

On the Path to Manhood: Men and Masculinities in the Contemporary Kurdish Novel

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Whereas gender studies in the West turned its attention to men and masculinity in 1970s, the topic has largely been absent in gender studies in the Middle East until recently.¹ As elsewhere in the Middle East, gender studies in different parts of Kurdistan has primarily focused on women.² Studies on the Kurds and Kurdish society have

¹Some representative works include Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds., *Imagined Masculinities Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London : Saqi, 2000); Hoda Elsadda, "Imaging the 'New Man': Gender and Nation in Arab Literary Narratives in Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no.2 (2007): 31-55; Paul Amar, "Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of 'Men in Crisis,' Industries of Gender in Revolution," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7, no.3 (2011): 36-70; Marcia C. Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); and Mostafa Abedinifard, "The Vices of Men and the Necessity of Studying Men and Masculinities in Iranian Women's Studies," *Iran Nameh* 30, no.3 (2015): 230-282.

²Of these works, one can name *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, edited by Shahrzad Mojab, a collection of papers which deal with issues ranging from women and Kurdish

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to take into consideration the specificities of each part of Kurdistan and their differences from each other as a result of decades of separation. A thorough understanding of socio-political dynamics of each part of Kurdistan would only be possible if any part is studied within broader socio-political framework of the states where that part resides. Therefore, this paper limits its focus on representation of masculinity in two Kurdish novels from Iranian Kurdistan: *Zindexew (Nightmare)* (2003) by Fatah Amiri (b. 1946) and *Siweyla (Suheila)* in Persian, proper female name) (2004) by Sharam Qawami (b. 1974).³

Studying *Nightmare* and *Siweyla* within the broader Iranian context can result in a better understanding of nuances and complexities of Kurdish masculinities, while also challenging the official narrative of a national masculinity which is blind to ethnic and religious diversity

nationalism and women and Sufism to sexism in language, covering all parts of Kurdistan (California, Mazda Publishers, 2001). Minoo Alinia in her book, *Honor and Violence Against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), utilizes an intersectional approach to illuminate gender oppression and violence against women in the name of honour. She studies honour-based violence intersecting with ethnicity and class against the backdrop of broader socio-political context of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Of the few works dealing with Kurdish masculinity in one way or another, one can name Ahmet S. Aktürk, "Female Cousins and Wounded Masculinity: Kurdish Nationalist Discourse in the Post-Ottoman Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no.1 (2016): 46-59. In his paper, Aktürk states that following repeated failure to liberate Kurdish territories under Turkish control in 1920s and 1930s, the Kurdish nationalist movement re-established itself in Syria and Lebanon in 1930s and 1940s. Unable to free Kurdistan through armed struggle, these Kurdish nationalists, instead, opted to revive Kurdish language and culture by, for example, publishing Kurdish periodicals. Despite all their efforts to revive Kurdish culture and awaken the Kurds of their national rights, Aktürk argues, their "male honour" was still injured because they were not able to fight for the independence of their country.

³"Shahram" is a Persian name which is pronounced "Sharam" by the Kurds. I chose the above two works because they represent two generations of Kurdish writers. While Amiri belongs to a generation whose works are more conservative in terms of their literary form and addressing sexual issues, Qawami comes from a new generation of Kurdish writers who experiment with innovative and radical literary forms and are more open to addressing sexual matters. It has to be said that Qawami's naked description of sexual scenes is quite radical even among the new generation of Kurdish writers. These two writers, as examples of two generations of Kurdish writers, give an insight into different patterns of masculinities and femininities in Kurdish literature.

in Iran. I suggest that whereas the above novels are progressive on certain formal and thematic levels, they are quite conservative when it comes to gender democracy, as I will illustrate below. Both novels present a “New Man” who is educated, socially and politically active, and relatively egalitarian in his attitude towards women. At the same time, they portray a “New Woman” who is educated, steps out of the domestic sphere and participates in social and political domains. Yet such positive changes in gender politics remain at the surface as both novels fail to move beyond hierarchical binary thinking.

The theoretical framework of the present paper is informed by R. W. Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity and Judith Butler’s notion of gender as “performativity.” The former refers to the masculinity which occupies dominant position “in a given pattern of gender relations,”⁴ and the latter suggests that gender is an *effect* constituted by “a regularized and constrained repetition of norms.”⁵ At any given time in a society, certain discourses become dominant which idealize one form of masculinity and marginalize the others. The concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” first introduced in gender studies in the 1980s, was notably developed by Raewyn Connell and further elaborated by other masculinity studies scholars.⁶ She argues that masculinity, as well as femininity, “is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.”⁷ In the same vein, Butler views gender as a process, “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid

⁴R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 76.

⁵Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 95.

⁶For critiques of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, for example, see Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” *Theory and Society* 30 (2001): 337-361; T. Jefferson, “Subordinating Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Theoretical Criminology* 6, no.1 (2002): 63-88. For a genealogy of the concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” its applications and critiques, see R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–859.

⁷Connell, *Masculinities*, 71.

regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”⁸ The above definitions denounce attribution of any fixed essence to men and women and instead set out to present these categories as relational, multiple, and contingent, prone to change under new conditions.

Drawing on Butler’s “performativity,” this paper sets out to put “masculine” man and “feminine” woman in the context of the discourses by which they are constituted, thus revealing the implications of naturalization of these categories for gender inequality. On the other hand, “hegemonic masculinity” provides a useful conceptual tool to examine patterns of hegemonic masculinity in the selected texts and how it adapts itself to new conditions to guarantee men’s dominant position.

Emotional women, rational men: ideal femininity and masculinity in Amiri’s *Nightmare*

Amiri was born in Bukan, a Kurdish city in West Azerbaijan province. He wrote his first novel entitled *Hawarebere* in 1990, which was also his first novel to be published in Iran.⁹ Three years later, in 1993, his second novel, *Mirza*, was also published in Iran.¹⁰ *Nightmare* covers the final years of Pahlavi rein leading to the Iranian revolution of 1979. It tells the story of a teenaged boy, Azad, about sixteen or seventeen years old, who disobeys his family’s plan for his future career and life. His family wants him to follow his profession as a merchant and marry early, but he craves the opportunity to study. His resistance and diligence finally pays off and he enters university. His first year in university coincides with the political upheaval that led to the Iranian 1979 revolution. Azad has been suffering

⁸Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999) 43-44.

