

HOW TO MAKE A VOICE AUDIBLE?  
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OF KURDISH CULTURE AND OF SOCIAL REALITY  
IN POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES



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W trzynastym i czternastym (podwójnym) numerze naszego czasopisma przedstawiamy artykuły w języku angielskim powstałe zarówno w ramach projektu badawczego, jak i teksty gościnne lub powstałe w ramach innych projektów badawczych.

The 13th and 14th (double) issue of our bulletin is published in English language. Four articles were written by the members of our research project and four other are guest publications or prepared in the scope of other research projects.

Hejmara 13-14an a kovara me nivîsên înglîzî pêşkêşî xwendevanan dike. Çar nivîs bi endamên projeya me hat nivîsandin û çar yên din jî bi mêvanan an jî di çarçoveya projeyên din hat nivîsandin.

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# Life after Death in Manichaeism and Yārsān<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The idea of resurrection (i.e. life after death) is a common thread amongst different religions; however, there are considerable differences in concepts regarding the return of the soul in this world. Like Manichaeism, there is a comparable belief in the Yārsāni Faith, referred to as Doon-ā-Doon. Significant similarities and differences among Manichaeism and Yārsān regarding resurrection underscore the motivation for conducting this study. From the analysis available ancient scripts, as well as viewpoints from Yārsāni scholars and leaders, this study attempts to obtain and offer a new, accurate, and pervasive interpretation of Yārsānis' beliefs about life after death. Furthermore, the results obtained from this work will be analysed and compared with the obtained results with Manichaean beliefs, resulting in a new, innovative, and upgraded assessment.

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this section is to describe the research methodology that I have applied for this research. In addition, I will present an evaluation of the sources. I have used primary and secondary data for analysis. I have collected the primary data regarding the Manichean concepts of life after death through library

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<sup>1</sup> Seyedeh Behnaz Hosseini completed her doctoral research with a focus on Yarsan in Iran and diaspora in the Department of Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the University of Vienna. Her research interests include religious minorities in Iran and Iraq and forced migration.

<sup>2</sup> This research is part of my fieldwork in Iranian Kurdistan.

research. Through fieldwork in Iran, as well as sources available in public and private Yārsāni libraries, I have collected the second portion of the primary data and secondary data. In addition, I have interpreted religious manuscripts and resources from outside of Iran. The most important focus of this paper is on *Divan Gureh*, the most essential Manuscript of Yārsān. Work on the text was not easy because interpretation of texts is very difficult as there are few Yārsāni adherents who can interpret even one line from these manuscripts. Finding the manuscripts was also difficult: upon my first request for the *Divan Gureh*, they told me I should first ask their leader, Seyyed Nasr Din in Kermanshah. Once he understood my need for the manuscript to conduct academic research, he allowed me access.

Conducting this study was very difficult. Mr. Nemat Zahmatkesh apprised me that he had a great deal of information about the Yārsāni faith and its rituals because of his long coexistence with Yārsāni leaders in Iranian Kurdistan. He allowed me to visit his library to collect necessary references. He initially stated that interpretation is not easy and that nobody has conducted a pervasive and scientific study on the Yārsānis' manuscripts (*kalām*). All translations of Yārsāni poems are baseless and have been refuted by those who are familiar with Yārsāni manuscripts. He added that some people have already published books by collecting *kalām* inscribed over Yārsāni tombstones – actions that Yārsāni leaders oppose very seriously. My transcription of sacred poems began under the supervision of a Yārsāni friend who lived in Finland. Another problem I encountered was the interpretation and translation of these old poems written in Hawrami dialect that was used in this area in the past. Hawrami is different than Kermanshahi and Qalkhani dialects which are spoken there at present and people cannot understand these texts easily. Moreover, these texts contain many metaphors that refer to the times of Sultan Sahak and to interpret them special knowledge of *kalam* and sacred poems is required. Finding the manuscripts was also difficult: upon my first request for the *Divan Gureh*, they told me I should first ask their leader, Seyyed Nasr Din in Kermanshah.

I will initially present the *Divan Gureh*, the most important religious manuscript of the Yārsānis. I agreed to continue interpretations on Doon-ā-Doon based on Yārsāni religious poems in the *Divan Gureh* to determine how they believed the soul transmigrated during different periods of their history. *Divan Gureh* includes a history of a long period from the *Bohlol* Era until the time of Seyyed Khamushi.

## REINCARNATION IN THE MANICHAEAN RELIGION

Life after death is manifested through metamorphosis and the Hearer, the believer, and one must find the competence to enter heaven through metamorphosis into another body (Beduhn, 2003). Klimkeit and Heuser relate that according to Manichaean principles, when a man comes into this world, he wears a garment made of soil that has been woven out of the corpses of monsters killed in the battle between lightness and darkness (1998). Mankind needs to doff this temporary garment in order to reach redemption. A number of Manichaean texts have explained the most detailed qualities of reincarnation. One of these, the *Kephalaia*, (The Kephalaia (Κεφαλαία), „Discourses,” found in Coptic translation) tells about the resurrection of the human soul into other creatures’ bodies, undergoing metamorphosis as many as 10,000 times. It has been emphasized that the process will continue until the soul reaches the kingdom of lightness, or eventual redemption (Klimkeit and Heuser, 1998: 78). As we can see in *Kephalaia*, when souls come forth from their body they travel on and go into life (Kephalaia 91.230, 12-19). They shall be purified in the heavens, in the same way that this alms-offering passes over to the Elect, and are given likenesses in many forms, are purified, and merge into the land of the living. The souls of the Catechumens, who shall never again enter a body, resemble them (Mirecki and BeDuhn, 1991: 29). A human soul will always suffer when returning to this world and entering another body before its time of redemption. Manichaean epistemology refers to this process of metamorphosis as *Zadmurd*. A study by Alexakis indicates that the Mani prophet had categorized his followers into three classes: the Elect, the Hearers, and the Sinners. While ordinary followers will be painfully punished after death, they will be returned to earth during reincarnation. Mani both promises that the Elects’ souls will live in the Land of Light and warns about the manifestation of Sinners’ souls into the bodies of animals or plants. According to the Manichaean faith, deeds such as the eating of animal flesh and the killing of other animals will result in serious punishments and manifestation into an animal body (Alexakis, 2001: 168).

In another work, scriptures point out that, by definition, the souls of Auditors are reprocessed into plants or into a human life, either as an Auditor once again, or as

an Elect, (Acta Archelai, 10), but this is not rebirth or reincarnation; the human soul does not cohere in ordinary passage from life to life.

Manichaeism teaches a traducian theory of the generation of personal identity: the personality of the child derives from the reproductive material of the parents, and does not enter into an independently formed body from elsewhere, ultimately descending from the material that constituted the parents' bodies. Thus, reprocessing occurs exactly according to the pattern by which the Elect reprocess the divine element in their food (Mirecki and BeDuhn, 1991, p. 30). The most important point that needs to be preserved is that Manichaean eschatology, which is itself a Gnostic system, is based on the perspective that only human beings' souls can reach redemption (Sundermann, 2001: 609). After death, the human soul (regarding a condition that will be explained later in this study) will be resurrected as an animal, another human being, or another metaphysical creature. Sundermann shows that Manichaean eschatology has commonalities with the Gnostic system, including the fundamental idea that only human souls can be redeemed, and after death they descend into this world as particles of the sacred light, thus, returning home (Mirecki and BeDuhn, 2001: 30).

Redemption is one of the most important stages of manifestation. Sundermann indicates that in Manichaean Sogdian *Turfan*, (fragment *M140* and *M1501*), the soul is subject to five kinds of resurrections, i.e., in Manichaean parlance, the liberation of the divine light from its worldly prison. We do not know what the first of these resurrections is, what the divine light is liberated from, or who is affecting it. The second resurrection, however, is from the sidereal constellations, and it is affected by the moon, whose sphere is above the stars. The third resurrection is the liberation from rain and cloud, and it is brought about by the atmospheric deity of the virgin of light. The fourth resurrection is from animals and, we may assume, from plants and perhaps other terrestrial phenomena. Its agent is not apparent, but I venture that it is the Sun God, i.e., the Third Messenger, whose particular task is the redemption of the light from the bonds of the macrocosm. The fifth and last resurrection deserves to be quoted verbatim from the thirteenth *Kephalaia*: "the fifth resurrection is from mankind. The god of the Mazdayasnian Religion does it." (Gardner, 1992: 11, Sundermann, 2001: 749). Therefore, life in Mani's view is

redemption of the soul, whereas death is captivity of the soul in a material prison. A *Uyghuryan* fragment (TM 296) reads:

because he deigned to enlighten [us], We were saved from the place of no return. Because he established the Law of the Buddha (i.e. Māni), we were freed from [distress] and misery. (Klimkeit, 1993: 291).

Jackson imparts:

Muslim scholar An-Nadim in his *kitāb al-Fihrist* quotes Mani as summing up ‘the three ways’ of the Elect, the Hearers, and the Sinners, the first being to Paradise, the second ‘to the world and to terrible things,’ the third (ultimately) ‘to Hell.’ The whole account, therefore, shows that the Auditor must continue his existence once more, submerged in another life and afflicted with terrible dreams, until, ‘after the long period of his roaming,’ he is found fit to put on the robe and to assume at last ‘the second form,’ or that particular degree of felicity which is his due (Jackson 1925:4; on *Fihrist*, ed. Flügel, *Mani*: 64, 71, 95, 101).

Jackson continues:

Shahpor ibn Tahir of Isfara’ini includes, in his Arabic work on the sects, the name of Mani as among those who believe in transmigration of souls. Earliest among the Christian controversialists, *Acta Archelai* (10)<sup>3</sup>, portrays how those who have committed sin (Hearers, or Auditors, being equally involved) are ‘transfused into five bodies,’ including the various forms of animal and plant life. ... [T]he *Acta Archelai*, 11 (10).2, which is wholly in harmony with the Manichaean doctrine of the future life and the punishment of sinners by rebirth, similarly records that, after enduring hell torments, the soul of unbelievers is again ‘transfused into bodies’ as a means of further castigation and finally consumed in the Great Fire at the end of the world. (Jackson, 1925: 8)

The Turkish Manichaean Fragments<sup>4</sup> furnish further support in regard to metempsychosis [and contain] at least an implication of the transference of the soul

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<sup>3</sup> Greek anti-Manichaean work written before 348, most well known in its Latin version, which was considered as an exact account of Manichaeism until the end of the 19th century.

<sup>4</sup> T. II, D. 173, called by Le Coq a 'Buchrest' or 'Doppelbuch- blatt,' cf. *Turk. Man.* 1: 3, *Turk. Man.* 3: 11.



into animal bodies,<sup>5</sup> [and continue] with a more explicit reference to rebirth, especially into plant and tree life<sup>6</sup>, different sorts of Hearers, the ascent of their souls to the Zodiac and progress in their cycle, and to their ‘changing into another body,’ ascending or descending (Jackson, 1925:8)<sup>7</sup>.

Most remaining Manichaean scripts emphasize the unrest experienced by creatures who seek to reach the land of brightness. According to these Manichaean formulations, worldly death and the soul’s convergence with absolute lightness after several metamorphoses is recognized as the sole pathway to reaching perfection. Boyce refers to a Manichaean Middle Persian text:

This Manichaean attitude is called *Zādmurd* (birth-death, rebirth), that is, the same metamorphosis found in Buddhist gnosis; in one of the Manichaean Middle Persian texts we see the same motif, “Wake up of deep drunkenness in which thou art slept, and watch me, take me out of the bosom of Death (Boyce, 1975: 108)”.

An Uyghuryan fragment T II D 78a, IT, preserved from *Turfan* documents, declares:

Deliver me from those that do evil, separate me from those that are laden with guilt, and deliver me from the sons of Hell who are all wicked and who do nothing but spread wickedness. My God, protect me from those devouring and from manifold kinds of poisonous [snakes] (Klimkeit and Heuser, 1998: 295).

A famous middle Persian hymn, *S9*, shows perfect agreement with this Manichaean testimony: “resurrection and return” is the light element rising up and returning to its place of origin. Augustine accused the Manichaean clergy of teaching their Hearers the transmigration of the souls and not the resurrection. Sudermann refers to Soghdian text *MI40* regarding resurrection in the flesh and that a belief by Manichaean sectarians in a resurrection of the bodies cannot be substantiated; Manichees did preserve some pre-Manichaean traditions, possibly mediated by some Elkhasaite source (Sundermann, 2001: 749). BeDuhn believes that Manichaeism professes an idea akin to a metempsychosis rebirth of the soul into trees as a possible fate that threatens those who commit violations of Manichaean ethi-

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<sup>5</sup> T. II, D. 173 a 1, recto, lines 4-9.

<sup>6</sup> T. II, D. 173 a 1, recto, lines 18-20 and verso, lines 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> T. II, D. 173 b, 2 verso, lines 8-19.

cal precepts (MM 17,55). (2010: 373-388) Augustine maintains that the Manichees believed that souls in such a state lack the capacity to understand the religious, who are able to hear and understand (Beduhn, 2010: 324).

Referring to Ashtiani's works, (Ashtiani, 1996, 100-85) Fomeshi describes reincarnation, metamorphosis, and *Zadmurd* as features of the *Orphée* Faith (Ashtiani, 1996: 100-85 cited in Fomeshi) He suggests that, according to these beliefs, someone will be completely purified over a 1000-year period. Therefore, the *Orphée* Faith was very effective in the formation of Greek beliefs on reincarnation, especially Platonic and Pythagorean schools of thought (Widengren 1965: 65). Fomeshi also states, referring to an assertion by Epiphanius, (Epiphanius Panarion 66:28.1, 3) that the Manichaeans believed in *Naskh*, *Maskh*, and *Faskh*<sup>8</sup> Although Fomeshi and Pederson both point out that it is difficult to confirm the influence of Pythagorean thoughts on Manichaeism (Fomeshi, 2003; Pedersen, 1988:180). The following section discusses findings of other scholars regarding the influences of Buddhism on this Gnostic religion.

## THE ORIGIN OF REINCARNATION IN MANICHAISM

The Manichaean faith's tenet regarding life after death can be considered to be rooted in Buddhism (Skjærvø, 2006:103, 26; Caudil, 2013: 5). Vaziri asserts that, in the eleventh century, Al-Biruni was the first to find Buddhist influences in Mani. He mentions that when Mani left Iran-shahr (presently southeastern Iran) for India in the tenth century, he was influenced by Buddha's teachings, including the reincarnation doctrine (2012). However, Ecto has gone beyond this claim and purports that Mani is said to have converted the king of Turfan by performing various magical tricks, and the king became convinced that Mani was Buddha's incarnated soul. (Skjærvø, 2006: 26; Jackson, 1925: 249). For Mani, souls go from one body to another and inspire everything, even water and earth (Cassadio, 1992: 126). Therefore, worldly karma is some sort of internal retribution, or *Mokafat-I bateni*:

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<sup>8</sup> Fomeshi, "Gnostic Beliefs." *Faskh* is the return of the soul to a plant, *Maskh* is its return to an animal, and *fasgh* to a human

the idea that bad deeds done unto others will eventually return to the performer of the deeds (*bad mikoni bad mibini*) (Caudill, 2013: 150; Vaziri, 2012: 150).

A more detailed comparison between Manichaeism and Buddhist thoughts on reincarnation shows that Manichaeism was not the only faith to be influenced by Buddha in this context: Buddhism has also helped shape the principles of many religions such as the cause of reincarnation (punishment of sinful souls), the terminable nature of life and death cycles in this process, hell, death, life qualities after death, etc. Moreover, it seems that the ethical points of Manichaeism remind us that the Elect are internalized from Buddhist teachings.

Fomeshi confirms the deep roots of Manichaeism in Buddhism; however, he believes that the concept of reincarnation has not been inspired by Mani's words, but has been added many years later to Sogdian, Uyghurian, Parthian, Chinese, and Middle Persian texts (2003, p.58). He clearly indicates that, although he does not disagree with the presence of reincarnation concepts in Manichaeism, there is no real Buddhist element in Manichaean beliefs. Thus, it can be posed that after Mani's death, Manichaeism's expansive Eastern influence allowed these tenets to be completed when faced with Buddhism *Samsara*. As he suggested, this sort of reincarnation cannot be seen in Mani's available scripts; however, one cannot fully nullify its presence in Manichaeism. He emphasizes that the reincarnation belief is stronger for those arriving to the religion after Mani than in the aboriginal Manichees. By inviting Buddhists that lived in the eastern empire into Manichaeism, there was a more fluid influence of Buddhism on the religion. Therefore, it has been demonstrated that the teaching of reincarnation to the west of Iran, either in the Near East or in Europe, had been acknowledged. This points to the fact that the last advent of Christ had been in Mani's body (Pedersen, 1988, p. 181.cited in Fomeshi, 2003, p. 58).

## **DIVAN GUREH**

Yārsāni followers call their 'religious manuscript' the *kalām*, in its entirety. Every period is marked by its own *kalām*. The *Pardivari* Manuscript of *Divan Gureh* (*Saranjam*) includes the portion of the *kalām* from the period during which Sul-

tan Sahak was in the village of Sheykhān, near Pardivar Bridge in Hooraman, Kurdistan. It is a collection of writings by Shah Khoshin, Baba Tahet, Shah Fazl, Bohlul, Baba Jalil, Baba Sarhang, Sultan Sahak, and Baba Yādegār that is known as *Zolal Zolal*. The portion of the *kalām* from the period of Seyyed Khamosh, and Ali Ghalandar is 272 pages and is known as the *Divan Gureh*. All manuscripts are written in Kurdish Gurani and Kurdish Sorani in syllabic form. Manuscripts include advice, rituals, and the concept of Doon-ā-Doon, as well as a history of periods from the beginning of time until the present<sup>9</sup>. Mir-Hosseini describes the *kalām* of the Yārsānis, for which she uses the alternate name, Ahl-e Haqq:

The Ahl-e Haqq [Yārsānis] believe that their religion – which is a *serr*, a mystery – is embodied in their *kalām* (‘word(s)’), which exist in the form of poetry, mainly in Gurani but also in other Iranian languages. *Kalām* were preserved and transmitted orally from generation to generation until they were committed to writing, probably in the nineteenth century. There are now many written collections of *kalām*, each relating to a specific period or ‘cycle’ of Ahl-e Haqq mythical history. The most important of these collections is the one belonging to the period of Soltān Sohāk, known as *Kalām-e Saranjām*. Until recently, *kalām* were jealously guarded from outsiders, and even within the sect only a few people had access to them, namely the Sayyeds (the sect’s religious elite) and the *kalām-khwan* (lit. *kalām*-reciters, who knew them by heart) (Mir-Hosseini 1996: 118).

## **DOON-Ā-DOON (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL) IN YĀRSĀN**

As previously mentioned, there is a relatively similar interpretation of the Manichaean reincarnation process and the concept in the Yārsāni faith known as Doon-ā-Doon<sup>10</sup> (Elahi, 1978, Vol I, p. 73; 1991, Vol II, p. 325). Despite several studies conducted about the Manichaean religion, few efforts have been undertaken to

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the literature on the Yārsān, or Ahl-e Haqq, see Jean During, “A Critical Survey on Ahl-e Haqq Studies in Europe and Iran.”

<sup>10</sup> Doon is a Turkish term meaning garment

shed light on Yārsānis' points of view regarding the aforementioned issues. As *Divan Gureh* reads<sup>11</sup>:

Any soul owner is the incarnation or the robe of its predecessor soul; so, if that robe or body or human form reach the perfection, it will be deserved to be purified and a become container for manifestation of divine light through various steps of mystical teachings and doctrines, and That person is becoming God <sup>12</sup>.

The Yārsāni manuscripts have never directly referred to the process by which Doon-ā-Doon may occur. Therefore, to understand this process perfectly, we first need to mention the definitions proposed by other authors and subsequently interpret chapters related to Doon-ā-Doon in the Yārsāni religious manuscript.

In Yārsān, everybody reincarnates 1001 times; of course each reincarnation (Doon-ā-Doon) involves many phases, and this belief in Doon-ā-Doon, or successive incarnations, greatly differentiates Yārsāni thoughts about God from Islamic ones. Believing in the successive incarnations of the divinity is pivotal for Yārsāni adherents; they believe every human has a god and that God is transferred in different forms and at different times to reach perfection. According to the Yārsāni belief, a soul inhabits 1000 Doon within a 50000-year period and continuously departs one body for another until it reaches perfection. Yārsāni adherents believe that there is always a divine particle in a human's nature that circulates regularly amongst holy ones; it is called successive manifestation (*Mazhar be Mazhar*). Thus, God will incarnate in perfect bodies. Religious Yārsānis believe in seven successive manifestations according to seven Angels; in this way, each time the Almighty God, along with its archangels, has incarnated in mundane forms. This incarnation is metaphorically referred to as putting on clothing; hence, it is called *Jāmeḥ* (garment) or *Doon*. In Yārsān there is a belief that reincarnation is moving toward perfection. However, it is possible for a soul to remain in the same phase of a Doon for years and even to become an animal but this does not mean a return to a lower standing; this is still progress toward perfection (Delaviz, 2007). For a more detailed interpretation of the Doon-ā-Doon phenomenon, it must be said

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<sup>11</sup> You can find more explanations about Kalām-e Saranjām or *Divan Gureh* in later pages of this study.

<sup>12</sup> Personal Interview with a Yārsāni member January 2016

that the manifestation of the Almighty God is carried out in two forms: Manifestation of the Guest Nature could be for a short while, or forever. When essence of god's manifest in human form it is called *zāt-ē-Bashar*. They are Mazharriyyat and perfect humans and when this essence manifests during the life of the human, or someone who hosts the divine essence it is called the guest's essence and *Shāh Mihman* or Guest King or *Zāt-ē-mehman*. The Divine Essence will be a guest in a human body that is devoid of human nature or a human soul, respectively. In Avesta this is called 'xvarənah.' In Pahlavi (Middle Persian), 'xwarrah' means 'Glory and happiness', and in Manichean it is called "Farrah."<sup>13</sup>

For Guest King serves only as the guarantor of king-stance, and he is tasked with determining the reason and for guiding followers. His position is higher than serving them as the guide and force of reason. For the adherents, God has put the human body in its own Doon to pave the way – leading his servants to redemption. Manifestation of the Almighty God is associated with some of its features or names. Some studies have equally considered this belief with what is called *Holul* (transmigration of soul) by theologians; hence, they treat Yārsānis as followers of incarnations.

The Shāh Mihman's soul after death again goes to human essence. In her research titled 'Inner Truth and Outer History,' Mir-Hosseini suggests that the soul enters another body in each travel. In fact, death is a suspension between the inside and outside worlds (Mir-Hosseini, 1994a). Suffering or happiness depends on the person's previous life, and the number of these goings and comings for the soul to reach perfection and join the divine source from which it has originated is fixed at one thousand and one in the course of fifty thousand years (Mir-Hosseini, 1994: 281, 1997:180, 1996: 120-121; Bruinessen, 2009; Durig, 1998).

Yârân natersân neyê siyâsata ..... taslim giânân Çûin gotey batak

Do not be afraid (of death). This is not a punishment, surrendering one's lives is like the plunge of a duck (soon to re-emerge) (Mir-Hosseini, 1994 a , p.281).

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<sup>13</sup> Glory or splendor, divine mystical force or power, reflecting the perceived divine empowerment of kings. In Persian mythology, a person with Dutifulness may achieve the degree of perfection acquired. This charisma was dependent on the legitimacy of kings.

For Elahi, manifestation of God in true believers is not incarnation, but advent. Incarnation of God's nature in its creatures is impossible (Elahi, [Traces of Truth] Vol. II, 1991: 633). Elsewhere, he says that the nature of guest is *Mazhariyyat*, not incarnation; human nature is of garment and Doon, not unification and transmogrification (Elahi, [Traces of Truth] Vol. II, 1991: 177). However, Mokri believes that the manifestation, or in Persian *Mazhar Elahi*, refers to the incarnation that is considered to be a connection with another soul; he calls it manifestation (Mokri 1968:76).

Yārsāni religious textbooks describe that Divine nature is seen everywhere and a belief that this nature needs to incarnate in various forms in order to indicate itself. Yārsāni adherents use manifestation, *Mazhariyyat*, and *Shāh Mihman* (the Guest King) to express the Doon-ā-Doon process. It seems there is a principle and basic essence that is manifested and incarnated in different Doons. (Personal interview with a Yārsāni member in Iran.) *Shahnameh haqiqat* (1984), written with Hāj Nemat-Alla Jeyhon Abadi, has referred to '*done be don shodan*' as a sort of punishment:

Shavad ghovat Zāt-e Dön be bad bogzarad	Ravanash be jäye degar mîravad
Chenîn tä shavad päk andar hesäb	begardad ze teflî beh dön-e aazäb
Keh in dönhä jorm-e osiän bovad	aläaveh bar än dön mîzän bovad

Zarrinkoob defines Yārsān as a sectarian-gnostic faith that, besides Sufism and Illuminationism, has combined several elements of Jewish, Majus, and Manichaeism along with some teachings of Shiism and other Islamic denominations, especially Druzi and Nuşayriyyah. (Zarrinkoob, 2008). However, Sufism can be pointed out as the most influential school of thought in this faith. A number of Yārsān branches believe that incarnation is a belief composed of Gnostic and Islamic eschatology (RezaHamzeh'ee, 1990: 93, Zarrinkob, 2008: 97) Bureke'i states, "Certainly commenting about the origin of incarnation in Yārsāni is impossible Elahi, 1991: 73). He refers to *Kalâm-e Saranjâm*, the central religious book of Yārsānism: Bohlol was the first person who believed in incarnation after the emergence of Islam (Safizadeh, 1982: 217). Mokri believes that the influence of Manichaeism, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian thoughts on Yārsānism is evident; however, believing in the circulation of souls and advent had initially existed

in the Ismaili Faith, before Yārsānism. It seems that they did not originate from Hindu beliefs (Mokri 1968:145).

Bruinessen states:

[I]ncarnation for Yārsānism has two different forms: divine manifestation in a body and the advent of soul, as a guest in a body that has already passed the process of deity or humanity. Most Gurani's texts confirm that manifestation in the body of animals is possible, but it has never been confirmed with certainty. It seems that the concept of manifestation depends on reward and punishment in the form of regeneration in lower and upper degrees of the soul (Bruinessen, 1995a: 13-14).

Mir- Hosseini believes that:

[D]uring each trip, the soul is placed in various garments (Doon) and death is a distance in the inner world. This means that the soul gets away from the body and emerges within another, along with the deeds of the previous person. Therefore, punishment and reward depend on the deeds of the previous individual. The target of this 1001 circulations through certain epochs is reaching perfection (Mir- Hosseini, 1994a: 281).

Elsewhere, she states that the Yārsāni Faith dates back to the Creation Day and that the Divine Essence had been in the form of a pearl in shell in the sea. She continues:

The creation of the world was the outcome of the first of these cycles, when the Divine Essence was manifested in *khavandgar*, the creator. Islam is the product of the next cycle when the divine Essence was manifested in Ali, the first shi'a Imam (shari'at) and in the course of other cycles the stages of tariqat and Ma'rifat were established, and finally divine essence manifested itself in Sultan Sohak, who brought new laws, and establishing Ahl-e Haqq as a separate creed and this is the stage of *haqiqat*, which supersedes the previous stages, and thus frees adepts from observing the shari'a rules on muslims' (Mir-Hosseini, 1994a:218; 1996:120-121). Although those who complete this journey become perfect souls, it occurs partially in the worlds of bāten, and if they come back to the outer world it is always for a purpose and to fulfill a mission (Mir-Hosseini, 1997: 180).



Dehqan explains the concept of the manifestation of the nature of the soul in Yārsānism:

[The] Yārsāni Faith had spoken about *Haft Tan* and *Haftvāneh* which affect inner and outer worldly aspects of Yārsāni adherents; in this thinking the highest ranking belongs to *Haft Tan* who control the inner territory. *Haft Tan* are Ramz-Bar, Pir Benyamin, Dawoud, Pir Mousa, Mustafa, Baba Yādegar and Shah Ebrahim and according to Kalām-e Saranjām, the Divine Essence has been manifested in *Haft Tan* (Dehqan, 2008: 4).

## DOON-Ā-DOON PROCEDURE IN DIVAN GUREH

This study attempts to shed more light on the vague phenomenon of Doon-ā-Doon by using available texts and taking advantage of Zahmatkesh's expert viewpoints as an interpreter of religious manuscripts.

All Yārsāni references and Manuscripts of *Kalām* are filled with remarks and speeches that discuss Doon-ā-Doon as the main basis of the Yārsāni worldview. Some of them nicely reiterate the previous Doons of their author and unveil personal secrets of a person or people. One of the best examples of these discussions is *Divan Gureh*, or *Divan-e Gureh*, known as *Zolal Zolal*, in which Shah Ebrahim and Baba Yādegar extraordinarily describe their previous Doons. Using pleasant poems from *Hawrami dialect*, they describe their Doons step by step, from the beginning of the universe until reaching the truth.

*Divan Gureh* is composed of a collection of aphorisms from Yārsāni elders, who sought to maintain these adages and beliefs. Learning these texts, which are organized as short Kurdish poems, is necessary for all Yārsāni adherents. The first chapter of *Divan Gureh* covers Sultan Sahak's Era<sup>14</sup>, also known as the *Damyar* Era. It includes the testimonies of the *Haft Tan* on how the King's (God) Doons were initiated before the creation of the earth, skies, plants, and animals – gener-

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<sup>14</sup> *Sultan Sahak*, or *Soltān Sohāk*, (born in the 14th century) was a Kurdish religious leader who founded the spiritual path of the Yārsān. He is considered to be the manifestation that fully reflects the divine essence by the Yārsān (Personal interview January 2016).

ally, everything before life began. The late Yār Morād Khalifeh, one of the oldest Yārsāni sripters, wrote a manuscript that narrates the beginning of God and his archangels' Doons, based on the philosophy and the commencement of Doon-ā-Doon from the Yārsān faith. He wrote his book from the main script, available to the general public in the religious center of Yārsān *Tekye Tootshami* in Tootshami village in the Kermanshah Province in southern Iranian Kurdistan, where the leader of Yarsani, Seyyed Nasr Din Heydari, lives. The first page of *Damyar* recounts the manifestation of God and his archangels. This volume, which is only 51 pages, articulates the commencement of Doon-ā-Doon before Creation by Sultan Sahak's time in *Pardivar* and then by Baba Yādegār's time in *Sahnēh*. The *Damyar* period begins in a condition in which the Divine Essence is manifested at *Pardivar* as Sultan Sahak, who asks his archangels to explain their own Doon-ā-Doon epochs and to testify about each other's Doon-ā-Doons, describing the role of Pir Benyamin (Gabriel) in various epochs of garment/Doon change. The first page of the *Damyar* Manuscript reads:

The King, i.e., Sultan Sahak, says,

baîân ao naward \_\_\_\_\_ qûlâmân yak yak baîân ao naward  
râsi benmânân yâri kûzê kard \_\_\_\_\_ baîânî sanâi dâmeî pîrê şart

O My Servants, express all of the past secrets with honesty to a certain timing and confirm that these secrets are all the results of efforts of "Pir Shart," Pir Benyamin (Gabriel), as well and describe his deeds through various Doons<sup>15</sup>.

Confirming the efforts and results of Pir Benyamin, the seven archangels, one by one, offer their description and point of view about the procedure of Doon-ā-Doon and past Doons of the Divine Essence. They themselves rely on the Pir Benyamin's achievements; he is called Gabriel by most religions and *Damyar* in *Divan Gureh*. They speak in consulting fashion, gathering that Sultan Sahak, the Divine Essence, is present too. Since the name of *Damyar* is repeated several times in this chapter, it has become known as the *Damyar* Chapter, or a period. On the first page of this chapter, Pir Benyamin says:

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<sup>15</sup> In Yarsani manuscripts, Pir Benyamin is referred to as Pir Shart.

dâmêm wa dasâ \_\_\_\_\_ wa loffê xâjâm dâmêm wa dasâ  
dâwo rahbarâ oa shûnû shasâ \_\_\_\_\_ xâjâm qûdratâ qûlâm sarmasâ

I am the servant of Damyar. Damyar is someone who can achieve something, i.e., a finder; since it was Pir Benyamin who succeeded in finding the Divine Essence for the first time and recognizing it through different Doons and garments ...

The Rumi says, in this regard, that:

Didehei Khâham Šahshenäs                      Šäh rä Šenäsad dar har lebäs

Which means he should recognize God in any Doon. He continues:

In that Doon, my God was the most lonesome power and his name was power (Ghodrat) and Davoud, my leader, showed me the path to find it.

After the creation of the skies and earth by the *Kiani* Era (an era of Ancient Iranian mythical kings), the Divine Essence was hidden from his archangels and was unaccompanied by anyone except *Ramzbar* and *Yādegar*, who were both part of the Divine Essence's existence.

For Doon-ā-Doon and its necessity, Ahmad (Baba Yādegar) says on the fifth page of the *Damyar* chapter of *Divan Gureh*:

dâmêš wa farzâ \_\_\_\_\_ dâmiâr bênyâmîn dâmêš wa farzâ  
ay dúnû qawâ panamân farzâ \_\_\_\_\_ šahbâzeš gêrdan xâjâi farâmarzâ

Ahmad, who is Baba Yādegar as well and plays the role of Yārsān's Pir Takhti and is very revered by the Divine Essence says, Confirmation of Damyari (function of Pir Benyamin is necessary for us), and this Doon for us is like a debt we need to pay back; and my name was Faramarz, son of Rostam during Kiani era.

In other words, his previous Doon was Faramarz, who was killed in the battle against Bahman, son of Esfandiyar.

For its previous Doon during the *Kiani* Era, who was Rostam-e Dastan, the Divine Essence says the following:

aû donê karda \_\_\_\_\_ qolâmân begandî aû done karda  
bênyâmîn madârân aû šonê šarta \_\_\_\_\_ raxšêm paydâ kêrd na pêšt parda

‘O My Servants be aware of your past Doons. I designated Pir Benyamin to the Pir-e Shart and I was the owner of Rakhsh (i.e. Rostam) during the Kiani Era.’

On page five of the *Damyar* chapter, Benyamin explains his Doon, stating that around the birth of Islam he was known as Salman:

dâmêm wa haolân \_\_\_ dâmem kêrdenâ wa halâo haolân  
na donê salmân kerdêmân jaolân \_\_\_ va chapa narges šâhmân dâ qolân Banyāmîn mar-  
amō: Dāmam kazīnā... haftam Jamā dām kazīnā  
Chain salmān bīm shīmō madina... Isa banyāmam yōrtan shīrīnēh

Benyamin says here, ‘My previous Doon during the early years of Islam was Salman-e Farsi and it was Shirin-Arman during the Sasanid Era, and now in Pardivar and Yārsān Faith my name is Benyamin.’<sup>16</sup>

The King Sultan Sahak, one of the greatest in religious ranking of the Yārsān Faith, on the eighth page of the *Damyar* chapter states:

šīm aû bârbēt \_\_\_ nadaûray xasraw šīm aû bârbût  
ramzēm bâd âwar nakîsâm sêkēt \_\_\_ benyâmêm êîsâ wîm šîâm aû bêt

The King introduces his several previous Doons and Pir Benyamin and Pir Ramzbar in the Sasanid Era, Christianity Era, and Idolatry Era. He claims:

In the Khosrow Parviz Era, I have been in the doon of Barbad [the then famous musician and singer] and Ramzbar has been known in Nakisa’s Doon. In the Christianity Era, Pir Benyamin was Jesus Christ, and the King has been incarnated as an idol.

