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Colour as Culture: Colour Implications in Selected Kurdish and African-American Poems: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

As a phenomenon, colour is influential in human's feelings, emotions, reactions, and even physical and mental products and outputs. Yet, its implications are bound by some social, mythical, historical, religious, political, psychological, and cultural perspectives. They also could be related to cultural pluralism and melting-pot theories on the one hand and multiculturalism and cross-culturalism on the other hand, since culture functions as a collective arena for different perspectives in any given society. The present descriptive study tries to illustrate the impact of different cultures and social make-ups upon the varying implications of the same colour in different poems from two different cultures that, despite their differences, may share some similar social, political, and cultural backgrounds. It tries to find answers for questions like: Can the similar social and political status of certain people be reflected in similar use of certain colours? Do such people or nations have similar psychological and cultural responses to the same colours and why? It hypothesizes that differences in norms and traditions bring about interesting and contradictory results from colour connotations in the chosen poetic texts. Searching a number of intellectual and up-to-date sources and practicing the collected and comprehended concepts in some English and Kurdish texts through a descriptive and analytical approach, the study reached some conclusions that are summed up at the end of the paper along with the list of the works cited.

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Key words: connotations, colour, multiculturalism, tradition, variations.

المستخلص

يعتبر اللون كظاهرة، عنصرا مؤثرا في مشاعر وعواطف وردود أفعال الانسان وكذلك في انتاجه الفكري والعضلي. ولكن هذه العواطف والمشاعر مرتبطة بالجوانب الاجتماعية والتاريخية والدينية والسياسية والنفسية وحتى الجوانب الثقافية. ويمكن ان تكون مرتبطة كذلك بالتعددية الثقافية ونظريات بوثقة الذوبان من جهة والتعددية الثقافية والعاور الثقافي من جهة أخرى لان الثقافة تعمل كبوتقة جامعة لمختلف الاتجاهات في كل المجتمعات. وفي هذا الاتجاه، يحاول البحث الحالي ان يوضح تأثير الثقافات والتركيبات المجتمعية المختلفة على نفس اللون في قصائد مختلفة من ثقافتين مختلفتين والتي على الرغم من اختلافاتها، يمكن ان تتشارك في خلفيات اجتماعية وسياسية وثقافية. ويحاول البحث إيجاد أجوبة لأسئلة مختلفة مثل: هل يمكن إيجاد انعكاس الوضع السياسي والاجتماعي المشابه على تشابه الاستخدام لنفس اللون في القصائد المختلفة؟ هل ان لهذه الشعوب او الأمم ردود أفعال ثقافية ونفسية تجاه نفس اللون ولماذا؟

في هذه الناحية، يفترض البحث بان الاختلاف في العادات والتقاليد والثقافات تنتج نتائج متضاربة وجالبة للاهتمام للألوان في القصائد المختارة للبحث. ونتيجة للبحث في عدد من المصادر الاكاديمية المعاصرة وتطبيق مفاهيم شاملة ودقيقة على النصوص المختارة، توصل البحث الى عدد من الاستنتاجات والتي تم درجها في نهاية البحث على شكل نقاط محددة، بالإضافة الى درج قائمة المصادر المستخدمة في البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المتضمن، لون، تعدد الثقافات، تقاليد، اختلافات.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not correct to connect a single concept of a colour in one way or another to the inclusive and multi-faced phenomenon of culture because, man's interaction with man, the deep human custom and tradition, and a host of other man-made measures help in bringing this unbalanced scale into existence. Colour hardly give accurate and fixed meanings unless connected or attributed to things or objects in certain cultures, and these meanings can vary within the same culture according to the varying contexts and

objects to which it is accredited. But colour, after all, is an essential element that, in many cases, forms and directs intra-cultural and cross-cultural communications and interactions. So, what may seem normal and acceptable in the first communication, may not be adequate, satisfactory, or even tolerable in another one. This process of connecting ideas or objects to specific colours harbors the mind unconsciously, as one critic states, “according to the Institute of Colour Research, all human beings make an unconscious judgement about a person, environment, or item within ninety seconds of initial viewing and that between 62% and 90% of that assessment is based on colour alone” (Bradfield: 3).

Generally, the meanings and connotations of colours are never universal nor even locally set and settled. The expression of “feeling blue” in English, for example, is replaced by “turning dark” in Kurdish if the same meaning is wanted to be conveyed. And so, colour has strong cultural and sociological bases as the professor of sociology, Gary Alan Fine and his co-authors state, “the arena in which sociologists have been most attentive to the analysis of colour has been in the realm of race” (443).

In support of Fine’s statement, the colour blue which is associated with sorrow and sadness in English, is used to reduce that feeling in the Kurdish culture. The Kurds used to hang a piece of a blue bead inside their houses to prevent them, as they believed, from evil eyes., The Japanese, on the other hand, paint their train stations with blue, believing that it can help in reducing the feeling of despair that leads, if continued, to catastrophes like committing suicide. This is what Chris Baraniuk means when he writes, “it all started in the late 2000s, when a number of Japanese railway companies began installing blue lamps above train station platforms. It was an attempt to deter people from suicide in such places” (www.bbc.com). The United Nations, as well, deploys the colour blue as an emblem for its originated map and even its peace-keeping police who work in the disputed areas and spots, as a symbol for peace and tranquility as opposed to the red colour of war and destruction. But the two colours of white and black and the dichotomy they established long ago, could be considered the most prominent point as far as function of colour is concerned in different cultures and communities. The simple and easy differentiation between white as the symbol of light and brightness on the one hand and black as the symbol of night and darkness on the

other hand is certainly as old as man's existence upon our planet; since the primitive man got familiar with them relatively before any other colour.

Though throughout ages and centuries, a great deal of progress and development has happened to this primary concept; yet the dichotomy is still alive with much complications intra-culturally or cross-culturally. In this respect, one critic remarks that "according to anthropologists Brent Berlin and Paul Kay in their classic study *Basic Colour Terms*, some societies only distinguish between light and dark or white and black. These include tribes in New Guinea, South India, and the Congo, suggesting that these divisions are not geographically localized (Berlin et al: 445). This cross-geographical understanding of black or any other colour could be accepted but to a limited extent and with some limits and boundaries. The distinction mentioned above covers some limited societies and in a limited geographical arena; it is, therefore, hardly applicable to other norms, other societies, and other geographical locations. The two theorists have taken primitive social groups in those areas, in which generalization would render it inaccurate. But the settled fact is that white and black have been and will remain the main prominent symbolic colours especially that their political and ethnic implications have overshadowed all other meanings and connotations. The white-black polarities that appeared with the European settlement in America after Christopher Columbus's discovery of the new world in 1492, brought about yet a more severe ethnic conflict as a result of settlement by force of large waves of slaves from Africa in that new world.

