Shwan: In these discussions, I engage with guests as a Kurd who has faced censorship and repression of my mother tongue - experiences that have significantly impacted my artistic journey. In today's episode, I will be speaking with the artist, writer, and critic Wahbi Rasul. Together, we will explore the reasons behind using war as a framework to address the issue of language subjugation, along with the symbols, artistic techniques, and traditions that I have drawn upon in my work.

Dear listeners, I warmly welcome you to another episode of our podcast series, "Halo of Shame" Today, we have the honor of hosting our esteemed artist, Wahbi Rasul. Wahbi has made significant contributions to the art field and has authored numerous books on related topics. While I won't go into further detail about Mr. Wahbi, I invite him to introduce himself.

Wahbi: Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Shwan: I believe it would be far more beneficial if you introduced yourself instead of me taking that role.

Wahbi: I am Wahbi Rasul, and I completed my master's degree in 2008. Since 2002, I have published 14 books on various topics, including translation, critical writing, and the history of painting in Greater Kurdistan, especially in Southern Kurdistan.

I have had the privilege of visiting universities and institutions across Europe for conferences and seminars, particularly in the UK, France, and Germany. I've also participated in numerous art activities and exhibitions, including eight solo exhibitions. Since 2021, I have operated "Hesa Gallery" in my home. I currently lecture at the Institute of Fine Arts and have previously taught at the University of Sulaimani's College of Arts. I continue to write and create art.

Shwan: Thank you very much. As you are aware of the project, I am eager to hear your thoughts on it. Is there a specific aspect you would like me to address or clarify?

Wahbi: Yes, I would like to congratulate you first and foremost. What is particularly striking about your project is your focus on war - specifically, the concept of war and its associated themes. I'm curious to know whether your perspective stems from personal experiences or if it reflects a broader sense of responsibility toward the history of a nation that has been beset by calamities and afflictions.

Shwan: Your question encompasses many detailed inquiries, and I will strive to answer them as comprehensively as possible. Regarding the concept of war, I believe it fundamentally relates to the profound consequences it has on individuals, often overwhelming what any person can endure. The impact of war is immense; when confronted with shelling or bombardments, it instills an overwhelming fear - fear of losing one's life or watching a loved one perish. This fear occupies your entire being, and escaping it is a difficult endeavor.

I think my experiences connect deeply to my upbringing in Kurdistan. I was only three years old when the Iraq-Iran war commenced, and I spent my entire primary school years amidst that

conflict. For instance, during school, we would suddenly hear the air raid sirens, signaling that we needed to rush down to the basement for safety. Our primary schools had sandbags piled high outside the windows, set up to protect us from potential explosions. While we may not have suffered physical injuries, the wounds we carried were etched in our hearts and memories.

As time passed, I began contemplating leaving the country, ultimately moving to Norway at the age of 23. My studies in art began during this period, and my work gradually shifted to grapple with the concept of war. This shift was largely influenced by the prolonged and arduous journey I endured as a refugee. I was arrested and faced significant trials along the way to Europe.

Once I arrived in Europe, many assumed that relocating meant leaving behind all the hardships of life due to its perceived comforts and luxuries. However, the genuine challenges of this new life often remained concealed. For 12 years, my asylum application was delayed, leaving me in a constant state of uncertainty about whether I would be allowed to stay in Norway or face deportation. The possibility of having my application rejected hung over me like a shadow, threatening to force me back to Kurdistan at any moment.

These experiences spurred me to reflect on my childhood memories of war - the Iran-Iraq war, the chemical attacks on Kurdish villages, the Gulf War, and the civil conflict. I began exploring how the ramifications of war affect individual victims: What memories linger? Because whether we acknowledge it or not, the experiences one endures during war become an integral part of their identity.

Regarding your second question about whether this feeling is distant or if I possess firsthand experiences of war, the answer is a clear no. I did not fight in the war; as I mentioned, I was merely a child when the Iraq-Iran war began. Furthermore, when the uprising in Kurdistan commenced in 1991, I was only 14 years old. No Kurds were conscripted into the military, and I never served as a Peshmerga[1]. Instead, my experiences of war were shaped by those around me. I come from a deeply political and patriotic family; my father was a police officer and a clandestine member of a revolutionary Kurdish political party. My brothers became Peshmergas at a young age, and I lost beloved relatives to chemical bombardments and during the Anfal Campaign[2]. These events have left profound memories etched in my consciousness.