Pir Musa, the scripter of good and evil deeds, explains his past Doon during the time of early Islam:

nūsîrê bê sar \_\_\_\_\_ mûsîanân nasîre bê sar  
I was Nasir in that time and I am known as Musa.<sup>17</sup>

On page ten of the *Damyar* Chapter, he introduces his past Doon as Shah Fazl-e Vali during the Tarighat (Sufism) Era. He states:

<sup>16</sup> *Divan Gureh*, *Damyar* Chapter, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> The King, *Damyar* Chapter, 9.

qûlâman qazlâ \_\_\_\_ maiîdân yârî hûşâ qazlâ  
chanî cheltanâ kêrmêmân fazlâ \_\_\_\_ na daworaî maûlâ şîm aû şâh fazlâ  
brûem kardan \_\_\_\_ na wasl hûsêîn brûem kêrdan  
chani ham yârân zemâieşt dardan \_\_\_\_ hûsêîn hûsêînâ kûştman wardan

Shah Fazl was the holder of the Doon of Shah Yādegar or Hussein and we ate his flesh  
in that Doon.<sup>18</sup>

tûrke sar bêr mên bîm \_\_\_\_ mûstâfai mûtlaq tûrke sar bêr mên bîm  
jeloem na dast na dâwo kûr bîm

On page eleven, while confirming the King's saying, Mustafa introduces himself as one of Shah' Fazl's companions who decapitated Shah Fazl.

Haqem wât chana.... ayna bayânî haqem wât chana

On this page Ramzabar introduces his past Doon as 'Eineh,' sister of Mansur-e Hallaj.

barrê ao bar bîm \_\_\_\_ yârân chanî ham barrê ao bar bîm

While confirming his previous Doon as King Fazl, Ahmad says on the same page.

On page eleven of the *Damyar* Chapter, the Divine Essence introduces himself in the Doon of Sultan Sahak and says:

dûn wa dûn gîlâm \_\_\_\_ ao shomê shama dûn wa dûn gîlâm  
chanî yâwarân tawûsî zilam \_\_\_\_ chani ahmadî Nâwûs eêlâm

Doon-ā-Doon covers me, too, and I have come following *Haft Tan*; and I have experienced apparent manifestation in different eras. For example, my name was Navos in Baba Navos time, while Baba Yādegar's name was Ahmad.

For the Doon-ā-Doon of Ebrahim, he declares:

bayânem ao xân \_\_\_\_ na daûrê şâh fazl bayânûm ao xân  
dûn wa dûn chanîş madîmî nişân

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<sup>18</sup> *Divan Gureh, Damyar Chapter, p. 10.*

Yes, along with the Divine Essence we experienced Doon-ā-Doon, and even in Shah Fazl's time, in which the Divine Essence, the God, was in the Doon of Shah Fazl, along with Gabriel, we traveled to Mars; and I was a lord in Shah Fazl era.

For his relation with the Doon-ā-Doon of the Divine Essence, Pir Benyamin says:

Xôšîn pakâ \_\_\_\_ dûnê pêrdîwar Xâjam sahakâ<sup>19</sup>

‘During Shah Khoshin, the Divine Essence’s name was Khoshin, and now in Padivar era his name is Sahak.’

The *Divan Gureh*, in the *Shandroy* Chapter, page twenty three, relates that Davoud Dalil and the guiding archangel describe his past several Doons and past Doons of Sultan Sahak, i.e., the Divine Essence, as follows:

sûltânê azîm \_\_\_\_ tû kabêî mêrâj mên mûsâî kalîm  
tû mûrtêzâî dîn mên qambar peshîn \_\_\_\_ tû nûhsad mên chêlêbîe zîn  
tû xodâî barê mên nasîme dîn \_\_\_\_ tû dîvânay arz mên rajab jâker  
tû taj sûlêîmân mên sûlêîman kûr \_\_\_\_ eltêjâm aydan xûdâî haft eqlîm  
nêjâtêm bêday pay bênyâmîne mim

O, My king in the Moses era I became Moses, and you became Moses's God. During the Islamic era, you were Morteza Ali and I was Ghanbar. During Nohsadeh era, you were Shah Khoshin and I was Sutan chalbi. And during Shah Fazl, you were Shah Fazl, and I was Nasimi. In Bohlol's time, you were Bohlol, and I was Rajab. And in the Solymân Prophet era, you were Solymân's crown, and I was Solymân himself. And now, O the lord of seven territories help me to rescue Benyamin.

In *Divan Gureh the Pireh va Pir* Chapter, page thirty one, Ramzbar, Sultan Sahak's mother and one of the seven archangels, explains Doon-ā-Doon, stating:

pîr dâwod marû ao hâlo xawar .....dûn wa dûn âmân axzar wa axzar  
bênyâmîn kîšâ cha nor ao nazar ..... eqeâreš chani kêrd ao dasawar

Prophet David blows the trumpet by which *Haft Tan* should change their Doons, and he exclaims for changing Pir Benyamin.

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<sup>19</sup> *Divan Gureh, Damyar* Chapter, p. 11.,

In the *Bargah Bargah* Era, generally all Doons of God and the seven archangels happen in various garments.

Page thirty three of the *Bargah Bargah* Chapter recounts the manifestation of Divine Essence in the Doon of Imam *Ali* in Medina City. Pir Musa says:

ao kû madîna ..... bârgaî şâm west ao koî madina  
dûn wa dûn âmân wîna wa wîna ..... bênymîn gardan yâr cha xazîna

My king's essence manifested in Medina City, and Benyamin has confirmed it and has served him as Salman-e Farsi.

Also on the same page of *Bargah Bargah* Chapter, Pir Benyamin speaks about his previous Doons, who were Jesus, son of Mary, and Job, the prophet. Finally, he describes his Pir Benyamin in the *Pardivar* Era:

Bênyâmêm nêî dam.....ayûb bayânî bênyâmêm nêî dam  
Chanî bâş têjâr kotâm ao sêtam.....eisâ bayânî eisabnê maryam

According to these remarks, Pir Benyamin introduces his past several Doons:

1) *Pir Benyamin* 2) Job the prophet 3) *Galim va kul* 4) Jesus Christ.

On the same page *Ramzbar* Maramo:

bârgaî şâm wistan ao sâyao şami ..... simorq bayânî jarâhî rostami

Ramzbar introduces her previous Doon as Simurgh, who had healed the wounds of Rostam

On this page, Davoud introduces his past Doon, Moses, as follows:

Bârgahe şâm wistan ao omrê sodêz ..... mosâ bayânî mosabne nargêz

In the Chapter *Vezavar*, on page fifty seven, Davood says:

nasîm zaîûêm..... hawâlaî hâwâr şûn aîûêm  
xasraw na telesm awardaî gaiûêm

Davood reminds his Doons in the Kiani Era, 'Give,' and in the time of Shah Fazl, Nasimi.

In the *Zolal Zolal* chapter of this source, Baba Yādegar says:

adêgâranân zolâl yârân ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, wa dûnê iraj gêrdêman šârân

Baba Yādegar introduces his Doons in the Kiani and Pishdadi Eras as Iraj, son of Fereidon, and Keikhosrow, son of Siavash.

In the *Baba Yādeagr* chapter, page seventy six

šâhbâze sêfid haftomîn yâna. .... îmam hûseîn bi va gard nišâna

amâ wast ao bêrj ghalâi sarâna

The previous Doon of Baba Yādegar is Imam Hussein. He is called the latest Divine Essence in the late Pardivary epoch.

The origin of Doon-ā-Doon, based on Yārsān religious manuscripts, is explained in the following paragraphs.

## THE ORIGIN OF DOON-Ā-DOON

The Doon-ā-Doon concept forms the basis of Yārsānism. Followers believe that Doon-ā-Doon is only possible for human beings, and not for other animals. God and his seven archangels, comprising *Haft Tan* and considered to be the most divine and sacred class, can experience Doon-ā-Doon. Like human beings and animals, the *Haft Tan* changed their Doons through various epochs and descended to the earth with various names. *Divan Gureh*, the most fundamental Yārsāni text, refers in detail to Doon-ā-Doons (manifestations) of the Divine Essence as well as the seven archangels:

The *Damyar* Chapter of *Divan Gureh* declares:

Pir Benyamin Maramō

dâmêm wa dasâ \_\_\_\_\_ wa lotfê xâjâm dâmêm wa dasâ

dâwo rahbarâ oa šûnû šasâ ----- xâjâm qûdratâ qûlâm sarmasâ

In the beginning the name of god was Hagh, Pir Benyamîn Maramō.

Qûlâmân šîân aô naward \_\_\_\_ chani bîm wa jôft chanî nawâêi



pâdšâm paydâ kêrd na dîne yaeî \_\_\_\_awsâ pâdšâm na dînê yâ bi na arz na samaâ bî

This means that after its Doon in the form of *Ghodrat*, the Divine Essence came to Doon in a form called ‘Ya.’ In Ya’s era, there was no earth, sky, humans, or existence; however, there were two natures in the Divine Essence, called *Ramz* and *Reza*. These two natures, along with the Divine Essence, are referred to as “Yari Tan” (three archangels). In this epoch, God decided to create four other angels in order to complete the *Haft Tan* Collection. At that time, other Doons were developed, and the Doons of the seven archangels began. Furthermore, God decided to create the sky, earth and plants:

King Maramō

šêîâm ao tâêî \_\_\_\_\_ qûlâmân nezâm šêîâm ao tâêî

dâmân qarârî arzo samâêî \_\_\_\_\_ bêîdî sanâî pîro pâdêšâêî

I [God] started the creation system through the creation of earth and sky, after creating seven archangels.

Pîr Bemyāmin Maramō [says,]:

dâmêm wa pâkan \_\_\_\_ wa lûtfê xâjâm dâmêm wa pâkan

qûlamân pay bâqî yaqašân châkan \_\_\_\_\_ âftao pâdêshâh bênyâmêsh xâkan

It means that the wait for the advent of eternity and the sun were created out of the Divine Essence. During this time, the King of the Divine Essence emerges and creates four elements (earth, fire, water, and wind) from the essence of four archangels. Earth (soil) was created from Benjamin’s essence; fire was created from Mustafa’s essence; water was created from Pir Mousa’s essence; wind was created from Davoud’s essence.

For the creation of the wind from Davoud’s essence, Pir Michael says:

dâmêš bê qâla \_\_\_\_ dâmyâr bênyâmîn dâmêš bê qvla

nânâtandêš na warû qâla \_\_\_\_\_ šahbâzêš kardan xâjâî šûmâla

Pir Mousa explains the creation of water out of his own essence.

dâmêšâ hawat \_\_\_\_ dâmîâr bênyâmîn dâmêšâ hawat  
nânâtandaš na warao samat \_\_\_\_ šâhbâzêš kardan xâjâi bahre šat.

Mustafa speaks about the creation of fire from his essence.

## **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF ‘LIFE AFTER DEATH’ BETWEEN MANICHAISM AND YĀRSĀNISM**

Most authors consider Doon-ā-Doon and reincarnation to be the same, whereas others find differences amongst them. Tamadonzadeh is amongst those who reject the origin of reincarnation in Yārsānism. He believes that if a soul is moved from one human body to another, it is called *Naskh*. If a soul is moved from a human body to an animal body, it is called *Maskh*. If a soul is moved to a plant body, it is called *Faskh*. Finally, transferring the soul to abiotic elements is called *Raskh*. However, this belief, with its features and details, is different from common elements in Yārsānism (Tamadonzadeh, 2000: 8-20). Manichaeism supports the manifestation of the soul in the bodies of humans, animals, or plants, which is necessary to be cleared and reach redemption (Alexakis, 2001: 168). Therefore, a soul that returns back to this world can be manifested in a plant, fruit, animal, or a human being, depending on the virtuosity or wickedness of its deeds (Klimkeit, 1993: 295). According to Yārsāni teachings, human beings are the end result of an evolutionary trip through the material world, after which a journey of a soul begins. Likewise, when this experience is completed, the soul begins to live in plants and animals, finally reincarnating into a body of a man or woman. Therefore, all men and women have four essences, including objects, plants, animals, and mankind (Dalaviz, 2007). The grave point of deduction Yārsānis pose to validate Doon-ā-Doon is God’s justice: they believe that if consequences of the worldly deeds of human beings are postponed to the afterlife, then God’s justice will be incomplete. Therefore, the upright people in fact suffer from punishments for their sins in past epochs<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with Yārsānis in Sweden in 2015.

Hamzeh'ee believes that *Mazhariyyat* is firstly a transfer of a *zāt* (essence of God) from one human body to another, and incarnation of a soul is dependent on its demeanor and dignity and occurs within human, animal, plant, or abiotic elements accordingly. Moreover, followers of the Doon-ā-Doon theory consider a limited passage for a soul. They believe that a soul, after 1000 manifestations, will reach perfection and head to the Divine Essence (Hamzeh'ee, 1990, p. 90; Elahi, 1991 [Traces of Truth] Vol. II, 17; Mir-hosseini, 1994 a, p. 218.). On the other hand, for Manichaeism, there is no authentic reference about the exact period for redemption. Thus *Zadmurd* may be eternal and will continue forever (Sundermann, 2001, p. 69).

There is a substantial similarity between Manichaeism and Yārsāni thought: they both believe that souls transmigrated in different things to reach purification. However, they have significant differences as well, distinguishing them absolutely from one another. Despite some authors' references to incarnation as one of the principles of Yārsānism, it is not possible to call this faith Incarnations faith. Doon-ā-Doon is one of the basic principles of the Yārsānism Faith, with its unique features.

As *Nowruz's kalām* pointed out:

The god blew its soul and essence to other souls. All good and devil souls have divine particles, or '*zarre khodai*,' '*zāt-ē-haqq*.' Because if it is not available, then no soul would be found in the world, and souls circulate through plants, animals, and human beings<sup>21</sup>.

It is true that a sinful person's soul moves to an animal's body (Akbari, 2003). As During quoted from Xvaje al-Din, who sees Hindu influences in Ahl-e Haqq, "Ali and Soltān are like incarnations of Brahma, and the *Haftan* similar to Krishna, Sarasvati, Kāli." (During, 1998: 138).

According to Hamzeh'ee, the earliest concept of manifestation in Iran can be found in Avesta, and in 'Far-e-Yazdān' or 'Farrēh Izadi.' Hamzeh'ee states, "Zoroastrian and Mazdaistic religions are matching with the transmigration of the soul", and he believes, "Mazdaism in early stages was close to Hinduism. Indeed, he adds, [Far-e- Izadi] on earth is evident of the existence of the idea of reincarnation,

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<sup>21</sup> Personal interview with Zahmatkesh, 2014

it must have existed in most of the early religions before the monotheistic religions became dominant.” (Hamzeh’ee, 1997: 110).

There is no hell or heaven in Yārsāni beliefs. After completing 1001 Doons, and each Doon may last for perhaps 1000 years, you become a part of God. Yārsānis believe in resurrection day and it is evident from the religious manuscripts they recite while playing *tanboor* (sacred lute) during their ceremonies. Although it differs somewhat from the resurrection day purported in other religions, a resurrection day in Yārsāni beliefs is the day on which everyone is corrected and becomes God, the day mankind will fix themselves through Doon-ā-Doon epochs. The world will be full of righteous deeds; that is a resurrection day.

## CONCLUSION

Many hypotheses, either from opponents or proponents of the Yārsān faith, have been posed regarding Doon-ā-Doon and/or evolution of the soul. This study entails terms of philosophical and intellectual aspects from previous research. It attempts to propose an exact definition of Doon, and seeks to compare it with Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism. The philosophy of Doon-ā-Doon in the Yārsāni Faith has similarities with Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism. Essence of God or ‘zāt’ hold similarities with the Zoroastrian belief in *xʷarənah*, divided to different categories, one of them is communal Farrah upon which all humans have Farrah (Uryan, 1992, paragraph, 44, 45, 46; Bahar, 1990; 51). But that is an independent faith according to Yārsāni religious manuscript. In fact, souls circulate through plants, animals, and human beings. A very important point emphasized in Yārsāni religious manuscripts is that Doon-ā-Doon does not include God; this means that God has experienced various stages of Doon-ā-Doon with various names, its first name being ‘Yā’. According to *Nouroz Kalam*:

Kān karam harkas bashi.....bazi faravan bazi khachashi

Everyone has the essence of god, or bounty of god; some have many and some like only to taste it.

Incarnation and evolution are two separate issues and most scholars, philosophers, and Yārsānis reject incarnation with respect to a certain quality followed by Incarnations. They believe in evolution, rather than incarnation. As scholars of Yārsāni have stated, each human being needs to pass 1000 worlds in order to reach the last 1001st, stage, i.e., eternal perfection. Accordingly, each creature, depending on its stance, moves from one body to another in order to complete perfection.

The concepts and beliefs of Yārsān presented here have concentrated on the soul showing its Divine Essence. Therefore, the following features can be reported in brief for Doon-ā-Doon in the Yārsānism School: First, a soul, depending on its talents and gifts, moves from one body to another – that of a human being, an animal, or other. Second, a soul is expected to pass 1001 epochs in varying worlds to reach and achieve perfection; again, the quiddity and quality of this procedure depends on his/her deeds, behavior and talent. Third, the soul who reaches the 1001st body in fact reaches the Truth ‘Haghighat’ stage, or the ‘great happiness’ (also called *Zāte Heq* or God). This means that a soul is in the last epoch of a mundane life. Lastly, a soul will experience the resurrection. What differentiates these beliefs from Incarnations, is that incarnation is without definite time but according to Manichean, the target is followed by these trans incarnations’ reach to Land of lighting. Most scholars who considered Doon-ā-Doon and incarnation in Manichean (Parthian *zādmūrd*)<sup>22</sup> the same have neglected this considerable difference. It’s worthy noting that according to my interview with a Yārsāni member, I understand that Yārsānism upholds that all individuals have the essence of God, and in the end the soul reaches Sultan Sahak. Yet, another great difference between Manichaeism and Yārsān.

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<sup>22</sup> The souls that still have not promoted from Category of Hearers (Middle Persian: *niyoshagan*) to the category Elect (Middle Persian: *ardawan, dēnāwar*), condemned so much in the material world from one body to another, to step up their election or

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# Ehmede Khani's Hymn to Forgiveness.

Salvation of Satan in the Kurdish Classical Poem *Mem and Zin*

## ABSTRACT

The idea of this article is to consider Ehmede Khani's concept of forgiveness as elaborated in *Mem and Zin* (1694). According to Paul Ricoeur, forgiveness concerns an enigma which can never be fully explained, however, the reflection on it is needed especially when any possible reconciliation is concerned. Ricoeur stresses that it is an enigma of fault "which is held to paralyze the power to act of the capable being", and, on the other hand – "the enigma of the possible lifting of this incapacity, designed by the term forgiveness". According to Ricoeur, forgiveness is evoked by "a voice from above" which originates in the Abrahamic religious heritage. It is rooted in the idea of unconditional love which is able to forgive even unforgivable. The aim of this paper is to present Ehmede Khani's *Mem and Zin* as a part of the abovementioned Abrahamic heritage. In this article I will show that Khani's idea was to elaborate on God's limitless love and mercy that was able to forgive even unforgivable. That is why he wanted Satan, personified as Bekir in the poem, to receive forgiveness from God thanks to Zin's intercession.

## INTRODUCTION

In my article I would like to apply Paul Ricoeur's reflection on forgiveness in order to highlight and discuss the God-Love idea presented by Ehmede Khani (1650-1707) in his poem *Mam and Zin* which can be considered a part of the important Abrahamic heritage preconditioning the idea of forgiveness as described by Ricoeur.

Undoubtedly *Mam and Zin* by Ehmede Khani<sup>1</sup> is the main representative of the Kurdish classical literature and cultural heritage. Written in 1694 in the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language it has been discussed and republished by the Kurds many times<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, there are still only a few published translations of this poem into European languages such as German (translations by A. Sosin, 1890 and by Oskar Mann, 1906), English by Salah Saadalla (2008) or Russian by Margarita Rudenko (1962)<sup>3</sup>. *Mem and Zin* has been discussed in terms of classical literature and Islamic mysticism (Rudenko, 1962; Muhammad Anwar Ali, 1972; Resul, 1977<sup>4</sup>; Yıldırım, 2010) or tragedy (Mirawdeli, 2012). Izzedin Mustafa Re-

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<sup>1</sup> All the quotations from *Mam and Zin* provided in this article are given after the original version of the text edited by M. Bozarslan along with his translation into modern Kurdish (Kurmanji dialect), which was published in 2005 by Avesta, and after the English translation by Salah Saadalla published in 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples of *Mem and Zin* first editions are given after the data by Kadri Yıldırım. For the full list look Xani. E. (2010: 15-16). Ehmede Khani's *Mem and Zin* was first published in 1887 in Saint Petersburg with A.Sosin's commentaries. In 1899 Maruf Kheznedar disseminated the copied version of a manuscript belonging to Martin Hartmanns's collection. In 1915 the text was published in Aleppo by Huzni Mukriyani. In 1920 Mukuslu Hamza published *Mem and Zin* in Istanbul. The other editions were subsequently published in 1947 in Aleppo and in 1954 in Hawler (Erbil). Some parts of *Mem and Zin* were also published by Kurdish magazines such as Gelawej or Hawar. After years of oppressions and bans, at present, *Mam and Zin* is being frequently published by many different editors and publishers all over Kurdistan.

<sup>3</sup> The French summary of *Mem and Zin* was first prepared by August Kościeszka-Żaba in the 19th century but its manuscript was lost. In 1890 A. Sosin prepared the German version of *Mem and Zin*. In 1897 *Mem and Zin* was published in Armenian translation in Yerevan in 1897 and followed by another translation (of a different copy) in 1904. Also Martin Hartmann was among the first Europeans who wrote about the text. *Mem and Zin* was first translated into Arabic language by Muhammad Said Ramazan Boti and published in Beirut in 1957 although it was censored. The first Turkish translation was prepared by Mehmed Emin Bozarslan (1968). The Sorani Kurdish translation was done by the Kurdish Sorani poet Piremerd, Hejar Mukriyani's translation into the Mukri dialect of Kurdish language was published in Bagdad in 1959. Shamil Askerov translated it into Azeri language (Baku 1976). Mehmed Emin Bozarslan prepared the first updated version of this poem into modern Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish language (2005). Since then he was followed by other authors, for example the Kurdish contemporary writer Jan Dost (2010). The Kurdish poet Kamal Mirawdeli provided another English translation of *Mem and Zin* in his book *Love and Existence* (2012). The draft version of the Dutch translation was completed by Michiel Leezenberg in 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Having no access to the Russian original text, in my article I refer to the Izzedin Mustafa Resul's book through its Turkish translation (2007) by Kadri Yıldırım.

sul (2007), Kamal Mirawdeli (2012) and many others have also highlighted the philosophical dimension of the poem. In the 19th and 20th century *Mem and Zin* received attention among Kurdish scholars who often described it as an early expression of Kurdish nationalism (Resul, 1977; Şakeli, 1996; Mirawdeli, 2012). However, in this article I wish to put aside the discussion whether *Mem and Zin* can be called an expression of nationalistic beliefs in the 17th century Kurdistan. I also have no intention to discuss widely the details of Ehmede Khan's life and works. These problems have been undertaken by many authors (see for example Sajjadi, 1952; Kurdo, 1992; Resul, 2007; Yıldırım, 2010; Mirawdeli 2012). I would like to narrow down the debate to the ethical dimension of Khani's work which is undoubtedly linked to the mystical and philosophical components of the text. In other words I aim to discuss Khani's idea of forgiveness which is inseparable from his God-Love idea. I will expose a few pieces of the poem which refer to the idea of forgiving that had been anchored in the Khani's vision of loving God and a loving human. I claim that in his work he opted for a vision of God, who was able to forgive even unforgivable; therefore, he suggested that Satan (Iblis in Islamic tradition), who was personified as Bekir in Khani's story, was excused and called back to heaven. This idea was not in line with Islamic orthodoxy which is why he talked about it inexplicitly by the means of metaphors and a particular story line. However, this concept was not totally alien to Islam and occupied significant margins in the Muslim society. The idea of the Almighty God whose mercy is limitless and unconditional and so must be His will to forgive was, for example, undertaken and developed in a form of a theological dissertation entitled *Evidence of Almighty Mercy* written by the Tatar theologian and philosopher Musa Bigeev (1873-1949)<sup>5</sup>. Bigeev (2005:85-86) traced down his concepts to many classical authors such as Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207-1273) or Ibn Arabi (1135-1240). He claimed that rejecting the idea of the limitless mercy encompassing unforgivable and infidelity was a fallacy rampant in Islam (2005:77-129). On the other hand, the question of the possible forgiving for Satan was also present in Sufism from the early ages of Islam. Massignon mentioned that "Dhu'l Nun Misri<sup>6</sup> claimed to have seen Sa-

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<sup>5</sup> In my article I refer to the Russian translation of the book (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Dhu'l – Nun Al Misri (796-861), was an Egyptian sufi considered to be the patron of physicians and one of the specialists of the concept of Gnosis in Islam.

tan's tears of loving regret flow, and Sahl Tustari<sup>7</sup> had conversed with Satan about his desire for God's forgiveness: and his disciples, the Salmiya, for two centuries taught that Satan would be forgiven, for he acted out of pure love (and had pros- trated himself at the second command)" (1982:171). In his book *Satan's tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (1981) Peter J. Awn highlighted that the figure of Satan played a very diverse role in the Islamic mysticism and was differ- ently painted. Starting from the classical vision of Satan, the tempter, in the early Sufi writings it has gradually developed into a more complicated image (p.10). For Mansur Al-Hallaj (858-922) Iblis was a victim of his loving devotion, not only the tempter but also the teacher (p.12). In Ahmad Al-Ghazali's (1061-1126) writings Satan's love and single-minded dedication resulted in Iblis's rehabilitation (p.13). Ayn Al-Qudat Hamadhani (1098-1131) elaborated of Iblis's love relationship with the Beloved (p.14). Farid Ad Din Attar (1145-1221) pointed out that "Iblis is the chamberlain to the Beloved wielding His divine power yet torn by the grief of sep- aration because, as chamberlain, he must stand at the door of the presence and not at His side" (p.15). Therefore, it is probably not accidental that in Khani's poem Bekir is introduced as a doorkeeper. However, what Khani proposed was different for he linked the figure of Satan with the question of God's mercy. Furthermore, he did not require repentance from Bekir-Iblis to be excused. Finally he showed a hu- man's involvement as necessary for Bekir-Iblis to receive forgiveness from God.

What is also worth mentioning, especially in the context of contemporary inter- pretations of *Mem and Zin*, the idea of forgiveness becomes especially important in times of peace processes. Hope for forgiveness is something which, to Ricoeur (1995), might be offered by victims to oppressors in the scope of such a process. Instead of a passive repeating of own sufferings victims actively engage in the rec- onciliation in order to encourage offenders to review their past critically and chal- lenge their dominating vision of history. As we know the recorded history is often devoid of any recollections of crimes and suffering. Thus, one of the first steps in the reconciliation process must be to encourage people from both sides to see one's own faults and not only the wrongdoings of others; therefore, highlighting the idea of forgiveness which offers friendship instead of punishment might be important

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<sup>7</sup> Sahl Al-Tustari (818-896) was a Persian scholar and mystic who found the theological school called Salmiyah.

for the Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation process if, after a rupture in 2015, it will ever be initiated again. The fact that the aesthetically sophisticated idea of love and forgiveness constitutes the core of the Kurdish national icon that is Ehmede Khani's *Mem and Zin* adds a very important message to this analysis.

## **FORGIVENESS AS A NECESSARY HORIZON**

In the epilogue to the book *Memory, History, Forgetting* Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) highlights the role of forgiveness, which to him “constitutes the horizon common to memory, history and forgetting” (p. 457). Although forgiveness is difficult to give and receive, but also to conceive of (p. 457) we cannot imagine any reality that would be divested of the idea of forgiveness. It is because forgiveness possesses the ability to unbind a person from his or her acts and to restore the blessed form of forgetting, and a *happy memory* which is free from remembering only fault, crimes and abuses.

The possibility to excuse others is always inscribed into individual's conscience, and selfhood of people rather than into an institutional realm which possesses no moral conscience capable of forgiving. In modern times it also poses the question who actually is entitled to ask for forgiveness and forgive in the name of any group of people or an institution. Lifting fault is possible only by a person who was abused by an oppressor and not by anyone else. However, there might be some gestures such as Chancellor Brandt's kneeling down in Warsaw in 1970 that can be interpreted as possessing the “secret alchemy” (p. 477) inviting people to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. They are addressed to communities that is to the individuals taken one by one (p. 476). Moreover, as highlighted by Ricoeur after Nicolai Hartmann, forgiveness may violate the sense of justice because very often it would mean ratifying impunity when one should punish (p. 473). Therefore, forgiveness does not in fact happen on an institutional level and might be controversial especially when cases of crimes against humanity, such as genocide are concerned (pp. 471-479). The idea of sincere excusing cannot be substituted by any political deal or normalcy established to mute the conflict (p. 477). Yet, it still possesses a reciprocal dimension hidden in the etymology of the word which in

many languages is rooted in the verb *giving* (p. 480). In many cultures, the act of *giving* evokes actions of *receiving* and *giving back* (pp. 481-483).

The doubts also consider seemingly an indissoluble tie between fault and self, the question is if the guilty can be unbind. Ricoeur (p. 491) stresses that, “this act of unbinding is not a philosophical aberration: it conforms to the lines of a philosophy of action in which emphasis is placed on the powers that together compose the portrait of the capable being. In turn, this philosophical anthropology is based upon a fundamental ontology which, in the vast polysemy of term “to be” in Aristotle metaphysics, accords preference to being as an act and as power, in contrast to the preference for understanding in terms of a concept of substance that prevailed in metaphysics up to Kant”. If a human is a capable being and if the predisposition of good is original and the propensity to evil is only secondary (p. 492), the restoration of the good capacity is possible. In other words, “under the sign of forgiveness, the guilty person is to be considered capable of something other than his offenses and faults” (p. 493).

Nevertheless, in spite of all these questions and difficulties “there is forgiveness”. Ricoeur applies this expression to stress the exceptional character of forgiveness which to him exists in a form of “a voice from above”, a kind of “a spiritual gift” and “charisma” which is silent “but not a mute one”, “not mute, because not deprived of speech” (p. 467). This silent voice can be attributed to the Abrahamic religious heritage, and to the idea to love not only one’s friends, but enemies as well. In the first instance, Ricoeur quite understandably comes back to his own cultural background, and evokes the Christian heritage by quoting from the *Hymn to Love* from Saint Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians which poses the absolute imperative to love because “if I have no love, I am nothing; I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal”. Moreover, as far as “love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men’s sins, but delights in truth” and “there is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance”(p. 467), it establishes the moral height that is capable to transcend “to the place of accusation, imputability, where one’s scores, one’s accounts are kept” (pp. 467-468). In this way it bridges a tremendous gap between fault and forgiveness. This must be acknowledged “because if love excuses everything, this everything includes even unforgivable. If not it would be itself annihilated”(p. 468). Moreo-



ver, the phrase “there is forgiveness” indicates, that forgiveness transcends the real world’s finality, the necessity of personalization: “for the hymn has no need to say who forgives and to whom forgiveness is directed. There is forgiveness as there is joy, as there is wisdom, extravagance, love. Love precisely. Forgiveness belongs to the same family.” (p. 467)

Asking for forgiveness should be rooted in sincere repentance, recognition of one’s own fault and compassion for a victim along with the will to redress. At the same time it cannot require any assurance that forgiveness will be granted nor any remuneration for such a risky request. On the other hand, if forgiveness is rooted in unconditional love, it cannot be conditioned by repentance. Thus, forgiveness means to be willing to excuse without admission of fault and repentance of the guilty side. Yet, there is some kind of reciprocal expectance animated by hope that awaits to be plumbed. Although forgiveness cannot be scheduled by any institution, designed by law or even properly explained, it always creates a necessary horizon of expectance. This horizon slips into infinity opening the perspective of the limitless. Hope for being forgiven that can animate the guilty party’s will and courage to recognize and confess one’s own faults because it offers love or friendship instead of punishment. Thus the hope for being forgiven usually inhabits the significant margins of individual and social consciousness (pp. 457-505).

## **EHMEDE KHANI’S GOD-LOVE IDEA**

*Mam and Zin* by Ehmede Khani is often described as a typical story of unhappy lovers which draws from Kurdish folklore and the Middle Eastern heritage of similar stories such as Nizami’s *Farhad and Shirin*, *Leyla and Mejnun* or Unsuri’s *Wamik and Azra* (Rudenko, 1962:39). In the scope of the mystical tradition human love symbolized *tariqa*, the path leading to God and the desire to be reunited with God’s eternal existence. Life was to be sacrificed in order to achieve this goal. It is also clear that Khani elaborated on the love toward his homeland regardless of the question if we call his concepts *national* or not (Bruinessen, 2005). Less frequently Khani’s idea of love was discussed regarding his vision of a perfect ruler (Bocheńska, 2011:140-147) which was probably inspired by both Plato and Al-Farabi’s

works (Resul, 2007:141). However, Khani's concept of forgiveness has not yet been elaborated in details.

According to the poet, an ability to love and forgive should be crucial for the ruler. Such an idea of leadership is expressed in the Quran:

It is by of grace from God that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh, hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, and ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in the conduct of affairs. And when you make a decision, put your trust in God; God loves the trusting. (the Quran 3:159)

Accordingly, prophet Muhammad should have been an example of a forgiving leader. Khani also called him "mercy to the whole worlds"(2008:23)<sup>8</sup>. However, on the other hand he told us about the lack of Muhammad's mercy toward infidels that is those lacking faith in God. Thus, "unavoidably many of them" were "perished by the sword" (2008:23). What seems to be incoherent in our epoch was quite understandable in Khani's times. First of all, similarly to cowards in the heroic communities (MacIntyre, 1996:226-242), infidels could not have been treated as respectful humans, they were outside the established *honour world* to apply Kwam Antony Appiah's (2010:19-22) term referring to those who deserved respect in a given society. Moreover, as stressed in different ways by Ricoeur (2004:466-467) and Bigeev (2005:101-103) we should acknowledge the difference between the "whole worlds" define in terms of eternal universal existence and the real world constricted by finality. While punishment or sword refers to the reality (to prophet Muhammad as a historical figure) which is marked by mortality, love, mercy and forgiveness constitute the height that is universal and above the human world. Khani elaborated widely on prophet Muhammad's eternal nature<sup>9</sup>. We learn from the introduction to *Mem and Zin* that he pre-existed Adam. Thus, on the one hand, as eternal being, he was "a mercy to whole worlds", on the other hand, as a mortal he "perished infidels by sword".

Furthermore, if God's love and forgiveness are limitless and eternal and if He is the Most Merciful, there could not have been any visible limit for His mercy.

<sup>8</sup> In the original text: "Ew rehmetê cumle alemin bû" (2005:142)

<sup>9</sup> In the original text: "Ewwel bîriqî ji husnê sermed/ nûrek, bûye maneya Muhammed" (2005:140), in the English translation: "First a light shined from the eternal grace/A light becoming Mohammad's essence" (2008:22)

Otherwise God's love and forgiveness could not have been called limitless and eternal. Therefore, in the ending part of *Mem and Zin* Khani mentioned this issue referring to the task for a teacher and an engineer and asking them to find or imagine the final score and "estimate the full area" of God's love and mercy (2005:610, 2008:232)<sup>10</sup>. He highlighted that: "foe [of God-JB] were to share in love." (2005:610, 2008:232). Interestingly, also both Bigeev (2005), and Ricoeur (2004) refer to the mathematic skills and vocabulary in the context of forgiveness<sup>11</sup>.