Generally, colour connotations can change as many times as almost the number of the different cultures and traditions are there among human ethnic, social, or cultural groups in the world. These ethnic, social, and cultural-based connotations are reflected clearly not only in the norms, traditions, and daily behaviour of the relevant groups and communities; rather, in the documented literature produced by the intellectuals of those groups and before that in their folk literature.

The study of this aspect in the literature of different cultural and ethnic groups is, therefore, significant because it will show to what extent such colour connotation affect the everyday life and beliefs of different cultural groups and their interaction through their literary products, with their counterparts elsewhere in the wide world.

Based on this belief, some poetic texts are chosen by poets from the African American and Kurdish poets, since the historical route and the cultural and political circumstances under which those texts are produced in both cases seem to have parallel lines of similarity, but differences as well and this, the study expects, will create the sense of interest and bewilderment as far as the symbolic meanings and connotations of certain colours are concerned.

Choosing the Kurdish and African American texts and extracts is based on the understanding that the Kurds as a nation and the African Americans as multi-national make-up went through similar social, political, and even psychological crises that helped, historically, in the social formation of the culture that differentiates them in a number of aspects and phenomena. It is partly due to this reason that the texts, especially the Kurdish ones, are not chosen strictly from one particular age. The principles and aspects of both cultures are settled long ago and they are hardly prone to essential development in speedy steps. The selection of the poems on both sides is made after scrutinizing the social, political, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the chosen poets.

2. COMPARATIVE STUDY

Though numerous definitions are provided for comparative literature, a field that appeared in France in the 19th century and reached America through the German scholars who migrated to the new world in the 20th century, yet, it can be simply described as a critical analysis of literary or artistic works with the only difference that the analysis, here, covers two or more than two works in which a special focus is put upon aspects of resemblance and differences between the works under study . Henry H.H. Remak for instance, define it as “the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts . . . on the other hand” (Qtd in Stallknecht and Frena: 1). But such definitions almost stress one aspect and neglects more relevant ones; therefore, the study finds its general definition above adequate and comprehensive enough to be considered inclusive.

Although it is relatively new as compared to the French school, yet the American school of comparative literature proves more workable and practical since its scope is not limited

and constrained as its French counterpart is. The reason is not hard to discern; existence of aspects of similarity between two literary works or more, the researcher believes, is not necessarily related to the principle of indebtedness and should not be taken for granted as such; rather, it should be concluded that similarity of human thoughts and reasons across nations and peoples comes from the natural make up of man away from environmental effects and influences.

The study, therefore, applies the school of ‘the nation of the immigrants’ in analyzing the chosen Kurdish and African-American texts and extracts, especially that proving the existence of inter-relation among the writers on both sides of the study is never an easy task but, the researcher thinks, a promising debut towards further studies in this respect.

3. KURDISH POETRY: COLOUR MEANINGS

The Kurdish poetry, like the poetry of most other peoples, served its culture and vice versa. Kurdish poets were enough aware of the history and culture of their nation and were keen to make use of them as elemental characters in creating the bulk of their literary products. The richly plague-stricken history of this people throughout ages participated in its distinctive culture to an extent that the lines between them is almost erased or at least blurred. For this purpose, the definition provided by the English anthropologist E. B. Taylor is relevant. He states that culture “is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd in Miran et al:355). Taylor’s inclusive definition applies for the Kurdish culture among other cultures; yet, his ‘acquire’ in the case of Kurdish culture and literature may encompass difference from the original ones due to myriad impacts and factors that participated in the overall formation of that culture.

It is beyond dispute that the Kurdish literature as part of its culture, started with oral performances by bards and minstrels who used to entertain their audiences with Kurdish epics and stories in verse; yet the Kurdish written literature and especially poetry, draws a greater attention for its prosperity as a cultural warehouse. It is necessary to stress that color associations in Kurdish poetry, like its counterparts in the world, are learned and acquired from the society rather than being innate, and so, color is a 100% social

phenomenon. As a result, any study that includes color is by no means comprehensive unless it is conducted within the social milieu (Murad:42). For this reason, the context of the texts under study, here, will be stressed to assist in understanding and consuming them smoothly.

The colour yellow for instance, in the Kurdish culture and poetry, like most other cultures, stands for hope, activity, gold, pleasure, and optimism especially when it symbolizes the sun. It is upon this belief that the Kurdish flag carries in its center, a yellow sun with twenty-one rays to stand for the concept of rebirth according to one of the ancient Kurdish religions. (The first day of a new year in the Kurdish culture and calendar is the 21st of March). In this respect, a critic takes this positive meaning back to the original religion of the Kurds, “it is used in the Kurdish flag to represent the source of life and light, while blazing golden (yellow) sun emblem at the center is a cultural symbol representing wisdom in the ancient Kurdish Zoroastrianism and Yezidi region (Izadi qtd in Romi: 144).

The contemporary Kurdish poet Abdulla Pashew (b.1946), who lives in Sweden as an expatriate, addresses the Kurdish flag in his poem “Oh, Yellow Flower”:

- The extracts will be presented in Kurdish followed directly by their translated version.

ئهی گۆلی زەرد،

ئهی گۆلی زەرد!

ئەگەرچی رەشەبای نامەرد

پەیتا پەیتا هەلمەت دینێ

.....

بەلام، گیانه

ئهی گۆلی زەرد،

تو هەر دەژیت.

Oh, Yellow Flower,

Oh, Yellow Flower,

Though dreadful storms

Blow regularly.

.....

But dear,
Yellow flower,
You will live*. (Vol. 1: 49-50).

- The Kurdish extracts are translated by the researcher himself.

