WHERE IS HOME?
Re-visioning "Kurdistan" and "Diaspora" in Kurdish
novelistic discourse in Sweden

Abstract
Employing textual and contextual analysis of three Kurdish novels, the aim of this article is to understand the way Kurdish characters have experienced their "home-land" through tracing the themes of displacement and exile, and to explore what kind of meanings and values are attributed to Sweden as the host country. Applying a conceptual framework based on "home", "homeland" and "diaspora", it aims to illuminate diasporic memory in relation to individual and collective pasts, and to depict the imaginary of "home-land". In this sense, this article will argue that Kurds in the fictional narratives neither feel at "home" in their host country nor can they return to their homeland.

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1   Introduction

Kurds are regarded as being divided not only geographically but also politically, linguistically and ideologically (Aknur 2012; Natali 2005; Rudolph 2003). Government policies towards the Kurds have differed from one sovereign state to another. Following the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurdish question in Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq, the four states containing regions of Kurdistan, became a particularly crucial issue within the Middle East region and in international politics. Hence, issues around Kurdish nationalism and political problems have received considerably more attention than matters of culture, including literature. However, though studies on Kurdish literature have remained rather peripheral compared with the historical and political issues, research (undertaken mainly in Europe and the US) on the literature of all Kurdish regions, in both Sorani and Kurmanji dialects, has increased notably in recent years. Linguistic diversity and the lack of political and national unity have not only shaped the fragmented character of Kurdish novelistic discourse but also forced the displacement and voluntary migration westwards of many Kurds in search of freedom. While some Kurdish intellectuals have, because of political conflicts, chosen the path of exile in various Western countries and have had the opportunity to publish their novels in their native dialects (Sorani and Kurmanji), others, despite political conflicts, have not left their homeland; nevertheless, those who remained have from time to time been obliged, or have sometimes preferred, to write in the official languages of the state, such as Persian, Arabic or Turkish.

Although Kurdish novelistic discourse was developed mainly in Sweden during the 1980s, and tens of novels have been produced since then, the majority of these novels focus on "Kurdistan" as the original "home-land" rather than "Sweden" as the country of settlement. In other words, the Kurdish novelists in Sweden have constructed discourses in which Kurdistan is their priority. This article looks at three Kurdish novels, *Pêlên Bêrikirinê* (Waves of Longing, 1997) by Mustafa Aydogan, *Ronakbîr* (Intellectual, 2003) by Laleş Qaso and *Payiza Dereng* (Belated Autumn, 2005) by Firat Cewerî, concentrating both on Sweden and Kurdistan in relation to the construction of "home-land" produced by diasporic experiences.

2   Methodological considerations

In this article, a "Kurdish novel" is a Kurdish-language work written in any dialect of Kurdish. This statement also relates to the discussions on Kurdish national identity in which the Kurdish language is regarded as one of the markers of Kurdish identity (Kreyenbroek & Allison 1996: 1; McDowall 2004: 9; Vali 2003: 100). Most importantly, the novelists examined in this article have also addressed the significance of Kurdish for the Kurds, both in their novelistic discourses and in their other publications, and often encourage the Kurds to read and write in Kurdish.

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I have only considered the works of novelists from Turkish Kurdistan. My reason for limiting myself to one region is primarily that identities and perceptions of "home-land" are considered to have developed differently in relation to contextual and political differences in each of the nation-states (Natali 2005; Romano 2006). The situation of the Kurds from Iraqi Kurdistan or Iranian Kurdistan is different from the circumstances of those in Turkey, owing to the different socio-political and cultural contexts of these non-Kurdish nation-states. Being dominated by different nations means that the Kurds are confronted by different policies resulting in the creation of different literary discourses involving different themes, subject-matters and "homeland" configurations. This approach does not necessarily assume the lack of a common Kurdish literature; rather, it attempts to reach an accurate comparative analysis of literary texts within the same dialect and related to the same political, social and ideological environment. Moreover, to include novels from different regions would require research on different Kurdish regions and their diasporas, which I do not consider manageable for a literary analysis based on diverse methodological approaches. The novels from other regions, including those in Soviet Armenia, are written in different dialects (Zazaki, Kurmanji and Sorani) and different scripts (Arabic and Cyrillic).[1]

Because I aim to develop a deeper understanding of the formation and significance of "home-land", my intention is to vary my methodological approach to the novels as appropriate for the analysis. Accordingly, apart from its concentration on the form and content of the novels, which are internal to the text, this article regards authorship or socio-political context as tools for reaching a better understanding of the text. This article is, therefore, positioned among diverse methodological considerations that, by raising concerns for the different symbolic, political and social meanings of the novels, attempt to illuminate the meaning of textual portrayals within an understanding of the social and political arrangements surrounding them. Most importantly, this article employs humanistic geography in its approach to literature, arguing that literature, and the novel in particular, constitutes an instrument of geographical inquiry into a society or a nation (Bordessa 1988; Pocock 1981; Porteous 1985). Thus, one should take the contextualisation of the novels/novelists into consideration in order to shed light on how and why the nation/society is constructed. In this account, I have taken advantage of both contextual and textual approaches.