Simultaneously Khani showed that there was not a merciful and forgiving ruler in Kurdistan and that the idea of authority boiled down to maintaining power, and thus inevitably leaned toward evil. As stressed by Kamal Mirawdeli (2012b) evil in Khani's work was "associated with the illusion of power and the need of rulers to maintain this illusion, however, unreal and naive it might seem, at whatever cost". Moreover, what Khani's prince represented was in fact the "institution of a ruler", and thus following Ricoeur's remarks, we must admit that it was not this level of reality where forgiveness could have occurred. As we saw in the abovementioned quotation from the Quran God urged prophet Muhammad to be merciful but within historical context prophet's mercy was limited. Therefore, we may presume that the idea of total forgiveness could invalidate the norms of justice in the 17th century Kurdistan which might turned out to be even dangerous for the social order. That is why Khani remained realistic and skeptical toward the possible triumph of love and forgiveness within the real world. Apart from the human imperfect world, the poet glorified spiritual idealistic reality. He seemed to believe that in some exceptional cases God inspired love may exhort people to forgive each other. Moreover, he might have been convinced that people simply need such a limitless perspective of God's mercy that is the hope for absolute love and forgiveness. This image was

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<sup>10</sup> Khani puts these words into Iblis-Bekir's mouth, in the original text: "Îz'an bike mes'elê, muderris!/Texminê mesahetê, muhendis!/Dijmin ku ji îşqê behrewer bin/Bes dost-i ne dê di mut'teber bin!" (2005:610). In Saadalla's translation: "Understand the question, teacher!/And try to estimate the full area, engineer/Is a foe were to share in love/Then would not a friend be regarded?" (2008:232)

<sup>11</sup> Bigeev (2005:83) suggests that be mathematicians interested in estimating the area of God's mercy instead of exclusively talking about the geometrical space, the problem of the limitless God's mercy would have been solved long time ago. Ricoeur (2004, 457-606) many times applies the world *equation* when talking about forgiveness.

able to strengthen trust and good will instead of evoking fear of punishment. As a devoted teacher of children – what we know from his first Arabic-Kurdish dictionary (Nûbehara Biçûkan/ 1683) addressed to children – Khani must have been experienced at punishing and remuneration. Writing the first dictionary for children meant that he was interested in helping *medresa*'s pupils to learn the Quran. He prepared the dictionary to make many words understandable for them. This may suggest that he saw as futile punishing for not learning the Quran properly while his pupils could not understand it. Also the perspective of remuneration might have been seen by him as more reliable than fear of punishment.

In one of the introductory stances to *Mem and Zin* Ehmede Khani defined the main goal of his work, which was to write a poem in the Kurdish language so that:

Hem ehlê nezer nebên ku “Kurmanc  
işqê nekirin jibo xwe amanc (2005:172)

Also the foresighted<sup>12</sup> may not say: “The Kurds  
Do not make love one of their aims (2008:33)

This small piece highlights a very important message. First of all, it means that being devoid of the ability to love would have divested the Kurds of something very important, acknowledged by “wise people”. Thus, the ability to love can be understood as the most important virtue on Khani's scale of ethical values. Interestingly, the Kurdish ability to love must have been considered by Khani as a feature hidden from sight. Those, who may have acknowledged it were rather outsiders, because the word “foresighted” or “wise people” seems to be addressed to some elite of not only Kurdish origin (possibly the whole Muslim world at the times of Khani). Thus, Khani's main goal was certainly not only to present pure and divine love between a young Kurdish man, Mam, and a Kurdish princess, Zin which is the traditional mystical framework in which this poem is discussed. I would claim that his main idea was to outline an idea of God as a loving and forgiving being who was willing to offer forgiveness even for Satan-like creatures. In other words, Khani wished to think of the idea of God to believe in. He did not want to challenge the idea of God. In Khani's times there was no possibility to live outside God- created world. However, he wished to glorify and promote the idea,

<sup>12</sup> Rudenko translated the word *nezer* as “умные люди” (wise people) into Russian (1962:54) and Yıldırım as “ilim İrfan sahibi olan kişiler” (wise, educated people) into Turkish (2010:158) which has slightly different meaning than the word “foresighted” in English translation by Saadalla.

that God's mercy has no limits. As we can see in the introduction love was the first and the most important feature to be attributed to God:

Sernameê name, namê Ellah Bê name wî natemam e wellah	In the pre-written book is the name of God Without his name, it is incomplete, by God
Ey metleê husnê işqebazî Mehbûbe heqîqî û mecazî	O, prelude to the beauty of loving The true and metaphoric beloved
Namê te ye lewhê nameya işq Îsmê te ye neqşê xameya işq	It is your name that is the tablet of the name of love It is your name that is the inscription of the pen of love
Bê neqşê te, neqşê xame xam e Bê name te name netemam e (2005:116)	Without your inscription, the pen's inscription is tame Without your name, incomplete is the name (2008:15)

As far as the name of God is “the tablet of the name of love”, the name of love cannot be written without God's involvement. As stated in the text, it would be incomplete and lacking. On the other hand, God is invited to become both “the tablet” and “the inscription of the pen of love”, so He has to descend from his abstract and distant existence and manifest in something. What is interesting, the introduction seems not only to be the praise of God, as most often described by commentators, but also the hidden request or suggestion for God to become a part of the human world. As we will see further this is not the only suggestion Khani had for God. The other one considered God's ability and will to forgive:

Kes nine ji kafir û usatan Mezher nebitin jibo sifatan	Every infidel and bandit Is a facet of your aspect
Kafir bûyin em bi ismê “Qehhar” “Xeffar” e ku em kirin gunehkar	In your almighty name we became disbelievers Your absolving name has made us sinners
Kufrê tu meger neşî bibexşî! Ger tê gunehan bi me binexşî	If you could not forgive infidelity If our sins you are recording
Dê şad-i bibin li me şeyatin Mesrûr-i bibin gelek melain	Satan will gloat over our misery And many accursed will be rejoicing
Qet xiret e, ey penahê alem Qet laiq e, ey şivanê adem	Would this be fair, O, refuge of the World! Would it be appropriate, O, shepherd of the herd!
Ev gurgê lein ê bed, serencam Jêkra biketin me şubhê exnam	This accursed and wicked wolf at last Like sheep tears us apart

Elqisse, bikî ku dêwê serkeş  
Tenha û tenê biçite ateş

In short: make the rebellious demon  
Only lodge in hell and alone

Filcumle me cumle xas û aman  
Asî û şeqî û natemaman

For us public people and private in general  
The evil, mutineer and criminal

Têkra bi şefaeta xwe xas ke  
Vêkra me ji agirî xilas ke (2008:157-158)

Intercede mercifully, Sire  
Save us all from fire (2008:28)

Careful reading of the abovementioned piece reveals a very ambiguous content. On the one hand, it can be of course interpreted as a “traditional praise of God”. There are some epithets of respect such as “you almighty name” or “refuge of the World”. However, on the other hand, the situation described above resembles a kind of transaction where more influential side ( in this case – God) is pushed to do something (as if not necessarily out of his will) for the sake of the poorer side of the deal (a human). Moreover, God is astutely portrayed as “responsible for the world’s misery” due to his own perfection which sounds convincing and amusing at the same time. He is perfect enough to stay detached from the world, however, as far as “every infidel and bandit is a facet of His aspect” he becomes entangled in the world’s affairs in order to make a favour, forgive sins and save the world from evil. This time it is not only a subtle request or suggestion but a kind of blackmail. Following Khani’s words we can imagine God as a rich merchant who is asked by a poor one to give him a valuable item. There is no reason why God should do it, but he is pushed to do so by the cleverness of the poor men’s rhetoric who is deliberately pointing out the responsibility of God, and the future wellbeing of the world created by Him. The poet appears to us as a clever tradesman and negotiator. His relationship with God seems to be much more interactive than the passive praise. It reminds us about many characters from Kurdish folk stories who due to their naivety were able to come closer and speak with God (Bocheńska, 2011:89-91). Khani cannot be considered a naïve poet, but he deliberately saves own naivety to make this close interaction happen. Again, we see God as an abstract idea that is not necessarily designed to help or forgive people. However, one may ask God to do that in the name of good and love which “keeps no score of wrongs” and “does not gloat over other men’s sins” as it is stressed by Ricoeur after Sait Paul. This piece makes us see God as free. He is not determined to love, he may be willing to love. This way, from the very beginning of his poem – by the mean of

human request – Khani invited God to be loving and merciful. To suggest God that he should love and forgive means in the first instance to imagine an idea of God being involved in the affairs of the world as well as being able and willing to love and forgive. Not accidentally Khani is very explicit about lack of forgiveness: “If you could not forgive infidelity/If our sins you are recording/Satan will gloat over our misery/And many accursed will be rejoicing”. This unavoidably suggests, that forgiveness is a precondition for good. Otherwise evil will win over the world. In this case the poet damns Satan wishing him to remain in hell and keep away from people. However, did Satan not emerge as a result of God’s inability to forgive the Angel (or Jinn)<sup>13</sup> his refusal to bow to a man? In one of the previous stances Khani also discussed God’s incapacity:

Îblisê feqir ê bêcinayet Hindi te hebû digel, înayet	The poor and guiltless Ibliss He had so much of your solicitude
Her roj-i dikir hezar îtaet Lewra ku te da wî îstîtaet	He submitted a thousand times a day So you allowed him to have his way
Wî secde nekir li xeyrê Me’bûd Gêra te, ji ber derê xwe merdûd	Not bowing to anybody, except his Idol Rejecting your replacement as idle
Yek secde nebîr li pêşê exyar Qehra te <sup>14</sup> kire muxelledunnar (2005:134,136)	He did not bow once before an outsider Your sorrow, put him forever in fire (2008:21)

Now we see Satan as someone else. Iblis is portrayed by Khani as poor, guiltless and faithful what not surprisingly corresponds with the image of the Yezidi Tawûse Melek that is the Angel, who, unlike in the Christian and Muslim tradition, was forgiven and beloved by God<sup>15</sup> because of his refusal to bow to someone else than

<sup>13</sup> In Islamic tradition Satan is often described as Jinn and not as an Angel. It is because he was created from fire and not from light as other Angels. He possessed the free will and thus he might disagree to do something.

<sup>14</sup> In this case again Sadallah’s and Rudenko’s translations of the word “qehir” differ. Wail Saadalla translated it into English as “sorrow” Rudenko translated it into Russian as “гнев”(42) that is „anger”. Yildiz left “kahir” in Turkish which can in fact mean both anger, violence and sorrow depending on the context.

<sup>15</sup> Since we have no proof of Khani’s links to the Yezidis because his concept of Satan could have been inspired by Sufi tradition as well, we have to call all such ideas “plausible”. However, I would like to point out one particular question regarding Khani’s origin that have been many times discussed by Kurdish scholars. In the introduction Khani stresses that he is a *Kurmanc* from “a far mountain edge” (“Kurmanc im û kûhî û kenarî”, 2010: 170). It raised a discussion

God. According to Yezidis, he did it out of faithfulness not pride and superiority. In Khani's stances we learn that it is God's inability to forgive Iblis his lack of subordination that "puts him forever in fire". We should, however, better think of the God's inability in this case. Was it the lack of mercy, anger or sorrow as suggested by Saadalla's translation of the word *qehir*? The problem is that from the ethical point of view God was not the only one who should forgive in this case. To make such an act of forgiveness acceptable and sufficient, a human must be involved. It was because Satan refused to bow to a man and not to God. Thus Satan became an enemy of a human which is widely acknowledged in Islam (Kościelniak, 1999:204-205). His first bad initiative was to tempt Adam along with his wife and not God. Therefore, God himself was not able to forgive Satan, not because of lack of good will, love or mercy, but because of the fact that it was not Him to be abused by Satan's disobedience. From an ethical point of view a human must be willing to excuse Satan in the first place. Interestingly, in the abovementioned quotation Khani is doubtful about God's rejection of Satan that was present in the

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on what mountain edge it might have been. The village Khani or the ashiret Khani or Khaniyani were often indicated as the plausible locations. However, instead of asking what real place it might have been, I would suggest to change the question and ask who in Khani times used to live in "mountain edges"? There were often the followers of the forbidden religious movements and Yezidis were among them. Yezidis were considered "devil worshipers" and were persecuted by Muslims. They were often forced to hide themselves in the mountains. Moreover Lalish and Hakkari regions where their religion originated from are mountainous areas. As stressed by Philip Kreyenbroek and Rashov: "In the early centuries of the faith many of the leading Kurdish tribes were Yezidis, and Yezidis were a powerful force in the area. Later, as the rivalry between the Persian Safavid and Turkish Ottoman Empires in the 16th and 17th centuries offered attractive opportunities to those inhabitants of the border areas who did not carry the stigma of being infidels, many Kurds converted to Islam and Yezidism lost much of its earlier influence. As its power waned, it seems, the community was increasingly a subject to persecutions." (2005:5). Khani's *Mem and Zin* was composed around times when such a mass conversion of the Yezidis into Islam occurred. Therefore, taking into account Khani's warm feelings toward Iblis present in *Mem and Zin*, and the fact that also in Yezidi sacred texts the idea of love is presented as God's main attribute and instrument, it is plausible that Khani might have come from the Yezidis converted into Islam. However, this is only a hypothesis that the author of this article has no ambition to prove. Yezidi motifs in Khani's *Mem and Zin* were discussed by the Yezidi author Rêsan Hesên (2004). The idea of the good relationship between Khani and the Yezidis is not foreign to some of Kurdish contemporary writers. In his novel *Mirname* (2008) devoted to Ehmede Khani Jan Dost described the friendship between the poet and a Yezidi.



Muslim and Christian tradition, but at the same time he stresses his trust by saying “aware of your wisdom/No one we saw, glory be to God” (2008:21). Khani stances reminds us about the God’s wisdom and man’s necessity for a deep faith and do not encompass any such ethical consideration which is of modern kind. Nevertheless, today, this text can inspire us to consider the moral aspect of the relationship between God, Satan and human that occurred after Satan’s disobedience. God could not order a human to pardon Satan either because such forgiveness would not be delivered out of his will or would not be sincere. The will to forgive Satan had to be rooted in the limitless love toward him and finding such a human seemed impossible. It could not be a person yielding to Satan’s bad whispers, and thus in fact interested in forgiving himself. It should be a person who suffered from deliberate evil and in spite of that being still willing to excuse the oppressor. Even though we should not, in my opinion, assign such a consideration to the poet, we can agree that in Khani’s poem such a person occurs. It is Zin that is willing to forgive Satan-like Bekir who was called her direct enemy in the story line. Khani’s idea to introduce Zin was explained by the poet in the ending part of his work where he claimed that Bekir could be forgiven because of his share in Mem and Zin’s love.

As far as God possess the ability to forgive and can exert it, a human can have hope to be forgiven that is to be set free from “sins two hundred loads he bears”:

Sed car-i bi ji te, ey keremkar Ger dê me hebin guneh du sed bar	O, Generous, by your life a hundred times I swear If sins two hundred loads we bear
Sed mertebe gerçi em xirabin Emma ji te naumid-i nabin	We may be bad to any degree Yet we shall not despair of Thee
Hetta bigîhîte Xaniyê jar Napak û pelid û wacibunnar	Until reaching out to poor Khani Hell-bound, impure and meany
Ew ji bi xirabî û seyînî Da’wa diketin bi ummetînî	He too badly and doglike Pleads for mercy, nationlike
Wî bed’emeli, weki kilaban Barî bike peyrewê sehaban (2005:150)	That bad worker like a dog appears O, Lord associate him with religion’s peers. (2008:26)

He mentioned hope for forgiveness in the name of himself and “we” that is supposedly a Kurdish and Muslim community. In this way he established the horizon common to individual and collective memory and history to apply Ricoeur’s

vocabulary. Designed this way in the introduction the idea of forgiveness reveals among the characters in the storyline.

## THE RULER WHO FAILS TO LOVE AND FORGIVE AND ZIN WHO LOVES AND FORGIVES IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING

Prince Zeynedin, the ruler of Jazira was entitled to be the perfect ruler, desired by the Kurds. In the first part of *Mam and Zin* he is described as having all the potential to be so. He is respected by the people and Jazira flourishes under his reign. However, he fails to fulfil people's hope by imprisoning Mem, who is believed to be one of the bravest men in Cazira. The prince also does not allow Mem to marry Zeynedin's sister Zin although he previously agreed for the marriage of his other sister Siti with Mem's best friend Tajdin. As a result of the rigorous imprisonment Mem dies in a cell after a year. The royal pardon issued by the prince reaches the prison only after Mem's death. It all happens because of Bekir, a doorkeeper, who comes closer and closer and finally becomes Zeynedin's trusted advisor suggesting the prince that Mem may become a dangerous opponent to him. Bekir is the most mysterious personage in *Mem and Zin*. He comes from outside of the duchy of Botan:

Emma bi neseb ne merdê Bohtan  
Belkî mutewellidê ji bohtan

By ancestry he was not a Botan men  
Perhaps he was born of Sin

Eslê wî, dibên ji Mergever<sup>16</sup> bû  
Mehza wî beşer bişor û şer bû (2005:348, 350)

"It was said that he came from Mergevir  
A sheer evil man and a malicious instigator"(109).

He is explicitly called "Iblis" by Khani:

Menna'û muzebzebîn û îblîs  
Xedda'û xeberbezin û teblîs (2005:350)

Evil<sup>17</sup>, unstable and falsifier  
An informer, a framer and deceiver (2008:109)

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<sup>16</sup> Bozarslan, Saadalla and Yıldırım put Mergever here and indicated that this place is near Urmîyê in Iranian Kurdistan. Interestingly, Rudenko translated this place otherwise: "говорят он произашел от змеи под камнем" (1962:120)/ It was said he came from a snake under a stone. If we translate it again into Kurmanji Kurdish we receive "ji marê bin kevirê bû" or (ji marê kevirê) which sounds and looks very similar to Mergever in the Arabic script.

<sup>17</sup> Saadalla omitted the word Ibliss.

This description can be treated as poetical exaggeration portraying the amount of evil in a single human. Rudenko seemed to understand it in this way, because in her translation she added the word *словно* which means *alike* in Russian. The same Kadri Yıldırım in his Turkish translation did (2010:259). However, Bozarslan left the expression as it was when preparing the modern Kurdish (Kurmanji dialect) version of this poem (2005:351). The assumption that Bekir is in fact a personified Iblis introduced to the storyline by Khani is not new. Izzedin Mustafa Resul suggested it by pointing to the very close links between the concept of Iblis and the figure of Bekir (2007:266-274). He stressed that Bekir does not represent any of the 17th century Kurdistan social strata (2007:269). He also discussed similarities between Khani's and other thinkers' (Imam Makdisi, Mansur Al -Hallaj and Sheykh Abdulkadir Geylani) ideas of Iblis (260-270). However, I will go further and claim, that Bekir is in fact personified Iblis and Khani introduced him into the poem in order to make it possible for Bekir-Iblis to receive forgiveness from a human and from God. Otherwise the idea of God as the most merciful would be logically invalid. Also, God's love would be apparently limited.

There is nothing very particular about Satan's possibility to take a form of a creature. The Biblical snake tempting Eve is undoubtedly one of the best known examples. According to the Quran, Iblis tempting Adam and his wife did not take a form of a snake. However, Resul stressed that Satan was often associated with a snake in the Kurdish culture, which probably originated from the Christian tradition due to the contacts with Christians inhabiting Kurdistan (2007:272-273). Bekir is compared to a snake (Resul, 2007:273). Furthermore, in the Islamic tradition jinns were able to take a form of a snake, other animals or even human creatures (Kościelniak, 1999:224-225). However, the main argument in favour of such an interpretation is the way Bekir acts in the plot of the poem. He "incites the Prince against Mem and Tajdin"(2008:108), but he never ever commits any wrongdoing himself. He is guiltless. He might be even considered a voice in the prince's head. He acts precisely following the Quranic description of the devil whisperer from the sura *An-Nas* (The Menkind):

In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.

1. Say, „I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind.

2. The King of mankind.

3. The God of mankind.
4. From the evil of the sneaky whisperer.
5. Who whispers into the hearts of people.
6. From among jinn and among people.” (the Quran, 114)

Bekir whispers to the prince’s heart his devil ideas which gradually find a sympathetic ear in Zeynedin weakness which, according to Khani – is the desire to maintain power. The ruler even finds explanation to that:

Ev renga he Mîr digote Tacdîn: “Fî’lêd-i Bekir meger nizanîn!	The Prince used to reply in this way to Tajdin: Do you suppose we are unaware of Bekir’s work
Em qismê emîr-î qismê aş in Pirrfetl û ger in, û pêş û paş in	We Princes resemble the mills Full of moves and twists, advances and retreats
Naçar e jibo me aşivanek Labudde jibo me dergevanek	Inevitably we need a miller Unavoidably we require a doorkeeper
Hindî bi hukmetê dikîn dewr Geh edl e jibo me kar, û geh cewr	While we run the government, Sometimes we practise justice, other times tyranny
Herçend-i Bekir weledzina ye Aşê me ji wî bifetl û ba ye	Although Bekir is a bastard Our mill through him turns and prospers
Ev zumre ku zalim û ewan in Sûbaşî û şehne, dergevan in	This clique of the wicked and oppressors Consists of the bailiffs, police and doorkeepers
Aşêd –i me zaliman digêrin Dexlêd-i mezaliman dihêrin	They turn the mills of oppressors And grind the grains of grievances
Aşê me egerçi weqfê am e Gewrî tijî garisê heram e	Though our mills are public endowment The throat is full of forbidden millet
Wî garisî harisek diçînit Ew harise bo me dê hilînit	That millet is planted by a ploughman And shall be harvested by the same ploughman
Ev adete nîne xasê mîran Nabînî, li ber derê feqîran	This custom is practised only by princes You do not find it in the domain of the poor
Wan ji hemî paseban ji san in! Ew ji hemî qismê dergevan in	All the guards are like dogs They also form the clique of doorkeepers
Sultanê serir ê bêniyazî Nabînî, jiboyê karesazî	The unwilling Lord on the Throne Is not seen managing the work

Hindî ewî rakirin selatîn Deh çend ewî çêkirin şeyatin”.	However much he created sultans He created ten as many satans
Hasil, di seyê xwe Mîr nebûrî Te’lîl-i didane ber zerurî	In short: the prince does not abandon his dog The explanation is that it is simply a necessity
Mîrin hene, ew seyêd-i tazî Nadin bi edaleêd-i Tazî (2005:351-353)	There are princes who would not exchange One of these bare dogs with ten Arab horses”(2008:109-110)

This part of the text unavoidably suggests, that the prince is aware of Bekir’s nature and role, and thus his yielding to Bekir’s whispers is deliberate. He cannot be absolved because of his unawareness. We also cannot be sure if his final tears accompanying his act of mercy and decision to free Mem after a year of imprisonment are true or fake. We know from the text that the idea to release Mem from prison was also a part of Bekir’s malicious plan. Khani leaves us with many doubts considering the prince. Yet, he describes Zeynedin’s weakness as a kind of special lack, which may occur even to wise people and is linked to the vice of heart:

Mîrin hene aqil in, ezîz in Lê sadedil in, di bêtemiz in	There are princes who are wise and strong Yet they may be naïve and undiscerning
Ew, sade ji bulh û natemamî Dil nadine menşe’ a kelamî	This naivetè derives from idiocy and inadequacy It does not give due weight to the source reliability
Wan dil guh e, guh bi dil ve nîne Reşçav in û merdimeksipî ne	Their hearts are their ears, the ears are not receptive to the heart Their eye sights are black, their pupils are white
Herçî ku dibêjin’ê xerezdar Bawer dikin ew bi rastiyê, xwar	Anything the malicious say They believe, though at bay
Nabên “Eve qenc e ya xirab e” Nabên “Eve xet’e yasewab e”	They don’t say: this is good of this is bad They don’t say: this is right or this is wrong
Qasirnezer in, di bêteemmul Hazirxezeb in, di bêtehemmul	Short-sighted, with no reflection Quick tempered, with no toleration
Exleb dibin ew bi aq’li mexrûr Ekser digerin ji danîşê dûr (2005:520)	Most of them have conceited minds The majority are allergic to advice (2008:184)

The ears which “are not receptive to the heart”<sup>18</sup> refer to the inability to love and forgive. Prince Zeynedin imprisoned Mem because of his admission, that he loves Zin who is Zeynedin’s sister. Mem expressed it directly to the prince after being defeated by him in the chess tournament. Previously Mem had agreed to answer Zeynedin’s question in case he would be defeated. Being a very good player he was unlikely to fail. However, Bekir brought Zin to the neighbouring room where Mem could see her, and thus he became a very distracted player. The prince arranged this game following Bekir’s ideas. He did so because of his fear, also fuelled by Bekir that Mem along with Tajdin might wish to challenge his position. Mem’s fault is nothing more than a simple impudence<sup>19</sup>, but the prince blinded by his position and fear to lose it becomes unable to forgive this misbehaviour. It is also likely that in the 17th century Kurdistan such lack of respect toward a ruler was a serious crime. So, in the light of the 17th century norms the prince acted justly even if Tajdin, his brothers and many inhabitants of Botan were not delighted with his decision to imprison Mem. However, in Khani’s view, guided by the idea of love, it was rather the ruler’s inability to forgive that was on trial in *Mam and Zin*. We shall not forget that even Iblis was described as “guiltless” by the poet.

Although it is rather prince Zeynedin who is responsible for wrongdoings against Mem and Zin, this fact is hidden from Jazira inhabitants who prefer to accuse Bekir. To some extent it is understandable; who would dare to accuse the prince? Moreover, there were Bekir’s “whispers” which caused prince’s failure, and Khani’s project was designed to find the way to forgive Bekir-Iblis. Thus, after Mem’s death, Tajdin kills Bekir. However, it is Bekir who is explicitly forgiven by Zin and then by God, who allows him to enter paradise, while Khani remains surprisingly silent about the fate of the prince. For some reason we cannot learn if he

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<sup>18</sup> This might have been a powerful metaphor in the Middle Eastern culture. We can find a similar one in Nazim Hikmet’s well known Turkish poem *Kerem gibi*: “*Dert çok, hem dert yok. Yüreklere kulakları sağır, Hava kurşun gibi ağır.*” Nazim Hikmet speaks about the ears of the hearts which are deaf.

<sup>19</sup> Even in nowadays Kurdistan I managed to hear that it was consider an improper behaviour to tell own father directly of being in love with someone. Such a behaviour was explained to me as a lack of respect toward the elders. This sensitive information was usually first passed to mother and only she was able to mediate between children and father. Therefore we might presume that Mem’s behaviour violated the rules of 17 century Kurdistan’s etiquette.

was forgiven too. Did he not deserve forgiveness as all other sinners? As far as in his case the evil was deliberate, Khani preferred to remain silent about him. It may be considered as the “silent voice” mentioned by Ricoeur which is “not mute because not deprived of speech”. In Khani’s view forgiveness for the prince touched an enigma that only deep faith could bear. Nevertheless, it is worth stressing that we do not learn about Zeynedin’s damnation either. At the same time Bekir became a doorkeeper in Mem and Zin’s palace in paradise. First, Zin and then the noble sheikh who was allowed to see the paradise informs us about Bekir’s special role:

Rawî wehe gote min rîwayet: Zînê ku bihîstî ev hikayet	The narrator then told this tale As Zin heard the story
Ev renga he gote Mîr û Tacdin: “Ey Şah û Wezirê izz û temkin	She addressed the prince and Tajdin this manner O, King and minister of glory and power
Ez hêvî dikim nekin înadê Der heqqê vî menbeê fesadê	I beg you to discard obstinacy Concerning this source of corruption
Lewra ku Xwedanê îns û canan Wî Xaliqê erd û asîmanan	Because the possessor of both mankind and the jinn The creator of earth and heaven
Roja ewî hubbê da hebîban Hingê ewî buxdê da reqîban	The day he gave love to the lovers He gave hate to the censors
Mewcûd-i kirin dema ji me’ dûm Em pêkve di lazim in û melzûm	When he created us from nothing He made us all needing and being needed
Em sorgul in, ew jibo me xar e Em genc in, û ew jibo me mar e	We are the red roses, for us thorns were created We are the treasures, for us snakes were created
Gul hifz-i dibin bi nûkê xaran Gencîne xwedan dibin bi maran	Roses are protected by thorns Treasures are guarded by snakes
J’ ewwel ve egerçî wî cefa kir Axir bi me ra ewî wefa kir	Though at the beginning he alienated us At the end he was loyal to us
Zahir wî eger muxalefet kir Batin bi me ra muwafeqet kir	Although he openly opposed us Yet he secretly agreed with us
Ger ew nebûya di nêv me haîl Işqa me dibû betal û zaîl	If he had not become for us a barrier Our love would have been vain and perishable
Wî gerçî jibo xwe ra xirab kir Der heqqe me wî qewî sewab kir	Though he harmed himself terribly Regarding us he acted correctly

Ew bû sebebê heqîqeta me Daxil gerîya terîqeta me	He was the reason we found our truth Inwardly he returned to our way
Ew jî di riya me da şehîd e Tehqîq-i bikin ku ew seîd e	He too is the martyr for the cause And he too is happy with no remorse
Zînar-i, jî meşheda ku Mem tê Elbette, jî merqeda ku em tê	Beware! Of this assembly in which we are And of cemetery we are standing in
Mehrûm-i mekin Bekir, emanet Em bûne bi wî seyî siyanet	Do not harm Bekir, trust We were protected by this dog <sup>20</sup>
Gava ku diçîne nêv seîdê Kelbê me bitin li ber wesîdê”	When we go to the lofty fold He shall be our dog at the threshold
Însaf-i, jibo Xwedanî, însaf Ayîne dibîtin ev qeder saf!	Would it be fair if the possessor of charity Who is a lens perceiving everything with utter clarity
Qet mumkin e ab û abegîne Ev renge neket qebûlê kîne!	Who is a perfect mirror like the water Would thus not accept a rancour?
Haşa, ku bi xeyrê puxteê îşq Kella, ku sîwayê suxteê îşq	God forbid that he should lack compassion for rancour For never having experienced a burning passion
Ev çende li sahibê cefayê Ev renge kesek biket wefayê	This much is said of the alienated person This way one fulfils one’s obligation
Ev taîfê merhemetsirişt in Lew laiqê nîmeta bihişt in (2005:578, 580, 582)	Such people are merciful by nature They too are deserving of heaven’s blessing (2008:219-220)

Zin delivers her speech after Bekir is killed, and thus it cannot be understood as addressed only to Tajdin and Zeynedin. Zin’s words are directed also to God and are suffused with love and wish to forgive her enemy. She is inhumanly perfect, inspired by her share in the divine truth she was able to get access to due to the fact that Bekir became “a barrier for her human love to Mem”. As we know from the very beginning of the poem, Zin is exceptional, so is her will to forgive. To compare, Tajdin was not able to forgive and he killed Bekir. Zin individualizes and makes public what Ricoeur calls “a voice from above”. In this way Bekir faces human justice (on earth) along with human and divine forgiveness (in heaven). He does not bow to Zin either. We do not learn about his repentance. Nevertheless, empowered by her charisma, Zin is strong enough

<sup>20</sup> Translation of these two verses into English belongs to the author of this article because Saadalla has omitted them in his English translation.



to offer Iblis-Bekir unconditional love and forgiveness, accepting Satan for who he is: “an evil thorn accompanying good”. What is more, she is able to see good in Bekir’s actions which were until that moment presented as the worst evil on earth and thus she interprets and presents evil done against her as good. Interestingly, it is a woman and not a man who becomes the main proponent of forgiveness. Maybe Khani considered women as being more capable of forgiving? Nevertheless, in the further part of the text we learn that it was love of both Mem and Zin that made excusing Bekir-Iblis possible. Both of them belonged to the group of people that Satan was not able to diverge from the right path, they were guiltless though they suffered because of his bad whispers.

God accepted Iblis-Bekir in heaven precisely because of Zin’s intercession. From the moral point of view she was entitled to excuse Bekir because he was her enemy such as Iblis was considered the enemy of all humans. Of course a significant ethical problem emerges here as well. Could Zin offer forgiveness to Bekir-Iblis in the name of all mankind? Definitely not. This is also the reason why Bekir could not have been called Iblis in this story. However, Zin’s action was symbolic and constituted rather a kind of invitation for other people to forgive evil out of love for an evildoer. What is more, we should not forget that in Khani’s times an individual was treated as an inseparable part of a community; thus actions of an individual were often considered representative for other members of a group; therefore, in Khani’s times it might not have been such an important moral issue. As we will see below the act of final forgiveness was depicted in much more universal terms than a simple story of the duchy of Botan.

Wî pîrî bi xewn, eger bi îlham Ev renge he kir heqîqet î’lam	That old man, following a dream or an inspiration This way announced the truth’s revelation:
Go: Çûme diyarê baxê ridwan Min dî du hezar-i hor û xîlman	Saying: “I went to the garden of the heavens Where I saw two thousand boys and maidens
Bîlcumle di qesrekê emeldar Ew qesr-i butun ji durrê şehwar	All were working in a palace The palace was made of precious pearls
Yek şubhê Bekir, bitac û binper Westayî li ber derî, muqerrer	One was like Bekir with a crown and an armour Standing in front of an appointed door
Çoganekeî heyzeran di des bû Emma me nezani ew çi kes bû	Holding a bamboo cudgel He was beyond recognising

Min gotê wî: “Ey xwedanmeratib Ayat tu xwedan î ya ne hacib?	I told him: “O, rank possessor Are you the owner or the doorkeeper?
Go: “Şêx, tu nizanî ma ku kî me? Ez ew Bekirê ku qapûçî me	He said: Sheikh! Do you not recognise me? I am Bekir, the doorkeeper
Ez muşterekê Memê û Zîn im Lew l’êre he asîtannişîn im	I am Mem and Zin’s partner So here I am sitting on the threshold
Ew qesre ku heşt tebeq eyan in Yek ya min e, heft tebeq di wan in	This palace consists of eight visible storeys One is mine, seven are theirs
Ez l’êre emin û destbidar im Lêkin di vî milkî hîssedar im	I, rod in hand, keep security And also hold a share in the property
Herçend-i bi şekl-i paseban im Emma bi mekan şerîkê wan im”	Though I appear as a keeper But regarding the palace I am a partner
Min gote wî: Ey nîkûserencam Wazih bike halî bo min, î’lam	I told him: “O malicious perpetrator Clarify the position so I may understand
Herçend kerema Kerîmî am e Barî bi çî da te ev meqame?”	Although the generosity of the Generous is boundless Still why did the Lord give you this place?
Go: „Şêx- i, tu hêj nebûyî arif Emma di dinê tu bûyî waqif	He said: Sheikh! You still have much to learn Though in the world you were well acquainted
Ez ger bi xeber reqîbê wan bûm Lêkin bi nezer hebîbê wan bûm	Although I was with my words their censor I always looked at them as their lover
Min ew ji dinê bi paş ve kêşan Mu’tad-i kirin bi derd û êşan	Thus I pulled them from the world’s corruption By making them familiar with pain and affliction
Xoşî di dine li wan bi der dan Munqad-i kirin bi dax û derdan	Although in the world I deprived them of joyful living Guided them through the hell of suffering
Ew çend-i me dane wan sîyaset Hetta we ku bûn xwedanrîyaset	I endowed them with so much policy That they could have the presidency
Lewra me li derrê wan xeber da Hetta ku serê xwe tê bi ter da	Thus I advised against their interests Until in this way I too lost my head
Ew her du cîhan bi hev hewî ne Ev derre li derrê hev qewî ne	These two worlds are like fellow-wives And the fellow-wives stab each other with knives
Hetta we ku bernedî tu yêkê Nabînî çû lezzetê ji yêkê	Not until you divorce one Shall you be able to see charm in one

Ew derre bi wan me daye berdan  
Kêşane bi asîman ji erdan

Min dayîe wan butun bihiştêk  
Wan dayîye min ji baxî xiştêk”

Şêx mayî li gotina wî guhdêr  
Go: “Ey şeqiyê te aqibetxêr

Tacdin ku tu kuştî bêcinayet  
Barî bi wî ra çi kir înet?”

