

# Kurdistan Chronicle

**KURDISH  
GELIMS  
WOVEN  
HISTORY**



A group of men and women dancing at the Duhok Kurdish Clothes Festival (2024)



## Advancing Diplomacy Through Culture

The BBC's recently released documentary *Secrets of the Neanderthals* on Netflix has once again brought Kurdistan and its rich history to the international stage. Meticulously crafted, it reminds the world that not only humankind, but also prehistoric life has deep roots in this part of the world. The documentary and its scientific findings narrate a story from 75,000 years ago about the Neanderthals who lived in Shanidar Cave, subsisting on a diet of animals and plants from their surroundings.



Botan Tahseen

In the present issue of *Kurdistan Chronicle*, several pressing issues related to politics, economy, culture, and the arts are tackled alongside this groundbreaking documentary. These stories prove that life continues to evolve

in this region despite the many challenges and repeated hardships its people face. Foreign observers are quick to note the special potential of the Kurdistan Region. South Korea's Consul General in Erbil Seungcheol Lim praised the Kurdistan Region not only for its scenic landscapes and rich history, but also its enormous human capacity. Likewise, India's Consul General in Erbil Madan Gopal commended the Kurdish people for their talent, noting that his country is ready to help Kurdistan with capacity-building efforts. Expressing astonishment at the majestic *Newroz* celebrations last March in Akre, Canada's Ambassador to

Iraq Kathy Bunka stated that she is planning to invite her brother to carry a torch alongside over 2,000 people marching to the summit of Mount Akre next year.

Similar to its prominent role in shaping the history of the Middle East, the Kurdistan Region is now playing a key role in regional diplomacy. From this perspective, the Kurdistan Region has always worked to be a factor of stability in the region and to refrain from any provocative action that would fan the flames of violence and tension. A recent visit by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechervan Barzani to Tehran carried the same message of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Meanwhile, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's recent efforts to resolve outstanding oil and budgetary issues with Baghdad reflected the same spirit of finding a solution that puts public wealth in service of the public interest.

With looming food and energy challenges facing the international community, the Kurdistan Region has emerged as a potential supplier that is more than willing to extend a helping hand and address possible shortages. On multiple occasions, Kurdish leaders have reiterated their willingness to play the role of the region's food basket and help bring stability to international energy markets.

Finally, in this edition of *Kurdistan Chronicle*, we shed light on the longstanding culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between different religious and ethnic components of society in the Kurdistan Region, such as the contribution of Christians to the Kurdish struggle for freedom and the impactful sacrifices they have made. Meanwhile, a story about Ibrahim Kievo tells us how the Armenians have utilized art and music to keep Kurdish culture alive. As we keep the rich cultural aspects of a pluralistic Kurdistan in focus, this issue also presents untold stories of Kurdish poets, painters, and musicians that have spent their professional lives helping their frequently denied identities to flourish. ●

# TIMELINE

APRIL 2024

**April 1** French Consul General Yann Braem met with President Masoud Barzani to discuss the upcoming parliamentary elections in Kurdistan.

**April 2** President Masoud Barzani received the Dutch and German consul generals in Erbil to discuss challenges ahead of the Kurdistan parliamentary elections.

PM Masrour Barzani welcomed UN Envoy Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and emphasized that the Kurdistan Region's constitutional rights as a federal entity should be respected.

**April 3** Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Iraq, met with President Masoud Barzani to urge the KDP's participation in the upcoming elections.

**April 4** Kurdistan commemorated the 44th anniversary of the Faili Kurds genocide under the Baath Regime.

Norwegian oil and gas operator DNO announced the restoration of operations in the Tawke oil field after a halt due to flood damage.

**April 5** Kurdistan celebrated the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 688, which protected the Kurds against the brutal attacks by Saddam Hussein's regime.

**April 9** A US State Department Spokesperson said during a press briefing that Washington is committed to supporting "a strong resilient" Kurdistan Region to resolve disputes with Baghdad.

The KRG announced that over 1.5 million tourists visited the Kurdistan Region in the first quarter of 2024.

**April 14** On its 36th anniversary, Kurdistan commemorated the victims of Saddam Hussein's genocidal Anfal campaigns.

A drone strike in Sharbazher, Sulaymaniyah province, left one civilian dead.

**April 16** During a meeting between the US President and Iraqi Prime Minister in Washington, the two leaders reaffirmed Kurdistan's pivotal role in Iraq's stability.

Kurdistan commemorated the 37th anniversary of the Balisan Chemical Attack.