Whether the flower is the flag or the homeland, the association is embedded with optimism despite ominous threats which are planted deep in the Kurdish culture and the psyche of almost every Kurd. Such threats, the poet wishes to stress, are still ongoing and, like a persistent wind, aim to pluck the flower out. Yet, the hope lies in the mind and psyche of the followers and supporters of the flower, represented by the speaker of the poem who urges the flower to stand against them because, the speaker seems confident, ‘You will live’. This optimism stems from the Kurdish people’s determination of resistance and insistence upon survival from the ‘dreadful storms’ that blow on them ‘regularly’, and this mindset has become a de facto part and particle of the culture of that people and was planted deep in their psyches.

But the same optimism and feeling of a bright future exemplified by the ‘Yellow flower’ and its likes, are overshadowed by a grim and dark image shown recurrently through the same colour in myriad Kurdish poems and texts. The yellow flower of the previous excerpt turns, in Hemn’s “An Autumn Eve”, to a yellow leave, (پەلە هەورێکی / چۆڵکە / گرتی سوچیکێ ئاسمان / گەلای زەردی دارێک وەری / زریان بردی بەرمو نەمان) “A muddy piece of cloud / Covered a slice of the sky / A yellow leave of a tree fell / Taken by blizzard to extinction” (Aali: 74). The leave of the tree draws the attention of the inner eye towards positive meanings like rebirth, new, youth, activity, juvenile, immature, etc., but it is haunted in this poem by murky clouds that change its colour to yellow, thus driving it towards the end in death. The poet, in this dramatic poem, maneuvers over the use of the colour yellow from its traditional and cultural undertones to a double metaphorical use where the cloud and the leave of the tree stand for pure political conflicting meanings. And reading the whole poem can clarify the intended message completely. The concluding quatrain discloses this underneath meaning where an imaginary dialogue between the speaker of the poem and the apostrophic addressee is attractively penned,

گوتم کەواو ئاشنا!

بەشی ئێمە لە نێوچووە.

گوتیک نا دور بنواره

دور بنواره، ناسۆ روونه.

I said, so, friend,

Our lot is annihilation,

He said, no, no, look beyond

Look beyond, horizon is clear. (Vol. 1: 82).

Beautifully dramatized, the speaker is horrified of the muddy cloud which could refer to the efforts of subjugation, oppression, dehumanization, demographic changes, and campaigns for annihilating the Kurds by the regimes that controlled them in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. He is, therefore, in a state of despair; but the addressee, most probably every Kurd, is sure that the leaves that turn yellow and consequently fall, will be reborn because the ‘horizon is clear’.

This negative implication of yellow is abundant in the Kurdish poetry, classic and modern alike. With Abdul-Raheem Mawlawi (1806-1882), the yellow colour of the leave moves to human faces and bodies. In a poem titled “Please Breeze!” he shows the negative impact of that colour,

”مه‌عدومی خەم کێش، خەم زەردی خەمبار / زەرد دەرد سەخت دووری بالای یار”

“Concerned Maadum, sad worry-stricken / yellow hard disease of the aloof sweet” (Mudarris: 325). The poet, nicknamed Maadum (non-existent), seems sick with the pale appearance since he has been separated from the beloved who is, according to his editor, “his friend Mulla Khayal from the city of Pawa in the Iranian part of Kurdistan” (Ibid). The yellow disease is, most probably, a clever reference by the experienced poet to jaundice that is recurrently mentioned and is still alive in the memory of the Kurds whenever the near history of that people is remembered because the deadly disease claimed the lives of thousands of people in Iraq and Iran, among other countries, every year, especially that its name in Kurdish and Persian can be translated as “yellowness”. This reason, among many others, made the negative meaning of yellow in the Kurdish culture overshadow its positive connotation.

This varying association of yellow among poets and even poems by the same poet should be related to the psychological status of the composer at the time of composing the poem and the context in which he/she wants to send the message. For this, the ‘Colour in Context’ theory by a group of specialists in psychology states that “the influence of colour on psychological functioning varies as a function of a psychological context in which colour is perceived” (Meier et al:1).

Despite the positive and negative connotations above and a large number of such cases with the other colours; the most prevalent colours in the Kurdish culture and poetry remain the main colours of white and black; and this seems normal, since these are the two basic colours from which the others can be produced. In this respect, Aristotle was a pioneer as David Briggs states, “the most influential was the *linear scale* devised by Aristotle, based on the idea that colours might be formed by the mixing in various proportions of white and black. In his *Peri Aistheseos kai Aistheton (On Sense and What is Sensed*, c. 330 B.C.) Aristotle arranged five chromatic colours on a line between white and black, with the lighter colours beginning with yellow close to white, and the darker colours beginning with blue close to black” (<http://www.huevaluechroma.com>).

Tawfiq Mahmood Agha, nicknamed Peramerd, (1867-1950) is one of the poets who used colours recurrently in his poetry to symbolize his complex and conflicting personal and national feelings and worries. Like his peers, the colour white is scattered everywhere throughout his oeuvre. In his “Fluent Kurdish” he beautifully describes nature around him,

به بهرگی سپییوه چهند خوشه شاخی گۆژه ببینه
له رهنگی ناسمان دلبر تره، ئهو سپیه ئهم شینه
ئهلین بهرگی فریشتهی ناسمانیش سپیه وهك بهفره
فریشتهی ئیمه بالایه، بهلام ناخ بوچ ئهخوین تهفره؟!

Wearing white clothes, what a magic, look at Gwezha*,
More attractive than sky's colour, one white, one blue,
They say sky angels' clothes are white like snow,
Our angel is high, but alas, why we get cheated?

(Hawar: 123).

* A mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan region close to the city of Suleimani.

The natural scenery of his city during winter raises the poet's emotion and the result is this lyric and a large number of other poems like it. Snow with its bright white colour has always been a source of inspiration for the Kurdish writers and poets and plays a great role in the Kurdish culture in general. The snow's colour is so beautiful and attractive that he could not compare it to any human thing. He, therefore, chooses another element of nature, i.e., the sky to match the white colour of the winter snow around him with it and he finds out that the white colour of the snow is more attractive than the blue sky. The Kurds, among other Islamic peoples in the world, believe that angels wear white clothes. This belief can also be seen in their original religions before Islam, i.e., Cult of Angels and Mithraism. The poet, therefore, should have been familiar with these religious concepts to borrow from them not only to show the beauty of the mountain but to express the purity, bona fides, and peace-seeking nature of the Kurds. It is this aspect that makes the speaker sorry for his people because history proved recurrently that this people have been cheated, most probably, due to their naivety and simplicity.

