

# Preserving the Kurdish Identity in Meme Alan

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## Abstract:

The Kurds are well-known for their presentation of their unique identity. Part of that protection of their incomparable existence is their ability to produce masterpieces under adverse, appalling and dire circumstances. Outstanding among the numerous literary figures of the early years of the twentieth century is the Islamic literary figure Evdilrehim Rehmi Hekkarri. Hekkarri who is known to have written the first Kurdish play Meme Alan in 1919. The current study revolves around the Kurdish identity, and how female characters strive to preserve it in particular, and how they can sustain a family in the absence of men in the family, and to what extent they can create or give rise to tragedies despite their sacrifice to be the breadwinners of their families. The study gives an account on the history of the Kurdish drama, too. Furthermore, the researcher lays stress upon some other significant and pervading predicaments that Kurdish men encounter in their daily lives as they become compelled to leave their families in order to protect their homeland, Kurdistan.

**Key words:** *identity, language, patriotism, culture, Islam, and domestic tragedy.*

## 1.1 Introduction to Kurdish drama: a historical overview

The first period in the history of the Kurdish drama begins with the emergence of nationalist plays; the plays that the Kurds used to perform on specific occasions were related to the Kurdish culture and traditions. So, the art of performing plays is an old Kurdish tradition throughout centuries. The plays had not been written, they would only be performed on several occasions like in wedding ceremonies (Zedo and Akkuzu 2015).

Majid (cited in Zedo and Akkuzu 21) states that many of the games that the Kurds used to play were more like dramatic performances. Those games are called qereqoz, ciritbazi, meydan oyini, eresuk, zorxane, kose bebe, rimbazi and ubendbazi. Those games are considered to be the early Kurdish national or local plays. Some of those games are still being played nowadays. Furthermore, religious men had a fundamental role in developing Kurdish drama, after night prayers they would gathered together to perform different plays in the courtyard of the mosques especially in Tuesdays nights and Fridays. The pious men throughout performing plays would spread and show their social norms. Sometimes, the city people would participate in their dramatic acts, some of the plays that they acted were Teacher and

Student, Master and Worker, Father and Son, and Shepherd and Wolf. The actors would sometimes wear different clothes so that nobody could know who they were (Zedo and Akkuzu 2015).

Apart from mosques, tea houses and cafes were suitable locations for people to narrate stories, tell jokes, and entertain each other with riddles, too. These places had been like a theatre where people would visit from time to time especially in Erbil in the second decade of the twentieth century. One of the most famous of these public places is the teahouse of Seyid Xerib Berzinci's "Seyid Kharib" (Zedo and Akkuzu 2015).

The most famous play in Kurdistan-Iraq is probably Paha u Pashayeti, The King and the Kingdom as the critic Tahir Ahmed Hewrazi affirms, this play was performed in each city in southern Kurdistan. As was the custom, a brave person from the city would be chosen to be dressed like a king with a crown worn on his head and a walking stick in his hand; he would sit on a chair with a number of guards surrounding him, he would go on giving orders to his subjects and his orders would be obeyed. Those plays would be performed especially in Koye, a city in southern Kurdistan. The pasha would also order his servants to take money from civilians and sometimes push them to commit crimes. The performance would last for three days or a week, eventually he would change his clothes and take off his crown and run away so that no one would capture him to punish him for his cruelty (Zedo and Akkuzu 2015).

Moreover, Islam as a religion of the Kurds has a huge impact on Kurdish drama, because religious rituals appear in different literary texts, one of these rituals is Ashoura. These religious norms can be of great use for writers to create scenes in their plays; Ahmedi Khani makes use of the Islamic rite Ashoura<sup>(1)</sup> in his epic poem Mem u Zin. In the final tragic scene Mem is buried according to the way Ashore rituals was held.

However, it can be clearly seen that the regular Kurdish drama started in the first decade of the twentieth century, Mahmud Taymur had staged a play called Miri Dil in 1905. It was performed in the city of Hewler in the same year. The same play had been staged in Suleimani too, yet with no written script. The first surviving Kurdish play is Meme Alan, it was published in Jin Magazine in 1919 in Istanbul by Evdilrehim Rehmi Hekkari. The publication of his play marks the second period in the history of the Kurdish drama. The third period starts from 1957 in the development of the Kurdish drama (Zedo and Akkuzu 2015).

## 1.2 Evdilrehim Rehmi Hekkari: a biographical sketch

Evdilrehim Rehmi Hekarri was a Kurdish poet, religious scholar and a dramatist. He was born in 1890 in Elbake, Wan. His father's name was Seyid Muhemed Pertewy Hekari and mother was Emetullah, daughter of Haji Teyar Beg. His parents were well-known among the Kurdish people. He started his education in Wan where he becomes a teacher, later he studied in the school of Meseleki Maliki` in Ankara. He studied

religion in Kurdish schools, the influence of his brother Seyid Taha Ewraşi upon him is undeniable as he granted him the official certificate was later approved by the ministry of education in Turkey. He went to Istanbul to study in the Faculty of İlahiyet. Being in Istanbul enabled him to be a strong Kurdish socialist activist due to the fact that Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, was the most significant place for Kurdish intellectuals to gather and work together to revive and reinforce the Kurdish nationalism and language (Zivingi 2015).

In 1912 he became a prominent figure when he became the seventieth member of Komeleya Xwandekaren Kurd, Hevî. Some members of the community are: Akrem Jemil Pasha, kemal Fewzi, mehmed Selim, Ezîz Bahan, Şefîq Erwasi and many others, Muhemed Amin Bozaslan says that 'Evdirehim Rehmi was a very active member of the Hevî and Komeleya Pesketina Kurdistanê. Along with Dr. Abdullah Cewat, and Ezîz Babanand Ziya Gokalp he opened a Kurdish school in the shrine of Sultan Mehmed. Cemiyeta Pesketina Kurdistanê and issued Jin Magazine in Istanbul in 1919. Hekarri began publishing his political articles, literary works and religious writings in this magazine. Most of the writings of Hekarri were about Kurdish patriotism, his religious poems like 'Bang' was firstly published in the first volume of the Jin magazine, in it he calls Kurds to go to the mosque and to pray altogether as a united people (Zivingi 2015).