French Ambassador to Iraq Patrick Durel met with Kurdish leaders in Erbil to discuss bilateral ties and recent regional developments.

Kurdistan celebrated the Yezidi New Year.

**April 17** President Masoud Barzani inaugurated the 16<sup>th</sup> Erbil International Book Fair.

EU Ambassador to Iraq Thomas Seiler visited Erbil to discuss the upcoming parliamentary elections with Kurdish leaders.

**April 18** The Armenian National Assembly approved a draft resolution to designate August 3 as a day to honor and remember the victims of the Yezidi genocide.

France announced it will deploy a missile defense system in Erbil to protect its troops and allies in the Kurdistan Region.

**April 19** A Turkish drone strike in Erbil's Sidakan district left a civilian dead.

**April 22** Kurdistan celebrated the 126th anniversary of the first Kurdish newspaper, marking Kurdish Journalism Day.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a historic visit to Erbil, where he was welcomed by top Kurdish officials.

**April 24** Kurdistan commemorated the victims of the Qaladiza Bombardment, carried out by the Baath regime 50 years ago.

**April 26** An explosive-laden drone targeted Kurdistan Region's Kor Mor Gas Field in Chamchamal, resulting in multiple casualties.

**April 28** Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani visited Baghdad to discuss ongoing disputes.

**April 30** Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani received Stephen Hitchen, the UK Ambassador to Iraq, to discuss the upcoming parliamentary elections. ●



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[info@kurdistanchronicle.com](mailto:info@kurdistanchronicle.com)

**Publishers:** Botan Tahseen

Marewan Nasraddin Hawramy

**Editor in Chief:** Nahro Zagros

**Managing Editor:** Shamal Abdulla

**Editors:** John Bowlus

Geoffrey Ballinger

**Co-author:** Jan Dost

**Senior Reporter:** Sardar Sattar

**Graphic Designer:** Hilal Çelik

**Features:** Qassim Khidhir

**Photograph Editor:** Safin Hamid

**Photographers:** Sabr Dri

Mohamad Dargalayi

**Liaison:** Aveen Howrami

**US Desk:** Goran Shakhawan

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## President Erdoğan's Historic Visit to Kurdistan



Marewan Hawramy

is a writer and has master degree in diplomacy and international relations.

Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 22 traveled to Iraq and the Kurdistan Region for the first time in 13 years and received a warm welcome in Erbil, with the Erbil citadel adorned in the colors of the Turkish flag.

"We had very fruitful, favorable, and sincere talks in Erbil following our visit to Baghdad. I once again offered my gratitude to our Iraqi brothers, who welcomed us with affection," President Erdoğan told reporters on May 6.

### Historical relations

This is not President Erdoğan's first visit to the Kurdistan Region. In 2011, he became the first Turkish leader to visit the Kurdistan Region in his capacity as the then-Prime Minister of Türkiye and attended a ceremony with then-Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani to celebrate the opening of Erbil's airport and of the Consulate General of Türkiye in Erbil.

Since that visit in 2011, economic relations have flourished between the Kurdistan Region and Türkiye.

Ahead of the visit on April 22, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani underlined that President Erdoğan's historic visit to Baghdad and Erbil came at a critical time in the region. "It highlights the strong political, economic, and security ties between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region with Türkiye."

"I look forward to welcoming President Erdoğan to Erbil and to discuss pressing issues, including peace, stability, and economic development."

The Kurdistan Region President, alongside Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, personally received President Erdoğan at the Erbil International Airport upon his arrival on April 22. "Alongside President Masoud Barzani, President Nechirvan Barzani, and other officials, I was pleased to welcome President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan back to the Kurdistan Region," Prime Minister Barzani posted on X on April 22.

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Since President Erdoğan's first visit to the Kurdistan Region in 2011, economic relations have flourished between the Kurdistan Region and Türkiye

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President Masoud Barzani receives Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Erbil (April 22, 2024).

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Prime Minister Barzani also reiterated the KRG’s commitment to strengthening relations and promoting economic and trade cooperation with Türkiye

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Photo: Farhad Ahmad

Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani and Prime Minister Masrour Barzani welcome Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the Erbil International Airport (April 22, 2024).

“We engaged in a fruitful exchange on a range of regional and bilateral matters.”

After being received at the airport, President Erdoğan attended a meeting that included several cabinet ministers and discussed ongoing issues between Baghdad and Erbil and trade ties.

Thomas G. Strong Professor of Middle East Politics at Missouri State University David Romano added that, “at a time when relations between Baghdad and Ankara are experiencing a rapprochement, it becomes even more important for authorities in Erbil to receive the Turkish delegation warmly.”