In addition, I attempt through thematic analysis to identify the themes that relate to the concepts already classified – in particular "identity", "home-land" and "diaspora" – so as to form a comprehensive picture of the novels. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to create a link between each text and to compare similarities and differences. While it might be thought that contextual, textual and thematic analyses contradict each other, in reality quite the reverse is true, and the method I have outlined is intended to promote a comprehensive and flexible approach to the reading of novelistic discourse, which allows every factor that contributes to meaning to be taken into account.

3 Theoretical considerations

The connection of certain disciplines with each other has received little attention from literary critics and scholars. The relationship between geography and literature has been discussed mainly by geographers, who see fictional literature as an alternative account of their texts because, as Meinig (1983: 316) remarks, it is "a valuable storehouse of vivid depictions of landscapes and life". However, some geographers (Claval 1998; Crang 1998; Shurmer-Smith 2002) have taken up literature from a geographical perspective and have concluded "true synthesis of geography and literature would produce an entirely new approach to meaning" (Bordessa 1988: 273). I share this view and, therefore, my analysis in this article derives from the cultural and literary theory that claims "literature […] is not *just* the idiosyncratic product of an author, but both reveals and conceals social and cultural practices as it produces and reproduces spaces and places" (Gilbert and Simpson-Housley 1997: 237).

This article similarly argues that an author's mode of perception of space and places, and thus his/her treatment of space and places, is culturally, socially and politically conditioned, reflecting the culture and ideology to which s/he belongs. In this case, the engagement between geography and literature appears through the way the novels are described as a depiction of a specific "space" and "place"; in terms of the cultural context of people's notions and views of a particular place, this can offer insights into the nature of their spatial relations.

A novel has long been thought of as some sort of vivid experience that allows its readers to identify with particular situations and encourages them to feel and act in the same way as the characters. The novel is defined as a genre through its attempt to create a reality by deriving meaning from an individual's life (Lukács 1971; McKeon 2000; Watt 2001 [1957]). However, reality in novels cannot be regarded simply as reflecting the personal experiences of novelists, since the society, setting and social environment of the novel may be used for various ideologies, issues and beliefs rather than for presenting an "objective" account of a subjective reality without context.

It is widely considered that the novel genre in literature is a form that depends mainly on mimesis (the imitation of reality through realist techniques), and the fact that "novels depend on their ability to make readers feel as if they are witnessing not art but life" (Davis 1987: 250). Consciously, or sometimes unconsciously, they reflect "real" cultural and political differences between nations because they are integral to the process of constructing national, cultural and political differences. In other words, the stories in the novels are not distant from lived experience, and their subject matter may be heavily oriented towards national and cultural differences.

4 Kurdish novelistic discourse beyond the borders of Kurdistan

It should be noted that Kurdish novelistic discourse owes much to Kurdish intellectuals and writers of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), who made a substantial contribution to the development of the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish and thereby to the emergence of the Kurdish novel. It is useful to give a brief description of the situation of the Kurdish intelligentsia in the USSR and its influence on Kurdish literature and publications. During the 1920s, Kurds played a significant part in the enhancement of Kurdish education and literary activities (Leezenberg 2011: 89). Former Soviet Kurds obtained a written form of their mother tongue after the 1917 revolution, and first began writing Kurdish using the Armenian alphabet during the 1920s. In 1927, they shifted to the Latin alphabet, with improvements by Aisor Margulov and Erebê Şemo, until 1945 when the Cyrillic alphabet was imposed on them. At present, Kurds in the FSU write using both Cyrillic and Latin forms. The first school textbooks to be written in Kurmanji were produced, and the principal steps towards

modern prose writing were taken in Soviet Armenia (Leezenberg 2011: 89), while the first Kurdish novel, *Şivanê Kurmanca* (The Kurdish Shepherd) by Erebê Şemo (1898–1978), which was based on the life of its author, was first published in Yerevan in 1935. Eliyê Evdirehman's *Xatê Xanîm* (Lady Xate, 1959), and *Dê* (Mother, 1965); Heciyê Cindî's *Hewarî* (Cry, 1967) and *Gundê Mêrxasa* (The Village of the Courageous, 1968); and Seîdê Îbo's *Kurdên Rêwî* (Traveller Kurds, 1981) are on the list of early Kurdish novels published in the USSR.

It is also important to mention that Kurdish literature, especially the genre of the novel, was developed mainly in the Europe during the 1980s, primarily in Sweden. Sweden, which was presented as a "centre of gravity" by Khayati (2008), is a significant host country for Kurds, many from Iraq and Iran, and many of whom are politically active intellectuals (Schmidinger 2010). Van Bruinessen (1999) argues that intellectuals, especially writers and journalists, chose Sweden as their place of exile. In fact, with economic support from The National Council for Cultural Affairs (*Statens* Kulturråd) and Foundation for the Culture of the Future (*Stiftelsen Framtidens Kultur*), Kurdish intellectuals managed to publish and open a Kurdish library (Alinia 2004: 34). Certainly, the struggle by Kurdish intellectuals and writers from Turkish Kurdistan in Sweden to promote Kurdish language and literature has been to the benefit of novelistic discourse, and Mehmed Uzun (1953–2006) and Mahmut Baksî (1944–2000), who were in exile in Sweden for many years, can be considered the most productive novelists from Turkish Kurdistan.