Worthy mentioning, Hekarri wrote poems in Turkish too such as Ararast Mevlut and Ramazan Geldi, those poems tend to include religious themes. Nevertheless, the prevailing themes permeating in his poems are Kurdish patriotism, this insatiable desire encouraged him to produce poems on the love of the Kurdish homeland, Gaziya Welat, Evîna Welat and Loria Welat are about the call for loving Kurdistan. Furthermore, Hekarri tries to make Kurds conscious of the oppression they undergo, in his poem Newroz he sheds light on the appalling circumstances Kurds were going through due to the bitter fact of being backward and badly-educated. Moreover, he emanates his narrative skills in his poems too, in his poem 'Mirovani' he tends to narrate a story in a poetic form (Zivingi 2015).

Though the influence of the classical writers on him is undeniable, he used the vernacular in all his Kurdish writings, the dialect he chooses is Kurmanji, his grammatical structure is fathomable even for common people, for him the Kurmanji dialect was the most standard Kurdish dialect, that is why he aimed to raise his voice in this particular Kurdish dialect (Tek 2018). As a historian, he wrote: Golden Page of History, Perek Zêrîn ji Tarîxê, this book is about the history of Kurdish people dating from the time of the prophet Noah up to the twentieth century. Hekarri affirms that Noah's ark landed on the Cudi mountain, a genuinely Kurdish name, furthermore, he confirms that He was originally a Kurd, subsequently; his descendant prophets were also of Kurdish origin (Geveri 2013).

For the first time in the history of the Kurdish drama he published Meme Alan. After the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923 many of the Kurdish intellectuals were subjected to be killed by the Kemalists, many others found shelter in some European countries. During the uprising of Şex Said Piran Hekarri was

imprisoned due to his involvement in political activities, after his release, he continued to support Kurdish education, as he ostensibly and fearlessly showed himself as real patriotic Kurd especially when he declared in one of his writings that “What should I conceal, I am like a child who was born in the West, since my childhood I would dream of having a University in Van” (cited in Ziving 2015). After publishing various writings in Jin, Hakkari worked as an employee in Istanbul, at the same time he founded Ehli Sunnet magazine in 1947. He became the writer of the magazine and chose the nickname Evdilrehim Zapsu (The Zap River in Turkey) for himself where he published numerous writings on Islamic faith, and science. In 1958, at the age of 65 he passed away in Istanbul. Before his death he wrote his will. His requested that his book which was made of two volumes to be published posthumously (Ziving 2015).

### 1.3. Meme Alan: Plot overview

The play is about a single character named Memo, he is called by the Mir of Hakkari to join the Kurdish army and fight against Christian infidels to save *Jerusalem*. Early in the play it is mentioned that Memo married the previous week, the decision of the Mir inculcates in him a sense of responsibility to join the Kurdish army to rescue *Jerusalem*. When his wife Khazal hears the news, she comes on the stage in tears, Memo consoles her and wipes away her tears, yet she begs him to let her go with him to fight but he insists that she should stay at home with her mother-in-law, Cavresh.

He bids goodbye to his family and joins the Kurdish fighters. After one year passes, Khazal appears on the stage to moan for her husband. Cavresh consolidates her that she had received good news that Memo would be returning from the battle. Consequently, she expresses her feeling of happiness for the news. Cavresh leaves the house on the purpose of doing some household tasks, after her disappearance, Memo knocks on the door, he is seen completely in disguise, he pretends to be a strange visitor, Khazal allows him to enter the house to relax, and she serves him food and drink, after that, he reveals his identity to her. Thus, she expresses her joy of having her husband back to the house, out of love they hug each other and fall into deep slumber.

When the mother comes home, she finds out that a strange man was sleeping with her daughter in law. So, she stabs him in the chest, when his Khazal wakes up she is horrified to see her husband stabbed to death, so shrills and tells her that she has stabbed her son to death. Thus; the play ends as the two sing in woe

“Herê Memo, Memê Ebasî, Ebasî!  
 Birîndaro Memo, dayê kor bit, nenasî. (Ziving 2015).  
 Oh, Memo, Mem Ebasi, Ebasi  
 Wounded Memo, may your mother go blind  
 Who could not recognize you!

## 1.4. The Kurdish Identity and the Role of Women in Preserving it

Women in Meme Alan take various important roles; one of the roles they take is preserving the Kurdish identity. In fact, the term 'identity' is derived from Latin 'idem' which means 'the same', However it is a vague word to be fathomed in the first hand, because it tends to be used for various reasons. There are different types of identities: such as national identity, cultural identity as well as gender identity (Buckingham 2008). The term identity is:

**...the concept of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is, together with an often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts—changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are embedded and in the societal structures and practices in which those networks are themselves imbedded (Howard 2000, p.367-368).**

Brien and Alamilla state that identifying one's identity is based on their social status, whether they are single, lesbians, religious, race, ethnicity and so on (cited in Howard 2000). Likewise Jim Fearon states that certain characteristics shape the identity of a person, for instance: one's knowledge, language, personal skills, beliefs, native land and religion are what makes a person to have a specific identity (cited in Wendt, 2014, p. 225).

The British historian McDowall (2004) relates Kurdish origins with some kind of mythical stories, for him the Kurds are mountains people who had long escaped from Zahhak, a gigantic figure who used to be a cannibal, he used to capture Kurds for eating, so Kurds avoided his oppression and fled to find shelter in the mountains. The other story he narrates about Kurdish roots is that Kurdish are the children of the slave girls of the Biblical figure King Solomon, those children would also run away from the dragon called Jasad and would end up residing on the mountains. Furthermore he affirms that Sara, the wife of the prophet Abraham, was originally a Kurd. Therefore for him the Kurdish identity as one entity originated from mountains. Moreover, he argues that numerous historians do not agree with his view on the origin of the Kurds, nevertheless, he proves that those mythical stories about the origin of the Kurds are of great benefit because those ideas would be useful for Kurdish people to identify themselves and to build a united nation altogether.