⁹“Hawarebere” is the name of a melody which is played by *shimshal*, a Kurdish musical instrument similar to flute.

¹⁰To transcribe Kurdish texts, I have used a modified version of Bedirxan’s Hawar alphabet to suit the Sorani dialect. Except for the names anglicized by the writers themselves, I have transliterated the names of other Kurdish writers and scholars and those appearing in the Kurdish texts.

from a recurring nightmare for several years. In his nightmare, he is a SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information) officer;¹¹ his name is Ḥusên (Kurdish pronunciation of Hussein), and he is Azari. He tortures political prisoners to extract information and forced confession from them. However, Ḥusên gets to a point where he can no longer continue torturing prisoners and, towards the end of the novel, he kills himself to put an end to his “disgraceful” life and unbearable sufferings.¹² Azad meets a girl named Elaheh at Urmia University whose father was a SAVAK officer who passed away when she was only a few years old. As the protests against Shah escalates, Elaheh and her mother no longer feel safe in Iran and leave the country. After a while, Elaheh posts a letter with his father’s photo to Azad, explaining her mother’s and her own special feelings for him. Surprisingly, Azad finds that he was born on exactly the same day that Elaheh’s father died and that his name was Ḥusên. The striking similarity between Azad and Ḥusên’s photo as well as his dreams all indicate that Ḥusên’s soul was incarnated in Azad’s body.

Nightmare is a realist text in terms of its narration, characterization, plot, and its attempt to mirror reality objectively. It is entirely narrated through one single character’s perspective and voice, that of Azad in the form of first person narration. Although Azad is not an omniscient narrator-protagonist, his perspective is a God-like one because what he tells us is presented as truth. He also enjoys a safe vantage point from where he observes the world. His perception of the other characters, of himself, and socio-political issues are rarely challenged, and when they are, he usually takes the upper hand in the arguments and discussions. Having said that, *Nightmare* is a progressive novel in the sense that it relativizes the ethnic and national identity. To do so, Amiri creates a simple, but successful strategy, that is, the incarnation

¹¹“Prior to the Islamic revolution of 1978–79 in Iran, SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information), the Iranian secret police and intelligence service, protected the regime of the shah by arresting, torturing, and executing many dissidents.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “National Intelligence Systems-Iran,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intelligence-international-relations/National-intelligence-systems#ref796186>.

¹²Fatah Amiri, *Zindexew* (Erbil: Aras, 2003), 257-58.

of the oppressor in the oppressed. In this way he shows that national or ethnic identity is largely constructed and “imagined.” As such, he conveys his message, that no nation or ethnic group is inherently superior to others or has any natural right to suppress them. At the same time, the novel calls for the recognition of Kurdish and other minorities’ rights in a democratic Iran. However, while *Nightmare* presents progressive political ideals, it undertakes a conservative approach when dealing with cultural and patriarchal values in society. The novel invites the reader to comply with the traditional gender values and norms underlying the patriarchal structures of the Kurdish society, for example, a gender-unequal division of labour and a polarized notion of masculinity and femininity.

In *Nightmare*, Amiri presents a new generation of young Kurdish men who, in comparison with their forefathers, are more educated, progressive, and hold more egalitarian attitudes towards women. In the same way, the new generation of Kurdish women, as depicted in the novel, are educated and more actively involved in social and political causes. Azad and Meli, for example, are the primary characters who represent the new generation of men and women in Iranian Kurdistan respectively. They are about the same age, and they played as friends since they were children. As they grew up, Meli fell in love with Azad and towards the end of the novel Azad develops mutual feelings of love. Azad defies his family’s insistence to pursue his father’s work as a businessman and instead enters university.¹³ Despite that he does not quite see Meli as an equal partner, he holds more respect for women than the previous generation did.¹⁴ When he talks to Elaheh, his female classmate, about the unrests leading up to the 1979 revolution, the status of the Kurds and their demands, he acknowledges her intellectual capability.

Unlike Elaheh, Meli is represented as emotional and impulsive in her reactions; but she is also depicted as someone who reads books and

¹³Amiri, *Zindexew*, 152.

¹⁴Amiri, *Zindexew*, 177-190.

actively participates in anti-shah protests.¹⁵ However, the novel does not abandon the old essentialist and binary perception of gender and sexuality, so these positive changes in gender politics do not trigger fundamental changes in gender relations.

In the course of the novel an image of ideal Kurdish masculinity is forged. The characteristic features of an ideal man mainly relate to his deeds, actions, and thoughts. Throughout the novel the ideal man is demonstrated as brave, strong, wise, and authoritarian. This ideal masculinity is partly constructed and conveyed through Daye Xeyal (Azad's nanny),¹⁶ recounting to Azad the story of a number of great men in the history of Sabllagh.¹⁷ Aqa Mirza Fatah Qazi is the one who had a deep effect on her.¹⁸ She describes him as a "chivalrous (*ciwançak*)," educated (*xwêndewar*), brave (*aza*) and mighty (*bekar*)" man who "would stop the Russian army."¹⁹ Likewise, Azad's father is described by one of his friends as an exceptional man and the kind of man one used to see in the olden days: "he was not like the men in our time; he was awe-inspiring (*besam*), everyone was in awe of him. Sabllagh has not seen a man like Haji Mirza since he passed away."²⁰ Elsewhere, Azad's father is complimented by his uncle as "great (*gewre*)," "wise (*beşi 'ûr*)," "social and communicative

¹⁵Amiri, *Zindexew*, 2013.

¹⁶"Daye" means mother. It is also used to address grandmother or an old woman.

¹⁷Formerly known as Savoujbulagh (Sabllagh in Kurdish), Mahabd is a Kurdish city in West Azerbaijan province.