Another Kurdish poet who used this colour more than other colours is Mawlawi. For him, the colour white is an excellent tool to specify purity, clarity, experience, infallibility and old age, among other themes and purposes. These themes are strongly related to the colour white in the Kurdish culture in addition to the all-knowing ideas of peace, purity and surrender that are cross-culturally symbolized by this colour. In a 40 lines lyric titled "Time of Whiteness", the poet philosophizes upon that colour and uses it simultaneously in its positive and negative aspects in the way they are known and used in his culture:

وادهى سفیدی شکوفه‌ی پیرین

شکوفه‌ی باخچه‌ی پیری دلگیرین

شکوفه‌ی باخچه‌ی پیری سفیدهن

سرمایه‌ی میوه‌ی عیرفان هه‌ر ئێده‌ن

'Tis time of whiteness, senility's bud,
Senility's orchard bud is ample and dull.

That grove's bud is white,
Is the capital of conception.

(Mudarris: 465).

The contradictory ideas are combined to serve the entangled purpose. The white hair which symbolizes old age and so, a stage close to death; is used to denote the beginning of a parallel stage but moving in an opposite direction. The white head and beard symbolize rich experience and wisdom; thus, that colour serves both positive and negative destinations simultaneously. This strategy, for sure, goes along the colour's two connotations in the Kurdish culture, where it stands for getting old; but more importantly, it denotes wisdom and sagacity. That is why the old people, men and women, receive the highest degree of respect in the Kurdish society. The poet, cunningly, expresses this double duty in three successive lines above.

This colour, however, accompanies sad, pessimistic, and negative aspects and situations as well in the Kurdish poetry and culture though to a lesser degree. Abdulla Pashew, for example, who used yellow as a symbol of hope and optimism, uses white to show bitter feeling instead of the expected meanings of this colour in purity, peace, innocence, etc. In 1968, the same year in which the American Baptist minister and activist Martin Luther King, (1929 –1968) was assassinated, the poet addressed him in a poem entitled “To Martin, the Human”. The poem encompasses contradictory and comparable situations at the same time. Using apostrophe, the poet addresses the deceased African American spiritual leader and tries to draw a parallel line between himself and King, and consequently between their two peoples and cultures:

ئەمى لوتەر كىنگ

رهشى گزنگ

.....

له گهڵ ئەوهى پىستهكهشم بهفرو خوینه،

ههه لهتیکم ئاوارهى ژیر ئاسمانیکه.

Oh, Luther King,
The active black,

.....

Though my skin is snow and blood,
My every part is émigré under a different sky.
(Vol.1: 125).

The poet's insight of man's oppression by man, through the cleverly-set allusion here, calls for a great deal of attention. Though an oppressed individual within a widely burdened community and people which is scattered in this wide world; the speaker seizes an opportunity to express his awareness of and sympathy with the African Americans who suffered from subjugation, oppression, and assimilation in America. King's assassination at that year carries seeds of a cry-out poem not for his people alone but for humanity at large. The message is conveyed through the contradictory colours of white and black. If King was assassinated and his people were subjugated, simply because they were black not white, the speaker wants to say; there should be no reason for the critical situation he and his people are suffering from since 'my skin is snow and blood'. The colour white, that traditionally symbolizes peace and purity in most cultures in the world; does not seem to do its owners any good here. Again, addressing Luther King, the speaker wants to disclose what happens to the whites as well:

سہرنج دہ!
منیش وہک تو،
خوری شادی،
ہی نازادی،
ولاتہکم پی نازانی.
Look at me
Like you
Sun of pleasure
Of freedom
My land does not know
(Vol.1: 125-126).

He aims to show the fact that it is not colour that brings catastrophic consequences; rather, it is the mentality, the sense of ownership and domination that regards any being outside itself as Others, and this 'Othering', the poet wants to conclude, is the basis of the imbalanced battle that started and is going on in the world between the oppressing minority and the oppressed majority.

Pasheew's contemporary, Sherko Bekas (1940-2013) also uses white so cunningly that it needs a deep contemplation before attaining the intended message. In a long poem written on the occasion of the ex- Iraqi regime's bombardment of the Kurdish city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1988, entitled "Waiting for an Earthquake" and written after the Baathist regime was toppled by the US-led international coalition against Iraq, the poet attributes a glimpse of hope and rebirth to the catastrophic result of that gas attack:

سهره‌تای هاتنه‌وی

قوربانی و سهرمتهای کزبوون و ورمینی دار ژهری
جه لادو، همنوکه ئه مۆلی هاتنه موی گۆرانی
جوانه مهرگ.. ئه مۆلی روانه موی سهر له مۆیی درمختی
گۆل سیی هه له بجهی ئه فاله!

It is the beginning of victims' return,
Weakening and withering of dictator's poison.
Now is time of victim's song,
Of replanting of Halabja* and Anfal's** white flower.
(Bekas, Vol. 5: 687-688).

* A city in Iraqi Kurdistan region bombarded chemically by the ex-Iraqi regime in 1988.

**** A military operation by the ex-Iraqi regime where hundreds of thousands of Kurdish civilians were transported**

to the deserts in southern Iraq and most of them were buried alive.

Negative meanings or implications of the colour white is mostly limited in the Kurdish culture and consequently their literature, so this negative use is somehow complicated especially in poetry. By choosing this way, the poet has experienced a challenge that is rarely tried before. In the midst of the grim and fatal image in the first three lines above, the speaker is positive and is looking forward to a bright future for the dark image of the attack-stricken city and its people. The white flower of the poet is most probably a reference to Colchicum, the first flower that grows after the end of the hard winter in the Kurdish areas in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and even Syria. It is, therefore, regarded in the Kurdish culture and by the Kurds generally as the symbol of a new spring and a rebirth and regeneration. He wishes this regeneration and rebirth not for his people alone but for himself as a poet as well. He wants to renew his artistic product and divorce the path of

his predecessors that he chose to follow earlier. This new understanding and strategy, he puts forward in his book-length poem “Butterfly Strait”*:

*The poem was translated into English and introduced by Choman Hardy under the title “Butterfly Valley”

نیازم وایه خانوو یهك بۆ:

شعری سبهینی و دوارۆژم درووست بكم. وینهی نهی.