### 1.4.1. LanguageHall examines the

relationship between language and identity closely, for him both are intrinsically connected. Hall claims that the use of language is what constructs and identifies one's identity, the first solid evidence he shows is that the meaning we convey in our daily language tells a great deal of who we are and with whom we are connected, secondly, even our body language can indicate and mirror one's cultural identity to a great extent, so language is not an inanimate tool that humans use, rather it is what shapes the society we live in (Hall cited in Zou 2012). Similarly,

Bichicki, the Turkish sociologist had written numerous books on the history of the Kurdish people in Turkey, he also links the importance of language to the national identity, for him no nation would exist without having a language of its own, if a nation is denying its language, then it becomes very hard to determine their true existence (Lezgin 2017). Maalouf in his book *In the Name of identity* confirms that language consists of remarkable attributes of being both a part of identity and a means of socializing with others. Thus, any attempt of separating language from identity is something that is neither likeable nor possible; this is due to the fact that language is what constructs a cultural identity (1996).

Moreover, McDowall indicates that during the reign of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk many Kurds were forcefully assimilated into the oppressing and hegemonic Turkish culture, this doubtlessly fragmented the Kurdish identity (4). Bruinessen (1992) states that after Kurds and Turks fought together to free Turkey from the Armenians` and Greeks` attacks to occupy the country they had changed their policy to turn aggressive toward Kurds. Many Agahs and Shaiks had been executed and many others were sent to exile especial between the years 1925 to 1928. Everything associated to the Kurdish identity including names of the people; traditional Kurdish outfits were replaced by the Turkish names instead. Again Bruinessen refers to the Shaikh Said`s revolt of the mid 1920s, he points out that Turkish government issued a number of restricted laws to exterminate the Kurdish language and identity consequently numerous houses of the rich Kurdish landowners were taken from them, instead Turkish people started to settle down in their places. Throughout fear, the government forced Kurdish civilians to live in Western Turkey where they would unwillingly be integrated with the Turkish society. Sheikh Said, who was the representative of Kurdish elite, had been expelled. Consequently, Kurdish language in educational institutes and courts would be prohibited to be spoken. The term Kurdistan had been deleted from geographical and historical books so that Kurds could not be acquitted with their own homeland, this very restricted point evidently could have created a sense of distorted identity on the part of the Kurds because identity is related to the land where someone can cling himself to.

The government employees would be Turkish speaking people in Kurdish cities. Besides, Turkish soldiers destroyed and looted Kurdish villages and stole their animals. Nevertheless, the country was not yet freed of Kurds, and the Kurdish race was not yet to be annihilated. In 1968 the Turkish magazine ``Otuken`` published two ant-Kurdish articles expressing a racist attitude against the Kurds who must leave Turkey, this notion is voiced in the following speech:

**Let the Kurds go away from Turkey! But to where? To wherever they like!  
Let them go to Iran, to Pakistan, to India, to Barzani. Let them ask at [sic]  
the United Nations to find them a home in Africa. Let them go away before  
the Turkish nation gets angry. The Turkish race is very patient, but when we  
get angry we are like lions. Let the Kurds ask the Armenians about us !  
(Romano 2006, p. 110).**

It is obvious that the Turks demand that the Kurds have to leave their cities which had been superseded by the Turks, they seem to hold the most horrendous

attitude toward Kurds who pose no threat to them but to practice their own language in their own homeland, the figurative language used in the above quotation shows their brutality against the Kurdish race, for them lions are the most ferocious animals who can destroy the lives of other animals. Nonetheless, the Kurdish intellectuals resisted to stand against Turkish in a diplomatic manner, among the many Kurdish spokesman is the Kurdish political activist and dramatist Musa Anter (1920-1992) had set his face against the deformation and fragmentation of the Kurdish identity, when he was arrested and tried he demonstrated a patriotic attitude to keep his mother tongue alive in the court yard, this dramatic scene is ostensibly unfolded in the following dialogue between him and the judge:

**JURY: There is nothing called Kurd or Kurdish language, Kurdish is made up of twenty words, and the other words are derived from other languages.**

**APE MUSA: Do hens cluck only in fifty words as they speak to each other? It is a big shame to say such a thing to us (Cicek 2013, P. 1-2).**

Bichicki (2017) declares the harsh times Kurdish were going through especially in 1970s where their language had been compared to the language of the hens. The dim view of the Turks in regard with the Kurdish language is doubtlessly viewed in the above dialogue, as it was commonly known the famous cliché that Kurdish language is virtually poor and unspeakable due to the few numbers of the words found in it. The figurative language that Anter is repeating is that Kurdish language is compared to the sounds that hens make, and so to defend it, he brings reproach upon those Turkish who used to view Kurdish in such a derogative and degrading manner.

Cicek (2013) brings more examples on how the Turks imposed their language on the Kurds, Tarik Ziya Ekinci tells his own story in regard with the use of Kurdish language, he says that the it was forbidden to speak Kurdish even among the Kurds civilians, whoever had spoken it would have to pay a certain amount of money to the government, the police would roam around our neighborhood to detect who is speaking Kurdish, so for us the five liras was too much to be paid every time we spoke Kurdish, so as a child, he says his father gave a piece of advice to avoid speaking Kurdish, so he says that he had gone through tough times to have learned Turkish at school.

Bischicki (2017) further brings an example on how the Turks used to deny the Kurds in schools, in one of the schools a Kurdish student after growing up, reaching the age of forty recalls the drastic events he had experienced at the hands of his Turkish teacher whose aim was only to integrate them into the Turkish culture, he says that he did not know uttering even a single Turkish word, and whoever had spoken Kurdish would be tortured by the Turkish teacher, the teacher would bang their head on the wall and would hit their hands with a strong stick and their fingernails would be pulled out by the teacher. A new Turkish teacher who has recently been appointed to give lectures in a Kurdish village, she narrates her story that it was the first time that she would teach in a village inhabited by Kurdish

civilians, she declares that the school was poorly erected, the doors and the windows were already broken and the school administrative were lacking sufficient office equipment like books, pens, rulers, and other set of office kits. So she made a list of all the things that the school lacked, and took hold of the paper and headed her way toward the Turkish directorate office, the director read her paper attentively and then after listening to her carefully he replied "What we want from you to is to teach your students that they are Turks, and they are from Asia Minor, besides teach them Turkish language, prevent them from speaking their own language, let them know that we are Muslim brothers..." (Bichikci 2017).

