprinkle,* the woman is left behind. The story is told in a linear fashion, unlike *Shouted from the Rooftops*. The audience experiences the sense of loss and grief in a different way, as the woman seems to believe in her husband's inevitable death. The audience witnesses her pain as she prepares for their separation, bathing and washing her waist-length hair, then sitting before her husband as he combs it for her, while she struggles with tears. The true significance of this final act of love is only made clear in the film's final scenes when the woman finds her husband's grave in the snow and cuts a braid from her hair and places it on the grave. The placing of the braid on the grave is a

Middle Eastern mourning tradition sometimes called *porkur* (*The Sprinkle). Porkur,* a Kurmanji word referring to hair cutting as an act of grief and sacrifice by women is also sometimes utilized as an act of protest, such as in the protests of Iranian women ("porkur", Safasian). In *The Sprinkle, porkur* denotes both the grief of the female character and her protest against her husband leaving for war.

Similar to *Shouted from the Rooftops, The Sprinkle* is a film about loss, grief, and abandonment. The emotions experienced by the woman in this film are mirrored by those expressed by Ferhat in *Shouted from the Rooftops*. When her husband leaves, the woman in *The Sprinkle* is so upset that she does not even watch him go. It is very clear that she does not agree with his choice, that nothing she says will change his mind, and the grief and loss women feel over losing men to war are real and valid emotions. However, it seems like the story of these women's losses is often being told by men, as in the case of *The Sprinkle.* Therefore, it becomes particularly interesting that Shalmashi, as a woman, turns this trope on its head and tells the story of a man's grief when he loses the woman he loves to war. Her film was not submitted to the Women in Film category because the main character is not a woman—the audience only sees Sherin at a distance and gets to know her through Ferhat, but to upend the trope of the emotional, grieving woman, it is really only Ferhat the audience needs to see.

Depictions of Honor-Based Violence and Forced Marriage in Kurdish Films

So-called honor-based violence is a frequent theme in films focusing on Kurdish women's issues. It is important to establish that honor crimes are not exclusive to Kurds, the Middle East, or any single religion or group of people. Nor are the extreme

patriarchal attitudes of those who perpetrate honor-based violence reflective of Kurdish culture as a whole. However, honor-based violence is widespread enough among the Kurds and disproportionately affects women, so it is a frequent topic of Kurdish films because there is such grave concern about the lives of women affected by it. Gill et al. define honor in this context as, "a value-system with associated norms and traditions." (75) and explain that "HBV is most commonly committed against young women by male relatives who view the violence as necessary to preserve or restore the 'honour' of the family and/or community by removing 'shame'" (75) Similarly, Idriss defines HBV stating, "Honour-based violence (HBV) is the infliction of violence predominantly upon women who are deemed to have brought shame and dishonour upon their family for reasons usually involving their sexual behaviour" (Idriss, "Not domestic violence or cultural tradition"). Honor-based violence is most typically carried out against women and girls who have brought "shame" to their families through some perceived sexual misdemeanor (Idriss, "Abused by the patriarchy"). Because of the heavy importance placed on female 'virtue' and female chastity, honor crimes are more often carried out against women and girls than they are against men; however, men may also be victims of HBV, particularly gay men, whose sexuality is often viewed as shameful by their communities (Idriss, "Abused by the patriarchy"). Films in this chapter that include the theme of honor-based violence include the feature-length films *Memories on Stone*, *One Candle Two Candles*, and the short film *The Kurdish Girl*,

Forced marriage is a specific type of HBV, and a topic found in a number of Kurdish films that remains an urgent social issue within the Kurdistan region and the

diaspora. It is closely tied to HBV, and like HBV, it is not an exclusively Kurdish issue. However, it is an issue that is of particular importance to Kurdish women and one that is often the main theme in Kurdish films featuring female characters and films made by Kurdish women. Sometimes Kurdish films present forced marriage in a fashion where it is clear the filmmakers are intending to present the issue to an unfamiliar audience and at other times to an audience with prior knowledge. Films about honor killing, which are often also films about forced marriage, are the same in terms of sometimes requiring prior knowledge to understand what is happening and at other times having an explanation for unfamiliar audiences woven into the film. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights defines forced marriage simply: "It's a marriage where at least one is married without consent, against their will or is not able to exit the marriage." ("Forced Marriage: A Violation of Human Rights"). The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services offers a more nuanced definition of forced marriage with the following statement:

> Forced marriage is a marriage that takes place without the consent of one or both people in the marriage. Consent means that you have given your full, free, and informed agreement to marry your intended spouse and to the timing of the marriage. Forced marriage may occur when family members or others use physical or emotional abuse, threats, or deception to force you to marry without your consent.

Victims of forced marriage may be girls, boys, women or men. Forced marriage can impact individuals of any race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or national origin, and it

impacts individuals from all economic and educational backgrounds. (“Forced Marriage”)

While males are affected by forced marriage, women and girls suffer at a disproportionate rate, and all the films in this chapter that depict forced marriage only look at the forced marriage of women and girls. Forced marriage is forbidden in Islam and it is a common misconception among non-Muslims that Islam encourages or allows this practice. Islam is not the only religion that has and continues to practice forced marriage. However, all of the films in this dissertation were created by filmmakers, who may or may not be Muslim themselves, but with ties to Muslim majority countries. Therefore, it is important to clarify that forced marriage is not specific to any religion, and it is a practice that occurs among other religious groups in many countries.

In the films included in this chapter that depict forced marriage, the types of force used are varied (as described in the USCIS definition) and reflect the complexity, desperation, and violence of the reality of forced marriage, while adding layers of commentary on the evolving roles of women in modern Kurdish society and the simple notion that women deserve to pursue their own dreams, choose their own partners, or be free to choose no partner at all. The films range from Viyan Mayi’s short film, *The Kurdish Girl*, about an honor killing, with almost no dialogue and a story that is mostly implied, to the complex *Memories on Stone*, in which a woman is coerced into an engagement to her cousin because she is deeply driven by the need to play the lead role in a film about Anfal.

It is useful when watching Kurdish films about marriage to be aware that

marriage norms are very different from Western ones. Breaking an engagement is the same as getting a divorce, something referenced in *Memories on Stone*. It is only in recent years that divorce has become more socially acceptable and that may vary widely depending on one's family. Attempting to leave a marriage can still be a life-threatening situation. *Banaz: A Love Story* (title later changed to *Banaz: An Honor Killing*) is a documentary film by filmmaker and human rights activist Deeyah Khan about a young Kurdish woman in the UK, who left her forced marriage and was murdered by family members. The love story is not a romance, but rather the story of the devoted policewoman who refused to give up on bringing Banaz's killers to justice. While not a Kurdish film in terms of filmmaking (director Deeyah Khan is Norwegian of Punjabi/Pashtun background), it does highlight how forced marriage/honor killing are realities in the Kurdish community, not only in the Kurdistan region but the diaspora as well. In the film, Banaz is forced to marry but leaves her marriage. She is raped and murdered by her cousin. The film shows the complex role of family relationships in forced marriages. Banaz does not want to cut her parents out of her life. The film also illustrates how women may be complicit in forced marriages, as in the case of Banaz's mother. Or they simply may be unable to fight a patriarchal system in which they have no more power than their daughters (the mother in *Memories on Stone*).

Rosebiani, Mayi, and Korki have all created heroines who faced forced marriage and/or honor crimes with courage and ingenuity. Rosebiani and Korki cast the male perpetrators of forced marriage and honor crimes as evil, foolish, relics of a bygone era who are standing in the way of progress. However, Viyan Mayi, by contrast, treats her

male characters with greater complexity, going so far as to suggest that the patriarchal society that supports these crimes does a disservice to men as well. In her short films, her killer and would-be-killer are both tormented young men, pressured by their families to carry out unspeakable acts.

Viyan Mayi is a Kurdish director from Turkey. She has directed three films, including one feature, the 2012 film *Doz*, and the short films *The Kurdish Gir*l (*Kiça Kurda*) and The White Dove (*Kevoka Spî*) in 2008 both of which deal with honor killing. *The Kurdish Girl* is four minutes and 39 seconds long, including the credits (about four minutes for the film itself). The film opens to a musical score of a *saz* strumming mournfully, while a young Kurdish woman in a traditional dress walks slowly surrounded by three men in a mountainous wilderness. Her hair is disheveled, and her face appears troubled. A shot of a young man near her age shows he appears troubled as well. The scene is disrupted by the roar of fighter jets flying overhead, jets that probably belong to the Turkish military. The first sound made by a human in the film is almost two minutes in--the young man weeping. The group has come to a stop at the base of a mountain. As the young man weeps with his head in his hands, two older men look on--it is easy to surmise that these are the father and grandfather of the young woman and that the young man is very likely her brother. Suddenly, nearly three minutes into the film, the mountainside erupts in explosions and the woman flees from the group of men. She runs until she happens upon a group of Kurdish women militants (probably PKK) binding the wound of one woman in the group. “Help!” she cries out. “My father and brother are going to kill me.” It is only at this point (around 3:12) that her predicament is made fully

clear. “What?” one of the women responds. “Have some water first.” another woman says, offering the runaway a canteen. Then the four women get up and walk away together. The film closes with a song by prominent female Kurdish singer, Aynur Doğan, “Keça Kurdan” (“Kurdish Women”). Unlike the slow, mournful music at the beginning of the film, the song ends the film with an air of joyful celebration.

There is not much time for *The Kurdish Girl* to explain honor killing for the uninitiated. The audience does not know why this young woman is being put to death by her family members. It does not even know her name. What the film does convey in its few minutes is the simple and obvious statement that honor killing is horrible and wrong, that patriarchal culture victimizes men as well as women (seen in the sobbing brother), and that courage, independence, and potential for support among women exist. In many ways, these themes come through with much more strength and clarity than they do in *One Candle, Two Candles,* which struggled with themes of female camaraderie in the face of forced marriage and honor crimes. Viyan Mayi has great limitations imposed by the length of such a short film. Women are the clear focus of the film. The only dialogue in the film is spoken by women. And beneath the video on YouTube is written, “The struggle of Kurdish women fighting for freedom and equality. A film made by women.”

In contrast to *One Candle, Two Candles* and *Memories on Stone,* the ultimate salvation of the young woman in *The Kurdish Girl* comes through a choice made by the female character, rather than a male character. While Viyan does choose to climb the tree, it is only a temporary fix. She is only able to get out of the marriage because Haji Hemmo decides to divorce her and because she runs away with another man, an action

that also hinges on a man's choice. Sinur makes a choice to trade herself in marriage to be in the film, but escaping the marriage is a choice made for her by men because her uncle dissolves the engagement. In *One Candle, Two Candles* women are entirely ineffective at coming to Viyan's aid. In *Memories on Stone* the only other female character, Sinur's mother, does not even try. In *The Kurdish Girl,* the young woman does everything she can to save herself and then is rescued from the honor killing by other women. It is as if the male filmmakers could not imagine a way for their female characters to escape their forced marriages other than through male decisions.

While there is no time for nuance or to shed light on the issues of the way women are often complicit in honor killings and forced marriages, even *One Candle, Two Candles* for all its length fails to provide much insight into this topic. This is not the point of *The Kurdish Girl,* though. Rather, it is an inspiration piece, to suggest the strength and courage of Kurdish women who escape situations like potential honor crimes and the bravery of those who help them, as well as the pride in female Kurdish guerillas.

The White Dove is a somewhat longer film at 24:37. It concerns Sardac (Siyar Tayib), a young man who has just been released from prison after serving a sentence for the honor killing of his sister, Sorgul (Narin Jang). He has returned to live with his mother. Unlike many perpetrators of honor crimes, Sardac is wracked with guilt. He experiences flashbacks of Sorgul and the events that led up to the honor killing, including the enormous pressure placed on him by members of his extended family. He struggles to eat while all male members of his extended family express concern for him and tell him he needs to "be a man" and get on with his life. Sardac asks the male members of his

family to be allowed to visit Sorgul's grave, but they ignore him. Instead, he experiences visions of Sorgul visiting him as he weeps in his room, offering to comfort him, telling him that she misses him. The vision expresses her deep love for Sardac and how utterly crushed and betrayed she is that someone she loved so much would murder her. Through all of this, he sobs uncontrollably. Sorgul even reminds Sardac of how she helped him so he could see his girlfriend, an act for which the girlfriend might have been risking her life. The performances in this short film are strong and it retains its emotional intensity throughout its length.

