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The (Re)production of Patriarchy in the Kurdish Language[1]

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Many Western observers of Kurdish society and most Kurdish nationalists claim that Kurdish women enjoy more freedom than their Persian, Turkish and Arab sisters. The claim has been questioned on historical and political grounds (see Mojab 1987; Mojab, this volume; van Bruinessen, this volume). This chapter brings the debate to the realm of language, and argues that the unequal distribution of gender power is clearly recorded in the Kurdish language, which is one of the ignored yet powerful sites in the exercise of patriarchal rule. The evidence presented in this study reveals that linguistic, discursive, and symbolic violence against women is ubiquitous, matched by various forms of physical and emotional violence. Women have been denied the right to control their own bodies, sexuality, and sexual desire. The right to control women's sexuality is conferred on the male members of the family, tribe, community, nation, and the modern state.

Theoretical Issues

One of the contributions of the feminist movements of the 1960s in the West was the creation of a body of knowledge about social gender and language, focusing on the exercise of patriarchal power in the realm of language. Individual feminists, widely dispersed throughout North America, acted as a language academy, and in the early 1970s launched a language reform movement by successfully promoting 'non-sexist,' 'inclusive' or 'gender-neutral' language use.

It is significant that, since ancient times, 'grammatical gender' (masculine, feminine, and neuter) has been studied and widely codified in the descriptions of diverse languages. However, this tradition of

scholarship, which continues in our time, has not examined the active presence of social gender in the life of language. In the early twentieth century, philologists such as Gustav Cederschiöld and Otto Jespersen took a step beyond grammatical gender by examining the different ways women and men use language. Of course, in these gender-conscious studies, patriarchy was not seen as a power capable of structuring verbal communication. Thus, in the absence of a theory of gender power, this body of research was itself gendered: it treated male language as a norm from which 'women's language' deviated (Romaine 1999: 34-5).

Feminist critiques of the patriarchal constitution of language date back to the nineteenth century. In their struggles for equal rights, some feminists in the United States contested the exclusionary power of male generics such as *man*, *person*, and *he* as used in religious and legal institutions (Matossian 1998). However, the emerging feminist scholarship was slow to develop these insights into a body of knowledge capable of challenging the claims of androcentric social and linguistic theory. It took the feminist (and other social) movements of the 1960s to theoretically challenge the (re)production of patriarchal power in the realm of language. By the 1970s, the study of *sexist language* or *sexism in language* offered abundant evidence about the ways in which language is shaped by and, at the same time, shapes the subordinate position of women and the dominance of men.

The recency of feminist linguistics is evidence of the maturing of feminist theory, which is now in a position to challenge the political and epistemological premises of the social sciences, including its 'queen,' that is, the 'rigorous' discipline of linguistics. Although feminist interest in linguistics is broad, 'sexist language' remained at the heart of the debate.

The feminist critique of 'sexist language' was conducted from a plurality of theoretical and political perspectives. Generally, critics rejected the claim that language is a neutral means of communication serving everyone equally and equitably. According to one trend of theorization, language not only *reflects* hierarchical structures of power such as male dominance, but also *constructs* and *reproduces* unequal gender relations. In the strong version of this view, language is 'man made,' and plays a determining role in the exercise of patriarchal rule. According to this view, consistent with the *linguistic determinism* of the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,' we think and understand the world through our language.[2] In the words of one linguistic determinist, Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world' (quoted in Romaine 1999: 21).

While many feminists did not adhere to a determinist position, they argued that sexist language played a significant role in the reproduction of patriarchy. Vast empirical evidence together with increasing theoretical refinement convinced many to resist androcentric language

use. By the early 1980s, the feminist movements in North America had already succeeded in launching the reform of English towards gender- and race-neutral verbal communication. In the early 1990s, the linguistic status quo was visibly disturbed by the proliferation of non-sexist dictionaries and innumerable guides to inclusive language use issued by institutions as diverse as mass media enterprises, universities, churches, and governments. In less than a decade, the struggle for non-sexist language had already turned into an international movement, involving speech communities as diverse as Lithuanian, Chinese, French, and Japanese (Pauwels 1998).

While the opposition to gender-inclusive language has been extensive, much like the resistance against the suffrage movement, the success of the feminist language reform is remarkable. It was achieved in the absence of a language academy, and under conditions of patriarchal hegemony over intellectual and educational institutions. However, if the opponents of women's suffrage rights lost the battle entirely (in the West and many non-Western countries), the conservative forces opposed to inclusive language soon found congenial voices in a new generation of feminists who question the need for interfering in sexist language. Today, feminists of a postmodernist or poststructuralist persuasion reject the idea of male *domination*, arguing that language is an indeterminate system which allows all speakers/hearers or writers/readers the freedom to make their own meanings. The process of signification or creating meaning is, according to this view, flexible and open, and involves 'negotiations' between males and females; it would be useless, therefore, to reform language (for a brief review of these claims, see Cameron 1998).

Some of the theorists who oppose *dominance* (male power) as the main target of feminist action tend to present *difference* as a positive constituent of language:

> Here, theorists seek to distance themselves from the dominance concept. Politically, it is felt that work on women should avoid the perpetual comparison of female with male norms, which invariably places women in a position of deficit. Instead, the aim is to study women's use of language on its own terms…. To a certain extent, the difference view explores the linguistic behaviour of women in a more positive light, and explanations are sought in the context of distinctive subcultures within which gender-specific patterns of verbal interaction are thought to be acquired. (Johnson 1997:10)

While it is difficult to distinguish between the 'difference approach' and traditional liberal-pluralist conceptualizations of power, some feminists do not rule out relations of dominance, and argue that the two are not mutually exclusive (Cameron 1985: 23-4; Johnson 1997: 10).

Poststructuralist discourse analysts also question the reform of androcentric language. They claim that the constructions and contestations of gendered and sexist meanings take place in the realm of 'discourse' rather than language. Cameron (1998: 963) observes: 'As discourse has attracted more attention, "sexist language" has attracted less.' Indeed, many reformists have reduced signification to the level of words, and ignored meaning-making at the levels of syntax and discourse (the latter is used, in linguistics, in the sense of utterances larger than the sentence).

Some critics question the possibility of successful language reform insofar as it fails to change the extra-linguistic world of patriarchal gender relations. Ehrlich and King, for instance, argue that '[b]ecause linguistic meanings are, to a large extent, socially constructed and constituted, terms initially introduced to be nonsexist and neutral may lose their neutrality in the mouths of a sexist speech community and/or culture.' For instance, neutral generics like *spokesperson* or singular *they* are 'often not used nor interpreted in their intended (neutral) way' (1994: 59). In other words, as Cameron (1998: 963-4) notes, '[w]hat people do in discourse overrides changes initiated at other levels, because discourse is the key site for the social construction of meaning.' One may argue, however, that while the extra-linguistic patriarchal 'reality' denies non-sexist language a rather enduring life or significant structuring powers, the extra-discursive world would equally constrain feminist discursive interventions.

The current fascination with the idea of an 'indeterminate,' 'contingent' or 'fluid' world is regularly frustrated by the ways in which patriarchy continues to engage in symbolic (linguistic) and physical violence against women. Even some researchers who emphasize the limitations of feminist intervention in language refuse to give up the struggle for democratization of language. Ehrlich and King (1994: 74), for instance, argue that 'nonsexist and feminist linguistic innovations challenge the absolute hegemony of.... [androcentric] meanings.' Cameron (1998: 970) believes that feminists should not stop 'trying to describe carefully, and to interpret persuasively, the ways in which words are used to make and remake the world.' While Pauwels (1998: xii) questions 'a direct, even causal, link between women's subordinate status in society and the androcentrism in language,' she provides a blue-print for challenging 'non-sexist language.' Her guidelines for feminist language planning consist of three stages—fact-finding, planning, and implementation (1998: 228-35). This chapter may be considered a preliminary 'fact-finding' step in identifying, describing and documenting androcentrism in the Kurdish language.

This study focuses on the exercise of patriarchal power in the realm of meaning. However, meaning itself is a locus of theoretical and political struggles where gender power is a major player. One site of

struggle, dating back to ancient philosophy, is the relationship between language and reality, and in recent times, discourse and reality.

Poststructuralists claim that language is a significatory rather than representational system of signs. Words, sentences, and discourses, according to this position, do not refer to or represent anything outside the realm of language or discourse; they do not have any referents in the extralinguistic or extradiscursive world, in 'reality,' or 'out there.'

The claim that language does not refer to the extra-linguistic world is based, in part, on a particular reading of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs. Each sign (e.g., a word, a photograph, green or red in traffic lights) is, according to this reading, composed of a signifier (e.g., a spoken or written word such as *woman*) and a signified (a concept, thought, or mental image of a woman or women). Signifier and signified are like two sides of a coin; a signifier refers to a signified not to a particular woman in the extra-linguistic world. This relationship between signifier and signified is, according to Ferdinand de Saussure, arbitrary. It is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic or natural relationship between the two. In other words, it is not the physicality of a woman or women that determines or produces the signifier: an individual woman is a female human being while the sign *woman* is a string of sounds, in spoken language, or a string of letters, *w-o-m-a-n*, in written language. Had the physical reality of women determined the signifier, all languages would have the same sign (word) to refer to women. In fact, even onomatopoeic words, which are reproductions or 'imitations' of 'real' sounds in nature, such as *crack*, *splash*, or *bubble*, are not the same in different languages. The arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified does not imply that individuals can make signifiers at will and attach meanings to them. It implies, rather, that the link between the two is established by convention, that is, relations of power in society and the history behind them.

The poststructuralist and deconstructionist reduction of language to a self-subsisting or autonomous sign system with no referents in the extralinguistic world has been critiqued, by Robert Grant (1996), as an 'anti-meaning ideology'. One may argue, dialectically, that language is both significatory and referential. Signification cannot be reduced to a process of semantic or mental exercise taking place independently of the world outside one's mind. The sign *woman* (the relationship between the signifier *w-o-m-a-n* and its signified), for instance, is a product of complex interactions between linguistic and extralinguistic worlds, especially the unequal division of power between the two genders. The relationship between a signifier and its signified is one of unity and conflict; this tension turns signification into a site of struggle among social classes, genders, nations, and all contending forces.

In this study, I treat language as a living social phenomenon used not simply for communication (in the sense of transmitting, imparting or exchanging information) but, more significantly, for the exercise and maintenance of power (class, gender, ethnicity, and so on) or access to it. Contesting linguistic and discursive determinism, I view meaning as a product of interactions between language (texts), speakers/writers, hearers/readers, and their historical and social contexts. While meanings change all the time, there is relative (semantic) stability, in the absence of which language users cannot communicate, and engage in the (re)production of their lives. In language, change and stability constitute a dialectical relationship of unity and conflict.

