

Kurdish national reconciliation from a historical perspective

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Introduction

Ever since our beloved Kurdistan was repartitioned in the wake of WWI amongst Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, our people have been forced to practice Arab, Turkish, and the Persian cultures. Exercising their own native culture became taboo for them. Each of the occupying countries utilized every means at its disposal to melt our national identity in its own national “melting pot.” Each racist central government intentionally left Kurdistan underdeveloped and deprived our people of the most basic human rights.

This division, by all accounts, was another enslavement of our people in a modern sense. The status of our people in each of these occupying nations was not only classified as minority but also denigrated to second or third class citizens. This awkward change in the political landscape drastically squeezed the Kurdish national identity. This division added to the number of merciless occupying countries, and consequently diminished the ability of our people to effectively challenge the xenophobic policies of these central governments. Any move towards claiming a Kurdish national aspect was severely crushed.

At that time, with the assistance of the Western hypocritical and power-greedy governments, the chauvinist occupiers used new strategies to culturally, and psychologically liquefy Kurdish existence. Kurds were out casted and treated as sub-humans—literally, with no identity of their own. In Syrian and Turkish occupied Kurdistan, as of today, Kurds not only have not been recognized as a distinct ethnicity, but also have been faced with the policy of constitutional genocide. In Iran, the Iranian subsequent regimes have always promulgated that there is no difference amongst Iran’s various ethnicities and that they are all Iranians—in reality, the Persian culture has been imposed upon all non-Persian ethnicities and practice of the indigenous cultures of other respective ethnicities is prohibited.

The forced cultural assimilation and the ban of Kurdish language not only weakened our indigenous culture, but also made the Kurds to be educated in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages. Consequently, the Kurdish intellectuals have been thinking in the dominant cultures. This ill-willed strategy of the occupiers has caused some Kurdish intelligentsia, although small in number, to claim their loyalty to Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

As a result of such “Dark Age” biased policies forced upon our people, the infrastructure of our national psychology has been shattered—this gradually enfeebled unity in the Kurdish national psyche. Therefore, the course of such policies has undermined national coherence in terms of the Kurdish social, economic, academic, and political perspectives.

The constitutional concept of each of the occupying countries has become the frame of reference for military, police/security, and judicial units to maintain the undemocratic dominant mono-culture, which has become the foundation for their racist mentality. Their social and political disposition has been guided by biased practices which have given rise to and strengthened the concept of ethnic superiority against the historical reality of our ancient people.

Unity of Kurdish national psyche

Reconciling Kurdish national psychology, perhaps, is the most crucial component in the process of national reconciliation. It is indeed the gravest national calamity—a shattered psychology divided by the regional geo-political map, on the one hand, and the other hand, as a result of the Kurdish party politics, it is traumatized by the division of the Kurdish political factions, and these divisions have always given advantage to the occupiers of Kurdistan and weakened the Kurdish national movement. Therefore, the Kurdish politicians and activists must go above and beyond party politics and take initiatives to, first, work with one another on the issues that are common to all, and do their due diligence to narrow gaps vis-à-vis personal differences and find a common ground on which they can build consensus.

Building consensus could lead to creating a strong national political culture, which puts Kurdistan and her interests above all the narrow and trivial party or personal interests and would strengthen national spirit and unity. A strong national psychology could create a democratic socio-political culture in which every member of Kurdistan society feels secure in his or her person and would execute his or her rights and responsibilities to serve, preserve, and promote the national identity.

Unity of Kurdish dialects

The division of our beloved motherland has complicated every aspect of our national identity amongst them is our national language which contains varieties of dialects and sub-dialects. The two main dialects including Northern Kirmanji, which includes the Turkish and Syrian occupied Kurdistan and parts in the Iranian and Iraqi occupied Kurdistan, and Southern Kirmanji in the Iranian and Iraqi occupied Kurdistan is the spoken dialect of the greater majority of the Kurds. All these dialects and sub-dialects have the same native roots. Nonetheless, there are differences in phonology and grammatical aspects. These differences are more noticeable in the Iraqi occupied Kurdistan.

During the Iraqi rule over Kurdistan, especially under the Ba'ath regime, there was an ill-intended policy of separation of the Kurdish dialects that was enforced by the regime to further weaken Kurdish unity by creating the so-called “badinani” and “sorani” dialects. The intention of the despotic regime of Saddam Hussein was not to provide opportunities for the Kurdish language to flourish, but rather to let the two dialects operate separately. By doing so, the tyrannical regime of Saddam was widening the gap between the speakers of the two dialects. The regime's goal was to create gaps between soranis and badinanis and by doing so, it could deepen the socio-psychological division amongst our people in this part of our Kurdistan.