The White Dove also evokes an element of suspense, keeping both Sorgul's name and the reason behind her murder a secret the last few minutes of the film. In these final minutes, the audience learns that even Sorgul's mother, who has been weeping for her daughter and plastering the walls with Sorgul's picture, is somewhat complicit--she attempts to force Sorgul to marry her cousin against her will. When Sorgul rejects the marriage and tells her mother, "I don't want anyone… I don't want a life like yours," she slaps her daughter. In the following scenes, the audience witnesses Sorgul's murder, her mother weeping when she hears what has occurred, and flashes of Sardac in the present remembering these events. The film closes as Sardac is finally taken to Sorgul's grave, unmarked except for a few small flowers planted by their mother. He collapses on the grave to stare up at the sky, and the audience witnesses a vision of Sorgul, who sings about the wishes she had for her brother: to become a doctor and for herself to dance at his wedding.

The film's theme continues to develop what was only seen very briefly in *The Kurdish Girl*--the idea that the patriarchal practice of honor killing victimizes men by exerting enormous pressure on them to be "real men" and perpetrate these crimes. However, the film also shows how Mayi believes the perpetrators of honor crimes should feel for their actions because many of them express no guilt at all and believe they are perfectly justified in their actions. *The White Dove* focuses heavily on emotional intensity. In many ways, the viewer knows more about Sardac than Sorgul, as she spends more time reminding him of all the good things that she wanted for him rather than expressing any of her own hopes and dreams. Still, she has more depth of character than Viyan, about whom nothing is known, other than that she does not want to marry Haji Hemmo and does want to marry Botan. *The White Dove* also gives about the same amount of information as *One Candle, Two Candles.* Each of these films depicts women who are complicit in forced marriages, but with its longer runtime *One Candle, Two Candles* could have given the issue more nuance.

The White Dove is very clear in its message--Sorgul is trapped by her entire family, even the mother and brother who loved her. Her mother wanted to force her into marriage and her brother murdered her for refusing to go through with it. Because the message is not convoluted with ableist and fatphobic subplots the way it is in *One Candle, Two Candles,* the message comes through with greater emotional force. In contrast to *The Kurdish Girl,* men's decisions are the only ones that matter in *The White Dove,* and rather than those decisions allowing women to arbitrarily escape terribly fates

the way they do in *One Candle, Two Candles* and *Memories on Stone*, the full consequences of male decision-making are felt in *The White Dove.*

***Before Your Eyes*--the Kurdish Girl Heroine**

Before Your Eyes deserves special consideration for its treatment of female characters and because it is a collaborative effort between a male director and a woman screenwriter. Evrim Alataş, Kurdish journalist and short story writer, is credited as writing the story on which the film is based, and on IMDB she is listed in the writing credits as treatment collaborator. Very few of the internationally recognized Kurdish film projects in which men direct have women contributing on the primary creative areas, such as co-directing, producing, or writing. It is unknown if Alataş might have contributed further to the writing of *Before Your Eyes* if she had not been seriously ill with lung cancer, which she had been battling for thirteen years. She passed away in 2010, having lived to see the release of *Before Your Eyes* in 2009. Auteur theory can lead to a tendency to discount the role of screenwriters, but without Alataş's story, *Before Your Eyes* would certainly not exist. In the panel moderated by Avesta Kadir, Soleen Yusef reminded the audience that Kurdish women in film are not just directors, they contribute as cinematographers, as writers, as sound designers, and as producers ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film."). She shows that she sees Kurdish filmmaking as a more collaborative process, rather than a work of art attributed primarily to the director as in auteur theory, which is a more customary view in Western cinema studies.

Before Your Eyes is the story of a girl heroine, Gulistan, who is orphaned after her parents are murdered by secret police in Turkey. While Gulistan is the main character,

she is supported throughout the narrative by other female characters, including her mother, her aunt Yakbun, the neighbor woman, the street girl Zelal, and the prostitute Dilan/Dilara. The film highlights the courage of these women, but especially that of Gulistan. In the climax of the film, Gulistan is faced with a choice: Does she kill the man who murdered her parents, or does she find another way to seek justice? Ultimately, the way in which Gulistan seeks justice is tied to her mother. At the beginning of the film, Gulistan's mother tells the children a Kurdish folk tale about a wolf that has been attacking the village sheep. Rather than killing the wolf, the villagers attach a bell to its neck so that the sheep can hear the wolf coming. Bezar states in the film's press kit, "The children's revenge against the killer at the end of the film is like a fairy tale. It is visualized wishful thinking. Gulistan has to undergo a painful process to arrive at the realization that violence cannot be an answer to violence" (5).

Cengiz Akaygün's 2018 short film *The Mandarin Tree* also features a Kurdish child heroine who displays extraordinary courage and cleverness. It was shown at the 2020 London Kurdish Film Festival. Like Miraz Bezar, Akaygün immigrated from Turkey to Germany as a child. The film tells the story of a Kurdish political prisoner in Turkey who is being visited by his wife and daughter. The daughter, Şirin, appears roughly the same age as Gulistan. During their first visit, Şirin attempts to bring her father a drawing of a bird that likes to eat sunflower seeds from their garden. However, a prison guard confiscates the drawing because he says the bird is an "anarchist symbol". The father comforts the daughter by telling her that the guards cannot control or see their thoughts, and he will imagine her drawing instead. At the next visit, Şirin arrives wearing

a headscarf and with another drawing in hand. This drawing is of a mandarin tree from the same garden but there is no bird in the picture. The prison guard makes a great show of calling his superior to find out whether the drawing is allowed. When he is told that it is, he grumbles that if he had his way all trees would be anarchist symbols. The girl gives the drawing to her father and then removes her headscarf, where she has concealed two mandarins.

When the man takes the mandarins back to his cell, he discovers that one has been partially peeled. Inside is a small packet concealing sunflower seeds. He holds them out, cupped in his hand, toward the drawing of the mandarin tree on the wall of his cell and whistles; in his mind he hears the song of the bird from his daughter's first drawing, showing that she has found a way to share it with him even if she cannot depict it in her art. The simple act shows Şirin's courage in thwarting the Turkish authorities as well as her intelligence, similar to Gulistan, who took away Nuri's power through a clever and non-violent act. Featuring young girls performing these acts of resistance also suggests that Kurdish women have important roles in the future of Kurdish resistance.

Both *Before Your Eyes a*nd *The Mandarin Tre*e depict young Kurdish heroines who undertake acts of resistance that could be considered political, even though the children are not thinking in political terms. For both Gulistan and Şirin, the stakes are personal, yet their actions are closely tied to the political beliefs of their parents, especially their fathers who have been punished for their outspokenness regarding Kurdish rights. Gulistan's father was killed for his beliefs, while Şirin's father was imprisoned. The two films highlight the ways in which Kurdish children might inherit the

political beliefs of the previous generation, a theme which is also important in the next film to be discussed in this chapter, *Memories on Stone*. In the latter, the two main characters have grown to adulthood; however, their actions reflect the beliefs of their fathers, particularly for the character of Hussein, who has become a film director after his father was executed for watching a Kurdish film.

The Cost of Creative Expression for Sinur in *Memories on Stone*

In *Memories on Stone*, director Shawkat Amin Korki intertwines the issue of forced marriage with the problem of casting Kurdish actresses in Kurdish roles. In his narrative, Sinur, a young Kurdish woman, desperately wants the lead role in a film about the Anfal genocide, but in order to do so, she must obtain the permission of her male relatives. Since her father is dead, she must request her uncle's permission instead, but he will only allow Sinur to act in the film if she marries his son, so in order to become an actress, she is coerced into an engagement with a cousin she abhors. This forced marriage plot is intertwined with a story about the perils of making films in Kurdistan to deliver their messages through a darkly comic story that emphasizes the bravery of Kurdish women artists. *Memories on Stone* makes a case that Kurdish women need to be allowed to act in roles written for them, that the experience of acting in Kurdish films is important for Kurdish women on a personal level, and that Kurdish cinema will benefit.

Sinur's story interweaves themes of Kurdish women's autonomy, forced marriage, and intergenerational trauma along with the very particular issue of Kurdish women acting in Kurdish films (even though it appears that the role of Sinur is played by a Persian Iranian actress.) There are two main sources of conflict in the film: the conflict

in getting the film made at all and Sinur's personal conflict in being allowed to participate in the making of the film. While Sinur's problem is part of the larger, overarching conflict that drives the narrative, it is unique in that it forms its own narrative arc within the film and confronts issues that pertain specifically to Kurdish women. Sinur is an Anfal orphan and her deep compulsion to play Lorin in Hussein's film is that her father was executed in the very fort where the film is taking place. Yet it is because she is an Anfal orphan that she is at the mercy of her uncle. Hardi writes, "The stigma around women as heads of families around 'the fatherless Anfal children' as well as poverty and voicelessness are major sources of grief" (192). Sinur is characterized as a woman with autonomy. While she lives with her mother, the film suggests it is Sinur, who cares for her mother, rather than the other way around. There is a scene where Sinur chastises her mother for smoking after believing her mother has given it up, showing Sinur taking a more parental/caretaker role, while her mother is reduced to the one receiving care. As a woman, she lacks authority and cannot grant permission to Sinur to pursue the acting job Sinur desires, even though Sinur is an educated career woman who works as a teacher at a school for the blind. Sinur is at the mercy of her uncle when it comes to the question of whether she can act in a film (and she would have been at the mercy of her father otherwise.) The film questions a Kurdistan that would place an independent career woman who is clearly contributing the most to society and her family at the mercy of an anachronistic and misogynistic individual (and by implication, society). Yet to achieve her dream she has no choice but to marry her worthless cousin Hiwa.

Sinur may also be a cinephile. A love of film, and of different kinds of film is one

of the themes of *Memories on Stone*. In the opening scenes, the director Hussein's father is shot for watching the Kurdish film *Yol* because it is forbidden. When Hussein interviews actors he asks them about the kinds of movies they like to watch. Some of them like Kurdish movies, like the films of Yılmaz Güney (*Yol* is one of these). One of them likes action movies (he cites Van Damme). Another says he does not like movies because they are all lies. Sinur is introduced to the audience as she is carefully selecting a film to rent in a video store. She overhears a news broadcast in the store that the film crew is still seeking a lead actress. It is a small clue, but perhaps the choice to introduce Sinur seeking a film to watch is an indication that she is someone who loves movies, that maybe acting is a dream that has been denied her. The need to participate in the film is so great that she is willing to sacrifice the rest of her life for it.

Sinur's reasons for accepting her cousin's Hiwa's marriage proposal so she can take the role of Lorin are multi-faceted. Her determination seems unfathomable at first. She is disgusted by her cousin both as a person and by the idea of marrying someone with whom she has such a close blood tie. She considers their familial relationship too close for marriage, and at one point she states that she sees them as closely related as a brother and sister. Their personalities are poorly matched. Hiwa sees women as subordinate to men. He is vain and more concerned with his own honor than Sinur's happiness. He insists on following Sinur to the film sets to make sure his honor is not being violated and his behavior becomes increasingly disruptive to the filmmaking process. Hiwa never asks Sinur why making the film is important to her or comments on why the film might be important to their family, yet he should know because her father was his uncle and died

in the Anfal. Understanding comes instead from Hussein, and the two develop and bond but not a romance. Hussein is married, with a wife and a young child back in Germany, struggling to explain to her why making the film is so important to him. With Sinur he shares a friendship, a bond forged through shared trauma and a desperate need to complete the film. This relationship is starkly contrasted with Sinur's relationship with Hiwa, who does not care about Sinur's feelings or the filmmakers' desire to tell the story of Anfal but only about his desire to possess Sinur and his concept of honor, which is largely rooted in male pride. While Sinur agrees to the marriage to Hiwa, she does so under duress, and the marriage is still a forced marriage.