¹⁸Mirza Fatah Qazi was a member of the prominent Qazi family in Mahabad. Qader F. Qazi describes him as a "man of pen and man of sword ... Despite being a cleric and wearing a gown and turban, he was an extremely brave warrior." Mirza Fatah never compromised with other oppressive tribe chiefs or the Mahabad governors appointed by central government. Hence, there were a great deal of tension and conflict between him and other tribes which at times led to bloody wars (Qazi, 63). Qazi holds that "due to his freedom-loving, Mirza Fatah was always at war with local governors" and was hosting people who were taking refuge under his protection from the local government's harassments and suppressions; see Qader F. Qazi, *Kurte Mêjuy Bine Malley Qazi le Wilayeti Mukiryani* [A Short History of Qazi's Family in Mukiryani Province] (Hewlêr: Aras, 2009), 67–70.

¹⁹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 38.

²⁰Amiri, *Zindexew*, 51.

(*bemişûr*),” and “generous (*bereket*).”²¹ However, they are only a few who are capable of rigorously practicing such hegemonic patterns of masculinity. They are “real” men who are considered as touchstone against whom the other men’s masculinity (*piyawetî: mardānigî*) is measured. At the core of the image of an ideal masculinity forged in the course of the novel is bravery, wisdom, and authority.

Having as its subject the development of its protagonist, Azad, in the passage from adolescence to adulthood through various ups and downs, *Nightmare* resembles bildungsroman novels.²² The novel opens with two psychological crises with which Azad grapples: his father’s death and his recurrent nightmare in which he is a SAVAK officer and torturer. Under the influence of these two events, he becomes depressed and, consequently, lives as a recluse. His relatives and acquaintances are less concerned for his health than for his endangered manliness. Azad is frequently blamed for his unmanly behaviour and is encouraged by his family members to resume a *normal* life and face the problems like a *man*. After two years or so he came to terms with himself: “I must be strong, life is a fight, fight to overcome problems ... I must be patient ... from today on I have to be a man, a strong and courageous man.”²³ Thus, he conforms to the widely accepted attributes of hegemonic masculinity such as physical strength, bravery, and sexual performance in order to be accepted and respected as a *man* and entitled to its privileges. His involvement in anti-Shah activities and his arrestment for a couple of days during which he is tortured are extremely significant in his development into manhood marked by bravery and toughness.

The construction of the ideal masculinity, however, as Alan Petersen notes, involves “reference to its complementary opposite,” i.e., the

²¹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 57.

²²“Bildungsroman” and “Erziehungsroman,” Abrams and Harphams write, are German terms referring to the “novel of formation” or “novel of education.” M.H. Abrams and Jeffrey Galt Harphams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Michael Rosenberg, 2009), 229.

²³Amiri, *Zindexew*, 44-45.

ideal femininity.²⁴ In the novel, the ideal woman is portrayed as someone with some degree of physical beauty and attractiveness.²⁵ Further, unlike men, the sort of behaviours and traits considered as appropriate for a *good* woman has nothing to do with bravery or authority. On the contrary, ideal woman is portrayed as shy, obedient to her man, and sacrificing her life for her family. Being submissive and tacit, she is viewed, by both men and women, as a *wise* woman. Daye Xeyal, for example, compliments Daye Xanim (Azad's mother) for being submissive and obedient to her husband to the extent that she "was always obedient to her husband's wishes" (*le ĥast Ĥacî roh'î nebû* which literally means "she didn't have a soul vis-à-vis Ĥacî").²⁶

Unlike the older generation, Meli has the opportunity to attend school and to be educated. She shows as much enthusiasm for reading and learning as Azad does, though she finds textbooks boring and does not do very well at school. The text reveals that under the influence of books other than those needed to study at school she becomes more liberal and progressive in her attitude and participates in the anti-shah protests to the end of the novel. Yet, she is expected to do the housework and cooking and to behave delicately and gently, like a *woman*. Daye Xeyal recommends Azad to marry Meli because "she is a perfect housewife, she is not loose (*Sûk û çirûk*) and a lazybones (*qûn-lê-kewtû*)."²⁷ Elsewhere in the novel Azad gets impressed by Meli's skills in housekeeping: "in no time she sets the table like an experienced housewife. She is clean and agile (*tond û tof*)."²⁸ Physical beauty, coyness and chastity, and being a good housewife are of great significance that along with submissiveness makes a perfect ideal woman of both generations in the novel.

²⁴Alan Petersen, *Unmasking the Masculine: 'Men' and 'Identity' in a Sceptical Age* (London: Sage Publishers, 1998), 43.

²⁵For example, see Amiri, 12, 29, 57, and 88.

²⁶Amiri, *Zindexew*, 77.

²⁷Amiri, *Zindexew*, 74.

²⁸Amiri, *Zindexew*, 88.

The female characters are also evaluated according to different parts of their body. Azad describes Meli, for example, as follows: “I look at her head to toe from a suitor’s view... Meli is slim and agile ... her teeth are shining and she has plump lips.”²⁹ This sexual description is not only limited to his beloved Meli, but also, he fantasizes about other female characters in the novel. Ashraf, an Azari and married woman, loves Azad and tries to seduce him, but this ends in failure.³⁰ Yet, Azad’s characterization of her is sexual. He introduces her to the reader from a male’s sexual gaze: “she stretched her slender neck out of the door, and was wearing a tight sleeveless blouse which made her waist look thinner.”³¹ Elsewhere in the novel, Ḥusên, praises Zari, his fiancé, for her physical beauty: “a tall, olive-skinned woman with round breasts ... her white teeth look whiter in contrast with her olive skin ... She is slim, sylphlike and a clean housewife.”³² Nowhere in the novel is a male character reduced to his physical beauty, nor is his identity represented as fragmented, as a woman’s is through descriptions of her legs, arms, lips, breasts and other parts of the body. Female characters in *Nightmare* are represented as ideal women only if they enjoy a certain degree of physical attractiveness. That is, there are pieces of their body which, from a male character’s gaze, make a perfect woman of them. The male character on the contrary, is presented differently. His body is portrayed as a unified whole inseparable from his mind, with the concentration on his wisdom, bravery and virtue.