Methodological Considerations

Review of the Literature. 'Grammatical gender' is almost absent in Sorani Kurdish. Traditional and descriptive studies of standard Sorani and its subdialects emphasize the lack of gender distinctions in phonology, morphology (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and particles), and syntax. None of these studies deals with the dynamics of the semantic system. Writing about the gender of nouns, one of the best descriptive studies of Sorani dialects noted: 'there are no inflective morphemes, and hence no distinction of *grammatical* gender or case. In the system of Vocative endings, however, a distinction of *natural* gender is observed' (MacKenzie 1961: 56-7). For instance, the ending *-e* is used for 'naturally' gendered nouns, for example, in *koře*! 'Boy!' and *piyawe*! 'Man!,' and *-ê* is used in *kiçê*! 'Girl!' or *xuşkê* 'Sister!' The first, and perhaps only, grammatical study of Sorani which distinguishes between 'male speech' and 'female speech' is McCarus (1958). In the section under 'Style of Kurdish Described,' he noted: 'The Kurdish represented in this description is that of a male speaker using a normally informal colloquial style' (1958: 10). However, he did not provide any description of the male/female differentials of language use and structure, and found only one gendered difference, that is, the substitution of one phoneme by another (1958: 10). All the studies cited here were conducted by males. There is no study of Kurdish conducted within the framework of feminist linguistic theory.

While grammatical gender is nearly absent, patriarchal relations are powerfully present in Sorani Kurdish. However, research about patriarchy and language in Kurdistan is at a very preliminary stage. Apparently, the earliest investigations began in the Soviet Union, where students of Kurdish society usually paid attention to the structures of feudal-tribal patriarchy and 'matriarchy.' For instance, Avdal (1948, quoted in Dzhalil 1987: 29) examined, on the basis of 'ethnographic and folklore material,' the position of Kurdish women in the patriarchal family. He also briefly studied 'patronymy among the Kurds of Armenia in the 19th century' (Avdal 1959).

The call for the 'democratization of the Kurdish language' along non-sexist lines came too late, apparently, in 1993 (Hassanpour 1993: 11-12). In 1996-1997, J. Hosainpoor [Hêdî] compiled a list of idiomatic usages of the women of Mukri Kurdistan (in Iran), which was published in a more detailed version in 1999 (Hosainpoor 1997; Hêdî 1999). The author lists, in alphabetical order, words, phrases, proverbs, and other utterances, and provides meanings, exemplification, and comments. Hêdî has listed utterances used by women or about women, and those related to gender relations. However, many items are not related to women or, more generally, gender relations (for instance, items 6 and 21, p. 82; 25-28, p. 83; 61-63, p. 182; 6-10,12, p. 192; 15-16, 19, 23, 25, p. 212). He rejects patriarchy, and notes that misogynism is prevalent to the extent that women themselves use androcentric language (pp. 7-8).

F. Abdullahi, in a survey of a major Kurdish dictionary, *Henbane Borîne* (Hejar 1990), examined the misogynist definitions of selected words related to gender relations. This polemical study alerts readers to linguistic and lexicographic misogynism (Abdullahi 1997); however, it sometimes confuses misogynist definitions with misogynist words, and calls for the omission of the latter from the lexicon of the language and its dictionaries. While these words cannot be omitted from language (as long as patriarchy prevails, and written and oral records of the language exist), lexicographers should record them, provide non-misogynist, non-sexist definitions, and by doing so, promote democratic modes of communicating through language.

The Corpus. Kurdish is a language with diverse dialects spoken by a population of roughly twenty-five million that were forcibly divided, in 1918, among the neighboring states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Some speakers of the language are scattered throughout Central Asia, northeast Iran, the Caucasian states, and various diasporas in the Middle East and the West. Two dialects, Kurmanji or Northern Kurdish, and Sorani or Central Kurdish, have emerged as standard varieties. Kurdish and its speakers have been subjected to various forms of repression including linguicide, the deliberate killing of the language, especially by Turkey, Iran, and Syria (Hassanpour 2000).

My corpus is based primarily on the Sorani standard, both written and spoken. The material analysed in this study is collected from diverse sources, including both oral and written traditions. I am a male, native speaker of the Mukri subdialect of Sorani spoken in Mahabad, a city now incorporated into the province of Western Azerbaijan, Iran.

The collection of the corpus was shaped, among other factors, by my intuition about sexism in Kurdish, Persian and English, as well as my growing consciousness about patriarchal gender relations, and resistance against patriarchy. Having checked much of the corpus with several native speakers, I tried to document, as much as possible, the words and their meanings in the written tradition of the language.

Scope of the Study. Language is a highly complex system consisting of networks of interacting semantic, syntactic, morphological, lexical, and phonological (sub)systems. These systems help constitute power relations (class, gender, nation, etc.) and are, in turn, constituted by them. The focus of this study is on the semantics of words and phrases, and the discursive generation of meaning in proverbs, poetry, and other texts and contexts. Although syntax and phonology are also sites of gendered generation of meaning, they fall outside the scope of this research (except for a few syntactic cases).

The collected material was extensive, and I had to limit the study to selected aspects of gender relations. Even in the areas covered, I have not exhausted all the lexical and semantic resources of the language. Quite often, adequate semantic analysis is not provided, although patriarchal constituents of meaning are prominent even in the absence of detailed analysis. Every word or phrase is dissected, within square brackets, into its semantic and morphological constituents; the purpose is to give readers not familiar with Kurdish a better idea about the components of patriarchal meaning in the language. Thus, the morphological analysis provided is not intended to meet the demands of linguists with structuralist interests.

This is a preliminary survey of the exercise of patriarchal power in the semantic and lexical fields of Kurdish, and discursive constructions of meaning. It leaves much room for more sophisticated semantic and semiotic analyses of the data.

Focused on the reproduction of patriarchy in the Kurdish language, this chapter also provides evidence about the way lexicographers participate in the semantic exercise of power by selecting entries and providing definitions. The approach is not prescriptive, although I hope this study contributes to the development of egalitarian uses of Kurdish.

Limitations of the Study. The absence of a comprehensive monolingual dictionary with adequate semantic descriptions of Kurdish vocabulary is a serious obstacle to this research. The only monolingual dictionary that covers all the letters of the alphabet (Xal 1960-1976) does not provide detailed semantic differentiation of the entries. Hejar's Kurdish-Kurdish-Persian dictionary (1991) is more comprehensive than Xal, but does not offer a semantically satisfactory description of the lexicon. Hesenzade (1995) provides a listing of the words and meanings not covered in Hejar. The compiler of the most adequate monolingual dictionary, Zebîhî (1977-1979), was killed by the Iraqi government in the early 1980s when he had published only two volumes covering the first two letters of the alphabet. I did not have access to the monolingual dictionary of Giw Mukriyani, published posthumously in 1999. There are yet no Kurdish dictionaries of synonyms and antonyms. The only dictionary of synonyms is bilingual—Kurdish-English—and covers the

first letter of the Kurdish-Arabic alphabet, that is, *hemze* (Ismail Hasan 1989).

Presentation. Kurdish is now written in Kurdish-Arabic and Roman alphabets. In this study, all the material is presented in the Roman alphabet that is used by the Kurds of Turkey. Each word is followed by an 'analysis' or, rather, 'concatenation,' that is, linear stringing of its constituent elements within square brackets. This is followed by the meaning of the word within single quotes. The morphological analyses as well as much of the translation of meanings into English are based on T. Wahby and C.J. Edmonds, *A Kurdish-English Dictionary* (1966, abbreviated as W&E). The meanings, if taken from dictionaries or other sources, are documented through references to their authors.

Lexical and Semantic Constructions of Patriarchy
Semantically, the words *jin*, 'woman,' and *piyaw*, 'man' connote diametrically opposed qualities, values, modes of thinking, physical abilities, and emotions. This opposition appears in language in diverse forms, especially as antonymous pairs of words and meanings. The following provides some insight into lexical and semantic fields where patriarchal power is reproduced.

'Generic' Man: *Piyaw*. Kurdish, like many languages studied so far, uses the word *piyaw*, 'man,' in the sense of 'human being' implying both women and men; for instance, *piyaw kuştin* [*piyaw + kuştin* 'to kill'] means 'commit murder' and *piyaw xirap* [*xirap* 'bad, spoilt...'] is 'scoundrel, bad character' (W&E). Thus, *piyaw xirap kirdin* [*kirdin* 'to do'] 'to vilify, to slander' is used for both females and males.

Not quite frequent in Sorani Kurdish, *mirow* or *mirov* (Kurmanji Kurdish synonym for *piyaw*), 'man,' is increasingly used in the written standard in the sense of 'human (being)' or 'humankind' (for instance, *mafî mirov* 'human rights'). Kurmanji *meriv* or *mirov*, like its Sorani synonym, means both 'man' and 'human being' (Baran), and *merivtî* is both 'manliness, masculinity' and 'humanity, humaneness' (Chyet 1997).

Brave Men and Cowardly Women. The word *piyaw* 'man' is associated with qualities such as *xîret*, 'zeal,' *piyawetî* [*piyaw + -etî* nominal suffix meaning 'state, quality'], 'manliness, manhood,' *azayî*, 'bravery,' and *netirsî*, 'fearlessness.' One of the meanings of *piyaw* is, according to one dictionary (Hejar), '*merd û rend û diɫawa*.' The first word in this definition, *merd*, is shared by Kurdish and Persian. In Persian, it means 'man, playmate, partner, brave, capable, male, mankind, masculine, person, human (being), homo-, anthropo-,' according to *The Concise Persian-English Dictionary* (A. and M. Aryanpur-Kashani 1983). In Kurdish, it means 'manly, brave' with the following derivatives: *merdane* 'manly, bravely,' and *merdayetî* and

merdêtî, 'manliness, bravery' (W&E). The word *rend* is defined by Hejar as a 'very manly man' (*piyawî zor piyaw*); the third word in the definition, *diĺawa*, is defined by Hejar as 'generous.'

The adjective *piyawane* [*piyaw* + -*ane* adverbial suffix meaning 'appertaining to, -like, -ly'], 'manly,' is defined by Hejar as '*mêrane*' and '*merdane*.' *Mêr*, a variant of *merd*, means, according to Hejar, '*piyaw*, *şû* 'husband,' *aza le şeř* "brave in war."' *Mêrane* is defined as '*wek azayan* [*wek* 'like' + *azayan* 'brave ones'],' 'bravely,' and *merdane* as '*azayane*,' that is, 'bravely.'

Jin, 'woman,' is the major word for a member of the female sex, and appears, in many contexts, as the opposite of *piyaw*, 'man.' Another word is *afret*, 'woman,' which is defined by Hejar as 'woman, the female of man, '*afret*, *ze'îfe* "weakling."' The definition given for *ze'îfe* [a loanword from Arabic; *da'īf* 'weak, feeble...' + -*e* suffix indicating feminine gender] in Hejar's dictionary is: 'denotes woman' (*brêtî le jin*). According to one proverb, 'where can I go with my daughter? I can cross mountains with my son,' *legeĺ kiçim bo kö biçim, legeĺ kořim kêw ebiřim* (Saliĥ 'Abduĺĺa 1984: 89).