While Hussein repeats over and over that the lead actress is crucial to the film (in one of the early scenes he sends all the male extras home because the actress trying out for Lorin has been barred from trying out for the role), what exactly it is about Lorin's role in the film that is so important remains unclear, as does much of the film's narrative. *Memories on Stone* closes with the primary cast and crew, along with Hiwa, sitting in the rain watching the film. The audience only sees glimpses of it, as it is being shot. Yet this is the film that Sinur was willing to sacrifice her life for, which begs many questions. How much of the sacrifice was about the need to tell an aspect of her father's story as part of her grieving process? How much of it was a need to make a film about Anfal for her people? Was there also a personal interest in having a chance to be an actress, to participate as an artist in a way she would never otherwise be allowed?

Memories on Stone and the unnamed film within the film are very male-centered films and Sinur/Lorin are the sole female protagonists, so it feels very important to have

answers to these questions. What would make a relatively independent woman give up her freedom to become an actress for a single film? There is no indication she was going to be forced to marry Hiwa before, and no indication that her uncle had marriage plans for her. Based on Hussein's request for an actress of 24 or 25, this is likely her age, so she has clearly escaped being forced to marry at a very young age as well. In a male dominated film, do we see a woman willing to sacrifice her independence because of a man? Even if the man is her father and she is determined to tell a story that is concerned with all of Kurdistan, is it worth it?

Memories on Stone is a dark comedy and much of the film is about everything that can possibly go wrong with making a film in Kurdistan. One of the things that does go wrong is that Hussein hires a famous Kurdish singer to play the male lead in order to gain publicity for the film, but he turns out to be a terrible actor and a liability due to his lack of professionalism. His poor acting clearly seems to degrade the quality of the film that Sinur has given up her independence for. And while things turn out alright in the end when Sinur's uncle calls for a divorce, ending the engagement. Sinur has no control over this outcome. As intriguing as Sinur is, she does not feel fully realized as a character, largely because the film is split between her story and Hussein's. There are indications that acting and filmmaking as an art form are truly important to her. This comes through in a number of scenes where she is performing as Lorin.

The importance of the role is also addressed comically when Hussein and the film crew arrive at Hiwa and his father's house with a plate of baklava, their hands stuffed nervously in their pockets. "This is ridiculous," one of them says, "it's not a marriage

proposal." This is one of two last-ditch attempts they make to cast Sinur before she agrees to Hiwa's proposal. The other is when Alan convinces his father to meet with Hiwa's father to talk about the importance of making the film. So, accepting the proposal is not Sinur's first choice. The men just don't know it is a choice she is willing to make, and they bargain over her as if she were a piece of property rather than a person at times. No one ever asks her about her thoughts or feelings on the film or the marriage, not even her own mother (although the film implies that her mother knows Sinur's feelings on the matter). The lack of a confidante could speak to Sinur's independence, but even without one, the filmmakers might have chosen other routes to hint at Sinur's feelings at signing away her future to a man she hates. Perhaps stoic acceptance and determination to throw herself into the part of Lorin are all the audience is meant to see.

Yet nothing is known about what Sinur has planned for after her marriage. Did she think she might divorce Hiwa later, keeping in mind that if she does so Hiwa and his father may consider honor killing a just punishment for the divorce. How did she think she could stand to live with him? Would she be enduring a lifetime of sexual and physical violence? She does not have a single friend or confidante throughout the film until she tells Hussein that her father died in the fort where they are filming, and she certainly does not share any fears relating to her impending marriage with Hussein. Sinur seems to be trying to address one trauma by inflicting a new one upon herself. And while the audience sees a great deal of the psychological toll that making the film is taking on Hussein, the toll the impending forced marriage is taking on Sinur is barely evident. For both Sinur and Hussein making the film involves great sacrifices. Hussein leaves his wife

and young son in Germany to make the film. Psychologically he is under extreme duress as problem after problem crops up and they are all his responsibility to deal with. At one point he even puts a cigarette lighter pistol to his temple in front of his toddler on a video call and the child cries in fear, not realizing the gun is a toy. Hussein is even shot by Hiwa and accepts blood money to finish the film rather than sending Hussein to prison. *Memories on Stone* is more Hussein's story than Sinur's. He is the filmmaker and the clear protagonist, and while Hussein is alone in much of his suffering - no one is aware of the strain he is under with his wife or just how desperately he misses his young son- he has the support of the crew. Sinur is alone. Lacking a confidante, she keeps her feelings about marrying Hiwa to herself. The only distress evident from her is that which is played out upon the set. When Hiwa arrives, the emotions she displayed as an actress are shut off completely, and the audience is left to wonder whether she is playing out her real-life anguish before the cameras, the only place she has to give her feelings a voice.

The film does not allow Sinur's forced marriage to take place because her uncle dissolves the engagement. It is a black comedy, after all. As strong a film as *Memories on Stone* is, one cannot help but feel that Sinur highlights the need for female filmmakers to tell women's stories and create more fully realized female characters. What would a female filmmaker have done with Sinur in the same situation? How would she have dealt with the problem if Sinur needed to enter into the engagement in order to fulfill her need to act in the film and honor the memory of her father? How would a woman filmmaker have freed Sinur from the marriage?

Sinur is fascinating in her fearless commitment to Lorin and in telling the story of Anfal through film, yet so much of who she is remains hidden. While both Sinur and Hussein have lost their fathers, there is a difference. The audience does not know what kind of father Sinur's father would have been to her. Her mother never talks about him, nor her uncle nor her cousin. If Sinur is 24-25 (the age of actress Hussein requests) it means her father died without her ever knowing him, because the Anfal genocide lasted from 1986-1989. This does not negate Sinur's grief. She was robbed of the chance to know her father, but it is hard not to wonder whether he would be like the other fathers in the film who refuse to let their daughters act. There is a sense of mystery about Sinur that adds to her fascination, but if she were a real woman, her apparent isolation would place her in great danger. The fact that she is only saved by the good fortune of her uncle calling off the marriage remains troubling. And Hiwa, who nearly murdered Hussein and forced Sinur into a marriage contract, shows up at the final screening of the film. It is meant to be read as funny that Hiwa has developed an interest in the film, to see him sitting there in the rain as the only audience member, outside of those involved in the making of the film. He has lost his power now and sits meekly behind the film group, several seats back.

Modern Kurdish cinema has created numerous independent female characters, but they are still greatly outnumbered by male characters and remain the exception rather than the rule. Sinur is notable as a female character for making her own choices, given an impossible situation. She knows she will most likely have to marry Hiwa anyway, but she is still able to get something she wants out of the engagement: a chance to make art. Sinur

is important to Hussein because he insists that the role of Lorin is crucial to the film, and he would clearly prefer an Iraqi-Kurdish actress to play the character. Yet so much of what Sinur thinks and feels about marriage, forced marriage, film, and acting remains hidden. In film, less is often more, and Sinur certainly does not need to be offering exposition on these topics. Yet for a film that is meant to highlight the need for Kurdish women to play Kurdish women's roles and to be involved in the telling of Kurdish stories, *Memories on Stone* gives its sole female character very little voice. She throws herself into her part, but the audience never knows who Lorin really is. And as fascinating as it is, Sinur's willingness to sell herself into marriage for the role remains hard to take. The price seems too high. The film would be unbearable to watch if she had had to pay it.

Depictions of Forced Marriage in Jano Rosebiani's *One Candle, Two Candles*

One Candle, Two Candles, Jano Rosebiani's 2014 feature film, also takes a darkly comic and somewhat fanciful approach to a forced marriage narrative. However, in *One Candle, Two Candles* forced marriage is at the forefront of the narrative, and rather than being coerced into a marriage like Sinur, the protagonist, Viyan is married off by her father without her consent. This is not to say that one forced marriage is worse than the other. But Sinur is coerced into marrying because acting in the Anfal film is deeply important to her, a circumstance that is unique and also speaks to the problem of casting Kurdish actresses in Kurdish roles. Viyan is in a more common position of being forced into marriage by her family with really nothing in terms of options. The way that the film resolves in Viyan's favor feels part fairy-tale and part wishful thinking, with the result, a

combination of Viyan's courage and defiance against the marriage but, similar to *Memories on Stone*, more heavily dependent on decisions made by men.

However, neither *One Candle, Two Candles* nor *Memories on Stone* show any self-awareness of this, which might have been less problematic if they had been able to indicate that an ending where the courageous heroine only escapes her forced marriage based on the whim of a man is not really a happy ending. Instead, it reminds one that the patriarchal system remains firmly in place. *One Candle, Two Candles* wants very much to be a film that speaks out against forced marriage and supports Kurdish women, and while it meets with some success and attempts creative risks, it ultimately fails, due to a lack of development for its many female characters. There is minimal action against the forced marriage taken by the female characters, the lack of dramatic reasoning for their behavior, and in spite of her brave efforts to resist the forced marriage, Viyan is only truly rescued by men's decisions. As will be shown infra, Kurdish women's films on this and similar topics stand in sharp contrast to the problematic way *One Candle, Two Candles* handles its female characters, even in short films. However, while deeply flawed in many ways, *One Candle, Two Candles* has some positive aspects as well. Viyan is drawn as a courageous heroine who does what little she can to resist her forced marriage in extremely limiting circumstances. There is a large female cast in the film, including numerous friends and relatives of Viyan, the wives and children of her undesired husband, and an outcast woman known as Kitan the "ball-buster" who is perhaps the most intriguing character in the entire film. The large cast of female characters with speaking roles sets *One Candle, Two Candles* apart from many other Kurdish feature

films, which tend to focus on men's stories and, if they include female characters, are more likely to include one or two that serve the stories of the male characters in some way.

One Candle, Two Candles makes varied use of its female characters, which is important because when it comes to forced marriage women are not only the victims but often also the willing collaborators in the crime. The film generally shows female characters who support Viyan but are unable to protect her from the marriage, and ultimately, they seem unwilling to take any action to change Viyan's fate. Unlike Sinur, Viyan has female friends, whom she confides in about her problems. She talks to her mother about how she feels about the marriage. Rosebiani seems to have intended women as the heroes of this film, but the female characters largely come off as inept and powerless. It is the women who rescue Viyan rather than her would-be-suitor. Zozan, Viyan's outspoken cousin states, "Our foremothers used to run the household. Some even ran the whole tribe. Then came the sword and cut us in half. A half-person cannot decide her fate." The women in *One Candle, Two Candles* have very little control over their own destinies, but the reasons for this are not delved into beyond the obvious themes of forced marriage and abusive husbands. For the uninitiated, the passive behavior of the female characters may be confusing. Without any explanation for the women's passive behavior, one wonders why Rosebiani chose to create a large cast of female characters and not make more creative use of them. In a film with magical-realist leanings, it seems that more options should be available for women to save themselves or each other, rather than for much of Viyan's final freedom to come from decisions made by men.

Western reviews of *One Candles, Two Candles* have frequently criticized its overall comedic tone as incompatible with its subject matter. However, Jano Rosebiani writes:

> I injected a humorous old folk anecdote in "One Candle, Two Candles" (the scene when young Viyan climbs a tree on her wedding night to escape her elderly suitor's advances) and I was happy to see it recognized as such by New York film critic Louis Proyect in his review Kurdish and Turkish Films of Note maintaining "a thousand-year old folk tale that Kurds might have told each other around campfires long before there was the novel, movies, television or the Internet."

These remarks suggest that there is a cultural divide, and perhaps Western viewers of the film are missing something. Some reviewers are clearly missing information as one referred to forced marriage as having a basis in Sharia, which it does not. Certainly, *Memories on Stone* flirts with the absurd in a similar way. Who marries a man she hates, so she can make a movie? In the review by Louis Proyect, which Rosebiani cites, she suggests *One Candle, Two Candles* as a kind of magical realism. Viewed that way and less literally -as every other review I am aware of has done- it becomes easier to enter the film's world of outlandish characters. The humor is never directed at violence against women but always-against the male perpetrators as a means of humiliation. The film received many different reactions when viewed by women in the Kurdistan region. In a conversation with Rosebiani, he described screening the film for a primarily female audience in which the women responded with cheers every time a male perpetrator was punished. The American critics may have made a mistake in thinking *One Candle, Two*

Candles was intended for them. While the film has flaws in terms of its use of humor (it is supposed to be funny that two disabled characters are cast as the town perverts and a fat female character is the town flirt, ready to marry any man who will take her) the film does not suggest that violence against women is funny, as some critics have claimed.

