

The Translingualism of Kurdish Writers: A postcolonial reading of Ali-Ashraf Darvishian's autobiographical novel *Sālhāyi Abrī* (Cloudy Years)*

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Introduction

Kurds are often referred to as the largest people without a state of their own. The vast majority of their estimated population of 25-30 million live in a contiguous area of West Iran, North Iraq, eastern Turkey and eastern Syria, comprising about 11–15%, 17–20%, 15–20%, and 11–14% of the population in these countries respectively (Sheyholislami and Sharifi 77). They experienced the first and most permanent division of their lands in 1639 when a treaty between the Ottoman and Iranian states resulted in drawing the first official border between the two empires and also separating what is known today as Iranian Kurdistan from the rest of Kurdish territories. When the Ottoman Empire was dismantled at the end of the First World War, the Ottoman part of Kurdistan was re-divided among the newly-born states of Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Thus, divided mostly among four neighboring countries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, Kurdish speakers, along with other minorities, became subjected to oppressive state policies aimed at constructing homogenous nation-states of Turkish, Persian and Arabic speakers. These policies ranged from deliberate killing of the language or linguicide to restricted and controlled tolerance. Kurdish was banned in Turkey from 1925 until 1991 at which point it was allowed limited and controlled freedom partly due to pressures from the European Union (see Fernandes; Üngör; Zeydanlıoğlu). Iran also banned minority languages, including Kurdish, at least during the Reza Shah period, 1925–1941 (see Hassanpour; Sheyholislami) while his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, followed a policy of restricted and controlled tolerance towards non-Persian languages which continued, more or less the same, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Sheyholislami). In Syria, beginning in the mid-1950s, the government destroyed Kurdish publications and banned language instruction in any language other than Arabic (Hassanpour et al. 370), a policy that was in place until 2011 when the

* For the purposes of this paper, quotes from the novel have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress Romanization systems for Kurdish and Persian.

Syrian civil war started. It was only in Iraq where Kurdish was recognized and allowed to be used in the media, elementary education, and local administration (Hassanpour). The formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1991 and the officialization of Kurdish as one of the two state languages of Iraq in 2005 have further contributed to the flourishing of Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Now despite the relative easing of the ban on the public usage of Kurdish in Turkey since 1991 and the introduction of Kurdish Language and Literature program at the university level in the Iranian Kurdish city of Sanandaj in 2015, Kurdish is still denied the right to be taught in schools or be the medium of instruction except in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Therefore, with a literature dating back to at least the sixteenth century, Kurdish still struggles for survival in Turkey and Iran (see Zeydanlıoğlu; Sheyholislami) while uncertainty shrouds the Kurds' future in war-torn Syria.

The process of linguistic homogenization through education system enforces the official language on Kurds and other linguistic minorities who, without education in and access to their native tongue and its literary heritage, grow up feeling a greater sense of intimacy, respect and admiration towards the official language of their country. Educated solely in the official languages, some of these bilingual children have grown up to become canonical figures of Turkish, Persian and Arabic literatures. It is indeed to the canons of these literatures that they owe their artistic inspiration in the first place.

The phenomenon of authors writing in a language other than their primary one, also called "literary translingualism" (Kellman, *Translingual Imagination* ix), has been widely discussed in regards to literatures from countries which have experienced colonization by European powers. Many colonial writers have had to use the imposed European tongues to represent their condition in their works. Some have interrogated the suitability and adequacy of the imposed language to describe the postcolonial experience and have expressed feelings of guilt for abandoning their mother tongues and contributing to the flourishing of the dominant languages. Chinua Achebe, for example, concedes that not writing in one's mother tongue "looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling" (Achebe 64).

Yet writing in a dominant language does not necessarily mean the assimilation of an indigenous writer into the colonial culture. In postcolonial criticism it has been argued that

the oppressed peoples write back to their oppressors “when the indigenous peoples write their own histories and legacies using the colonizer’s language” (Kharbe 425). According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, postcolonial texts display a refusal of the standard of normative or correct usage of the language of the center which is adopted as a tool and utilized in ways which express widely differing cultural experiences (Ashcroft et al 38-39). Practices such as using oral tradition and specific modes of narration have been characterized as subversive strategies that peripheral writers have come up with to resist assimilation. This appropriation of the colonial language means that the postcolonial writer seizes the language of the center to express all the local proverbs, riddles, songs, chants, legends and colloquialisms, thus preserving the sense of orality in the written text. The result is a syncretic and hybridized text that does not privilege the center or margin, but instead establishes a dialectic between the languages of the center and the margin (41).