Women are also weak in reasoning; according to one proverb, 'women are deficient in reason,' *afret 'eqĺî nuqsane* (Resûĺ Ibrahîm 1984: 100). According to another proverb, 'a woman's reason is in her lap, when she gets up it drops' (Fattahi Ghazi 1996: 149). 'Consult with women,' according to another saying, 'but do not listen to them' (1996: 44).

The two words for 'male' and 'female' are *nêr* (with variants such as *nêrewez*) and *mê* (with variants such as *mêçk*, *mêçke*, *mêwîne*, *mêwez*, *ma*, *mak*, *mayine*) respectively. The Kurdish-English dictionary of Wahby and Edmonds provides these meanings for *nêr*: 'male, robust, masterful, swift (stream), masculine (gram.).' Hejar, in his sexist lexicography, defines *nêr* as 'that sex (*jisn*) which puts the seed of life into the female, the opposite of *mê*..., brave and active (*Piyawêkî nêr bû*, "He was a brave/masculine man").' The adverb/adjective *nêrane* is defined as *azayane* 'bravely' and *merdane* as 'manly, bravely.' In clear contrast with *nêr*, the word *mêçik* is defined as 'female' and 'denotes coward (*tirsenok*)' (Hejar). The bravery of a woman, when acknowledged, is lexicalized in masculine terms: *nêrejin*, 'very brave and knowledgeable woman' (Hejar) is, literally, a 'male/masculine woman.'

The language offers many resources for silencing assertive women. One is *xesû bezên* [*xesû* 'mother-in-law' + *bezên* 'defeater'], a woman who can beat her mother-in-law (Hêdî 1997: 103). *Canane* [*canan* 'beloved' + -*e* nominal suffix] is a '*zimandirêj*' [*ziman* 'tongue' + *dirêj* 'long'] that is, 'abusive,' and *seĺîte*, 'shrew' woman (Hejar 1990; Hêdî 1997: 76). One proverb recommends, 'Beware of ravenous dogs and abusive women' *le segî diř û jinî dimşiř bitirse* (Fattahi Ghazi 1985:

373). Men, however, should be as outspoken as possible. According to one proverb, 'a shy woman is worth a city, a shy man (is worth) a goat' (Resûĺ Ibrahîm 1984: 44).

Women and men are not expected to cross the borders that separate their worlds. According to one proverb, 'a woman is called a woman and a man is [called] a man' (*jinyan jin kutuwe w piyawyan piyaw*), that is, 'a woman should not imitate a man, and vice versa' (Fattahi Ghazi 1985: 232). A man should never behave like a woman. The adjective *jinanî* [*jin + an* plural ending + *-î* suffix forming an adjective with the sense 'pertaining to, having qualities of'] means a 'man who has womanly behavior' (Hejar); it is the same as *jinanîle* [*jinanî* 'effeminate' + *-le* suffix forming diminutive of nouns and adjectives], or *mêçke*, 'female, feminine' (Hesenzade).

Men are expected to openly exercise power over women. The pejorative word *aĺî* is a 'man who fears his wife' (Hejar) or even one 'who listens to his wife; loves her; or fears her' (Zebîĥî); a husband is expected to remain indifferent to his wife in the presence of parents, relatives, and strangers. Deviations from this rule invite labelings such as *arîle*, which means 'a womanly man, a man whose behaviour and disposition are womanish' (Zebîĥî) and a '*jinanîle* man, *jinerenge*' [*jin + reng* 'color'] (Hejar). *Kiçanî* [*kiç* 'girl'], 'girlish,' is a 'boy who behaves like a girl' (Hejar).

Even in the absence of wives and sisters, men maintain, in speaking and writing, their sovereign masculine identity. It is shameful for males to mention the names of their wives or sisters when talking to or writing to anyone other than closest relatives. The substitutes for the real name of a man's wife are numerous. One is *maĺ*, 'house, home' (W&E). One of the meanings of *maĺ* is '*jin* "woman" *xêzan*, "wife" as in *maĺman nîye le maĺa*', literally, 'our home is not at home,' that is, 'my wife is not home' (Mardukh Kordestani). Thus, *maĺewe* (*le maĺewe* 'at home') means 'home, wife;' *maĺ-û-minaĺ* ('home and child') is 'wife and family' (W&E). Another alternative to mentioning the name of one's wife is *daykî mindaĺan*, 'mother of children' or, if there is only one child, *daykî...* 'mother of (the name of the child).'

Women, too, should not cross the boundaries set for their gender. When females cross into male territory, they are called *kuřanî* [*kuř* 'boy'] and *nêrekořke* [*nêr*, 'male' + *koř* 'boy' + *-ke* nominal suffix], 'tom-boy,' and *nêrblokê*, 'a woman who imitates men' (Hejar; Şîrwan, 1998: 16). *Nêreĥeyte* [*nêr* 'male' + *-e* composition vowel + *ĥeyte* 'name of a mobile force of gendarmerie in Ottoman empire'] is 'a woman who looks like a man in stature' (Şîrwan 1998: 16). *Déĺe kuřanî* [*dêĺ* 'bitch'], a 'tom-boy bitch,' is a 'girl who imitates boys and has boyish behavior' (Hêdî 1997: 134).

Human beings should be either males or females, even biologically. *Nêremûk*, 'one who is neither male nor female' (Hejar; Hêdî 1997), a 'hermaphrodite' according to W&E, is semantically derogatory.

Questions of Sexuality. One may view (female) 'sexuality' as 'a social construct mixing sensuality, reproductive life, eroticism, and gender-role performance, diffused throughout all social and personal life in activities, feelings and attitudes' (Tiefer 1999: 1304). As a social rather than biological construct, sexuality assumes different forms across cultures, although its regulation by custom, religion, law, nation, and language has served everywhere to socialize and control women (Tiefer 1999; Abeysekera 1999). An adequate understanding of female sexuality, I contend, requires knowledge of male sexuality with which it co-exists, dialectically, in a relationship of conflict and unity.

In Kurdish society, as elsewhere, the control of the female body and female sexuality is crucial to the reproduction of patriarchy. The ideal, good female is one who firmly constrains her sexuality according to established codes of propriety. Women are punished, often violently, if they breach the terms of the 'social contract' scripted by patriarchal tradition. The linguistic record is quite vocal.

Females, married or not, are accepted as members of the family, tribe, community, and nation if they possess and maintain *namûs*, 'honour,' *abřû*, 'honour,' *şeřef*, 'honour,' *şerm* 'shame, shyness, modesty,' and *ḥeya*, 'modesty, sensitiveness, decorum, sense of shame' (W&E). The codes of honor and modesty are numerous, although the most important is, for unmarried females, maintaining virginity. Like its English counterpart 'virgin,' which derives from the Latin word *virgō* 'maiden,' the concept in Kurdish is lexicalized as *kiçênî* [*kiç* 'girl' + *-ênî* suffix forming abstract nouns] which means 'girlhood, virginity' (W&E) or 'the unpierced evidence of a girl, hymen' (Hejar).

The protection of 'honor' depends on, among others, guarding the 'hymen,' *bin*, until it is lost in lawful marriage. The polysemic word *bin* is defined as 'base, bottom, root, underside... hymen' (W&E). In Kurdish, as in other languages, the distinction between 'girl,' *kiç* and 'woman,' *jin*, is based on the status of the hymen. The language offers a range of lexical resources for evaluating females in terms of the state of their hymen.

A semantic field has developed around 'virginity,' which lies at the center of the definition, social construction, and disciplining of females. A female's destiny is tied to her virginity as defined by patriarchy. A female who has had sex is identified as *bêbin* [*bê* 'without' + *bin* 'bottom'], that is, 'no longer virgin' (W&E). The opposite is *bebin* [*be-* 'possessed of, -ful'], 'non-deflowered girl,' defined, in Hejar, as '*kîjî kun nekraw*,' [*kîj* 'girl' + *kun* 'hole' + *ne* 'not, un-' + *kraw* 'done'], literally, 'unpierced girl.' The absence or presence of hymen is profusely conceptualized in masculine terms: *binpijandin* [*pijandin* 'to

squirt'] means 'to deflower' (W&E) a girl through sexual intercourse; another word is *binřijandin* [*řijandin* 'to pour'], 'to deflower.' *Kun kirdin* [*kun* 'hole' + *kirdin* 'to do, to make'] means to 'pierce, deflower (virgin)' (W&E), and 'to turn a girl into a woman' (Hejar). *Bindiřîn* (*diřîn* 'to tear') is 'to remove hymen' (Hesenzade). *Binřijan* [*řijan* 'be poured, spill'] is 'losing hymen' (without sexual intercourse) (Hêdî 1997: 36); *binsipî* (*sipî* 'white') is 'a girl without hymen and not due to sexual intercourse' (Hêdî 1997: 37). Male sexual power is, thus, exercised, linguistically, in the transitivity of the verbs that signify men's ability to remove a female's hymen (to tear, to pierce, and to squirt).

Unlike males, females are violently punished if they engage in pre- or extra-marital intercourse. Honor killing is prevalent, especially in rural Kurdistan. Writing in Kurmanji Kurdish in 1858-1859, Mela Meĥmûd Bayezîdî, a knowledgeable Kurdish mullah, noted that Kurdish women were, 'like Europeans,' free to associate with men; they know, however, that they would be killed if they engaged in 'bad deeds' (*şûla xirab*), that is, pre- or extra-marital intercourse. The threat of killing instilled, Bayezîdî noted, fear in the hearts of women, and this fear alone prevented them from committing 'bad deeds' (1963: 113, 174-5, 190-1, quoted in Mojab: forthcoming). Punishment includes killing and defamation (*etk kirdin*). The most brutal form of killing, rarely practised except by the Islamic Republic of Iran, is *berd(e) baran kirdin* [*berd* 'stone' + *baran* 'rain' + *kirdin* 'to do'] or *seng baran* (or *sengesar*) *kirdin* [*seng* 'stone'], 'stoning (to death)' (Hejar; Şîrwan 1998: 3). Defamation includes, among others, *lût biřîn* [*lût* 'nose' + *biřîn* 'cut'], 'cutting nose'; *xoĺ û do be sera kirdin* [*xoĺ* 'earth, mould' + *û* 'and' + *do* 'buttermilk' + *be...da* 'up on, over' + *ser* 'head' + *kirdin* 'to do'], 'pour earth and buttermilk over the head of a woman while being paraded on the back of a donkey' (Şîrwan 1998: 7); *pirç* or *egrîce biřîn* [*pirç* 'tresses;' *egrîce* 'side-tress, kiss-curl' + *biřîn* 'to cut'], 'cut tresses or side-tress;' *ser taşîn* [*ser* 'hair, head' + *taşîn* 'shave, cut'] 'shaving off hair' (Hêdî 1996: 26, 152); and more 'modern' forms of defacing by pouring acid on the victim.