[1] The Peshmerga (literally meaning "those who confront death") refers to the military forces of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq. They have a long history of fighting for Kurdish rights and self-governance and have played a significant role in various conflicts in the region, particularly during the Iraq-Iran War, the Gulf War, and the fight against ISIS. The Peshmerga are known for their commitment to protecting Kurdish territory and identity, operating independently from the Iraqi military, and are often seen as a symbol of Kurdish resilience and nationalism.

[2] The Anfal Campaign refers to a brutal military operation conducted by the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq during the late 1980s, particularly from 1986 to 1989. It aimed to systematically eliminate Kurdish resistance and involved mass killings, forced displacement, and the use of chemical weapons against civilian populations. The campaign resulted in the deaths of an estimated 50,000 to 182,000 Kurds and the destruction of hundreds of villages. The Anfal Campaign is considered one of the worst

Now, regarding your third question: How important is this to me? Do I feel a sense of responsibility towards my people? As I mentioned earlier, war has profoundly impacted my personality since childhood. I often reflect on my close relatives - my maternal cousins - who were a few years older than me. We grew up together and played in the same village, and every summer, I would travel to Qaradagh Province and Sewsenan village to spend my vacations with them. However, in 1988, I witnessed the devastation of those villages caused by a deadly chemical gas which claimed the lives of all my beloved relatives - they disappeared from my life. These are undoubtedly painful memories that linger in my heart.

Additionally, when considering whether the theme of my work stems from a sense of responsibility towards my people - particularly regarding the choice of "language and mother tongue" as the focal point of this project - I must acknowledge its deep connection to my childhood memories. In Southern Kurdistan, we Kurds had the right to speak our mother tongue and learn it in schools, but this fundamental right was denied to other Kurds in the east, north, and west.

Regrettably, before leaving Kurdistan, I did not have the opportunity to explore other parts of the region to better understand their situations. However, when I became a refugee, my journey took me first to Iran and then to Turkey. It was there that I truly grasped the challenges of being a Kurd, including the difficulty of identifying as one or even uttering the word “Kurd.” I learned that speaking Kurdish often came with significant hardships.

I have many memories from that time. For example, during my childhood, Ba'ath regime helicopters would suddenly fly over Sulaimani, dropping leaflets, messages, and warnings known as “statements.” These would circulate throughout the city, and on certain mornings, we would be alerted to impending curfews. Shortly thereafter, the sound of our outside door being slammed would signal the entrance of 20 to 30 soldiers, who would speak Arabic as they searched our home.

In those moments, my father’s demeanor would change drastically; the transformation in his personality was striking. The father who routinely wore traditional Kurdish clothing (kurdish Mraxani) and communicated in Kurdish would suddenly switch to speaking Arabic. The soldiers would regard him with puzzled expressions, likely questioning why a man like him wasn’t fluent in their language.

After leaving Kurdistan, I spent time as a refugee in Turkey, where I again confronted the difficulties of being a Kurd. Many Kurds in Turkey have lost their language due to oppression and have forgotten their mother tongue, which felt very strange to me at that time. I often reflect on history; writing first emerged in our region, particularly in southern Iraq, developed by the Sumerians in the city of Uruk, around 3000 to 3200 BC, with the development of cuneiform script. This writing originated in an area where language and writing were conceived. Ironically, minorities in the same region are oppressed and denied the right to speak the language that is closest to their hearts.

Another childhood memory that underscores the issue of language is the reality that difficult memories of war can render you silent, stripping you of the ability to articulate your experiences, particularly the painful ones. A significant memory for me is my father's imprisonment, a subject he seldom discussed, though my mother spoke of it. When the Iraqi government discovered that my father was a covert member of a revolutionary Kurdish party, he was punished by being sent to Nugra Salman prison[3] for six months, during which he was barred from seeing his family. This situation made me reflect on my father's role in my life - a father serves as a hero and a role model for a child, someone to emulate. Yet, in confronting his painful memories, he chose silence, unwilling to share what he endured in prison.

Perhaps this project represents an effort to forge a new language or to retell the stories I have gathered from my mother and others. For example, when I returned to Kurdistan last year, I purchased a book about Taimur[4], one of the Anfal survivors. The bitter memories depicted in that book were heartbreaking, especially knowing that many of my relatives from Sewsenan village perished due to chemical weapons and massacres. Until recently, their mothers and sisters held onto the hope that their sons and daughters would return.