Go: „Efw-i kir ew cenabê Barî  
Bû cennetî, û neçûye narî

Xellaqî, xirabî û xebîsî  
Bexşîne wî, cennetî nivîsî

Alem ku bi dest xirabîya min  
Aciz kiribû fesadiya min

Kuştim wî jibo nizamê alem  
Bo rahetiya ewamê alem

Zahir wî egerçi kir qebahet  
Batin bûye rahet ew qebahet

Şolin hene, zahîren xirab in  
Fî’lin hene, sûreten sewab in

Yek edl e li sûretê cefayê  
Yek qehr e di kiswetê wefayê

Li perdekeşê rumûzê hîkmet  
Bê sir nekir ew kunûzê qismet

Tewzî’i nekir li amê nasan  
Mexsûs ewî da nedîm û nasan

Ew sir wî nekir jibo me mel’ûm  
Hin mehrem in, û hinek di mehrûm

Sed şikr-i, ezê xirab, û Tacdin  
Mehza bi teelluqa Mem û Zîn

Mehrûm-i nebûn bi pirrgunahî  
Bûn mezherê rehmeta îlahî” (2005:602, 604, 606, 608)

That dualism we had them abandon  
When we pulled them up from earth to heaven

I have given them an entire garden  
They have given me a straw in the garden

The Sheikh listened carefully to this words  
And said: O, culprit with the good end

How did Tajdin kill you without committing a crime?  
How did the Lord take care of your predicament?

He said: “The Lord forgave him, I could tell  
So he went to heaven, not to hell

The creator has forgiven the evil and wickedness  
And he has thus inscribed the heaven

With my evilness and depravity  
The world has become angry

I was killed for the sake of the system of the World  
For the comfort of the people of the World

Perhaps his action seemed an abomination, visibly  
But that abomination was a blessing, invisibly

There are deeds which are wrong, apparently  
There are acts which are right, formally

One is justice in the form of alienation  
One is oppression in the form of loyalty

But if Veil Keeper of the signs and the wisdom  
Did not reveal the secret of that treasure and fate

It is not readily distributed to just anyone generally  
It is only given to companions and friends, particularly

He did not inform me of that secret  
Some are prohibited and others are deprived

Praise God that the evil one and Tajdin  
Thanks to the affection of Mem and Zin

Were not punished for so many a sin  
And became an aspect of the divine compassion (2008:229-231)

What should draw our attention is that, “the old man was announced the truth’s revelation” and not simply “the fate of Mem and Zin after their death”. Thus, we are informed that what will follow is of special importance. Secondly, Bekir informs us, that he was killed, “for the sake of the system of the World/For the comfort of the people of the World”. This is not the reality of Jazira, Botan, Kurdistan or even the Muslim world, but rather the universe and its order. Further, he was killed as “bad” Bekir, but now we learn that he was able to love. Thus, Bekir “born” in heaven is rehabilitated to some extent. We learn that he is able to love and that he is God’s envoy. Moreover, what we are told is that we are allowed to touch the secret, enigma – in Ricoeur’s language – that cannot be “readily distributed to just anyone” and contains elements which are “prohibited” or “deprived”. It suggests that only some people are able to understand it, but also that this information is not in line with Islamic orthodoxy. In the abovementioned quotation and in the ending part we learn that both Bekir-like scoundrels and Tajdin-like cruel men as well as killers and desperate people are forgiven because of their share in the love of lovers that is those who are capable of love.

If it is true that Khani personified Iblis in the form of Bekir; we have to acknowledge his attempt to change the conviction that Satan deserved damnation. What he did, was calling Satan back to heaven, to “de-satanize” him. Unofficially, under the cover of poetical rhetoric Khani welcomed and acclaimed heresy in his work. We may link it to Yezidi or wider Sufi tradition where the Angel who refused to bow to a man happened to be rehabilitated. However, Khani’s aim was not to challenge the Islamic beliefs, he otherwise was very attached to. He did it to emphasize the part of tradition which was particularly important to him, though, he was perfectly aware that this must be done non-explicitly. Firstly, because he touched an enigma that could have not been expressed otherwise. What is more, Khani’s life and the book he wrote could be endangered. Finally, the explicit presentation of such a sensitive matter would spoil the unassuming grace of the poem. Khani acclaimed the power of perfect love and forgiveness in order to make them irreplaceable from his religion and Kurdish culture. The damnation of Satan meant that God could not have been called “the most Merciful”. As stressed above, the inability to forgive Satan created a visible border for God’s mercy. Since a human was entangled, because Satan became his enemy, Allah himself could not excuse Iblis. In his poem

Khani found a way to make it possible. Human love, forgiveness and intercession made Satan welcomed in heaven again. Iblis was rejected because of men and accepted back thanks to woman. Could it be more powerful and impressive hymn to forgiveness creating hope that one day the world become reunited? The palace of Mem and Zin which is built from pearls recalls the Yezidi pearl from which the ocean and then world occurred after God had thrown Love into it:

Êzdanê me durr deranî.	Our God brought the Pearl Out
Mihbet avête nave	He threw Love into it
Jê peyda kir du çavê	From it he brought forth two eyes
Jê herikî pir avê.	A great deal of water flowed from it.
Av ji durê herikî	Water flowed from the Pearl
Bû behra bê serî bê binî	It became an ocean without end, without beginning
Bê rê û bê derî	Without road and without gate
Êzdanê me ser behrê gerî.	Our God circled over the water.

(Qewlê Afirîna Dinyayê 10-11, Kreyenbroek, Rashov, 2005:67)

## THE SELECTIVE VISION OF ABRAHAMIC TRADITION

We should not forget that what Ricoeur refers to as “a voice from above” and “Abrahamic tradition” is in fact a selective vision of this tradition. We can find there “eye for an eye” principle too. And even if Christians refer to the act of lifting this principle by Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount<sup>21</sup>, suggesting that their religion always used to call to love and peace; it was not until quite modern times when the idea of love and forgiveness started to be widely acknowledged and promoted in Europe<sup>22</sup>. This phenomenon seems to be linked to what Kwam Anthony Appiah calls “moral revolutions” which gradually occurred in Europe and some other places as a part of the wider modernization project. Moral revolutions result-

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<sup>21</sup> ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; Matthew 5.1-37

<sup>22</sup> Taking into account the debate on the capital punishment which is still present in many countries as well as European and US contribution to many wars and conflicts for example in the name of “fighting terrorism”, it is rather difficult to call this moral revolution completed.

ed in the reinterpretation of *honour* and *honour worlds* – that is the social areas of codes defining to whom respect might be offered (Appiah, 2010). What followed was the widening of the *honour worlds* which gradually started to encompass many different others and their cultures. In this way the modern idea of dignity was born, supressing the traditional notion of honour. While the traditional honour was based on faithfulness (chastity in case of women) and courage, because these virtues were particularly important when the stability of a traditional community was concerned (MacIntyre, 1996:230 ); the modern notion of dignity was established to preserve and promote value of a human life in more universal sense. Yet, it is thanks to our ability to love that we recognize the value and vulnerability of life (Nussbaum, 1999: 261-285). This development meant repositioning of the traditional system of values and paving the way for love and life to be acclaimed as the top of a new hierarchy regardless of religion or atheist worldview. Both values were subsequently promoted among the laymen especially since Romanticism. Goethe's *Faust* (1790) or Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) are one of the literary examples of such practice. In other words love and forgiveness were re-invented on mass scale in a new increasingly secular context of a modern society. They were needed as guiding principles due to the growing plurality and the new existential uncertainty of the world. Ricoeur's reflections on forgiveness are also the product of this revolution. His "voice from above" originates from the Abrahamic tradition, but is not necessarily identified with God or a particular religion. It is a kind of *voice of heart* that even atheists may be willing to listen to.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thanks to Khani's work the idea of love and forgiveness received a new individualised form within the Kurdish culture. Khani did it by drawing from Kurdish folklore, Islam and non-canonical believes, as well as from foreign and domestic array of literary works. Supposedly the role of the poem was also to challenge the traditional tribal system of values where revenge was rampant<sup>23</sup>. Not surprisingly

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<sup>23</sup> The fact that the revenge was widespread among the Kurds even in XIX century is well illustrated by the collection of Kurdish stories translated by August Kościeszka-Żaba and Mela

Khani's characters live within this system. Though dominated by passionate love Mem and Zin keep chastity and Tajdin takes revenge on Bekir for the death of his best friend. However, at the same time Khani paves way for the new approach to fault and the guilty person which he associated with a certain part of own cultural heritage and the Islamic tradition. Khani's idea of God and human forgiving Bekir-Iblis together seemed to be established not in order to accept evil and wrongdoings, but to foster people's will to understand each other better. Let's not forget that 'to understand' does not mean "to justify". Khani presented Zeynedin's own justification of why to follow Bekir-Iblis whispers (so, he listened to him and understood him), but he did not justify his deeds (he did not acclaim them). Moreover, as stressed many times in this text, the idea of the limitless forgiveness was crucial to conceive of the Most Merciful God.

In *Mem and Zin* Khani appreciated what he felt most attached to. He wished to prove that the Kurds are not devoid of the idea and ability to love. As stressed above, there might have been some "wise people" who were doubtful of that. Thus, for Khani promoting Kurdish literature and culture meant showing the Kurds as capable of love and forgiveness, as noble humans in fact. On the other hand, Khani remained very sceptical about the possibility to apply the idea of love and forgiveness in the earthly life. Nevertheless, although he portrayed many vices and shortcomings he still remained hopeful. The ending highlights the main idea of the poem again:

Her qisse û hin ji wan mîsal in Hindek di heram û hin helal in	Some are stories and some are anecdotes Some are forbidden and some are permitted
Her qisse ji hîsse behremend in Her emsîle, ger bizanî, pend in	Each story has a share of feeling though Each anecdote has wisdom, if you know
Lêkin wî xerez ji guf û goyê Meqsûd-i ji hinde cust û coyê	But the purpose of talking and arguing The aim of discussing and searching
Zahirkirina cemalê îşq e Sabitkirina kemalê îşq e (2005:614)	Is to proclaim the beauty of love And to confirm the perfection of love (233-234)

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Mahmud Bayazidi and published in Russia in 1860 under the title: *Recueil de notices et récits kourdes servant à la connaissance de la langue, de la littérature et des tribus du Kourdistan, réunis et traduits en français par M. Alexandre Jaba consul de Russie à Erzeroum*. In my article I refer to the Polish edition of this work (2015).

We should, however, not go too far in the analysis of the Khani's God-Love idea. Khani glorified the beauty of life in the case of Siti and Tajdin, that is other characters confronted with Mem and Zin, nevertheless, a life of a human was not yet a value in the *Mem and Zin*. The perfect life meant to Khani to be able to sacrifice life in order to reach paradise and unify with God:

Xweş eyş-i kirin bi işqê, wellah Xweş pêkve mirin, tebarekellah	They lived well, enjoying love, by God They died well, blessed by God
Herçî bi ciwanî, şubhê Zînê Tebdîl-i biket bi işqê, jinê	Anyone as beautiful as Zin Exchanging her life for love
Ya mislê Memê, bi işqê ser dit Eyş û xweşiyê li rê bi der dit	Or like Mem sacrificing everything for love And forgetting life and enjoyment
Elbette miradî dê hilînit Herçî ku îrade dê bibînit (2005:594)	Shall attain all their desires And shall achieve all their wishes (2008:225)

Life of a human, life on earth is not the end in itself in *Mem and Zin*. It is God who means love and is worthy of such an exchange: life for love. That is also why *Mem and Zin* cannot be treated as the fully modern expression of the national idea which emerged to glorify an eternal life of a nation and sacrifice for the sake of a nation (Smith, 1999:133). It was well understood by the Kurdish writer, Seyit Alp, who in both of his novels *Şewk*, and *Dewran*, although written in Turkish language, challenged Khani's ideas and advocated for the sacrifice in the name of other people not God (Bocheńska, 2011:292-313). Also in *Gotinên Gunehkar* (Sinful words, 2007) by contemporary Kurdish-Kurmanji writer Hesenê Metê, the protagonist Behram abandons both God and Ahriman in order to love a human being. This is the only love he recognizes as true and worthy of sacrifice (Bocheńska, 2013). In the film *Marooned in Iraq* by Bahman Ghobadi the protagonist Mirza challenges the traditional honour code (that urge to kill unfaithful women), and guided by love to his unfaithful wife sets out on a journey to find and help her. He agrees to be the object of ridicule, he gives up his pride, and thus love and life win the battle with honour.

Thus, it is evident that Ehmede Khani and *Mem and Zin* are still inspiring for Kurdish contemporary culture which reproduces and redefines his thoughts and images according to needs of a modern society. Although there is not yet modern understanding of dignity in Khani's work, his hymn to forgiveness can be considered as a



great source for such a notion to be developed. Ironically enough although the Kurdish idea and ability of love expressed through their culture is visible for and debated by the well-educated Kurdish elite which participates in Kurdish cultural activities it still remains invisible for many people from outside. This includes Kurdish neighbours such as Turks who associate the Kurds rather with terrorists<sup>24</sup> than poets and writers. This phenomenon might be depicted in the scope of modern socio psychological theories, and called a subtle form of dehumanisation which is infra-humanisation (Demoulin, et. al., Leyens, et. al., 2007), divesting of human nature (Haslam, 2006) or mental properties (Morewedge, Preston & Wegner, 2007), lacking human potentials (Tarnowska, Sławuta & Kořta, 2012). In other words, those who do not belong to the Kurdish community, may display a tendency to divest Kurdish people of uniquely human qualities, for example the ability to love, think or change. Fuelled by the ideology of Turkish nationalism, this invisible process often ends up in moral disengagement which means, that many representative of the Turkish society close their eyes to the Kurdish problems, needs and suffering, and even support the heavy-handed policy toward them. Thus, Khani's reason for writing *Mem and Zin* expressed in the 17th century is also relevant today. He seemed to be a prolific psychologist.

There cannot be any doubts that the Turkish state with its long lasting ban on the Kurdish language and culture holds the main responsibility for this situation. That is why, if the reconciliation process is ever to be initiated again, acknowledging Kurdish cultural heritage and its ideas must be placed among the most important tasks. First, it has to be done to mute the military conflict and allow the Kurds to speak and to be heard because only then any dialogue may be established. The aim is not simply to fulfil Kurdish demands, but to provide the intellectual background and vital climate for the reconciliation and for any political solution to be established. However, following Ehmede Khani's assumption that proving the Kurds to be creatures capable of love is of utmost importance, the Kurds should also engage more in promoting the Kurdish culture and social initiatives instead of relying on a military confrontation which leads to nowhere.

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<sup>24</sup> Turkish authorities often claimed that the term *terrorist* is addressed to the members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and not to the members of the Kurdish society living in Turkey. However, as shown in the study by Bilali, Betül-Çelik and Ok (2014:260), this term is often applied by the Turks when thinking and speaking about the Kurds. It shows the actual impact of such political labelling on the societal level

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# The impact of the Ottoman policy on the relations of Assyrians with Kurds

The case of Bedr Chan's uprising

## ABSTRACT

In this essay I would focus on elucidation of contribution of Ottoman policymakers in Bedr Khan's massacre of Assyrians as an example of influence of other, external powers on internal relations of neighbouring subaltern societies/ ethnic groups. Key position in this deliberation will be held by the analysis of centralisation reforms in Ottoman Empire and the role of Beiraktar, Pasha of Mosul, he played in implementation of the centralisation plan in eastern provinces. But this will follow only after a presentation of a general description of political and demographic composition of Assyrian population in Ottoman Empire in 19th century since in order to understand a change that the Turkish policy exerted on these relation we have to depict first an image of the relation before the Ottomans direct engagement.

The events of Bedr Khan's uprising and resulting massacre of Assyrians is commonly perceived as a turning point in hitherto good relations between Kurds and Assyrians based mostly on coexistence since it sowed overt animosity among them for many following decades with its peak during 1890s and the First World War. This has led to coming down the interpretation of that relations to a continuous series of acts of enmity and mistreatment skipping examples of cooperation between them. Therefore it seems advisable to scrutinise the role of other players in boosting that hostility and that is primarily Turkish authorities in the case of Bedr Khan's uprising and subsequent massacre.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF ASSYRIANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

At the beginning of the 19th century Assyrians lived mostly in a triangle between Lake Van, Urmia and Mosul divided between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. We can circle four big areas of a large compact of an Assyrian population at that time consisting of: Hakkari and Tiyari region, Tur Abdin, Mosul district and Urmia region. The geographical distribution was, to some extent, connected with religious and political diversity of the Assyrian ethnic group i.e. that each area had a specific feature in at least a religious and political field. From the very past Assyrians differentiated socially and politically and were divided into three categories/classes: independent tribes, semi-independent tribes and tribes dependent to regional political power (mostly Kurdish, Afshar or Turkish landlords). A homeland and centre of independent Assyrian tribes remained Hakkari and Tiyari region, while the rest of the Assyrian areas were inhabited by either semi-independent and dependent tribes or non-tribal Assyrians.

### **HAKKARI AND TIYARI**

English protestant minister J. W. Etheridge after visiting Assyrians' areas wrote that:

Adiabene, Ashur, or Atyria, Assyria were names for the same region. In this region, lived from time immemorial, the Assyrians as independent people, and during the first half of the nineteenth century they were in constant conflict with the Kurds for pastoral rights. Because they were independent therefore they were called '*Asherat*' (Etheridge 1846:18).

The largest Assyrian tribes living in Hakkari and Tyiari and mentioned by William Ainsworth were Upper and Lower Tiyari, Jellawi (Jelu), Tobi (Tekhoma), Piniyaniski, Artoshi Bashi, Bazi, Al Toshi, Sati, Ormari, Dez, Siliyahi, Julamergi and Berwari. They lived in districts of Jelu, Diz, Tekhoma, Baz and Julamerk with the latter forming an administrative centre of the region (Ainsworth 1842:285).

At the head of the political structure of each tribe stood its own chief called *malik*. The post was not hereditary but appointed by a Nestorian patriarch. Foreign travellers noticed that patriarch Mar Shimun exercised both spiritual and temporal jurisdiction over the tribes in Hakkari and Tiyari, which were by far inhabited by Nestorians. Mrs Bishop visiting Kochanes (Kochanis) in the 1890's pointed out that:

Mar Shimun is not only a spiritual prince but the temporal ruler of the Syrians of the plains and valleys, and of the Ashirets or tribal Syrians of the mountains of Central Kurdistan, as well as a judge and a salaried official of the Turkish Government. He appoints the *maleks* or lay rulers for each district, where the office is not hereditary, and possesses ecclesiastical patronage. For over four centuries the Patriarch has been of the family of Mar Shimun, which is regarded as the royal family; and he is assisted in managing affairs by a 'family council'. Kochanes is thus the ecclesiastical and political metropolis of the Syrian nation, and the innumerable disputes which arise among the people of this region are brought here for judgment and arbitration (Mrs Bishop 1891:288).

Mrs Bishop remarked on a status of a patriarch as "a salaried official of the Turkish Government" referring both to the principles of so called *millet system* and to subsequent circumstances that occurred in the second half of the 19th century after implementing deep state administration reforms. Wigram put the political status of the patriarch above his ecclesiastical authority noticing, after his visit in the Church of Mar Shalitha in Kochanes, that "Mar Shimun is accustomed to think of himself rather as a chief of his nation than as Patriarch of his Church (or to be accurate not to separate these two offices in his mind)" (Wigram 1922:273). However, the civil authority of the patriarch was limited to independent tribes, while the rest of his followers – from semi- and non-independent tribes – recognised only his religious authority. The patriarch's temporal or civil authority meant that he possessed also military power, and was the supreme head of the armed forces of independent Assyrian tribes through maliks subordinate to him. His headquarter was in Kochanes. Another important town in this region was Amadiya laying on the edge of its southern border.

There were also some Kurdish tribes in Hakkari but they constituted minority of the population of the region since the vast majority consisted of Assyrians, who lived mainly in villages and spoke mostly Syriac, hardly Turkish or Kurdish. However, the Kurds lived with their Assyrian neighbours in comparative peace and coexistence. Assyrians from all local districts regularly paid visits to the patriarch, and even Kurdish *aghas* sometimes attended his audiences to discuss issues between people. It was a commonplace habit that the consecutive patriarchs cooperated with the Kurdish chiefs of the emirate of Hakkari in administering people's and emirate's affairs and subbed Kurdish emir during his absence (Aboona 2008:36).

Assyrians in Hakkari and Tiyari made a unique Christian society in the Ottoman Empire for a few reasons. Firstly, although Christians (as non-Muslims) were exempted from military service in the state the Assyrians of Hakkari and Tiyari formed their own troops. Secondly, tribal militia was a unit separated from the Ottoman army coming under the authority of *maliks* and the supreme power of the patriarch. Thirdly, Assyrians in Hakkari and Tiyari were far more isolated from the adjacent areas due to a mountainous terrain than other population of Assyrians in the country. Thus, it goes without saying, that Hakkari Assyrians owed their own independence from state authority both their military organization and impenetrable roads of the local mountains for ages.

## **TUR ABDIN**

Tur Abdin ('Mountain of Worshippers') is a plateau with lower mountains than Hakkari. It is surrounded from the north and east by the Tigris river and Cizre city stretching to Nusaybin (Nisibis) to the south and Mardin to the west. Mardin, from the very past, was an administrative and besides Midyat, a religious centre with its traditional headquarter of the patriarch, monastery of Dayr al-Zafaran built in 493. The vast majority of Christians of Tur Abdin were followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church, so called *Jacobites*. According to the census carried out in 1840, approximately 64 000 Jacobites lived in Mardin sanjaq (10 500 families), 1300 families of Syriac Catholics and 18 500 Armenians (Sims 2013:80; after Özcoşar



2008:158). It is believed, that in the middle of the 19th century Christians of Tur Abdin made a slight majority over Kurds in this region with the biggest population concentrated around Midyat and Mardin. Due to relative isolation of the Jacobites' religion, especially in villages, preserved their mother tongue i.e. vernacular Syriac in dialect called *turoyo* (Joseph 1983:18-19). According to another source, in 1890 in the Mardin district there were 12 Catholic Armenian schools, 2 Protestant Armenian schools, 22 Chaldean schools, 18 Jacobite, 4 Catholic Syriacs and 1 latin (Özdemir 2012:33).

It is arguable that Christians and Muslims Tur Abdin generally lived in peace, which was bolstered by similar usages, dresses, appearance, superstition, character, customs, work on land and farm, and sometimes the same language as well as folk music and dances of both ethnic groups. Horatio Southgate, a missionary sent to Tur Abdin in 1840 by Episcopal Church from the USA, noticed that Christians and Muslims in the countryside wore so similar clothes that it was difficult to recognise them at first glance. The biggest differences between them could be found of course in religion: faith, customs and traditions. The two religious communities fasted and worshipped differently, they had various ways of celebrating holidays, conducting their marriages and funeral ceremonies, etc. Nevertheless, there were also some endeavours of sharing the same religious customs. Southgate witnessed in Mardin that Muslim women sometimes visited churches to 'join a prayer' or to bring their children to ask a priest to bless them. This could be due a quite popular habit among Muslims of showing Christian monks high regard, which was a tradition ranging from the onset of Islam (Joseph 1983:24-27). However, the fields of similarity of the Jacobites and Kurds differed in cities and in the countryside. According to John Joseph, "in urban centres, where Jacobites formed an important element of the population in such places as Mosul, Mardin, Urfa, Diyarbakir, Aleppo and even Baghdad, the ethnic origin of the man on the street was often discernible from his dress, especially his turban" with the Jacobites and Chaldean wearing a black silk turban, though in some areas restrictions on dress and colour were flouted (Joseph 1983:22). As early as in the 15th century, the Jacobites adopted the Arabic language to the Syriac alphabet and thus Garshūni emerged among them as a style notation used also in the 19th century. In contrast to the Nestorians, who primarily chose their first names from the Bible, the Jacobites used more Arabic-

and Muslim-sounding names but with a strict exception for women, whose names couldn't implied Muslim faith (Ibidem). The main political difference between Nestorians in Hakkari and Jacobites in Tur Abdin was that the latter belonged mostly to semi- or non-independent tribes and neither possessed their own military units nor their patriarch enjoyed wide civil and political power over his faithful as it was in the case with Mar Shimun. However, the Jacobites in Tur Abdin seemed more assimilated with their neighbours' culture than Nestorians in Hakkari.

## NINIVEH PLAIN

Niniveh Plain with the centre in Mosul has been for ages inhabited by Christian Assyrians for ages . In the 19th century they were either semi-independent tribes or *ra'aya* people, mostly Jacobites and Chaldeans. *Ra'aya* is derived from an Arabic word meaning 'flock' or 'herd animal', which in reference to Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire is often understood as pejorative term meaning that *ra'aya* could be shear from their property for ruler's profit as flock of sheep (Hitti 1957:667; Pears 1912:7). Christian villages were interspersed in Mosul district among Arabs, Turkomans and Kurds. According to the census from 1849, quoted by Badger, 2050 Muslim families lived in the city of Mosul, 350 Chaldean, 450 Jacobite families, 300 Syrian-Catholic and 200 Jewish families (Badger 1852:82).

In Mosul Southgate was kindly surprised to see an uncommon degree of "familiarity and regard" of Muslims toward Christians, which was unveiled, for example, by the cordial and respectful manner with which Christian priests were usually saluted by Muslims. Southgate mentioned two reasons that stood for these genial relations in Mosul. Firstly, in the past the Christian inhabitants had considerably contributed to rendering in defending the city during war as blacksmiths, masons and carpenters. The evidence that might be adduce to corroborate such premise was a habit of some Muslim parents in Mosul that after losing their child they sometimes brought their new children to a priest to be baptised. They actually did not mean to convert their children to Christianity, but supposedly believed that this rite had magical power to protect lives of their offsprings. Secondly, some of the Muslims of the city, among them the most prominent had Christians ancestors.

One of them was a popular governing family Jalilis, who preserved the memory of their last Christian ancestor, a Nestorian, by visiting his tomb in a church cemetery (Southgate 1841:253-254). For ages the traditional headquarter of a Chaldean patriarch was Rabban Hormizd near Mosul. Other important towns were: Qaraqosh, Bartella, Bashiqa, Bahzani and Alqosh.

## **OTHER REGIONS OF ASSYRIAN POPULATION**

Other regions and districts where Assyrians used to live in the Ottoman Empire embraced districts of Gawar or Gavar, Somai, Chara and Mamoodiah as well as districts of Bash Qala, Albaq and Van. In middle of the 19th century, the district of Berwar contained villages belonging both to Kurds and Nestorians, mostly inhabited by *ra'ayas*. There were also two important compact Assyrian populations nearby Ottoman borders in Persia: Urmia region and the district of Dilman in Persian Azerbaijan, by 1840 they comprised 63 villages. Urmia was the biggest concentration of Assyrians outside the Ottoman Empire with the majority of Nestorians. Justin Perkins, an American Presbyterian missionary working for many years in Urmia, made a distinction between urban (Urmia) and mountainous Nestorians (Hakkari):

“The Nestorians of Oroomiah partake much, in their manners, of the suavity and urbanity of the Persian character. By the side of their rude countrymen from mountains, though originally from the same stock, they appear like antipodes.” (Perkins 1843:10)

It is believed that in Urmia, as well as in Hakkari, Tur Abdin and Mosul regions Assyrians had settled before the advance of the Muslims and even in the pre-Christian era and that in Urmia Muslims groups arrived not sooner than between the 11th and 15th centuries (Aboona 2008:1-5).

To bring this part of the paper to a close we must concede that our evidence forbids any firm general conclusion that in the first half of the 19th century there was any kind of continuous hostility between Assyrians and Kurds. Conversely, relations between them in all the aforementioned regions were quite peaceful, though sporadically intruded with pillages and robberies of some nomadic Kurdish tribes, whose victims actually were not only Christians but Turks and other

fellow Kurds as well. We must not forget that there was some kind of coexistence between Kurds and Assyrians forged through ages of neighbourhood, though the degree of Assyrian's economic and political dependence to Kurdish control varied significantly in some cases. This world in such a condition lasted till the 1840's when the sultan's programme of centralisation of the empire dispelled isolation of south-eastern *vilayets*.

## REFORMS OF CENTRALIZATION

The programme of centralisation of the Ottoman Empire was a principle of Tanzimat's reforms launched by sultan Abdülmecida with issuing two edicts: *Hatt-ı Şerif* of Gülhane (1839) and later *Hatt-i Humayun* (1856). To put it briefly, the new law, on one hand, brought Christians closer to become equal subjects of the sultan and extended their rights e.g. to testify in court against Muslims, form mixed courts (Muslim-Christian), serve in the army (it became a duty for them as other subjects) but only on lower ranks, though they could buy themselves from the service by paying *jizje* tax, as well as legal work in state administration. But on the other hand it augmented military and tax duties of south-eastern provinces. As a result, "non-Muslims in general were willing to accept the benefits of equality, they opposed its price" (Aboona 2008:145; Ottoman Way of 154-159). Moreover, the Tanzimat reforms with their stress on equality challenged the belief in Muslim superiority that had been enforced ever since the advance of Islam. Thus, it was no easy task for the reformers to remove from the minds of local rulers and their subjects the view that Christians and Jews were inferior to Muslims, and the attempt to raise their status to equality with Muslims proved to be unacceptable (see: Aboona 2008:146; Joseph 1983:23). Accordingly many Christians began to practise their religious customs openly. In this way they inadvertently challenged the population of Muslims which was in majority. They rang church bells, carried crosses in processions or sold alcohol in public places. As Ma'oz Moshe concluded "such deeds strongly irritated the Muslims almost everywhere, and in some places they provoked anti-Christian outbreaks ... many Christians were killed and their houses and churches sacked and burnt." (Ma'oz 1968:190)

Consequently, Tanzimat reforms proved to be effected in centralization of the state administration but to a large extent failed with a task of implementing equality rights for non-Muslim subjects. Although, acknowledging equal rights for non-Muslims was hindered in practice by traditional Islamic prejudices also in eastern provinces, there were also political reason that stood behind the rise of hostility between Kurds and Assyrian in the middle of the 19th century.

## **ACTIVITY OF PASHA OF MOSUL**

A significant role in this process played İnce Beiraktar Mehmet Pasha, who in 1834 was appointed by the sultan the governor of the Mosul province. He introduced harsh law with intrigues aimed to set Kurds and Assyrians at variance. A local mulla quoted by Flechter describe Beiraktar as follows: “Mohammed Pasha is in one respect a just man; he robs Jews, Christians, and Moslems alike” (Fletcher 1850:286-287). In order to assert his control over subjects he frequently used armed forces against them and division among Kurdish chiefs. The scheme was to support one Kurdish chief against another and against the Assyrian independent tribes in order to finally suppress the winner of the intra-Kurdish and inter Kurdish-Assyrian rivalry by Turkish troops. First, he subdued Yezidi region of Sinjar and Sheikhan and after that conquered Rawanduz emirate (1836), and Bahdinan with its centre of Amadiya (1838).

In Amadiya the Kurdish family, who was ruling for ages descending from Abbasid dynasty, was backed by the local Assyrian tribe Diz. The Kurdish chieftain of Hakkari, Nurullah, sought to protect Amadiya from being captured by Turkish army moving forward to east and at the beginning of his attempts of armed defence of the town he had been given support of Assyrian units sent by Mar Shimun. But afterwards Beiraktar threatened the patriarch that his resistance would be understood as betrayal of the sultan and consequently Mar Shimun decided to retreat his troops from Amadiya. The Pasha of Mosul seized the town then while Nurullah had to escape and in revenge for Mar Shimun withdrawing he plundered his headquarter in Kochanes and some Assyrian villages in 1841. Henceforth, the patriarch supported Nurullah's cousin Sulaiman Beg in their competition in control over Kurdish

tribes in Hakkari. These events prompted a long and sharp conflict between Mar Shimun and Nurullah. But both were unwittingly incited by Pasha of Mosul. On the one hand, the patriarch, instigated by Beiraktar, refused to pay *jiza* to Nurullah but, on the other hand, Beiraktar aroused Nurullah's suspicion toward Mar Shimun and American missionaries' involvement in the region of Tiyyari and sent reports to Constantinople depicting Assyrians as rebels. The American missionary's involvement in Tiyyari and Hakkari at that time, led by Asahel Grant, was aimed at building a missionary post. But the building of the post resembled more a fortress than a house of praying or teaching. This provoked Kurdish and Turkish suspicion that Assyrians along with Americans they were carrying out a secret military plot. When in May 1843 Mar Shimun sent letter to Beiraktar warning him about Bedr Chan's preparations for war, Beiraktar forwarded it just to Bedr Chan. From that conduct it might be undoubtedly inferred that Beiraktar's objective was to set Bedr Chan and the patriarch at variance and lead them to an armed clash (Aboona 2008:181-188).

In 1842, the Pasha of Mosul managed to subdue the emirate of Botan and in 1847 – the emirate of Baban. However, the chief of Botan emirate, Bedr Chan, stayed in power. With the Ottoman policy of forced centralization of power in the state both Bedr Chan and his brother-in-law Nurullah sought an opportunity to crash the Assyrian autonomy in the Hakkari region totally and establish absolute Kurdish dominion in the area. What is more, Mar Shimun backed Nurullah's rival, Sulaiman Beg, while on the contrary a few of the Assyrian *maliks*, apparently jealous of the patriarch's power, turned against him and advocated the Kurdish emir of Hakkari (Ibidem:182).

The joint attack of Kurdish troops of Bedr Chan and Nurullah on Assyrian villages and towns began in July 1843. As a result of the bloody campaign lasting till the end of 1846 over 10 000 Assyrians were killed, men and women, while thousands of women and children became enslaved and others had to abandon their homes seeking refuge from persecution in neighbouring areas, mostly in Mosul and Urmia. The invaders were also prompted by some Kurdish religious leaders who had announced *jihād* against Christians living on Muslim land. Fortunately, there was also a positive reaction from the Kurdish side since some of the Kurdish villages in Techoma district dared to refuse their support for Bedr Chan and backed up Nestorians (Donef 2012:130-13; Aboona 2008:211).

Simultaneously, Bedr Chan's units invaded Tur Abdin region starting with Cizre and later moving toward Mardin. Almost 3600 Syriac villages were compelled to convert to Islam and a monastery of Mar Sharbil in Midyat was destroyed (Aboona 2008:259). Both Mar Shimun and notables from Tur Abdin had sent letters to Beiraktar Pasha asking him for help to stop the massacre, but he replied that any of his military action needed sultans's acceptance and in a result he did nothing for the victims. Only in 1847, when Bedr Chan finally succeeded in subduing independent Assyrian tribes, Beiraktar launched a military campaign against him and eventually defeated him in July 1847. Bedr Chan was deserted by most of the Kurdish leaders including Nurullah. Later he was sentenced by court and sent to Crete (Aboona 2008:260-276).