The word *piyaw*, 'man,' is semantically inseparable from masculine sexual prowess. One of the meanings of *piyaw* is, according to Hesenzade, 'one who has fucked' (*gan kirdû*); the noun *piyawetî*, 'manliness,' signifies 'the ability to fuck' (*tuwanay gan kirdin*); the example provided is '*le bûkê bote piyaw, wate bote zawa, kiçênîyekey la birduwe*,' that is, 'he has become a man over the bride, meaning he has become a groom, has removed her hymen' (1995: 28; see, also, Şîrwan: 1998: 5). *Nepiyaw* [*ne-* 'no, non-'], in addition to the meaning of 'mean, unmanly' (*napiyaw* [*na-* 'un-, in-']), is 'a man who lacks the ability to fuck' (Hejar). A serious abuse for a man is calling him a woman or a bride (*bûk*). While the verb *be bûk birdin* or *birdin be bûk* [*birdin* 'carry'

+ *be* 'as, to...' + *bûk* 'bride'] means 'to get (a female) married' (see below), it is also, according to Zebîĥî (see under *be bûk birdin*), a word of abuse (*cinêw*) for a male; it means that he 'is a woman and is being given in marriage' (*jine w be mêrdî deden*).

A man's sexual organs are the measure of manhood. For example, testicles (*gun*) are associated with the ability to fuck, that is, *piyawetî* 'manliness' (see above). Further, *aw de gunan geřan* [*aw* 'water, semen' + *de*, 'in, into' + *gunan* 'testicles,' + *geřan* 'circulate, wander'] 'have wet dream, reach the age of puberty' (Hêdî, p. 20), and *be gun* [*be* 'with...' + *gun*] (Hesenzade) and *gundar* [*gun* + *-dar* 'possessor of'] mean 'strong, mighty, powerful;' *gunî gundarî derdênê* [*gun* 'testicle' + *-î* 'of' + *gun* + *-dar* 'possessor of' + *-î* suffix indicating direct object + *derdênê* 'brings out, extracts'], literally, one who 'takes out the testicles of a testicular person,' means a 'ruler who is powerful and despotic' (Fattahi Ghazi 1985: 351). According to Hejar, *gun* means, also, 'penis.' *Kêr*, 'penis,' too, is associated with the exercise of physical and political power: *kêrzilî* [*zil* 'huge, bulky' + *-î* suffix forming nouns] 'having big penis' means, according to Hejar, 'bullying, coercion'; by contrast, *jêrkêre* [*jêr* 'under' + *kêr* + *-e* nominal suffix], person 'under penis,' means one who is 'subject, inferior, subordinate, powerless, unimportant, undignified' (Şîrwan 1998: 13) and 'servant' (Hejar). Males who fail to establish their sexual powers are not accorded the status of *piyaw*, 'man:' *şilepete* [*şil* 'loose, slack, flabby, sloppy' + *-e* compound vowel + *pet* 'cord' + *-e* nominal suffix] 'languid, slack' (W&E) is 'one who cannot become a groom,' that is, cannot copulate (Hesenzade). *Kewĺe kon* [*kewĺ* 'hide, skin' + *-e* compound vowel + *kon* 'old'] is an impotent old man (Şîrwan 1998: 14).

Sexual intercourse is constructed hierarchically as a form of the exercise of masculine power. In Kurdish, as in other languages, men and women are constructed oppositionally as fuckers and fucked. The former is the dominator and the latter the dominated. This is the case even in male homosexual relationships.

The dominant/dominated, male/female, and fucker/fucked hierarchy is prominent in male homosexual intercourse. Compared with the West, where the hierarchical distribution of power has been changing in 'gay' relationships, in Kurdish, as in other languages of the Middle East, masculine supremacy is asserted in binarisms based on the homophobic separation of the *ganker* 'fucker' and *gander* 'the fucked'. The former, the doer or agent, is celebrated while the latter is demeaned: *nêrbaz* [*nêr* 'male' + *-baz* suffix meaning 'performer, player, fond of'] is a male who fucks another man, mostly younger males. Synonyms are *beçebaz* [*beçe* 'child'], *hetîwbaz* [*hetîw*, 'orphaned child'], and *mindaĺbaz* [*mindaĺ* 'child'] all meaning 'pederast' (see Zebîĥî, under *beçebaz*]. A man's copulation with male children, adolescents or adult males (*nêrbazî*) is tolerated, socially and semantically, while all the words used for these

adolescents or adults are derogatory and pejorative: *qûnder* [*qûn* or *kiŋ*, 'arse, rump, buttocks, anus' + -*der* suffix denoting 'agent, giver, etc.'], *kûnî* [borrowed from Persian *kûn* = *qûn*], and *gander* [*gan* 'copulation'], 'catamite' (W&E; Hejar). The word *gander* means, according to W&E, one who engages in *gan dan* [*gan* 'copulation' + *dan* 'to give'], that is, 'be promiscuous (woman), submit to sodomy (man).' These words are also used for purposes of abuse and insult. The poetry of the well known lampoonist Şêx Reza TaÍebanî (1838?-1910) provides vast semantic, lexical and discursive documentation of the politics of masculine sexuality briefly outlined here. One of the poet's main lampooning weapons against male adversaries is his own penis and penis-wielding language; he dishonors antagonists, male and female, by claiming that he has fucked them or will do so in future.

Kurdish does not have a word for the less homophobic English concepts such as 'homosexual,' 'gay' or 'lesbian.' Closest to the English words are the following: *dûdekî* [*dû* 'two' + *de* present stem of *dan* 'to give' + -*ekî* suffix meaning 'pertaining to, having qualities of'] means 'a man who is both fucked and fucks' (Şîrwan 1998: 8), and, according to Hejar, 'a *gander* man' (see below). *Ganganoke* or *ganganokê* [*gan* 'copulation' + -*oke* suffix forming diminutive nouns], translated as 'mutual sodomy' by W&E and 'mutual fucking' by Hejar, means two male children's playing or imitating copulation (Hesenzade). The word *ser-be-sere* [*ser* 'head' + *be* 'to' + *ser* + -*e* nominal suffix] and *ser-be-serêne* mean, according to Hejar, 'mutual fucking (two males).' The only word recorded for lesbian relations is *panpanoke* or *panpanokê* [*pan* 'broad, wide' + -*okê* suffix forming diminutive nouns], which is translated, by W&E, as 'sapphism.'

Bondage into Marriage. A rather long list of words dealing with married life highlights the absence of women's right to choose their spouses and to divorce them. In language, as in the extralinguistic world, men alone are entitled to initiate marriage; this is clearly signified in the verb *xuwazbênî kirdin*, which means to 'send intermediary to parents of girl to ask for her in marriage' (W&E) or 'to ask for a girl to become a bride' (Hejar). Another verb, *nardine ser...* [*nardin* 'to send' + *ser* 'head, top, on...'], synonymous with *xuwazbênî kirdin*, is also an exclusively male act of sending an intermediary 'to ask for a girl's hand' (Hêdî 1997: 210).

Women in rural and tribal regions of Kurdistan enjoy considerable freedom to associate with males in the village, farms, during weddings, and so on. However, they are deprived of the freedom to marry as they wish. A cluster of words signifies women as the property of the father or male members of the family; this property is exchanged, sold and bought in marriage. *Jin be jine kirdin* [*jin* 'woman' + *be* 'to, for' + *jin* + -*e* compound vowel + *kirdin* 'to do, perform'] is 'exchange of women in marriage as between two families' (W&E). *Be jin çûn* [*be* 'as, to, for...'

+ *jin* 'wife, woman' + *çûn* 'to go'] means 'to be exchanged (as a female) in *jin be jine*' and *be jin dan* [*dan* 'to give'] is to 'give a woman in exchange' (Hêdî 1997: 51).

Daughters or sisters may be exchanged in infancy, sometimes even before they are born. *Le ser piştî lankê be mêrd dan* [*le ser* 'over, on' + *pişt* 'back' + *-î* 'of' + *lank* 'cradle' + *be mêrd dan* 'to give to husband'] means to 'give (a girl) in marriage while in cradle' (Hêdî 1997: 195). The noun *binpişk* [*bin* 'hymen' + *pişk* 'lot, lottery'] means a 'girl betrothed in childhood in exchange of women' (W&E) or 'a girl who is exchanged in marriage in childhood...' (Zebîĥî); *barbeha* ['*bar* 'load' + *beha* 'price'] is a synonym for *binpişk* (Hesenzade). *Marebiř* is a 'girl who has been married in childhood' (Hejar). *Kaĺgê* [*kaĺ* 'unripe' + *gê*, present stem of *gan* or *gayîn* 'copulate with (of man)'] means 'a woman who has been married in childhood' (Hêdî 1997: 177). The age of females is significant but does not constrain the practice of exchange: *gewre be biçûk* (or *giçke*) [*gewre* 'old' + *be* 'to' + *biçûk* or *giçke* 'young, small'] is '(exchanging an) elder girl with a (female) child;' in this case, an adolescent female is exchanged for a female child; the former goes to an adolescent male and the latter will be exchanged for a male child who will marry after they grow up (Qani' 1989: 30; Şîrwan 1998: 14). However, this type of matching of age is not a requirement. A father may exchange his daughter for a woman he wants to marry (Qani' 1989: 30).

Having no daughter or sister to exchange (*jin be jine*), a groom or his family should pay a price to the father of the girl or other male members of her family. This is called *şîrbayî* [*şîr* 'milk' + *bayî* 'price'] 'bride-price,' which is also called *xönbayî* [*xön* 'blood'] 'blood-money' (W&E.; Edmonds 1957: 226). Bride price, which may be paid in kind or cash, is the cost of raising a daughter, whose labor will be lost to the husband and his family. While this a largely economic transaction, political exchanges of women also happened in tribal and feudal society. In tribal-feudal confrontations, the family that happened to kill a male member of the rival family had to offer a woman in marriage in order to settle the conflict. This is *xön xoş kirdin* [*xön* + *xoş*, 'good, pleasant, amusing...,' + *kirdin* 'to do;' cf. *lê xoş bûn*, 'pardon, make up quarrel with...'], that is, 'to seek pardon for (shedding) blood' (Qani' 1989: 31) from the *xönxuwaz* [*xön* + *xuaz* 'present stem of *xuwastin* 'to wish, desire, ask for...'], 'aggrieved party in blood-feud, avenger of blood.' The woman offered in exchange for blood is *le xön da gîraw* [*le... da* 'in' + *xön* 'blood-(price) + *gîraw* 'taken, caught'] 'caught in blood-price' (Qani' 1989: 31).

The political economy of marriage in urban areas is more complex than that of the declining tribal and feudal village. Feudal-type *jin be jine* is virtually absent among the urban middle classes, although two men may choose to marry each other's sisters. Instead of paying 'bride-

price' (*şîrbayî* or *xönbayî*), the families of the marrying couple agree on a price, *mareyî* or *marebiřane*, that will be paid by the husband to the wife in case of divorce. The words *mare* and *mare biřîn* are respectively translated by W&E as 'marriage' and 'conclude marriage contract.' However, it is clear, semantically, that males alone initiate and conclude a marriage contract. Women are not free to ask for a man's hand in marriage.