I would like to argue that the strategies of appropriation can be applied to writings by Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Iran, and Syria, in order to show how these translingual texts defy the state-imposed monoculturalism by merging the official language with their native Kurdish, thus manifesting a hybridity which is emblematic of the heterogeneous national culture. For this purpose *Cloudy Years* (2000), a Persian novel by the Iranian-born writer Ali-Ashraf Darvishian, has been selected to be analyzed according to the strategies of postcolonial writing proposed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* to show that this novel is a hybrid cross-cultural text which reverses the language hierarchies by undermining the norms of the language in which it is written, thereby contributing to the literature that affirms the postcolonial hybridity of texts produced by Kurdish writers.

The dilemma facing Kurdish writers and their choice of language has been hitherto discussed by Alparsalan Nas who has analyzed the choice of medium in novels by Mehmed Uzun, a Kurdish writer from Turkey. Having written several novels in Kurdish, Uzun began to write his next novel *Hawara Dicleye* (The Cry of Dicle, 2003) in his native Kurdish while simultaneously translating it into Turkish, an act signaling Uzun’s departure from nationalist literature: rather than trying solely to save Kurdish, he opens up “a dialogue between languages” (Nas 186) because for him, “writing in Kurdish also enriches Turkey and the Turkish language” (Ibid.). Similarly, Yaşar Kemal, a Kurd and Turkey’s most internationally known author, upholds the idea of literary translingualism by pointing out the contribution that minority cultures can make to the Turkish language and culture (Kemal). Kemal, himself,

introduced a wide range of Anatolian myths and folklore to the dominant Turkish narrative with epic novels in the folk tradition including, *Three Anatolian Legends (1967)*, *The Legend of Mount Ararat (1970)*, and *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls (1971)*.

Like Uzun and Kemal, Darvishian has celebrated translingualism by asserting that the Persian and Kurdish languages and cultures can mutually enrich each other (Darvishian, “Kurdish Literature Will Find Its Way”). What comes below is an attempt to explain how he has achieved this in one of his best known works by incorporating the Kurdish dialect and culture of his hometown into his Persian narrative, thus highlighting his cultural distinctiveness while writing in the official language of his country.

Ali-Ahraf Darvishian and *Cloudy Years*

In Iran, state policies towards Kurdish during different political eras have been described either as “linguicide” or “restricted and controlled tolerance” (Sheyholislami). The scholarly research conducted in the area of sociolinguistics in Iran all point to the endangered state of local languages due to the hegemonic influence of Persian language (Bashirnejad; Mashayekh; Zolfaqari). The denigration of non-Persian peoples and languages is so internalized and institutionalized that the words “Persia” and “Persian” have come to represent “Iran” and “Iranian”, with the unfortunate consequence of the omission of minority languages and literatures from anthologies and history books.¹

The exclusion of minor literatures in state-run schools, despite the stipulation of Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution that “regional and tribal languages” are “allowed” to be used “for teaching of their literature in Schools,”² denies non-Persian children access to their own literary heritage. Naturally, many of these children, especially in cities, grow up admiring Persian literature without any knowledge of other Iranian literatures, while some have even become prominent figures in the Persian literary canon. Particularly among them, Ibrahim Yunesi (1926-2012) and Mohamad Ghazi (1913-1998), of Kurdish origin, contributed significantly to the development of the Persian language and literature by translating and introducing to it some of the world’s greatest novels. Another such figure is the Kurdish-born story-writer, Ali-Ashraf Darvishian who is best known for his autobiographical novel, *Cloudy Years*.

Ali-Ashraf Darvishian, Iranian story-writer and scholar, was born in Kermanshah in 1941 to a large family where his maternal and paternal uncles, grandparents, parents and siblings all lived together. His father worked as a blacksmith along with his brothers. His maternal uncles worked in the oil company and brought back home Marxist pamphlets and books by Maxim Gorki which kindled Darvishian's lifelong commitment to the working class. This sense of justice later manifested itself in his writings which mostly depict the difficult life of the impoverished masses in Kermanshah. Later in his life, Darvishian came under the influence of prominent Persian writers such as Jalal Al-Ahmad and Simin Daneshvar who encouraged him to pursue writing seriously (Darvishian, "I like the world to be covered with snow").