Afterwards the teacher said that the director had given her the paper back, then she said he asked whether there was the Turkish flag hung on the walls of the schools or not. She could hardly believe her ears after her encounter with him, henceforth, she had left his office in a state of bewilderment. In retrospect, the mentioned event dates back to the 1970s, the aim of teaching Kurdish children Turkish was to deny the Kurds entirely, they used to despise and make Kurdish feel inferior, they held the belief that Kurds are mainly composed of some tribes, their poor language is not the written one as it would not make them get progressed to be modernized people, so they have to acquire a modern language in order to be modern people, and one of those modern languages is the Turkish, only with the use of the Turkish language they can be a part of a big civilization. So the Kurdish language even does not have thirty words to be good enough for communication, in fact they conclude that Kurdish is only an accent. Necdet Atalay, the mayor of Bataman hints to the historical events prior to the twenty first century how the Kurdish identity was once restored back to its natural shape:

**We were ashamed of our Kurdishness 30 years ago. How happy for these people [PKK militants], they have taught us how to live with pride. Now, no Kurd is ashamed of her Kurdishness. To the contrary, every Kurd is proud of her identity. This struggle entailed tremendous sacrifices. I hail these honorable individuals in your presence (cited in Tezcür 2009, p. 10).**

Nonetheless, Tezcür (2009) illustrates that speaking Kurdish and illustrating the Kurdishness would hardly be easy for the Kurds, those who would adhere to their Kurdish culture would face racial discrimination hailed by the Turks, they would be deemed as the others or the second-citizens, a living example of this racist treatment is reported from a barber who refers to some historical events of the second decade of the twentieth when his grandfather was acting as a representative of the Wan city in Erzerum Congress in 1919, in his speech he complains that:

**My great-grandfather used to address Atatürk as Field Marshal. Now look at our situation. They treat people who recently emigrated from Bulgaria better than us. They even treat Afghan refugees who were given housing in Diyarbakır better than us. Yet we will fight for this state if a war erupts, not the Afghans. We do not discriminate against anybody. We do not want to be discriminated against. We are the owners of this country (cited in Tezcür 2009, p. 8).**

As it becomes clear that in the twenty first century showing the Kurdish identity makes the Kurds undergo some psychological problems especially in Turkey, many Kurds would avoid speaking in their mother-tongue language in the company of the Turks, this situation might have made them feel uncomfortable and inferior especially in big cities where Kurds were forcefully integrated into the hegemonic Turkish state. Tezcür (2009) while interviewing an engineer who spoke of a co-worker "We have a brilliant engineer in our office. I know he is a Kurd but he walks to the balcony whenever he speaks to his parents in Kurdish. He does not want us to hear him speaking Kurdish". Moreover, Saatci adds that Turkish language has been forcefully imposed on every ethnic group in each cities in Turkey, the language has been taught in educational institutes as well as in military sections, this consequently resulted in deforming Kurdish identity (cited in Tezcür 2009).

Meme Alan, as metaphoric work, has been written by the playwright who has encountered racial oppression under the hegemonic Turkish racists. Thus, his play is deemed to stress upon the significance of the Kurdish to be widely spoken by its indigenous people all over the Kurdish cities, throughout the play it is event that Cavresh does her best to make Kurmanji be spoken and known to Kurdish every now and then, her son is heavily under her influence to join the Kurdish troops and to preserve the Kurdish language, to make the Kurdish be attached to their own culture and to recognize that their mother tongue language is not Turkish or Arabic, or Persian thus, from the early of the play Memo has established the same dogma, his mother does not show a shred of rejection as he wishes to pursue the same dream that his mother has "Am I not a Kurd? Am I not a Kurmanj? The honour of all Kurds belongs to me, of course... of course, I shall go no matter what may precipitate"(Hekkari 2015, p. 58).

In fact the play does not show any Turkish characters who would threaten Kurdish people of speaking their mother language, yet, they are verily aware of the sociopolitical situation that had compelled them to adhere and cling to their own language. They realize that it is only through the use of their language they can determine their Kurdish identity. Memo is doubtlessly under the influence of his mother who keeps encouraging him to pursue his dream, to them if they can subdue their enemies they can fearlessly and freely utilize their cultural norms. Memo emanates his identity by using the word 'Kurd', for him the name Kurd is of immense significance to be heard by other people. He seems to be the representative of all the Kurdish people as he considers himself as a gallant Kurdish fighter, for him it is an honor for him to fight in order to preserve the Kurdish identity. At the same time, he could hardly decide on his own, it is his mother who understands the importance of fighting for keeping their identity intact. His mother shows her strong attachment to the Kurdish language especially the Kurmanci dialect, to keep it undamaged, she proudly tells her him "You will depart... to uplift the name of Kurds and Kurmanci, thus, I permit you to go, May God be with you" ( Hekkari 2015, p. 59).

### 1.4.2. The value of patriotism

Nowadays the concept of patriotism can be defined in various ways depending on the way that a person views it. It is not a new term that has been introduced to people, the Roman poet Horace had long opined on it in his odes "To die for native land is sweet and fitting: death pursues the man who flees and does not spare the hamstrings, and the trembling back of youth avoiding battle"(cited in Kaimowitz 2008). Primoratz and Pavkovic interpret that the concept of patriotism has often been a source of inspiration for literary writers to produce works of literature. In the same token, the majority of the poets who concentrated on it are the pro-war poets who used to be known as a group of poets who encourage people to fight at wars, for them the killed soldiers will be honored after their death, the poets who advocated a strong sense of patriotism are Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon.

Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth century English poet, opines that "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel"( cited in Armitage 1997, p 397). On the contrary, for Horace the patriotic fighter must take pleasure in fighting against the enemies, it is down to him to keep fighting without retreating back from the battlefield. Besides, the modern historians further explicate the very idea of patriotism as a moral virtue and obligation (Primoratz and Pavkovic 2007). Thus whoever is fighting to protect his country has high moral values. Anderson points out that the country that patriots tend to be loyal to might not be the place that they have ever been to or lived in, the core idea of patriotism stems from the patriot's strong adherence to his country (cited in Igor 2007). Sparrow argues that the notion of patriotism may not always involve fighting, rather, a patriot while residing rather than in his homeland can also reveal as long-loving attachment to his country (cited in Primoratz and Pavkovic 2007).