Kurdish does not have a gender-neutral verb such as the English 'to marry,' which is defined as 'to take as a husband or wife' (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1966). The concept 'to marry' is, for males, 'to bring wife,' *jin hênan* [*jin* + *hênan* 'to bring'] and, for females, 'to do husband' *mêrd kirdin* or *şû kirdin* (*mêrd* or *şû* 'husband' + *kirdin* 'to do, make, have...'). While there is a verb with the meaning 'to give (a female) in marriage' (*be mêrd dan* or *be şû dan* [*dan* 'give'], there is no comparable verb 'to give (a male) in marriage,' *be jin dan. The verb *mare kirdin* is used, by some lexicographers, as inclusive of both genders, in spite of the fact that women cannot engage in the *mare kirdin* of a male. This explains why W&E have translated the verb as both 'marry' and, more accurately, 'take as wife.' Even the verb *lê mare kirdin* [*lê* 'to, at...' + *mare* 'marry' + *kirdin* 'do, make'], translated by W&E as 'give in marriage to,' should be rendered, more accurately, as 'give (a female) in marriage to (a male).' While there are no syntactic constraints on the occurrence of a female as the subject, agent or doer of the transitive verb *mare kirdin*, semantic imperatives strongly inhibit it. The verb *lêk mare kirdin* [*lêk* = *le yek* 'to/from each other' + *mare kirdin* 'give in marriage'], 'arrange marriage between a couple' (W&E), implies reciprocity but does not overwrite the male-centered meaning of *mare kirdin*. Hejar is more accurate, though typically masculinist, in defining *mare kirdin*, together with the synonym *mare biřîn* [*biřîn* 'to cut, fix, take decision...'], as 'to make a woman the legal/wedded wife (*ĥeĺal*) of a man according to religious mores.' In fact, the verb *jin hênan* [*jin*, 'woman, wife' + *hênan* 'to bring'], 'to bring a wife' is used consistently in the sense of 'to marry.' This is obvious in, among other contexts, the Persian-Kurdish lexicographic translation of the female-inclusive Persian verb *ezdevāj kardan* [*izdivāj* loan from Arabic + *kardan* 'to do'], 'to marry' as *jin hawirdin* 'to bring a wife' (Ibrahimpour 1994) or *jin xuwastin*, 'to ask for woman in marriage' (Baban 1982). Even the Kurdish loanword *zewcîn* [borrowed from the same Arabic root as the Persian *ezdevāj*] is defined, in Hejar, as *jin hênan*.

If women are denied freedom in marrying, they are also deprived of the right to divorce. The noun *teĺaq*, 'divorce,' borrowed from Arabic, means 'to divorce one's wife.' Hejar defines it as *bêbeş kirdinî jin le mêrd* 'depriving wife from husband' and, in the same vein, defines *teĺaqdiraw*, 'divorcee' as 'woman deprived of husband.' When *teĺaq* is

used as a verb, male supremacy is insured, linguistically, in its division into the husband's *telaq dan*, 'to give (wife) divorce' and the wife's *telaq wergirtin*, 'to receive divorce' or *telaq diran*, 'to be given a divorce.' Thus the word *telaqdiraw*, 'divorcee,' is never used for males. A man cannot be the object of a divorce.

The enslavement of women in divorce, as in married life, goes beyond the husband's monopoly of the right to end the marriage contract. Islam, as practised in Kurdistan, allows a husband to divorce his wife by simply uttering the sentence *Her sêk telaqim kewê*! 'I divorce (my wife) three times!' This is the act of *sê be sê telaq dan*, that is, to 'pronounce triple divorce against' a wife (W&E), which is an irrevocable decision. Remarriage can happen only when the divorced wife is subjected to *be caş kirdin* [*be* 'to, by, into...' + *caş* 'donkey foal' + *kirdin* 'to do'], which means 'give thrice-divorced woman in marriage to another man so as to allow the original husband to remarry her lawfully after the second husband has in turn divorced her' (W&E). Equally degrading is the case of divorce in *jin be jine*, 'exchange of women in marriage between two families' (see above). *Telaq be telaq*, 'divorce to divorce' happens when a husband divorces his wife, and the husband in the other family retaliates by either divorcing his wife or demanding 'bride-price' for his divorced sister (Qani' 1979: 41).

As a piece of property, females are a source of income not only for their fathers but also for feudal and tribal lords. The feudal lords levied a marriage tax, *sûrane* [*sûr* 'feast, celebration' + -*ane* 'appertaining to, -like, -ly'], 'fee taken by tribal chief *or* village headman on occasion of marriage *or* other celebration' (W&E; see, also, Seccadî 1974: 139). The amount of the tax depends on the value of the bride, especially her appearance and sexual appeal; a higher tax had to be paid, according to Qani' (1979: 44), for a bride who was *şox*, 'vivacious, sprightly' and *nawaze*, 'rare, wonderful.'

A husband can keep his wife in bondage by, among other things, his ability to threaten her with divorce, and *jin be ser hênan* [*jin* 'woman, wife' + *be ser* 'over, on' + *hênan* 'bring'], that is, 'to take (another) wife over' her. The only resistance is *ĥaşa lê kirdin* [*ĥaşa* 'denial, avoidance' + *lê* 'from' + *kirdin* 'to do'], that is, '(of a wife) leaving husband, renouncing deferred portion of bridal gift and other rights and so oblige him to divorce her' (W&E); tradition, and often law, denies divorced women the right to custody of their children.

Polygyny, though not prevalent, is another form of patriarchal exercise of power. The several wives of a single husband are hierarchically ranked according to age: *jinî gewre*, 'senior wife in polygamous society,' *jinî nawuncî*, 'second wife (of three),' and *jinî piçûk*, 'junior wife' (W&E). *Gule cerge* [*gul* 'flower' + -*e* compound vowel + *cerg* 'liver' + -*e* nominal suffix], 'flower of heart,' is one of the wives most preferred by the polygynous husband (Fattahi Ghazi 1996:

225-6). *Hewê* is a 'co-wife in polygamous society' (W&E); *ser be hewê* [*ser* 'head' + *be* 'to, for, by...' + *hewê*] is a woman who has been taken as a new wife over another wife (Hesenzade); the 'state of being a co-wife,' *hewêsarî*, is much dreaded. According to a proverbial saying, co-wives tell each other: *Hewêsarî, sengesarî*! 'Living as a co-wife is like being stoned to death' (Hêdî 1997: 227). Another, sarcastic, saying *Hewê hewêy cuwan deka*! 'Co-wife decks out co-wife!' implies co-wives always compete for the husband's attention, and that partnership among them is 'astonishing and impossible' (Fattahi Ghazi 1996: 297-8).

   Bûk, 'bride,' is the site of much semantic tension between misogynism and love. The word signifies beauty and youthfulness; the femininity of the bride is, however, subjected to masculine aggression. In the word-formation dynamic, *bûk* is the object of verbs whose subjects are males: *bûk birdin* [*birdin*, 'carry'], *bûk gözanewe* or *guwastinewe* [*gözanewe* 'transport, transfer'] and *bûk suwar kirdin* [*suwar kirdin* 'mount or place upon a horse, etc.'] mean 'escort the bride to bridegroom's house' (W&E); *bûk dabezandin* [*dabezandin* 'cause to dismount, alight'] is to cause the bride to alight at the bridegroom's house. *Bûk gořînewe* is the 'exchange of brides in *jin be jine*' ('exchange of women in marriage between two families,' see above); in feudal-tribal culture, female members of the family are, for the males, a source of shame; to 'give' a daughter or sister in marriage transgresses feudal masculine honor.[3] The two brides should be exchanged at exactly the same time, otherwise the losing side engages in war against the side that first took possession of their woman, and 'merrymaking' and 'wedding' (*şayî*) turns into 'mourning' (*şîn*) (Zebîĥî, under *bûk gořînewe*). A fearful experience for the bride is *çûne perde* [*çûn* 'going' + *-e* 'compound vowel + *perde* 'curtain'], 'consummate marriage' (W&E) on the night she is possessed by the bridegroom. This is the time when the bridegroom puts her virginity (see above) to test through intercourse on the *perde-w-kule*, 'marriage-bed' (W&E). Bleeding is the only valid test, which will be announced to the guests invited for wedding ceremonies. *Rûsipyetî* or *rûsipêtî* (see *rûsipî* below) 'honour, high reputation' (W&E) also means, according to Hejar, 'the blood that indicates the bride is a girl.' One of the functions of *berbûk* [*ber* 'front, beginning...' + *bûk* 'bride'], 'matron who accompanies bride to bridegroom's house on wedding day' (W&E) is to verify the virginity of the bride by obtaining a blood-stained, white cloth soon after the first intercourse. The absence of bleeding, whatever the reason, results in tragedy. It is a disgrace for the bride's family, and may result in the bride's murder or suicide (Hansin 1983: 302-3). Virginity is prominently displayed in the dressing of the bride on her way to the groom's home. A virgin bride always wears a *tara*, 'red bridal veil' (W&E) or 'the red cover of bride' (Hejar), while a widow, re-marrying,

wears only a white cover or none.[4] One may argue that the redness of the virgin *tara* and its contrast with the whiteness of non-virgin *tara* collapses the Peircean distinctions between 'iconic' sign (one which shares certain properties with the object it signals or signifies, e.g., a photograph of a person), 'indexical' sign (one which is tied to the object it signals but does not share any of its properties, e.g., smoke as an index of fire), and 'symbolic' sign (one which is connected with its object by convention and agreement alone, e.g., the words of language). Thus, the redness of *tara* is, like the map of a city, an iconic sign of the presence of virginity; *tara*, itself, as a piece of cloth covering the head and shoulder of the bride is, like cloud as a signal of rain, indexical. The word *tara* and its lexical fields of redness constitute a symbolic index. A good wish for a girl is to say *Be bextî sûr bî*! 'Have red luck!' that is, to get married with a tight hymen. *Bûkî sûr*, 'red bride,' is one 'who is a girl, not a widow' (Fattahi Ghazi 1996: 39).