## CONCLUSIONS

Consequently, the crushing of independence of Assyrian tribes in Hakkari had a considerable influence on Kurdish-Assyrian relations in the Ottoman Empire afterwards. Firstly, a comparative balance of military power between Kurdish majority and Assyrian minority in eastern provinces was ultimately dispelled. From now onwards Assyrian would hold only subordinate status towards the Kurds. Moreover, with the loss of military power they were deprived of means to protect themselves effectively (Nestorians of Hakkari) and other Assyrians (semi-independent and ra'ayas) not only from Kurdish military attacks or tribal raids but also from excessive economic exploitation either Kurds or Turks. As a result, Bedr Chan and Nurullah pacified the only independent Assyrian tribes and took direct responsible for the massacre, while sultan's Pasha of Mosul eventually removed them from their posts and established the sultan's power over the whole region and succeeded in reducing Kurdish independence as well, according to Tanzimat's principle of centralisation. But we have to emphasize that the Bedr Chan's massacre of Assyrians would not have been possible, if Turkish authorities had not allowed for such an action. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the massacre sowed much of animosity and hostility among Assyrians and Kurds for many decades.

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# The task of translation

Some remarks on the New Testament translation  
into Kurdish *Мъзгини. Пәймана Ну* (2000)

## ABSTRACT

In 2000 the Kurdish translation of the New Testament called *Мъзгини. Пәймана Ну* was published by the Institute for the Bible Translation. The Institute founded in 1973 from its very beginning have dealt with Bible translations into non-Slavic languages used in Russia. In 1983 the translation work among the Kurds living in the Caucasus started. It was inspired – to some extent – by Kurds and one of them Nadr Ozmanyanyan was involved in the project. He emphasises the cultural role of the Bible translation into Kurdish. In fact the final book consists not only the translated text of the New Testament but also contains many additional information, notes, maps and glossary introducing the reader to the biblical realities and culture.

In his article on semiotics and the Bible, Rober Hodgson states that “There are two Bibles, one visible, one invisible. We see the visible Bible rolled up in scrolls, sewn together in the pages of manuscripts; or, since the invention of moveable type and the printing press, bound up in the now familiar and canonical form of a printed book. We see the invisible Bible in over two millennia of media presentations — drawings, illustrations, music, dances, dramas, pageants, sculptures, icons, mosaics, paintings, tapestries, rugs, and architecture elements such as stained glass, portals, and altarpieces” (Hodgson 2007:182). Such a statement opens a discussion on the cultural function of the translated text indicating the role of its physical, material form and, at the same time, shows the possibilities of the inter-semiotic translation of its message. The visibility and invisibility of the Bible are equally important and determine particular projects of its translation. New translations intentionally interweave visual elements with textual contents. We also see

that “In the last hundred years, editors have introduced concordances, maps, tables of measurement, topical lists, pictures, footnotes, glossaries or dictionaries, and introductions to individual books” (Ott 1990: 34). It can be used as the description of the Kurdish translation of the New Testament – *Мъзгину. Пәймана Ну*.

## THE SEMIOTICS OF TRANSLATION

Methods characteristic for the linguistic analysis of a text are fully recognized and used in the field of biblical studies (Chmiel 1972; Zaborski 1973, Bartnicki 1994). Jerzy Chmiel, a Polish Catholic priest and Biblical scholar, in his numerous valuable articles proposed semiotic tools for the study of the Bible and its translations (Chmiel 2001). Undoubtedly, semiotics may be seen as one of many approaches to textual and cultural analysis of translation (Nowotna 1999). The works based on such an approach intent to highlight semiotics as a frame organizing grammatical analysis, semantics and anthropological dimension of the text (Nowotna 1999:80). Chmiel is convinced that apart from semantic and stylistic adequacy, translation also needs involved translators in the process on semantic decoding of the whole text. Proper translation of various elements of the text is not enough, which is obvious, a certain translator must take the entire text with its semiotic configuration into account. This is a proper way for understanding the various cultural models (who speaks), language (how he/she speaks) and intercommunicative aspects (why he/she speaks) of the translated text (Chmiel 2001:183). In fact, while discussing the semiotics in reference to translation we consider not only the text but also the cultural context in which it was composed.

The text of translation may – compared to the original – comprise some additional information indicating the context in which it was produced. In reference to the Bible translation they are: introductions, commentaries to the main text, footnotes, references and glossaries at the end. Chmiel makes an attempt to distinguish between the textual semantics (with reference to the main text) and the para-textual semantics comprising commentaries, footnotes and also graphic elements (Chmiel 2001:185). The Kurdish translation fits perfectly to the assumption made by Chmiel. The reader is given not only a biblical message translated into

Kurdish but rather a hypertext equipped with a critical apparatus in the form of notes, drawings, maps and a glossary. As such, it constitutes a whole translation called *Мъзгини. Пәймана Ну*. It comprises the translated text of the New Testament and a meta-text in the form of the already mentioned commentaries and additional notes related to it. The language of commentary (to which introductory notes, a glossary, diagrams, maps are included) as the meta-language of the whole text uses the *object language*, in spite of John Lyons' opinion that the language of commentary needs no words or group of words belonging to the object language (Lyons 1984:15). In the translation analysed the meta-language of the commentary classifies and explains the lexical entities used in the main text translated.

Thus, translation raises a number of questions concerning the way in which foreign words and structures are incorporated into a text, how they are explained and what the role of the visual elements added to the text is. They constitute the full edition of the translated text which should not be analysed separately.

## THE HISTORY OF TRANSLATION

The idea of the Bible translation into Kurdish for the Kurds living in the Soviet Union was introduced by the Institute for Bible Translation (in Kurdish *Wәлгәр'андьна К'ьтеба Пироз*) in 1980s based in Stockholm. The Institute initiated its project in 1973 conducting ethno-linguistic research among the non-Slavic nations living in Soviet Union in order to estimate the conditions and possibilities of the Bible translation. At the beginning, the main task was to review the existing translation and later its re-edition. In the following years a collaboration with representatives of the minority ethno-linguistic groups was established in case of new translations. The Institute came into contact with other institutions working on the Bible translation like Wycliffe Bible Translators and United Bible Societies. Since 1990s it has been preparing some projects in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Although the initiative to translate the Bible for Kurds living in the Soviet Union was undertaken in 1983 the first translated book – The Gospel according to Matthew was published in 1993. The whole translation of the New Testament in

a Cyrillic script – *Мъзгунн. Пәймана Ну* was published in 2000. In 2011 it was re-edited in the Roman script. In 2009 part of the Old Testament – the books of Ruth, Esther and Jonah were prepared and in 2010 Pentateuch both in the Roman and Cyrillic scripts was issued (see: <https://ibtrussia.org/en/projects?id=KKD>). The 2000 edition was printed in 5,000 issues and circulated in the territory of Russia Nizhniy Novgorod, Bataisk, Yaroslavl, Krasnodar and other cities as well as in Armenia, Georgia.

The origins of translation are connected with the personal story of Nadr Ozmanyanyan, a Kurd from Armenia who became a Christian in 1973 and later was involved in the translation work with Curt Gustafson. The materials published by the Institute emphasise the role of Kurds in the preparation of the book and their expectations to obtain the Bible in their own language – Kurdish, they, in fact, could read the Bible but only in Armenian or Russian. The personal story of the translator shows how the Bible is perceived among Kurds and what role it may play in the religious and cultural development of the society. Ozmanyanyan says:

“In April 1973 I found Christ and began to read the New Testament in Armenian. I felt that the Gospel was spiritual food which I could not eat alone but which I must share with others. I envied other ethnic groups who had the Gospel in their language, and I began to translate Matthew’s Gospel into my mother tongue of Kurmanji- Kurdish.” (Translators’ News 2004)

## **THE BIBLE AS A SIGN**

The Bible in Kurdish is a sign. For the people involved in the project it is a sign of collaboration between different institutions and churches. But the final form is the result of the work conducted by a scholar from the Russian Academy of Sciences. Apart from the text of translation, the edition comprises some information to make a reader familiar with the socio-theological context of the Bible. Each part of the New Testament is provided with an introduction. All this certainly makes it easier to understand the message of the Gospel. Excessive expansion of the commentary allows to insert words and structures characteristic for the original language in the text translated, which are explained in the meta-text of the glossaries and footnotes.

In the introduction *Пешиготъна Институте* the history of the Bible translation into Kurdish is presented along with some information about the method (*Шыр'е [мет'ода] хэбата ве вэлгэр'андъне*), and the edition which became the base for this translation – *The Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart 1993. Such information seems to be important in the light of history: the New Testament was translated into Kurdish via Persian, Arabic not from the original Greek. The authors of the translation ensure that they maintain the strict meaning of the original text, which may be seen as a declaration of fidelity, and the original thoughts were presented in a beautiful, clear and modern language.

The process of translation, however, is explained in religious terms. “The issue of faith seems to be crucial for many Kurds, and their religious fervour recalls that of apostolic times. When members of the Kurdish community experience Christian conversion, it arouses a great spiritual struggle around them. Since the Bible translation process has started bearing fruit, many Kurdish families and whole clusters from different parts of Russia and the CIS have received Christ and become fervent members of either Evangelical or Orthodox Christian communities” (Newsletter on the Kurdish Kurmanji project 2011).

## **SOME SEMIOTIC AND SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION**

The translation always represents the original text. Therefore, to be considered correct and understandable it must correspond with other texts in the language of the original text. On the other hand, as a representative of the original text it also may be characterized by the usage of a special language, defined just as the language of translation, not encountered in the texts produced directly in that language. Some scholars suggest that, because the translation is secondary and referential to the original text, we can hypothesize that it is highly possible that it indicates some elements of its foreign origin (Lewicki 2000:22). In the case of the New Testament, especially Gospel of Matthew, the Semitic elements are manifested both in the style and the lexemes used. Due to its well-seen Semitic background, the Gospel of Mathew seems to be the most translated part of the Bible into Arabic (Kościelniak 2001:282). Of course the message of the Bible is universal but trans-

mitted in the particular linguistic form (Wierzbicka 2002). Some elements of the original language having been left in translation indicate its stylistic bias – the so called biblical style (Bieńkowska 2002). What is more, such elements influence the semiotic structure of the text emphasising the distance between the original and translated texts. In translation the semiotic feature is elementary and as something expected it defines the way of reading and interpreting the text (Lewicki 2000:24). Strangeness is manifested in non-equivalent terminology, proper names, terms describing realities (functions, ranks, etc.).

It is common for the authors of the New Testament to speak about two aspects of one action separately (Carmignac 1987). A good example being a fragment ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν Matthew 14:28 ‘And Peter answered him and said’ (King James Bible), *Пэтрыс лe вэгэр’анд у гоме*. The Greek form of an aorist participle passive ἀποκριθεὶς took the form of the past tense in translation: *вэгэр’анд*. In the Kurdish translation we have two actions: ‘answered’ and ‘said’. Such forms are also used in other places: Mark 13:2; Luke 4:8: *Иса ль (wи) вэгэр’анд у гом*.

The construction ‘got up and went’ frequently appears in the text. Mark 10:1: καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀναστὰς ἔρχεται εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἰουδαῖς ‘he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea’, *Иса жь вьр р’абу чу синоре Шьһустане*. The translation of the fragment καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς λέγον ‘he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying’ in Kurdish *эви дэст бь һинкьрьна хвэ кьр у ванр’а гом* in Matthew 5:2 seems to be very interesting. The translators used the idiom with the meaning to start, to begin, *дэст ... кьрьн*.

Among the numerous phrases of Semitic provenance nominal phrases (connections) constitute quite a large group. Often, it is a combination of a precise noun with the abstract one. The group includes phrases functioning as metaphors: the son of light, the son of perdition, the son of the kingdom.

Such structures need to be translated with some sort of equivalency, when they remain translated literary become a stylistic indicator. In the Kurdish translations they are translated as *мэрьв* ‘man’, or *зар’ (зар’о)* ‘child’.

The usage of the word ‘son’ Kurdish *көр* ‘son’ is obligatory in Mark 3,17, where it explains the Hebrew name, the phrase in Greek καὶ ἐπέθηκεν αὐτοῖς ὄνομα[τα] Βοανηργές, ὃ ἐστὶν Υἱοὶ Βροντῆς ‘and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is,

The sons of thunder', is translated into Kurdish as: *эви наве Боанерцэс ль ван кьр, кӧ те фә'мкьрьне: "Кӧр'ед Гӧр'инийа э'змен"*. Of course the word *кӧр'* 'son' appears many times in the phrases used to describe Jesus as the son of God or the son of Man – *Кӧр'е Хwәде* 'Son of God, or: *Кӧр'е Инсан* 'Son of Man'.

Sometimes words 'man' and 'child' are used interchangeably in translation. The Greek text *υιοὶ τῆς Βασιλείας* 'sons of the Kingdom' from Matthew 8:12 and 13:38 is translated into Kurdish differently. The first one as: *зар'ед П'адиатийе* 'children of the kingdom, while the second one: *мәрьвед н'ара П'адиатийе* 'men of Kingdom'. Similarly, the Greek: *υιοὶ φωτός* 'children of light' from Luke 16:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:5 in Kurdish is translated as: *мәрьвед* and *зар'ед*. The phrase 'sons of a space of time, an age' is preserved in translation. In Luke 16:8: *υιοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος* a space of time, an age, in Kurdish took the form: *мәрьвед бь дьне*. The exception in translating words 'son, sons' by 'мәрьв, зар' can be found in Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19, where the Greek phrase: *υιοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος* 'children of the bridechamber' is translated as *хwәндиьед дә'wәте* 'called, invited (to the wedding)'.

In the New Testament the phrases which are used to put an emphasis or to open a speech, especially in relation to Jesus' sayings are very common. Mark 3:28: *Ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν* 'Amen, I say to you'. The word *amen* is translated into Kurdish as *p'act* 'right': *эз p'act wәр'a дьбежьм*, 'Verily I say unto you'. Hebrew *amen* in John 1:51 is dubbed: *Ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν* 'Verily, verily, I say unto you' (KJB). In the Kurdish translation two words with opposite meanings are used in order to avoid repetition. The emphatic structure like *эз p'act бе хельф wәр'a дьбежьм; бь хельф* 'without error, falsehood' deserves some attention. It is a very interesting proposition while there is no such equivalent in other translations. And thus, the Kurdish proposal seems to be very innovative.

The word *amen* opens a broader discussion on the lexical borrowing from Semitic languages in the New Testament (Carmignac 1987:518; Mussies 1984). In fact, their appearance in different translations depends primarily on individual choices and the methods adopted during the translation process (e.g. translations prepared in the frame of a dynamic equivalence approach seek to replace Aramaic and Hebrew words with the native ones). In the Kurdish translation analysed they occur in a large number indicating the „strangeness” of the text and may determine the biblical style of the translation. Their use in the original form is motivated large-



ly by the glossary, which contains detailed explanations of the meaning. Foreign vocabulary allows the reader to associate with a different cultural reality, and thus to understand the cultural context of the original text. Among many borrowings we can count: *abba* ‘Father’ in Mark 14:36: Абба, Баво!; *alleluja* ‘praise the Lord’, in Revelation 19:1: халелуйа, with initial h like in Hebrew: *halēlū jāh*; *effethah* ‘be opened’ appearing as a synonymous quotation in Mark 7:34: “эффата!” кӧ те фә’мкъръне: “Вәбә!”; *Eli, eli, lama sabachtani* ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me’ in Matthew 27:46: “Ели, Ели, лама сабахтани?” кӧ те фә’мкъръне: “Хвәдейе мьн, Хвәдейе мьн, тә чьма әз һьштъм?”; *hosanna* ‘save, rescue’ appears in Matthew 21:9: *hosanna Kōr’e Dawḅdr’a!*; *panna* ‘bread’ in John 6:31: мана; *maranatha* ‘Our Lord, come’, in 1 Corinthians 16:22: маранат’а, but in the footnote it is explained: *Йа хӧдан вәрә*; *rabbi* ‘master, teacher’ is used in John 1:38 with semantic equivalence: *p’abbi, kō te fә’mкъръне дәрсдар*. In the Kurdish translation, however, Semitism like *raka* ‘fool’ in Matthew 5:22 does not appear. It is translated as: *бе ақьл* ‘out of one’s mind’. There is also no Semitic word *satan* in the main text of the translation even in the form borrowed from Arabic (*шәйт’ан* is used just in the glossary). It is replaced with *мирещьн*, a word composed of *мир* ‘master, prince and *щьн* ‘Jinn, spirit’.

## VISUAL ELEMENTS AND GLOSSARY

The graphic element has a very important position in the analysed edition of the Kurdish New Testament. To some extent, visual and textual elements are complementary. Illustrations are of interpretative character (Chmiel 1998). The glossary contains 16 graphic illustrations, five of which are related to the 5 have to plants (*бьхуре ә’реби* ‘incense’; *зоха һусоне* ‘hyssop’; *зьмьр* ‘myrrh’; *хәрбал* ‘mustard seed’), which explain difficult and specialized vocabulary. A good example is the drawing of a Roman soldier and the description of each item of armour, which is associated with a fragment of Ephesians 6:11.

The graphic elements may be divided into three categories: 1) the ones which are merely illustrative or decorative; 2) those of explanatory character (e.g. a drawing with a note: *дара һежуре* ‘fig tree’); 3) those commenting a particular verse,

which is also used as an explanation of the presented figure, for example legs in sandals with a note (Acts 13:25): *аз нә хежа мә бәне чарьхед нъгед вәкъм* 'whose shoes of *his* feet I am not worthy to loose'.

The glossary contains more than 300 words. The definitions proposed by the authors can be divided into at least two classes: those that explain the meaning of the word, like *Иса, Мәсүһ* 'Jesus, Messiah' and those that explain the meaning of a term, for example *Хач* 'cross'. Kurdish words which must be clarified because of the dialectic differentiation constitute a large group, like *p'aw* 'root' or *p'a* 'root' and *p'äie dape* 'the root of the tree'. The word *мәрвв*, which we also find in the glossary may cause some surprise, but perhaps due to the lack of standardized written forms another form is given: *мьров*, along with the word of the Arabic origin *инсан*.

The notes and the glossary constitute an integral part of the Kurdish translation, making it more "interactive" and more interesting to the reader not familiar with the Bible. It is important to notice that the meta-language of the commentaries fully corresponds with the language of the main text, explaining its concepts and forms.

The edition of the translated Kurdish New Testament gives an impression of a small encyclopaedia introducing some cultural and religious aspects of the ancient world to the readers. The text of the translation remains "foreign" by preserving some Arameisms and Hebraisms but by using a critical apparatus it gives an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the meaning of the original culture. And, at the same time, the linguistic choices made by the authors.

The authors of the Kurdish translation try to avoid explicit solutions. They decide to leave some elements of the original text, which, in fact, makes the reader aware of the strangeness of the text and the cultural context in which it was composed. Narrowing the possible ways of interpretation, they include notes and a glossary. Such translation seems to be a kind of ethnographic description of the situational context.

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# Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey

## Between Political and Non-Political Nature

### ABSTRACT

Visible Kurdish theatrical scene is a relatively recent phenomenon in Turkey. Its development is constantly going between political and non-political inclinations what can be traced not only in an organizational platform but also in an artistic one. In spite of the pro-Kurdish reforms in Turkey resulting in making more freely artistic activities by the Kurds, there is still a variety of problems ahead of them that stem from reluctance, prejudice and authoritarian institutional ties. However, there are also some positive trends. The most striking and constructive feature of the contemporary Kurdish drama is striving for freedom from the previous anachronistic message based on propaganda and a simplistic way of expression.

### INTRODUCTION

Packages of legislative reforms introduced under the so-called ‘Kurdish Opening’ in Turkey, allowing the Kurds to experience their own language and culture also in the public sphere<sup>1</sup> – despite its incomplete and half-hearted character – reap the harvest in terms of an artistic activity. One of the most tangible effects of a posi-

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<sup>1</sup> The so called „Kurdish Initiative” or „Kurdish Opening” it’s the reform program introduced by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), ruling in Turkey since 2002. In 2009 the Turkish government started the Kurdish TV channel. Then it introduced “democratic package” and gave the Kurds i.a. the right to learn Kurdish on private courses, and the ability to use letters typical for Kurdish alphabet such as q, w and x, absent in Turkish. The reform results were establishment of Kurdish academic entities or publishing the first official Turkish-Kurdish dictionary by the Turkish Language Institution (TDK). On the pro-Kurdish reforms in Turkey see more: (Bocheńska, Kurpiewska-Korbut, 2015:193-238). In face of the events of the last and this year, i.e. break down

tive change in the cultural climate is the freedom of expression given to Kurdish theater.<sup>2</sup> As of today, one can discuss existence of Kurdish alternative scene in Turkey. Jîyana Nû Theater, Seyri Mesel Theater, Avesta Theater, Bakur Theater, DestAr Theater, Şermola Performans, Mezopotamya Theater, Arsen Poladov Theater, Metropolitan Diyarbakır Theater, Metropolitan Sur Theater or Nusaybin Council Theater – they are just a few groups which have currently been involved in creating the Kurdish theater. They produce their own performances, gain legitimacy by obtaining government funds; they are noticeable in the media and perform on Turkish stages. Through their activities they are involved in promoting the Kurdish language and Kurdish art.

## **A MEANS OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION**

The fact is that the drama stage as public art that directly addresses audience – unlike literature and printed media – seems to be one of the most appropriate and effective forms of combining Kurdish literature, ideas of national policies and recipients. In the case of the Turkish Kurds, who do not have national institutions working for protection and promotion of their national language and cultural heritage, theater is of great importance as means of disseminating both cultural preservation and political mobilization. It is worth remembering that in the early stages of nationalist movements, theater was the best way to educate people on new nationalist ideas. This was due to the fact that most people were illiterate, and therefore the ideas could reach them only through performances, shows and sound. Theater often acted as a place for staging national history and folklore, and was also involved in formulating national ideology in many parts of the world. As such, it played an important role in influencing and contributing to the process of representation and challenging the idea of national identity (Theatre and Nation-building 2012).

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of peace talks with PKK and revival of Turkey's war against the Kurdish population, all previously entered reforms are under question.

<sup>2</sup> This fact is underlined by Y. Kaya (Kaya, 2012:16-21).

## CREATION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND NÇM

Kurdish theater in Turkey began to revive – as some say<sup>3</sup> or ‘to create itself’ – as others maintain, in the early 90’s as a result of so-called ‘First Opening’.<sup>4</sup> A symbolic turning point in the development of Kurdish theater was the publication of the first Kurdish theater play in modern Turkey. The play was written by Musa Anter, a Kurdish writer, journalist and co-founder of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (NÇM, Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya) in Istanbul.

Kurdish theater was institutionalized for the first time with the establishment of the cultural institution in 1991, which marked the introduction of the political paradigm of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê). The organizational structure of the NÇM is currently based on an extensive network of regional offices, cultural centers in many urban centers in Turkey: Diyarbakır, Van, Sanlıurfa, Mersin, Adana, Izmir, Mardin, Siirt, among others and the ones abroad. After opening the first European branch in Germany, further centers were established in Austria and the Netherlands. These centers are usually treated as stops for Kurdish theater groups being on a national or foreign tour. Teatra Jiyana Nû operates under the aegis of the NÇM. The former is a reputable institution showing a high degree of originality; it has produced dozens of one-acts as well as many classical pieces (Kaya, 2012:16-21).

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<sup>3</sup> Released in Istanbul in 1918 „Meme Alan” written by Abdurrahim Rahmi Hakkari is considered the first theatrical text ever published by Turkish Kurds. Two Kurdish plays are known to have been staged in 1918-1919 at the Kurdish Women’s Association in Istanbul, but we have no detailed knowledge about both of them. On the origins and development of the Kurdish theater, see: (Kaya, 2012:16-21) and the interview with Ahmed Salar, Kurdish director and playwright (Bocheńska, Kurpiewska, 2014:41-45).

<sup>4</sup> The so-called „First Opening” or mitigating restrictive legislation against the Kurds in the field of cultural rights in 1991 took place at the initiative of Turkish President Turgut Özal.

## MUNICIPAL THEATERS

The process of rebirth of Kurdish theater has intensified due to development of municipal theaters run by municipal councils in the Kurdish region. One of the most powerful Municipal Diyarbakir Theatre (Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediyesi Şehir Tiyatrosu) has built a vast repertoire in the Kurdish language since the early 2000s. Its activity started from presenting Kurdish songs and short plays in Turkish. Currently, it stages performances, including the adaptation of ‘Hamlet’ by William Shakespeare and Anton Chekhov’s works, entirely in various Kurdish dialects. Municipal council’s theater department invites eminent directors or playwrights and finances translation of their scripts into Kurdish, mostly in the dominant Kurmanji dialect. It also chooses the best scripts through a competition and publishes them as books (Kurpiewska-Korbut, 2013).

Since the local elections in 2004, and even more clearly after taking power by the BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, Peace and Democracy Party) in 2009, municipal theater ceased to be the subject of previous restrictive state control and supervision, at least that of an official character (Bant 2014). The significant role of theater in life of the Kurdish community is reflected in the organization of theater festivals by indigenous local authorities. The most famous among them is a cyclical event held under the patronage of the abovementioned municipal council, Diyarbakir. In November 2015, it organized the third Kurdish theater festival that hosted groups and actors from all parts of Kurdistan and neighboring countries, and dramas were staged in different dialects of Kurdish as well as in Persian, Turkish and Arabic languages. This extensive and a week-long artistic project took place amid ongoing violence between the PKK and the Turkish army. The premise of the festival organizers was to highlight the importance of social and artistic activities, even during times of political-military turbulence (Kurdish theatre thrives 2015).



## THE THIRD WAY

In addition to the Mesopotamia Cultural Center and urban theaters there is a separate Kurdish drama environment – independent groups and ensembles that are trying to engage in theatrical activity beyond the reach of both Kurdish centers with notable political backing as well as the Turkish state institutions. The core of their work is an apolitical stance and a desire to achieve independent status resulting in, among others, an effort to free themselves from the tutelage of a political trademark of PKK. The most well-known theaters in this trend are Avesta, Destare and Performance Şermola.

The last of them, Şermola Performans, is considered the first modern Kurdish theater in Turkey. Opened in Istanbul in 2009, the same year it received media coverage due to the staging of the first Kurdish play on the stage of the Turkish state theater. The founders of Şermola, playwrights Berfin Zenderlioğlu and Mirza Metin, presented the drama entitled ‘Reşê Şevê’ (‘Nightmare’) in the eastern province of Van with financial support from Turkish Ministry of Culture. The ensemble received a ministry budget support again in order to develop the next play entitled ‘Buka Leki’ (‘Plastic Bride’).

## A SPECTRUM OF OBSTACLES

Despite precedents like these, Kurdish theater is far from being a regular component of the Turkish theater scene. Because it is formed by small, independent theater groups that do not normally receive state support or funds from other sources. Their activity in Turkey is still very difficult (Nurtsch 2014). Indeed, Kurdish theater today is not banned in Turkey, and it certainly measures towards recognition of cultural productions and heritage of minorities taken by the Turkish authorities what is noticeable. However, there is a huge discrepancy between cultural policy in this area and daily practice, prejudice and constant reluctance of Turkish society to allow the Kurds to use their own language (Bant, 2014).

Irrespective of the public announcement that state theaters will be open for Kurdish performances (Ziflioğlu, 2009) and existing plans to create a bilingual

theater repertoire and introduce a pilot program in Diyarbakır; institutional ties were not established between state theaters and local artistic organizations, neither local governments nor independent ones. In Diyarbakır and other cities in Kurdish provinces, state theater does not have an ‘organic connection’ with the city and it does not seek to establish such status. Although the package of legal reforms taken in 2002 and 2004 abolished restrictions on using the Kurdish language, and it has the status of legal language, to this day there was no production in Kurdish in the state theater. Even an oftenly staged performance in the state theater in Van drama ‘Mem û Zin’ is done only in Turkish. Moreover, other public culture centers do not allow the Kurds to produce in the Kurdish language by using underhanded tricks and stratagems (Serinci, 2014).

Refusing earlier promised places and premises remains a frequent tool of suppression of Kurdish artistic production throughout Turkey. When teams of municipal theaters go on guest appearances, they are still a subject of control taken by security forces, despite the fact that the scenes are subordinated to the municipal councils of BDP. The organizers of the performance are still required to provide a summary of its script and pass personal data of all actors and technical staff to local authorities to be allowed to play. It happens that the security forces record an event (Band, 2014).

Furthermore, insurmountable financial difficulties occur. Economic survival is particularly difficult for independent theaters that have no easy way to reach an audience and get access to advertising, when the state does not provide any help in promoting Kurdish culture. They face double discrimination, firstly on the part of state institutions, and secondly on the part of Kurdish cultural institutions with political affiliations (Serinci, 2014).

Yet another obstacle to functioning of Kurdish theater is poor knowledge of the native language by the audience, but also by the artists themselves. More importantly, even if they manage to catch linguistic shortcomings, it often turns out that the spoken language is different from the language of the stage and it is incomprehensible to potential viewers. Hence, some ensembles decide to issue performances with subtitles in both Turkish and English which in turn is perceived (Ziflioğlu, 2009) in the environment as the promotion of assimilation and the lack

of incentives for young people to make an effort to learn the Kurdish language (Nurtsch, 2014).

In the case of the production of Kurdish performances, the problem is also posed by the lack of viewers. So far it has not managed to attract long-standing theater audience, although teams operating independently seem to have a positive impact on formatting a group of recipients and development of Kurdish theater. Theaters such as Avesta and DestAr – by portraying the life of the inhabitants of Kurdish cities on the stage – managed to break the rigid framework of Kurdish theater which was almost exclusively focused on politics and national identity issues. Thus, they reached the circle of spectators from metropolis. Improving economic status of this social group elicits more interest in topics other than those previously offered by the Kurdish theater scene.

## **NO SLOGANS AND PROPAGANDA – INSPIRATION**

So far the central theme has been the Turkish-Kurdish political conflict and negative emotions associated with it; now it is changing including problems of the middle class life. Although the issues of a language, identity and culture are invariably a source of inspiration, the scene also encompasses love, longing, attachment, sexuality, loss, loneliness, psychological problems, etc., that is, ideas, values and issues that define humanity, human nature which are a part of the contemporary reality of the Kurds. In plays, one can find both traditional Kurdish as well as contemporary Western music, but above all, one can come across concepts that are free from any political associations. Hitherto, the most common theme of ‘oppression’ and ‘oppressed’, was supplemented by topics related to troubles of everyday life and relationships between individuals (Kaya, 2012).

The spectrum of topics appearing in Kurdish plays today is much broader than just oscillating around the ‘agitation-propaganda’ alliance. Modern theater groups are a signal that the era of theater based on slogans and declarations is ending. They redirect Kurdish theater from certain fixed political positions to the artistic sphere (Kaya, 2012). It can be stated that there is a return to the oral tradition

which has long been a staple of the Kurdish society and is seen as the sphere of freedom (Nurtsch, 2014).

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The activities of independent theater groups are an inspiration to many new artistic projects. Getting involved in the art of theater in an independent, non-political way, headed by artistic self-determination, seems to be the real achievement of Kurdish theater in Turkey.

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# A Return of Forced Migration in Turkey?<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Taking into consideration that emergency state was lifted in southeast of Turkey in 2002, but migration continued and negative net migration from Kurdish inhabited regions still have grown. It can be argued that between 2002 and 2015 there was a more voluntary flow of internal migration. It was based more on economic and educational needs and pull factors than push factors connected with physical conflict, which was the case during the 1980s and especially the 1990s in Turkey.

With the failure of the peace process and drastic aftermath of coup attempt it can be argued that these changes will result in the wave of forced migration in the country. These processes can strengthen the atmosphere of insecurity in Turkey which will stimulate a wave of forced migration both in its internal and external aspects. The article aims at analyzing the events and their results which are connected with deterioration of security in Turkey, and that can lead to the rise in forced migration. It starts with a general overview of circumstances leading to resolution of armed conflict. The second part of the article points to some estimations of deadly consequences of it and closes with an attempt to search for some indicators of the beginning of a new wave of forced migration in Turkey.

Voluntary – or relatively less insecurity-driven – spatial mobility appeared to be a significant part of overall Kurdish migration between the first and the second decade of the 21st century. This was a result of stabilization in Southern Kurdistan (Autonomous Kurdistan Region in Iraq) and democratic reforms in Turkey which culminated in a peace process (or more literally a solution process – *çözüm süreci*) between the Turkish government and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). I have previously advocated for recognizing and studying this new wave of migration

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both in Turkey and among Kurds (see: Kaczorowski 2015; Kaczorowski 2016). Taking into consideration that emergency state was lifted in southeast of Turkey in 2002, but migration continued and negative net migration from Kurdish inhabited regions still have grown. It can be argued that between 2002 and 2015 there was a more voluntary flow of internal migration. It was based more on economic and educational needs and pull factors than push factors connected with physical conflict, which was the case during the 1980's and especially the 1990s in Turkey (see: Jongerden 2007). Migrants from that period did experience difficulties and conflicts connected with moving to a different place, but these hardships were of different nature than struggles of IDP's who faced problems with legal recognition, registration and often lacked previously established networks of people coming from the same family or province (*hemşehri*) (see: Çelik 2012). Consequently it can be argued that the period of 2002-2015 was stable in the political sphere which was more inclusive for Kurdish initiatives and open legal and social atmosphere allowed to intensify growth of Kurdish civil society initiatives.

Unfortunately with the failure of the peace process and return to armed conflict with PKK and devastating results of curfews in Southeastern Turkey it can be argued that this change in Turkish political landscape will result in the wave of forced migration, mostly consisting of people escaping from demolished districts of Kurdish inhabited cities and from villages affected by military operations. Moreover the emergency state imposed in the whole country in the aftermath of the coup attempt will strengthen the atmosphere of insecurity in Turkey which will stimulate a wave of forced migration. This can be argued also on a theoretical basis as most Turkish and international scholars of migration point to military and physical conflict as a crucial factor influencing migration (see: Gezici and Keskin 2005; Filiztekin and Gökhan 2008: 6-7; Sirkeci 2009).

The presented article aims at analyzing the events and their results which are connected with deterioration of security in Turkey, and that can lead to the rise in forced migration. It starts with a general overview of circumstances leading to resolution of armed conflict. The second part of the article points to some estimations of deadly consequences of it and closes with an attempt to search for some indicators of the beginning of a new wave of forced migration in existing data on internal migration in Turkey.



## EVENTS LEADING TO IMPOSITION OF CURFEWS<sup>2</sup>

On June 7, 2015, marked the historical outcome of parliamentary elections in Turkey. Elected political representation included delegates of ethnic and religious minorities – Roma, Armenian and first Yezidi deputy. For the first time in the history of Turkish Republic, the party sympathetic to the Kurdish minority and their problems (People's Democratic Party – Turkish shortcut HDP) passed very high 10% threshold. Despite the fact that the partial reason of installment of such threshold, after 1984 military coup, was to prevent the Kurdish political movements' involvement. These elections were also special as due to their result, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's *Justice and Development Party* (Turkish shortcut – AKP) for the first time in 13 years could not reign alone. The result seemed to show also Turkish public's rejection of the presidential system intensively promoted by the ruling party and President Erdoğan. It was also the time when the peace process between Turkish state and *Kurdistan Workers Party* (PKK) was in a kind of crisis because of different stances towards *Democratic Union Party* (Kurdish shortcut PYD) fight with Islamic State in Northern Syria (Western Kurdistan). Clashes between guerrilla fighters in rural areas and Turkish army were, however, limited and there was a lot of hope for peace connected with ongoing talks between HDP and the government. Lots of Turkish figures also expected that legitimization of HDP in parliament will lead to completion of PKK's withdrawal of arms which began in 2013.