Rosebiani sets the tone of *One Candle, Two Candles* clearly in the first few minutes, and within those first few minutes he also provides a clue that the film we are about to watch is more of a modern myth -magical realism, as Proyect suggests- than a narrative meant to be taken entirely literally. As was mentioned in the previous chapter concerning *Half Moon,* magical realism has found a place in other Kurdish art forms as well, as a way to express what seems inexpressible through ordinary means. Rosebiani's use of humor in the film never suggests that there is anything funny about forced marriage or violence against women. At times, as in the opening scenes of the film, the humor serves as a smokescreen, an aspect of small-town life that hides ugly secrets, including Viyan's impending forced marriage. At other times the humor is darker, with punishment and humiliation meted out to those who would hurt women, although they deserve more punishment than this, and they receive it.

To set the stage for the magical realist nature of the film, Rosebiani sets up a romantic scene between Viyan and Botan, a young artist who will become her love interest. He is seated outdoors sketching her portrait, while she stands between two young female friends. They question him about the way he speaks (a different dialect of Kurdish) and ask him about where he is from, and he replies, "Zakho, the mother of Nefertiti, on the River Khabur, the city of music and love." When Botan proceeds to refer

to all three young women as Nefertiti, they ask him why, and he explains, “Nefertiti is close to my heart. Her father, King of the Hittites, gave her to the son of the Pharaoh to honor a truce.” Viyan’s friends respond saying, “I haven’t heard this story. I think he’s made it up,” one of Viyan’s girls says, laughing. “All boys lie,” the other adds. “But you must have heard of the Hittites?” Botan asks. Viyan’s friends reply, saying that she is a Hittite. Botan replies with amazement that Viyan is “of Nefertiti’s bloodline.” There is nothing in what is known of Nefertiti’s history to suggest any truth to this story. It is a myth. Perhaps one known to the people of Zakho (where Rosebiani grew up), or perhaps it was created for the purposes of this film, to set a magical and romantic tone. Regardless, it should clue the audience not to expect a realistic film, which is something American critics have overlooked. This is a film in which a woman squeezes a fish to death and seems to give a man a stroke as a direct result. It was never meant to be realism, yet it seems only one English-language critic other than Proyect has remarked on this.

The story Botan tells suggests that he holds Nefertiti in high esteem and that he has attached her to his city and his cultural heritage, but he glosses over the arranged marriage, with no thought for whether Nefertiti had any agency in the matter, the same way he makes a thoughtless remark to Viyan moments later. The mythical quality of Botan’s story sets up expectations for extraordinary events, things that the audience might not be expected to take quite literally. This is particularly important in terms of Kitan, the most mysterious character in the film and the closest the film has to a true hero. Despite the fact that she fails to save Viyan from being forced into marriage, she is

the only person, other than Viyan, who truly attempts to do so. And while she is not responsible for engineering Viyan's escape, she does enact revenge on her behalf. The grotesque act of revenge (performed off-screen and only heard by the audience) also lends itself to the not-quite-real quality of the film.

The story of Nefertiti with its arranged (or forced marriage), and a comment Botan makes to Viyan shortly after telling it, foreshadow the darker aspects of the film: "Lucky is the man who marries you," he says to Viyan. Her face turns dark, and she flees the scene. "You shouldn't have said that," one of her friends calls back to him, foreshadowing something terrible in store for Viyan with regard to marriage. The film feels very theatrical at this moment, as though the stage should go dark. Western audiences may be more used to encountering magical realism on the stage; one wonders whether a theatrical adaptation of the script would have been received differently there. Regardless, the cultural disconnect is much of the problem, given that the film received a more positive reception from a Kurdish female audience and in light of Project's review.

Immediately after the exchange between Botan, Viyan, and Viyan's friends, Rosebiani begins introducing the audience to his cast of colorful characters. Each of these people has a part to play in the narrative, in terms of representing how the small fictional city treats women. Three old men sit outside drinking tea, objectifying women who look young enough to be their granddaughters. They do not approve of Haji Hemmo, the rich man who is going to marry Viyan, but they stand up and give him little bows anyway. Kitan, a woman who is called the "ball-buster" because of what she is reputed to have done to her husband, is given a wide berth. But the old men call out to her and suggest

she take on Haji Hemmo, something they clearly lack the courage to do. Botan seems to have made a friend who tells him he wants to break Haji Hemmo's nose. When Botan asks whether she agreed, the boy responds, "Does she have a choice?" Again, we see Botan as highly ignorant of forced marriage. His first question is not, "Did she have a choice?" but whether she agreed to the marriage. The idea that she did not have a choice does not enter his thoughts, which seems strange when forced marriage is so widespread in the region. However, Botan's ignorance serves both to highlight male privilege and to serve an audience unfamiliar with forced marriage.

Botan and Haji Hemmo are also starkly contrasted against each other. While each enjoys male privilege, Botan is a kind young man, who seems not to have considered the plight of women too deeply. He is an artist, clearly not very well-off financially, and he is a great romantic. He never speaks once about his honor. When he begs Viyan not to marry Haji Hemmo, he does not ask her to be with him, even though one can see he would like her to be. He actually cares about her. Haji Hemmo, by contrast, is an old man who is very wealthy. He has three wives and numerous children. He is deeply concerned with matters of honor. His wealth brings him a kind of respect in the town, although people talk about him behind his back. It seems unlikely he has done a single kind thing for anyone as an adult. He is cruel, manipulative, and selfish. He sees women as property and objects who can provide him with pleasure, not human beings with their own needs, agency, and dreams. He seems like an exaggerated caricature, but reading much about forced marriage shows that men like this exist. Botan is not the hero of the story. *One Candle, Two Candles* is primarily a film about women's agency, in which women are the

true heroes. But he is the love interest and the romantic hero, the one Viyan fantasizes about escaping with. He represents a kind man who is ignorant about forced marriage and provides a way to let an audience ignorant about forced marriage in on what is going on in the film. However, it seems unrealistic that Botan, as a Kurd raised in Kurdistan, would be so ignorant of forced marriage.

In the brief moments leading up to the sealing of the wedding contract between Viyan and Haji Hemmo, the women present a united front. Viyan's grandmother tells her father, "You will burn in hell for this." Her mother sits beside her in the roomful of men, clutching Viyan's hand. Neither of them has any say in the marriage agreement, nor is their presence addressed or acknowledged by any of the men. Viyan's two friends look on through the partially open door. Throughout the film, Rosebiani shows women united against forced marriage--an incredibly valuable social statement as women are often complicit in forced marriages. Kurdish films don't often receive a great deal of notice from Western critics, but *One Candle, Two Candles* was repeatedly criticized for its use of humor in a film dealing with violence against women. Yet subtle, moving scenes like this one and their cultural significance were ignored. Nor is this scene showing women supporting each other an isolated occurrence in the film; rather, it is one of the film's strengths.

Male characters in *One Candle, Two Candles* are largely underdeveloped, but Haji Hemmo and Beko, Viyan's father, but serve to show attitudes and behaviors of Kurdish men in situations of forced marriage. Haji Hemmo and Beko both treat women like property and are obsessed with their own honor. At one point in the film Haji

Hemmo states, “Women must be kept on a leash.” The happiness and bodily integrity of women are of no importance to them. When Botan is caught drawing Viyan again in a public café, he is dragged into an SUV by Haji Hemmo’s hired ruffians, taken out of town, and beaten. But it seems Viyan deserves punishment for the innocent encounter as well. In a scene outside Haji Hemmo’s house, we find him reading a newspaper and taking tea while Beko fidgets nearby. Beko protests, “My daughter had no bad intentions. Viyan is innocent.” Haji Hemmo replies, “I believe you. But what about my reputation?” Beko responds, “You’re right, Sir.” Haji Hemmo lectures him that, “Your daughter is your responsibility. Teach her a lesson.” And when Beko agrees, he notes that Beko is “still on foot” and suggests he choose a car from the showroom, as it “does not look good” for his future son-in-law not to have a car. However, based on what has just occurred, this gesture seems very little for the benefit of Haji Hemmo’s pride but more as an additional incentive to give Beko for Viyan. The conversation is a business arrangement and Viyan is treated as an object to be traded for a car. On the day of the wedding ceremony, the men celebrate in one room with music, food, and drinks while the women sit in another, with Viyan sobbing in her wedding dress. They have no music, food, or drinks. Beko is not present. He is on the lot choosing his vehicle.

Hiding nearby is Kitan, and when Beko is not looking, she leaps into the back of his new pick-up. While Viyan’s female relatives are angry, they are helpless, but Kitan, as an outcast, has power. She does not care who sees her in the back of the pick-up, beating on the roof, shouting at Beko. When Beko finally stops outside of town at the fisherman’s outdoor restaurant, he grabs a knife and threatens Kitan, but he is visibly

terrified, his hand shaking, even though she is weaponless. Finally, she grabs a fish and begins to squeeze its neck. Beko collapses. When the police arrive, we learn that Beko has had a stroke, but they are worried that Kitan has "squeezed his balls". No one wants to check, and so Kitan is arrested and incarcerated in the town's only jail cell, while Haji Hemmo's men are released, and the two old policemen laugh about what a good mood Haji Hemmo was in when he paid the fine "on account of his new wife." It is unclear whether Kitan possesses some magic and her squeezing the fish really caused the stroke. The scene is played for seriousness, and Kitan threatens to kill everyone like she killed the fish if they do not let her drive Beko to the hospital. What is critical about this sequence is that Kitan is the first person to take action to try to save Viyan. Botan has asked her not to marry Haji Hemmo, but he has not offered her any practical way out. Her mother has not pleaded on her behalf. All her grandmother has done is curse her father. Her cousin has suggested sticking a needle in Haji Hemmo's rear end. But no one has fought directly for Viyan except Kitan, the outcast woman who is not of her family. Not once in the film has Kitan even encountered Viyan in person, but she chooses to stand up to Viyan's father on her behalf.

There are a number of small humorous scenes that take place in *One Candle, Two Candles*, but one can only assume that the one that led American critics to so quickly dismiss the film for its alleged attempt to "make violence against women funny" (Hillis) is when Viyan climbs a tree to escape Haji Hemmo on their wedding night. Yet this scene is not exactly played for laughs. There is a little tittering from Haji Hemmo's children, but it seems mostly to be directed at Haji Hemmo, running past his swimming pool in his

pajamas, his shirt half-unbuttoned. The humor in this scene is mostly used to make Haji Hemmo look foolish. He abandons Viyan in the tree and tells his other wives to call her mother, although here is the first example of female betrayal, as the wives call the imam first. Again, the male character is made to look the fool for a few seconds, when Viyan asks him if "You were in my place and you knew Haji will be riding you, would you do it?" He is forced to give up and admit he would not. This line does come off as somewhat tone deaf for the scene, though it is intended at the imam's expense. Yet apart from a couple seconds of humor at the men's expense, the scene is dark and desperate. Viyan is terrified; even among the women she has no ally. But the result of Viyan's simple action of climbing the tree--two of the most powerful men in the city have been made to look like fools in front of a group of women and girls (all Haji Hemmo's children are daughters), and for a time Viyan is sent home to her mother. Nothing about the scene suggests that violence against women is funny.

While the overarching theme of *One Candle, Two Candles* is women's camaraderie, Rosebiani shows that he is aware that women are often complicit in honor crimes. When Viyan climbs the tree, Haji's young daughters clearly have no idea what is at stake, but his wives know and they do not care. One of them is worried about what the neighbors will think if they see Viyan in the tree. One would rather call the imam than Viyan's parents. None of them try to comfort Viyan or show any concern for her emotional or physical well-being. Worst of all, when her mother arrives, she acts as though Viyan is inconveniencing her. "Viyan, your father had a stroke today. Don't make it harder for us. Come down, I'll take you home." Her mother does offer to take her

home, and she tucks her into bed, kisses her goodnight, and says, “Sleep well, my Child. We’ll talk tomorrow.” The love is there but it is hard not to notice the “Don’t make it harder for us”, a sense of creeping annoyance as though her mother cannot be bothered with Viyan’s problems much longer. This is extremely mild behavior, when compared to the actual complicity of many women in forced marriages. Nevertheless, Rosebiani shows that Viyan, at a time when she feels most frightened and alone, has no one to turn to, not even other women. Even her own mother seems, for the moment, more concerned with the father, who has put Viyan in this miserable position rather than Viyan.