Women's expression, direct or indirect, of sexual desire is castigated; 'a girl who desires males' is called *dêĺe beba* (Hêdî 1979: 134) [*dêĺ* 'female animal' + -*e* compound vowel + -*be* 'possessed of , -ful' + *ba* 'wind, wag'], which means, according to W&E, 'any female animal on heat especially bitch.' *ĥekedar* [*ĥeke* loan from Arabic *ĥikka* 'itching' + -*dar* 'possessor of'], 'horny,' is, according to Hejar, 'a woman thirsty for fucking' and its synonym *ĥeşerî* is 'a woman very thirsty for fucking.' The verb *pê xoş bûn*, 'to desire, to like' gives the word *pêxoş*, 'desiring,' which is a synonym for *ĥeşerî* (Hêdî 1979: 52). *Bider* [*bi*- prefix to present stem of verbs to form adjectives and nouns denoting agent, activity + -*der* agent of *dan* 'to give'] 'giver' (W&E, see under *bi*-) is synonymous with 'a shameless woman, *pêxoş*, *gander* (promiscuous woman), *ĥîz* (promiscuous)' (Hêdî 1979: 34). *Bermawî ĥemû kes* [*bermaw* 'left over' + -*î* + *ĥemû* 'all' + *kes* 'person, anybody'], that is, 'left-over from all people (men),' is a woman who sleeps with everyone (Hêdî 1979: 49). *Be aĺoş* [*be* 'with' + *aĺoş* 'itch'], 'itchy,' is a woman who desires males, voluptuous woman' (Hejar). Often used in reference to women, the two adjectives *rû damaĺraw* (lit., 'stripped-off face') and *rû heĺmaĺraw* (lit., 'raised-up face') mean '*bêşerm û bêĥeya*' 'without shame and modesty' (Hejar). *Bêçaw-û-řû* (lit. 'without eye and face') is also defined as *bêşerm û bêĥeya* (Hêdî 1979: 59).

Sexual intercourse is divided into legal and illegal types as defined by traditional and Islamic norms of patriarchy. The word for illegal intercourse is borrowed from Islamic *sharī'a*, 'the revealed or canonical law of Islam'; *zînaĥ* [adopted from Arabic *zinā'* 'adultery, fornication'] 'improper, unacceptable fucking' (Hejar) or, according to Şîrwan (1989: 9), is the 'unlawful intercourse of woman and man;' however, *zanî* 'adulterer,' is usually used in non-formal contexts, for males (Şîrwan 1989: 9). *Ĥîz*, also used in related senses in Persian or Ottoman Turkish,

means 'catamite, coward' (W&E), and implies, in some contexts, male or female 'adulterer.' While males are usually free to engage in extramarital intercourse, females may pay with their lives if they have an affair or are accused of having one. Survival of a woman depends on her 'chastity.' Women who are thought to be in extramarital relationship are linguistically vilified. *Bestok* is 'a wet-skirt [i.e., unchaste] woman who is in every one's hands' (Hejar). The concept 'wet-skirt,' *dawên teř* [*dawên* 'skirt' + *teř* 'wet'], is, according to Hejar, a synonym of *dawênpîs* [*pîs* 'dirty'], 'unchaste, libertine' (W&E). *Ganekî* is 'a *ĥeşerî* and *ganawî* [*gan* 'fuck' + -*awî* 'full of, covered with, affected by, having character of'] woman' (Hejar); *dêĺediř* [*dêĺ* 'female animal' + *diř* present stem of *diřîn* 'to tear'] is 'abusive shameless woman' (Hejar). A proper female is *dawênpak* [*pak* 'clean'], 'chaste' (W&E). *Rûsipî* [*rû* 'face' + *sipî* 'white'] and *rûsûr* [*sûr* 'red'] mean 'justified by results, honourable' (W&E), and are used for women who are *be abřû*, i.e., 'have honour,' (Hêdî 1979: 136).

Women who fail to reproduce sons are punished in different ways, for instance, their husbands may divorce them or bring a second wife (see *jin be ser hênan* above. P. 244). At the same time, a woman who gives birth frequently is slandered as a 'cat' (*pişîle*) or a bitch (*dêĺ*) that 'whelps' (*detirekê*) (Hêdî, 1979: 122, 125). Other pejorative labelings for frequent birth include *zawûzê kirdin*, *zigûza kirdin* 'increase by breeding' (W&E) and *şîrawşîr* [milk-to-milk] or *şîrbeşîr mindaĺ bûn*, 'the pregnancy of a woman with a suckling child' (Hejar).

Resistance to Patriarchy in *Kurdewarî*. The semantic repertoire examined so far provides a grim picture of the linguistic and social history of gender relations in *Kurdewarî*, that is, 'the Kurdish way of life.' However, resistance to oppressive patriarchal relations is also recorded in language. Love *(xoşewîstî, diĺdarî, ewîn*, etc.) and romance are highly cherished ideals even though marriage has been one of the crucial institutions for the reproduction of feudal and tribal modes of production. Kurdish folklore is rich in songs and stories of love; women have openly expressed their sexual desires in some genres of verbal arts (see Allison, this volume; Rohat 1994); lovers, women and men, resist social and economic imperatives in marriage, and refuse to be treated as property and exchanged for social, economic and political gain.

One form of resistance is for lovers to elope (see Mojab, this volume). Running the risk of losing their lives, lovers in rural areas leave their villages in secret, and seek sanctuary to avoid being caught and killed. Once in custody of a respected or powerful person, the couple is safe, and a compromise is usually reached when all parties receive their share in the political economy of marriage. The bride's father receives *şîrbayî*, 'bride-price,' or *xönbayî* 'blood-money' (see above); the mediating party may receive a *cerîme*, 'fine,' and the landlord has the right to claim *sûrane*, 'marriage tax' (see above). The

father of the bride may ask the family of the groom for *berxön* [*ber* 'front, before' + *xön* 'blood'], that is, a daughter or sister in exchange for the eloping daughter (Hêdî 1979: 47). Thus, this form of resistance becomes a part of the reproduction dynamics of patriarchal gender relations. It ensures the fulfilment of love in a system that is not hospitable to its realization; however, the eloping couple continues to be wed according to the requirements of the tribal and feudal system of property relations (see, Mojab 2001). Moreover, this form of resistance has not led, over the centuries, to consciousness about the oppressions of the patriarchal order. Indeed, the semantics of resistance is itself patriarchal. Kurdish has two words for 'elopement:' the male engages in 'abducting,' *jin heĺgirtin* [*jin* 'woman' + *heĺgirtin* 'lift up, pick up, carry, take away'], while the female 'follows behind' the male, *re dû kewtin* [*re-* or *ra-* 'along' + *dû* 'behind' + *kewtin* 'to fall, lie, go'].

Other forms of resistance include women's expression of their love, sexual desire and pleasure in rural songs, especially in *lawik*s, *ĥeyran*s (see Rohat 1994: 98-141; Allison, this volume), and a genre known as *Suwaro*, 'Horserider' (see two texts in Hosayni 1975). In the latter genre, an elegy or *şîn* 'lament' (see Allison, this volume), the 'horserider' is typically a young man in the village who has gone to fight in a distant land; the lover is a woman who is worried that her beloved, the horserider, might not return alive. She lauds the bravery and beauty of her beloved, and offers him, if he ever returns, her love, her body and her breasts. In one version, when the fighters are coming back and she does not see her beloved among them, she laments,

> It was yesterday, I was sitting in the portico
> My little horserider was coming and passing by,
> Asking me for a kiss;
> And, alas for me, I wish that chains were around my neck
> Because I would not give him a kiss….
> If, God grant, he may return safely....
> I will take to him some of the wise men,
> And the pair of my yellow breasts,
> In order to apologize,
> Lest I, hopeless and ruined, may have offended him,
> Hoping that he would forgive me.
> May I die, horserider! O Rider, I am left alone!

> Emin dönê bû danîştbûm leber bêĺayê
> Çûkeĺe suwarî min dehat û radebirt,
> Daway maçêkî lê dekirdim;
> Be serê ke şîn û be milî be kön,
> Nemdedayê…
> Eger xuĺa deka be bêmizeřetî dêtewe…
> Emin be'zê piyaw maqûĺan û
> Cûtêk zer memî zerdî
> Debeme tikayê,

> Nebada le min, qelender û baban wêran, renca bêt û,
> BeĺKû bom bête redayê.
> Hay, nemênim suwaro! Suwar! Hawar le min be tenê.
> (text recorded by Hosayni 1975: 33-4)

And when she hears that her beloved is drowned in blood, she says:

> Send my message to physicians, druggists, Lokmans, doctors,
>   and sages,
> Tell them that no one should touch him,
> Until I concoct a medicine for him,
> From cardamom, cinnamon, clove gillyflower, the rust of my
>   earrings, and the dust of my turban, that I mix with the sweat
>   of my neck,
> I will put it on the wound of [my] little rider.

> Dena cuwabim bo bere ĥekîman, ĥetaran, luqmanan, tebît û çazanan,
> De biĺên çi taqe destanî nekenê,
> Heta bo xom dermanêkî bo degirmewe,
> Le ĥêlê, le darçînê, le qenefiĺê, le jengî de guwarê, le tozî de
>   şedê, destawî dedem be areqê gerdinê,
> Deyhawême ser zarî brînî çûkeĺe suwarê… (Hosayni 1975: 35)

In these quotations, as elsewhere in the longer text, the lover is not constrained, by language, in expressing her love or sexual desires. Here, social and cultural constraints are more prominent than the limitations of language. Restrictions on male-female socializing as well as hierarchical relations in sexual contact (the male asks for a kiss, and the female refuses) are more prominent. In elegy, at least, the female lover is rather free to express not only her desire, but also, aware of the mores of male sexuality in her culture, offers the sweat of her neck, the dust of her headwear, and the rust of her earrings as the cure for the fatal wounds of the dying beloved.

The few surveys of the 'role of women' in Kurdish oral literature, written mostly from a nationalist perspective, depict a rather egalitarian system of gender relations in the traditional society of Kurdistan. Rohat (1994), for instance, has traced the 'sovereignty' (*serdestî, hakîmîyet*) of women in Kurdish oral tradition. In examining the rich proverbial heritage, he documents a diversity of 'motifs' or claims about women, for example, their depiction as 'spring of life,' 'developer (*avakar*) of home,' 'mother,' 'good and bad,' and so on. He finds, in this multivocal tradition, a dominant 'pro-woman' (*jinparêz*) perspective. However, examining this heritage from a feminist perspective, it is difficult to establish women's sovereignty in the sense of exercising gender power independent of patriarchal rule. The most 'pro-woman' proverb, 'woman is the spring of life' (*jin kanîya jîyînêye*), confers on women a prominent role in the reproduction of 'new generations' and humanity (*mirovayetî*); thus, 'through bearing children, woman has become a

symbol of *bereket*, 'blessing, abundance, prosperity'' (Rohat 1944: 44). Put in the context of power relations, however, one may argue that these reproductive roles contribute to the reproduction of patriarchy, and work against the sovereignty of women.

It seems, however, that oral literature was more democratic than written literature in terms of women's participation in the creation, dissemination, and reception of this form of art. Written literature has been, until recently, a predominantly male domain.[5] Still, the feminine (rather than feminist) consciousness expressed in oral literature was not in a position to challenge the patriarchal order of feudal and tribal society of Kurdistan.