Hopes created as the result of June elections were turned into dust in late July when the AKP's government announced Turkey's war on terror officially aimed against both IS and PKK, but with significant focus on bombing and arresting people affiliated with the second organization. Turkey has provided the United States the access for its Incirlik base, vital for conducting air attacks on IS targets, however, Turkish jets bombed mainly PKK bases in country's southeast (Northern Kurdistan) and Northern Iraq (Southern Kurdistan – where in Qandil mountain are perceived headquarters of the organization). Many leftist activists were arrested

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<sup>2</sup> The article includes enumerations of arrests, victims of violence, terror and persecution. This data is surely incomplete and I apologize for that. More than a detailed relation of events it serves as an illustration of deteriorating situation of security in Turkey which indicates new wave of forced internal migration and emigration.

and first curfews were imposed in cities of the Southeast. Officially the reason for fighting PKK was the murder of two policemen by youth organization sympathetic to PKK – Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (Turkish – *Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareket* YDG-H). The group – operating mainly in Kurdish cities and Kurdish inhabited districts of large Turkish metropolis – has before committed some extrajudicial killings of people allegedly connected with IS. Killing of the policemen was, in YDG-H's view, a retaliation for Turkish services negligence (or perceived by many Kurds – complicity) in terrorist bombing in Suruç (near the border with Syrian Kurdistan) which left 31 leftist activists dead and more than hundred people wounded. According to YDG-H, the executed policemen were in some way connected to IS or organization of the bombing.

This deterioration of relations was preceded by bombing in HDP's rally in Diyarbakir, and many government and presidential statements indicating that: „Kobane will fall”, „Islamic State is less dangerous than PYD” and that it is a more tolerable neighbour than Syrian Kurdish organization with its ties to PKK. The war on terror announced by Turkey was aimed at improving Turkish international image in the time of pressure from international public for the country to engage more actively the fight with IS. Some allegations from voices both inside and outside of the country were raised about government's negligence or even compliance with activities of IS. For the first time in its history Erdoğan's moderately Islamic party embraced to such an extent a nationalistic agenda. Resurrecting armed conflict with leftist Kurds corresponded also to political strategy of gaining votes from far-right – necessary for a return to a single party rule. It can be noted, however, that along this strategy, all achievements of peace process were destroyed and ultra-nationalistic discourse was raised to the main stream debate.

When AKP indeed benefitted from increasing support of nationalists and gained advantage in snap elections of November, relations with Kurds were not stabilized but more curfews were imposed and even more fierce measures were taken to fight resistance in Kurdish populated regions. After securing 317 places in the parliament from the total of 550 the ruling party can govern single-handedly but still does not have a majority allowing it to propose a referendum about presidential

system (this would be 330 seats) or impose it without (400 seats needed)<sup>3</sup>. Some like Diyarbakır based journalist – Frédérique Geerdink, hypothesized that continuation of military conflict with leftist Kurds is aimed at earning more deputies by encouraging delegates of Nationalistic Movement Party (Turkish shortcut MHP) to enter AKP. Geerdink was herself arrested and deported from Turkey in September 2015 on the grounds of being a journalist who supports „terrorism”. Expected growth of seats can be achieved also by banning HDP which can eventually lead to attributing votes to party with second best result in Kurdish regions – AKP. Moreover, ongoing tactics against PKK were supported by army which perceives PYD success in northern Syria as a greatest threat for Turkey in the region. While attacking PKK affiliate – PYD directly in Syria might have drawn fierce criticism from the West, Turkish state tried to weaken the organization in Turkey and in Iraq. These military and political objectives seemed to overshadow – in the eyes of state – the costs of civilian repression, deaths and deterioration of living conditions in the Southeast. The situation reminding the one which occurred in the 1990s – the darkest era of Turkish army where thousands of Kurdish villages were burnt or expelled.

## **DRASTIC CONSEQUENCES OF CURFEWS AND SECURITY OPERATIONS**

According to the report of Human Rights foundation of Turkey (*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı – TİHV*), curfews affected 1377 000 people as they were imposed 58 times in 7 cities and 19 districts. Between August 16 and January 8 there were 162 civilian victims including 32 children, 29 women, and 24 elderly people (over 60 years old). Almost half of this tragic toll (79 civilian deaths) was taken between December 11 and January 8. Victims included also people who were shot in their homes. It is impossible to distinguish which deaths might have been caused by YDG-H fighters and not Turkish forces as at the time there was no examination of civilian casualties, and there were cases where it was impossible to obtain the dead

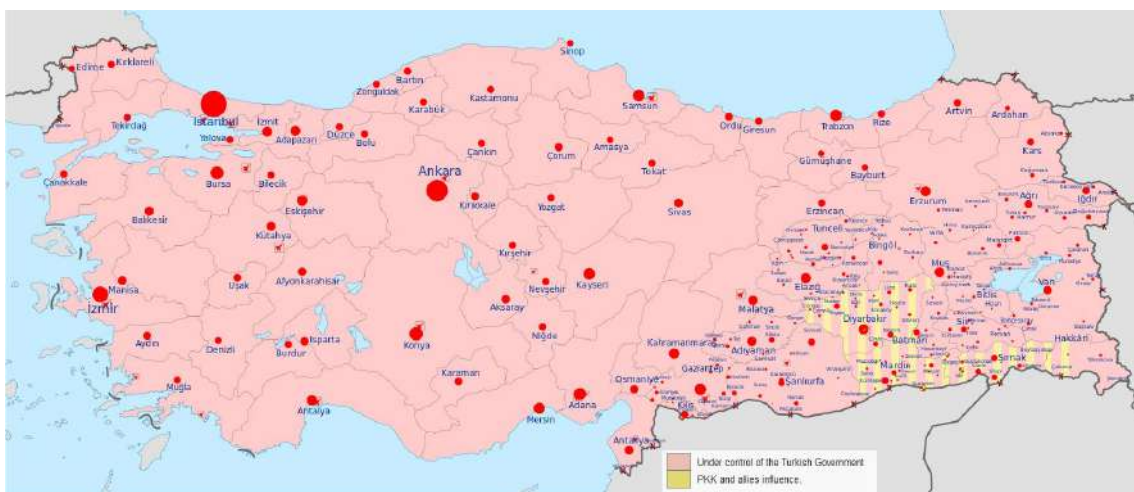
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<sup>3</sup> This situation can however change in extraordinary atmosphere after the attempted army coup on July 15th 2016.

and bury them, as military operations were continued. It is however known that bombing of Çınar police station in Diyarbakır left among others 5 civilians dead including 2 children.

Human Rights Watch published in December 2015 the report presenting collected statements of people in the areas under curfews. The organization underlined the need for reduction in using un-adequate force from the side of Turkish army and thorough examination of civilian deaths. Amnesty International has also called authorities of countries to stop collective punishment of Southeast inhabitants (HRW 2015).

The estimation calculated at the end of April 2016 by Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, pointed to 1,5 million people affected by curfews. Since announcement of first such state in August 15, until April 20, 2016, the Turkish operations and fights with YDG-H have led to 338 civilian deaths (including 30 elders, 69 women and 78 children). Moreover, 93 people who died during the curfews were not identified as they were buried immediately. Kurdish activists pointed to destruction of 5,000 houses, while Turkish Ministry of Health have calculated that until March 2016, 355 000 people were forcibly internally displaced (see: Rudaw 2016). The excessive use of force by Turkish authorities was assessed also in the reports prepared by more conservative muslim organization – Mazlumder – The Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed (2016a, 2016b). The following map prepared by Ali Zifan illustrates places in which Turkish army operations were conducted.



Source: Ali Zifan [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Turkish-PKK\\_rebellion.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Turkish-PKK_rebellion.svg)

Severe results of Turkish armed operations ending in destruction of whole neighborhoods in Kurdish inhabited cities – including the ones residing in the historical Sur district of Diyarbakır (Kurdish: Amed or Diyarbekir) have caused calls from many commentators to recognize them as *urbicide* – deliberate destruction of social urban space of a targeted group. Matthieu Gosse – a French geographer, in an article published in *La revue Urbanités*, underlined not only physical but also symbolic indicators of such a process: Turkish nationalistic slogans on the walls of many buildings, covering the historical city walls with giant Turkish flag, closing and damaging the house of *dengbêj* (which aimed at preserving and reviving Kurdish oral tradition), occupation of municipal museum by the army and deterioration of rich Christian heritage in the city (both by gunfire and racist inscriptions), which was often underlined by the HDP ruled municipality: Syriac church of the Virgin Mary, Chaldean Church in March Petyun and Armenian Catholic Church (Gosse 2016).

The symbolic aspect of return to persecution of Kurdish movements in Turkey was also connected with police raids which started in late July 2015. Vast majority of them were aimed at PKK and not IS. During the arrests, there were many Kurdish activists accused of collaboration with PKK. Moreover, the sole call for stopping the excessive use of force in operations in the Southeast proved to be persecuted by the authorities. Scholars from many universities across the Turkey and from abroad, who signed the petition called „Academics for peace” faced public defamation and criminal charges. They were called „helpers of terrorist” and „traitors”, their names were also published in a pro-governmental newspaper with derogatory connotations. Most of signatories from Turkey faced charges, some were fired or forced to leave their university posts. Human Rights Watch estimated in March 2016 that three academics were jailed, 30 removed and 27 suspended as consequence of signing the petition (HRW 2016). Some journalists and human rights jurists were also arrested, among them the head of Human Rights Foundation of Turkey and professor of Istanbul University – Şebnem Korur Fincancı. Fincancı was released in July but charges against her were upheld, their consequences could result in the penalty of 14 years in prison (CCS 2016). After the attack of TAK in Ankara in March 2016, President Erdoğan has called for a legal change allowing inclusion of journalists and academics in the pursuit of aiding „terrorism”

(see: HRW 2016). This can result in widespread arrests of people who in any way criticize Turkish policy and operations in the country's southeast. It may result also in self-censorship and silencing dissent against the government, but most definitely in rise of the atmosphere of constant threat of being legally persecuted.

## **EMERGENCE OF NEW KURDISH ARMED GROUPS**

Fight against the police and army was led mainly by radical youth sympathizing with PKK who organized themselves as Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (*Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareket* – YDG-H). The group was formed shortly before the peace process in 2013. In contrast to rural guerilla of PKK it operates mainly in Kurdish cities and Kurdish inhabited districts of large Turkish metropolis. Officials of KCK – a military wing of PKK – have at several times declared that they do not have full control over YDG-H. PKK itself can be treated as a political party gathering a wide range of leftist sympathetic to the Kurdish cause, including those who taking example from its captured leader – Abdullah Öcalan's urge for peace, does not see physical conflict as a way to gain Kurdish rights. Calls for peaceful resolution were raised especially by Peoples Democratic Party (HDP), and its leader Selahattin Demirtaş has spoken about uselessness of violence. On the other hand, radical youth tactics are not condemned as widely as are Turkish forces which are perceived by Kurds as a primary source of oppression and occupier. That was the reason behind the declaration of autonomy in many Kurdish regions under curfews.

In December 2015, new force, aiming at supporting YDG-H's in a wider spectrum was proclaimed. Taking up the name of Civil Protection Units – (Kurdish – *Yekîneyên Parastina Sivîl* – YPS), which is a close reference to Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) defending the autonomy of Rojava. During the declaration of *YPS Botan* in Cizre: Civil Protection Units were described as a result of exercising legitimate right of Kurdish people against the „physical, political and cultural genocide perpetrated by Turkish army”. It was also stated that the group takes the same stance as youth who organized YDG-H and was created in need of further enlarging their cause. YPS announced that they goal was also to demand

the Turkish state to pay for policy of assimilation, occupation and forced migration of Kurds. The announcement called to arms all the Youth of Botan districts (stating their names in Kurdish: Cizîr, Sîlopya, Hezex, Şirnex, Nisebîn, Kerboran), however, the authors underlined that their struggle was not a sole struggle for self-rule of Kurdish people, but a struggle for freedom of the whole Turkish public (people). Some assumed that it was just a change of name from YDG-H, but declaration of gathering wider support can show signs of more direct cooperation between PKK's guerilla and radical urban youth, and an attempt to call for protection of declared autonomy. There were also some rumors that rural guerilla would come to cities and join the battle side by side with youth.

Such a general call to arms maybe a result of some leftist Kurds' perception of being pressed to the limits by the state by its continuation of violent policy against Kurdish society. As many commentators point out, there are some factors that can be attributed to radicalization of a part of Kurdish Youth. Young people of YDG-H and YPS were usually raised in the 1990s in the atmosphere of a total war, their families could have been expelled from their native villages, fathers spent years in jail. They themselves, often with limited economic opportunities, might have lived in constantly instable conditions. Exemplary to the situation was a constant threat of being arrested just for sole participation in a peaceful protest for Kurdish rights. This atmosphere of insecurity might have rendered them radical, with a sense of no solution than violence which in effect might have caused in some of them the lack of respect for human life.

Another organization fighting against Turkish state but with more deadly and public consequences was *Kurdistan Freedom Falcons* (in Kurdish: *Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan* – TAK). Allegedly separated from PKK in 2004, the group since the following year executed some bombings (including the one on Taksim Square in Istanbul in 2010) which targeted not only Turkish army and police but also civilians. Their actions drew public attention and condemnation in 2016 as bombing of a bus with soldiers in Ankara in February brought 29 (including 16 civilian) deaths and the following attack in the city's central district in March, killed 37 people – mostly civilians. Although the group claimed their separation from PKK which was perceived by Falcons as using too „humanistic” approach, the public of Turkey widely recognized the terrorist attack in March as done by PKK.

Representatives of PKK's headquarters have on several occasions denied involvement in the attack and control over TAK – described as autonomous, hidden and allegedly not very known (in terms of personal involvement) to PKK group. Members of parliament elected from HDP lists, including its leaders have also strongly condemned these attacks. However, international and Turkish commentators (including publicists and scholars) pointed to ambiguous ties between TAK and PKK. It has been argued that given negative approach to other armed groups and organizations representing Kurds in earlier decades, PKK at least did not stop the TAK, and attacks accomplished by the organization would have been very difficult to prepare with no use of previous PKK guerilla experience and networks. Falcons did address Abdullah Öcalan as a leader of Kurdish people and claimed that their attack was a retaliation for 300 civilian casualties of the security operation in Cizre (see: Porter 2016; Geerdink 2016). Their ideology, however, still remains connected with Kurdish separate state which is contrary to the idea of Democratic Confederalism and Turkification which has been announced and promoted in recent years by Öcalan. Some pointed also to the atmosphere of radicalization of Kurdish youth in the wake of IS siege on Kobane and worsening of situation in Turkey's southeast. In such condition it is probable that radicalized Kurdish youth would be difficult to control and not regard traditional PKK hierarchy or familial ties. They did, however, respect the ceasefire announced by PKK before the Turkey's parliamentary elections in November 2015.

It has been observed that violent actions of YDG-H and PKK can strongly negatively influence both short-term and long-term goals of leftist Kurds in Turkey. Some way of negotiation with the state appears to be necessary in the future in order to achieve an autonomy or just secure peaceful political functioning (see Dalay 2016; Geerdink 2016). Returning to military measures was also negatively perceived by many from Turkish public opinion who called for the end of violent ways of dealing with Kurdish question in the aftermath of HDP's passing the election threshold in June 2015. The international and domestic image of PKK was arguably most negatively affected by terrorist attacks of TAK aiming at civilians. The organizations are often perceived as being somehow connected despite that their representatives did state otherwise. Most of the respondents of qualitative research conducted by Serhun Al (2016) in the areas affected by curfews did not



support violent methods used by YDG-H. The participants of the study pointed to deterioration of security of their livelihoods and relatives. However, Turkish army and police were still perceived as the primary aggressor because of the destruction of neighborhoods and excessive use of force. Measures used by the army were widely regarded as inadequate to relatively much worse equipped tactics of urban guerilla of young radicals.

## **OTHER FACTORS OF DETERIORATION OF SECURITY – THE AFTERMATH OF COUP ATTEMPT**

Arrests and police raids intensified after the failed coup attempt organized by the group within the army (designated by the government as tied with Fetullah Güllen but likely having radical kemalist connections). The coup attempt resulted in at least 265 deaths. President Erdoğan has also suggested that following chants of his supporters on the streets, if the parliament agreed, death penalty could be reinstated in the country in order to punish the ones who stood behind the coup. In the aftermath, with the goal of purging the country from supporters of the coup 2839 army members were arrested and authorities ordered detainment of 2745 prosecutors and judges (Yuhas et al. 2016). Some of the judges and jurists have written letters to international law associations (including their colleagues from Poland) sharing their pain and feeling of insecurity waiting for being arrested. Among these letters underlined were claims of surprise in being enlisted on the warrant and perception of being persecuted just for legal criticism towards government (Gazeta.pl 2016).

In the scope of the attempt to purge the country from coup supporters 15 000 employees of public education in Turkey were suspended, government also called for resignation of 1577 deans of both state and private universities. Licenses of 21000 employees in private education were revoked, 100 people working in intelligence were forced to leave, 2156 people from staff of various governmental offices were dismissed, 30 governors of provinces and 47 governors of districts were removed. Additionally 20 internet sites covering news were blocked (Euronews 2016). The Higher Education Board (Yükseköğretim Kurulu – YÖK) requested all of academics on foreign delegations to come back for the examination

and proclaimed temporary ban on any foreign delegations of scholars (see: Yeung 2016). The atmosphere in the wake of the coup affected also the press. The Turkish edition of weekly comic satire *Le Man*, prepared a special issue on the coup attempt, however, it was forced by the police not to release it<sup>4</sup>. In the evening of 20 July, President Erdoğan announced the imposition of the state of emergency in the country, expecting it to last for three months. The Turkish army following the coup continued its operations against PKK, as it was illustrated by the airstrike in which 20 guerilla militants in Northern Iraq were killed (HDN 2016).

From the perspective of the government and its supporters the aftermath of the coup can be understood as careful and legitimate examination of civil servants' backgrounds in order to prevent further coup attempts and punish those who prepared the one organized on July 20, 2016. Regardless of normative evaluation of the events in the aftermath of the coup, dismissing thousands of employee's of both public and private institutions connected with arresting of hundreds will definitely affect their families and people of immediate proximity. This will most probably result in the rise of atmosphere of insecurity (at least for the mentioned people), and it will contribute to overall strengthening of insecurity in Turkey and growing influence of push factors both within internal migration in the country and emigration from Turkey.

Even before the coup, Turkey was perceived as a country threatened by Islamic and radical leftist terrorism. This perception was strengthened by the IS attack on Atatürk airport at the end of June 2016, which left 36 people dead and 147 injured. The airport is the largest in the country and the place transferring not only travelers to Turkish Riviera, but also several countries in Asia and Africa (see: Tuysuz and Almasry 2016). Deterioration of the situation of security in regards to Turkish state's policy was also noticed by international organizations, an illustrative for this fact can be a report by Statewatch – an organization monitoring liberties in Europe. Emanuela Roman, Theodore Baird, and Talia Radcliffe (2016) who prepared the report argued that Turkey could not be treated as a *safe country* in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Both front-pages of the issue made a reference to the coup and contemporary success of the *Pokemon Go* game suggesting that both sides of the coup were religious conservatives and that people with knives and bats on the streets were ready for lynching Alevi's and Syrian refugees (see: Bianet 2016).

international conventions. They underlined that the state had severe problems with guarding rights connected with definitions of a *safe country*: no risk of persecution, no risk of physical harm and non-refoulement (which means protection from sending migrants back to areas where they are threatened). This means that the country has problems with direct physical danger of being attacked by terrorists, excessive use of force by the army or police and also the legal framework does not support protecting personal security of its citizens.

Growing insecurity in Turkey affects also Western Europe, as the European Union by signing the deal with Turkish officials agreed to provide financial support, grant visa-free travel in immediate future and stimulate countries integration with the community in exchange for reducing migration flow. Problems with democracy, rule of law and ongoing military operation in country's Southeast were the reasons why many western commentators called the deal unethical. Especially that many representatives of the EU have been perceived by many (including Turkish public opinion) as reserved towards further integration with Turkey and in a way obstructing the process prior to the migrant crisis. The promise to stimulate integration was not made in 2011 when the country was proclaimed by many as a model of democracy for country's affected by Arab Spring, but it happened in 2015 when the political sphere was restrictive and arguably in the worst situation since 2002. Turkey was meant to reduce migration to Europe significantly by providing aid to refugees. However the country can produce its own forced migrants abroad as a consequence of growing domestic insecurity.

## **SOME INDICATORS OF THE WAVE OF FORCED MIGRATION**

Achieving accurate data on internal displacement and forced migration is a difficult task, especially when processes stimulating it – in this case military operations, curfews and conflict with YDG-H and PKK – are still ongoing. Additionally in many cases it can be almost impossible to distinguish economic migration from conflict-driven, having in mind that Turkish Southeast was for years characterized by high levels of economic insecurity (see e.g.: İçduygu et al. 1999). As mentioned before Turkish ministry of health gave 350 000 as the number of displaced people due to the conflict

with PKK in January 2016. According to Russia Today, 300 000 people were forced to leave their homes due to the curfews until December 2015. Contemporarily the number of people can be much higher as the curfews and operations continued. Other factors like coup attempt and emergency state in its aftermath have strengthened the role of push factors for internal migration in the country. Looking at official statistics on internal migration in Turkey in 2015, it cannot be directly interpreted that forced migration dominated internal migration in that year. The biggest rise in out-migration was, however, experienced by the Southeastern Anatolian region (in the period of 2014-2015 comparing to 2013-2014 it has risen by 25 093 and negative net migration risen<sup>5</sup> by 19 881) although the proportionally biggest rise was in Eastern Black Sea region (in the period of 2014-2015 negative net migration more than tripled comparing to 2012-2013). The data can be seen in the attached table.

Bölge (1. düzey ) Region (Level 1)	Net göç Net migration							
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
<b>Toplam-Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TR1 İstanbul</b>	26 675	39 481	102 583	121 782	30 461	66 321	14 336	50 543
<b>TR2 Batı Marmara</b> Western Marmara	30 074	12 573	14 599	15 861	25 052	19 260	46 448	20 643
<b>TR3 Ege- Aegean</b>	34 692	16 563	955	1 225	25 355	15 741	46 115	32 247
<b>TR4 Doğu Marmara</b> Eastern Marmara	82 161	42 570	37 579	42 824	37 090	47 044	56 189	72 167
<b>TR5 Batı Anadolu</b> Western Anatolia	20 063	31 544	39 128	50 308	26 194	28 227	39 239	50 138
<b>TR6 Akdeniz</b> Mediterranean	19 449	4 790	5 479	- 11 797	- 10 524	- 7 018	3 441	159
<b>TR7 Orta Anadolu</b> Central Anatolia	- 34 299	- 19 170	- 34 624	- 33 878	- 15 862	- 18 621	- 25 860	- 25 394
<b>TR8 Batı Karadeniz</b> Western Black Sea	- 19 529	- 10 842	- 50 720	- 39 557	- 14 393	- 25 678	- 34 818	- 19 652
<b>TR9 Doğu Karadeniz</b> Eastern Black Sea	- 5 622	1 585	- 22 703	- 24 949	18 495	- 9 223	- 4 556	- 15 180
<b>TRA Kuzeydoğu Anadolu</b> Northeastern Anatolia	- 58 268	- 32 588	- 30 104	- 27 973	- 34 434	- 42 765	- 43 088	- 46 512
<b>TRB Ortadoğu Anadolu</b> Centraleastern Anatolia	- 39 613	- 33 207	- 33 255	- 61 679	- 27 091	- 26 972	- 46 797	- 48 629
<b>TRC Güneydoğu Anadolu</b> Southeastern Anatolia	- 55 783	- 53 299	- 28 917	- 32 167	- 60 343	- 46 316	- 50 649	- 70 530

**Kaynak: Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi sonuçları, 2008-2015**

Source: The results of Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS), 2008-2015

**Yabancılar kapsamamıştır.**

Foreign population is not included

<sup>5</sup> The net-migration decreased from – 50 649 to – 70 530, in order to better illustrate it I have used the words "the negative net-migration increased".

Bölge (1. düzey ) Region (Level 1)	Verdiği göç Out-migration <sup>(1)</sup>					
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
<b>Toplam-Total</b>	<b>1 985 917</b>	<b>2 045 720</b>	<b>1 942 874</b>	<b>2 122 454</b>	<b>2 254 607</b>	<b>2 287 542</b>
<b>TR1 İstanbul</b>	336 932	328 663	354 074	371 601	424 662	402 864
<b>TR2 Batı Marmara</b> Western Marmara	89 752	90 149	84 276	99 543	101 113	114 957
<b>TR3 Ege- Aegean</b>	184 640	190 979	170 489	189 098	189 490	204 334
<b>TR4 Doğu Marmara</b> Eastern Marmara	162 675	164 586	162 615	173 425	180 965	182 293
<b>TR5 Batı Anadolu</b> Western Anatolia	182 562	184 218	177 798	200 077	208 817	199 629
<b>TR6 Akdeniz</b> Mediterranean	200 003	219 315	206 925	219 509	222 621	233 715
<b>TR7 Orta Anadolu</b> Central Anatolia	138 677	134 765	117 130	132 541	142 812	136 246
<b>TR8 Batı Karadeniz</b> Western Black Sea	183 046	174 374	157 816	187 639	195 633	185 588
<b>TR9 Doğu Karadeniz</b> Eastern Black Sea	113 098	110 220	86 614	114 398	118 470	121 186
<b>TRA Kuzeydoğu Anadolu</b> Northeastern Anatolia	98 728	100 345	97 734	111 784	123 105	127 477
<b>TRB Ortadoğu Anadolu</b> Centraleastern Anatolia	124 025	164 354	139 320	134 247	148 095	155 336
<b>TRC Güneydoğu Anadolu</b> Southeastern Anatolia	171 779	183 752	188 083	188 592	198 824	223 917

**Kaynak: Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi sonuçları, 2008-2015**

Source: The results of Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS), 2008-2015

**Yabancılar kapsamamıştır.**

Foreign population is not included

Source: TÜİK 2016, modified table generated from Turkish Statistical Institute's website

Looking at the data from the perspective of division into 26 sub-regions (groups of provinces divided according with standard NUTS2 for Turkey), some sub-regions affected by the conflict like Ağrı, Kars, Iğdır, Ardahan and Malatya, Elazığ, Bingöl and Tunceli did not experience rise in negative net-migration while some other did not significantly differ than in previous years (e.g. Van, Muş, Bitlis and Hakkari). The biggest rise of negative net-migration among Kurdish inhabited sub-regions concerned: Mardin, Batman, Şırnak, Siirt (from -18769 in 2014 to -32403 in 2015, the biggest change since 2012) and Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır (from -24459 to -30346 also the biggest change since 2012). As stated before the biggest rise in the negative net-migration in the whole Turkey concerned the sub-region

of the Black Sea (Trabzon, Ordu, Giresun, Rize, Artvin, Gümüşhane) (see: TUIK 2016). It has to be noted that the data based on Addressed Based Population Registration System depend on official registrations and calculations of municipalities, especially in the case of displaced people leaving their homes in hurry. There can be a large group of migrants and IDP's not included in the official reports. The higher growth of out-migration in 2015 comparing to previous years can be, however, an indicator of a growing wave of migration from Kurdish inhabited provinces. Rise in insecurity of Kurdish inhabited sub-regions can, however, strongly influence official data in the future when internal migrants will be registering in new locations as a result of leaving their homes due to feeling rising physical and economic threat.

## CONCLUSION

Imposition of curfews in Kurdish inhabited regions and the military conflict between Turkish army and PKK, YDG-H and TAK since July 2015 have affected 1.5 million people, resulted in destruction of whole districts of cities, death of hundreds of civilians and displacement of at least 350 000. Additionally it can be argued that massive layoffs and investigations in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016 will strengthen the atmosphere of insecurity among Turkish citizens which can result in a new wave of forced migration in Turkey.

Unaware to many in the West, there is an ongoing internal war in Southeastern Turkey, led by the state against radical young sympathizers of Kurdistan Workers Party – PKK. Because the state imposed emergency operations people are unable to lead their normal daily lives, and they are in danger of getting shot in a cross-fire every day. In predominantly Kurdish inhabited cities' districts, such as Diyarbakır's historical Sur access to healthcare and external space is highly restricted. Waste is not removed, there are food shortages, electricity is often turned off and clean water is a scarce resource. People who have to leave their houses are rushing through the streets waving improvised sticks with a white piece of cloth in order to underline that they are civilians.

One can hope that eventually circles oriented on peaceful achievement of Kurdish rights will dominate and Turkish state will stop the excessive use of force. These hopes, however, contemporary are not very high as President Erdoğan announced complete breakdown of the talks with anyone connected to PKK. The emergency state imposed in the wake of the coup attempt in July 2016 can lead to further arrests among Kurdish activists, continuation of military operations and diminish chances of peace talks. At the same time most attempts at urging for limiting destructive military operations during curfews were treated by Turkish officials as „treachery” and helping the „terrorism”. This was particularly visible in the reaction to the academic petition raising awareness of casualties caused by the curfews. Many of signatories employed by Turkish universities faced criminal charges (often under infamous article 301 describing defamation of Turkish nation or state). Even more employees from the education sector faced investigations in the aftermath of the coup.

As growing international support in solidarity with Turkish academics rises, it can be noted that more people in Europe started to pay attention to events taking part in Turkey.

A possibility of return to a peaceful solution of the conflict is still present as indicated for example by continuous functioning of legal pro-Kurdish leftist HDP party. The events analyzed in the article which happened in Turkey in 2015 and 2016, point to emergence of return of forced migration within the country.

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# Mother Tongue Multilevel Kurdish Education in Northern Kurdistan

## ABSTRACT

The recent development of Kurdish language education as well as intensified work preserving and promoting a language, and culture itself in the area of Northern Kurdistan (South-Eastern Turkey) is an interesting phenomenon functioning on multiple levels. Although with some restrictions, it is possible to learn Kurdish not only at school, but also at university as a part of BA and MA studies. Moreover, various institutions belonging to a private sector as well as some municipal ones provide numerous opportunities to take part in rich and vivid Kurdish culture. However the prolonged policy of shunning and marginalizing languages of minorities proved to be a serious disadvantage, especially to Kurdish children. It causes confusion in communication among them, their families and their peers, which may lead to identity problems while growing up and in their adult lives. This paper provides insight into the situation of Kurdish language education in South-Eastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan), highlighting the linguistic, legal, and pedagogical aspects of schooling in the area.

## INTRODUCTION

The paper presents observations, and analysis of the data collected during the study visit in Northern Kurdistan which took place as a part of “Ez mefe xwedizanim! – I know my rights!” project between 2nd April and 14th April, 2015. The project was

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launched by the Kurdish Institute in Brussels<sup>3</sup> and planned for 2 years – from 2014 to 2016. The other organizations participating in the project are Kurdî Der from Diyarbakır (Turkey), Pro Humanitate from Cologne (Germany) and Jagiellonian University from Cracow (Poland). The project is formally under the auspices of Erasmus+ program, aiming to improve knowledge about mother tongue education among Kurdish youth, and to prepare a report about human and linguistic rights for European youth, basing on the experience from Diyarbakır and cooperation with the institutions mentioned above. The aim of the paper is to present the situation of minority language education in South-Eastern Turkey and raise awareness of importance of mother tongue education. As a part of the study visit within the project, we visited seven different institutions: Kurdî Der (Diyarbakır), Ferzad Kemanger Primary School (Diyarbakır, Department of Culture and Tourism of Diyarbakır's Municipality, the office of Eğitim Sen Union (Diyarbakır), Artuklu University (Mardin) and the refugee camp (Suruç).

## THE AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The methods used to acquire data in the research were mainly based on analyzing documents (the Turkish constitution and civil code, international tractates) and conducting interviews. Notes and recordings were taken during the observations in the visited institutions. The visits and meetings took place in different cities of Northern Kurdistan including, Diyarbakır, Suruç and Mardin. People with whom we cooperated were mostly teachers, lecturers, children, educators and ordinary people. We used consecutive translation provided by other participants of the project who spoke Kurmanji Kurdish; sometimes we used English, particularly at

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<sup>3</sup> Main site of the Kurdish institute in Brussels, available online at: <http://www.kurdishinstitute.be/kurdish-institute-of-brussels-1/> [accessed: 08.05.2016]. The Kurdish Institute is a non-profit organization trying to improve and promote ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities' rights in Turkey, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. They publish the bi-monthly periodical *The Kurds* as well as reports about the Kurds and other minorities in Turkey, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. They organize conferences, French and Kurdish language courses, exhibitions and various social projects.

Artuklu University. The collected data was combined with the research on the role of education in mother tongue especially in the case of minorities and of bilingualism and, we tried to make a case study of the mother tongue education in Northern Kurdistan. In this article we would like to analyze the phenomenon of the Kurdish mother tongue education in the Republic of Turkey as well as describe the original Kurdish educational system, and depict its national and private sectors. We begin with the origin of the Kurdish language, then we introduce legal status of languages of a minority. Later historical development of Kurdish cultural and educational institutions of Northern Kurdistan will be presented. It is described using the historical and cultural background of the institutions that we visited in the scope of this study.

To introduce the development of the Kurdish education in the Republic of Turkey, it is necessary to begin with complex social, psychological, and linguistic phenomena which have been named as *bilingualism* or *multilingualism*. In this article, we will call bilingual/ multilingual individuals after Yuko Goto Butler, as “people who obtain communicative competence in more than one language, with various degrees of proficiencies, in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society” (Butler, 2014:112). According to Butler, the term bilingual refers to one type of a multilanguage user who uses two languages, whereas trilingual respectively uses three languages and quadrilingual uses four languages. The following definitions will help us to look at the Kurdish society as a bilingual and sometimes a trilingual community.

Since a language is “a vehicle of tradition and culture, and the medium of group narrative” (Edwards, 2013: 19), and is always used in a cultural context we dare to claim, that it is inseparable from cultural identity. Our statement will be supported by presenting findings of researchers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Nihat Polat and Diane L. Schallert. Also Li Wei claims, speakers of a particular language feel a sense of identity and security in a culturally familiar environment which includes the feelings of being understood, valued, supported and respected (Wei, 2013:43-44). In such conditions, speakers may easily develop their linguistic skills to communicate and share their feelings with other members of a group. Unfortunately, language use can often be the product of necessity rather than a choice (Jones, 2004:41) and may have a presence through the military, religious or economic

force (Edwards, 2013:20). A language contact very often involves varieties of unequal strength (Edwards, 2013:10). It is important to ask to what degree the power can be used to impose a language. According to Turkish law, Turkish is the only language of instructions in the public education which marginalizes a number of minority languages i.e. Kurdish. It has been called by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas an *assimilationist education* and presented in her research about the linguistic genocide and linguistic imperialism (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008). According to Wayne E. Wright, cited by L. Wei, students learn best in the language they understand most, so bilingual education where two or more native languages are used in a classroom is the most welcomed solution (Wei, 2013:598-599). She claims that bilingual/multilingual education became desirable whenever language groups came into contact (Wei, 2013:598-599).

During our research we observed, that Kurdish education exists on many different levels – in some primary public schools (one lesson per week from the 5th grade), primary private schools (only three institutions), academic institutions, private lessons in different Kurdish institutions, Internally Displaced People's camps. We called it as *multilevel education* supported by the institutions which play a significant role in an individual's life. Moreover, other associations play satellite, but an important role in shaping education in Northern Kurdistan which goes far beyond its traditional perception. Yücel Demirer, the researcher at Ohio State University, describes it as *Kurdish civic education* (Municipality of Diyarbakir might be given as an example) which is, in her opinion, a form of socialization (Demirer, 2005:135). It requires participation, shapes citizen's awareness, and answers the dominant cultural policy. To understand the concepts discussed above better, we will analyze particular segments of the Kurdish education in Northern Kurdistan in more details in the following sections of the article.