As established in my PhD thesis, which covers Kurdish novels from Turkish Kurdistan and its diaspora from 1984 to 2010, out of 68 novels, 47 were produced by novelists originally from Turkish Kurdistan living in Sweden. Most novels take place in Kurdistan, and very few are set in, or refer to, the diaspora. In my PhD research covering all Kurdish novels written in Sweden up to 2010, I have shown that Kurdish diasporic novels in Sweden do not usually focus on any sort of dramatic or positive experiences that they have faced in exile. Put more simply, in most of these novels the story is set in any region of Kurdistan and very few of them focus on migrant or exile experiences in Europe. For example, in Mezher Bozan's quartet of novels, *Av Zelal Bû I, II, III ,and IV* (Water was Clear, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008), the narrator rarely refers to Sweden except in passing to praise its democratic system and high living standards. In Bozan's bildungsroman novel *Asim* (Asim, 2007), it is impossible to see anything related to diaspora; everything is concerned with past experiences in the homeland. Similarly, Silêman Demîr's *Piştî Bîst Salan* (After Twenty Years, 2007), Mihemed Dehsiwar's *Çirîskên Rizgariyê* (The Sparkle of Liberation, 1995), Mehmed Uzun's *Mirina Kalekî Rind* (The Death of Old Rind, 1987) and *Siya Evînê* (In the Shadow of Love, 1989) all refer to life in exile only in the most general of terms. Their main characters appear as exiles returning to their lands, some struggling to re-adapt after many years away, and some searching for alternative ways to save their homeland from the hands of others. However, as emphasised earlier, exilic experiences or issues related to the host country do not constitute the main concern of the novelists except for the three novels set in Sweden, which are analysed in this article, *Pêlên Bêrikirinê, Ronakbîr* and *Payiza Dereng*. This article will attempt to explore the experiences of displacement reflected in these three literary articulations, to illuminate diasporic memory in relation to individual and collective pasts, and to depict the imaginary of "home-land". In doing so, two aspects in particular will receive attention. The first part examines the articulations of diaspora experiences in the novels, and question whether or not a host country is considered as "home", since the place of settlement

does not necessarily refer to one's real home. The second part looks at the portrayal of Kurdistan, which is considered together with a critical perspective.

5 The experiences of displacement: diaspora as "temporary space"

Analysing the lack of attention for, or the negative images/ description of, the diaspora in the novelistic discourse is essential for understanding the meanings of the original homeland. Accordingly, this section asks whether the country of settlement is considered as home. If not the country of settlement, where, then, is "home" in these Kurdish diasporic novels? This raises another question – what does their country of residence mean to them if it is not a "home"? Pursuing answers to such questions will not only result in an articulation of the meanings of the country of settlement for the novelists as members of the diaspora but will also contribute to revealing the constructions of "home-land" in the narratives. In this research, the concept of "home" appears as more of an idea than a physicality that conveys a stable place of residence in which one feels secure, comfortable and familiar. On the other hand, "homeland" in a territorial sense refers to a place/land of origin to which one feels emotionally and physically attached. If the text invokes both "home" and "homeland", the keyword "home-land" will be used.

Apart from the exceptional conditions of Kurds in relation to their stateless "homeland", "home-land" is already a multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. However, in the case of migration and detachment, the notion of "home-land" conveys more complicated meanings that arouse a sense of temporality. "Homeland" and "diaspora" have been used as interlinked terms for centuries, as diaspora populations are deeply influenced by and implicated in their links with their homeland, both ideologically and culturally. Indeed, as Avtar Brah (1996: 190) has claimed, "the concept of diaspora embodies a subtext of home." In the settlement countries, these communities and groups, which have not necessarily migrated as a result of force, recreate a territorially discontinuous identity and maintain a link with other members in their claimed or imagined homeland (Marienstras 1989; Safran 1991).

In light of the above, "homeland" also plays a defining role in the orientation of Kurdish migrants (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2010, 2012; Khayati 2008; Wahlbeck 1999). As Ahmadzadeh (2011: 65) points out "while Kurdish novel is by no means created by nation-state, one can clearly trace the imagining of the nation-state in the Kurdish novel." Accordingly, the Kurdish novelistic discourses also reflect the general notions of Kurdish diasporans in terms of a disrupted construction of "home-land" from abroad. However, the novels have a critical perspective towards both the homeland and the country of settlement, the latter being seen, either through lack of attention or a negative image of European countries, as a "temporary space" rather than a new "home".