In the morning, however, Viyan has come down with a fever, and the mother’s thoughts on the subject have changed completely: “May God break your father’s neck” are the first words out of her mouth, as she spoons soup into Viyan’s mouth. She goes to Haji Hemmo to ask him to let Viyan stay home for a few more days due to the fever, yet the end result is the same and Viyan returns to his home. Indeed, things are worse because men have been sharing the tree story all over town, thanks to the Imam spreading it around, and Haji feels humiliated. Viyan’s mother has not stood up for her daughter enough to stop the marriage. Perhaps there is not much she can do if Viyan’s father is comatose (this part of the film is somewhat unclear). In spite of her stronger words and slight action, Viyan’s mother fails her. She does not fight back even though she objects to her daughter marrying Haji Hemmo. Viyan’s mother is a respectable woman, contrasted with Kitan who fought back against her abuser and was cast out by society. Haji’s wives are similar; they see Viyan’s marriage as something inevitable whether Viyan wants it or not. They believe she must submit just as they did.

However, as Haji's behavior towards Viyan becomes more brutal, Haji's wives become more sympathetic. To punish Viyan for humiliating him, he chokes her and orders his wives to leave her alone in his room while he goes on a business trip. They attend to the welts he has left on her neck. One wife stays in the bed beside her, while she cries and shakes, and another wife brings her a plate of fruit. But they have no plans other than that Haji will calm down during the time he is away. The scene that suggests change is slow to come in terms of how people think about forced marriage. Haji's wives clearly do not love him. They are resigned to their fate, and they expect Viyan to do the same. They cannot imagine getting a divorce and going to a women's shelter. Haji would probably try to have them killed. They may have no job skills. They probably have no family who would help them escape. So, from their perspective they are being kind and realistic.[5] The small gestures the women make are very tender and echo the way Viyan's mother treated her when she was ill (one, possibly two of Haji's wives look old enough to be Viyan's mother), but they will not defy Haji. When Viyan's cousins and Botan, whom they also identify as her cousin, come to visit, the wives lie and say Viyan is away with Haji on a honeymoon.

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[5] For further information on forced marriage in Iraq see the report from the Tahirih Justice Center. "Forced Marriage Overseas: Iraq." *Tahirih - Forced Marriage Initiative*, preventforcedmarriage.org/forced-marriage-overseas-iraq/.

Yet the reality of their circumstances means there is not much they can do, at least not if they want to remain "respectable" or even just alive. When one of the cousins asks why the wives allowed Haji to marry again, they explain that he wanted a son and they could not give him one. When she asks whether he has been examined by a doctor, one wife responds that he would probably kill them for suggesting it, while another agrees. They mean literally. It is only when Viyan refuses Haji's sexual advances again, beating him over the head with a basket of flowers and struggling against him until she makes it into the yard, does he declare her divorced and decides to burn her alive. This finally galvanizes the wives into action, and they beg him not to burn her. One of them even pushes him into the shed where he tried to burn Viyan, though she crawled away unnoticed while he was distracted by his wives. Haji, too, escapes, but with the back of his trousers badly burned.

Kitan, the so-called "ball-buster" is respected by no one. She is a complete outcast in the town and has no friends, men or women. Viyan's laughing cousins relate her story to Botan, telling him she was "given in marriage" to a man four times her age and that she killed him by squeezing his testicles, and, as a result, everyone is afraid of her. Viyan's cousin, Zozan, is very open about her views that women should have more rights and even mentions that she tried to convince Viyan's father not to marry her to Haji Hemmo around the same time she tells Botan the story about Kitan. But not once does she consider things from Kitan's perspective, think about what might have driven her to such desperation, or even stop to wonder whether the story is true and to think about all the reasons a conservative, patriarchal society might have to slander a woman.

What is frustrating about Kitan is that one never finds out from her lips what really happened. The audience only hears about her from people who hate her. While she is in her jail cell, Kitan gives a soliloquy to her jailer about how horrible men are. It is overblown and even seems to turn to homophobia at one point, suggesting that there would be something wrong with men who turned to homosexuality if there were no women in the world. Near the end of the suggestion is that Kitan earned her nickname, as she quietly enters Haji Hemmo's compound, and his screams can then be heard. She retaliated against a violent husband.

Yet while the film handles some women's issues in a positive and supportive fashion, it handles others poorly, particularly the depictions of disability and fatness. Because this chapter is focused on women's issues, it will not go into depth about how problematic the depiction of the two disabled characters in the film is since they are both male. Both of the disabled male characters sexually harass women in the film. Dino, who prefers to be called Sugar, is constantly sexually harassing women in the film. The film suggests that Dino suffers from PTSD due to witnessing the death of both his parents and he also appears to have some type of developmental disability although no specifics are provided. The other character is an unnamed dwarf (played by Mustefa Reuf) who likes to expose himself in public. He is not given a name, merely listed as "Flasher" in the credits, further reducing his humanity. The portrayal of these two disabled characters is concerning and warrants further critique as this film struggles with portrayals of non-normative characters.

The depiction of the fat female character, Asia, Haji Hemmo's adult daughter, is also problematic. The film suggests she is desperate to find love and thus completely taken with any man who shows her attention, even if that attention is sexual harassment. Her portrayal exemplifies concerns raised by feminist scholars of fat studies. For example, Plotz describes how female characters who do not fit the conventions of what society deems attractive tend to be portrayed as evil or used for 'humor' in film when they express overt sexual desire (90,91). When Asia is with a group of women and the dwarf exposes himself, all the others run away but Asia stays and looks. This scene is played for humor and suggests that because Asia is a non-normative female character due to her fatness, she, unlike the normative and 'acceptable' slim women, enjoys being sexually harassed. Plotz writes, "Her fatness marks the fat woman as a strongly desiring subject, in terms of both hunger and sexuality, while at the same time it makes her ineligible for being a *normative* desiring (sexual) subject" (92). *One Candles, Two Candles* depicts Asia as a woman who longs for a sexual relationship but her desire for sex and love is mocked because, due to her fatness, she is "ineligible" for these healthy and normal feelings.

Dino, the developmentally disabled character, has been telling everyone how badly he wants a wife throughout the film and making many women uncomfortable with how he asks for their attention. Dino is suggested as a wife for Asia, and Haji Hemmo seals the deal without even asking her. When Asia finds out, rather than being upset about the arranged marriage, she bursts through a door in traditional Kurdish formal wear, a floor-length dress, matching sequined vest, and fancy turban, as though she has

been waiting for this news. The message is that because she is fat, Asia will happily accept anyone for a husband because a fat woman is lucky to marry at all. While the arrangement of Viyan's marriage is depicted as a repugnant immoral act, the arrangement of Asia's marriage is acceptable, even though the potential groom has been shown to treat women poorly. While Asia's marriage is not forced, since she has agreed to it, the film suggests that since Asia is fat she does not deserve to choose a husband who is successful and treats women with respect. The most problematic issue in *One Candles, Two Candles* is not that it sometimes employs humor in a film that is about violence against women; rather, it is the way the film weaponizes humor against disabled people and fat people. Asia has very little character development beyond occasionally being kind to Viyan and standing up for her when Haji tries to set fire to his young bride. Her character is mostly played for laughs connected to her fatness and evident desperation for love and sex. Asia is not depicted as a woman with needs and feelings, but as an object suitable for mockery and derision due to her fatness, in stark contrast to Viyan, who, because she embodies conventional female attractiveness, is allowed to want a husband who is also conventionally attractive, age-appropriate, and respectful toward her. Plotz describes similar pairings in numerous American comedies where a fat, sexually aggressive woman is contrasted against a slim conventionally attractive woman whose behavior lacks the sexual overtness of the fat female character with whom she has been placed in opposition (98-101). This author has not observed other such pairings in Kurdish cinema, and it is possible the trope carried over from Hollywood to influence the depiction of fat women in *One Candle, Two Candles.*

Another disconcerting aspect of *One Candle, Two Candles* is that it ends with an elopement, or that is what Haji Hemmo is told. Botan and Viyan ride off into the mountains together on his motorcycle. From the opening scenes of the film the audience expects a romantic ending of some kind, but the idea that to escape forced marriage one must marry is troubling. The audience knows nothing about Viyan other than that she does not want to marry Haji Hemmo and she likes Botan. Time that could have been spent fleshing out her character was spent on minor characters that added little to the film's plot or themes. One even knows more about Botan's interests and education than hers; he enjoys drawing people and he went to art school. *One Candle, Two Candles* is a film that wants to educate its audience about the horrors of forced marriage, to make women the heroes, but also to show how they can be complicit in forced marriage, even if in some cases it is only because they too are trapped by the patriarchal system. The film is a mingled success and failure in this regard with moments where female characters shine for their agency and bravery and others where they fall flat for their lack of development (or underdevelopment.) Even Sinur, for all her lack of connections, has a depth that Viyan lacks. Being surrounded by other women does not lead to much character development, since the only thing we learn about the character through her conversations with them is that she does not want to get married.

Both *Memories on Stone* and *One Candle, Two Candles* draw attention to the issue of forced marriage in the Kurdistan region. The films highlight the degree to which young women's lives are controlled by male relatives. In the case of *Memories on Stone*, this includes not only marriage but career choices as well, since Sinur is unable to pursue

acting without the permission of her uncle. The directors clearly intended to create strong independent female characters in Sinur and Viyan, and they achieved a degree of success in this. Sinur only agrees to the marriage as a last resort, and she does so because she wants to take the part of Lorin in Hussein's film, a role of deep personal importance to her. Viyan defies Haji Hemmo and climbs a tree rather than submit to his sexual advances on their wedding night.

The limited options the two women have to escape their forced marriages can be viewed as a reflection of the grim reality women in forced marriages actually face. Viyan is nearly burned alive after her husband divorces her; in Islam, he can legally do so by saying "I divorce you" three times in front of witnesses. At the same time, it is frustrating that the only way Viyan and Sinur are able to escape their forced marriages is that their respective husband and husband-to-be become so "dishonored" by their behavior, that they decide to divorce them. Viyan almost dies in this process. Real women have died. In *One Candle, Two Candles,* Rosebiani has a much larger female cast than Korki does in *Memories on Stone*, and while some of these women come to Viyan's aid, none of their actions ultimately save Viyan from the marriage. Kitan most notably attacks Viyan's father and later Haji Hemmo, but nothing she does prevents Viyan from being married or from being assaulted. In the end, all she does is enact revenge. The audience is supposed to gain some satisfaction from this, and it is supposed to be funny, but Viyan has already suffered through the traumatic experience of being physically assaulted (one scene seems to indicate that Haji Hemmo also rapes her), and nearly burned alive. Whatever payback Haji Hemmo receives is not going to undo the trauma that Viyan may live with for the

rest of her life. The cast of female characters serves to show how little power women might have to stop a forced marriage, but for a film with a magical realist touch, it lacks imagination. Why can the women not be braver and cleverer? Why can they not save Viyan? Where is the daring rescue attempt? Ultimately her freedom hinges on Haji Hemmo's pride and him divorcing her in a fit of anger of his own sense of dishonor.

This is exactly what happens in *Memories on Stone*. Rather than find a clever way for Sinur (or even her mother) or perhaps some other female characters (of which there are none) to orchestrate a way for Sinur to get out of her marriage deal, she only escapes because Hiwa's uncle ends the engagement out of a sense of injured pride. It almost feels as if Korki could not think of a better way to get Sinur out of the situation. First, she was not allowed to be in the film as an unmarried woman because of family honor. Then her uncle becomes so frustrated with her that he ends the engagement with his son but allows her to finish the film. This is through no particular plan or ingenuity on the part of Sinur. As in *One Candle, Two Candles,* it seems she would have been trapped in the marriage if a male authority figure had not suddenly decided in a fit of pride that she should be divorced. This choice on the part of the directors undermines the strength of the female characters. There is nothing in either film that reflects on how precarious these women's fates are that they narrowly escaped forced marriages at a man's whim. Forced marriage is treated as more of a side issue in *Memories on Stone*, meant to underscore how deeply Sinur wants to act in the Anfal film. Thus, in the end it seems a quick solution was needed to get her out of the marriage, so she was not forced to live out her life in horror for a role in a film.