In Meme Alan, patriotism is seen in this strong attachment to Kurdistan, a divided homeland, is ostensibly divulged from the very beginning of the play. Memo insists that he has to handle his personal task to fight alongside his Kurdish fighters, he entertains the belief that as long as he is a Kurd it is his duty to fight until he faces death, he shows his fervent desire to lay down his life for the holy errand that he has been given to: this is evidently apparent in his first appearance in the play:

**(Alone) yes... today the Mir has given an order. The enemies have occupied Serhad, the Kurdish city, God forbid! the enemies would be washed away. Whom I am inferior to? Am I not a Kurd? Am I not a Kurmanj? The honour of all Kurds belongs to me, of course... of course, I shall go no matter what may precipitate. Even if we are waded in blood, I shall make my leave even if Kahzal comes on my way, I shall not listen to her. I am Meme Alan, the Mir of Hakary has ordered, Sultan Salahading has pulled out his sword, and he has stood before the world...(Hekkari 2015, p. 58-59).**

Mem's monologue is quite intriguing for the audience because he seems too ferocious as he angrily addresses the audience, the audience wonder what would come out of his threatening speech, his long speech foreshadows drastic actions to happen later in the play. He seems to be too confident to defeat the enemies, as it

becomes apparent that he is going to fight for the Kurds, he feels that it is his responsibility to defend Kurds as if he is the protector of all the Kurds. Putting aside his emotions makes him be more determined to pursue his goal.

**MEMO:** Mother, give me your blessings, the enemy has rebelled against us, they have come to take Jerusalem from the Muslims. The (Kurdish) Emir ordered Jihad, people are preparing for it. If I am a Kurd from Alan, and my forefathers went in the way of Jihad, I should go for it also...

**CAVRASH:** My son, if I do not forgive you in the way of religion and the homeland, God would not pardon me. If you do not go today, the enemy will triumph tomorrow. I raised you up for such a day. to perform Jihad for your homeland and for your religion and exalt the name of the Kurds and Kurmanjis, I bless you. May God be with you (Hekkari 2015, p. 58)

Memo, as a Kurdish patriot, demonstrate a fervent desire to be defensive of his country, in fact, as it is seen in the above dialogue, Memo is incapable taking the decision to go fighting with Kurds fighter without being given the permission from his patriotic mother. As a fatherless son, he might have learned the value of patriotism from his mother. Nathanson, in his book *Patriotism, Morality and Peace*, lists the many characteristics of the patriots who do not cease to fight until they face death:

- a. Special affection for one's country.
- b. A sense of personal identification with the country.
- c. A special concern for the well-being of the country.
- d. Willingness to sacrifice to promote the country's good (1993, p.35).

Memo, who embodies the ideas of his mother, wants to show himself as a real Kurd, likewise his mother holds the same belief as she urges him to assert that he is a genuine Kurd who must revive the Kurdish language, Kurmanji. Patriotism is professed as a collective responsibility handled by the Kurdish patriots, first of all, Memo's mother Cavrash avoids seeming weepy as her son informs her that he is going to fight against the infidels, instead she encourages him to stand against the enemies as another Kurdish patriot, her duty is not only to be a mother, she is another fighter like her son. The third patriotic character in the play is Memo's friend Lawend, he pays them a visit so that they can get ready for the upcoming fighting:

**LAWNED:** Have you prepared yourself? Did your mother give you the permission?

**MEMO:** We were just speaking about it, my mother has given me the permission to fight for the holy cause, she is going to prepare my stuff, I am wondering when are we leaving?

**LAWEND:** A messenger has come from Bashgalan and has informed that the Mir has reached Colemerg, I suppose that we must be dead ready in Colemerg this week.

**MEMO:** So we must get ready today so that tomorrow morning we could leave.

**LAWEND:** Excuse me; I am also going to prepare myself. (He exits)

**MEMO:** Keep safe.(Hekkari 2015, p. 60-61).

Lawend's abrupt appearance at this crucial moment is of immense significance because he stands as backbone in the play to support and encourage Memo to erupt his unbridled patriotic desire for his country. Without him Memo might not be completely encouraged to accomplish his errand. Memo has to be rational in such appalling times, that is why the wailing of his wife fall into deaf ears as he keeps his composure and sings:

**..I shall go to confront the infidels**

**My Khazal, my beloved, stop crying**

**Memo has become a soldier today**

**Our love has been all pain**

**Take me with you as you go**

**Or kill me, then you must go**

**Memo replies:**

**You, stop shedding tears**

**Our foes are full of rancor**

**To not go is improper**

**My Khazal, my beloved, stop crying (Hekkari 2015, p. 62).**

It is apparent that Memo is not being emotional while seeing his wife in bitter tears, he has to take emotions for granted, if he occurs to be devoured by emotions in this critical time he will not be able to accomplish his mission. Furthermore, his state of rationality makes him not to shirk his duties as a loyal patriot. He makes it clear throughout the song that it is not the Kurds who are riddled with aggressive feelings toward others, while it is the enemies who are brimmed with those feelings of brutality, that is why he has to put an end to the feud between the Kurds and enemies. Cavrash is also not an emotional character like Khazal, she does not shed tears for her son who might be killed at the battlefield, her notion is that she has to stay strong at a time when her country is at stake. In the second scene Khaazal drop tears for her husband who has not returned back from the battlefield, luckily

Cavresh consoles her and tells her that Memo is soon to be at home. She is full of vigor and passion for the victory that Kurds have achieved:

**KHAZAL:** Oh, God! a year has passed, yet nothing is heard from Meme, if once again I could see Mem, I shall welcome the angel of death to come and take my soul from my body! (Rises) Woe, me, woe me, what is this ignoble life! Are humans born to go through pain!

**ÇAVRASH** (Comes out from the room) Khazal, for God's sake, what ills have befallen upon you? Are you weeping again? Cease crying for my boy, stop crying! Here I have good news for you, today someone has come from Ordûgahê, our soldiers have attacked the enemies, thus, they have relinquished, Meme is safe and sound, he will come back home soon (Hekkari 2015, p. 63).