“Kurdistan’s leaders must make sure that Türkiye takes their needs and concerns into account while it pursues its policies in the region.”

President Barzani “discussed continued paths of cooperation in pursuit of the interests of the people of Kurdistan and Türkiye” in a separate meeting with president Erdoğan.

Prime Minister Barzani also reiterated the KRG’s commitment to strengthening relations and promoting economic and trade cooperation with Türkiye, according to a press release from the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region. He also highlighted the job and investment opportunities available for Turkish companies across various sectors and expressed gratitude for Türkiye’s continued dedication to implementing projects despite economic difficulties.

### Development Road project

In Baghdad, the Iraqi and Turkish governments signed 26 agreements across various fields, including security, water, and commercial relations.

One of these agreements was a memorandum of understanding between Türkiye, Iraq, Qatar, and the UAE for a 1,200-kilometer highway and railway project known as the Devel-

opment Road project, which aims to connect Basra’s Grand Faw Port to the Turkish border via key Iraqi cities, enhancing transportation routes to Europe through Mersin Port and Istanbul.

“I think the importance for Türkiye is both economic and geopolitical. Economically, the Development Road project and discussions over resumed cooperation on oil export and water issues can benefit Iraq and Türkiye – and the Kurdistan Region – through enhanced trade and economic growth,” retired U.S. Colonel Rich Outzen, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in Türkiye, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“Geopolitically, working with the Gulf states to integrate Iraq into the Gulf-Europe trade system, rather than leaving it dependent on Iran, helps balance the current overdependence on Iranian ‘guidance’ in strategic matters. A new incentive structure could well improve Baghdad’s approach to cooperation with Arab states, Türkiye, and Erbil on a variety of matters,” he added.

Kurdish officials have also underlined that the Kurdistan Region should not be excluded from this project.

For instance, on May 12, Prime Minister Barzani stated that the KRG proposed to Baghdad that the road enter the country via Zakho and run through Mosul, Erbil, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Najaf, before ending in Basra, rather than going through a sparsely populated area.

“Although relations between Erbil and Ankara have improved in recent years, the Kurdistan Region is still wary of any scenario that may be used by Ankara and Baghdad as a trump card to bypass Erbil in the case of possible tension,” Ankara-based analyst Mehmet Alaca told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“I think Baghdad’s decision to avoid the route passing through the Kurdistan Region is based on technical

and political considerations. Baghdad claims that the road was initially planned to pass through the Kurdistan Region but encountered challenges due to mountain ranges and large valleys. However, this is not the most valid reason.”

He said that the possible exclusion of the Kurdistan Region from the project is compatible with recent Baghdad decisions that have eroded Erbil’s status on issues such as oil and the federal budget.

“Furthermore, after the independence referendum in 2017, Ankara proposed the construction of the Ovakoy Border Gate, as an alternative to the Erbil-controlled Ibrahim Khalil border crossing, to pass through Faysh Khabur.”

“Nevertheless, despite the challenging terrain, increased cost, and longer project duration, a strong Erbil lobby and an ambitious Baghdad could ensure the integration of the Kurds into the project.”

### Diplomatic reaffirmation

Senior fellow at the U.S.-based Foreign Policy Research Institute Mohammed Salih told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that, apart from the “domestic controversy surrounding the KRG’s manner of receiving Erdoğan, the Turkish president’s visit to Erbil is important for KRG leaders as they seek to mitigate the rising pressure coming from Baghdad and Tehran.”

“The visit to Erbil is an important diplomatic reaffirmation of the KRG’s status and a step toward deepening ties with a crucial yet difficult neighbor that is Kurdistan’s key gateway to the outside world for trade and much else,” he said.

He concluded that in an ideal world, KRG-Türkiye relations, and Kurdish-Turkish relations in general, “could be very different and mutually beneficial, paving the way for a different and more peaceful region to emerge.” ●

## The Future of Kurdistan-Iran Relations

Kurdistan Chronicle

**K**urdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani arrived in Tehran on May 5, accompanied by a delegation of senior officials, including Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Interior Rebar Ahmed Khalid. During his three-day visit, President Barzani met with the Supreme Leader of Iran, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as key Iranian leaders including President Ebrahim Raisi, Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Secretary of the National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian.

This visit, made at the official invitation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, marks Nechirvan Barzani's fifth visit in 11 years and is considered a pivotal step in strengthening relations between Erbil and Tehran. It follows extensive discussions with political leaders in Baghdad aimed at launching a new phase of cooperation.

