

The impact of partition, behavior, culture, and trauma on Kurdistan

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Despite the changes in the world, the divided and traumatized Kurdistan is still struggling to become a free nation. While progress is undeniable, difficulties are numerous. To make a difference abroad, the Kurds in North America need a unified voice to reach out to the public and policy makers. For the past 22 years KNC has become this voice and worked with various political, cultural, academic, and humanitarian organizations and personalities to promote the Kurdish cause. In order to be more efficient, organized, and productive, it is imperative for all Kurds and friends of Kurds in North America to join KNC and help inform the public about the Kurdish culture, history, and struggle for freedom and equality.

The world has changed; however, ethnocentric ideas dominate the Middle East, where the Kurds are still denied their basic linguistic, cultural, and national rights. In the past, native people around the world were exploited and terrorized by colonial powers. Enlightenment led to the American, French, and the Industrial Revolutions in the 19th century. Then the world witnessed two disastrous world wars. During World War II, even the academia and intelligentsia was partially responsible for the Nazis' racial and social hygiene program in Germany. Similar attitudes against the Kurds are still prevalent in the Middle East.

Since the 2nd half of the 20th century much progress has been made. The number of states in the United Nations has increased from 51 to 159 in 1990 and to 192 in 2006. The Russian domination over many nations ended and many disadvantaged people became free and independent. This development would not have been possible without the support of the free world and the active participation of the disadvantaged nations to obtain their equal rights.

Despite significant progress in the world, Kurds, with 40 million people as the largest stateless minority, have been witnessing significant sociopolitical discrimination ranging from denial of their existence and identity to severe traumatic experiences by four central governments in the Middle East. Although the free world and the majority of the people in the Middle East might be sympathetic to the Kurdish cause, the central governments in the region have often been controlled by chauvinists, tyrants, and fanatics. Consequently, Kurdish society has been suffering for decades. Multiple factors might have led to this suffering including partition, behavior, trauma, and culture in the region.

A major reason for the suffering of the Kurdish people is related to its geographical location and partition. In 1639 before the era of the nation states, the land was divided

between the Ottoman Empire in the West and the Persian Empire in the East. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Western part was further divided between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria without Kurdish consent. In 1920 in the Treaty of Sevres the Kurds were promised an independent Kurdistan . Within 3 years Turkey broke its promise in the Treaty of Lausanne and the Kurdish dream fell apart. After World War II the Eastern part of Kurdistan had its first state, which lasted only 11 months; its leadership was hanged in public by Iran.

The colonial powers broke the Kurdish land apart between rival and undemocratic countries and let it be controlled mainly by non-Kurds. Despite rich natural resources, the land is lacking in modern infrastructure and industries and remains isolated form the international community. Instead of giving priority to building roads, factories, schools, hospitals, and cultural centers, the governments have focused on making sure that Kurdistan remains underdeveloped. The fear is that a developed Kurdistan would endanger the territorial integrity of the controlling states. The rival countries have taken advantage of this partition, manipulated and helped the resistance movement of other parts of Kurdistan, and often betrayed them soon after they have reached their own goal.

Behaviorally, Kurdish society has been run by the tyrants of the central governments. These dictators have manipulated the submissive faction of Kurdish society to serve the central government and overlook their own national interest. Through bribery and favoritism some Kurds have accepted subservience and focused on internal pitiful conflicts instead of fighting discrimination, exploitation, terror, assassinations, mass murder, and neglect of citizens. Instead of promoting knowledge, science, and culture, some fanatic leaders have preoccupied people's minds with unreasonable rituals, superstition, and fantasies of earthly and heavenly empty promises.

Culturally, Kurds are known as highly ethical and righteous. However, instead of filling the academic, artistic, and industrial centers, many young Kurds still go to the mountains to fight injustice as pishmarga. Being ethical, the pishamrga forces in all parts of Kurdistan have never invaded anyone's land and do not hurt anyone who is not an aggressive occupier of their land. Yet, the governments sell the Kurdish defensive pishmargas as terrorism to the free world. Despite high ethical values, the underdeveloped Kurdish society is behind in term of science, philosophy, politics, art, literature, music, etc. and therefore vulnerable to accept unusual imposed norms such as assimilation instead of integration, fanaticism instead of diversity of belief, submission instead of progress, gender discrimination instead of role distribution.