To begin with, blending in with the culture of the host country is not seen as an option for survival. In *Pêlên Bêrikirinê*, which depicts an exile's day on the streets of Stockholm, the unnamed protagonist, through an intra-fictional narration technique that positions the narrator as part of the story, explicitly introduces the readers to his life, in which he is entirely encircled by Kurdish institutions/ organisations and other Kurdish migrants like himself. Through the highly didactic language of the narrator, these Kurds demonstrate that they are not attempting to create a habitat that is different from the "home-land" left behind, since they tend to regard their existence

in exile merely as a temporary and transitional period. However, they are aware that this period has lasted for a longer time than they had expected and have, therefore, struggled not to become attached to the new environment or to become involved, in exile, in any actions apart from transnational socio-political activities for the sake of their "homeland". The narrator of *Pêlên Bêrikirinê* who has implicit access to the protagonist's mind describes the latter's relationship with exile: "the life of exile had tied up his hands and feet" (126),[2] which conveys the desperation of many years of exile, and the impossibility of return that is, in fact, a "critical element of the condition of exile" (Torres 1999: 37), becoming a mythical aspiration (Naficy 1993).

In some ways, diasporic conditions in the place of settlement are characterised by the sense of non-belonging and isolation due to strong feelings about the return. *Pêlên Bêrikirinê* shows that Kurdish migrants have not managed either to return to their homeland or to adapt to the new life offered by their host countries. In this regard, the protagonist shares his views on his experience of exile:

> At the beginning of my life in exile I was hoping that when the ivy in my living room completed its second round in the room I would go back home. The ivy, however, has completed its fourth round and myself and the ivy are still in an unknown place looking into each other's eyes (166).[3]

Similarly, Laleş Qaso's novel *Ronakbîr*, with first-person narration and based on the diasporic experiences of the protagonist named Ronakbîr, mentions that it is impossible for a Kurdish migrant to regard the host country as his home country, and how the sense of loss and loneliness always remains, even if the migrant has lived there for many years. Ronakbîr lives in Stockholm, has problems with his wife and frequently changes jobs, as he cannot find an occupation that suits him. From time to time, he expresses regret for having left his homeland to come to Europe: "Whatever happens, I would like not to abandon my homeland" (48).[4] He remains a total outsider, neither returning to his "home-land" nor becoming part of a new community and a new culture. This, for him, means rejecting the path of assimilation into the dominant majority, and this becomes evident from the narrator's complete omission of details about Swedish culture or even of a physical description of Stockholm. He expresses his strong sense of disappointment:

> I do not accept (…) after studying at university, knowing the world, the universe and the rottenness of human beings; for twelve years burning down the fire of Turkish prisons; struggling for twenty years against cruelty and in the end to come here and become a protector of this mess, ha! (…) And above all, in Europe! Even without studying, anyone could possess this shit (47).[5]

Ronakbîr considers himself useless, since he can do nothing for his country nor can he return: "When I cannot do anything good for my people and sit in front of the toilet, then what I am looking for in this country?" (47,48).[6] On the other hand, his sense of loneliness and loss increases because of his half-hearted relations with other Kurdish migrants in Stockholm. He does not approve of their lack of national consciousness, and prefers to keep his distance, even from his wife, who wears a necklace with the image of Atatürk (Founder of the Turkish Republic) on it and listens to Turkish music. For the protagonist, this means that even his spouse living in the same house does not show any sensitivity to his ideological affiliation or political background. In addition, the atmosphere of Kurdish politics

and amongst migrants in Europe also makes him question the necessity and benefits of his national struggle, which causes him trouble. He points out: "Their [Kurds] struggle is a struggle with fire! Those involved in this struggle, those against this struggle and those who remained silent burn down!" (58).[7] In brief, he manages neither to adapt to the new environment, nor to keep alive the national values in which he once believed. He regrets having been involved in all the political actions that have forced him to migrate to Stockholm. He loses all his hopes for the future and distrusts other Kurdish migrants around him in Sweden, which seems to be the main reason behind his lack of integration and adaptation to the host country.

The protagonist condemns countries such as Sweden for ignoring violations of the human rights of Kurds back in Kurdistan, while his comments on Europe's policies towards the Kurdish case show that the distance between the host country and Kurdish migrants has occurred because these countries have paid insufficient attention to the Kurds.

The novelistic discourse in *Ronakbîr* shows the Kurdish characters finding their host countries neither reliable nor supportive towards the cause of their struggle. In this regard, *Payiza Dereng*, fictionalised as an epistolary novel by Firat Cewerî, is also a good example of the depiction of the negative aspects of host countries. Through parallel narratives, one half of the novel takes place in the host country, Sweden, and the other in Diyarbakir, hometown of Ferda, the protagonist. In his letters to his close friend in Sweden, Ferda sometimes compares Sweden and Kurdistan, either explicitly or implicitly, and considers Swedish culture to be founded on self-interest and lacking any sense of community. The individualistic environment in Sweden deepens his sense of homelessness and loneliness, although he praises the openness that respects different identities and cultures. Before leaving Stockholm for his hometown, Ferda explains his feelings to his son, claiming that "one cannot easily enter into their world, become friends with them, [even] through this path of friendship, you cannot forget your sorrows of foreignness and the longing for homeland" (29).[8] He explicitly underlines his dilemma during the years of his exile in Sweden: "I have been living here for twenty-eight years with the intention of returning. My body was here but my mind was in my homeland. Half of me was here, the other half of me was in the homeland" (20).[9] Clearly, for a variety of internal and external reasons, Ferda and other exilic characters in the novels are unable to bond with their new society, which causes them to turn their eyes to the place left behind. In sum, the sense of de-territorialised and transnational socio-political relations with the homeland (Clifford 1999; Van Bruinessen 1999; Wahlbeck 1999) has become the focal point for almost all of them, and concentrating on a far-off homeland causes them to occupy their current locations differently from their home locations.