This is an impending scene where the audience is still in dark, that is to say that they are still waiting for an action to be performed near the end of the play. This is because the audience have not yet watched a single conflict from the starting point of the play, this scene is enabling the audience to critically think what may happen when Memo arrives, at the same time they release time Khazal releases the heavy burden and sorrow she had endured for her husband, similarly as a tragedy, the audience might have felt the pain that Khazal bore. Thus, both of them can purge their feelings of pain and frustration.

#### 1.4.3. The Cultural Values

Hall (1997) affirms that the term culture seems to be too ambiguous to be defined adequately, because there are numerous definitions of it. However, according to him culture is the embodiment of the various ideas, philosophy, music, art, painting, entertaining activities, design, and publishing books that are created by a society. These cultural activities and creation of art in general is what shapes a society to determine it is cultural identity. Hall adds that "Culture is a way of life"(1997). For Hall (1997) people who belong to a specific culture tend to hold almost similar views about the world around them, due to the circle or the enclosed society they dwell in. They can easily communicate with each other and understanding cultural values and traditions would never be a problem for them. Thus he comments that "...culture is about feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas". Culture can show a great deal about how someone is or how they feel even if they do not communicate verbally with others, that is to say the stagnant and static statue of the culture can demonstrate and delineate numerous interpretations of a person, for instance the expressions on someone's face can show his identity as well as his state of mind, whether he or she is angry, comfortable and so on, this facial expression can be understood by others and at the same time it could be interpreted to which group in the society that person belongs to. In Meme Alan the only woman who shows embodies a great deal of the Kurdish traditions is Khazal, her attitude toward her the

guest is striking, because she seemed to treat him in the most generous way when he asks for the permission to enter the house and to have some rest:

**KHAZAL:** Who is it?

**GUEST:** A Guest (Covers his mouth with his scarf and enters)

**KHAZAL:** Do come in... (Offers him a glass of dooh, and places her hand on her chest) help yourself please.

**GUEST:** (He grabs the glass and drinks the dooh) Thank you very much (KHAZAL goes to prepare food)

**GUEST:** Please do not be bothered, now I am exhausted, I can not eat anything.

**KHAZAL:** Guests are sent by God, thus, we do have to obey their orders (Hekkari 2015, p.64-65-66).

Bruinessen (1992) comments Kurdish are known to be generous to guests and travellers, especially the aghas (The leaders of the tribes) would offer a single room for the guest and would tell him "Make yourself at home".

Various types of food and fruits would be served to him, if he would want to stay fortnight, the family members would not set their faces against his presence in the house, sometimes the guest would be given a separate lodge where he can feel rested. In the similar manner, Khazal is treating the guest generously as she welcomes him with due respect without trying to be impolite or paving the way for him to approach her as she behaves modestly and politely. When the guest pretends to be infatuated by her at first sight, she loses her temper and raises her voices as reaction against his unethical attitude:

**GUEST:** Are you the daughter or the daughter in-law in this house?

**KHAZAL:** If you were not the guest, I would answer your question in a more abhorrent manner, you know your value as a guest, to respect the guests is our duty, and the Kurds had never raised their voices at their guests in their houses, mind you, Kurmajis had often times laid down their souls for their guests. Even if the Kurd's enemies are their guests, again, they welcome them, respect them and serve them (Hekkari 2015, p. 66-67).

Minorisky the Russian Historian argues that in the Kurdish culture it is the custom of the Kurdish to show reverence toward women, because for them women take a fundamental role in life, they can be present in wedding parties, taking care of the household chores, receiving and welcoming guests, they can also be work in the fields and can also been seen participated in each and every social events (cited in Isik 2015, p 107). Moreover, women tend to revive Kurdish folklore in Meme Alan, as the two women are singers, they sing at times of suffering, Khazal is the first women who shows her talent of singing when she hears that her husband is going to fight against the enemies, thus she in a melodic voice expresses her deep-rooted love for her husband:

**Memo has become a soldier today  
Our love has been all pain  
Take me with you as you go  
Or kill me, then you must go (Hekkari 2015, p.62).**

Christie asserts that the Kurds are people with artistic skills as they produce a wide range of oral literature like songs and poems, the bards compete with each other by satirizing their fellow poets in their poems, at times they would also engage in singing and merry making especially in villages. They would tell jokes and crack riddles to entertain themselves, this type of entertainment actually helped the Kurdish be more acquitted and familiarized with their own culture and had also made them to be more aware of their national identity (cited in Kreyenroed and Marzolph 2010). It seems intriguing that women are preserving the Kurdish culture by singing songs; it is evident that Memo is not preventing her from singing as they both sing, so his attitude toward women is positive to be singers. Likewise Memo's mother is also a singer who emanates her skills by the end of the play.

Lamenting the death of a beloved person is a common type of song pervading in the modern Kurdish literature, Jan Dost for instance has used this type of song in the beginning of his novel *Mirname* (The Prince's Letter (2007) when Khan's sister expresses her immense feeling of sorrow and loss on the death of her brother. The lamenting poetry is typically sung by women and it is considered to be a duty of women to sing after their beloved one's death, these lamenting poems are not like sad lyrical poems that men sing at some certain occasions. These laments seem to be short, poignant and expressive and of various images, those songs are sometimes convey two ironical feelings, from a sense of euphemism to an abject sense of sadness: "Make my exile clean and tidy Put the bridegroom's clothes on him Let the dust and heavy earth rejoice"(Allison, cited in Kreyenroed and Marzolph 2010). When a person laments the death of a dear person, the mourning and wailing is also meant to exalt God (Chyte 2013). However the killing of Memo creates a cultural song that has spread across most of the cities in northern and southern Kurdistan, the type of tragedy that Memo's mother brings forth is domestic.