The novel relies on a dualistic view of the world in which every phenomenon, concept, or value gains its meaning against its opposite. In this binary system, Woman functions as “other” for the male character against whom he can shape his masculine subjectivity. Hélène Cixous lists a set of binary oppositions including “Activity/passivity, Sun/Moon ... Father/Mother, Head/heart, Intelligible/

²⁹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 29.

³⁰Amiri, *Zindexew*, 42.

³¹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 57.

³²Amiri, *Zindexew*, 12.

sensitive, Logos/Pathos” and poses the question as to where the place of woman in this binary system might be.³³ These couples are not neutral; rather one opposition overweighs the other. Each couple “can be analyzed,” notes Moi “as a hierarchy where the ‘feminine’ side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance.”³⁴ These oppositions are, in one way or another, associated with femininity and masculinity. To put it another way, the opposition of “man/woman” has underlain the hierarchal binary system throughout the history.³⁵

Most of these binary oppositions presented by Cixous could be found in *Nightmare*. Activity/passivity, as Cixous remarks, “traditionally” comes up when dealing with sexual difference.³⁶ The female characters in the novel are less active than their male counterparts in the political, intellectual, social, and economic realms. Amiri brings to the fore some social, cultural, and familial constraints which have led to the female characters’ suffering. Zohreh and Ashraf are two characters whose lives have been ruined by some socio-familial factors over which they have no control. Ashraf, as we come to know from Azad’s perspective and comments on her, is not happy with her married life. Azad notices a deep and hidden sadness and frustration in her eyes, her sighs, and the tears she sheds.³⁷ However, she has accepted her life as it is and passively puts up with it without doing anything to improve her situation. Also, Zohreh, Azad’s landlord’s daughter in Urmia, is ashamed of her mother who is a prostitute and suffers from loneliness as she spends the night at her customers’ places. She finds herself completely helpless and doomed to failure in her life. Her only hope is to wait for a prince to take her away with him and make her happy.³⁸

³³Hélène Cixous, “Stories,” in David Lodge and N. Wood, eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, (London: Longman, 1988), 262–70.

³⁴Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 102.

³⁵Cixous, “Stories,” 287.

³⁶Cixous, “Stories,” 288.

³⁷Amiri, *Zindexew*, 64–65.

³⁸Amiri, *Zindexew*, 192–93.

In the novel, Azad is depicted as cool, wise, respectable, and logical while Meli is presented as emotional, mysterious, and irrational. Meli is head over heels in love with Azad. Perpetuating suffering and never-ending jealousy are the consequences of her lovesickness which has taken her to the edge of madness: “Jealousy has ruined Meli’s life ... I’m worried that it makes her sick,” Azad says.³⁹ She is extremely suspicious and jealous of any woman, stranger or relative. Early in the novel when Azad returns from his uncle’s place to his home, Meli is waiting for him there. “She turned pale and looks angry,” as she is suspicious of Fewziye (Kurdish pronunciation of Fouzieh), Azad’s cousin, trying to steal his heart. Calmly, Azad teases her and makes her more furious with his response when she asks what he was doing in his uncle’s house for the whole afternoon. Azad says: “I was with Miss Fewziye; the cousins’ fates are entwined in the heavens. She blushes with anger and goes into attack mode; she is about to grapple with me.”⁴⁰ The novel abounds with such scenes in which Azad behaves wisely, calmly, and patiently, while Meli, controlled by her emotions, behaves irrationally and is easily irritated. Azad is concerned about her excessive love for him: “For the first time I have noticed that her love is different from mine, her love has crossed the line.”⁴¹ However, this insanity is not perceived as a big surprise by the narrator, and probably Amiri himself, as he does not regard this behaviour very unusual for a woman.

Allocating the inferior place in the patriarchal binary system to women, however, is not questioned by the female characters in *Nightmare*. Rather, they have internalized a “female inferiority” which, as Lynne Pearce notes, “is held by both sexes in a set of shared, but mostly unspoken, ‘beliefs’ that women ... are intellectually inferior, emotional rather than rational, primitive and childlike.”⁴² At points

³⁹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 58.

⁴⁰Amiri, *Zindexew*, 26.

⁴¹Amiri, *Zindexew*, 159.

⁴²Lynne Pearce, “Sexual Politics,” in S. Mills and L. Pearce. eds., *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading*, 2nd ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), 23–56.

in the novel Meli is treated like a child who needs some degrees of control by Azad. He punishes her for the scandal she caused at the wedding by ignoring and not speaking to her. Receiving no attention from Azad is unbearable for Meli; thus, she appeals to Daye Xeyal to intervene. Consequently, Azad agrees to talk to her: “[M]y feeling for you will not change, but only if you promise to be a bit wiser. Had it not been for Daye Xeyal’s sake, I wouldn’t have talked to you.”⁴³ This seems to be more like a parent-child relationship in which the former resorts to punishment for the latter’s sake. This parenting and protecting role is granted to Azad by the society, as presented and approved of in the novel. Meli’s mother and Daye Xeyal, are content when Azad slaps Meli on the back to exercise his power and control over her and to stop her attending demonstrations and doing activities against the Shah.⁴⁴

All Meli wants is to have Azad, to possess him; her world is confined to him. Her extreme love for him has led her to teetering on the brink of paranoia, psychological imbalance, and behavioural disorders. However, it seems that in the novelistic world of *Nightmare* only female characters are susceptible to lovesickness. In this regards, Kurdish/Iranian perception of “masculinity” as a rational entity appears to be similar to Western perception of it, as the association of “masculinity” with rationality, and the opposition of “masculinity” with emotionality “are central themes in contemporary Western thought.”⁴⁵

Yet, the New Man represented by Azad had to combine sensitivity with toughness to regenerate male authority. Hegemonic masculinity, as Connell notes, “embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy. When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded.”⁴⁶ In the face of socio-political challenges and with the increasing pressure from women rights movements, Kurdish/Iranian men had to refashion

⁴³Amiri, *Zindexew*, 168.