But the figure who played the main role in shaping Darvishian's life as a writer was his grandmother. She was a learned woman and an authority on numerous Kurdish legends and traditions of Kermanshah. Due to her influence, collecting folk legends and myths became one of Darvishian's lifelong obsessions. *Kurdish Myths and Proverbs*, *Encyclopedia of Kermanshahi Dialect* and *The Encyclopedia of Iranian People's Myths* are the results of this obsession with Kurdish oral tradition. This rich oral tradition is also reflected in Darvishian's autobiographical novel, *Cloudy Years*.

Cloudy Years, first published in 1991, is a four-volume novel about the life of a boy called Sharif who narrates the events of the story as he sees them. The novel begins when Sharif is a three or four year old kid living with his parents, grandparents, his uncles and his two younger brothers in Kermanshah. With Sharif's father out of work, their meager source of income is his mother's knitting and his grandmother's sewing. To help their family, Sharif, his brothers and uncles are put to work at an early age doing menial jobs. His uncles acquaint him with Marxist ideas and later join the Marxist opposition party, Tudeh. However, after the brutal suppression of Marxists under Mohammad Reza Shah, who solidified his grasp on power in the country after the 1953 coup, many Tudeh members, including Sharif's uncle, lost hope in the party and changed their allegiance in favor of Khomeini. Sharif, though, remained loyal to his socialist ideals and continued his struggle against the oppression of people in the hands of the local lords and government authorities. One day when he is collecting Kurdish proverbs and myths in a village in Kermanshah, the intelligence service suspect and consequently arrest him. After that, prison and torture become an integral part of Sharif's life and he spends eleven years in Shah's prisons. He is finally released after the

revolution of Iranian people in 1979 with which the novel ends.

For obvious reasons, the reviews of *Cloudy Years* always focus on how the novel depicts the social and political realities of Iran in an era spanning from the end of the Second World War to the fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979 but almost no attention is brought to the analysis of the stylistic features of this novel which is regrettable given the fact that *Cloudy Years* is one of the richest sources of Kurdish oral tradition. A large part of the novel which deals with Sharif's childhood is mainly constituted of stories told by different characters in the novel. These narratives abound in Kurdish legends, colloquialisms, songs, proverbs and myths and the oral history of Kermanshah.

A Postcolonial Reading of *Cloudy Years*

As mentioned earlier, postcolonial writers infuse their works with their local cultures and traditions: oral culture, vernacularism, local folk, mythology, and history. This persistence of orality in written literature is the result of the lack of a literary tradition. Due to this gap, the indigenous writer not only has to translate from one language to another, but also "from a spoken to a written culture" (Talib 75). The oral narratives are appropriated into a written text while preserving the sense of orality, and thus the indigenous histories and legacies are preserved using the language of the colonizer (Kharbe 425).

Darvishian's autobiography is similar to postcolonial literatures in that the source of its narrative mode draws upon indigenous oral traditions even as it is written in the only official language of the country, Persian. Orality is the central indigenous mode in most postcolonial writing, as in *Cloudy Years*, which is replete with proverbs, songs, colloquialisms, local legends and myths. In *Cloudy Years*, the oral tradition of a region is represented by the writer's family coming from a rural area, and this orality is maintained in the written text. A large part of the novel which deals with Sharif's childhood is mainly constituted of stories told by different characters in the novel, mainly the elders. This autobiographical novel is not written by a single individual – it is a collective biography in which the first person narrative merges with spoken narratives of the narrator's father, Buchan, his mother, Zari, his grandmother, Bibi, her husband, Uncle Olfat, among other characters. The poly-voiced narrative is distributed among many characters as they tell their life-stories which are closely related to the unwritten history of the region.