At a press conference in Tehran on May 7, Kurdistan Region's President Nechirvan Barzani expressed optimism about his visit, stating, "Our visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran was positive, marking the start of a new chapter in the relationship between the Kurdistan Region and Iran."

He highlighted the warm reception from the Iranian leaders and noted that the meetings were highly productive.

Barzani emphasized the historical ties between the Kurdistan Region and Iran, acknowledging Iran's support during challenging times and stressing the importance of addressing existing challenges together. "For Kurdistan, relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran hold immense importance," Barzani stated. "Iran has always been a supportive ally during our challenging times."

President Barzani emphasized the need for concerted efforts to address current issues, expressing a strong willingness to establish the best possible relations with Iran, a crucial neighbor. He also underscored Kurdistan's role as a stabilizing force in the region.

Discussing his meeting with Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, Barzani described it as a remarkable and productive experience, highlighting Khamenei's strong support for the Kurds. While specifics of the meeting were not disclosed, Barzani mentioned that the upcoming visit of President Raisi to Baghdad was discussed, with

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Kurdistan Region's President Nechirvan Barzani expressed optimism about his visit

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Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani meets with Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Tehran (May 6, 2024).



*Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani with Iran's late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran (May 6, 2024).*



*Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani and Vice Presidents meet with officials from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran (May 6, 2024).*

an official invitation for President Raisi to visit the Kurdistan Region also being extended.

Regarding Kurdistan-Iran relations, Barzani underscored the importance of a recent agreement on a mechanism to prevent and resolve problems. He highlighted the significance of enhancing trade, security, and the movement of citizens between the Kurdistan Region and Iran. Barzani also mentioned the appreciation for the hospitality shown to pilgrims passing through the Kurdistan Region, noting the economic and security benefits this brings.

Barzani affirmed the KRG's commitment to implementing agreements with Baghdad, particularly

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**Barzani concluded his visit to Tehran with hopes that the new agreement and mechanism between Iran and the Kurdistan Region would enhance relations and prevent future problems.**

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concerning salary-related issues, and expressed optimism about finding a solution, emphasizing the importance of separating salary matters from broader political disputes.

In response to security concerns and demands for more robust cooperation between Erbil and Tehran, Barzani indicated that these issues would be addressed through the security committee. He also mentioned the potential for future cooperation in the cultural and educational domains once security concerns are resolved.

Barzani concluded his visit to Tehran with hopes that the new agreement and mechanism between Iran and the Kurdistan Region would enhance relations and prevent future problems. ●

## Can the Kurdistan Region Export Clean Energy?



John V. Bowlus

is a researcher and lecturer at Kadir Has University in Istanbul and has written widely about energy security, transit, geopolitics, and transitions from a contemporary and historical perspective. He is also the Editor of Kurdistan Chronicle.



PM Barzani, US Assistant Secretary Geoffrey Pyatt, and US Ambassador Alina Romanowski visit Pirdawood Power Plant in Kurdistan.

Photo: Farhad Ahmad

Conflict in the Red Sea and the resulting disruption of trade through the Suez Canal – a vital artery for transporting oil and gas to Europe – reminded us earlier this year of the centrality of energy-transit routes for maintaining global economic stability. In 2023, roughly 22% of global seaborne trade passed through the canal, but transit passages fell by 42% in January as tankers were forced to circumnavigate Africa to reach European markets.

Historically, disruptions of oil supplies have precipitated conflict in the Middle East – the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1973 October War, and the 1984-1988 Tanker War be-

ing notable examples – but have also created opportunities for the Kurdistan Region. In response to the canal's eight-year closure from 1967-1975, Iraq and Türkiye built an oil pipeline that was completed in 1977; later, the disruptions of oil exports from the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War prompted an expansion of the pipeline system to 1.5 million barrels per day of capacity, making it the largest pipeline system in the Middle East.

Though the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline is currently mired in a political dispute between Baghdad, Erbil, and international oil and gas companies that is especially destructive for the Kurdistan Region, the pipeline has long served as an

economic lifeline that bolstered relations between Iraq, the Kurdistan Region, and Türkiye and helped provide oil-supply security to the world.

The world certainly does not need more oil, with the International Energy Agency and major oil companies projecting global oil demand to peak in 2030. However, the landlocked Kurdistan Region might be able to play a similar role in offering safe, secure exports of two cleaner energy sources – natural gas and solar – to Türkiye and Europe. Both sources have robust demand for the foreseeable decades, especially with the REPowerEU plan that seeks to end EU consumption of Russian fossil fuels by 2030, and present opportunities for the Kurdistan Region to export clean energy resources and bolster and diversify their economy.