The Ideological (Re)production of Patriarchy Much of the evidence presented so far has dealt with patriarchy in the semantic and lexical fields of Kurdish. The following section examines a few cases of the exercise of patriarchal power in the realm of discourse, where language and politics combine in complex ways. Discourse is a highly contested concept. In linguistics, it usually means 'units' larger than a single sentence. Discourse analysis is vital in linguistics because meaning is never, except in dictionaries, fixed in a word, a definition or a single utterance. Thus, discourse consists of a bloc of utterances, which furnish insight that is not discernible in an isolated unit. In poststructuralist theory, 'discourse' is usually a mode of interpretation tied to relations of power.

Endearing Patriarchy in **Kurdayetî**. If conscious resistance against patriarchy was historically impossible in the feudal society of Kurdistan, the critique of unequal gender relations began to emerge with the advent of the ideas of modernity in the late nineteenth century. Nationalist males, who had a monopoly of literacy in the largely illiterate Kurdish society, were the first to raise the question of gender equality. Hacî Qadirî Koyî (1815?-97), the apostle of *Kurdayetî* 'Kurdish nationalism,' was the first on record to openly support the idea of women's education. The emerging Kurdish press in the last two decades of Ottoman rule discussed the 'woman question,' and a Kurdish women's organization was established in Istanbul in 1919 (see Klein, and Alakom this volume). In Iraqi Kurdistan, a well-known nationalist mullah, Mela Miĥemedî Koyî (1876-1943), protested the oppressive practice of divorce and supported women's education (see relevant texts in Husên Eĥmed 1990: 164-77; for the translated text, see Mojab, forthcoming). The more radical poet Miĥemed Qani' (1898-1965) castigated the oppression of women, especially their treatment as property to be bought and sold in marriage (Qani' 1989: 357-60). The communist poet 'Ebduĺĺa Goran (1904-1962) exposed, in his subtle and innovative poetry, gender and class violence against women, especially honor killing (texts quoted in Husên Eĥmed 1990: 164-77). These types of

resistance were inspired by liberal and democratic ideals of equality and justice, as well as exposure to the achievements of women's liberation movements in both the West and the socialist countries. Individual women also struggled for equality, although it is difficult to speak of feminist or women's *movements* until the 1990s. Women's resistances were not politically different from enlightened male efforts for equality and justice between genders.

Thus, the earliest efforts for the democratization of gender relations occurred in spite of the domination of androcentric language; these efforts did not lead to any consciousness about the exercise of patriarchal power in language. Indeed, this dialectic of the conflict and unity of patriarchy and language allows both progress and retrogress in the struggle for the democratization of gender relations. Here feminist consciousness (knowledge, theory, organizing) plays a crucial role. Kurdish nationalist movements have never challenged patriarchy as a structure of male power that operates in all realms, including economy, class, politics, religion, law, language, custom, tradition, world view, and culture. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that tension is beginning to grow between feminism on the one hand, and androcentric politics, religion, and language on the other hand.

Kurdish nationalism has so far entertained patriarchy, and by and large shielded it from feminist critique and independent organizing. Nationalists, whether already in power (in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991) or struggling to achieve state power, have virtually exhausted their politics of gender reform (see Mojab, this volume, Introduction and chapter 3).. The following evidence, old and new, provides some insight into the linguistic and discursive reproductions of patriarchy in Kurdistan.

In late nineteenth century, in a poem addressed to the men of his hometown Koye, now in Iraqi Kurdistan, Hacî Qadirî Koyî criticized the backwardness of the people and, especially, their superstitious obedience to the corrupt *şêx*s, 'heads of *terîqet*s,' that is, religious orders, and ignorant mullahs. In this critique, he contrasted the corrupt men of his hometown with ideal good men. Referring to some great figures in history, all male, he argued that it was possible to follow their example. In doing so, he sharply contrasted a few good and great men with women in general:

> They [great men] were like you or perhaps like me,
> Why are they men, and we (are) like women?
>
> Misalî êwe bûn ya xud wekû min,
> Ewan bo çî piyawin, ême wek jin? (Koyî 1986: 260)

As an early Kurdish modernist thinker, Koyî was aware of the novelty of his nationalist ideas, and quite often had to defend his politics. Living in Constantinople (Istanbul) during the last decade(s) of

his life, he expressed the agonies of life in exile. In one poem, he complained:

> Do not say that 'Hacî [Qadirî Koyî] was an idle person in Rom
>   (Ottoman Turkey),'
> I am a man [but I live] in the midst of the city of women.
>
> Meĺên bêkare bû Ĥacî le Roma
> Emin piyawim le nêw şarî jinanim. (Koyî 1986: 76)

In these texts, discourse and language are inseparable. Ĥacî's woman/man binarism is both linguistic and discursive. Linguistically, it is an antonymy based on positively marked virtues of masculine courage and ability. Discursively, it is an assertion of male power in a politics, which not only reproduces women's subordination but even denies many men the status of *piyawetî*, 'manliness.' A century after Hacî, this politics is widespread in nationalist discourses and in *Kurdewarî*. The Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran, for instance, has put gender equality on its agenda. However, in the elections of the members of the Central Committee of the party in 1981, one of the top leaders spoke against the candidacy of a prominent party member, arguing that 'he would not be able to be effective, because he is powerless in the face of his wife' (quoted in Kawe 1996: 225).

The nationalist poet, Yonis Re'uf, known as Diĺdar (1918-48), made a sharp contrast between *jîn* 'to live' and *jin* 'woman' in a poem entitled 'Child of Hope.' The poem is an address to the ideal Kurdish child, who should be knowledgeable, honest, hard working, and ready to serve the difficult cause of the Kurdish nation. Although the gender of the child is not identified, it is clear that the poet was talking to a young boy:

> I am telling you, learn it well,
> Living like a man (*jiyanî merdî*) is a difficult undertaking.
> Living like a woman is not living at all,
> You should live both bravely and majestically.
>
> Ewa pêt eĺêm çakî bizane,
> Jiyanî merdî barî girane…
> Ewe jîn niye ke wek jin bijît,
> Ebê hem aza w hem mezin bijît. ('Ela'eddin 1985: 217)

The contrast between 'dying like a man' and 'living like a woman' is ubiquitous. In his introduction to *Beytî Dimdim*, the Ballad of Dimdim, which tells the story of a seventeenth century Kurdish revolt against the Iranian king Shah Abbas, Huseynî (1981: 2) commented on the conquest of the Fortress Dimdim by the Shah's army and the massacre of the residents. According to this author, some of the fighters (all men) were inclined to surrender; an elderly woman interfered and

encouraged everyone to resist. The woman, Huseynî wrote, told the demoralized fighters:

> engage in war in a manly manner (*piyawane*) and do not surrender until the last drop of your blood (dying like a man rather than living like a woman, *merdane mirdin nek jinane jîn*).

It is difficult to separate, in this text, masculinist politics from androcentric language. The existence of the adverb *jinane*, 'like a woman,' in the language has, apparently, not shaped the generation of the quoted statement, which appears in a book of Kurdish proverbs (Fattahi Ghazi 1985: 403), as 'dying like a man rather than living *ĥîzane*', that is, "like a catamite, like a coward"' (W&E). There is, at the same time, an intertexuality of signification: 'cowardice' is a central meaning, connotative more than denotative, of the signifier *jin*, allowing *jinane* unobstructed interchangeability with *ĥîzane*, and vice versa. In this intertextually subsisting semantic field, Fattahi Ghazi quotes, as the source of the saying ('dying like a man rather than living *ĥîzane*'), the poet/lexicographer Hejar's famous *Laylaye*, 'lullaby,' composed in 1944 (Hejar 1979: 312).

Not all nationalists view women as inherently cowardly and weak. The few women who were allowed, before the 1980s, to join the nationalist movement, and take up arms for the independence of Kurdistan, are extolled as heroes (see Galletti, and Bruinessen, this volume). However, the woman *pêşmerge*, 'guerrilla,' is accepted only if she becomes a male freedom fighter. The nationalist poet Hêmin composed in 1963 'The Flower of Hope,' a poem about a woman freedom fighter named Exter (Akhtar). The poem was soon used by the famous singer Miĥemedî Mamlê in a song known as *Exter*.

The Flower of Hope

Akhtar, Kurdish girl with beautiful eyes!
Inspirer of poems full of feeling!
O you patriotic *pêşmerge*,
When I saw you with a rifle in your hands,
    I knew that the flower of hope blossomed
    The morning of freedom dawned.
Akhtar, invincible *pêşmerge*!
Akhtar, flower in the trench!
Blood drops from the tip of your dagger,
You stop the offensive of the [enemy's] troops.
    You aimed with your beautiful eyes at
    The flanks of these bastards (*bîjûwane*)
You kicked away jewellery and clothing
You have thrown away kohl and kohl-pot
You have tightened your loose waistband
You have put bandoliers on your shoulders.
    You have broken your bracelets and anklets

You took up a rifle like a man (*piyawane*)
You don't make up [your] eyelids, don't redden [your] lips
You don't comb your dishevelled side-tresses
You discarded your veil forever
And turned toward the mountains
    You cut to pieces the liver of the bastard enemy (*zoĺ*),
    With your bayonet, not with your eyelashes.

Guĺî Hîwa

Exter kiçî Kurdî çaw mest!
Ilham bexşî şê'rî piŕ hest!
Ey pêşmergey milletperest
Ke dîtimî tifeng bedest
  Zanîm guĺî hîwa pişkût
  Beyanî azadî engût.
Exter pêşmergey koĺneder!
Exter ey guĺî nêw senger!
Xönit detkê le dimî xencer
Degrî berî hêrşî esker
    Sêret girt bew çawe cuwane
    Le kelekey em bîjuwane.
Şeqit heĺda le zêŕ û cil
Tûrit dawe kildan û kil
Tundit kirduwe piştênî şil
Fîşekdanit kirdote mil
    Pisandit bazne w pawane
    Destit da tifeng piyawane
Naŕêjî çaw, sûr nakey lêw
Şane nakey biskî pişêw
Yekcarî fiŕêt da çarşêw
Ewe rût kirde çiŕ û kêw
    Debŕî cergî dujminî zoĺ
    Be sernêze nek be mijoĺ. (Hêmin 1974: 142-3)

In this text, male and female worlds are constructed as binary opposites or, rather, as antonyms. Women and men are, in fact, 'ungraded antonyms' in which, unlike 'graded antonyms' such as 'hot/cold,' they constitute either/or contrasts rather than degrees of difference. The *jin/piyaw* 'woman/man' antonymy is, in the text, centered on the sememes (units of meaning or 'semantic components') of *piyawetî*, 'manliness.' War is a masculine undertaking, and Akhtar is defeminized in order to meet male standards of warfare. Although she is still seen, from a male sexualist perspective, as a 'flower in the trench,' the opposites are irreconcilable: male bayonets versus female eyelashes (the latter are widely metaphorized in classical poetry as arrows and spears); bandolier vs. jewellery; dagger vs. bracelets and anklets; home vs. mountains (battlefield); and blood on the dagger vs. red color on the lips. Equally significant is the patriarchal construction of the enemy as 'bastard,' *zoĺ* and *bîjû*, both defined by Hejar as *ĥeramzade*, 'illegitimately born (person),' that is, one whose father is not known. The

construction of meaning in this text is complex, with interplay of language, poetic devices, and masculine and nationalist politics. In contrast to the following text, 'A New Trench,' it freely uses patriarchal lexical meaning (e.g., 'bastard' and 'manly'). However, poetic diction rewrites the androcentric lexicon of the language into a manifesto of the fusion of woman's and national emancipations; meter and rhyme underwrite the text as a nationalist anthem; and nationalist politics overwrites the gendered discourse of armed resistance, which is conceived as the only road to both national liberation and women's emancipation.