## THE KURDISH LANGUAGE AND IT'S LEGAL SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

A linguistic situation of the area inhabited by Kurds is vastly heterogeneous with languages belonging to multiple families, such as Semitic languages, mainly Arabic and Neo-Aramaic, Indo-European languages such as Persian, Kurdish and Armenian as well as Turkic languages such as Turkish and Azeri. Kurdish is widely spoken in Kurdistan, the area extending from Western Iran, Turkey, Iraq to Syria (Haig and Öpengin, 2015:1). Kurdish is rather continuum of various, closely related languages and dialects (Paul, 2008) with a number of speakers that varies greatly depending on sources and should be treated with great cautiousness. Northern Kurdish, Kurmanji, is spoken approximately by 20 million people and is by far the most commonly spoken dialect, followed by Central Kurdish, Sorani with a number of speakers estimated on the level of 5 million people (McCarus, 2009:587). The literary works written in Kurmanji date back to the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and contain masterpieces of Malayê Jezirî (1570-1640), Feqiyê Teyran (1590-1660), Ehmede Xanî (1650-1707), Ismaîl Bayazidî (1642-1709) and others (Blau, 1989:328,). Although a written standard of both Sorani and Kurmanji is still developing, the foundation of a comprehensive writing system for Kurmanji was laid in the 1930s by Celadet Ali and Kamuran Bedir Khan brothers, who popularized it in the newspaper *Hawar (The Call)* (Blau, 1989:328), issued in Damascus since 1932 until 1945 (Uzun, 1989:74), and is based on a modified Latin alphabet containing 31 letters. Sorani is written with a modified Arabic alphabet, which consists of 36 letters developed in the newspaper *Jîn* in Sulaimania in Iraq (McCarus, 2009:587).

According to the definition of European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a minority or a regional language is a language which is traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of the State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population, and is different from the official language(s) of that state as well as it does not include either dialect(s) of the official language(s) of the state or the languages of migrants (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 1992:2). Basing on this definition it is possible to concur that Kurdish may have status of a minority or a regional language

according to European law. Although Turkey was not a signatory of the said agreement, there are still laws and treaties which were approved by Turkish legislation. The main example would be Treaty of Lausanne, signed by Turkey after the first World War, that states in section III, article 39, that:

“No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings. “ (Lausanne Peace Treaty, Part I. Political clauses, 1923)

This point, however, stands in certain opposition to the present Turkish constitution, precisely articles 3, 42 and 66, which are valid and enforced by law. According to the constitution:

- The State of Turkey, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish. (Article 3)
- No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution of education. (Article 42)
- Everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk. (Article 66) (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, current version: 29)

Apart from articles 3, 42 and 66 in the previous constitution from year 1982 there was article 26, that stated:

“No language prohibited by law may be used for disclosure or publication of ideas and opinions. Written or printed materials, records, tapes, videotapes, as well as other means of expression that are in violation of this prohibition, will be confiscated.” (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982)

This law was abolished in 1991 (Hassanpour et. al., 1996:367-379), leading to an improvement of minority language rights. The law which was passed in 2012 enabled to introduce Kurdish language classes in State run public schools in a form of an elective course (Bocheńska, Kurpiewska-Korbut, 2015:205).



## **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS CONCERNING MINORITY LANGUAGES**

Legal situation of minority languages in case of many countries is based on national policy as well as international conventions, and treaties, which regard it as a vital element of human rights. The conventions mostly guarantee free usage of a language, prohibit any form of repression or discrimination against its users, perceiving communication in mother tongue as a natural extension of indigenous culture. The international resolutions concerning rights of usage of minority languages and education in mentioned languages are:

- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. (Article 27) (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976:179)

- **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities**

Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (here in after referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination. (Article 2) (Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992:2)

There is abundance of examples of European and international laws, treaties and conventions emphasizing an indisputable value of a language as an important element of one's identity. Roger Dunbar states, that in discourse concerning minority languages, there are two main approaches: one focusing on a language being a fundamental constitutive element of personal identity helping with development of one's identity, and the second comparing linguistic diversity to bio-diversity being

a value itself (Dunbar, 2001:90-120). Growing awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity lead countries such as Great Britain to more complex and intensified policy protecting minority languages, which can be seen on the example of Gaelic and Welsh, both languages of the traditional minorities, which until recently have been in decline, although this trend has recently stopped at some point (Dunbar, 2006:181-198). Understanding the multilingual diversity and its undisputable value in a process of education was a very important part of “Ez mefe xwe dizanim! – I know my rights!” project conducted in the spirit of understanding multi-ethnic and multilingual society of South-Eastern Turkey.

## **THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TURKEY**

The education system in Turkey revolves around compulsory education for children lasting for 12 years. After the structural reform which took place in 2012, the new system emerged in a form of 4+4+4 model, consisting of 4 years of primary school, 4 years of lower secondary school and 4 years of upper secondary school (Zapata, Pont, Albiser, Fraccola, 2013:6). There is also a possibility of completing non-compulsory pre-primary education involving children at the age of 3-5. At the age of 6 minors start their primary education and after completing it, they start secondary education provided by various high schools (Zapata, Pont, Albiser, Fraccola, 2013:6).

During the last twenty years, there were some changes regarding Turkish policy towards Kurds, especially since 2002 the ban of using Kurdish was lifted, and also since 2005 it became possible to teach Kurdish on private courses (Bocheńska, Kurpiewska-Korbut, 2015:204). Public television dedicated one of its channels to broadcast the program in Kurdish (TRT6), and since 2009 Kurds opened some institutions dedicated to teaching, researching and promoting Kurdish culture, language and literature, amongst which is Institute of living languages at Mardin University, moreover, the possibility of studying Kurdish language and literature exists also at Van YüzüncüYil University, Alp Arslan University in Muş and Dicle University in Diyarbakır, Bingöl University, Bilkent University, Sabancı University and Tunceli University in Istanbul. All of the universities offer courses of

Kurmanji, apart from Mardin and Bingol Universities, where it is also possible to learn Zaza and Sorani dialects (Bocheńska, Krupiewska-Korbut, 2015:204-205). In 2012, the Kurdish language was introduced to schools in a form of an elective class. The condition of running the classes was a substantial number of students willing to participate in them (Bocheńska, Kurpiewska-Korbut, 2015:204).

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

On the public level the first institution worth considering is Eğitim Sen – Education and Science Workers' Union (Eğitimve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası)<sup>4</sup>. We visited their Diyarbakır's office on 6th April, 2015. Eğitim Sen was founded in 1993, but it was not acknowledged by the law until 2001. Its headquarter is located in Ankara, and it has over 100 offices all over the country. The offices are situated in Diyarbakır along with 9200 members. During our visit the representative of Eğitim Sen told us, that the union had almost 200 thousand members in general. As stated by the headmaster of Eğitim Sen the vast majority of them were Kurds, but a lot of people were also of Turkish or Armenian descent. The leadership of Eğitim Sen was held by a chairman and co-chairman, respectively a man and a woman on the base of gender equality rights. The union works on six different fields: law, education, public health, promotion, management and gender issues. They support equal rights for all Turkish minorities, work in public schools with mother tongue education, help in hospitals, promote culture of minorities, organize events and promote women's mobility and empowerment.

The structure of modern formal schooling in the Republic of Turkey, as it is mentioned above, is divided into three parts: primary school, secondary school and a university level. It is based on the usage of the Turkish language both written and spoken, what means, that this language is dominant as a standard medium of instruction. Eğitim Sen works in primary schools where Kurdish children can learn their mother tongue during one lesson per week (45 mins). Amir Hassanpour – a

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<sup>4</sup> Eğitim Sen is a part of the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, KESK), which is one of the four major national trade union centers in Turkey.

Kurdish scholar and researcher, holds the view that school as a public institution through the language of instruction fulfils different roles. First of all, it unifies and normalizes, so acquired knowledge is properly taught and developed on particular levels of the schooling system. Secondly, it shapes linguistics and intellectual homogenization which serves political integration and ethnic assimilation (Hassanpour, 1992:142). Thus, in his opinion, school should be perceived as a medium of students' identity (Hassanpour, 1992:142). Unfortunately, according to the data collected by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Desmond Fernandes, researchers examining linguistic genocide, the dominant language programs in Turkish schools in general are: "widely attested as the least effective educationally for minority language students" (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008:55). Moreover, "this subtractive, dominant-language-only-medium submersion model of education can cause serious mental harm to students from indigenous, minority or dominated groups" (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008:55). The context of language dominance in school is important because "history matters and those longstanding, coercive relations of power at the macro-level have the potential to take their toll on school-based micro-interactions between educators, students, and peers" (Taylor, 2009:304). The data reported here appears to support the assumption, that Eğitim Sen teachers encounter a lot of different problems connected with the Kurdish mother tongue education in Turkish public schooling system which, by the mentioned researchers, is called as *assimilationist education* (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008:52). It often forcibly transfers Kurdish students to another linguistic and cultural group, which results in confusion in communication within a family and with their peers. Accordingly *assimilationist education* weakens writing and reading competencies in both Kurdish and Turkish, causing constant frustration and might lead to the dominant bilingualism (de Zulueta, 1995:182)<sup>5</sup>. As a consequence students may perceive themselves through the image offered in the dominated language and feel less intelligent or even humiliated and anxious. Moreover, students receive more input in the second language than in the first language as we assume Kurdish is mostly learned at home. Charles Marcum holds the view, that the strongest language proficiency, the more individuals identify

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<sup>5</sup> According to Zulueta, in dominant bilingualism individuals don't feel self-confident in one of the languages they speak what weakens their self-esteem and makes them less friendly.

themselves with a particular society and its culture (Marcrum II, 2007:4). Kurdish pupils may fail to identify with some part of their culture which is not represented in the Turkish textbooks and Turkish children's literature.

This situation also creates a new group of bilingual speakers of both Kurdish and Turkish, which was examined by Nihat Polat and Diane L. Schallert. In their findings, they divided this new group into speakers who were native bilinguals, and whose exposure to both languages began before schooling (Bilingual First Language Acquisition), and speakers who were monolingual in Kurdish until they began formal education in Turkish around the age of six, and whose Turkish showed varying degrees of proficiency (Early Second Language Acquisition). They estimated that the majority of Kurds in the group was consecutive bilinguals – they acquired proficiency in the second language after the first language (Polat and Schallert, 2013:750).

On 9th April, we visited Artuklu Univeristy in Mardin, which was established in 2007 and Institute of Living Languages, opened two years later, where Kurdish dialects are taught. It is divided into three departments: Department of Kurdish Language and Culture, Department of Arabic Language and Culture and Department of Syriac Language and Culture. Among the others, the first one is the biggest and 1276 people has graduated from it so far (Aydin, 2016). It offers two different kinds of postgraduate studies. It is possible to study for two years, what implies writing a master thesis or to study for one year without writing a thesis. Both of them entitle graduates to teach the Kurdish language at school. There are 40 people working in the department, ten of them are responsible for teaching Kurdish dialects. It is crucial because the master program contains the following subjects: grammar, syntax, writing, classical literature, modern literature and folklore culture. At Artuklu University, to teach Kurdish dialects teachers mostly use materials written by themselves, and sometimes they import books from abroad, mainly from Kurdish diaspora (Bülbül, Geyik, Bingöl 2015, Aydin 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Institute of Living Languages encounters its own difficulties in teaching Kurdish dialects. It is mainly connected with a situation of graduates who are not able

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<sup>6</sup> The information was obtained by Sewiłło and Podlasiński from the representatives of Institute of Living Languages during the study visit in Northern Kurdistan (April 2015), and also during the academics' visits at Jagiellonian University (May 2015, May 2016).

to find jobs in Turkish primary schools. Problems occur when it comes to organization and payment rates. To start Kurdish dialect lectures, each school is obliged to obtain a consent of 10 children's parents who declare their interest in participation in this class in writing. However, for different reasons pupils do not declare a desire to learn Kurdish, they acquire the language mostly at home, in different conditions and their language competence differs. Until the fifth grade, they do not have an opportunity to learn it in public schools. Moreover, teachers struggle with their own problems. It is difficult to earn a satisfactory amount of money by teaching Kurdish. They are hired by the government and their salaries are very small, so they have to work in several different places and constantly move from one institution to another. It can be considered as paradox because Institute of Living Languages was primarily designed to educate Kurdish language teachers for public schools. But during our meeting with the lecturers, we discovered that for the past 5 years the institution became an important point of cooperation where people who are interested in developing Kurdish dialects work on literature, grammar, history and folklore (Bülbül, Geyik, Bingöl, 2015, Aydın, 2016).<sup>7</sup>

## **THE KURDISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTIONS**

Kurdish Language Association called Kurdî-der'a Amedê (in abbreviation Kurdî Der) in Diyarbakır was the first institution visited in the project. It is a part of a bigger organization named Kurd Der – Kurdish Democracy Culture and Solidarity Association which was founded in 2004 as a non-governmental organization in Ankara. The institution is committed to protecting human rights and promoting the Kurdish language in the Republic of Turkey (Kurdî Der, 2015). During our visit on 5th April, 2015 the building of Diyarbakır's Kurdî Der was completely devoted to a schooling activity and eight different courses were being run there. During that time language classes both in Kurmanji and Zaza dialects were organized for those who were eager to learn them. But, according to the Turkish law, which is mentioned above, education of minorities' languages cannot be provided for children

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<sup>7</sup> As Above

on the level of primary and secondary school outside Turkish public schools. Due to these circumstances people who want to attend classes in Kurdî Der have to be at least fifteen years old (Kurdî Der, 2015). The association organizes courses on three different levels: for beginners, students and non-students. They pay respectively: 0, 50 and 100 TL for three months of studying, basing on the information provided by the director, the money is spent only on supplies for the school, and what is worth mentioning, teachers probably work without payment. Despite that, lectures are conducted twice a week, and entrants can obtain a certificate of proficiency in the Kurdish language after they complete one of the courses (Kurdî Der, 2015).

The interesting thing about Kurdî Der activity is, that they also hold Armenian language classes conducted by Armenians – another minority in Turkey. As it was said “they work together in the name of the rule which says that a language not only serves communication but it emphasizes one’s own identity” (Kurdi Der, 2015). As Nahid Polat and Dien L. Schallert claim language is a twin skin of ethnicity (Polat and Schallert, 2013:746), and its separation from people might result in different kinds of disorders and pathology (Hassanpour et. al., 2012:13). Beside them, Gloria Anzaldúa, Latin-American scholar, who was promoting equality of languages and accents in the United States, claims that language and ethnicity are connected with each other. She wrote: „I am my language”(Anzaldúa, 1999:59)<sup>8</sup> and it is what, in our opinion, Kurdî Der is definitely associated with.<sup>9</sup> Another reason for putting stress on learning mother language is socio-political context. Most of Kurdish people who belonged to an older generation did not learn how to communicate in Kurdish dialects at school, but rather at their homes, from their parents and family. Unfortunately, a lot of them are illiterate so they cannot teach

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<sup>8</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa was also famous for creating a new term ‘linguistics terrorism’ by which she described a domination of one language over another and people’s ability to exclude others on a base of a language they use. She taught that ethnic identity is a twin skin of a language and that the usage of a language creates hierarchy in a society. See: <http://geanzaldúa.weebly.com/what-is-linguistic-terrorism.html>.

<sup>9</sup> We have been informed by one of the teachers during our visit in Armenian school, in Cracow (which was also part of Ez mefe xwe dizanim project), that knowing ones mother tongue improves pupils’ self-confidence greatly, allowing them to understand themselves, and secondly improves the results of a said child in an education process.

their own children how to write and read. Not only for this reason some of young people have not been taught how to communicate in Kurdish. Often the reason, as we were told, is that their families do not associate better future with proficiency in Kurdish. They insist on learning Turkish mainly because Turkish labor market requires a high level of competence in it, and minimizes Kurdish in a daily life. It seems to be paradox and it might cause the so-called ‘Matthew effect’ – a negative effect on identification with the minority language visible for example in the lack of enjoyable reading in the minority language by teenagers (Jones, 2004:38). However, quite a big amount of the young speak Kurdish only at home, but they are not able to write or read in it. Numerous children and teenagers learn Kurdish in public schools one hour per week. And all of them can improve their skills during a private course. In this context, the mission of Kurdî Der seems to be very clear: to fill the gap – to create a replacement system of learning the Kurdish language. That is why, they also offer trainings for teachers. Fortunately, for such organizations like Kurdî Der the Kurdish language is also taught in other educational institutions, which will be described below.

The second destination in the project was Dîbîstana Seretayîya Ferzad Kemanger<sup>10</sup> (eng. Ferzad Kemanger Primary School) which we visited on 6th April, 2015. This primary school is located in Diyarbakır’s Bağlar district, and is one of three private primary schools in Turkey offering education in Kurdish. The other two are located in Cizre district, in Şırnak and Yüksekova district in Hakkari (Rudaw, 2015). The Kemanger School was opened on 15th August, 2014, so it had been active for almost a year at the time we were there. There were eight teachers at work at school during our visit, among whom only one was not paid and was doing voluntary work. They were giving lessons to a hundred of pupils. During the interview the staff mentioned, that Kemanger School had not received any financial support from the government. During our visit, the school was financed by the

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<sup>10</sup> Ferzad Kemanger was a Kurdish teacher and human rights activist from Iran who was sentenced to death by Islamic Revolutionary Court in 2008. He was accused of acting against God and national security of Iran but no evidence was found to prove his guilt. Amnesty International and Education International called to acquit Kemanger but they failed. It is not a coincidence, that this school is named by his name even though it is located in Turkey. Kemanger became a symbol of the unity of Kurdish stateless nation and school with his name refers to education in its language.



Municipality of Diyarbakır, which had its own budget, and cooperated with two organizations supporting Kurdish education: Kurdî Der and Eđitim Sen. These organizations were helping with editioning and printing educational materials which were written by Kemanger's teachers. On Turkish book market materials written in Kurdish and dedicated to common subjects taught in primary schools such as: mathematics, literature, geography etc. do not exist, so teachers provided books and workbooks by themselves using their own money and experience. They approved contents by voting in a commission consisting 8 people working at school as teachers. Additionally, they were discussing the syllabus of particular courses with students' parents who had also cooperated together with other inhabitants of Bađlar district in preparing food for children during lunch breaks. The interesting thing which was observed was the fact that, school was governed by a council instead of principals. It consisted of three people of equal status. They had been chosen by teachers and among themselves. The members of the council change every year, so that all teachers would take part in school's administration. That was the sign of collective approach, which we was seen for the first time visiting Kurdî Der Association and it started to be a constantly repeated motif during our visit in Northern Kurdistan, which evolved to really interesting outcomes in our project what is discussed more at the end of the paper.

Teaching at school was fully conducted in Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish. Students attended the following classes: mathematics, literature (writing and reading), history and society class, art, music and sport. During our visit, we were able to observe how the classrooms looked like and meet the children studying there. The teachers showed the school's property than in the teachers' room we had a chance to interview them, and ask detailed questions which provided us with new information about mother tongue education in Northern Kurdistan. At the base of our observations and talks, we registered that children's voice in school is highly respected. Students are not obliged to participate in a lesson if they do not want to and they cannot gain negative grades (Kermanger School, 2015). At this point, the approach seems for us to be similar to the idea of Alexander Neill's Summerhill School founded in England at the beginning of the XX century. He believed, that school should be conducted in the way to fit a child, not the other way (Sumerhill, 2015). His pupils were free with developing themselves as long as their activity

did not harm other people. In Kemanger School, if a child does not want to participate in a lesson it can go with an adjuvant teacher to the playground in the garden, which is located in front of the school's building and take a rest or come up with its own activity (Sumerhill, 2015)<sup>11</sup>. Surprisingly, students rarely use this possibility and they prefer to participate in lessons. As reported by the teachers, some of them might have family problems or be distracted for other reasons but then they can easily share their problems with teachers and they do so. According to what the teachers said, having no negative grades eliminates envy and sense of grievance among children. It changes rivalry into competition and encourages pupils to continue their self-development. Introducing the idea of a common property was another interesting concept which was observed at school. It teaches students how to cooperate, share things and respect what they have. They were also encouraged to perceive girls as equal to boys as well as disabled people equal to physically capable ones. Teachers emphasized that they refrained from entering political topics at school.

According to what is written above, we can surely observe, that in Kemanger's Primary School teachers treat school surface as a democratic sphere for children, themselves and other members of a Kurdish society who were involved in the school's activity – parents, Kurdish organizations, Municipality governors, people living in Bağlar district etc.. They shared collective approach not only at the administrative level, but also among their pupils underlining the importance of common ownership. At school, they presented an individual approach towards their students and introduced an attitude of gender equality, respect, creativity and stress-free teaching methods. Being aware of the importance of mother tongue education they provided schooling in the Kurmanji dialect for Kurdish children from Diyarbakır and reimagined school to create their own type of an educational institution adapted to the socio-political conditions of the country.

However, the collected data about the future of the pupils from Kemanger School leaves a question because there are neither Kurdish secondary schools nor high schools in Turkey. The students of Diyarbakır, Şırnak, and Hakkari primary schools are not able to continue their mother tongue education what may cause confusion by mixing two languages at the same time: Kurdish and Turkish. Lack

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<sup>11</sup> The playground is equipped with sandpit and benches.

of proper education in neither of them might be the other problem that occurs. An important issue, which also provoked some speculations was connected with the legal status of Kemanger School. As mentioned above, schooling on the primary level in a language other than Turkish is forbidden. Teachers whom we interviewed reported few raids on school made by Turkish police, which caused a lot of problems mainly connected with devastating the school's property.

## **OTHER CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

On the same day we met the head of Serokatiya Daîreya Çand û Tûrîzmê Ya Şaredariya Bajarê Mezin a Diyarbakır (Department of Culture and Tourism of Diyarbakır's Municipality), which cooperates with central Turkish authority, but as we were told, recently had gained some liberty in their activity from the state. Diyarbakır province is a widely known region with a lot of touristic places among which the ancient city walls and the Hevsel Gardens which were put on UNESCO's World Heritage List in summer 2015 (UNESCO: 2015). It is visited by almost 200 000 people from all around the world every year.

Department of Culture and Tourism organizes many cultural events which attract people and popularize Kurdish culture, history, and art. According to Muharrem Cebe, the Head of the Department of Culture and Tourism, the department cooperates with some European countries such as Sweden, Switzerland, Netherland and Austria. The department is also responsible for smaller institutions such as Mala Dengbêjan (The Dengbej House) and Art Gallery in Sumer Park visited by us (Cebe, 2015). The first one is a traditional old public house with a courtyard where around 10 -15 elderly people gather to express their grief or happiness by singing legends, stories and commemorating events from Kurdish history. They continue the long Kurdish tradition of singing and storytelling as well as they play a huge role as a part of national heritage, and also constitute an important part of national heritage. For years they have been cultivating and preserving oral folktales, passed from generation to generation, shielding national identity from oblivion. It is an important place for meetings, reflection and sharing a common tradition. The other place, is an institution, which exhibits Kurdish modern art. The Art Gallery in

Sumer Park was the first place in Diyarbakır which exhibited Kurdish Art. It began archivization of Kurdish art to create a collection of art with a purpose focused creating a museum in the future (Bocheńska, Kaczorowski, 2016:62).

According to Yücel Demirer traditional festivals shape and reproduce Kurdish identity in Turkey, and we can perceive such gatherings as a form of pedagogy which connects knowledge about the past with surrounding, political climate and ideological constructions (Demirer, 2005:135). Encountering Kurds with their own traditions takes place in the transitive points where reality makes a new meaning. Demirer writes that:

Through the history of Turkish Republic, the teaching and learning settings functioned as a microcosm of the sociopolitical order and the citizens of the state were depicted as Turkish. The distinction of other identities was ignored in the pedagogical texts. Therefore, the Kurdish political organizations created alternative patterns and venues for learning and unlearning, which constitute a kind of “civic education”. This way clearly presents a different kind of socialization and has to be distinguished from the common definition of civic education as a political intervention that shapes the citizen’s understanding and the level of participation in governance by providing some ideas and standards. It should be used in a much more narrow sense and we might call it “Kurdish civic education” which defines less structured, moderate and condensed, but ultimately politically charged, effort to respond to the dominant cultural policies and the “disjuncture between curricular and social change” in Turkey (Demirer, 2005:135).

The *civic education* brings up very important questions connected with the citizenship, belonging to the society and identity constructs (Crittenden and Levine, n.d.). Jack Crittenden and Peter Levine, the authors of the article in the mentioned source, wrote that civic education is not limited to schooling and education. It should be perceived as a lifelong process which involves governments, families, mass media and other institutions. It affects people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities and actions as members of communities (Crittenden and Levine, n.d.). It is worth pointing out that people decide by themselves whether they perceive themselves as members of a particular community or not.

According to Paulo Freire, the author of the term *liberation pedagogy*, civic education is also connected with oppressors and those being oppressed. He considers

that people living under a certain regime and suffering from lack of freedom in the major community should overcome the oppression, which is internalized within their own identities. They can do that by critical reflection on their situation (history and culture) and by taking an action within their own minorities by organizing cultural events (Freire, 2006:92-93). *Liberation pedagogy*, therefore, is a tool for a dialogue exchange which involves both teachers and students who can learn from each other and create common society by working on the past and present reality which surrounds them. As Yücel Demirer says, in Turkish conditions there is a necessity to create a hybrid term called *Kurdish civic education* which according to the collected data might be also a part of so-called *multilevel education* (Demirer, 2005:135).

The examples mentioned above show three different types of education observed in three different institutions. The one which is being described in this paragraph needs a wider perspective involving not only students and educators but also other members of society who participate in events outside school walls. Department of Culture and Tourism of Diyarbakır's Municipality created a new space for culture and language transmission which is located in the urban sphere on the national and international level. Not only inhabitants of South-Western Turkey take part in these events but also people from other parts of the country and furthermore from abroad – they can all participate and create new social space. Thus, Dengbej House gatherings and Sumer Park's exhibitions become new tools of pedagogy in civic education because they transmit knowledge about the past, using Kurdish dialects as languages of an instruction constructing identities based not on oppression, but culture, history and a language. And in the context of Paulo Freire's *liberation pedagogy*, they start a dialogue between visitors in which everyone can learn from each other.

Our last experience with different types of Kurdish education, which we called above *multilevel Kurdish education*, in Northern Kurdistan was a visit in Internally Displaced People's camp which was located in Suruç. Around the city, there were seven camps made for Kurdish people coming from Kobanê in Syria which provided schooling for children. According to the teachers working there, on the day of our arrival (7th April, 2015) the number of minor refugees varied from 200 to 250 in each camp, but before the liberation of Kobanê in January 2015, the num-

ber reached more than 4 thousand. During that time, it was very difficult to create proper teaching conditions due to lack of space, books and teachers. However, in April the situation looked differently, mainly because a lot of people had gone back to Kobanê. During our visit most of the teachers working in the camps (around 15 people) were women refugees who arrived from Syria. They were supported by Kurdish and non-Kurdish NGOs such as Kurdî Der and Danish Refugee Council<sup>12</sup>, and arranged lessons for three groups of children (around 20 people in one class) divided according to their age: 3 to 6; 7 to 10 and 11 to 15. Classes were conducted between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. or 12 and 14 p.m. The youngest students were taught the Kurdish language, history, and ecology whereas older ones were taught maths, music and foreign languages such as Arabic and English.

According to what we have seen, teaching in war conditions is a very complicated matter. The refugees live in tough and extraordinary conditions, and they need almost everything – beginning with soap and water, health care, a place to go and take rest, not to mention – peace of mind. As reported by Punamäki:

“For children, war means life in danger, worry about family security, and horrifying memories. These experiences place overwhelming burdens on children’s mental health and development. Research has provided evidence that children who have been exposed to war and military violence are at risk for increased psychological distress, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and concentration problems” (Punamäki et. al., 2005:178-179).

Teaching in the camps is a real challenge and requires a mix of education skills and therapy. It is also a fight for preserving the identity. Additionally, in Suruç in most cases Kurdish children coming from Syria are bilingual. They speak Kurdish and Arabic dialects. Teachers being aware of its importance, pay attention to speaking both of them. Bilingualism or sometimes trilingualism, which can be also called as multilingualism, is a common phenomenon in Kurdish societies. Children from the beginning learn how to speak in more than one language which, according to collected data, empowers their general language capability. Amir Hassanpour, Jaffer Sheyholislami and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas proved that: “properly conducted mother-tongue-based multilingual education can lead to high levels of

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<sup>12</sup> About DRC operating in Turkey look: *Turkey*, <https://www.drc.dk/where-we-work/middle-east-and-north-africa/turkey> (data access: 29.11.2015).

multilingualism (e.g. Kurdish/Turkish/English), good school achievement (with accompanying later job prospects), a positive multilingual identity, and positive attitudes towards self and other” (Hassanpour, Sheyholislami, Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012:13). And, if we agree on the fact that a language is a twin skin of identity it will also help to create a safe place for children in a classroom where their multi social identities, different ethnicity, religion, dialects, age, gender and social status – will be understood and respected.

## CONCLUSION

In the paper, we tried to analyze the phenomena of the Kurdish mother tongue education in Turkey. We presented 6 Kurdish educational institutions, described their roots and we have followed their goals. In our findings, we discovered the unusual Kurdish educational system which functions in specific socio-political conditions. According to Turkish law, it is not possible to conduct lessons in other languages than Turkish in public education. However, in recent years, some attempts can be observed which peacefully introduce new ways to preserve the language of minorities from extinction. We called them *multilevel education* which is visible on the base of minorities using Kurmanji and Zaza dialects. Due to the efforts of Kurmanji teachers the system could start in primary schools. It is possible to learn Kurdish in public schools – one hour per week or in three private primary schools where all subjects are conducted in Kurdish. However, private primary schools encounter many problems with legalizing of the activity. Both types of primary schools offer the Kurdish language in the region of South-Eastern Turkey, where the majority of people are Kurds. One of the schools is called Kemanger Primary School and is located in Diyarbakır. Usually graduates from Artuklu University, people associated with Kurdî Der Association and the Eğitim Sen Union of Teachers used to work at those primary schools. On the secondary level, children can continue Kurdish lessons only in public schools with the same amount of hours. However, it is possible to continue learning in an organization such as Kurdî Der which offers Kurdish language courses for people who are older than fifteen years, twice a week. Then Artuklu University offers Kurdish studies within Institute of Living Languages,

where students may continue their education with Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza dialects. They are obliged to write a master thesis using one of them.

There are also other places, such as Department of Culture and Tourism of Diyarbakır's Municipality, which offers different types of education. We called it, after Yücel Demirer, *Kurdish civic education*. It is mainly connected with activating culture and society within events and exhibitions through the medium of Kurdish dialects.

All of the described institutions show an unusual approach to collective support. They managed to provide books, school materials, collect people and institutions, and change classrooms into a democratic place for all kind of students. This approach can be surely called as *liberation pedagogy* which serves the other idea, very important for our findings – a language, cultural and to some extent political identity. These institutions flourished to promote the Kurdish language and identity of its people. As Haydar Darıcı wrote: they created “new public space (...) contributed to the feeling that the Kurdish question could be solved by non-violent means” (Darıcı, 2013:783).

Unfortunately, it is possible to observe a lot of obstacles that impede steps taken by them. It is not possible to analyze this topic without using terms such as *assimilationist education* practiced by Turkey. According to it, the Kurdish educational system needs a ‘pedagogical intervention’ which we understand as a change in the approach towards mother tongue and multilanguage education in the country. Some of the solutions had already been proposed by other researchers. The most convincing model was created by the following researchers: Amir Hassanpour, Jaffer Sheyholislami and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in their article called *Kurds In Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan: a comparison of Kurdish Educational Language Policy in Two Situations of Occupation*. This model is based on trilingual approach (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008). It uses Kurdish as the main language of instruction in public schools and Turkish as an additional subject for Kurdish minorities. It involves teachers who are bilingual in Turkish and Kurdish and proposes following model for all minorities: 1. for all, the mother tongue (Arabic, Armenian, Kurdish, Turkish, etc.); 2. for all minorities, the dominant state language (Turkish); for native Turkish speakers, a domestic minority language; and 3. for all, English (or some other major international language). The data collected



here support the assumption that a language we speak is instrumental in forming our identity. Unfortunately bilingual education is intricately tied to political, economics, historical, and socio-cultural factors. But steps that have been taken by Kurdish educators, lecturers, teachers and scholars of Northern Kurdistan might be seen as an example of not popular yet, but soon wider spread, approach towards Kurdish education on many different levels.

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ARTUR RODZIEWICZ

# The Armenian Portrait of the Peacock Angel

A polemical review of Garnik Asatrian and Victoria Arakelova's  
*The Religion of the Peacock Angel. The Yezidis  
and Their Spirit World*<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In a recently published book, two well-known Armenian scholars try to create a holistic portrait of the Yezidi religion. Besides an attempt to formalize the oral tradition, the authors present their own interpretations of some obscure elements of the Yezidism, as its name or origin. They present an original approach to these issues, in many places different from the opinions of some Western scholars. In the article, besides the presentation of the content, I discuss some of these topics.

All the surveys of Yezidi theology published so far are pioneering studies. This is because the Yezidi community is hermetic and its religious principles, for centuries intentionally preserved solely in the oral form, as yet have not been codified in a writing.<sup>2</sup> This community was also for a very long time subject to universal and mandatory illiteracy, albeit with the exception of the members of its highest caste. Hence, there exists no Yezidi “sacred book”. It was only in the 1970 that the Yezidi elders granted their permission for the community’s religious hymns to be published. Until recently this tendency seemed to be on the increase, with the Yezidi Cultural Centre in the Iraqi city of Duhok beginning to issue scholarly journals

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<sup>1</sup> Another version of my polemic was published in Polish (Rodziewicz 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See passages from interviews with the Yezidis concerning this topic, in: Khenchelaoui, 1999: 27-30. It is not impossible that some texts were in use, but if so, they were (and still are) rigorously kept secret (cf. Kreyenbroek, 2010: 88).

(e.g. *Lalish*); currently, however, the growing threat from the “Caliphate” and the fact that the Yezidi activists working at the Centre must now focus on helping the refugees have put a stop to its development.

The public codification of Yezidi theology is thus being achieved almost before our very eyes. Involved in this effort are non-Yezidi scholars parallel with the young generation of Yezidi researchers investigating their own religion, such as Dmitri Pirbari (2008a, 2008b), Khanna Omarkhali (2009a, 2009b) or Kovan Khanki.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Yezidis themselves have found the findings of non-Yezidi scholars useful. I have witnessed this special synergy myself during field research I conducted in Lalish, a village near Duhok and Mosul, in May 2014. It is the site of the central sanctuary of the Yezidi cult, i.e. the shrine of the modifier (or creator) of this religion Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, and of the holy Zem-zem spring. During conversations with the Yezidis concerning their theology, I have often observed how the findings of Western scholars were integrated into my interlocutors’ own religious outlook. For instance, the Yezidis’ familiarity with studies by scholars who accentuate the Mithraic and Zoroastrian roots of Yezidism<sup>4</sup> results in the fact that, when asked about their religious identity, they often emphasise its origin from Mithraism or Zoroastrianism.<sup>5</sup> I mention this because what we are currently witnessing is truly exceptional: the ongoing publication of scholarly studies triggers the process of modifying, codifying and fossilising the theology of a religion which has existed since at least the 12th century AD; thus, a religion whose attested practice is older than, for instance, Protestantism, is only now gaining a generally accessible theoretical form.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> His synthesis of Yezidi theology in the light of philosophy is especially noteworthy: Bestamî, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Especially that by Prof. Ph. Kreyenbroek, who wrote e.g. “The essentials of the pre-Zoroastrian cosmogony, with an admixture of Zoroastrian elements similar to that of Mithraism, can still be found in the mythology of two modern sects, The Yezidis and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, both of which may have originated among speakers of Western Iranian languages” (Kreyenbroek 1992: 57-79).