Wahbi: What you've shared about identity - the sense of losing one's identity upon arriving in Europe - has also impacted your children. But why choose to embed this identification through the lens of wars and national afflictions? As you mentioned, this was not your direct experience but rather indirect - through your family, father, brothers, and those close to you. Is that correct?

Shwan: Yes, that is accurate.

Wahbi: What about representing affliction and calamities? You could express Kurdish identity through various means, not just through tragedy. Have you considered that, or do you prefer to focus on tragedy?

Shwan: I believe that the choice of my project's subject - language (mother tongue) - essentially addresses that question. Why is our language - Kurdish - subjugated? For me, identifying as a Kurd is inherently a political act. It is akin to wearing a military uniform that cannot be removed; our language has been politicized. For instance, Mahsa Amini[5] (Zhina Amini) in Eastern Kurdistan is referred to as Mahsa, not Zhina. This directly relates to the concept of Kurdish identity. During the French colonial period in Algeria, Arabic was prohibited from being taught;

[3] Nugra Salman is a well-known prison in southern Iraq, near the town of Najaf. Originally a military prison, it gained notoriety during the regime of Saddam Hussein, particularly for its role in the persecution of political prisoners, including Kurds during the Anfal Campaign. The prison became infamous for its harsh conditions, forced confessions, and human rights abuses. It serves as a symbol of the broader repression faced by various groups under Saddam's regime.

[4] Taimoor: Sole Survivor of Garmyan Anfal Campaign, Part 2." *Kurdistan Tribune*, 10.02. 2025, https://kurdistantribune.com/taimoor-sole-survivor-of-garmyan-anfal-campaign-part-2/.

[5] What Happened to Mahsa Zhina Amini?" *Amnesty International*, 10.02. 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/what-happened-to-mahsa-zhina-amini/.

however, those who sought to learn the language endeavored to ensure their children could acquire it by transferring these efforts to mosques.

However, the unfortunate reality for Kurds is that sometimes you are not even permitted to teach in Kurdish, even in mosques. In other words, on one hand, Kurds are subjugated and occupied; on the other, we face oppression from many sides. We also encounter challenges related to imagery, as our religion forbids the use of images. While the practice of Sharia law is not uniform and varies from country to country, when you attempt to work on any topic and give it a Kurdish identity, you cannot escape expressing the hardships and suffering of the Kurds. Even when you reach a story - be it a love story - you will face numerous obstacles, whether they are cultural, religious, or political.

Wahbi: Therefore, we can conclude that there exists a responsibility towards a nation. This is why it appears you have employed letters and words as if they could represent a complete concept. I appreciate your work - thank you for sharing it. All your pieces are vertical, reflecting an original and traditional genre in the East. In the vessels known as *Vessels of Supplication*[6] (الإناء النذري), which were offered as prayers and vows, objects were depicted from bottom to top. Historically, when prose and poetry were crafted, two intertwining sticks were used at the ends; this carving style continues to be practiced here in Kurdistan. It is truly beautiful.

In your work, I noticed letters and words, and while they may not always be complete or entirely legible, I'm curious: does the fear of losing the language inform this choice? Or are you aiming to convey a sense of Kurdish and national authenticity through the words and letters you've used in this region?

Shwan: The letters I incorporated appear as you describe. In some instances, for example, the words reflect those of well-known figures, such as a poem by Sherko Bekas[7]. Rather than providing an interpretation in my thesis, I opted to present them as letters, allowing the paintings to function as both historical documentation and artistic expression; you might say they are hybrids. However, the choice to use letters, including the Arabic alphabet, is not driven by a desire to establish a historical record preserving the Kurdish language. In fact, more often than not it's the contrary - the letters I utilized are derived from Arabic, which is the dominant language in the region.

The occupation of the East by Islamic forces has also impacted neighboring countries, such as Turkey and Persia, which adopted the Arabic script. Encountering those letters often evokes a sense of sadness within me. Returning to the topic of war, many of my loved ones were lost due to chemical weapons and during the Anfal Campaign. The presence of Arabic letters reminds me of how Koranic verses were misused to justify massacres and the obliteration of a people.