### Starting with gas

The current context most favors gas. While gas is still a fossil fuel whose leaks release damaging greenhouses gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere, the global climate problem is coal, whose emissions grew to an all-time high of 15.5 gigatons of carbon dioxide in 2022, some 37% of energy-related emissions. Gas is a cleaner source of reliable baseload energy that is fundamental to the EU and global strategy to address climate change.

However, gas is also the most politically challenging, as the Kurdistan Region lacks a pipeline to Türkiye and faces formidable competitors in Iran and Russia, who will seek to block Iraq and the Kurdistan Region from competing for market share in Türkiye. The January 2024 missile attack by Iranian-backed militant groups against the Khor Mor field in Sulaymaniyah Governorate was the latest of a string of strikes in recent years against the Kurdistan Region's primary non-associated gas field and speaks to the dangers that other gas-exporting countries see in the region's potential.

For its part, Türkiye would certainly welcome a gas pipeline from the Kurdistan Region to diversify the sources of its imports and meet its domestic demand more efficiently. Such supplies can also help it bolster its capacity to become a gas trading and export hub, something it has long sought.

As always, the major benefits of increasing gas production start at home to meet domestic power and heating demand in the Kurdistan Region. Construction is underway for a 36-inch gas pipeline from Khor Mor to a power plant in Duhok, which is roughly 70 kilometers from the Turkish border. This is a key step to signal the Kurdistan Region's ability to produce and potentially export gas to Türkiye. Energy analyst Robin Mills argued last year that "exports of about 5 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year by 2030, and ultimately about 15 bcm annually, are feasible."

The costs of a gas pipeline to Türkiye are largely already sunk outside of building it. The pipeline could follow the same route as the Iraq-Türkiye oil pipeline, and so security is already in place. The economic costs of building the link from Duhok to the Turkish grid would be relatively low for such a large payoff, so long as similar links on the Turkish side could be constructed.

A gas link could also bolster Erbil's position in relation to Baghdad, not least because it could potentially distribute gas throughout Iraq. The country currently imports gas from Iran and is set to welcome imports from Turkmenistan via Iran soon. Iraq already relies on imports of gas and power from Iran for up to 40% of its power supply. The net result could be a win-win for Erbil and Baghdad.

### Moving to solar

In recent years, major Middle East oil and gas producers have invested in solar power production to meet their domestic needs and create the potential for exports to Europe. For instance, Saudi Arabia added another 2 gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity last year, with another 20 GW to be tendered this year, all to meet its target of 58.7 GW by 2030.

The Kurdistan Region has solar ambitions of its own. Last year, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) inaugurated construction of its first large-scale project, a 25-megawatt (MW) generation facility in Minara village near Erbil. It plans to build another station in Soran District with 100 MW of capacity. These figures need to rise considerably before exports can be considered.

Yet the Kurdistan Region is no stranger to clean energy, with the KRG having made significant investments in hydropower in recent years to reduce dependency on oil, increase power supplies, and curtail GHG emissions. The Ninth Cabinet has also placed the environment as a top priority in its agenda, streamlining regulations and procedures to encourage foreign investment in the energy sector, among others.

Meanwhile, households and businesses are embracing rooftop solar as a low-cost way to reduce consumption from higher cost power generators. This comes as China's increased solar panel manufacturing capacity has caused the price per watt of electricity generated from solar modules to fall to \$0.11, a 40% decline from last year.

Renewable energy exports to Türkiye could serve a similar role as gas. Türkiye is already a strong wind producer but would, much like in gas, welcome additional imports both to bolster its energy security, its long-term export potential, and its capacity to power its more energy-poor southeastern regions.



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

In January, Türkiye signed a \$200 million agreement with the Iranian Grid Management Company to connect a 400-kilovolt line across the two countries' border. Countries like Türkiye that have such large demands for energy and power are looking to diversify their options, even with geopolitical competitors.

Finally, as with gas, an abundance of solar power from the Kurdistan Region could help bolster and diversify Erbil's relationship with Baghdad, as well as with Türkiye.

### The future of energy

In March, The Telegraph reported that Britain was looking at a plan to import power from the United States through a series of six trans-Atlantic undersea electricity cables, as technological advancements are making such infrastructure viable for the first time. Last year, Denmark and the UK built a shorter connection along these lines that will power up to 1.4 million British homes.