⁴⁴Amiri, *Zindexew*, 204–5.

⁴⁵Petersen, *Unmasking the Masculine*, 72.

⁴⁶Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

their masculine identities and come up with new strategies to legitimize patriarchy. As such, Amiri had to renegotiate the old ideal masculinity to fashion a man which was tuned to the new conditions in the Iranian/Kurdish society, that is, a modern notion of being a man, one which is less marked by roughness, violence, and authority as was the case with older versions of masculinity.

In the same vein, Amiri has attempted to depict a modern woman in the novel as educated and as someone who is, to a certain degree, allowed to involve in social and political movements. Yet, she cannot transgress the social norms regarding femininity. She has to act and behave properly as a woman in order to fit into the patriarchal definition of womanhood, that is, in Afsaneh Najmabadi's words, a "modern-yet-modest" image, and be accepted by others, both male and female characters.⁴⁷ In other words, while Amiri's redefinition of the ideal woman requires her to have a minimum of literacy, education, valour, and intelligence, these characteristic features have a complementary role in the female characters' subjectivities—unlike their male counterparts who are required, by both male and female characters in the novel, to enjoy a good deal of those characteristics. The primary characteristics a woman needs to have are still those of the previous generation, namely, self-sacrifice, submissiveness, patience, housekeeping, and, above all, physical attractiveness.

Whereas Amiri comes from a generation of Kurdish authors who followed literary and social realism in their writings, Qawami belongs to the younger generation of Kurdish writers who abandoned conventional realism and experimented with modernist and postmodernist modes of writing. Qawami's first novel, *Siweyla*, is experimental in form and radical in content. It deploys a multi-focalized narrative, abundant with flashbacks and sharp shifts in perspectives and voices. It is radical for its political standpoint and for portraying sexually explicit scenes. However, the technically and

⁴⁷Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 22–47.

politically progressive *Siweyla* is still, more or less, as conservative in dealing with sexuality and gender as is Amiri's *Nightmare*.

Sexual act as a remedy for wounded masculinities in *Siweyla*

Qawami was born in Sanandaj in Iranian Kurdistan. In 2000, he started his career as a writer by publishing a collection of short stories entitled *Mêjûyîtirîn Zamî Daykim* (My Mother's Most Historic Anguish). Since then, he has produced works ranging from poetry, translation, and literary criticism to novel. *Bîrba* (2006) and *Palltaw Shorr* (*The Man with Long Coat*, 2007) are his other two novels. In 2017, he published his first novel in German, entitled *Brucke dez Tanzes*. In this section, I examine masculinity and sexuality in *Siweyla*. At stake here is how sexuality serves to revive masculinity undermined by unfavourable socio-political circumstances. Whereas *Nightmare* is set in the last years of Pahlavi reign, *Siweyla* covers both pre- and post-revolutionary Iran. But it is mainly concerned with the social, economic, political, and psychological aftermath of the Kurdish movement's failure in Iran after the revolution. It narrates the concerns, dilemmas, hopes, desires, and dreams of two generations in the pre- and post-revolutionary Iran. Both generations are affected by massive social, political, and environmental changes, of which the 1979 revolution in Iran is of utmost significance. Equally, the novel is about love and sex. Most of the characters presented in *Siweyla* are affected by a mystified notion of love as a disease. The protagonist, Aram, is a young man who used to be an energetic writer and social activist who spent most of his time reading and writing. This great enthusiasm, however, comes to an end when he falls in love with *Siweyla*, the eponymous character, though they had never met and had only spoken to each other through telephone.

Siweyla is politically progressive in the sense that it facilitates dialogues between different voices and points of view regarding Kurdish armed-struggle as a suitable means to obtain freedom and democracy. Like Amiri, Qawami does not dehumanize the Kurdish "other", namely, those who sympathize with and work for the Iranian

government. It seems that the Kurdish writers writing in the early years of the twenty first century, including Amiri and Qawami, have abandoned the simplistic representation of “us” against “them”. *Siweyla* and *Nightmare* both counter the general trend in some other Kurdish novels written during 1990s, especially the ones written in diaspora by the writers affiliated with the Kurdish opposition parties of Iranian Kurdistan, in which a strict line is drawn between the Kurds and the Iranian government, representing the former as the good and the latter as the devil. However, in terms of form, *Siweyla* is more progressive than *Nightmare*. It mostly employs the prototype modernist narrative techniques: a fragmented narrative, stream of consciousness, multi-focalizations, and sudden shifts in perspective and voice. That said, while Qawami’s experiment with prototype modernist techniques in *Siweyla* has led to a relativization of “truth” and a radical political viewpoint, it nevertheless fails to be progressive in terms of creating alternative masculine and feminine subjectivities or offering a new, non-hierarchical gender order.

As depicted in *Siweyla*, before the 1979 Revolution, at the core of hegemonic masculinity was chivalric (*pahlavānī*) values. One of the characters in the novel named ‘Eziz Khan is the embodiment of chivalric masculinity. Pālewān ‘Ezîz (*pālewān/pāhlavān* means “knight” in Kurdish) is actually a real person from Sine (Sanandaj) in Iranian Kurdistan, who is well known to most of the Kurds in Iran for his chivalry and physical strength.⁴⁸ In the novel he is depicted as a knight who protects the poor and the oppressed.⁴⁹ ‘Ezîz Khan’s words and actions are prototypes of a knight. After the revolution, when his friends ask him to explain his case to the new government – that he was sacked in the Pahlavi regime from his job as a gendarme due to political activities – he refuses to do so. His resistance is especially heroic taking into account that “he was in a very bad condition. Being

⁴⁸Aziz Rahmani, known as ‘Ezîz Khan and Pālewān Aziz (Pāhlavān Aziz), was born in 1921 in Sanandaj, Iran, and passed away at the age of 73. He is buried in the same city. For more information, see www8.irna.ir/fa/News/80720399/.