In addition to reflecting the history of the region, Darvishian relies heavily on local cultural beliefs in his writing. An interesting example of local traditions recorded in the novel is the tradition of marrying girls to drying up lakes. In the novel we read about Nazka, an old woman who was wedded to a lake when it was about to dry. Nazka narrates,

They sat me on a horse and took me to the lake and performed the wedding sermon. I slept at the lake for forty days and each day I woke up before sunrise, undressed and washed my body in the lake seven times. A small hut was set up for me and Kaw Lake...But it was its fault. It dried out little by little. People lost their farms to drought. (Darvishian, *Sālhāyi Abrī (Cloudy Years)* 559)

As the above anecdote shows, many local beliefs and practices reflected in the novel are based on a strong belief in supernatural powers. From the beginning of the novel, when Sharif's mother, Zari, is giving birth to her youngest son, the readers are introduced to a world in which the supernatural and natural are not distinguishable. Aal³ comes to take Zari's life. It is holding her heart in its yellow skeletal hands. If the heart is soaked in the river, his mother will die. Sharif screams and we realize those were all his hallucinations. However, Aal is not just a creature of Sharif's imagination. When the baby is finally delivered, one of the women takes the placenta, sticks needles in it, wraps it in a cloth and buries it in a corner of the garden so that Aal will not claim the baby's life. Suddenly a black cat appears and the women hurry to chase it away from the house. They are certain that it is Aal, whose existence is as unquestionable as the existence of the jinn.

It is interesting to see that the belief in these "old wives' tales" is not particular to women, and men are also bearers of such folk myths. Assured of the existence of the jinn, Sharif's father says to uncle Olfat, "you know better than anyone else that every house has a jinn...when a building is made, the jinn move into it sooner than the people who own it" (45). There are many references throughout the novel to the belief in black magic such as the evil eye. One small scene that stands out in this case is the scene when Sharif's grandmother, Bibi, uses a mixture of a boy's urine and the feces of a white dog to fend off the black magic cast by a woman (724).

Bibi is the first character in the novel who is introduced as a story-teller. From the beginning of the novel, it is Bibi who feeds Sharif's imagination with stories about the supernatural and the fantastic. She is an authority on Kurdish folktales which are frequently narrated in the novel. These folktales tell how local birds like Kaka Yusuf and hoopoe⁴ were once human beings who were transformed by God. Bibi narrates the story of how Kaka Yunes tricked his younger brother, Kaka Yusuf, out of his inheritance after their father died. Later, full of regret, Kaka Yunes abandons his home, wife and wealth in search of his brother. God changes him into a bird so that he could fly, calling out his brother's name asking him to return home (21-3). According to Bibi, the hoopoe, too, was once human:

She was a newly-wed wife afraid of her evil mother-in-law. One day her mother-in-law gives her a bowl of milk to boil. She leaves the milk on fire and starts combing her beautiful hair. The milk boils over the pot and spills over the fire. The poor bride is so afraid of her mother-in-law's reaction that she asks God to change her into a bird. God grants her wish, the comb sticks to her head and she flies away. (538)

Bibi's world is one that combines fantasy and reality. She believes that animals understand everything so she treats them like human beings. When she leaves her house she talks to her cat and asks him to look after the chickens. She is aghast when she hears that her husband has beaten up a cat saying "what if it was a jinn? What if it took revenge on our kids?" (47). In Bibi's world, the spirit and human worlds coexist. She believes that there is a fairy princess in her humble room and that she can easily make the princess find her lost needle. She just needs to tie a knot at the corner of a piece of cloth that prevents the princess from finding a husband (105).

Even trees, food and water have souls. As part of her prayers, Bibi offers votive date seeds to the river and asks the river to take them to a safe and clean place. At another point, when Sharif, who has just recovered from an illness, wants to eat pickles, she adjures the pickles not to harm him. Much to Sharif's surprise, Bibi addresses the pickles saying, "hey pickles, you are an enemy of Abbas⁵ if you harm this child" (156). This belief in the supernatural and magic is so firmly implanted in her mind that she incorporates them in her narratives as unquestioned facts. Bibi's account of her brother's death is an example of such amalgamation;

There was a tall old cedar in the middle of our garden. One day when my brother was staggering home drunk, he found the tree blocking his way, attacked it, but fell on the ground and knocked himself out. The next day he decided to cut the tree. When the lumberjacks started sawing the tree, we heard a heartbreaking shriek coming from it. The saw broke and the workers stopped. Blood ran from the injured tree for two months and filled the whole pool...the tree's shrieks woke us up in the middle of the night, every night. We covered our ears but we could still hear it clearly. Until one night, the tree fell on my late brother's room...every night we could hear wailing and crying coming from around the tree. My brother, who was the strongest man in Kirmaşan, became thinner and thinner until one morning we found his emaciated body next to the tree. (105-6)