Yet it is troubling that both *Memories on Stone* and *One Candle, Two Candles* are so limited in the ingenuity and imagination they offer their female characters for escaping forced marriage, when in reality there are many women who do escape forced marriages and many organizations that help them, some founded by escapees themselves. There is a dilemma where on the one hand one wants to see male filmmakers care about issues that primarily affect women and strive to create female characters of strength, courage, and ingenuity; yet on the other hand, it feels as if these two films have fallen short of the mark, developing their female characters only so far and not pushing the boundaries of what they might have been.

Women in Film at The London Kurdish Film Festival 2020

Film festivals have an opportunity to create opportunities for the representation of women filmmakers and telling women's stories through film. The London Kurdish Film Festival 2020 featured a category entitled Women in Film. However, not all films in this category were directed by women nor necessarily directed by Kurds. Furthermore, films in other categories may also have been directed by women. The films shown in the Women in Film Category were divided over two days, with only one woman-directed film shown in the first group of films and only woman-directed films shown in the second set. Additionally, a few films directed by women were screened in other categories. There were also pre-recorded statements from some of these directors, live Q&As, as well as a panel discussion with two female directors, entitled Women in Film: Reimagining the Film Industry. The films in the Women in Film category included a rich variety of topics and a deep talent pool. There were a few strong films by male

filmmakers in this category, but mostly they paled in comparison to the women's films in the way they handled women's issues and female characters. This section highlights a few of the strongest of these films, provides some comparison and contrast between the way male and female-directed films portray some of the same issues, and provides a brief commentary on the most problematic of the films in the Women in Film category, particularly to the comments made by director Mostafa Shahrokhi in the interview he gave for the LKFF on 8.17.20, the same day his short film, *For Camera* was live-streamed.

For Camera includes the portrayal of physical spousal abuse of a wife by her husband, and in the interview the director, Mostafa Shahrokhi, who was filming his own family, said that his mother, "likes to be hit. She likes violence." He further stated: "It's my mother that makes him [his father] violent," and that his mother appears sadder on camera than she actually is, suggesting that she is "performing sadness" because she has an audience. However, he had no way of knowing "how sad" she actually was and whether she was suffering. Does it not make sense to express that suffering when she has a potential sympathetic audience, rather than alone? He was interviewed by a male interviewer, and it is hard to imagine he could have said these same things if he had been interviewed by a woman. The interview is troubling, especially since the film was accepted in a category meant to represent women. There is nothing about the film that particularly focuses on the women, only that they happen to outnumber the father, since there are three of them. The director stated that his film was better than the others in its category because it was intended for a Kurdish audience rather than outsiders and not

meant to draw pity for the Kurds, but his evident lack of respect for women and his Springer-esque documentary style belie his opinion. Watching *For Camera*, one believes that the Women in Film category ought to be closed to all but women directors for a few years.

Child Marriage, Virginity Testing, and Abortion

Three films in the Women in Film category, *Rojek le Rojan* (Zhino Hadi 2019), *Life Gone with the Wind* (Siavash Saed Panah 2019), and *Zhwan* (Kaveh Jahed 2019), deal with issues related, in a general sense, to women's sexuality and bodily autonomy. All come to these topics from different angles, yet they are closely tied to the issues of honor-based violence and forced marriage. Of these films, two were directed by men: *Life Gone with the Wind* and *Zhwan*. All three films focus on the perspective of female characters, and largely leave male characters out of the picture. In two of the films, male characters hardly speak at all. Unlike in *One Candle, Two Candles* and *Memories on Stone*, there are no hastily made male decisions to rescue the female characters. Their dilemmas are created by the patriarchal societies in which they live, but they are also complicated by the fact that other women help to uphold those patriarchal norms. Only in the film directed by a Kurdish woman director, *Rojek le Rojan* by Zhino Hadi, does one also see women working together against those norms rather than a lone woman trying to fight against them.

Hadi made an incredibly brave film, not only confronting rape and incest within Kurdistan but advocating for abortion, a highly controversial issue within Kurdistan, although Hadi pointed out in her interview that abortion access is a global issue (Hadi).

The film was funded by a British organization that wanted Hadi to make a film on the topic, but Hadi stated that she was very passionate about these issues herself (Hadi). However, because *Rojek le Rojan* was made for a particular organization she was asked to tone down some of the original language in her script, which she stated was originally much stronger (Hadi). Nevertheless, *Rojek le Rojan* does not shy away from confronting its topic.

The film opens ambiguously with the words "Once Upon a Time in Kurdistan" (this is the film's title, translated to English with the addition of Kurdistan) over the image of a teenage girl staring out of a window at a bleak, snow-covered landscape. That the film is shot in black and white adds to its bleakness. The tones are gray, rather than high contrast, so, instead of a beautiful snowy day that might emphasize the whiteness of the snow, everything feels washed out. An air of depression hangs over the girl and the landscape, reinforced with a somber piano score. The film's title suggests a fairy tale. At first, the words seem to be bitterly ironic. This is the story of a young woman whose life has gone terribly wrong. But by the end of the film, the viewer is presented with some aspects of modern fairy tales, in which women prevail as the heroes through their resourcefulness and strength of character.

Rojek le Rojan is the story of a young woman, Dunya, who has been raped by her uncle and is now pregnant: traumatic consequences she will live with for the rest of her life if she can avoid an honor-killing. The phrase also suggests, like a fairy tale, a kind of repeated story. In this case, multiple Kurdish women have suffered similarly to Dunya, and her story is not the story of one woman but of many women. The name, Dunya, while

it can be complex in its meanings, can be simply translated as “the world” and perhaps implies that this young woman represents a global issue, as Hadi stated about the issue of abortion access in her Q&A session (Hadi).

The next shot is of a man and a woman driving with the teenage girl through the snow-covered landscape. They come to a woman waiting on the side of the road, neatly dressed in a coat and jeans. The man asks the woman, “See if that is her?” She gets out and speaks to the woman, shows the woman some papers, and hands them over. The next shot is of a building behind an iron gate, guarded by a man with a dog. These early scenes are somewhat difficult to follow, with little dialogue and the images shot from Dunya’s perspective in the back of the vehicle. One might surmise that the couple are her parents, but they are dressed very differently than Dunya, who wears the more traditional clothing of a village girl, while the couple in the front seat are wearing modern urban clothing. Later in the film, one learns that Dunya is being transferred from one shelter to another; thus, the drivers of the vehicle are probably social workers. It soon becomes evident that the woman waiting for them is a social worker too, there to assist Dunya with entering a women’s shelter.

The next shot is of the interior of the women’s shelter. A woman eats, and as Dunya and the social worker enter, a baby cries. But it is not immediately clear what sort of place this is. However, the confusion and uncertainty about the audience’s place and what is going on serves as a reminder that Dunya must be feeling something very similar. The audience is in the dark in a different way than she is (at this point in the narrative one does not even know her name), but there is a sense that one is being shuffled about,

without getting all the information, a loss of control, that slightly mirrors in a small way, the huge loss of control Dunya must be feeling over her own body and her life. The social worker walks Dunya quickly through the shelter, but it is enough to see that it is a place for only women. There are a few young children. Dunya stares at a girl ~~of~~ about her own age, and the girl stares back.

The first time one hears Dunya's name is when the shelter manager addresses her: "Dunya, make yourself at home." She continues, "We are aware of your problems…don't worry no one can hurt you here. Why are we here then!? To protect you. About your pregnancy, we will take care of the baby until she is born." Here the shot shifts from the shelter manager to Dunya and her social worker, both of whom shift uncomfortably in their seats. And this is the first time one learns that Dunya is pregnant. The intake worker promises Dunya that they will "keep your secrets here at any costs," something that is highly important because if the secrets of these women get out, they could be killed. She is told that they can change her name and warn her not to tell her story to any of the other women (Hadi was asked about this in the Q&A and explained it was for privacy and for Dunya's safety, not to create a sense that there could not be camaraderie between women). Here the social worker interjects, "Excuse me Maryam Xan but we were told, from the shelter Dunya came from, that she wants to abort the baby." The shelter manager responds, "No, no, no, no no way!" That is murder! Killing that baby is a crime! We will not take responsibility for that!" The woman insists that the legal authorities have forbidden them to do such things, and as she is nearly three months pregnant, Dunya should "let her baby grow." The social worker says that Dunya's mother has given

permission. The shelter manager shouts at them that she is in charge and that she follows the law. She gets up and walks out of the office, letting the door slam behind her. Dunya begins to cry. The social worker says, “Dunya, look at me. I will have your back. I just want one thing from you. Stay this strong, everything will be fine.” She puts her arms around Dunya and holds her.

Four minutes into the film and what the audience has seen is a film directed by a woman, primarily featuring female characters with one minor male ally. The audience is given clear examples of women supporting women, in one case in a very limited capacity and in another, a woman who will support Dunya tirelessly in her efforts to seek an abortion. The audience also knows that Dunya’s unseen mother supports her too. Contrast this with the longer male-directed feature films, where the female characters seem to be helpless or non-existent in taking action to support each other, and there is no explanation offered for why they behave the way they do.

The social worker takes Dunya to her room to rest for the time being and we cut to a scene of headlights driving through the night in the rain.” We see two women in the car. “Who is following us?” the driver asks. The woman in the passenger seat gasps, “It is Dunya’s filthy uncle!” Slowly the whole truth of Dunya’s situation is revealed. The women park their car and turn out the lights. A dark SUV follows them into the lot. The silhouette of a man exits the vehicle and then gets back in, as if he does not know what to do. From their car the women call the social worker, Chia. They tell her they are being followed, and she tells them to stay where they are and that she is “trying to find another

place." She promises to get back to them. The tone is ominous. It's clear that Dunya's situation is dire, but she has allies.

Dunya and the social worker walk down a hallway and enter a room where a doctor is prepping for surgery, and women wearing gloves and masks are making up a bed. They are clearly preparing to perform the abortion. But even one of the women helping perform the procedure asks, "Why didn't you marry this girl to that bastard?" Calling him a "bastard" suggesting that she knows Dunya was raped, but she still thinks marrying a rapist is better than having an abortion, even though she is helping to perform it. Chia, the social worker replies, "Sara Xan, how do you marry a girl to her own uncle?" revealing further horror about Dunya's situation. "Damn you evil," the woman replies.

The narrative cuts to the next morning with Dunya asleep, an IV in her hand, and Chia asleep in a chair beside her. From outside someone calls Chia's name. "What have you done to that girl, Chia?" From inside Dunya's room, the audience hears Chia's defense, that she has done what was good for Dunya and what Dunya chose. There is indistinct shouting and they both go into the room. Dunya vomits onto the floor. "Come to my office now," Maryam Xan says. Dunya looks wretched and alone in the bed.

At the end of the film, the audience once again sees Dunya staring out the window at the snowy hills. But this time we hear a bird singing. A voice and the occasional violin accompany the same somber piano music. And Dunya almost seems to smile but not quite, her lips move a little but do not quite turn up. We know the situation has shifted. Things are better than they were, but we also know that Dunya will never be the same. A dark SUV with a male figure inside drives away from the women's shelter. It seems that

Dunya's uncle is giving up and will leave her alone. *Rojek le Rojan* is a powerful film that shows through the character of Chia how far Kurdish women can and will go to support each other. The women's shelters serve women in many different situations, but often they are for women who are at risk of honor-based violence or forced marriages. *Rojek le Rojan* also shows a range of women's support, with one woman completely unwilling to support the abortion and another believing a woman should marry her rapist if possible, providing a realistic depiction of Kurdish women's attitudes towards abortion, premarital sex/pregnancy, and marriage. However, unlike with *One Candle, Two Candles*, women are shown to be much more capable of taking matters into their own hands and finding solutions to their problems, particularly the resourceful and steadfast Chia. Additionally, Dunya is not a helpless victim. While she speaks little, she makes her own decisions. She chooses to have the abortion. She is, as Chia describes her, strong.