⁴⁹Sharam Qawami, *Siweyla*, (Sanandaj: Golbarg, 2004), 76.

addicted and helpless, he became a recluse. We couldn't convince him to get a pension from the new government. Whenever we asked him to do so, he replied, 'God is Generous'. He was such a great man."⁵⁰

During the last years of the Pahlavi era and after the Revolution, however, the public sphere in Kurdish society where ideal masculinity could be performed, shifted from tea-houses and ZurKhaneh (house of strength) to streets and later to the mountains of Kurdistan. Along with unrest in the other parts of Iran during the final years of the Pahlavi era, the Kurdish people actively participated in protests against the Shah.⁵¹ However the Kurds soon realized that the new Islamic government is strongly against any share of power with other minorities or granting autonomy to the Kurds or other ethnic minorities in Iran. Consequently, the clashes escalated between the Kurdish fighters and the Revolutionary Guards, or Sepah-e Pasdaran, "a formation which asserted the Shia values of the new government," that soon turned into a full-scale war.⁵²

This new social and political environment required recasting of the ideal masculinity, which shifted from chivalric (*pahlavānī*) masculinity to some sort of heroic masculinity which could be attained by self-sacrificing for the sake of homeland and demonstrating courage and valour in the battle to bring about justice, equality, and freedom. The protagonist, Aram, and his friends were exposed to Kurdish nationalism when the Kurdish Peshmerga forces were fighting against central government in Iran. They were highly idealized and respected by most Iranian Kurds and this made them heroes to be praised by Aram and the other boys in his group.⁵³

Shahin Gerami, in her article on masculinity in post-revolutionary

⁵⁰Qawami, 113.

⁵¹F. Koohi-Kamali, "The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan," in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, eds., *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 135-52.

⁵²David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 162.

⁵³Qawami, *Siveyla*, 121-22.

Iran, argues that the Islamic Revolution's ideology "discredited some prerevolutionary masculinity types" and instead promoted new ones: the "mullahs" as the leaders of revolution, "martyrs" as its soul, and "men" as its beneficiaries.⁵⁴ With its centralized political structure, the Islamic Republic's gender policies affected the whole country, including its Kurdish areas. The state's forced *hijab* and harsh policies of segregation, for example, affected all Iranian women regardless of their class and ethnicity. Having said that, the peculiarities of Kurdish society should not be overlooked. As an example, while they share a good deal of history, religion, and mythology with Persians, they also have a history, culture, and literature of their own. Furthermore, they do not share the same national heroes, at least in their modern histories. As such, except for the "beneficiary men," who enact what Connell calls "complicit" masculinities,⁵⁵ the first two masculinity types in Gerami's classification of masculine prototypes in post-revolutionary Iran are not compatible to the Kurdish society. Having said that, there is indeed a Kurdish version of the martyr type of masculinity. Whereas in the official ideology of the Islamic Republic, martyrs have been glorified for fighting to protect Islam and their country, in Kurdistan the Peshmerga warriors are idealized for fighting for the rights of Kurdish people who live under the Islamic Republic in Iran.⁵⁶

This dramatic shift from chivalric masculinity to heroic masculinity

⁵⁴Shahin Gerami. "Mullahs, Martyrs, and Men: Conceptualizing Masculinity in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Men and Masculinities* 5, no. 3 (2003): 257-274.

⁵⁵Connell, *Masculinities*, 79. According to Connell, in a patriarchal system, while not all men benefit from the hegemonic masculine ideals, most men do become complicit with those ideals so they can benefit from a "patriarchal dividend," that is, "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women."

⁵⁶Hemn Seyed, in an article published by BBC Persian, provides a different reading of the unrest in Kurdistan in the first years of the Iranian Revolution. He counterposes two different discourses on two key figures back then: Mostafa Chamran and Foad Mostafa Soltani. Whereas the former is presented, by the Islamic Republic, as a hero in its war against the Kurdish Peshmerga, the latter is regarded as a hero by the Kurds themselves for defending the Kurds and their rights. See www.bbc.com/persian/blogs/2014/05/140508_144_nazeran_chamran_paveh.

in the national imaginary underpins Connell's theory that hegemonic masculinity is a social construct that varies socially and historically. Aram and his friends are the younger generation of men in the novel whose youth coincides with late 1990s in Iran when the Kurdish movement had been suppressed by the central government. Accordingly, as reflected in the novel, severe frustration, passivity, and a lack of action ensued.

Presenting the events, memories and experiences from almost entirely the male characters' perspectives, either Aram or others, the novel obtains the reader's sympathy and approval of them. *Siweyla* does not invite the reader to challenge sexual potency as the marker of masculinity; conversely, it actually reinforces such perception of masculinity. In order for male characters to impose their dominance over women, the narrator and other male characters in *Siweyla* emphasize male sexual virility and prowess on the one hand and female sexual weakness and passivity, on the other.

In *Siweyla*, in effect, whenever male characters' masculinity is undermined in the face of political repression and economic hardship, their sexual virility is overemphasized in a desperate attempt to heal their wounded masculinity. They freely talk about their penises and proudly express their sexual needs and desires. Both generations in the novel, to put it in Andreas G. Philaretou's words, "embark on various personal odysseys to conquer the much-prized female sexuality hoping that such sexual conquests would ultimately help them maintain their masculine status or attain it respectively."⁵⁷ This is especially the case when they cannot enact their masculinity by becoming involved in social and political causes. Whereas in Amiri's novel, the increasing political opposition to the Shah provided a great opportunity for the protagonist, Azad, to obtain a hegemonic position of masculinity through his involvement in the Anti-Shah protests, the male characters in *Siweyla* find themselves in the post-

⁵⁷Andreas G. Philaretou, *The Perils of Masculinity: An Analysis of Male Sexual Anxiety, Sexual Addiction, and Relational Abuse* (Oxford: University Press of America, 2004), 13.

revolution era when Kurdish resistance and all forms of dissidence in Iran are suppressed. Under such circumstances, Aram and other male characters find themselves powerless to make any changes. Instead, they utilize sexual virility to construct an exaggerated masculinity as a compensation for their inability to take political actions.