Whipday (2014) affirms that the subject of the domestic tragedy is of great magnitude as it is considered to be a highly serious subject, the audience who are watching such domestic violence would think that they could encounter similar drastic events in their daily lives. Unlike Seneca plays the tragic scene is witnessed by the audience, this might be a very sad and plaintive for the spectators to see a mother stabbing her son to death unexpectedly, the play's core issue is the killing scene because throughout the entire play the audience are left in utter darkness without knowing how the play will end, thus they do not expect such a shocking event to be precipitated on stage. Hekkari has placed immense significance on the very last scene because it is the only scene dramatic scene that would complete the meaning of tragedy. Even the tragedy he creates is quite modern one because while replying on

Aristotle's concept of tragedy the hero who commits a mistake goes through endless suffering and rue, while Cavresh is not a queen to have made such a horrible crime, she is rather a normal Kurdish woman who safeguards her family, accidentally she brings the tragedy into her family only for being too blind and impetuous. Her action is unrealistically swift and unreasonable, rushing toward her son without being able to control her behavior, her anger is being uncontrolled, thus she fails to ameliorate her overwhelming sense of ire to have ceased befalling such a domestic violence. Both women like the chorus end the play with their cries: "Here Memo, Mem Abasi Abasi, wounded, Memo, blinded be the mother, who did not recognize you" (Hekkari 2015).

#### 1.4.4. Islamic Identity

Throughout the play all the characters show a strong adherence to Islam, each one of them uses the Muslim terminology in correct Arabic, which is the best indication of how faithful they are. Throughout their conversation one can figure out that those characters consider Islam as the bases of their lives. Babanzâde İsmail hakkı states that Kurdish identity was 'before everything Islamic'(cited in Bajalan). Cavresh appears to be a strong religious believer because the majority of her speeches tend to be religious. When she speaks to her son early in the play her religious views come turn out to have a huge impact on the impending action of the play:

**Cavresh: My son, for God's sake, what have you heard that made you so uncomfortable? Why are your eyes brimmed with ire?**

**MEMO: Mother, do forgive me, the enemies have loomed large, they have come to take over the Jeaurselem of Islam...**

**CAVRASH: My son, I allow you to go on your errand for the sake of your religion...if I don't not permit you, then God will also not pardon me... May God be your guardian (Hekkari 2015, p. 59).**

Cavresh took Islam as the most fundamental basis of life, as she believes that God is the one who controls all the events, she, while heavily relying on religion, allows her son to pursue his desire, the desire to fight against the enemies. Furthermore, it becomes surprisingly intriguing that those Kurdish characters do not use the very basic daily expressions as they communicate with each other, the main reason behind that is that they believe that the Islamic expressions are more benevolent than the Kurdish ones, so instead of saying 'Spede Bas' which means 'Good morning' they prefer saying 'Salam u alaikum' this is heard throughout the character of Lawend, all the other characters reply similarly:

**LAWEND: Esselamu aleykum**

**CAVRESH: Elaykumeselam, do come in please....**

**LAWEND: May God be forgiving to you... ( Hekkari 2015, p. 60).**

In fact, Macdowall declares that Yezidim used to be the first and the foremost indigenous religion the Kurds embraced, later on they had been converted to Judiasim and Christianity, that is to say that their last religion was Islam (cited Brenman 2007). In his article The Kurds and Islam Bruinessen (1999) clarifies that the Kurdish society as a whole is deeply under the influence of Islam, this religion played a fundamental role in forming a united Kurdish identity. This is owing to the establishment of religious schools that enabled Kurdish to communicate with each other for the purpose of gaining sufficient knowledge about Islam. With those religious schools numerous writers appeared to show the Kurdish national identity.

In retrospect, Cavresh as a pious mother finds a believable excuse to commit the most hideous crime in the eyes of secularism while blindly mistaking the identity of her son for a stranger, she believes that it is the law of God to clean the honour of the family, she is seen devoured with an intense feeling of aggression and abhorrence while coincidentally seeing a stranger in the house, this instantly she pour her inner sense of killing in the following monologue:

**Good God! How could this be? how is it possible to see my son's honour being satined in the hands of the enemies. Who is that scoundrel? No, no, no ,no,( She goes back looking at him). I should put an end to this or kill him, no Kurd would ever be so impassive to see his honour being taken away, yes that is my honour...(Hekkari 2015, p.66)**

Afterwards, he takes hold of a spear and utter her religious cliché to convince herself that she is not committing a murder but cleaning the name of the family “Yes, yes, killing... there is no other choice... even God will not ask why, because it is all due to honour”(Hekkari 2015). On the one hand, her act of killing is a solid proof that God is more important than all, on the other hand, faith is also more significant to the Kurdish women than ethnicity.

Bayezid (2012) stresses upon this cultural problem, he sees that it was the nature of Kurdish men to immediately kill their wives, sisters, and daughters when they are found sharing their bed with strangers, often times they would poison them, or chock them when they in their sleep. It is seen that the Kurds have strong tendency to keep their reputation intact as they wipe away the satin on their family honor whenever they find a family member bringing reproach into the family. In reverse, the murder here is a women not a man, thus, Cavresh takes the role of a man to kill her son by accident. Bayezid further explicates that Kurdish women are capable of fighting, whenever their houses had been under attack, they would fight alongside their men savagely, they would also fall victims at times. Likewise, Cavresh is deemed as a typical Kurdish female

fighter who is capable of grabbing the spear and kill. In the majority of the Kurdish and world literary works, the conflict is often between the father and the son, or it is between the daughter and the mother. While taking a look at the Greek plays, and considering the famous play of King Oedipus, Oedipus mistakenly kills his father

and marries his mother, so after realizing his mistake, he becomes blind and the rest of the family members die out due to the sin that he committed.

Similarly in the *Mullato*, by Hugues, Robert, the black boy is rejected by his cruel white father called Norwood. The father and the son was in conflict with each other throughout the entire play, each one of them were trying to kill the other one. His father who had raped his mother and never intended to marry her, consequently he kills his father and then puts an end to his life. Usually the perpetrator of the crime is a man in the majority of the plays, like Creon in Sophocle's *Antigone* murders his niece Antigone because she has stood against his decision not to bury the corpse of her dead brother, as she disobeys him and buries the corpse, the king kills her. After realizing his big mistake he comes to go through deep suffering and pain.

In a similar manner, *Cavresh* is the main character who causes sheer tragedy, her pain is as deep as if not deeper than the pain of the tragic heroes. She shows her excruciating pain and endless rue in the elegy she and Khazal sing in lament over the corpse of her killed son "Here Memo, Mem Abasi Abasi, wounded, Memo, blinded be the mother, who did not recognize you". The tragedy she brings about heavily affects her daughter-in-law at the same time, their feelings of sadness are made into a plaintive song, the stage remains empty as the two all alone cry and shout without finding anybody around themselves to console them or alleviate their pain.