بریتۆن به خه نهیدیتبی

.....

من نیازم نییه له ژیرنهم رشمالی

شعیرانهدا خهیاڵ پیرکم،

یان هه له ژیر یهك سایه

گولهكانم پرچی سپی بهۆننهوه.

I also wish to build,
A house to my future poetry, never seen,
Andre Breton never dreamt of.

.....

I do not intend to make my vision
Old the tent of these poems,
Or let my flowers weave their white lock
Under just one shade.
(Bekas: Vol.3: 553-4).

The date of writing the poem is between May, 1990 and January 1991 as it is put by the poet himself and this period is a critical and politically transitional period in the history of Iraq and the Kurdish people in that country. Before that, The Kurdish cities and villages were attacked by the Iraqi army and thousands of people were killed or transported to southern Iraq in 1988 and 1989. Then, just a few months later (March 1991), the Kurdish historical uprising drove the Iraqi army and power out of the Kurdish cities and areas. The situation, then, became deformed and surreal with a great deal of chaos and transition. That is why, it seems, the poet alludes to the French poet, Andre Breton (1896-1966) who is regarded as one of the major founders of surrealism especially that Breton believed that “politics were inextricably linked to poetics” (Conley:12) The poem, therefore, can be studied as a transitional one for the poet and his readers as well. This poem and

any other future poem by Bekas, are supposed to be different in this differing age. The house of his future poetry would be so surreal that 'Breton never dreamt of'. No more old vision is intended, and a new phase is critically required to cope with the newly born bright day away from oppressors and tyrants. Beautifully set, the metaphorical concept of the last three lines presents an image of what has the poet undergone and what is he looking forward to. Weaving 'white lock' in the Kurdish culture and literature connotes stagnation and unchangeability, since it means that the girl remained unmarried though she got so old that her locks turned white. This is what the poet does not wish to do and the long poem under study is used as a bridge between two different phases in his poetic career. He struggles throughout the poem to foreshadow what will happen to his future poetry and maneuvers over his physical existence (an immigrant in Sweden then) and his flying imagination:

کەم بوو شەوانە خەم نەزێ و
ئەستێرەى شەریکی لێ نەبێ!
کەم بوو رۆژانە من نەبم بە هەلەم و
دانەکەم بۆ شەوێ!
زیاتر لێی ئەچمە پێشەو. بۆ مژینی خەمی سپی.
خۆشەویستیم ئەبێ بە هەنگ.

Hardly I did not become a daily fog
And did not fall at night
Go approach from it
For sucking a white grief
My love turns into a bee
(Bekas, Vol.3:629).

His daily fogs were the fruit of the new era for his people and poetry as well. Yet, he does not overlook the terrible past that drove him out of home. The oxymoron 'white grief', most probably, denotes the white colour of the Iraqi regime's poisonous gas that claimed the lives of thousands of Kurdish children and old civilians.

Like white, the colour black has also a strong share in the Kurdish culture and literature and specifically poetry, and it is also used in both positive and negative connotations. Psychologically and culturally based, it can evoke feeling of beauty, mystery, aubade, love, etc., but the majority of its connotations are negative and signal grief, horror, darkness, pessimism, death, etc. Peramerd's poetry is rich with colour descriptions, especially white and black, that describe the attractiveness of the Kurdish country girls. In "Dear Black Eyed", he marries the positive and negative meanings of black:

سەوزەلەهێ چاورەش، سەوزەلەهێ چاورەش / رۆژی رەش کردم سەوزەلەهێ چاورەش

"Dear black eyed, Dear black eyed / Turned my days black dear black eyed" (Hawar:156). The 'black-eyed' as an expression, refers to a legend and sometimes to something that damages man's reputation in the western culture (Berg); yet, it carries quite opposite messages and meaning in the Kurdish culture and poetry. A black eye for a girl is one of the most attractive features that draws males' attention, including the poets, and makes them pen beautiful lines about it; but for our poet, here, it is more a sign of indignation than blessing. The beautiful black eyes of the beloved should have been a source of bliss and infatuation, but it turns to work in an opposite direction for the speaker here, because, it can be concluded, he suffers from a rejected love or an estrangement from the beloved as there are, in the Kurdish literature, many unattained or unrequited love stories similar to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Tristan and Isolde* in its English counterpart. The sweet sorrow for the speaker, here, is reminiscent of Juliet's famous balcony speech to Romeo in Act two of the play, "Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow" (Craig:773).

For Abudl-Raheem Mawlawi, the black is quite dark with no signs of any bright ray in the horizon,

خامەهێ سەرەوێز نە چای سیایی / مەرێژۆ ئێسەڕین شەکوای جیایی

"My pen looks down at the black hole / dropping sad tears of separation" (Mudarris: 209). This short and sad lyric was written after his house caught fire and his books were completely burnt. In the Kurdish culture and literature, to bend head forward refers, among other things, to the state of grief and depression, especially when the target is a

‘black hole’, and this is the state of the speaker’s pen here, because it lost the fruit of years of its hard work. The loss, albeit an individual one, could be considered a national harm because a poet’s product should normally be counted as a national treasure.

من ڪوٽ وٽ لھ ڦلھ ڀاڳھيھي ڪي رهڻي شھل ٺھڄم
ڦلھ ڀاڳھيھي ڪي بھ سھ سزمان و تھملھل. ھيڙي ڦير انڊنم
ٿيڏا نہ ماوھ. ھموو جار ملھ ٺھ ڪھم بھ ڙير
بالھ روتاوھ ڪانھ موھو پو سھديھ ڪ و دووان و
سيان ٺھنووم.

Every time I hid my neck under my featherless wings,
And sleep for a century, two, or three (Bekas, Vol.4: 84).

speaker (s) then blame (s) himself/ themselves not just of being ominous like the crow or the raven, but of losing hope, activity, sense and spirit of struggle. The poet seems to believe that just having a bad luck is not everything and that he should blame himself and his people as well for not being resistant enough to win over that same bad luck, a thing other peoples did before them. Taking into account that the poem was composed in July 1993; the poet could refer to the bad administration measures the Kurdish political parties showed in the first attempt of the autonomous rule in Iraqi Kurdistan region after the defeat of the Iraqi army and government there, as a result of the spring uprising of 1991.