Bibi is not the only story-teller in the novel. In the long winter nights when the family gathers around the korsi,⁶ the elders take turns telling stories about their own lives or famous local heroes. The tale of multiple generations is told by different members of the family. These oral narratives are the only source of history for these people. They tell stories about the events of the past, the family's history as well as the history of Kirmaşan.⁷

One of the main chapters of the novel is an account of the life of Dawrisha, Sharif's grandfather, as narrated by his father, Buchan, over the course of three days. He starts narrating the story on the Çile⁸ night, the longest night in winter, when all the family is gathering around the korsi drinking tea and eating watermelon seeds. Bibi's husband, Uncle Olfat, starts the round of story-telling by describing the "year of the famine" during the First World War when Kermanshah became the battleground of Russian and Ottoman forces which fought over the control of Iran. At the end of the war in 1918, an influenza epidemic entered Iran via the western border from Baghdad to Kermanshah and ultimately spread to the entire country which was also plagued by a great famine as well as a cholera outbreak (see Azizi et al). In *Cloudy Years*, Uncle Olfat describes how the famine, the cholera and the Russian invasion affected the daily life in Kermanshah during the reign of Ahmad Shah (1909-1925):

The bakeries used ground date seeds and beans for bread...it looked alright but if you ate it on an empty stomach, you would throw up and die...in this road, several people had fallen on the ground dying...once a Cossack stopped a

peasant who was carrying a small bag of flour to sell in town. The Cossack wanted to take his bag by force and when he resisted, he shot him. (66)

Bibi adds to the story by recounting the threat of Russian invasion, and giving her own version of the story of the famine:

We were all hiding in fear of the Russians. People kept their doors locked all day and night...It was the reign of Ahmad Shah. He was a kid...a kid cannot rule...people were hopeless. The famine came. People ate breads made of ground date seeds and beans. They were full of cockroaches, flies and other insects. Cholera came and killed thirty people in our road. There was no one to bury them... (67)

Here, the unwritten history of Kirmaşan becomes available through Bibi and her husband's stories. Furthermore, the emphasis is on listening and a community of listeners rather than the first-person narrator, whose biography is less about him than his family's oral narratives and his community's oral history. This poly-voiced narrative form that combines memoir, biography and history is an important feature of the novel in that such oral accounts, especially the memories of the elderly, are sometimes the only sources of history; and if they go unrecorded, important aspects of the local history will be lost forever.

Darvishian's birthday coincided with the Anglo-Soviet invasion and occupation of Iran during the Second World War (25 August–17 September 1941), as a result of which Kermanshah became subject to British control for four years and six months. Naturally, British colonialism, war, famine, and political oppression feature prominently in the novel, especially where it deals with events leading to the 1953 coup d'état. Early in the novel, the four-year-old Sharif witnesses the humiliating defeat of Kermanshah's army by the British (57-64) and later on experiences the anti-imperialist movement that sweeps the nation and leads to pro-Mosaddegh protests by the angry impoverished masses in Kermanshah (560-792).

In its depiction of historical events from the perspective of the disenfranchised and the poor, Darvishian's novel recovers a "history from below" which demonstrates the exploitation of workers by the Anglo-Iranian oil company, the abject poverty in villages and

the vulnerability of peasants to petty whims or caprice of their feudal landlords.⁹ It also uncovers forgotten stories of powerful acts of resistance by disadvantaged yet courageous groups and individuals, such as the workers' protests on May the 1st, and Sharif and Dawrisha, who stood up against injustice and suffered extreme forms of punishment as a result.

Perhaps one of the most interesting examples of the documentation of local history is when the novel provides a glimpse into the life of Shahmorad Moshtaq, known as Shami, the Kurdish poet from Kermanshah who has been excluded from the Iranian, as well as the Kurdish, literary canon. Shami was a blind penniless poet who wrote social satires. His poem *Kiranişînî* (Tenancy) is among his best known poems in Kermanshah where many people know at least some parts of it by heart. Shami appears in the novel when women have circled around him, offering him tea and asking him to recite his poem, *Kiranişînî*. He recites two more poems: an address to Mosaddeq, the prime minister at the time, and Mosaddeq's reply to Shami (706-717). In the novel, all of Shami's poems, which are originally in Kurdish, have been translated into Persian and therefore have lost their original rhyme and rhythm. However, this translation is a direct or word-for-word translation which is very loyal to the source language. This loyalty to Kurdish has resulted in a Persian which sounds more Kurdish than Persian. As seen below, there is little difference between the original Kurdish poem and its Persian rendering. The underlined phrases in particular defy conformity to the standards of Persian grammar and usage. See the following examples which are among many:

- Tway bizanî seg we halim now, asayiş nîrim ne rûj û ne şû
- Râstî ki sag bi hâlam nabâshad, na rûz âsâyish dâram u na shab
[I am worse off than a dog, I have no comfort in day nor at night]

- Er bûşî mirdim ûşin we tewes, le min nepirsin teklîfiman çes
- Agar bi ânâ bigû'î murdam bigûyand bi tabas, az man napursîd
taklîfiman chîst

[If I tell them I'm dying they say to Tabas (to hell), do not ask me what we should do]

Word-for-word translation, a common feature of translingual literature, is an attempt to appropriate oral narratives into a written text while preserving the sense of orality. Other translingual features in postcolonial texts include: editorial intrusions such as the footnote, the glossing or parenthetical translation, as well as untranslated words, interlanguage and syntactic fusion. The stylistic analysis of Darvishian's *Cloudy Years* shows unmistakable similarities to these translingual postcolonial features. For instance, *Cloudy Years* abounds with Kurdish words which have been left untranslated. Although the writer has provided the translation of around 300 words in the appendix of the novel, there are still many words used by the Kurdish characters in this four-volume novel which have not been translated. Such words include simple words like *mâl* (house), *şêt* (mad), *zoran* (wrestling), *çarşêw* (chador), among many others. The choice of leaving words untranslated in postcolonial text is considered a political act because translation gives the translated word and thus the 'receptor' culture the higher status (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 65). By denying this privilege, the postcolonial writer forces the reader to find the meaning in the context and in a way to learn the local language which thereby refuses to be subordinated to the dominant culture.

The fusion of linguistic characteristics of two languages or "Interlanguage", a term coined by Nemser and Selinker to characterize the linguistic system used by learners of a second language, is considered a common feature of translingual literature produced by postcolonial writers (cited in *ibid.* 64). In diglossic societies where a majority of people speak two or more languages, the linguistically subordinate groups have to learn the superordinate group's language as their second language. These second-language learners develop language systems distinct from both their mother tongues and their target language. *Cloudy Years* is an example of such linguistic fusion in its adaptation, integration and creolization of Persian for Kurdish cultural distinctiveness. Although many characters in the novel speak Kurdish, their conversations have been translated into Persian. However, this Persian is not the standard educated Persian but transformed through the direct translation or word-for-word rendering of Kurdish expressions into Persian. This linguistic fusion is most vivid when Sharif's father is narrating the story of how they lost their house;

- Châri'am nâchâr bûd. Pâk u pûch shudîm. Khānahmān chunān khālī shud ki shānibisar dar ān āvāz mīkhānd. (Darvishian, *Sālhāyi Abrī (Cloudy Years)* 36)
[My choice was no choice. We got clean and null. Our house was so empty that hoopoes sang in it.]

The vocabulary of the above example differs remarkably from the daily Persian speech and shows clear features of a distinct cultural tradition. “Chāri’am nāchār būd”, for example, is a word-for-word translation of a Kurdish expression denoting hopelessness, while “hoopoes singing in an empty place” is not a Persian expression and “shānibisar” [hoopoe], itself, is never used in everyday Persian. Its Kurdish equivalent, on the other hand, is “pepû silêmanî”, which is common in Kurdish folklore and the line itself is the literal translation of a Kurdish proverb.