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[6] Analytical study of the symbolism of the votive vessel discovered in the city of Uruk" Al-Nnas, n.d. Web. [dato du hentet informasjonen]. http://al-nnas.com/ARTICLE/HalHaydar/11h.htm.
[7] Sherko Bekas: Poet." *Nykcc*, n.d. Web. [10.02.2025]. https://nykcc.org/sherko-bekas-poet/.

I frequently remark that Arabic writing and calligraphy possess such beauty that they can be deceptive. Their allure is so profound that, even without understanding the language, one can still find themselves captivated by its elegance. Yet, in my work, I strive to convey the opposing sentiment. Particularly in pieces where the letters entwine, they transcend mere written words and become interwoven letters. I intend for that intertwining to evoke the imagery of a black serpent hanging from someone's neck or infiltrating one's dreams, transforming into a nightmare, as it encapsulates both the letters and the darkness and texture of the script. I have given it scales to reference the serpent from Kurdish mythology, though I can't quite recall the specific term.

Shwan: Mythology… Yes, as Nietzsche discusses In book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a dragon figure is described in the first part of the book. This dragon symbolizes 'Thou shalt' and represents the conventions and restrictions that society and morality impose on the individual. I would say that, from a linguistic standpoint, I have not leaned on this aspect for my project; rather, my focus has been artistic. The underlying concept of these works is that I will create 34 paintings to symbolize the 34 Kurdish letters, which are currently facing subjugation. This subjugation silences its speakers in expressing themselves in their language, a language that resonates most profoundly with their hearts. Each painting narrates a story of subjugation. While not all are negative or dark, the majority reflect this ongoing subjugation, as it remains unresolved. We are not talking about a post-colonial narrative; instead, this is a continuous colonization. Such subjugation is still enforced in various regions of Kurdistan, unlike in the southern part where I come from.

Furthermore, despite my extensive experience, I still find it challenging to articulate my thoughts in my mother tongue. As you may notice, I predominantly use Arabic words, as I have lived in Norway for several years and have lost a lot of my Kurdish vocabulary. Often, I resort to English concepts to express myself.

Wahbi: You have a profound understanding, perhaps more than I do, that modernity is deeply rooted in tradition; it perceives itself as the most authentic worldview. This ideology has been communicated worldwide, not just to us, aiming for dominance over the entire East, Latin America, Africa, and beyond. The colonial movement began under the guise of liberating and developing nations with the intent of advancing them, but the reality was far different. Instead, it sought to reap the resources of these nations and plunder their cultural heritage. Colonial powers looted cultures in every conceivable way, including art, imposing their perspectives on the entire world.

Let me share an insight about Egypt during the French occupation. One writer mentions that when the French established the academy, there were families skilled in crafting everything from doors and windows to walls and decorative maps in Eastern palaces. These skills were part of their heritage, passed down through generations. However, with the onset of French occupation, people gradually distanced themselves from these family crafts, drawn instead to the fashionable

Western art. Consequently, as this writer states, these families ceased their artistic practices and disappeared, taking with them the artistry that once adorned the eastern palaces.

When the British arrived in Iraq, coinciding with the French presence in Egypt, miniature art had already taken root in Iraq, influenced by both the Ottomans and nearby Iranian styles. I like to mention the "Surat Bath," where Iranian artists embellished the bath's interiors and ceilings. According to narratives, these decorations significantly impacted the artists of Sulaimani. This is not merely my perspective; it is based on the accounts of prominent art mentors, such as Hama Kaka, Ali Karim, and Ali Jola, among others I have interviewed. Their influence reached the affluent families in Sulaimani, who desired artistic embellishments for their homes.

Following the departure of Iranian artists, some families began commissioning local artists. Several other baths were also enriched by these artists' work, reflecting the style of Surat (meaning "pictures"), as this bath was formerly known as Chwarbakh Bath or the Near Mound Bath, renowned for its imagery.

With that in mind, I must ask: why didn't you consider incorporating, alongside the Arabic script, the symbols and writings from the period of the Medians, which boasted its own unique scripts? Was it a lack of resources, or did it simply not occur to you? Or was it a matter of personal choice?