The attractive and emotional colour of red which mainly symbolize status(es) like love, beauty, flower, sexual desire, etc., could stand for others especially if Colour in Contest Theory is kept as a related idea in mind. For Hassan Abdul-Qadir (1882-1971), nicknamed Shaho, it is just ominous. In one of his poems, he is addressing Almighty God concerning the catastrophic situation he finds his people in:

خودایه تۆ خۆت ساحیبی کوردی
خه‌به‌رداری له‌ نازاری و له‌ دهردی
.....
له‌ ژێر رحمی فرۆکه‌ی ورچی سوورا
هه‌مووی وویزانه‌ خانووی و دارو به‌ردی
“Oh God! You own the Kurds,
And are aware of their pain and misery.
.....
Under the ‘mercy’ of red planes,
Their houses and haves destroyed.
(Khaznadar, Vol.6: 170).

The poet attributes a double symbolism to the colour neither of which accompany any bright glimpse to the reader or the people about whom he is speaking. The ex-USSR ‘red planes’ are used by the then-Iraqi regime to bombard the areas, villages, and towns under the control of the Kurdish revolution and these ‘red planes’ like ‘red army’ could not bring more than disaster wherever they exist. But, according to the poet here, their presence is not just a threat for houses, lands, and villages; rather they paint those places with blood! And the helpless poet could not find a way out except in God. Recurrent use

of 'red' to denote death, blood, oppression, etc., that overshadow its use for flowers, rebirth, re-generation, and love among other things, proves that this 'special' use had actually become part of the Kurdish culture and literature. Peramerd, for instance, turns to it in a mixed fit of anger, sorrow and pride to glorify the execution of two Kurdish revolution leaders by the Turkish authorities in 1925,

هاتن شههیدەکان بە جلی سووری خوینەمە / دایکی و متەن دە هەلسە سلاویان بسینەمە

“The martyrs show up blood-red dressed / O, mother land! Stand up and welcome them home” (Khaznadar, Vol.5:127). So, it is not accidental that among the four colours of the Kurdish national banner, 'red' covers the upper part as it symbolizes the blood of the Kurds who sacrificed themselves for their land and nation.

Another colour with mostly awkward symbolism in the Kurdish culture and literature is blue. Culturally and historically, it has been the colour of grief, sorrow, and consolation since women who lost a close relative, used to and still, wear blue clothes for periods that sometimes extend to a full year. And the Kurdish men of letters, including the poets, participated in confessing this cultural phenomenon. As a result of the disastrous status of Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan during the British-sponsored Iraqi Kingdom rule in Iraq, again Peramerd laments the gloomy situation,

لە گویم دێ دەنگی لایلایەمی و متەن / نەڕژینی بەسەر وێرانەکەمی خویناویا خویناوی / نەلاویننیتەموو نەگری، سەری
شینە لە ماتەمدا

“I hear homeland's lullaby, the miserable mother / shed upon its bloody form blood drops / Cries and lullabies, blue her head in solace” (Hawar: 66). The poet's act of performance applies to what professor Nick Coupland states, “we reproduce culture through discursive performance. Members of cultural groups perform their culture by creating „texts“ of various sorts – the process of *entextualization* {italics is the author's}” (Qtd in Onwudiwe:138). Elsewhere the same poet reflects again upon blue and, this time, it seems that he narrowly missed the target when he starts his poem “For the Spirit of the Kurdish Heroes” by

ئەم ناسمانە شینە کەوا بەرگی ماتەمە / تەحلیلی وا کراوە کە قوبەیی غەمە، تەمە

“This blue sky which is grief's cover / Its smog is concluded as sorrow's dome” (Hawar: 94). The occasion is, again, gloomy and heartbreaking as the poem recalls the memory of a

number of political and revolutionary characters from his people who were killed by their enemy.

Though a limited number of colours are studied in these selected poems, yet the Kurdish poetry hardly left any other colour unused, but to lesser degrees compared to the above colours. The paper therefore and due to its limitation, does not attempt the other colours though some of them are used cunningly to convey the intended messages of the poets and their poems.

4. AFROPOLITAN COLOURS

The term, relatively new as it is, denotes people of African descent around the world. According to Mark Tutton, “the term “Afropolitan” first appeared in a 2005 magazine article by Nigerian/Ghanaian writer Taiye Selasi. Selasi wrote about multilingual Africans with different ethnic mixes living around the globe – as she put it “not citizens but Africans of the world” (<https://edition.cnn.com>). This combining term gathers people from different African backgrounds but those people share cultural tradition and behaviour. Among these practices, the use of specific colours for clothes, houses, cars, and even flags among other things can be noticed.

It is significant to stress the strong relation between culture and politics wherever cultural-based studies are conducted and this is widely evident in the case of Afro-American studies. This fact was elemental in the creation and appearance of what is called “Pan-African Flag” with its triple colours of black, red, and green. In this respect, the black critic and activist, Sidney Clark states, “preserving African American traditions is one way to increase equity in education. U.S. history courses often center European colonizers and white Americans. But, learning about Black culture is essential to understanding American history as a whole” (www.bestcolleges.com). Clark’s quote and the flag itself connote the fact that the African Americans wanted to be regarded as one nation and treated as such, since they share almost the same culture, tradition, misery, and problems of enslavement.