The autonomy of (sexist) discourse (in the poststructuralist sense) from (androcentric) language can be seen in the following text, in which the poet lampoons one of the leaders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) for intimidating a number of Kurdish intellectuals in the city of Suleimani, Iraqi Kurdistan, in 1997. The PUK had engaged in mountain guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi state from 1976 to 1991; in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, it switched from underground to open activism in the cities in the no-fly zone in Iraqi Kurdistan created by the United States and its allies. The PUK soon shared power with another Kurdish party, and formed the Regional Government of Kurdistan in 1992. By 1997, after the disintegration of this government, the PUK was the ruling party in the eastern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, with its capital city of Suleimani. Most of the guerrilla forces had moved from the mountains into the cities and towns, and had become part of the armed forces of the PUK, which was now running a government independently from the Iraqi state. The lampooned PUK leader, already married, had taken a young woman as his second wife.

A New Trench

It is said that the leader of
Tough struggle(s) and resistance,
The God of guerrilla (war),
The standard-bearer of protracted war,
Has laid down his arms.
He has put on his shoulders,
The fleshy leg of
A lively woman (*şekrejin*).
He won't exchange it
For the treasures of Khabour,
For the citadel of Hawler [Arbil],
For the oil[fields] of Zambour
For (the city) of Suleimani.

Sengerêkî Nö

Delên pêşeway
Xebatî sext û berberekanî,
Xuway partîzanî,
Alahelgirî şerî tûlanî,

Çekî danawe,
Lingî goştinî
Yek şekrejinî
Kirdote şanî,
Nay gořêtewe
Be gencî Xabûr,
Be Qeĺay Hewlêr,
Be newtî Zembûr,
Be Suleymanî. (leaflet, November 24, 1997 [Stockholm])

In this text, the androcentric opposition between femininity and masculinity is intertwined with the opposition between surrender and struggle, arms (rifle) on the shoulder vs. the 'fleshy legs of a lively woman' on the shoulders. The surrender is complete in that giving up armed struggle is equated with surrender to a female, in this case the pleasures of sexual intercourse with her: not only has he surrendered to a woman, but also is not willing to exchange her body for the Kurdish nation's disputed treasures, and colonized oilfields, citadels, and cities.

The political conflict over censorship is, in this text, fought on the site of women's body, which is used as the touchstone of 'manliness.' The body does not belong to the woman; it is a *new* trench that has been conquered; this is quite 'natural' for a man, a fulfilment of his status; the problem, for the poet, is that the conquest is done at the expense of the *old* and more vital trenches of the nation and its national liberation war. Still, the language of the text, compared with Hêmin's poem, is rather non-masculinist; *şekrejin* [*şekr* 'sugar' + *-e* compound vowel + *jin*] is defined, by Hejar, as 'a good and respected woman;' W&E translate it into 'decorative and lively woman'. There is, for males, a similar lexical construct *şekrepiyaw*, which does not appear in W&E but is defined, by Hejar, as 'a well-behaved and flawless man.' Thus, patriarchal power is asserted not through the semantics of a sexist lexicon but, rather, discursively, in its politics of gender. I will contend, later, that the (re)production of patriarchy in the texts examined in this study can be better understood if we view them not simply as language and discourse but as components of the ideology of feudal and tribal patriarchy.

Modernist Forms of Resistance. I suggested above that, in feudal and tribal Kurdish society, resistance against patriarchy was constrained by the absence of feminist consciousness. The feminine consciousness resonating in oral literature could not lead to theoretical reflections on patriarchy, male oppression, sexism, women's rights, unequal gender relations, or non-sexist language. The rise of feminist consciousness has been tortuous, going through the conflict and convergence of a declining feudal order and an emerging but scavenger capitalism; it is the context of the slaughter of hundreds of women for reasons of 'honor' *namûs*; the site of incinerated bodies of hundreds of self-immolating women; the lost lives of thousands of women subjected to genocide and ethnic

cleansing; and, the total failure of nationalism in confronting patriarchal violence.

It is in these contexts of unprecedented cruelty that women and men, feminists and non-feminists, in Kurdistan and in diaspora, have begun to protest the physical and symbolic violence of Kurdish patriarchy. As the final draft of this chapter was being proof-read, one woman columnist wrote 'Men… Beware Your Language' (Ezîz 2000) while a male author (Miĥemed 'Ezîz 2000) wrote that Kurdish women have been denied equal rights in the 'feudal, tribal, agrarian and Islamic Kurdish society'. He cited texts by Kurdish poets, classical and modern, leftist and rightist, that have treated women as 'weak', 'cowardly', 'worthless', and 'undignified' *sûk*; feminists are beginning to challenge nationalism, Islam, feudalism, and capitalism as cohorts of patriarchy. There is a proliferation of women's journalism (see Mojab, Introduction, endnote 14).

Conclusions

This study documents the androcentrism of the lexicon and semantic fields of the Kurdish language. While it is not unique to the Kurdish case, the universality of linguistic patriarchy betrays the claim to the particularity of the status of Kurdish women, that is, their relative freedom compared with women in neighbouring nations. In the texts and contexts examined in this chapter, language and patriarchy coexist in conflict and unity. However, unity has been paramount so far. Much of the linguistic evidence presented in this study constitutes symbolic violence against Kurdish women.

In the Kurdish language, relationships between males and females have been hierarchical, one in which males are *dominant* and women are *subordinate*. In light of the evidence from the Kurdish case, the poststructuralist reduction of the patriarchal exercise of gender power, that is, *dominance*, to the question of *difference* seems most inadequate in theory, and conformist in politics. A more promising approach would be to see in language a dialectic of ceaseless closing and opening of the semantic space, a process in which the unequal division of power is reproduced but may be challenged through conscious resistance. This resistance is emerging among the users of Kurdish in the context of the spread of feminist knowledge.

Patriarchal domination is ubiquitous in the Kurdish language in everyday acts of writing and speaking, poetry and prose, music, lexicography and other contexts. However, the evidence in this study emphasizes the relative autonomy of discourse (in its poststructuralist sense) and language from the exercise of patriarchal power. On the one hand, language is open to non-sexist modes of signification. On the other hand, using non-sexist language (lexicon, morphology, syntax, and

discourse), it is possible to make sexist and patriarchal meaning (for instance, in the text, 'A New Trench,' cited above).

Patriarchy in Kurdistan is a form of the exercise of political (in this case, gender) power, which thrives on language but is not determined by it. Very simply, the exercise of gender power cannot be reduced to discursive operations, modes of interpretation, or linguistic games. I contend that linguistic and discursive reductionisms can be avoided if patriarchal rule is seen as 'politics' and 'ideology' that shape discourse and language in complex and conflictual interactions. Viewed dialectically, one may argue that patriarchal rule has shaped the dynamics of signification in Kurdish. The interests of the male gender are visible in the construction of the signifieds examined in this study. However, the fact that patriarchal meaning can be generated without the use of sexist or androcentric language undermines the theory and politics of linguistic determinism. At the same time, if signification is a site of struggle over power, it would be appropriate to resist patriarchy in both language and discourse. While non-sexist language use will certainly not overthrow the rule of Kurdish patriarchy, the struggle for 'inclusive' or 'gender-neutral' modes of signification will contribute to the spread of feminist consciousness.

Kurdish patriarchy, much like language, is a system of subsystems. It is the system of gender rule and, among other things, a cultural institution, a form of social organization, an Islamic way of life, a secular male order, a political economy of gender relations, a form of class power, a mode of signification, and a meeting point of tribal, feudal, and national traditions. It is woven into the very fabric of language, oral and literary traditions, modes of thinking, music, dance, behavior, emotions, habits, attitudes, and dress codes.

Linguistic, semantic, semiotic and discursive analyses provide significant insight into the intricate universe of patriarchy. However, fearful of the reality of the real and the 'binarism' of mind and being, many poststructuralists have discarded concepts such as domination, unequal distribution of power, oppression, and exploitation, which are crucial for understanding the (re)production of patriarchy or capitalism. From an activist perspective interested in democratizing gender relations, the unseating of patriarchy rests on understanding, to quote Marx in his approach to capitalist society, how patriarchy 'produces the conditions of its own reproduction.' As Marx noted in this theorization of capitalism, 'when viewed,… as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction' (*Capital*, I, chapter 23, quoted in Himmelweit 1983: 417). The theory of ideology, with its philosophical commitments to realism/materialism, accounts for critical aspects of the (re)production of patriarchy. One may, then, argue that poststructuralism's replacement of 'ideology' by 'discourse' involves

more than a philosophical or theoretical commitment. Preoccupied with the internal dynamics of discoursing, discourse theory leaves the unequal division of power and its reproduction intact (see Purvis and Hunt 1993, on the conformist tendencies of discourse theory).

Notes

1. I would like to thank Himani Bannerji, Michael Chyet, Stephan Dobson, Michael Kuttner, Shahrzad Mojab, and Jaffer Sheyholislami for reading the first draft of this chapter. I am alone responsible for the contents.

2. Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) argued that we understand the world according to the way our native language presents or 'dissects' it through words, concepts, and semantic and grammatical categories. See, among a vast literature on Whorf and his principle of 'linguistic relativity', Lee (1996). For a critique of studies that equate linguistic relativity with linguistic determinism, see Schultz (1990).

3. Honor continues to regulate social, especially gender, relations in modern societies (see Nye 1993, on masculinity and honor in modern France and the development of 'bourgeois honorability'). Although feudal honorability is in decline among some members of the middle classes, and is giving way to bourgeois codes of honor, the feudal norms are still powerfully present, and continue to generate violence against women.

4. I would like to thank Jaffer Sheyholislami for the information on the use of white *tara* for non-virgin brides. I am, however, responsible for the interpretation.

5. My rather sketchy claim is based on a comparative survey of oral and written literatures. According to one preliminary survey, based on incomplete data, there were only seven women among the 147 Kurdish poets who lived before 1917, and whose social background are known (Hassanpour 1992: 75-6). In her study of the 'poetry of Kurdish women' published in 1980, Mukriyanî mentions some twenty poets who were born, with a few exceptions, after 1917. Women's participation in literary creation increased visibly after 1980.

The *Suwaro* text, quoted above (pp. 248-9), was recited by a male bard. Lament (*şîn*) in Kurdistan is usually a female practice, and one may assume that this genre is composed by women, but also performed and, even, composed by males.

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