## Conclusion:

Throughout the play the Kurds strived to determine their identity despite the hardships they experienced. The act of preserving the Kurdish identity became the responsibility of women to bear in particular, at the same time they tend to cause tragedy and their lives end up in utter sadness. The current research has revolved around how the Kurds who embody the characters of *Cavresh*, *Khazal*, *Memo* and *Lawend* have maintained the Kurdish identity by having a strong sense of patriotism as each one of them encourages one another to fight for the sake of their homeland, Kurdistan. *Memo* is the most crucial patriotic character who emanates his love for his homeland early in the play, likewise, his mother demonstrate a similar attitude toward the love of her homeland as she pushes her son to fight against the enemies. Alongside *Memo*, *Lawend*, another patriot, joins him to achieve their errand. Those characters are strongly attached to their identity as they avoid speaking the language of their oppressors, the Turks, at the same time, both male and female characters succeeded to emanate some of the most important Kurdish cultural traditions like sinning, the first song is song by both *Memo* and *Khazal* at a time when *Memo* is preparing himself to leave his family and fight for Kurdistan. The domestic tragedy had also showed a great deal of the Kurdish culture as both *Cavresh* and *Khazal* lament the death of *Memo* by singing. The other component of the Kurdish identity, Islam, is demonstrated throughout the four characters, especially *Cavresh*, and *Khazal* as they use various phrases that reflect their strong belief in Islam. Both believe that God preplanned the events in their lives, and God ordered them to clear their honour by

killing the unfaithful partners, as the mother of Memo, while adhering to these views accidentally murders her son.

Moreover, the study showed that Kurdish women can sustain a family in the absence of men, they could take care of the household chore and act like fierce men in trying times, on the one hand, they refuse to be dependent on men when they see that men have to leave the family in order to cleanse the country of the enemies, on the other hand, they act in a rash, reckless and impulsively irrational ways at specific and critical moments without being able to be calmed when it comes to the act of infidelity, they can not tolerate and accept any disloyal behavior, the women must remain loyal when the husband is away, once they are found committing adultery they would be killed at once. Besides, as the tragedy befalls, the mournful culture and the funeral come to be seen, singing sad songs on the dead is what makes the Kurdish folklore to be detectable on the stage, despite the feeling of regret and sorrow being felt by the heroine.

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- (1) Ashura, the Islamic ritual, precipitates on the tenth day of Muharram when Shia Muslims mourn the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandchild of the prophet Muhammad that took place in 61 AH/ 680 AD.

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## پاراستنا ناسناما کوردی د شانۆگه‌ریا مه‌می ئالان دا

### پوخته:

کور ب پاراستنا ناسناما خوه باش ده‌یین نیاسین. هه‌ولین وان بو پاراستنا ناسناما وان نه‌وه، دهما کو به‌ره‌مه‌یین نه‌ده‌بی د کاودانین سه‌خت و دژوار دا دنقیسن. عه‌بدولره‌حیم رمحمی هه‌کاری ئیک ژ نفیسکارین مه‌زنن چهرخی بیستی یی کوردی ده‌یت هژمارتن، هه‌روه‌سان ده‌یت ناسکرن وه‌کو یه‌که‌م شانۆنقیسی کورد، شانۆیا وی ژ ب ناھن (مه‌می ئالان) ل سالا ۱۹۱۹نقیساندی.

ئه‌ف قه‌کۆلین، ل سهر ناسناما کوردی یه، کو چه‌وان ژن و می‌ر به‌ره‌نگاریی دکن ژ بو پاراستنا ناسناما کوردی، و چه‌وان بی زه‌لام دشین خیزانا خوه بریقه‌ ببن، و دیسا ب چ ناوای دشین ببن نه‌گه‌ری چیکرنا روویدانین تراجیدی. ئه‌ف قه‌کۆلین به‌حس دیرۆکا نووی یا کوردی دکت. دیسا جه‌ختی ل سهر وان ئاسته‌نگان دکت ئه‌وین کو دکه‌فن د ریکا زه‌لامان دا، دهما کو ب نه‌چاری خیزانین خوه ده‌یلن و داکو بچنه جه‌نگی و به‌رگریی ژ وه‌لاتی خوه بکن.

په‌یفین سهره‌کی: ناسنامه، زمان، که‌لتور، ئه‌فینا وه‌لاتی، ئیسلام، و تراجیدیا خیزانی

## (الحفاظ على الهوية الكردية في مسرحية مي الان)

### الملخص:

الکُرد معروفون بالحفاظ على هويتهم الفريدة، فقد دافعوا عنها بطرق شتى، منها الحماية على وجودها، عن طريق الإنتاج الأدبي وربطها بالحدث التاريخي، وهي القدرة على إنتاج روائع معارضة في ظروف مروعة وسيئة. ومن ذلك ظهور عديد من الشخصيات الأدبية في السنوات الأولى من القرن العشرين، منها الشخصية الأدبية الإسلامية عبدالرحيم رحمي هكاري، الهكاري، صاحب أول مسرحية كردية مكتوبة في عام ۱۹۱۹. تدور الدراسة الحالية حول الهوية الكردية، ودور المرأة الكردية وسعيها؛ لأجل الحفاظ على هويتها، وكيف يمكنهم إعالة الأسرة في غياب الرجال، ومدى يمكنهم أن يخلقوا التراجيديا على الرغم من تضحياتهم؛ ليكونوا معيل أسرهم في الحياة. كما أن الدراسة تعطي نظرة لتاريخ الدراما الكردية أيضا فضلا عن ذلك أن الباحث يضع التشديد على بعض المآزق الهامة والتعمية الأخرى التي يواجهها رجال الأكراد في حياتهم اليومية، كما أصبحوا مضطرين أن يغادروا منازلهم و أسرهم للدفاع عن وطنهم كوردستان.

الكلمات الدالة: الهوية، اللغة، العرف، الاسلام، حب الوطن، والتراجيدية المحلية