The three colours of the Pan-African Flag which “was created in 1920” (www.bestcolleges.com), have been reflected in numerous poems by African-American poets. The Kenyan writer, filmmaker, and poet, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo (1983)

for example refers to the flag enthusiastically in “Flag and Future” where the colours are main role players. She starts the poem with the most known colour that is attributed to her people, “They declared black the colour of my people” (<https://www.poetryinternational.com>). But she turns quickly to one of the main symbolic colours for the African Americans at large, not only for the people of Kenya, “Green signified the land and its fertility, / of Marsabit and Muranga and Malindi, / every altitude and region between” (Ibid). The plainly said significance of this colour is deeply rooted in the African culture. In addition to the global concept of rebirth and regeneration that is linked to it, this colour, for the Africans and African Americans, can symbolize the growth and renewal of the black individuals and their power and energy against oppression and segregation. This belief is shared by the Africans who still physically live there and the African Americans away who seem to be connected spiritually to their original land, custom and tradition. In this respect, the writer and critic Sidney Clark remarks that, “the symbolism of green in the Pan-African flag relates to the desire to belong to a physical land that is budding with promise and development. It signifies Black people's belonging within the history of the African continent (<https://www.bestcolleges.com>). It also confirms a distinctive cultural heritage of those people who adopt the flag and its colours; a heritage that alienates them from the culture and tradition that surrounded and surround them in their newly settled land. The young woman poet should have been aware of this respect for the original culture by the African American or simply black descendants wherever they be. Writing such a poem by her and many other black skinned poets about their cultural heritage proves this hypothesis. For the black Jamaican movement, Rastafarianism, for instance, the colour green is one of the three colours that decorate their flag and according to the writer, Brian Ka, it stands for “the natural beauty and vegetation of Africa. It represents the lush forests, fertile lands, and diverse flora that can be found throughout the continent” (<https://vocal.media/styled>).

While the colour blue generally represents serenity, trust, peace, intuition, etc., it has different values for the African Americans and the ladinos. The most striking

example that comes to the mind in this respect is, for sure, the well-known black word, blues. African American culture is enriched with a genre of poetry, African per se, called blues poetry which addresses themes like struggle, oppression, segregation, sexuality, etc. This nomenclature should not have happened in vain; rather, it agrees with the overall situation of the African people whether at home or those scattered in the new world and elsewhere. In this respect, the American black poet novelist, and social activist, Langston Hughes (1901–1967) who descends from an African origin is an outstanding poet. In his “Hard Daddy”, he hits the target as far as the blues is concerned:

I went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Ma daddy says. Honey,
Can't you bring no better news?

(Rampersad: 124).

The speaker's pleasure for getting 'de blues' is encountered by the father's frustration. Though neither the character of the speaker of the poem nor that of the daddy are identified; but the dramatic stanza shows that the speaker should be of a biracial parent, the father coming from a white ancestor. And this shows that the speaker is Hughes himself as his “paternal great-grandmothers were enslaved Africans, and both of his paternal great-grandfathers were white slave owners in Kentucky” (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The word 'blues' of the extract becomes a source of pleasure and frustration simultaneously; as the speaker (Hughes) relieves at getting the blues which is one of the essential cultural emblems of his African American people. But for the father as a white man, it resembles stumbling against a stony post.

The American black woman poet Rita Dove (b.1952) who also descends from an African origin, is one of those voices who reacted against the bad treatment and the poor livelihood of her African American people and even Latinos in America and elsewhere. She expresses her disappointment at the status of her black people in the ghettos in a

number of poems like “Teach Us to Number Our Days” which was published in 1989. As it is the case in most of her poems, she presents her theme through a story-like scenario:

In the old neighborhood, each funeral parlor
is more elaborate than the last.
The alleys smell of cops, pistols bumping their thighs,
each chamber steeled with a slim blue bullet.
(Dove: 18-19).

The neighborhood is elegant in buildings and outer appearance, but the elegant sight is abruptly connected to a military scene where cops, pistols, and blue bullet are on the show. Through this unusual beginning, Dove wants to imply that the environment is violent and ominous. The blue colour is normal and symbolizes police which should consequently stand for peace and protection. Despite the general atmosphere of the stanza, readers expect peace-keeping role for the cops with their ‘slim blue bullets in the subsequent lines and stanzas.

But the poet digresses instantly towards a mini story of an unknown boy, “A boy plays tic-tac-toe on a moon / crossed by TV antennae, dreams / he has swallowed a blue bean.” (Dove: 18-19). The much-expected playing of the boy is interrupted by a dream with sexual inferences. Having the general atmosphere into account, swallowing ‘a blue bean’ could refer to having a nightmare as a condensation of what the boy may have faced in his ghetto in reality. If so, the ironic nightmare is that the boy dreamt of having been shot by a blue bullet instead of swallowing blue beans! The carriers of such bullets are expected to keep the people secure and protect them against any act of violence at home and abroad as well; but the blue bullet swallowed by the boy causes adverse consequences: “It takes root in his gut, sprouts / and twines upward, the vines curling / around the sockets and locking them shut” (Dove: 19-20). The roots could be no more than the injury caused by the bullets that will lead to a feeling of pain and, consequently, death.

For the other African American poet, Maya Angelou (1928-2014) as well the colour blew represent, instead of serenity, the sky, water, etc., feelings of depression, disease, and boredom. In her poem, “My life Has Turned to Blue’ from *Shaker, Why Don’t You Sing?* this concept is revealed:

Our summer's gone,

the golden days are through.
The rosy dawns I used to
wake with you
have turned to grey,
my life has turned to blue.

(Angelou: 341).

If the poem is about age and youth, as this first stanza explores clearly, then the speaker's life should have turned dark to denote going close to death as Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) pictures in his "Crossing the Bar", "Twilight and evening bell, / And after that the dark!" (Ferguson et al: 1009). The addressee could be a lover, a parent, a sibling, a friend, etc., as the middle lines above illustrate. In this case as well, human's life and days turn dark not blue in the usual states. But Angelou's has turned blue instead! Her sorrow is caused by passing of the happy days and turning grey of the 'rosy dawn' which are enough to turn somebody sad and depressed. She ends the next two stanzas of the poem with the same line, 'my life has turned to blue' creating a refrain to stress that her sad feeling resembles stepping forward towards death, that is why she feels hopeless and dejected.

As the previous samples above and many others throughout the literary pieces of African and African American men of letters show; the study connects this transformation of symbolism to the cultural and historical backgrounds of the composer or the speaker, if it is not the poet himself or herself. In this context, Andrew J. Elliot, the professor of psychology at the University of Rochester states in an article on April 2015 that "all color effects undoubtedly depend on certain conditions – culture, gender, age, type of task, variant of color, etc." (www.frontiersin.org). Putting culture as the starting point in his list of effective conditions is noteworthy and proves the significance of this aspect which is stressed in the extracts above. It is not by accident, the study proposes, that the jazz halls or the poetry gatherings of the African American musicians and poets set blue lighting in their halls when they perform; rather, it should be connected to the same cultural and psychological background or mindset.