Sadly enough, the negative impact of such a divisive policy can be seen even today, because after “Ērpeñî” uprising in 1991, and the subsequent creation of the Kurdish administration in 1992, the same policy of Saddam's regime has been adapted and both dialects still operate separately.

Unfortunately, instead of ameliorating components of the national unity by removing impediments that threaten and further weaken our national identity, the Kurdish leadership has consumed itself on some trivial party politics. The Kurdish leadership has allowed these two dialects to go further away from each other. Therefore unless a sound approach is implemented, the unity of our language could become a far-fetched dream.

To overcome this threatening predicament is to look for a way to resolve this issue. Thus, Kurdish politicians and activists need to get their heads out of the box and look around to find a practical model that can be utilized to narrow the gap that exists between the two dialects.

For instance, in India there are 18 official languages including Hindi as the national language. Each of these languages is used in their respective geographical areas. And the Hindi language is used across India for facilitating communication at the national level.

In Kurdistan, the Kurdish officials can use the same or similar model by officially recognizing the two dialects in their corresponding regions. Then, through an efficient center for academic and strategic language studies plan a foundation for creating a national language—this approach should include linguists from all over Kurdistan including Dimlî (Zazakî) and Luŕî dialects. Recognizing each dialect prior to creating a national language would assist regional linguists to show no bias towards such an important national mission, because each dialect has its official recognition.

Improving the education system

The health and progress of any society are determined by the quality of a very important compartment of the national agenda—the education system. The curriculum a society uses to educate its children and how it is implemented indicates how the respective society looks forward and paves the path of the future.

In Iraqi occupied Kurdistan, some of Kurdish national rights have been achieved. For the first time in the history of this part of Kurdistan, the Kurdish authorities have been able to set the goals of education system and determined what should be included in the education of Kurdistan children. Thus, Kurdistan children are fortunate to study, for the most part, the entire course of study in their mother language. Other non-Kurdish students have equally been given opportunities to study in their native languages.

Nonetheless, one could ask whether the quality of education has improved since the Kurds took ownership of their own affairs in some parts of the Iraqi occupied Kurdistan. Well, in retrospect, when Kurdish children were educated by the Iraqi occupying regime, the education system was Ba'athified while the Arab history and culture were promoted. The Ba'athist regime was teaching a literature that would enhance its image under the banner of "Urooba" pan-Arabism mentality. To bring the education system under its total control, the Ba'athist regime gradually required all the school principals and teachers in K-12 to become members of the Ba'ath party. Principals and teachers who refused to become members of the Ba'ath party were dismissed from their positions.

Compare this practice with what has taken place in education unit in Kurdistan under the Kurdish administration, we see that changes have occurred, strangely enough, only in style; and sadly enough, aspects of the Ba'athists' practice can be seen in the education unit under the KRG leadership. In Slêmanî, for the most part, principals, teachers, and higher education faculty and administrators have to display loyalty to the Slêmanî zone administration. In Hewlêr zone, the same practice is equally implemented. Each zone has controlled and utilized education unit to enhance its own images. Just like the Ba'athist regime, the dominant parties have their own political "committees" and "nawchas" inside the universities in Kurdistan. Each faction has its own student union, which is a peripheral party branch. These unions interfere with the way universities conduct their affairs. As a result, the quality of education has come down to a record low.

To improve education in particular and the life of people in general, the Kurdish administration needs to reform and improve education in a way in which it leads the Kurdistan society to live in a functioning civil society in which human rights, and human dignity are preserved and promoted. They should use the education system to strengthen national spirit and loyalty to Kurdistan and her sacred and revered integrity in which the national unity is placed above every political interest.

A healthy education system that is premised on democratic principles could prepare future generations that are more committed to preserving the integral unity of our people and creating a mentality that would establish a political culture that operates under the banner of an “indivisible nation” under a Constitution that improves social justice including gender equality.

Conclusion

To reconcile such an ill-adapted and deeply divided psycho-political culture, we need to reconcile the paradox of the differences that exist between and amongst the political parties in Kurdistan with regard to the national interests and integrity. To overcome all the hurdles that have affected our national unity we need to put every single obstacle in perspective. We must begin with Kurdish political factions. Since they are national political parties, their party interests cannot and should not be at odds with national interests.

If the Kurdish political leaders only honor their own words and practice what they preach, there will be no paradoxical disunity in their words and deeds. The differences that exist between and amongst the Kurdish political parties, as we all know it, are in style and not substance. Therefore, they must reconcile these differences. This would lay down a platform for national unity, which would facilitate the process of national political integration. At that pinnacle of the national awareness, the interests of the people of Kurdistan and the integrity of the motherland in all parts of Kurdistan would and should be above anything and everything. Only then can the people of Kurdistan live in a democratic and civil society.