Geographical shifts and the consequent social and cultural changes seem to be insufficient to enable Kurdish characters to go through the process of "re-homing". Thus, migration for these characters contains elements of strangeness and, by extension, embraces homelessness. In this case, homelessness comes to be the only home state (Chow 1993: 197) because to "rehome is not simply to go home but to undergo a constructive homing process" (Zhang 2008: 43), which is not the case for these characters. They regard the new environment as a "temporary space", not as a "home", despite the fact that the notion of returning to the "homeland" is not turned into an actual plan. However, this also locates them in a different sense in which feelings of belonging and embellished affiliation toward the original homeland are also lacking, and in which the aspiration of return functions as a myth.

6 Diasporic memory: a critical overview of Kurdistan

The meanings of "home" for diasporic communities have attracted the attention of a great range of researchers and scholars, including Levy and Weingrod (2005) and Ryang and Lie (2009), as well as diasporic literary productions such as Mishra (2007) and Al-Maleh (2009). The common view is that diasporic experiences play a part in transforming the way that diasporic individuals imagine their "home". Accordingly, imaginary Kurdistan in the diasporic novels, involving cultural, historical and political elements, is characterised by the intersection of various cultural and socio-political realms; this is absolutely a fragmented space with a tragic history and horrendous living conditions. As Vali (1998: 82) states, "the division of Kurdistan after the First World War and the consequent structural diversity of Kurdish societies, administered by different political and economic regimes, have deprived the Kurds of political unity." In relation to Kurdish novels as "national allegory" (Jameson 1988), it can be argued that Kurdistan as the "homeland" of the Kurds in the novels also evokes traumatic experiences, internal conflicts, a destructive feudal system and conflicting ideologies towards national struggle.

The construction of a unified "imagined community", as coined by Anderson (1983), is prevented primarily by the continual emphasis on the Kurds' failure to achieve statehood, and severe criticism of social–political and historical aspects of Kurdistan, with geographical, social, political and cultural experiences repeatedly manifested as negative elements. The narratives make it clear that the descriptions of Kurdish places, or of identities surrounded by these places, involve either plain or realistic observations only, based on destructive facts, or depend on a pessimistic view for the future of Kurdistan and Kurdish identity. This pessimistic portrayal of Kurdistan is formed by internal and external factors. According to the novels, Kurdish characters ignore the significance of the national struggle and their Kurdistan is not fully politicised. Kurds either accept the superiority of the Turkish authorities or even some of the other characters (mainly tribal leaders and landowners) who negotiate with the state for their own self-interest. Many characters are criticised for speaking Turkish, which again signifies the lack of national awareness. In addition to the absence of a national struggle and the lack of support of other Kurds, the acceptance of the existence of Turkish sovereignty, the cooperation of some Kurds with the Turkish authorities, along with social or cultural backwardness, all combine to construct a very negative image of Kurdistan that carries with it various criticisms.

For example, *Payiza Dereng* takes place in Diyarbakir, where the assimilated attitudes of local Kurds become a constant backdrop of the novel. This sense of exile does not vanish when Ferda, the protagonist, returns to his original home. He experiences different feelings of displacement in his homeland, as his people have been assimilated. In this sense, the significance of the Kurdish language as a component of identity is often underlined, and the degeneration of Kurdistan is narrated through a lack of use of Kurdish. When the novel's characters prefer to speak Turkish rather than Kurdish, this signifies their assimilation, according to the narrator. Returning to his hometown from Stockholm after 28 years of exile, Ferda perceives a damaged Kurdistan in which people ignore the necessity of their mother tongue. Throughout the novel, he criticises Kurds for speaking Turkish instead of Kurdish, and sometimes even regrets coming back, since observing the behaviour of his assimilated nation has made Kurdistan seem almost like a foreign land to him. As Ferda comments, "I feel as if I have returned to a foreign country rather than to my own country, with foreign people, a foreign culture" (221).[10]

In addition to negative elements, focusing on conservative, patriarchal and feudal aspects involving the superiority of *aghas* (landowners) and their exploitation of villagers, the narrative also expresses how Kurdistan is corrupted by the actions of betrayers and immoral persons. For example, in *Ronakbîr*, the narrator criticises Kurds, in general, saying "Kurds are a corrupted nation. A nation surrendered to occupiers. Even if they are a surrendered nation, they still would not feel ashamed of this" (57).[11] Similarly, *Payiza Dereng*, with its highly critical attitudes and highly autobiographical elements,[12] responds to the fact that the reality of Kurdistan is reflected in the fact that one Kurd can be a guerrilla while his neighbour is a "village guard" (*korucu*)[13] cooperating with the Turkish state. As Ferda, the protagonist says,