Shwan: I initially embarked on my project as a study of language, which lasted for a month or two, but eventually, I found myself regretting that decision. I came to realize that I wasn't a linguist. With three years of study already behind me, I had only two and a half years left to complete the project. I began to ponder, "What can I do to deepen my understanding of language?" My concern was that any effort I made might ultimately be for nothing. Therefore, leveraging my position as an artist, I sought to express the theme of subjugation through graphics and paintings; this became my first endeavor.

The historical context of the region - south, east, and north - reveals that the Arabic alphabet serves as the foundation for the script we use. However, in the north, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kemal Ataturk introduced the Latin alphabet. I attempted to create my own letters by blending both Arabic and Latin scripts, dedicating considerable time to this pursuit. Unfortunately, I ultimately found myself regretting that direction. I realized I needed to work on a much larger scale - one that transcended my personal limitations - because, in my view, art is more expansive than what I can convey through linguistic language alone.

As such, my work evolved into a drawing approach rather than simply a study of language; I also explored various other avenues. One significant influence has been Soran Hama Rash's book, *The Lost and Untold History of the Kurd* [8], which I find fascinating. He argues that Kurdish does not originate from Indo-European or Indo-Iranian languages, as many European linguists assert, but rather derives from the Sumerian language. There is an immense amount of work to be done, but

[8] The Lost and Untold History of the Kurd." *DCKurd*, 6. apr. 2023, https://dckurd.org/2023/04/06/the-lost-and-untold-history-of-the-kurd/

I did not wish to embark on a path where I might fail. Consequently, my focus shifted toward drawing and storytelling. Unlike my previous works done in Norwegian, I endeavored to produce my pieces in Kurdish while also incorporating subtitle translations.

Wahbi: So, the scale of your work is indeed significant, reflecting the reasons you've mentioned?

Shwan: Yes, the work truly emerged from an unconscious state. I wanted to create something larger than myself in terms of physical scale. In prior works, I frequently used A4-sized paper, which felt too small and restricted the scale of my charts. I wanted to break free from that comfort zone, recognizing that my previous approach was flawed and repetitive. I typically worked with compounds and watercolors, which often became unwieldy. Hence, I decided to branch out into larger water-based pieces, utilizing compounds and watercolors that frequently slipped out of my control. I created works directly on the ground, standing on them, which contributed to a loss of control over the water as well.

My artistic style has tended to be realistic; I have aimed for precision in the forms and figures I create. However, in these new works, everything arose organically from composition, allowing me to revisit our Eastern heritage - specifically the Eastern or Islamic miniature style - therefore reintroducing a two-dimensional aspect into my art. This journey became one of self-discovery. I found myself navigating the space between two poles: the East (Europe) and the West (Kurdistan). I was 20 years old when I departed from Kurdistan, and I have since spent 23 to 24 years in Europe. I feel as though I am a synthesis of these two poles, yet I find myself lost between them, striving to discover my identity.

Whether I label this project as an exploration of language or a quest for self-discovery, I remain uncertain. Thus, you will encounter works that integrate both realistic investigation and, in some instances, drift toward two-dimensional abstraction. When reflecting on the Eastern or Islamic miniature art or the Ottoman period, one can find two-dimensional works where gold compounds were employed to embody the intentions I seek to communicate in my sketches.

Wahbi: Have you read any books by Orhan Pamuk?

Shwan: Yes, I have read him. Orhan Pamuk is one of those who has truly inspired me, especially the book *My Name Is Red*.[9]

Wahbi: That's great. Beyond reflecting the struggles and tragic histories of a nation, did you also aim to convey a sense of loyalty and belonging to this region, particularly Kurdistan, through your technique and style?

Shwan: Absolutely. I spent my formative years in Kurdistan until I was 20. Whether I like it or not, I often dream of our home in the Sershaqam neighborhood of Sulaimani. I am deeply impressed by that culture. In terms of style and technique, I have been greatly influenced by

[9] Pamuk, Orhan. *My Name Is Red*. n.d. Web. [dato du hentet informasjonen]. https://www.orhanpamuk.net/book.aspx?id=62&lng=eng.

Kamaleddin Bahzad[10] and his miniature works. He was a teacher and leader within the miniature art movement, which, unlike European art, lacked a singular direct style.