In her Q&A session Hadi stated that abortion is a "global issue that happens everywhere," but Shahrokhi dismissed her film with all the others as one that would make other nations feel sorry for the Kurds. Her film, from its opening words, is clearly set in Kurdistan and is about Kurdish women. The cast is almost entirely female. The only male cast member is the driver of the car. The uncle is never seen. The women are almost entirely supportive, other than the social worker who refuses to help Dunya obtain an abortion. Thus, while the film presents a problem, the need for abortions in Kurdistan, it also showcases Kurdish women's supportive relationships and strength. This is in sharp contrast to *For the Camera*, where the director clearly had an agenda to discredit his mother. He made no similar remarks about his father, criticizing his abuse, never

gaslighting him, never questioning that any emotion that his father expresses on screen is actually real. Hadi's film shows women's suffering and strength, and while the film is fiction based on real events, Shahrokhi reminds us that a documentary is not necessarily truthful.

The 2019 male directed, *Life is Gone with the Wind* (Siavash Saed Panah) is a short film about child marriage. The title in Kurdish is ابردوو, which translates as "The Past " and provides a somewhat different context to viewing the film with its English title, where the fact that the old woman featured in the opening scenes is the little girl featured in the intercutting scenes is less clear. In contrast to *Rojek le Rojan*, *Life Gone with the Wind* makes use of vivid color, which the film utilizes to great effect, often contrasting bright colors symbolizing childhood with less colorful objects symbolizing adulthood; for example, the repeated image of the pink girl's shoes sitting next to the black adult shoes. *Life Gone with the Wind* is a visually stunning film with little dialogue, yet it conveys its message with great strength. The film is female-centered and the male characters in the film only serve to uphold the female-centered story (they are all extras). Even the character of the groom never appears on screen--we only ever see his shoes--large black ones in stark contrast to the delicate pink girl's shoes of his bride. The film opens with a shot of those shoes, side by side on a small red carpet outside a door. The film cuts back and forth between an old woman making a kite and a young girl playing with a group of other children of about the same age who are making and flying kites. The children are dressed in brightly colored clothes, a mixture of boys and girls all laughing and playing together. As they run down the street with their kites, one girl is

grabbed off the street by an old woman who begins washing her. “Let me go!” the girl says. The woman does not relent, but instead begins applying makeup to the girl’s eyes. Once again, we are presented with two pairs of shoes, large black male shoes beside small pink girl’s shoes. We hear a male voice saying, presumably the voice of the imam performing the marriage saying, “This little girl must know that she cannot go anywhere without her husband’s permission.” The old woman is the young girl; finally, in her old age, she is a widow and has no husband to control her anymore. She is free to fly her kite after all these years, but her life, her childhood has been wasted in a forced marriage.

The film is a simple but eloquent statement that girls need to be just as free as boys to play and enjoy their youths. It reminds the audience of the complicity of women in forced/child marriages, in that it is the mother who prepares her daughter for the marriage, but it is the adult male who chooses to marry a young girl and the imam who chooses to marry them. The ominously large black shoes next to the pink child’s shoes are a blunt visual reminder of the wrongness of the union, especially when this repeated image is combined with the voiceover of the imam’s voice performing the marriage ceremony.

The short film Zhwan, is similar, showing how women can be complicit in perpetrating violence on other women. *Zhwan* is a film about the practice of virginity testing. It explores the tension between the bride-to-be, her fiancé, and even other women who believe she should go through with the test. Zhwan, the bride-to-be does not want her virginity tested, but she cannot find a single ally among her friends or family. She waits anxiously in her room refusing to come out until her fiancé returns, thinking he will

understand that she does not want to be tested, only to have him casually dismiss her feelings and tell her she should just go ahead and let his sister perform the test.

Window and Womanism

Rezzan Bayram's 2018 short film, *Window*, explores the connection between two Kurdish women prisoners. However, the fact of the women's imprisonment is kept hidden until the very end of the film. Bayran chooses to create empathy in her audience by fostering a sense of confusion and dislocation, obscuring the women's circumstances and the nature of their relationship. The visual construction of the narrative reflects the emotional state of its characters and the vital nature of the way the two women support each other.

Window opens with an abstract image of paint swirling in water that fades into a woman's face. The camera moves in for close-ups of her hands gripping her hair and of her bare toes. There is a sense of desperation in the way her hands grasp her hair. The first sounds are of water dripping from the ceiling into a bowl on the floor. For the viewer, there is a sense of disorientation; in the tightly focused shots, it is difficult to get a sense of where the action is taking place. The film's action is sparse and contained, creating a sense of claustrophobia. The woman gets out of bed and pads across the floor in her bare feet. Her face appears distressed. She hears a sound above her and looks up. The film cuts to a shot of the woman painting, mixing paint with a palette knife as a woman's voice describes the colors to her, "There is a blueness close to the navy blue. There is a slightly clearer blue towards the horizon line. A small cloud cluster stands in the middle of the navy-blue field. It is so white and soft that it looks like cotton that my

mother put in a quilt. It makes me feel light inside." When the voice stops describing the scene, everything fades to black.

The time frame shifts from day to night, adding to the film's sense of disorientation. In the darkness, we hear thunder and rain. The artist is in bed, but she cannot sleep. She stares at her unfinished painting in the darkness. There are drops of water on it, which, like the bowl of water catching drops in the previous scene, indicate a leak from the ceiling. While the leak suggests that the woman is living in substandard conditions, it also suggests another type of "leak", one that is not revealed until the close of the film, when the audience realizes it is observing two women–the painter in one room and another woman speaking to her from the room above.

The scene cuts to the woman waking up in bed the next morning; the sun is shining on her face. A man knocks at her door, but she does not reply to him nor answer the door. She washes her face. In the mirror, her paintings are reflected behind her, as though they are part of her to be included in her reflection. She goes to her easel, ties up her hair, and once again we hear the voice of a woman describing the scenery, "There is such a clear sky. There is no dust in the air. The smell of rain seems to pass through the window and come to my nose. If I were outside, I could smell the rain like this." The description has changed from before--it is no longer a direct description of what the woman is painting. "The sky is more blue than I talked about last week." Here it becomes very clear that one woman is talking to another and that the woman speaking and the woman painting cannot go outside. The second woman says, "It is not like a sky but a

sea. There is an unbearable desire inside me to go up on the roof and jump into this blueness."

Suddenly the film takes a much darker turn. The speaker expresses a compelling urge to commit suicide. The camera pans around the room of the artist. It is filled with paintings. One of the paintings depicts the silhouette of two women standing in the mountains. They might be Kurdish guerillas from the appearance of their gear. They stand together arm in arm. The camera zooms out and we see the artist through her window, a small high window, blocked by thick round bars. It is too high for her to see out of. The camera pans up to the room of another woman. She has a large window. She is the one who has been describing everything to the woman below her. And in an instant, everything becomes clear--these women are prisoners, and because they are Kurdish women, it is likely that they are political prisoners. The shot of the two women in the painting takes on new significance--they might be the two women in the cells.

One's impression upon first viewing this film is that the voice of the woman describing the scenery is a voiceover, the artist, alone describing her own ideas as she paints them. At first, the film seems to be about a woman in isolation, with nothing but her paintings and her imagination for comfort. But it is not. When the second woman is revealed, the viewer understands that *Window* is about two women supporting each other through circumstances so dire that one of them is contemplating suicide. It is also a tribute from director, Rezzan Bayram, to two women she knew.

Alice Walker defines a womanist as, "A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional

flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength" (xi) *Window* is a womanist film, not only in the sense that it is a film where the characters in the film are supporting women but the director is supporting women too. While there is not any laughter in *Window* this is a story of a great love between two women (evidently) non-sexual in nature. It is certainly a film that showcases the strength of women, as these two women get up day after day in prison to support each other, one woman with the gift of her artistic abilities, the other with the gift of a large window. While we do not see any of the laughter Walker talks about, we do see utter despair countered with hope: "women's flexibility" to adapt creatively in these brutal circumstances. And while there are many issues regarding patriarchy in Kurdish culture that are important to address, not every woman's film needs to address them to present issues that are important to Kurdish women, nor are women confined to making "women's films" by any means. Walker states that a womanist is "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (xi). Therefore, while *Window* focuses on female characters it looks at an issue that affects the Kurds as a group, the detention of political prisoners.

Bayram's inspiration for the story and the roots of her desire to become a filmmaker are womanist in nature as well. In her *Views on Filmmaking* statement, she explains that her desire to become a filmmaker was founded upon a love of her mother's stories about their village and a desire to keep those stories alive. Throughout the LKFF 2020 multiple directors, male and female, expressed the need to tell Kurdish stories through film. Telling the stories of one's people is part of ensuring their "survival and

wholeness" (Walker xi). It is an act of resistance against erasure, against assimilation, against genocide. Bayram also states in her *Views on Filmmaking* that the story for the film was inspired by two friends she lost in the Self Autonomy War, who were her colleagues in the Art and Culture Department, and that the film was made for them. Therefore, while *Window* is not a feminist film in the sense that it is in opposition to patriarchy. It is a deeply womanist film, both in the content of the fictional story of the two women prisoners whose relationship sustains each other, through the film's origins, and that it is not only a story of women's resistance but a story of Kurdish resistance.

Kurdish Women's Voices for Kurdish Women's Films

It should be obvious that women need to be making their own films to give their own perspective, to give voice to their own thoughts on issues pertaining to them, and just to be able to give voice and shape to their thoughts and artistic goals. However, it does not seem to be clear to men in the film industry that they need to step back and make space for women to do so instead of making the films on women's issues themselves. A number of female directors, including Zhino Hadi and Soleen Yusef, at LKFF 2020 expressed frustration that men were making films about topics that were deeply personal to women and that, as men, they could have no direct knowledge of. There was a sense of ambivalence, because, on the one hand directors described the Kurdish filmmaking community as being "like a family," but on the other hand women directors felt they faced disadvantages in the diaspora as women and immigrants, and in Kurdistan for being women in the leadership role of director. The issues they faced in Kurdistan seemed to vary, with some expressing that they faced more substantial barriers

than others. The barriers also seemed to be easier to overcome if the director had a connection to that particular city or region in Kurdistan ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film.").

Additionally, Shalmashi and Yusef expressed frustration with the film, *Girls of the Sun* ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film"). The film is about female Kurdish fighters, but was made by a non-Kurdish director, using a non-Kurdish cast, and was not shot in Kurdistan. The film received a great deal of attention at the Palme d'Or which is troubling due to the fact that films about Kurdish women created by Kurdish women have not received the same level of attention.

Conclusion

The London Kurdish Film Festival 2020 did not give any awards to films that featured female characters. The only award given to a film produced by a woman, Berfin Bingol, was for a documentary about a male Kurdish filmmaker. Notwithstanding Bingol's accomplishment, it was troubling that the only film to receive an award involving a woman filmmaker does not have directing credit due to being a documentary created from the footage of the (deceased) male filmmaker who is the film's subject of the film. The jurors seemed to favor films that utilized low-budget, guerilla filmmaking techniques rather than those that paid greater attention to detail and spent more time crafting their shots and developing their story, which are elements that describe essentially all the women's films.

Even more disturbing was that Shahrokhi's short film *For Camera* received a special honorary award. His words about his mother, that she, "Likes to be hit. She likes

violence" were not enough to raise questions about the place of his film in the Women in Film category nor suggested that it is wrong to reward a man who thinks women are asking to be beaten. Instead, he was given an award for his style and innovation. There were only four awards given, and with a preponderance of male directors and male-centered films, the odds were in favor that those would be the films to win the awards. Nevertheless, it raised questions about inherent bias in the jury, something that has been the subject of debate with regard to other film awards, such as the Oscars.

What Kurdish women need in order to make great films is financial backing and opportunity. They do not need men to tell their stories. It would behoove Kurdish men to listen to what Kurdish women have to say and to step back from telling Kurdish women's stories (particularly those about personal women's issues), or, if they wish to do so, to invite Kurdish women screenwriters and directors to work with them on their films, especially features like *One Candle Two Candles* and *Memories on Stone.*

Zhino Hadi and Soleen Yusef both made strong statements that men are dominating Kurdish cinema to the extent that they are making films about highly personal women's issues, which they stated in separate interviews. While it is important to have male allies, Hadi's point, that women need to be making films about women's issues and making films about whatever they want to make films about (just like men do), cannot be overstated. Indeed, two of the female directors at LKFF 2020 chose to make films about issues that were not exclusive to women and did not feature female characters. One film did not even feature Kurdish characters but featured Greek or Armenian exiles. The other film was the only one that featured a disabled character.