> This is a true picture of the country. This is a picture of the reason and result of a long history and centuries of slavery. This is our regular internal hostility (…) this is an evil worm and this worm is eating away our hearts and brain (254).[14]

The 1980 military coup[15] and the conditions in Diyarbakir prison during the 1980s, which became increasingly harsh and dangerous, constitute a crucial aspect of diasporic memory through personal experiences of their malign influence. In this respect, the period during which the majority of Kurdish novelists leave becomes the dominant vision of their homeland. Kurdistan is generally associated with the conditions witnessed by the novelist, usually during the 1980s, and preceding the experience of exile. This is the situation, for example, in Mustafa Aydogan's *Pêlên Bêrikirinê*, which also informs its readers of the names and techniques of various methods of torture by listing them and describing them in a realist manner. Like Aydogan himself, who has lived in exile in Sweden since 1985, the protagonist remembers his prison experiences and narrates the recurring memories of torture and fear that affect his new life in his new environment. He is torn by his painful past, and subconsciously fears the Swedish police, whom he always tries to avoid whenever he encounters any of them, underlining the fact that up to this time "he has not got rid of the effects of incarceration and torture in prison. Its impact still continues (…) Even after he had received his passport, he was arrested in his city by the police many times in his dreams" (122).[16]

In light of the above analysis, one can argue that Kurdish novels deconstruct the meanings attributed to the homeland by diaspora communities, as many scholars and researchers have explained. Generally speaking, because of a geographical existence away from "home", coupled with an idealised longing to return there, diasporas frequently picture home as "mythic place" and "imaginary homeland" (Anderson, 1983; Blunt, 2003; Golan, 2002; Veronis, 2007). It is argued that homeland-oriented diasporic groups locate their homeland within a mythologised, idealised and historicised discourse in such a way that homeland becomes "a place that exists primarily in stories" (Berns-McGown 2007–2008: 8). Most importantly, the idea of "home" left behind is reinvented through imaginary and mythical features within the narratives because, according to Mardorossian, exiled literature "constructs a binary logic between an alienating 'here' and a romanticised 'homeland'" (2002: 16). Accordingly, diasporic writers tend to imagine the origin of country and the concept of nation with pleasant moments, which Gayatri Gopinath confirms in relation to the South Asian Diaspora nation; it is an "imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history" (2005: 4). Due to the strong sense of displacement, the writer needs to create an imagined and fictionalised world to ease the harsh realities of exile.

Again, for diasporic Armenians (Payaslian 2010) and Basques (see Totoricagüena 2004), in the case of a geographical existence away from "home" coupled with an idealised longing for return, diasporic groups will construct romanticised images of "homeland". In light of these assumptions, it is important to note that Kurdish diasporic literary writing reverses the arguments on configurations of "imaginary homeland" by diasporas. Analysis of Kurdish diasporic novels shows that "home-land" in these novels is not romanticised or idealised, a finding that contradicts the fictionalised "homes" model argued by leading theorists and scholars (i.e. Agnew 2005; Brah 1996; Safran 1991). One might expect to encounter a similar portrait in Palestinian literature, since the status of the Palestinians is similar to that of the Kurds in terms of statelessness; however, research on Palestinian literature has produced a different picture, bearing more similarities to the cases mentioned above. Al-Nakib explains how, as a Palestinian diasporic writer, Yasmine Zahran's novel *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* describes "actual Palestine ¼ under siege, enclosed by walls, divided forcibly into unliveable cantons"; however, "Zahran's novel traces the contours of a 'virtual' Palestine not the 'actual' one" (Al-Nakib 2005: 238, 266). An imaginary homeland in Palestinian diasporic literature often enables the exiled writer to create the sense of stability and security that they aspire to, in contrast to the actual occupied and conflicted conditions of Palestine. The difference between Palestinian and Kurdish literary discourse in handling "homeland" arises from the different background of exile writers, and different dynamics in the homeland. Hence, being both exile and stateless does not necessarily result in the same configurations and perceptions.[17]