In one scene, for example, Aram and his friends, when they were teenagers, compare their penises to see whose is the largest. Then, they compete in another game, that is, splitting the tomatoes with their penises, “the tomatoes were too hard for our penis to penetrate; they were bending like plastic when we tried to penetrate them; but, ‘Ebe⁵⁸ penetrated the tomatoes with his penis like a skewer, splitting them and laughing loudly while throwing them to one side.”⁵⁹ The young boys proudly participate in a competition to test their masculinity, the bigger and stronger the penis, the more powerful and masculine its owner is assumed to be. It is worth mentioning that *Kêrzilî* “having a big penis” in Kurdish language means, according to Hejar, “bullying, coercion,”⁶⁰ that is, as Amir Hassanpour notes, “associated with the exercise of physical and political power.”⁶¹ This coercion and consequently the physical power are well conveyed in the narrator’s tone when describing ‘Ebe splitting the tomatoes with his penis.

⁵⁸Ebe is the short form of Abdullah in Kurdish.

⁵⁹Qawami, *Siweyla*, 56.

⁶⁰Cited in Amir Hassanpour, “The (Re)production of Patriarchy in the Kurdish Language,” in Shahrzad Mojab, ed., *Women of a Non-state Nation: The Kurds* (California: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 227–63.

⁶¹Hassanpour, “The (Re)production of Patriarchy in the Kurdish Language,” 240. The association between phallus and power is not limited to Kurdish culture. Examining the “sexual politics” in the works of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet, Kate Millet shows that, with the exception of Genet’s works, the phallus is praised for its form and size and is granted an innate power and supremacy over the vagina. See Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 7–8. Analysing an excerpt from Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Millet writes “Connie and the author-narrator together inform us the penis is ‘overweening,’ ‘towering’ and ‘terrible.’ Most material of all, an erection provides the female with irrefutable evidence that male supremacy is founded upon the most real and uncontrovertible grounds” (*Sexual Politics*, 239).

As with *Nightmare*, a hegemonic masculinity, an idealized manhood, takes shape in the course of the novel as virile, dominant, and physically and/or intellectually powerful. ‘Ebe, for example, is presented by the narrator as a hero who “as soon as sexually matured, he found [Feride] and screwed her” (*her ke gonî pêşey kird, xoy pêgeyand û boy pêwe na*).⁶² This *heroic* action earns him honour and respect from his friends, and also invites the male reader to identify with and admire his virility as a significant marker of hegemonic masculinity. Also, another character, ‘Izet, since falling in love with a girl, became a recluse and drank alcohol day and night as he could not obtain her father’s consent to marry her. His friend blamed him for ruining his own life and showing weakness for a woman: “You should be ashamed of yourself. Why on earth do you behave like this? There isn’t a single woman in Iran and Iraq who you haven’t screwed (*Jinî ‘Êraq û Êran nemawe netgabê*).”⁶³ For him, a woman is just for sexual pleasure; she is not worth sacrificing one’s life for, especially by a promiscuous man who used to, in Connell’s words, rigorously practice the hegemonic masculinity “in its entirety.”⁶⁴

Interestingly, at least in this regard, the same “phallic economy” in Western culture dominates the Kurdish/Iranian culture. In the western sexuality, as Luce Irigaray writes, erection has more or less, received an “exclusive—and highly anxious—attention.”⁶⁵ In this “male-rivalry” dominated sexuality, she continues, the “strongest” is “the one who has the best ‘hard-on,’ the longest, the biggest, the stiffest penis, or even the one who ‘pees the farthest’ (as in little boys’ contests).”⁶⁶ No doubt, then, in the fictional world of *Siweyla* the male characters would gain honour and respect for having sex with women, while women would be labelled as loose or as prostitutes for having sex with men. Not even once in this novel has a woman

⁶²Qawami, *Siweyla*, 56.

⁶³Qawami, *Siweyla*, 81.

⁶⁴Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

⁶⁵Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 24.

⁶⁶Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 25.

talked about her vagina, as if she is completely unaware of this organ or ashamed to talk about it as the male characters frequently do, and thus a woman does not have “a” sex to be identified or represented. That being the case, no “room” has been left for women in sexual relations. Conversely, the whole space is allocated, in Elizabeth Grosz’s words, to “men’s fantasies of a femininity that conforms to their (oedipal) needs.”⁶⁷ The male characters’ fantasy of femininity and womanhood not only leaves women with no space of their own, but it also deprives them of their very control over their body.

For Irigaray, as Grosz notes, isomorphism, the “correspondence of form or shape between phallogocentric representational systems and phallic male sexuality,” is not a natural or objective one, but a “socio-linguistic construction.”⁶⁸ That is, the human body, whether female or male, is “already coded, placed in a social network, and given meaning in and by culture, the male being constituted as virile or phallic, the female as passive and castrated. These are not the result of biology, but of the *social and psychological meaning of the body*.”⁶⁹ The female body, is considered as weaker in the novel, and has been subordinated to its male counterpart and, accordingly, her life and fate would be in his hands. This attitude is especially true of the characters from the older generation most of whom are parents of the group of young boys.

On the other hand, in *Siweyla*, Qawami presents a new generation of women who are liberal and educated. Aram’s sister, Çinûr, for example, studies medicine at university. She and another girl named Parvin would hang out with the group of young boys. They would drink alcohol together and are relatively free to have romantic relationships with two of the boys in the group.⁷⁰ However, unlike the male characters, even one single female character cannot be found to talk about her sexual needs and desires to others or even to herself

⁶⁷Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney, Aus.: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 119.

⁶⁸Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 111.

⁶⁹Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 111(original emphasis).

⁷⁰Qawami, *Siweyla*, 42.

in the form of, for example, interior monologue. Women are mainly portrayed as “sexual objects” desired by men, not “desiring subjects” when it comes to sex.