Use of repetitive words is an important stylistic feature of Kurdish language, as it is spoken in Kermanshah. Iranian scholars Iranzadeh and Sepehvand wrongly argue that Darvishian’s years of teaching in villages and the inspiration of the sounds of nature are the reason behind the occurrence of these words which they describe as examples of onomatopoeia (Iranzadeh and Sepehvand 62). Therefore, they completely ignore the influence of Kurdish in the language of *Cloudy Years*. In Kurdish, repetition is sometimes used to derive collectiveness, for example, *tişt-mişt* (things), or *gûl-u-mûl* (flowers and other plants) (cited in Shopen 46). An example of this in *Cloudy Years* is *çepe-çepe* (in handfuls) in “Bībī sūrati khud ra kharāshīdī va mūha ra chapa chapa kandī ast [Bibi has scratched her face and pulled her hair out in handfuls]” (Darvishian, *Sālhāyi Abrī (Cloudy Years)* 54). Sometimes repetitions occur in Kurdish to express onomatopoeic sounds or ideophonic sensations which are also frequent in Darvishian’s novel. For example, when Sharif says, “Pushti gardanam milq milq mīkard [The back of my neck was going *milq-milq*]” (137), he succinctly expresses the sensation of throbbing pain by relying on his native Kurdish. This code-mixing is a linguistic phenomenon common in translingual texts.

Darvishian not only infuses his narrator’s Persian with Kurdish but also switches the language codes from Persian to Kurdish in the dialogues of different characters. While the narrator reports the events in standard Persian with infrequent occurrences of interlanguage, the language changes from the narrator’s standard Persian to other characters’ local language varieties. In the following example, the narrator moves from Persian to the underlined Kermanshahi Persian which is a variety of Persian appropriated by people in Kermanshah and heavily influenced by Kurdish:

Mudīr az zīri ‘iynakash bā khashm marā nigāh mīkunad. Huwl mīkunam. Bi

titi piti mīuftam. Bā luknat mīgūyam, bi khudā...bi khudā...dasmān shikastāwtāwd agi zadāwdīm tū gūshi īn. (Darvishian, *Sālhāyi Abrī (Cloudy Years)* 358)

[The principal is looking at me angrily behind his glasses. I'm nervous. I stutter. I lisp, 'I swear to God! I swear to God! May my hand breaks if I slapped him in the ear.']

Here he moves from his own Persian to the Kurdish of a local masseuse:

Sahar ki mīshavad mardī az myāni kūchi mīguzarad. Bībī mīgūyad kīsikishi hamām ast va bi sari kārash mīravad. Mard hiy dād mīzanad: sahara...sahara...halsin. Khudā bāwgtān byāmurzad...halsin...sahara...sahara halsin. (188-189)

[When morning breaks a man passes through the street. Bibi says he massages people in the bath. He keeps shouting, 'It's dawn...it's dawn...wake up...God bless your fathers...wake up, it's dawn.']

The characters in the novel are not ideal speakers in a completely homogeneous speech community. Their Persian is tainted by an amalgamation of Persian and Kurdish which attests to a heterogeneous cultural reality. Therefore, for its syncretic and hybridized style, *Cloudy Years* can be considered a translingual work which refuses to conform to the idea of the purity of the national culture. This autobiographical novel is an example of the appropriation of a dominant language by a Kurd whose own language has been marginalized in Iran. Using textual strategies to integrate his spoken Kurdish narratives into his written Persian has enabled Darvishian to produce a culturally distinct language which is grammatically hybridized, attesting to the existence of a distinct Kurdish cultural identity and therefore the hybridity of the national culture.

It is important to note that the national identity of the postcolonial or the marginalized group is not pure and I am not arguing for imposing separatist, nativist/nationalist readings on Darvishian's work.¹⁰ Cultures are susceptible to change and influence from outside forces and the movement of different cultural groups into each other's areas and the immigration of the marginalized to the center result in the heterogeneity of postcolonial cultural identity as well as the hybridity of the national identity. As a result of the interaction between the

cultures of the center and the margin new transcultural forms are produced within the contact zone of the margin and center. This hybrid nature of the transcultural form is considered a strength rather than a weakness because a translingual writer, as Kellman argues, is free from the constraints of one language (Kellman, *Switching Languages*).

Ali-Ashraf Darvishian himself upholds the idea of the hybridity of literary works by pointing out the heterogeneity of Iranian cultures and the contribution that each can make to the Persian language and culture. Darvishian asserts that the reason behind his inclusion of Kurdish words in his works is his belief that “Persian can be fully rich only when it incorporates all the different languages and dialects spoken in Iran” (Darvishian, “Kurdish Literature Will Find Its Way”).