It can also be said that the portrayals of Kurdish homeland are at odds with the findings of ethnographic and anthropological research undertakings. According to Alinia (2004), whose PhD research was based on Kurdish migrants in Sweden, homeland meanings are multiple in a real as well as an imagined sense and can be both idealised and/or associated with traumatic experiences arising from conflicts with, and oppression by, the sovereign state. Similarly, research conducted by Khayati among diasporans in France and Sweden shows that homeland is associated with migrations, war, persecution, political instability, states of emergency, atrocity, assimilation, national struggle and nostalgia (Khayati 2008: 158). Both Alinia and Khayati maintain that, in contrast to diasporic fictional narrative, the traumatic experiences narrated by the respondents are mainly based on external factors such as war, state oppression and persecution. However, in Kurdish diasporic novelistic discourse in Sweden, one also finds criticisms relating to the Kurds themselves.[18] It is important to emphasise the fact that the writers discussed above are doubly displaced, being first stateless, and secondly diasporic, which leads to various complex "home-land" configurations. There are two main factors that result in negative portrayals of Kurdish "home-land" or Kurdish identity: the first relates to the conditions of being exilic, the second is specific to the particular case of Kurds. Despite coming from a similar background or sharing the same national concerns, writing within or outside of national boundaries affects the view of "home-land" and identity. These writers may share a sense of statelessness with writers within the national borders, but the actual physical distance from national borders sharpens their understanding of the situation "back home" and turns their nostalgic aspirations into critical approaches. Angelika Bammer (1992: vii–xi) defines the critical narratives of exilic writers as "instability of home as a referent", and that "on all levels and in all places, it seems 'home' […] is either disintegrating or being radically redefined."

In relation to Bammer's definition in the context of Kurdish diasporic writers, distance generates an awareness through which "home-land" and identity are both disintegrated and radically redefined. Benefiting from the position of outsider and from a sense of exclusion, the space of exile is transformed into a vantage point from which they self-critically view home, from its political aspects (lack of unity, betrayal of the national struggle) to the socio-cultural realm (the oppressive influence on Kurds of landowners and sheikhs, honour killings).

These novelists represent certain groups of people who share similar characteristics; for example, they used to be involved in politics, fled to Europe mainly after the 1980 military coup and suffered many traumatic experiences. Therefore, the diasporic authors referred to in this article are both physically distanced from the heated conflict and immediate developments in their homeland, and either cannot or have not cut their ties with transnational politics in Europe. This constantly creates in their prose narratives a pessimistic and critical perspective.

7   Conclusion

When all Kurdish novels in Kurmanji dialect written in Europe are taken into account, it can be easily seen that many are either set in Kurdistan or rely on Kurdistan-related content. The authors generally place their subject matter within an historical context, or base it on the current political and socio-cultural environment in Kurdistan, while their ethnic identity, country of origin and history are regarded as more significant than concern for the identity and history of the host nation and the authors' experiences within that context. In relation to this, it can be argued that socio-political identity related to "home-land" appears more significant than the experiences that they have gone through in their host countries. The main reason is not simply that the "homeland" lacks a state deserving of much attention, but, as noted earlier (and as the definition of diaspora also suggests), because such displacement evokes the hope of a return one day to that "homeland", and this causes the authors to focus on the issues or views related to "home-land" rather than the exilic experiences in the host countries.

It is important to note that even those focusing on diasporic experiences argue about a lack of material relating to internal and external environments, criticising the external environment of a different culture and the lack of attention by Europeans to Kurdish issues, in addition to the internal environment, and the problems and complaints that migrants have with each other. Failure to adapt, cultural differences and the uncertain state of the homeland encourage the novelists to concentrate on the country of origin they have left behind, rather than on their countries of settlement.

Kurdish characters in the novels occupy the ambivalent space between belonging and non-belonging. Due to a strong sense of dislocation, of belonging neither to "homeland" nor the host country, the state of exile has become an existential condition. The shattered Kurdish homeland is described as unsafe and unstable, but neither can the current space of settlement be referred to as peaceful and secure.

This article has also challenged the general argument made with regard to diasporic literature, which refers to authors' perceptions of an idealised imaginary homeland, by arguing that Kurdish diasporic novelists offer a reflection of an actual Kurdistan intertwined with historical facts and internal critiques; these contribute to producing a negative portrayal rather than one that is "mythic" and "idealised" in the way that has been identified in diasporic literature in general. The effects of diaspora, the traumatic experiences in the

Kurdish homeland, and diverse and conflicting political agendas are combined, resulting in these critical homeland portraits. The representation of "home-land" in the diasporic novels is fundamental to the authors' political critiques and ideological views, which fail to confirm Kurdistan as an ideal "home" conveying safety, solidarity and socio-political freedom.

Finally, in answer to Clifford's question, "is it possible to create a home away from home?" (1999: 302), I suggest that, for Kurdish literary characters, it does not seem to be possible to see the host country as their home. Accordingly, home country for the characters is also "a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory" (Brah 1996: 192). In addition, the characters cannot avoid the gap between the ideological rhetoric of longing for Kurdistan, and the daily struggle over collective and personal existence in the diaspora.

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Notes

1. Due to the lack of relevant research, it is hard to establish the circulation of Kurdish novels and analyse their readership. However, it is known that the potential readership for Kurdish novels is small. According to my correspondences with publishing houses and writers from Turkish Kurdistan throughout my PhD research between 2008 and 2011, such novels would sell between 200 and 300 copies, which is very low. Their readers are considered to be people with a special interest in literature. Some believe that this is because so many Kurds are still illiterate in the Kurdish language, and some believe it is related to the highly political content of the novels, not something demanded from a fictional work by general readers. However, the number of Kurdish novels sold in Iraqi Kurdistan is much higher. Bakhtiyar Ali, one of the most well-known Kurdish writers, whose novels sell up to 10,000 copies, is considered as the best seller.