Nevertheless, Kurdish women still face substantial barriers when it comes to making their own films. Men may need to consider handing over some of their creative power and instead of making films about women's issues, co-directing those films with women. Instead of giving interviews about the state of women in Kurdish cinema (and not naming any female directors), they need to direct news outlets to women to interview. It was a privilege to hear from every Kurdish woman director who gave an interview or prerecorded statement at the London Kurdish Film Festival this year. Hopefully, in the future, more such interviews will become available online. Such interviews offer insight and inspiration to other Kurdish women and girls who dream of directing films, a career path that is difficult to navigate even in the U.S. Kurdish women are making insightful films with great artistic merit. This work needs to continue, to be shared through international and Kurdish film festivals, and to expand to include more Kurdish women. International Film Festivals need to become more aware of the issues faced by Kurdish women filmmakers and others in similar situations and to take action to include their films in their festivals.

It is vitally important that Kurdish women continue making films to tell their stories, whether the stories are women's stories or simply Kurdish stories. Additionally, more Kurdish women should be given the opportunity to be included in the main creative filmmaking teams. The number of short films made by Kurdish women is increasing, but access to Kurdish films is a serious issue in addition to the problem of access to the opportunity to make films. Films by male directors are often easier to access than films by women. While Kurdish films can be difficult to access in general, the most well-

known and easily accessible ones are those directed by men. Short films are primarily accessed through film festivals, and while a few of these films are available online, the process of finding them can be challenging, making female Kurdish film directors even less visible. However, Kurdish women filmmakers are active and are speaking about their work.

Conclusion

The case for Kurdish cinema is made by the filmmakers themselves, who claim Kurdish cinema as a category. Looking at Kurdish cinema as a whole brings to light common narrative themes related to Kurdish identity. This work has examined Kurdish cinema across national and transnational borders, remembering that while the Kurds share an identity, there are also great differences between the situations of Kurds in different national contexts and even within the same nation. The Kurds self-define not only as one people but also as a stateless nation (Rubin, M. 5). They choose to view their films as a collective whole when they create Kurdish film festivals, inviting Kurdish filmmakers from across the globe to submit their films. Both Çiçek and Koçer reflect on the global nature of Kurdish cinema, with Koçer making a case that Kurdish cinema is a form of national cinema even as it crosses national borders (Çiçek 5, Koçer 473). The Kurds are an "imagined community" even if they lack a state, and this sense of community is reflected across national and international borders in Kurdish cinema.

Chapter 1, In Search of Identity and Homeland, looks at the ways Kurdish films explore themes related to identity and the meaning of homeland. All of the films discussed in this chapter were directed by diasporic filmmakers and depict Kurdish characters returning to Kurdistan from the diaspora. The films this chapter focuses on are *Jiyan* (Rosebiani 2002), *Chaplin of the Mountains* (Rosebiani 2013), and *House Without Roof* (Yusef 2016). *Jiyan* and *House Without Roof* depict characters who left Iraqi Kurdistan as children and later returned as adults. *Chaplin of the Mountains* depicts a second-generation Kurdish-French woman visiting Kurdistan for the first time to learn

about her family's roots. All of these films portray characters of Kurdish origin who struggle with Kurdish language proficiency to some degree and narratively show a rupture between the diaspora Kurds and the Kurds who remained in Kurdistan. Many Kurdish films, especially those touring the international film festival circuit, are created by filmmakers living in the diaspora and receiving funding from countries with large Kurdish diaspora populations, such as Germany and the UK.

Chapter 2, Depictions of Trauma in Kurdish Cinema, explores depictions of trauma in Kurdish cinema, with an emphasis on generational trauma. The films examined in this chapter include *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi 2004), *Chaplin of the Mountains* (Rosebiani 2013), *Memories on Stone* (Korki 2014), and *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009). Particular attention is paid to literature from Trauma Studies, including works from Craps, Watters, and Caruth as well as works from Genocide Studies, particularly Hardi's *Gendered Experiences of Genocide*.

Chapter 3, Kurdish Cinema through an Indigenous Lens, considers Kurdish cinema through an Indigenous/trans-Indigenous lens, offering discussion about why an Indigenous Studies view toward Kurdish cinema offers insights beyond the framework of Postcolonial Studies. The Native American film *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998) and the Kurdish film *Half Moon* (Ghobadi 2006) are examined comparatively with emphasis on Gertz and Khleifi's concept of the "roadblock movie." Yilmaz Özdil's 2020 short film *The Heavy Burden*, which focuses on the devastating results of restrictive borders is also discussed along with the short films, Fekri Baroshi's *A Dream Before Dying* and Aram Hassan's *Yar.*

Chapter 4, Women and Kurdish Cinema, looks at Kurdish cinema both in terms of how women and women's issues are portrayed (with an eye toward critiquing portrayals by male filmmakers) as well as examining films directed by women and the differences in how they approach the same issues. The male-directed feature films include *Before Your Eyes* (Bezar 2009) which was co-written by a woman, *Memories on Stone* (Korki 2014), and *One Candle, Two Candles* (Rosebiani 2014). This chapter emphasizes the importance of short films when looking at women's cinema because more women have access to directing short films than features. The short films directed by women that are discussed in this chapter include Viyan Mayi's short films *The Kurdish Gir*l (2013) and *The White Dove* (2008), *Window* (Rezzan Bayram 2018), *Rojek le Rojan* (Zhino Hadi 2019), and *Shouted from the Rooftops* (Beri Shalmashi 2017). A few of these films are compared and contrasted with male-directed short films employing similar narrative themes, including *The Sprinkle* (Volkan Uludağ 2019), *Life Gone with the Wind* (Siavash Saed Panah 2019), and *Zhwan* (Kaveh Jahed 2019).

Continued research exploring the benefits/limitations of translations and subtitles would be beneficial. English-subtitled films are accessible to a wider audience but are often not able to communicate cultural subtexts, especially when an audience may not even be able to distinguish between when Kurdish and another non-European language are being spoken.

While this dissertation is aware that distribution poses challenges for Kurdish filmmakers in terms of reaching audiences, it was not a focus of this work. It would be worthwhile to explore more closely how distribution operates to bring Kurdish films to

certain audiences from certain filmmakers, what types of films might be receiving less distribution internationally, and the reasons for this. Distribution limits the availability of certain films and the way films find their audience. The author is aware that distribution issues make some films accessible to a wider audience than others and influence the selection of films for projects such as this one.

One of the issues not considered in this dissertation is the funding of Kurdish films. It would be useful for future research to examine sources for the funding of Kurdish films with an eye toward whether funding sources have any effect on content. Additionally, it would be interesting to look at demographic information relating to funding, such as whether more films directed by diaspora Kurds receive funding or more male than female directors.

More attention to Kurdish women's feminism and its relationship to Kurdish women's filmmaking would be beneficial. Kurdish women's filmmaking is a substantial body of work that merits further study with an in-depth look at Kurdish feminism. As Kurdish women direct more films, this category is becoming even richer.

This study was limited by examining Kurdish women's films that deal with Kurdish women's issues overtly, but it would be interesting to look at Kurdish women's films as a broader category since they are not always focused so closely on women's issues; moreover, it is important not to limit women filmmakers to telling only women's stories. For example, *House Without Roof* was directed by a female filmmaker, but it is not a film that is focused on women's issues in the way that films discussed in this chapter are. Additionally, it would be insightful to look closely at damaging depictions of

women and women's issues in male-directed films and how Kurdish women engage with these topics. The author is aware that some women are not comfortable going on record and giving their names when criticizing these films for fear of ostracizing themselves in the Kurdish film community. This is concerning, as it is important that Kurdish women are able to raise questions and offer criticism of how Kurdish women are depicted and included in Kurdish filmmaking without fear of retaliation.

Another area that warrants further research would be close examination of filmmakers' backgrounds and the types of films they produce. This would compare films produced by filmmakers in the global diaspora to that of filmmakers within the Kurdistan region as well as filmmakers living in non-Kurdish regions of countries that encompass the Kurds' ancestral homelands (such as Kurdish filmmakers who grew up in Western Turkey rather than Eastern Turkey.) Additionally, more attention could be paid to examining aspects of transnational (across the Kurdistan region and national borders) and global Kurdish cinemas. This would include looking at directors, funding, screenwriting, actors, and film crews as well as aspects of distribution.

One of the threads that runs through many of the films examined in this dissertation is the use of dark and absurdist humor in many of the films. This author is interested in further exploration of such humor in Kurdish cinema, particularly in films that explore dark topics, such as genocide and generational trauma.

It would also be useful to explore Kurdish filmmaking with a stronger emphasis on visual aspects since this dissertation largely focused on narrative. This author is interested in

exploring the relationship between narrative and visual elements in Kurdish cinema, such as the use of *mise en abyme* in *Memories on Stone*.

A closer examination of whether Kurdish films express nationalist or political agendas may be warranted as well, particularly with regard to films that may not be circulating widely in contexts like international film festivals. An in-depth consideration of the relationship between Kurdish cinema and Third Cinema may be useful as well.

Final Thoughts

While the Kurds remain stateless with many living in the diaspora, cinema draws them together. Soleen Yusef and Beri Shalmashi express that there is a growing interest in the study of film among Kurdish youth ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film"). Yusef describes the importance of working with local people when she goes to Kurdistan to make her films ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film"). Shalmashi comes from the Netherlands to teach screenwriting in Rojava ("Panel Discussion: Women in Film"). There is a driving passion when one listens to the directors speak about their work, a love of filmmaking and a love of Kurdistan, a need to express a unique cultural identity that cannot be expressed when other people make films about one's culture, as Yusef and Shalmashi stated in their panel discussion. It is vital for Kurdish cinema to come together and be recognized as a single cinema, and for Kurdish filmmakers to be given their due as artists so that they are the ones receiving the backing to make films about themselves, rather than other people making films about them.

Currently, many new and innovative Kurdish films are short films and the filmmakers often face extreme budget restrictions, so much so that they may struggle to

have the funds to enter film festivals. International film festival entry fees need to be paid for in U.S. dollars, and for Kurdish filmmakers in Iran this poses an additional hardship because the U.S. dollar is an illegal currency in Iran, so one has to go to extra lengths to exchange money for the entry fee (Naderi). Translation fees can be costly as well, creating another barrier to distributing Kurdish films to a wide audience (Naderi). Thus, excellent Kurdish films may go unseen internationally simply because the director cannot afford to enter them in many or even any festivals. As a result of these budgetary constraints, Kurdish directors are mainly limited to creating short films, and the question of whether a Kurdish director has made or will soon be making a feature is not a matter of the director's talent, but of how good the director is at securing funding. All the films included in the London Kurdish Film Festival 2020 demonstrate that there is a strong talent pool of Kurdish directors. And if one watches the credits, one sees that production crews are filled with Kurdish names. Kurdish cinema is a growing field, with filmmakers working across borders in the region of Kurdistan as well as from the diaspora, developing a transnational Kurdish cinema.

While relatively young, Kurdish cinema is a rapidly developing artistic medium that gives voice to marginalized Kurdish experiences with thought-provoking, nuanced storytelling. Through exploring the complexity of themes such as identity, oppression, and resistance within the scope of third cinema, Kurdish films provide a uniquely Kurdish perspective, one that has often been overlooked or purposefully ignored. More recent Kurdish films also fall within Hamid Naficy's category of accented cinema with diasporic filmmakers telling stories deeply rooted in cultural displacement and

transnational identities. As Kurdish cinema continues to develop, it offers new dimensions to not only Kurdish studies, but academic fields such as cinema studies, diaspora studies, trauma studies, and Indigenous. The social commentary, narrative themes, and stylistic qualities of Kurdish films merit further study. With stateless Kurds comprising one of the largest displaced groups in the world, the growth of Kurdish cinema is significant as a source of cultural expression in terms of cultural pride and sharing Kurdish stories with the world at large. Moreover, as Kurds continue to struggle for cultural rights and recognition, Kurdish cinema serves as a politically vital art form.

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