As intriguing as such new undersea energy links are, the future of renewables generation is local. Britain is an energy-poor island and a major economy. Japan is another, and China will likely export power to its geopolitical rivalry one day if their relationship does not completely unravel.

Yet there are few other similar geographical cases. Power, unlike oil, is not a globally strategic commodity that is linked to military power. Renewables are less valuable than gas, but both are essentially stores of value and money that are most economically consumed either locally or regionally.

Whereas coal and oil required global free trade – respectively supplied by the UK and then the United States – gas and renewables are regional sources that allow countries to reduce their energy-import bills, clean their environments, and power economic growth and emerging technologies.

The best strategy for the Kurdistan Region is to continue on its current path, build out its connective infrastructure, invest in gas and solar power generation, and be ready when the opportunity presents itself.

Exporting gas and solar-generated power to Türkiye or helping bolster Iraq's power deficit both require long-term visions, steady investment, and shift in global contexts in the Kurdistan Region's favor, both in stronger geopolitical will from regional and global powers to welcome new supplies onto the market and in an acceleration of the energy transition. The first context is possible; the second, undeniable. ●

## Social Diplomacy Canada's Ambassador to Iraq on Navigating Social Media, Disinformation, and Climate Change

Kurdistan Chronicle

Canada's Ambassador to Iraq Kathy Bunka, who was appointed in August 2023, is highly engaged on social media. In an interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, she emphasized that she "invests a great deal of thought and energy to sustain an active, professional social media feed on X."

"Social media is another venue to promote key messages, including Canada's interest in a strong relationship with both the federal government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and to work with these governments to make the world a better place," she said.

Ambassador Bunka underlined that social media is an indispensable tool in diplomacy. "I also use my social media posts to demonstrate my humility. I am Canada's Ambassador to Iraq, but I don't profess to be an expert on issues related to the Kurdistan Region or the Middle East. I am here in Iraq to learn and listen to the experts and to be a conduit to share what I learn with the Canadian government."

"I am the eyes and ears of the Canadian government on the ground in Iraq. I post fun and silly things on social media to show that I am approachable and kind

and humble, an approach that has served me well in many parts of the world: people know that I am approachable and they come to me and share information with me. This makes me a good diplomat, I say with all humility."

### Disinformation

However, Ambassador Bunka noted that, as a government official, she needs to be vigilant about what she shares and reads on official social media accounts and watch out for disinformation. "If I unwittingly share incorrect information, I become part of the problem because this is misinformation."

"In the 21st century, with widespread use of the internet and social media, and the advent and accessibility of tools for artificial intelligence, disinformation is easy to make and spread. It is more sophisticated and harder to detect," she added. "Complicating matters further, there are foreign governments peddling false information and unprecedented levels of fraud perpetrated using disinformation."

"At the same time, at all times when using social media, I and others need to be aware of the extent of disinformation.



Kathy Bunka, Canadian  
Ambassador to Iraq.



“  
I urge all authorities with vested powers to do what they can to restore security to the Sinjar region and to accelerate reconstruction efforts  
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Frequently, there are reports of security incidents in Iraq posted on X and on websites that are not true,” she said. “Ottawa picks them up and – at any time of the day or night – writes to me to ask: ‘Ambassador, we’re hearing reports of explosions in Iraq, are all staff accounted for?’ And time and time again, I check with my contacts – people I trust and people who trust me – and more often than not, reply saying, ‘False information, go back to sleep.’”

Moreover, she said that there are multiple companies on the internet promoting services to provide visas to visit Canada. “Multiple companies around the world make ludicrous claims about what they can do for you if you pay them enough money. They may claim to be in a position to guarantee a visa, for example, or provide free travel and employment in Canada,” she said.

“There is nothing a law firm or a private company can do that an individual cannot do themselves: they cannot guarantee or speed up a visa application. There is only one lawful legitimate site for visa applications: the ‘canada.ca’ website.”

Additionally, there are websites and social media posts promoting the services of people posing as immigration lawyers, trying to take advantage of refugees and people who want to

immigrate to Canada. Canada aims to raise awareness of false campaigns and flag such a campaign or company as fraudulent.

“As for immigration services, a law firm qualified to provide immigration services will be registered with the provincial bar association in Canada. An immigration consultant needs to be licensed by the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants,” she said.