2. Jiyana sirgûnê dest û lingên wî girêdabûn.

3. Dema min dest bi jiyana surgûnê kir, min weha hêvî dikir ku lavlavka min a li odeya rûniştinê, du caran li dora odeyê bizîviriya, ez ê vegeriyama welêt. Lê wê dora xwe ya çaran jî temam kir, hîn ez û ew li warekî nenas li çavên hevdu dinihêrin.

4. Çi diba bila bûba, divabû min welatê xwe terk ne kiriba.

5. Ez qebûl nakimmm (…) Unîversîtan bixwîne; dinyayê, kayinatê û rezaleta insên nas bike; duwazdeh salan di nav agirê zindanên tirkan de biqijqije; bîst salan li himberî zilme tekoşînê bide û di dawiyê de jî were bibe nahtorê pîsiyê, ha! (…) Û bi ser de jî li welatekî Ewrupayê! Bêyî xwendinê jî mirov dikarîbû bûba xwediyê vî gû yî.

6. Gava ez ê li vî welatî ji bo miletê xwe nikaribim tiştekî baş bikim û li ber qedemgehan rûnim, ez li vî welatî li çî xwe digerim?

7. Doza wan (Kurds) dozeke ji êgir e! Ên ku bi vê dozê radibin, ên ku li himberî wê disekinin û ên ku bêdeng jî dimînin dişewitin! Ev dozek e ku herkesî dişewitîne.

8. Mirov nikare zû bi zû têkeve cîhana wan, bi wan re bibe heval û bi riya hevaltî û dostanîya wan êşa xerîbiyê û bêrîkirina welêt ji bîr bike.

9. Bûn bîst û heyşt sal ku ez bi niyeta vegerê li vir dijîm. Laşê min li vir, serê min li welêt bû. Nîvê min li vir nîvê din li welêt bû.

10. Wek ez venegeriyabim welatê xwe, lê ez vegeriyabim welatekî xerîb, nav mirovên xerîn, kultureke xerîb.

11. Kurd miletekî xerabe ye! Miletekî ku bindestî qebûl kiriye. Û miletê ku bindestiyê qebûl bike jî ji xwe fedî nake.

12. Both the main character Ferda and the novelist Cewerî have lived in Stockholm since 1980. Ferda in the novel is between two different worlds (homeland and host country); Cewerî himself has expressed similar thoughts: "When I am in Sweden, I say to myself I will go to my country, when I am in my country, I say to myself I will return home." The interview is available at: http://www.nefel.com/articles/article_detail.asp?RubricNr=7&ArticleNr=2827, accessed 15 August 2012.

13. These village guards (*korucu*) are mostly Kurdish paramilitaries armed and paid by the Turkish state to fight the PKK.

14. Ev resimekî welêt yê rastîn e. Ev resimê dîrokeke dirêj e û sebeb û encama bindestmayîna me ya sedsalan e. Ev dijmininatiya me ya hundurîn û herdemî ye (…) ev kurmekî xerab e û ev kurm e ku ji dil û mêjiyê me dixwe.

15. The Turkish military, promoting a Kemalist ideology, intervened in government on 12 September 1980 and remained in power for 3 years. Under military rule, the unitary state with its ideology of a single national identity dealt a fatal blow to diversity and multiple identities, while oppressing Turkey's democratic civil society. Undoubtedly, the military coup had numerous outcomes, including termination of the legal activities of a great range of left-wing parties, media censorship, economic liberalisation at the expense of labour, increased Islamicisation, weakened relations with the EU and the denial of Kurdish identity. See Hebditch and Connor (2005) and Lipovsky (1992) for further in-depth analysis and details of Turkey's 1980 military coup.

16. Wê gave hîn tesîra girtin û lêdanên li girtîgehê, ji ser xwe neavêtibû. Ev tesir hîn jî dom dike (…) Piştî ku pasaport wergirtibû jî di xewna xwe de, li bajarê xwe, ji aliyê polîsan ve çend caran hatibû girtin.

17. A comparative analysis of Kurdish and Palestinian literary discourse would a useful contribution to the understanding of the differences and similarities between literary productions by stateless authors.

18. Apart from the self-criticism in Kurdish novelistic discourse, the self-criticism is also common among Kurdish migrants in Europe, which is revealed by some researches conducted among Kurdish migrants. For example, the paper by Thomas Schmidinger entitled *The Kurdish Diaspora in Austria and its Imagined Kurdistan* (2010) contains harsh criticisms by Kurdish interviewees of the quality of Kurdish programmes and the independence of Kurdish programmes from political parties. Again, Khalid Khayati (2011) in his paper entitled *Kurdish Diaspora in Europe: From Victim Diaspora to the Practice of Long Distance Nationalism and Transborder Citizenship*, which he presented at the World Kurdish Congress, points to self-criticism within the Kurdish diaspora with regard to issues ranging from the position of women in Kurdish society, through lack of democracy, transparency and individual choice in Kurdish political movements, political events such as the killing of journalists in unclear circumstances, to corruption and the abuse of power.

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