The same mindset which should be the consequence of the psychological and cultural symptoms, can be perceived in the colour red like the others, whether or not studied here. Langston Hughes used different colours in his mostly revolutionary and anti-racism

poems with connotations that show clearly the African cultural and psychological impacts as mentioned before. In “For an Indian Screen” for instance, his symbolic and metaphorical use of red draws a distinct method of treatment of colours:

A black and golden tiger
Climbed a red cliff’s side,
And men in black and golden gowns,
Sought the tiger’s hide.
(Rampersad: 102).

The juxtaposed words of black and golden are beautifully used to describe, it seems to the study, the metaphorical ‘tiger’ which astonishingly climbs ‘a red cliff’s side’. Why a black tiger and why a red cliff? These are the questions that Hughes, it seems, found it necessary to present a response to. Maneuvering around the straightforward answer, he sends black and golden people like the wild animal to follow its red path and try to find out its hide. The poet does not disclose the destiny of the tiger or the black men, but the hidden message is not very complicated to be discerned. Unlike the much-expected implications of red as the colour of love, passion, enragement, anger, desire, etc., the red cliff seems to be of ominous consequences for both the tiger and the black men who seek its hiding place.

Maya Angelou also, as mentioned above, turns to the colour ‘red’ as a means for expressing the inhibited feeling of discrimination she sees against her ‘nation’. In “No No No No” with its unusual and striking title, she attacks the religious authority and the colour ‘red’ implies other than its expected implications:

No
The red-shoed priests riding
Palanquined
In barefoot children country
the plastered saints gazing down
beneficently

on kneeling mothers
picking undigested beans
from yesterday's shit.
(Angelou: 86).

Either on purpose or for any other reason, Angelou seems to be missing the target here; since historically red shoes are worn by Popes not priests as the specialized writer of classical and medieval philosophy, Shawn Tribe states, "the use of the red for the shoes of the Pope, like the red dress of the cardinals, has traditionally been understood as a symbol of the blood of the martyrs" (www.liturgicalartsjournal.com). The result, however, is the same and the criticism against the Christian establishment is harsh. Angelou attributes the colour red to the priests as a symbol of blood, a symbol which is established for Christian religious characters, but, here, it serves a purpose other than its historical symbolism as 'the blood of the martyrs'. The poet, being a mouthpiece of her African American people, seems to be referring to the ghettos where the bereaved black families live with 'barefoot' hungry children and helpless mothers; thus, the African American people are the martyrs whose blood is, metaphorically, shed and sacrificed so that the religious people ride 'Palanquined' and other non-black people live in prosperity. So, the colour red does not remind Angelou and her African American people of love, passion, beauty, flower, etc., that are traditionally attributed to it. Instead, it symbolizes the one implication that is the fate of her people to remember whenever they encounter white people, including religious characters in their ghettos.

The two contradictory colours of white and black have historically and culturally stood for the old and continuous feud between the black and white people since, at least, the discovery the New World, the campaigns of slave-trade from Africa, and the harsh treatment those slaves met in the newly discovered continent. But the study does not take it into a great consideration to delve deep in their implications in the African American poetry, since, first, implications of these two colours are so obvious that they hardly in need of further investigation, and secondly, they are so widely scattered in the poems of almost all African American poets that covering them would be above the capacity of such a study. It would suffice, the study sees, to present a text as a single sample from an

African American poet about them. Langston Hughes's "Cross" sets the two colours' implications for the African American people and in the African American culture plain:

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man,
I take my curses back.
If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.
(Rampersad:58).

A severe internal conflict of the mulatto speaker is revealed with an autobiographical touch. The speaker's conflict is, clearly, caused by the delineation between the white Americans and the African Americans in the 1920s which, daily accidents prove, is still going on in one way or another. Through this 12-lines poem, Hughes seems to be summing up the core of the circumstance using the two much contradictory colours of white and black where, unlike the normal cases in the majority of the societies worldwide, their implications are reversed.

5. CONCLUSION

In addition to the settled fact that colour symbolism is part and particle of every nation's culture and helps in enriching it, the study came up with some other conclusions. The Kurds form one nation divided among four countries along with a large number of expatriates and refugees scattered in Europe and America; while the African Americans had come from different nations in the black continent. Despite this clear difference; some similarities along with differences can be found in their poetic products:

First: The most prominent colour in the Kurdish poetry is red in its negative implication while black is

its counterpart in the African American one with a positive connotation for them, though it is

considered shameful for their oppressors who used to use the word 'nigger' to refer to it as a

means of mortification.

Second: The political and social statuses of both people were elemental historically in creating negative

implications for colours like white, red, and blue which stand typically, in normal cases, for

enchancing concepts of serenity, the sky, beauty, love, purity, etc.

Third: The undesirable inference of white in the Kurdish poetry is caused by feeling of fear or shame

that accompanies it due to the political and social statuses mentioned above, especially that

historically the Kurds were oppressed by their occupiers in the four countries where they live

though not in Europe and America where they live as expatriates and refugees. Whereas the same

colour for the African Americans symbolizes occupation, oppression, and inequality that has been

implemented against them whether at home by the colonial forces or in the new world by the white

authorities.

Fourth: Unlike most other poetries, both African American and Kurdish poetries adopt blue as the

symbol of grief, sorrow, misery, and death among other negative associations, and this concept

seems to be deeply rooted in their culture, again, due to the statuses of their people throughout

history.

Fifth: White is not entirely negative in the Kurdish culture and literature, beside its gloomy

meanings, it denotes concepts like purity, cleanness, innocence, etc. But in the African American

poetry its negative meanings seem to highly overshadow the positive ones. This trend is almost

inclusive for the Africans and African Americans alike because of, as the study concludes, the

harsh dominance the white people inflicted upon them both at home through colonialization and

then away in America and elsewhere through ownership.

Sixth: The existence of the colour red as the top of both the Kurdish and pan-African flags proves its

bloody implication in both cultures which is stressed by their poets as well including the poets

under study here.

Based on the study and its conclusion, further academic works are recommended to:

1. Show more similar points and aspects between the two literatures, not only the two poetries, that seem to be logical results of the similar social and political statuses of the two 'nations' or peoples.
2. Present as much as possible of the body of the Kurdish literature to non-Kurd readers as an attempt to familiarize it better to the world literature.

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