### Newroz in Korek

Ambassador Bunka has made several trips to the Kurdistan Region. In March, she shared pictures from the Newroz celebrations in Akre and Korek on X. “I said thank you to Prime Minister Masrour Barzani who hosted the diplomatic community in Akre for Newroz, but let me say it again here: ‘Big Thank You!’ The organization of the events was ‘over the top’ exceptional.”

“These are the moments when I feel privileged to be a diplomat, to represent Canada, and to have the opportunity to witness extraordinary things like the torchlight procession up the mountains in Akre,” she said. “I posted photos on X and Facebook and sparked envy in my social circles. My brother, who always expects me to go above and beyond, expected me to join the procession and carry a

torch up the mountaintop. He asked for photos from the top of the mountain! I said that he should join me in Akre next year, and we’ll do the climb together!”

### Sinjar agreement

On January 19, Ambassador Bunka met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Interior Reber Ahmed and “had very fruitful and frank discussions about the security challenges facing the region and the implementation of the Sinjar Agreement, which is one of the key topics of discussion when I meet – and I meet regularly – with Yezidi representative groups and activists.”

Canada has also urged the authorities in Erbil and Baghdad to complete all administrative, security, and reconstruction aspects of the Sinjar Agreement at the earliest opportunity, to enable Yezidi communities to return to safety and security.

“I understand that there has been significant progress in recruiting and training the police forces stipulated in the agreement but that militias with vested interests in the region are reluctant to cede control to national security forces. This needs to be resolved. With the imminent closing of camps – on July 30 – Yezidis want to return. I urge all authorities with vested powers to do what they can to re-



store security to the Sinjar region and to accelerate reconstruction efforts.”

“I believe that the measure of civilization is partly determined by the manner in which a government treats its minority populations and respects freedom of religious beliefs and practices for all minorities. Full implementation of the Sinjar Agreement is a test of this commitment to minority rights.”

### Climate change

In November, Ambassador Bunka also met with Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, Senior Advisor to Prime Minister Barzani for Foreign Affairs and Climate Change. According to experts, Iraq is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

“The KRG has a stellar envoy for climate change. I have met Advisor Rahman many times, and she is an exceptional diplomat and advocate for the priorities of the KRG,” she said.

In Iraq, Canada has invested in climate change mitigation efforts, aligning with Iraqi priorities and coordinating with UN agencies. This includes initiatives like water management, alternative energies, and climate-sensitive agriculture. “We all need to do more, Canada and Iraq alike.”

“Canada’s policy on climate change in Iraq is the same as Canada’s policy on climate change around the world: we need to do more to mitigate its effects and do better with policy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 13, which calls for urgent action to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C,” she concluded. ●

## India Offers 50 Scholarships to Kurdistan

Kurdistan Chronicle



Prashant Pise, Indian Ambassador to Iraq

As part of its capacity building and development cooperation initiative, the Republic of India announced last month that 50 fully funded scholarships would be made available to students in the Kurdistan Region. In an exclusive interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, India's Ambassador to Baghdad Prashant Pise and Consul General in Erbil Madan Gopal shed light on these scholarships and India's broad-

er cultural, economic, and diplomatic relations with the Kurdistan Region.

Ambassador Pise explained that the scholarships are open to undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students. Students can pursue a variety of subjects, including information technology, engineering, agriculture, water management, humanities, accounting, and pharmacy.

"These are the subjects in which India has extensive knowledge," Ambassador Pise said. "Students from Kurdistan will have the opportunity to attend India's most prestigious universities."

Ambassador Pise proudly cited examples of Indian-origin CEOs leading global corporations, including Sundar Pichai of Google, Satya Nadella of Microsoft, and Arvind Krishna of IBM. "There is a saying that you can't become CEO of a company in the United States if you are not an Indian," he remarked with a smile, highlighting the significant presence of Indian talent at the helm of 500 companies worldwide.

"We want students from Kurdistan to benefit from India's expertise," he continued. "Our hope is that they will return home and contribute to the development of the Kurdistan Region."

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We want students from Kurdistan to benefit from India's expertise

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The ambassador acknowledged that there is not enough awareness in India about Kurdistan and Kurdish people. People in India know about Iraq as an ancient civilization, like India, and about the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

"This is a great opportunity for the students to go to India and explain to the people of India what Kurdistan is and who the Kurdish people are," said Ambassador Pise, adding that some parts of India, such as the northern Himalayas, have a similar geography to Kurdistan.

Photo: Sajfin Hamid



Indian Consul General in Erbil Madan Gopal (Left) and Indian Ambassador to Iraq Prashant Pise (Right).