<sup>5</sup> Another example may be the Yezidis’ propagation of the theory by George Habibi, a Christian, concerning the Assyrian provenance of their religion (Spät, 2008: 397); see also Spät’s observations on the feedback phenomenon among the Yezidis of Iraq (2010: 125-146).

<sup>6</sup> This certainly does not mean that earlier, the Yezidis did not have any theology. Yet profound knowledge regarding it has until now been reserved for a small circle of the highest religious



As it has already been mentioned, authoritative written sources regarding Yezidism have only recently been made available. These are primarily texts of religious hymns, poems and prayers. The most recent are those edited in 1991 and 2005 by Kreyenbroek and Rashow. Passages from Yezidi literary texts were published for the first time only in the late 19th century, by the Armenian Orientalist S. A. Egiazarov, with a translation into Russian; they were translated into German soon after (Egiazarov, 1891: 221-227).<sup>7</sup> The anthology of source texts edited by the brothers Ordîxanê and Celîlê Celîl brought out in their *Kurdish Folklore* in 1978 was the largest collection until the publication of Kreyenbroek and Rashow's study. That anthology did not contain translations, however, but only the bare text in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, which is used by the Yezidis. *Meshefa Resh* and *Jilwe*, two "books" ascribed to Yezidis which have been in circulation in the scholarly community since the beginning of the 20th century, are currently considered to be forgeries.<sup>8</sup>

Considering that new source materials are constantly being discovered, every publication concerning the Yezidi people brought out by field researchers is exceedingly valuable, since it provides crucial information on a religion which is still only superficially known. For this reason, *The Religion of the Peacock Angel. The Yezidis and Their Spirit World*, the fruit of many years of research conducted by two Armenian scholars, deserves special notice: it fills many lacunas in our knowledge of Yezidism. This pertains especially to the materials gathered by Asatrian and Arakelova in the milieu of the Yezidi diaspora in Armenia and, to a lesser extent, the diasporas resident in Georgia, Russia and Turkey. This community has until now remained mostly at the periphery of Western scholars' investigations because, for linguistic reasons, they hardly ever availed themselves of Armenian-

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leaders; also – as is typical of oral cultures – its fragments that could be gathered by outside researchers varied considerably in many areas.

<sup>7</sup> A decade later these passages were translated into German by H. Makas and published in his work *Kurdische Studien* (1900: 37-38).

<sup>8</sup> Although it must be admitted that they are quite accurate in conveying basic information about Yezidism. Interestingly, many Iraqi Yezidis consider them to be reliable and original sacred books, which indicates that here, too, we are dealing with the mechanism of acquiring derivative knowledge about themselves. Regarding the debate as to their authenticity (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 10-16).

or Russian-language literature concerning the Yezidi people. While the works by Edmonds (1967), Guest (1993), Kreyenbroek (1995, 2010), Lescot (1975) or Spät (2010) present mostly materials gathered in Iraq and Syria, Asatrian and Arakelova additionally offer us a much fuller picture of the theology of the Yezidi community resident in Armenia.

The book crowns Asatrian and Arakelova's extensive research on Yezidi theology. The title indicates that the authors have focused mainly on the theological aspect of the religion. By and large, the book constitutes a disciplined set of articles which both authors have for years been publishing in *Iran and the Caucasus*, a journal brought out by Brill publishers, of which Garnik Asatrian is the editor-in-chief. Some texts have been greatly extended and modified.

The authors have divided the text into two parts preceded by the Introduction, which concisely presents the origins of Yezidism and summarises the current condition of the community. The first part is entitled "The one god", the second "The Yezidis' pantheon<sup>9</sup> and the syncretic features of their religion"; each is divided into three chapters which focus on particular aspects of Yezidi theology. In fact, the structure of the study, proceeding from the one to the many, resembles a pyramid, broadening from the peak (I.1 "Malak Tāwūs: the leader of the triad") to the description of various sacred entities (II.5. "Aspects of nature and celestial bodies in the Yezidi tradition") and the catalogue of elements borrowed by Yezidism from other systems of belief (II.6. "Yezidi religious syncretism"). It is thus a strictly theological analysis, since it pertains to the intricacies of the Yezidi concept of a divinity or God who, in manifesting himself in the spiritual and corporeal world, assumes diverse forms and persons. In addition, it is the first publication concerning Yezidis in which monotheism is ascribed to them so forcefully. The authors accentuate this assumption already in the Introduction, where they also succinctly communicate the purpose of their book:

This book is entirely dedicated to the essentials of Yezidi identity – the Yezidi religion, or more precisely the so-called Yezidi folk pantheon in its varied dimensions. The idea of one god and his incarnations, Yezidi deities, saints, holy patrons and deified personalities are the prolonged focus of this book. It is not a mere presentation of the char-

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<sup>9</sup> The authors emphasise (p. x) that they have applied this term only provisionally.

acters in this “pantheon”, but a thorough attempt to determine their domains, to define their main functions and features, to trace their genealogies, and, in short, to locate their niches in the system of the Yezidi faith. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: ix-x)

In spite of this declaration, in the Introduction Asatrian and Arakelova refer also to a highly controversial issue which, although rigorously pertaining to the Yezidi identity, exceeds the boundaries of theology in the narrow meaning of the term, namely to the issue of the Yezidis’ ethnical identity. This issue is not commented upon in any detail, although other publications by Asatrian and Arakelova indicate that the two scholars consider it extremely important. Here, they introduce it only implicitly and treat it as obvious, for instance when they mention the Yezidi’s “permanent struggle for survival among the neighbouring Kurds and Turks” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: vii) or affirm that the Yezidis “were very often, and with particular brutality, persecuted by the Kurds, even though they share with them the same language, the Kurmanji dialect”<sup>10</sup> (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 10). Asatrian and Arakelova reiterate and promote the view that the Yezidis, especially the “Armenian Yezidis”, constitute an ethnos separate from the Kurds also in their other publications, especially those associated with the milieu that has evolved around the *Iran and the Caucasus*<sup>11</sup> journal of which they are editors; they apply to them the concept of an “ethno-religious (Kurmanji-speaking) group”.<sup>12</sup> Yet the view that Yezidis are a non-Kurdish group is rarely approved of by the Kurdish Studies milieu.<sup>13</sup> Asatrian and Arakelova are fully aware where the fault line

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<sup>10</sup> The same observation, in: Asatrian, Arakelova, 2003: 9.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Asatrian, 2009: 3: “At present, in Armenia and Georgia, there live respectively 52,000 and 26,000 Yezidis, who are, in fact, a separate ethno-religious entity, with their own identity and ethnic characteristics, though they speak a dialect of Kurdish, the so-called Kurmanji or Northern Kurdish.” On the criterion of the Yezidi ethnic identity, see Arakelova, 2010: 1-17. Other Armenian authors, while stressing the separateness of the Yezidis and the Kurds, attempt to indicate their potential common genetic roots; see e.g. Yepiskoposian *et al.*, 2010: 37-42; “The results demonstrate that the Yezidis living in Armenia significantly differ from the Kurds” (*ibidem*: 39).

<sup>12</sup> As phrased in a review published in “Iran and the Caucasus” (11 (2007), p. 154): “The right term, which, in our opinion, should be used in referring to the Yezidis, is the “ethno-religious (Kurmanji-speaking) group”.

<sup>13</sup> Western scholars prefer to see the Yezidis as a sub-group of the Kurds; thus e.g. in Kreyenbroek, Sperl 1992. Some use such phrases as “Yezidi Kurds”, e.g. Blau 2010: 31, 16).

of this debate lies, because they delineated it clearly in their review of *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, the now classic book on the Yezidis by Philip Kreyenbroek, whom they explicitly accused of being a “Kurdophile” (2007: 158), writing: “The very first chapter, ‘Aspects of Yezidi Society and Culture’, first presenting a short history of the Yezidi community, starts with a statement, which in its essence cannot be regarded as univocally right – the authors approach the Yezidi people as “a small Kurdish community”. Correspondingly, some basic definitions in the book are also characterised as Kurdish (Kurdish tradition, Kurdish culture, etc.)”.<sup>14</sup> They also suggested, not without basis, that the categorisation of Yezidis as Kurds is often politically motivated and useful to Kurds in their attempts to increase their geo-political clout (2007: 157). It, however, difficult to resist the impression that the opposing course, Asatrian and Arakelova’s insistence on the categorisation of the Yezidi people as non-Kurds, is no more than the reverse side of the same political tendency, which in this case may arise from the Armenians’ attitude towards Turks and Kurds.

Concerning the two main approaches to the Yezidis: their perception as a separate nation or a part of the Kurdish people, it is worth remembering that in the 1830s, under the influence of the European concepts, the latter idea (which, by the way, seems to be returning to favour) was promoted especially vigorously and in a much stronger form than today. It was postulated to recognise Yezidism as the original Kurdish religion. The idea was raised by the brothers Badger and Bedir Khan in their search for a common identity for all the Kurds (Allison, 2008: 16). The power of this idea is confirmed by the fact that it is regarded with approval

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<sup>14</sup> From a review by G. Asatrian and V. Arakelova (2007: 153): “The very first chapter, ‘Aspects of Yezidi Society and Culture’, first presenting a short history of the Yezidi community, starts with a statement, which in its essence cannot be regarded as univocally right—the authors approach the Yezidi people as ‘a small Kurdish community’. Correspondingly, some basic definitions in the book are also characterised as Kurdish (Kurdish tradition, Kurdish culture, etc.)”. According to the authors, most Yezidis do not identify themselves with the Kurds, and the occasional declarations of Kurdishness among the Yezidis resident in Europe spring from the fact that this gives them “better opportunities for integration in respective countries through the Kurdish political organisations and pseudo-academic institutions” (*ibidem*: 154). Also, Asatrian and Arakelova refer to research conducted in the Yezidi community, which indicates that an overwhelming majority of the Yezidis resident in Caucasus and Russia refuses to identify themselves with the Kurds.

also by those Kurds who identify themselves as Muslim<sup>15</sup> and that it is promoted by Barzani and Talabani, political leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>16</sup> To put it succinctly, the controversy arises from the fact that the Yezidis and Kurds share a territory and a language: Kurmanji belongs to Kurdish dialects. In spite of this, they are deeply convinced (and this conviction is expressed in religious parables) that as an ethnos, they are distinct from all the others, because while the human race in general originates from Adam and Eve, the Yezidi people were born without Eve's involvement and originate from Adam alone (or, in another version, they are derived from Adam's son Shahid bin Jarr and the houri Layla by the act of the main deity Malak Tawus).<sup>17</sup> Aware of their religious discreteness, the community upholds the principle of endogamy. Hence, the Yezidis themselves often emphasise: "To say that we are Kurds is to deny the existence of the nation".<sup>18</sup> This is not a place for resolving this controversy, which to a large extent can be determined by assuming a certain definition of "nation" and its determinants (especially the group's self-identification) and resolving whether Yezidism and the Yezidis existed before the Sufi brotherhood was established by the central human figure of the religion – Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, born in today's Lebanon, who was a pious Sunni and was not a Kurd.<sup>19</sup> It is more or less generally assumed that he was a crucial figure in the process of shaping the Yezidi religion, even though even some Yezidis

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<sup>15</sup> When in 2014 I was asking Kurds in Diyarbakir in Turkey or in Erbil in Iraq about this idea, it found acceptance even with the elderly Sunnis, which is undoubtedly connected with the revival of Kurdish search for ideas that would bind together various groups with differing dialects and traditions, and for a mythical foundation for the Kurdish state which is now taking shape.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Allison, 2001: 38; Spät 2008: 399. Similarly, Zoroastrianism is being cast in the role of the original Kurdish religion (M. Strohmeier, 2003: 167, 196). According to Spät, "The notion that Yezidis are the "original Kurds", in other words all Kurds were once Yezidis, has for some time enjoyed popularity not only among Yezidis, but – since the foundation of the Kurdish Autonomy in 1991, and the need for constructing a national myth – among Sunni Kurds as well" (2008: 141-142).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Spät, 2002: 27-56, and chapter 9 in *idem*, 2008: 327-368 and 417-452.

<sup>18</sup> A statement of an Armenian Yezidi (Dalayan, 2012: 194).

<sup>19</sup> In his work *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān*, in the biographic note on Adi, Ibn Khalliqān of Erbil (13th c.) wrote: "The shaikh Adī Ibn Musāfir al-Hakkāri was an ascetic, celebrated for the holiness of his life, and the founder of a religious order called after him al-Adawia" (*Ibn Khallikans Biographical Dictionary*: 197). On Sheikh Adi, see the anthology of related source texts collected and with a commentary by R. Frank (1911). It was only the son of his nephew

are of the opinion that what Adi did was deform the “original” Yezidism (this view was several times expressed in my presence).<sup>20</sup> Above all, Adi is supposed to have systematised beliefs associated with the cult of the Sun and the forces of nature.<sup>21</sup> According to Asatrian and Arakelova,

The process of the formation of the Yezidis as a separate ethno-religious group took place in the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth century in the region of Sinjar in northern Iraq. The religious dissociation of the Yezidis from the local milieu took place in the very colourful religious scenery of Mesopotamia where different ideas of Islam and Christianity were interlaced with Gnostic ideas and local folk beliefs. In the tightly loyal surrounding of the Sufi ‘Adawīyya order, which became the core of a new community, there arose and developed a fundamentally new syncretic religious doctrine. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: ix = Arakelova 2010: 6)

Further on in the Introduction, the authors declare: “We (...) will explore a sphere mainly ignored by other authors, probing Yezidi conceptions of divinity in the light of a comparative religious analysis” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: x). It must be noted, however, that their work is not as pioneering as they profess: for instance, the book published by Philip Kreyenbroek in 1995 had a similar structure and topic, although it was not limited to theology alone. In his *Yezidism – Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*, which today belongs to classic texts on the Yezidi people, Kreyenbroek too organised divine entities in groups and defined their functions, adding an extensive comparative commentary and an edition of Yezidi hymns. On the other hand, it is true that the book *The Religion of the Peacock Angel* is limited almost exclusively to theology. Its authors point out:

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(Adi b. Abu ‘l-Barakat) who was called a Kurd. According to Guest (1993: 19) “he was also called ‘Adi the Kurd’ because he was the first sheikh to have been born in the Hakkari mountains”.

<sup>20</sup> Which may be explained by, among others, an attempt at distancing themselves from any connections with Islam, and thus with the possible influence of Sufism, with which Adi was supposedly lined as the founder of the Adawīyya *tariqa*. Cf. Spät, 2008: 399.

<sup>21</sup> Texts published by the Yezidis themselves are kept in a similar tone, e.g. Sh. Bibo (2013: 13): “By the time Sheikh Adi appeared among the Izidies, Izidism, of course, was already there but was actually deteriorating because ignorance was descending upon the followers of this religion. (...) Soon after Sheikh Adi settled down in Lalish, he gathered the leaders and chief men of this community to enlighten them about their religion. Some Izidies were and are still known as Shamsanis i.e. the sun worshipers”.

“There have been numerous publications on Yezidi history and religion, but we can dare to conclude that this has been first attempt to probe the core aspects of the Yezidi religious outlook and to do so in a systematic way” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 133).

In order to present a picture of the whole book, I shall now briefly review the chapters contained in the two main parts of *The Religion of the Peacock Angel*.

## I. THE ONE GOD.

The first part of the book presents a defence of Yezidi monotheism, as well as a detailed description of the figures of the Yezidi holy triad: the Peacock Angel (*Malak Tāwūs*), Sheikh Adi (*Şeyx 'Ādī*) and Sultan Yezid (*Silt 'ān Ēzīd*) with a extensive chapter devoted to each. Most scholars, including the authors of *The Religion of the Peacock Angel*, support the view that in Yezidism, the figures of this triad as much as the particular divinities constitute avatars or manifestations of the highest deity, whom the Yezidis call *xwadē*. Asatrian and Arakelova point out the analogy with other monotheistic religions, especially the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity, and the status of Ali in extreme Shiite factions. The first part of the book contains also a detailed analysis of the etymology of words used by the Yezidis to denote “god” and a review of his role in Yezidism, which entails being a distant creator of the world then left to be governed by the Peacock Angel: “*xwadē* is completely indifferent to its fate; he is not concerned with worldly affairs or human fortune” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 4). Hence, almost all the Yezidi cult focuses on this ruler of the world, not on the God who hides somewhere away from it and seems not to interfere directly in its affairs (unless his manifestations are regarded as his attendance in the world).

The poly-variation in the Yezidis’ religious thought, or rather, their dismembered representation of the divine entity or of god, is none other than the personification of the functional division of the divine, which has nothing to do with polytheism in its pure form. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 1)

A careful analysis of the Yezidi triad will show its component deities to be unambiguous manifestations of the one god worshipped by adherents. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 3)

The matter of the Yezidis' postulated monotheism is so complicated that the worshippers of the Peacock Angel themselves do not seem to be clear on the issue. As it has already been mentioned, the issue of whether Yezidis should be considered monotheistic seems to depend mostly on the interpretation of our vestigial knowledge of the subject matter and on the definition of "monotheism" itself. Also, it is necessary to bear in mind that the content of many religious hymns and other orally transmitted texts, from which our knowledge of Yezidism is derived, is often divergent and conflicting; in oral cultures, in which strict codification of the religious doctrine is lacking, this is a common phenomenon. Nevertheless, observation indicates that the Yezidis' main object of worship is not *xwadē*, but the Peacock Angel; they consider themselves his chosen people and speak of themselves as "the Peacock Angel's nation" (*milatē Malak Tāwūs*). It is they who had looked after him when he was thrown down from the heavens, and so he chose them to be his worshippers and gave them their laws. Many of those laws are recorded in the so-called *Book of Revelation (Jilwe)*, the translation of which, "based upon the Kurdish-Arabic edition by Maximilian Bittner and our Armenian translation" (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 11), has been included in the book. It has already been mentioned that this text is considered to be a forgery, although its informative value for the research on Yezidism is undeniable. Considering that the postulate of Yezidi monotheism constitutes one of the main theses of Asatrian and Arakelova's book, we must note that on the basis of quotations from the *Book of Revelation* it would be possible to argue that the Yezidi people are not, after all, monotheistic – which amply demonstrates how far we are from full certainty as to this issue. For instance, a passage (IV) of this book, where the Peacock Angel addresses the Yezidis, saying: "I will never cede my right to any one of the gods [divinities]"<sup>22</sup> is very much open to discussion. We might ask whether a worldview that assumes the existence of other gods/divinities, and thus, by the same token, their multiplicity, is truly *monotheistic*.

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<sup>22</sup> The translation and addendum in parentheses by Asatrian and Arakelova.



Concerning the Peacock Angel and his demiurgic function, in their commentary to the *Book of Revelation*, Asatrian and Arakelova write:

A deeper analysis (...) shows that while Malak-Tāwūs “existed before all creatures”, he is not in actual fact the creator. We look here at the phenomenon, hardly unknown in the history of religions, when there is a complete transference of the features and functions of creator from one god to his chief representative. Malak-Tāwūs, being as noted a manifestation of *xwadē*, claims, quite legitimately, the role of the demiurge. (...) It is the prophetic mission of Malak-Tāwūs that indicates to us what stays the same – the manifestation of the demiurge, rather than the demiurge himself. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 13)

Considering that the authors, as they themselves emphasise, profess to be concurrently conducting a comparative analysis of religions, this issue would have benefited from some examples.<sup>23</sup> Within the Middle Eastern context, it would be worthwhile to point out that in the Christian doctrine, the demiurgic role is transferred from God the Father to God the Son, the *Logos* without whom “was not any thing made that was made”, as we read in the Book of St. John (John I.3).<sup>24</sup> Similar conceptions were also developed in religious systems inspired by Platonism (especially by the contents of *Timaeus*, and later by the *Chaldean Oracles*, Plotinus’ *Enneads* or Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*,<sup>25</sup> passages from which functioned in the Middle East as texts by Aristotle<sup>26</sup>), which propounded the conception of an entirely transcendent God and the lesser gods/divinities. This pertains especially to Gnostic theologies, which are, in fact, briefly mentioned by Asatrian and Arakelova at the end of their book:

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<sup>23</sup> This chapter, including the above statement, was published in an almost identical form as the article *Malak-Tāwūs: The Peacock Angel of the Yezidis* (Arakelova, Asatrian 2003: 1-36). The difference lies in the strong assertion: “hardly unknown in the history of religions”, which was added in the book.

<sup>24</sup> The current text is not the place for a detailed documentation of relevant passages; I present them in the following articles: Rodziejewicz 2011: 167-185; in the context of Yezidism in: Rodziejewicz 2014: 27-45.

<sup>25</sup> The similarity is especially evident in the case of *Oracula Chaldaica* and *Stoicheiosis Theologike*, as in these two texts the existence of a triad and, previously, of a single god is proposed.

<sup>26</sup> A summary of the *Enneads* was known (from the 8th c.) in the Arabic translation as *Theology of Aristotle*, while Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* as *The Book on the Pure Good* by Aristotle (Latin: *Liber de Causis*).

The idea of *xwadē* (one god) in Yezidism, who had delegated all his functions to the triad except perhaps the function of the demiurge (...), is to a certain degree reminiscent of the Gnostics' image of the demiurge, who had created the world by the lesser god's assignment. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 125)

To the Yezidis, that “lesser god” is the Peacock Angel. Hence, in the first part of their book, Asatrian and Arakelova refer also to the symbolism of the peacock, a bird which represents Malak Tawus. This section contains valuable remarks on etymology, for instance the indication of a connection between the peacock (*tawus*) and the Mesopotamian Tammuz, and comments on the connotations of this word in Greek (*ταῶς*, “peacock”, purportedly being at the root of the Arabic word *tāwūs*). The authors also refer to the analogies with the mystic Simurgh bird and the role of the peacock in Sufism and the related parables (e.g. in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*). In fact, they venture much further and point to the analogies in the Zoroastrian tradition and the association of the peacock with Ahriman and, in other traditions, with the devil, emphasizing that the image of the peacock contains “both divine and infernal attributes” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 26). Further on, they discuss another symbol associated with Malak Tawus – the serpent, and its connotations in the Middle East, where it is associated with the fallen angel/Satan. Especially interesting are their comments on the position of Satan in Sufism, which is not unequivocal and – for instance in the case of the followers of al-Hallaj (Arakelova 2001: 183-192) – is actually considered to represent a model of monotheism. Their remarks on the figure of the Peacock Angel in other traditions, especially among the Ahl-e Haqq and the Mandaean, are particularly valuable. In addition, Asatrian and Arakelova attempt to shed light on the mystery of the name “Sharfadin”, which was borne by a member of Sheikh Adi's family and is used by the Yezidis to define their religion in the often-quoted formula “Our nation – the Yezidis, our religion – Sharfadin” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 29). The hypothesis they propose is that the association with Sheikh Adi's family is of secondary importance, and the core of the matter lies in the Arabic etymology of this word (*Šaraf ad-dīn*), which signifies “the honour of religion”. According to Asatrian and Arakelova, with time this word became “the title of the Yezidi religion (...) as an allegory substituting the tabooed name of Malak Tāwūs, the supreme deity of the Yezidis” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 30).

The second and third chapters contain the discussion of the two remaining figures of the Yezidi holy triad, i.e. Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir – the creator of the doctrine of Yezidism and originator of a Sufi order, the *Adawiyya tariqa*, and an enigmatic personage known as Sultan Ezid, “the lord of people and their worldly life”, ruling the fourteen spheres of the heaven and earth (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 45). The latter, about whom the Yezidis say: “Sultan Ezid is our religion” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 45), has for years been a thorny problem to researchers (cf. Kreyenbroek 1995: 95-96), mainly because his identification with the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid ibn Mu’awiya, is not at all clear. Worse still, the Yezidis themselves are not unanimous on this subject. According to Asatrian and Arakelova, Sheikh Adi laid out the theological order of Yezidism, but the name of “Yezidis” adhered to them precisely because of Yazid ibn Mu’awiya, even though his own views seem to have had nothing in common with the principles of the Yezidi religion and in spite of his notoriety (his father, Mu’awiya ibn ‘Abi Sufyan, allegedly cut Prophet Mohammed while shaving him) and the fact that he is hated by the Shiites as the man responsible for the death of al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali in 680. Considering that the creator of Yezidism, Sheikh Adi, was a pious Muslim, many scholars harbour doubts as to the deification of Yazid. On the other hand, the choice of this particular personage may have made sense in a religion that attempted to be different from Islam. Asatrian and Arakelova argue that according to the Yezidi sources, Sultan Ezid was the one who “once broke away from Islam and adopted the religion of Shahid bin Jarr, the son of Adam, and spread it everywhere in Syria till the time of Sheikh ‘Adi, the founder of the first Yezidi community according to Yezidi tradition” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 46). They also hypothesise a connection between the Yezidis and “some groups venerating the Umayyads”, which were active in the times of Sheikh Adi and which “called themselves Yezidis, meaning that they held exclusive adherence to Yazid ibn Mu’awiya” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 47), adding:

We could conditionally define this group as the proto-Yezidis, or one of the proto-Yezidi sects (...). It is because such continuing groups later came to join the so-called ‘Adawiyyas, those inspired by Sheikh ‘Adi’s piety in the early twelfth century, and because Yazid’s followers were already influential, that they took part in the formation of the Yezidi tradition. (...) The whole ‘Adawiyya community, as an obligatory course of any

Sufi order's affairs, stressed the deification of Sheikh 'Adi as the founder of the order back in the 1110s, while, the particular Umayyad supporters within the same order venerated Caliph Yazid. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 47)

Thus, as emphasised by the authors, deification of Sheikh Adi may have resulted in a similar elevation of Yazid, closely associating them both with the person of Malak Tawus and subordinating all three to God as his manifestations. According to Asatrian and Arakelova, it is a common error, made also by the Yezidis themselves, to ignore the historical connection between the members of the Adawiyya order and the supporters of the Umayyad caliph, and to derive the name "Yezidi" (*Ēzdī*) from the Persian *īzād* meaning a divinity/god or from the Avestan *yazata* ("venerable"):

The term *ēz(ī)dī* is the heritage of the Umayyad supporters in the community, either from those having joined the community with a "cult" of Yazid or as the result of his deification within the 'Adawiyyas themselves. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 48)

Asatrian and Arakelova point out that, considering the Shiites' negative associations with Yazid, the name "Yezidis" may have concurrently been in general use among the Muslims as the term for religious dissenters, and thus may have even more strongly adhered to a religious group that lived in their proximity and rejected Islam.

## II. THE YEZIDIS' PANTHEON.

The second part of the book focuses mostly on the other emanations of the divinity in Yezidism. Its first chapter refers to the lesser "divinities", the second to the deified elements of the natural world, and the third – to elements shared with other Middle-Eastern religions. According to the authors, this is "the first scholarly attempt to complete a rounded account of the Yezidi range of beliefs in spiritual beings" (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 52). It must be noted, however, that a similar catalogue has already been presented by Philip Kreyenbroek in his book *Yezidism. Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (Kreyenbroek 1995: 91-123),

albeit not limited to only the divinities and not provided with equally exhaustive comments.

This is one of the most valuable sections of the book, since it provides catalogued descriptions of many divinities, especially the deified personifications of the sun and the moon (as Sheikh Shams and Farxadīn), God of Thunder, Lord of Wind and the Yezidis' First Mother (Pīrā-Fāt), as well as those which are not mentioned in other publications on the subject of the Yezidis. Among them is the "Holy Angel" (Milyāk'atē-qanĵ), an example of a phallic deity that is unique among the Iranian peoples. The authors present a detailed discussion of the etymology of each described deity's name, quote relevant religious hymns and mention parallel cults in the culturally related area. They also discuss problematic issues and round out the bibliography of relevant literature with supplements and corrections.

The following chapters present the summa of our knowledge regarding the forces of nature which play a special role in the Yezidi religious worldview. This section of the book is important, since the Yezidis themselves frequently stress that the object of their cult is the natural world, with their "sovereign", the sun, personified as Sheikh Shams, to whom they pray at dawn. The authors have collected an extensive source material complemented with numerous Armenian analogies, encompassing the entire scope of natural world – from animals (e.g. the chameleon, cock or dog) through plants (e.g. the mandrake or onion, cf. Arakelova, 2014) to meteorological phenomena (the eclipse of the moon, the rainbow, as well as stars, planets and their specific constellations). Surprisingly, however, the description of salad (*khas*), which is the subject of one of the most important Yezidi alimentary taboos, is missing from the chapter on plants. The chapter on natural phenomena, in turn, does not contain even a tersest note on the cult of the Zem-zem spring, which is possibly a Mithraistic remnant in Yezidism. Located in the subterranean cave of the sanctuary in Lalish, this spring is one of the Yezidis' most sacred objects;<sup>27</sup> earlier researchers mention that access to it used to be barred to non-believers and even today it is still difficult for a non-Yezidi to approach it.

This is not the only obvious deficiency of the book. The absence of a separate chapter devoted to Yezidi religious festivals is felt particularly keenly in a publi-

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<sup>27</sup> The authors mentioned it only once, while discussing a Yezidi legend relating to it (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 39).

cation that focuses on theology, especially such an expertly written one; after all, holy days constitute a manifestation of theological principles and permit us to understand them better. Such a chapter would be a perfect conclusion to the observations regarding the divinities and natural objects venerated by Yezidis.

A chapter devoted to the Yezidis' religious syncretism concludes the book. The authors have focused on the connections between Yezidism and the beliefs of contemporaneous religious groups and the earlier systems, especially the Gnostic and Sufi ones. In particular, the analogies to the beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq and the Kurdish heterodox Shiite groups (e.g. Alevi) have been discussed, especially with regard to mythology, the belief in metempsychosis and the socio-religious organisation. Of the elements Yezidism shares with Gnosticism, the symbolism of the serpent and the pearl in Gnostic texts are highlighted. The quantity of material is considerable; in view of this, however, the amount of space devoted to the theme of the cosmogonic Pearl in the Yezidi theology is surprisingly small, just two paragraphs on p. 127, whereas many Yezidi religious hymns (especially *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*, *Qewlê Bê Elîf*, *Qewê Şêxubekir* and *Qewlê Afîrîna Dinyayê*) bring this theme to the fore. Its counterpart is found also in the Ahl-e Haqq mythology (cf. Mokri, 1963: 159-168). According to the Yezidi worldview, the world emerged from the Pearl, and thus the Pearl is, to some extent, the highest image of an element in the Yezidi theo- and cosmogony. It is also mentioned in the apocryphal *Black Book (Meshefa Resh)*.<sup>28</sup>

The authors have also ignored the theme of the cosmogonic role of Love, even though it is accentuated in the Yezidi hymns.<sup>29</sup> Both these elements find clear paral-

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<sup>28</sup> "In the beginning God created the White Pearl out of his most precious essence. (...) Then he shouted at the Pearl with a loud voice. Thereupon the White Pearl broke up into four pieces, and from its midst came out the water which became an ocean. The world was round, and was not divided. (...) Before heaven and earth existed, God was on the sea. (...) He then created the White Pearl and ruled over it for forty years. Afterward, growing angry at the Pearl, he kicked it" (tr. I. Joseph, source text in: Joseph, 1909: 122-123 and 126). Regarding the problematic vocabulary, cf.: Gasparro 1974: 201, n. 10. This passage reveals some analogies with Ahl-e Haqq tradition (see Kreyenbroek, Marzolph 2010: 77).

<sup>29</sup> Which, according to Kreyenbroek (Kreyenbroek, Marzolph 2010: 77), is a legacy of the "Sufi" period of early Yezidism. Cf. my article: *Yezidi Eros. Love as the Cosmogonic Factor and Distinctive Feature of the Yezidi Theology in the Light of Some Ancient Cosmogonies* (Rodziewicz 2014: 42-105).

lels in the Gnostic theologies, and the links between Yezidism and these theologies is, after all, the subject of the chapter in question (which is, actually, the weakest segment of the book). Furthermore – and this must be underlined – other essentials that are conspicuous by their absence are a reference to Kreyenbroek’s hypotheses (especially on the topic of the links between Yezidism and Mithraism) and even the briefest mention of an important book regarding the connections of Yezidism with Gnostic systems: *Late Antique Motifs in Yezidi Oral Tradition* by the Hungarian author Eszter Spät (2010), which is omitted in the bibliography as well.

It is also astonishing how scant a space (just two pages) is devoted to the connections with Sufism in a section that purports to concentrate on this very topic. This is even more strange bearing in mind the prominent position of very influential sufis, especially Sheikh Adi, Rabi’a al-Adawiyya and al-Hallaj, in Yezidism, the period of its formation in the framework of the Adawiyya order, as well as the existence of Yezidi religious hymns that focus on these personages. In writing about Sufism, the authors reiterate a strong thesis according to which there is a close connection between the figure of Iblis (in its Sufi interpretation, associated mainly with al-Hallaj) and Malak Tawus:

Sufi elements in the Yezidi tradition belong to the layer actually rooted in Islamic mysticism. The most obvious elements of Sufi heritage in Yezidism are the figures of two central personages of the latter: Sheikh ‘Adi himself, a once Sufi leader and later a Yezidi saint, and Malak-Tāwūs, whose cult was mainly developed upon the Sufi idea of the apology of Iblis. (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 128)

According to the interpretation advanced by al-Hallaj and the mystics who shared his view, Satan’s act of a refusal to bow to Adam was a testimony to his monotheism and allegiance to God; thus, Sufism radically reassessed Iblis’ deed, creating the theoretical basis for his worship – the worship which, it must be added, led directly to the allegations that the Yezidi people followed Satanism. Thus, Asatrian and Arakelova present the Yezidi religion as clearly inspired by Muslim mysticism with a tinge of Gnosticism, from which it allegedly inherited its special attitude to the serpent that “was originally one of the main symbols of Gnosis and, quite naturally, in most traditions affected by Gnosticism this symbol had to be preserved, either in a degraded form (as with the Mandaeans), or in a formal

representation with no dogmatic context (as among the Yezidis)” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: 126).

Here, too, the reader feels a certain deficiency, arising from the conspicuous absence of any comments as to the links between Yezidism and Christianity, especially the early Christianity and its heresies, e.g. that of Bardesanes, to whom the authorship of the *Hymn of the Pearl* is ascribed.<sup>30</sup> Links with Christianity seem interesting also because many Yezidis have predominantly Christian neighbours. This is particularly striking in Iraq, where entire villages are settled by Yezidis and Christians, whose shared desire to distance themselves from Muslims reinforces their mutual ties.

Bearing in mind the potential of such an excellent publishing house as the Routledge, which brought out *The Religion of the Peacock Angel*, the book would have gained much by the inclusion of illustrations, especially that the Yezidi-related archival documentation is large and varied.<sup>31</sup> Given that the material concerning symbolism and representations is truly extensive, an iconographic element would have certainly raised the book’s quality. It would be, of course, unfair to condemn the authors for this shortcoming. In no way does it diminish the quality of the material they have gathered or the importance of the hypotheses they have posed, which, in addition to broadening our knowledge of Yezidi theology, bring a great deal of valuable information on how the Yezidi people are perceived by their neighbours the Armenians.

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<sup>30</sup> This deficiency is all the more acute considering, as the authors themselves had noted earlier, that “The religious dissociation of the Yezidis from the local milieu took place in the very colourful religious scenery of Mesopotamia where different ideas of Islam and Christianity were interlaced with Gnostic ideas and local folk beliefs (...)” (Asatrian, Arakelova, 2014: ix).

<sup>31</sup> The *Lalişa Nûranî* by Dmitri Pirbari (2008b) and the second volume of the book by Birgül Açıkyıldız (2002), which is focused solely on iconography, are examples of a magnificently illustrated publications on the topic of the Yezidis.



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