When you consider the works of European artists like Robbins, Rembrandt, Ilya Repin, and Van Gogh, each has a distinct personal style. In contrast, miniaturists in the East typically worked in schools or groups, often collaborating on the same piece. This collective approach meant that individual styles were less prominent; instead, the style was recognized as a school or tradition. [11]

This difference may stem from the Eastern perspective, which is more community-oriented, in contrast to the more individualistic ethos found in the West. In the West, artists are often focused on expressing their individuality and achieving personal success, whereas, in the East, family ties are stronger, and artists often work together.

Exposed to these traditions, you can see that the details in miniature art[12] prioritize symbolic and aesthetic elements over the naturalistic reflection's characteristic of European art. For example, during the Ottoman period, miniaturists infused their work with Islamic visions, resulting in a unique approach that doesn't seek to replicate the distance or aloofness often found in European pieces.

When I look at Käthe Kollwitz's work, I can feel the pain of the figures she portrays. For instance, in her piece "Woman with Dead Child," the mother's grief is palpable, and you can sense the strength in her hand as she holds her child. I use these works as references - not to replicate their techniques, but as sources of inspiration that infuse emotional depth into my own work.

Similarly, Fernando Botero's depictions of figures in Abu Ghraib prison during the American invasion of Iraq powerfully convey the humiliation suffered by the Iraqi people. The imagery of soldiers wearing blue gloves symbolizes a detachment from the suffering they inflict, transforming this imagery into a reflection of the discontent toward Americans.

Wahbi: I feel like there's an important circle missing from this discussion: the artists of the Diyarbakir school. After the Diyarbakir school artists, Sharafkhan Bidlisi[13] contributed significantly with his work in the *Sharafnama*[14]. This was followed by a number of other miniaturists who created the stories of Shirin and Khosrow[15], as well as Khurshid and Khawar

[10] James, Joseph. "Behzad Kamal al-Din." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2022, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/behzad-kamal-al-din.
[11] W.W. Norton & Company. *The Islamic World: A History in Objects*. n.d. Web. [dato du hentet informasjonen]. https://wwnorton.com/books/9780500204559?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
[12] Loukonine, Vladimir, og Anatoli Ivanov. *Persian Miniatures*. Baseline Co. Ltd, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Parkstone Press International, New York, n.d.
[13] Sharafkhan Bidlisi." *Kurdistanica*, n.d. Web. [10.02.2024]. https://kurdistanica.com/465/sharafkhan-bidlisi/.
[14] Bidlisi, Sharaf Khan. *Sharafnama: Or, History of the Kurdish People*. n.d. Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/sharafnamaorhist0000bidl/page/n7/mode/2up.
[15] Khusraw e Shirin." *Gulbenkian Museum*, n.d. Web. [10.02.2024]. https://gulbenkian.pt/museu/en/collection-of-stories/khusraw-e-shirin/.

[16](خورشید و خاوەر), including figures like Haji Agha Kermashani and Mullah Noor Ali Kanolayi, who illustrated the tale of Khurshid and Kharaman[17].

I noticed when you used gold in your pieces, it reminded me of carpet designs. Could you elaborate on the meaning behind the use of gold?

Moving on, let's discuss your work titled "I, your terrorist." This piece depicts a small prison room, and part of it comes across as abstract. Are you referencing the linguistic aspect, as prison walls often display countless writings? These walls have historically inspired Kurdish artists, including Faek Rasul, who infused his own experiences from imprisonment into his work.

Finally, let's talk about your work titled "The Color of Betrayal" Why did you choose that title?

Shwan: "The Color of Betrayal" refers to Sweden and Finland's applications to become NATO members last year. A couple of years prior, Turkey had set conditions for their acceptance into NATO, demanding the extradition of individuals whom Turkey labels as terrorists. These individuals had applied for asylum in Sweden and Finland. This marked a troubling trend in Europe. Sweden, with over 200 years of democratic tradition, suddenly sought NATO membership while yielding to the demands of a dictatorial regime like Turkey.

In my work, I wanted to explore how the shapes I created both in terms of technique and language - could convey this concept. I questioned whether an abstract concept like betrayal could even have a color. This reflection reminded me of Orhan Pamuk's book, *My Name is Red,* in which he describes the ink from the books of Baghdad that the Mongols threw into the Tigris, turning the waters red. That imagery inspired thoughts on what the color of betrayal should be.

The story behind the artwork evolved from a previous drawing, eventually becoming an integral part of the narrative. Most of the time, my stories don't originate from factual sources; they blend information and personal experiences that I have gathered with my imagination, resulting in a mixture of reality and fiction. However, the miniature aspect is an exception, as it reflects a real-life experience from my family. It tells the story of my brother, Kamal, who was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured in 1982.