Conclusion

Linguistic unification or homogenization, which is one of the main causes of discontent among minority groups, is an integral aspect of nationalist ideologies and nation-building projects. “One language, one people” is such a pervasive equation that many still see bilingualism as a threat to national unity and identity (McCrone 119). This essentialist attitude naturally leads to the exclusion of minority languages from school curricula and the creation of monolingual literary canons and anthologies which fail to represent the multicultural multilingual realities of the states. In ethno-nationalist states, it is often the case that the hierarchy of languages leaves the writers from periphery no choice but to write in the official languages and for a bigger audience. But when the dominant language is also the medium of education from an early age, it is not an alien language since it has been the medium through which the writer has been familiarized with the world literary masterpieces and to which he owes his intellectual, if not emotional, make-up as a writer (Walder 43).

However, as we have seen writing in the dominant language does not mean assimilation. There are various translingual strategies that writers of the marginalized societies use to differentiate themselves from the mainstream culture. Writers from these literary backgrounds might write in dominant languages but they assert their sense of identity through the use of dialects, imagery, and narrative modes not found in those languages themselves. These new subjectivities construct their national identity in a state whose official language they use.

These and other translingual characteristics of postcolonial literary theory are apparent in other works by Kurdish writers, such as Salim Barakat, a Syrian Kurd who has made extensive use of Kurdish oral traditions, legends of warriors, and folktales of peasant lovers and feudal tyrants. His novel *Fuqaha al-Zalam (Sages of darkness, 1985)*, which is about the struggle and hardship of life in a remote Kurdish village in Syria and is written in the mode of magical realism, can be read in the light of the homogenizing nationalist policies of the Syrian government and its ideology of Arab unity that denies the rights of ethnic minorities. Moreover, by using extensive metaphors and metonyms, he has been able to make the Arabic language so difficult that “even Arab readers will fail to understand it” (Barakat 88). Barakat himself explains that his difficult language is an attempt to work out his existential confusion as a Syrian Kurd whose fate is to be a foreigner in his own land (46).

Translingual strategies are shared by Kurdish writers, regardless of the country and language. Using textual strategies to make their texts fit their spoken Kurdish narratives has enabled Kurdish writers to gain a larger audience and yet produce a culturally distinct idiom that announces itself as different while being “Persian”, “Turkish” or “Syrian”. As demonstrated in this paper, the hybridized nature of the translingual text does not privilege the center or the margin, but instead establishes a dialectic between the languages of the center and the margin. Moreover, it reverses the language hierarchies by undermining the norms of the language in which it is written. While dominated languages are systematically exposed to the dominant languages through state-run media and its institutions, this balance is turned around when a minority literary work, such as *Cloudy Years*, forces the majority language speakers to acculturate to its norms. In Iran the Kurds have always had to learn Persian. In reading this novel, it is the turn for Persians to familiarize themselves with Kurdish.

Notes

1. For example, Jan Rypka’s *History of Iranian Literatures* ignores a large part of Iranian literatures by focusing only on Persian literature, giving only scattered references to Iranian literatures in non-Persian languages. This defect is noted by Richard N. Frye who argues, “Since this is a history of ‘Iranian’ literature and not just Persian, one misses any discussion of Baluchi, Kurdish, Pashto and Ossetic literature” (Frye 91).
2. IRI Constitution:

<http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution.html> (accessed 20 May 2016)//

3. A mythical creature that harms women in labour or their babies.
4. A colorful bird notable for its distinctive 'crown' of feathers
5. Ali ibn-Abitaleb's son, a respected figure among the Shia Muslims
6. Korsi is a table with a heater underneath it, and blankets thrown over it. People used to put samovar on the table and get under the blankets in cold winters of Iran.
7. The Kurdish name for Kermanshah
8. Chelleh or Yalda in Persian
9. Recently, scholars have pointed out the need to acknowledge the role of the common people in social movements and to examine oral cultural forms in order to recover "history from below". This concept was developed by British Marxist historians such as E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm and was later developed by the South Asian Subaltern Studies School which aimed to re-inscribe into history authentic accounts by subaltern classes and thus restore their agency in contributing to the dynamics of historical change.
10. I am also not arguing against other approaches to the study of works written by minor writers in majority languages. A social study may account for class domination and the uneven and unequal development of nations, languages and cultures, and see relations of domination even when languages are legally equal (as in Canada, where not only indigenous languages are repressed but also French continues to be under the domination of English largely due to the operation of market forces).

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