It is difficult for the Kurds to reach any position of importance. Neither Saladin nor Talebani, Tetlisi, or Nazeri could freely side with their own nation. Kurdistan's original faiths such as Mithraism, Yaresan, and Zoroastrianism have been marginalized and many Kurds have welcomed new faiths. Unfortunately the welcoming and trusting attitude of the Kurds at times have become a handicap. Betrayal by the opponents after negotiation and even murdering some of the Kurdish leaders during peace negotiation are examples of the naively trusting and welcoming Kurdish culture. However, as a heterogeneous

society, Kurdistan has the cultural potential for tolerance, openness, friendship, hospitality, and peaceful coexistence with others.

Traumas such as suppression, assassinations, displacement, bombings, genocide, and other form of assault have broken the backbone of the Kurdish society. The massacre in Dersim and Qamishili, Anfal and the chemical bombing of Halabja, bombing the Kurdish cities and the assassination of Kurdish leaders in Iranian Kurdistan are just the tip of the iceberg. Other cities and villages in all parts of Kurdistan have repeatedly undergone through similar experiences without the international community knowing, caring, or doing anything about it.

The trauma has led to constant fear and lack of confidence among many Kurds to assimilate and deny their own rights and identity as the members of a partitioned nation. Many Kurds look at the Kurds in the other side of their divided border as foreigners and identify themselves as Turks, Arabs, and Persians to be safe and have an opportunity to make a living.

Despite all of the obstacles, there is hope. The Kurds have sustained themselves and never given up on their hope for freedom and democracy. As evidenced by their welcoming attitude toward coalition forces as well as working with their neighbors, the traumatized but democratically minded Kurds in Iraq have proven to be a capable, reliable, and valuable contributor to freedom and peace. As members of the same nation, the Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan could replicate the same or do an even better job, if they have an opportunity to do so. Supporting these people to process their trauma, overcome their difficulties, and collectively become contributing members of the international community is a service to the Kurds, to the Middle East , and to the world.

The experience in South Kurdistan has shown that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The Kurds, as a united group, are a reliable partner of the free world and could make a difference in bringing democracy and human rights to the Middle East . The Kurds in the North are making progress to convince the Turks that they have nothing to fear, if they become equal and together join the **European Union**. The Kurds of Syria are trying to unite and convince the West to push Asad toward democratization, before he has the same destiny as Saddam. The Kurds of Iran gradually are being heard by the democratic faction of Iranian opposition that they have the potential to be an important free region bridging East and West.

Ideally, the Kurds of all parts of Kurdistan should be united and supported by the free world simultaneously. However, such a major undertaking is beyond the scope of this discussion. The purpose here is to promote communication, exchange, cooperation, and unity among the academic, cultural, and political Kurdish organizations and personalities in North America, so together they could become members of the **Kurdish National Congress**. In the context of such a strong membership they could become more efficient and organized in promoting Kurdish culture, identity, history and struggle for freedom and equality in their original homeland, so they too could live in peace and comfort.

In summery, any broken part needs repair and reconstruction. In the case of Kurdistan, the solution lies in unification of all parts, which is still a dream for the Kurdish people. To fulfill this dream, interrupting the oppressive behavior of the occupiers in Kurdistan as well as changing the submissive behavior of the Kurds themselves is essential. Any strength could become a weakness and vice versa. A cooperative mindset and honesty of the Kurdish leaders could be misused by the oppressors. It is important to avoid any negotiation on conflict resolution with the oppressors without international monitoring. The lesson from traumatic experience is not to develop a victim mentality, but to learn from the past, to forgive without forgetting, and to move on with determination not to accept anything less than what other nations have in term of linguistic, cultural, and national rights.

To make a difference in North America, it is important for immigrant Kurds to integrate in the new society, to educate themselves and others, to defend and promote their own identity, to support liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all, and with peace and progress in mind to join KNC and together promote a free and united Kurdistan.