In a scene from a wedding, for example, the narrator, Aram, expresses his desire for the female body: “I was stealing glances at women’s big butts. Their butts were swaying from one side to another, stretching their maxi dresses.”⁷¹ Or, “a woman’s beautiful leg caught my eyes [...] she was sitting half-naked, wearing a mini skirt. She had exposed thighs. When she bent I snuck a look and could see her cleavage.”⁷² Furthermore, overemphasizing the male characters’ sexual virility has resulted in some pornographic descriptions in the novel. Aram, for example, overhears a couple making love while he passes an empty alley at midnight; he, then, peeps through the window into their house:

A light was lit in the Gendarmerie alley. I grabbed the window and lifted myself up. Inside the room a naked man and woman were making love. The woman was lying on her back and the man was touching her butt and breasts [...] He grabbed her breasts and made a pillow of her arse. The woman’s mouth had drooped open [...] He went over her body and rode with her butt, grabbed her hair, lifted her head and breast up and took her breasts into his mouth from the back. The woman was moaning. He turned her over, slid into her legs and screwed her.⁷³

While the man is presented as active, virile and dominant, literally and symbolically, the woman remains passive and under his control.

⁷¹Qawami, *Siweyla*, 37.

⁷²Qawami, *Siweyla*, 40–41.

⁷³The original passage reads : “Le nêw kollanêkî Jandarmîrîda çîray malêk helkira bû. Çîngim kirde sawî sitadyeke u xom berz kirdewe. Lew dîwî hewdakanî baranda jin û piawêk be rûfî xerîkî eşîqbazî bûn. Piyaw jiney demewrû rimandibû u destî be simt û memkekaniya ehêna [...] pencey kirde jêr sikya u memkekani girte çîng û simtî kirde serîn. Jine demi taq mabû [...] Çiwe ser jestyê û siwar simtî bû, çîngî be çijya kird, ser û siney helbirî u le piştewe memkekani girte dem. Jine eynûzandewe. Hellîgerandewe xoy be nêw qaçekaniya kird û têtî tepand.” (Qawami, 139).

Nowhere in this scene is the woman demonstrated as actively participating in the sexual act.

Furthermore, the verbal expression used here is also sexist. The words, for example, “*têy tepand*” and “*eynûzandewe*” have a visible and invisible meaning. On the surface they mean “fucked her” and “she was moaning,” respectively. However, beneath the surface meaning there is an invisible patriarchal history. Coitus, as Millet rightly pointed out, does not simply indicate a biological activity between the two sexes; it rather “is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes.”⁷⁴ “*Têy tepand*” has a more cultural meaning than a biological one. It belongs to men’s vocabulary which denotes an aggressive form of penetration, enabling them to impose authority over women. In “*eynûzandewe*” (she was moaning), the woman even loses her place as a human. It is a misogynistic term which dehumanizes her and derogates her status to that of a dog. This especially makes sense in the context of the Islamic/Kurdish culture in which it is an insult to call anyone a dog or to describe someone as behaving like a dog, i.e., barking, howling, or whining.

Siweyla’s treatment of sexual matters and gender relations reinforces the traditional conventions on masculinity and femininity, which presents the man as both socially and sexually active and desiring and the woman as a passive object of men’s sexual desires. Presenting sexuality merely from a male gaze that objectifies women sexually, *Siweyla* reproduces the already existing definitions of masculinity and femininity in society, thus failing to create an alternative female subjectivity that indulges in, for example, “activity, satisfaction, and a corporeal self-sufficiency.”⁷⁵

The male characters, on the other hand, attempt to obtain the hegemonic position of masculinity by overemphasizing their *manliness* through

⁷⁴Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 23.

⁷⁵Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 116.

sexual potency and promiscuity. They resort to virility and sexual prowess, to borrow Philaretou's words, "to attain, maintain, heal, and strengthen their fragile masculinity not only in the eyes of their significant others, but above all, in their own eyes. It is as if the intensity of their sexual experience with women acts as a booster of their damaged masculine male self-esteem."⁷⁶ In other words, sexual relationship is more than simply a biological act; it is also a site where men aspire to hegemonic masculinity by, in Samira Aghacy's words, transforming sexual intercourse "into a kind of conquest conflated with rape where the penis is a symbol of power, an instrument of appropriation, and a weapon expressing simultaneously male misogyny and fear of female power."⁷⁷

Conclusion

This paper engaged in an exploration of the presentation of masculine subjectivity as opposed to feminine subjectivity in *Nightmare* and *Siweyla*, two Iranian Kurdish novels published in the early twenty-first century. The authors of both novels attempted to present a modern image of Kurdish men as more educated, liberal, and *softer* than their forefathers. They also opted to present a different image of woman, an educated New Woman involved in socio-political activities. However, both novels substantially reproduce essentialist gendered subjectivities, through reinscribing a binary opposition that defines woman as man's "other." In this hierarchical binary system, women are allocated the inferior status: they are described, for example, as caring, self-negating, emotional, and sexually passive as opposed to supportive, independent, rational, and sexually active men.

While Amiri's *Nightmare* is set in the mid- to the late seventies, Qawami's *Siweyla* is mainly set in the nineties and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The late seventies were a time of new hopes, high ideals, and belief in people's agency and power to overthrow the

⁷⁶Philaretou, *The Perils of Masculinity*, 13.

⁷⁷Samira Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East Since 1967* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 20-21.

tyranny of the Shah. Thus, the protagonist, Azad, was able to enact hegemonic masculinity through his involvement in the Anti-Shah protests. The nineties and the early twenty-first century in Iranian Kurdistan, however, is a period of lost hopes and shattered dreams. In stark contrast to *Zindexew*, thus, *Siweyla* portrays a Kurdish society in Iran which has lost its high values due to frustration ensuing the suppression of the Kurdish movement. Under such circumstances, Aram and other male characters utilized sexual virility to construct an exaggerated masculinity as a compensation for their inability to take political actions. Regardless of being modernist or realist, experimental or conventional, these contemporary Kurdish novels reproduce hierarchical binary oppositions essential for men's dominance over women.