Wahbi: I appreciate the prison painting, especially considering the richness of the narratives within its walls. For instance, the Amna Suraka[18] (Red Museum) has an extensive archive, including photographs that convey powerful stories. Have you seen the work of Imran Qureshi?

Shwan: Yes, Imran Qureshi is a Pakistani artist, isn't he?

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[16] Khursheed Khawar Ahmad Sultan Mirza." *Rekhta*, n.d. Web. [10.02.2025]. https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/khursheed-khawar-ahmad-sultan-mirza-ebooks.

[17] Zohouri, Ahmad. "The Impact of Cultural Features on the Construction of Identity in Contemporary Kurdish Literature." *Kurdish Studies Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2021, pp. 13-28. https://journals.uok.ac.ir/article_48355.html?lang=en.

[18] Babat: Is the Response to the Kurdish Question Through Violence?" *Kurdistan Chronicle*, n.d. Web. [10.02.2025]. https://kurdistanchronicle.com/babat/3392.

Wahbi: Correct. He draws inspiration from the Herati School.

In my opinion, leveraging the Diyarbakir School and extending its influence on your project could enhance its success. I recall an expression: “Dilshad stands on my head like an ever-wounded animal.” This metaphor of an "ever-wounded animal" suggests a sense of stagnation. If you were to rework this, it might resonate more clearly. Additionally, the phrase “eternal life like Gilgamesh” could be refined to “a life reflecting Gilgamesh's desire for immortality,” since Gilgamesh never actually attained immortality; he only aspired to it.

Shwan: That’s a valid point.

Wahbi: Gilgamesh's story is centered around his longing for immortality, not its attainment.

Shwan: Absolutely.

Wahbi: It would be beneficial to revise those phrases based on these suggestions.

Furthermore, I noticed a whisper at the end of *I'm a Pigeon*.

Shwan: Yes, that’s true.

Wahbi: What is the significance of the whisper? How does it relate to the overall project?

Shwan: The whisper symbolizes a fear that becomes part of your being when you live in a state of subjugation for an extended period. I observed this in my parents and family. When my eldest brother went to the mountains to join the Peshmerga, the sons of our neighbors - who were all friends - went too. I remember my parents sitting together in our home, speaking in hushed tones, believing that even within their own house, there could be spies reporting them to Saddam Hussein's regime.

This illustrates the fear a dictator instills in individuals, becoming integrated into their very essence. I employ the whisper as a narrative device to tell these stories. Additionally, I incorporate the voice of theater artist Sara Baban as a mute character. When I spoke with relatives who survived the chemical attack and the Anfal Campaign, I realized that, years later, when they recounted these painful experiences, they were so emotionally affected that they struggled to find words. Their expressions often became simplified and mixed, reflecting a deep-seated inability to articulate their trauma.

The idea revolves around how a mute person - a voiceless individual who has lost their mother tongue - would convey their story of suffering to me. This exploration is to discover various ways of expressing subjugation. That has been my primary aim. It’s not about declaring, “I will now express myself in a special language,” but rather about testing and experimenting with how to articulate these concepts. My ongoing question has been: while I discuss language subjugation in words, how can I translate that concept into images?

My images have evolved into new formats, incorporating film, sound, music, and visuals - three mixed mediums that collectively help the audience grasp the subject matter.

Wahbi: Given that narrative, I believe the imagery itself held a significant place in our lives during that period. It might be beneficial to explore more than just that visual space. The whispering at the end of the film reflects the many whispers that permeated our existence. So much of our lives was lived in whispers.

Therefore, if that whispering occupies a larger auditory space, I think it would enhance the piece and make it even more impactful. I must commend your work; it is truly beautiful and filled with profound ideas.

The way you transformed the hand into a wolf through its form is a remarkable drawing. Additionally, the way you've given the hand wings, allowing it to soar into the sky, creates a beautiful and meaningful representation.

Shwan: Thank you. Unfortunately, our time is running short. I wish we could continue this conversation, but we will have to save it for another occasion. I apologize for taking up your time and thank you very much for the discussion.

Wahbi: The pleasure was mine.

Shwan: Have a great day.

Wahbi: You too.