Photo: Sufin Hamid

The academic year in India begins in August, and the application process for the scholarships is already underway. Students from the Kurdistan Region have until May 31 to apply through a dedicated online portal for India's top five universities. English language proficiency is required for acceptance.

PhD students receiving scholarships will be eligible for a high monthly stipend that allows them to bring their families to India.

Kurdistan already has a strong tradition of sending students to India for higher education. Many choose universities like those in Mumbai, Pune, Kerala, and Delhi. For these students, studying in India represents a chance to experience the country's rich multicultural heritage, diverse religions,

numerous languages, and delicious cuisine.

Ambassador Pise described India as a vibrant tapestry of languages, cultures, and religions. With a population of 1.4 billion, India is now the world's most populous country, having surpassed China last year. Muslims make up 16% of India's population, over 200 million people, which is more than five times the entire population of Iraq. This makes India the world's second-largest Muslim population after Indonesia.

India is also the world's largest democracy. Nearly one billion people are eligible to vote, and voter turnout is exceptionally high, ranging from 65% to 70%, with around 700 million people participating in elections.

Friendship between the two nations Since opening its consulate in Erbil in 2016, India has actively fostered a strong friendship with the Kurdistan Region. This bond was further solidified in 2019 with the inauguration of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi, inscribed with his quote "My life is my message," gifted by India as a token of their friendship.

Consul General Gopal highlighted several cultural initiatives undertaken by India in the Kurdistan Region. These include annual celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi's birthday featuring Indian musicians, Holi (the spring festival), and the International Day of Yoga.

Furthermore, the Indian government sponsored Kurdish yoga instructors to receive advanced training in India,

aiming to certify them as professional instructors in Kurdistan. Consul General Gopal noted the enthusiastic embrace of yoga in Kurdistan, where people are discovering its physical and mental benefits.

In the realm of music and dance, Consul General Gopal mentioned sending a Kurdish dance group last year to participate in the India International Dance Festival and Dussehra celebrations.

"The Kurdish group was able to travel from one corner of India to another in two weeks. Covering 1,500 kilometers, they saw northern India, the middle of India, and then northeastern India, so it was huge what they did," Consul General Gopal said.

Additionally, a project is underway to donate Indian musical instruments

like the tabla and harmonium to the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Culture and Youth.

Cricket holds a special place in this cultural exchange. The large Indian population in Erbil enjoys weekly matches, and the Indian community organizes an annual cricket competition with nine teams. Notably, the community has expressed a desire for the construction of a dedicated cricket pitch in Erbil.

"We are attempting to introduce and engage local people in cricket," he said.

### Strong economic ties

India considers Iraq a key economic partner, importing the majority of its crude oil from the country. "Iraq's annual oil revenue is \$100 billion,

and we import roughly 35% of that, valued at \$35 billion," Ambassador Pise stated.

While some non-oil exports like rice and meat are also important, India seeks to diversify its exports, particularly in electrical and digital equipment.

In June, India plans to hold an exclusive Indian trade show in Erbil, with 50 Indian companies representing a variety of sectors.

An increasing number of Kurdish businesses are exploring opportunities in India each year, aided by the country's simplified visa process. Businessmen can obtain multiple-entry, long-term visas, while patients seeking medical treatment can get a visa within a day. Meanwhile, the Indian consulate actively encourages and supports Kurdistan participation in Indian trade fairs.

Every year, hundreds of Iraqi patients suffering from cancer, heart conditions, neurological disorders, and Down syndrome travel to India for treatment due to its advanced and affordable healthcare system.

While direct flights exist between Baghdad and Basra to India, a direct connection to Erbil is absent. "We're in talks with both Baghdad and Erbil to establish a direct flight route," the ambassador said, acknowledging the difficulty that critically ill patients face traveling through other countries.

Ambassador Pise believes India can assist Iraqi hospitals, particularly in management development. He also encourages the Kurdistan Region to attract Indian pharmaceutical companies to set up manufacturing facilities, highlighting the high quality and affordability of Indian medicines.

"Indian-manufactured medicines are high quality and very cheap, and they can be manufactured here and even exported abroad," said Ambassador Pise. ●

## A Special Relationship South Korea and the Kurdistan Region



**Qassim Khidbir**

has 15 years of experience in journalism and media development in Iraq. He has contributed to both local and international media outlets.

This year marks two decades since the deployment of the South Korean army to Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Zaytun Division arrived in September 2004, joining the U.S.-led coalition to free Iraq from Saddam Hussein’s regime.

The people of Kurdistan warmly embraced the South Korean troops and until their departure in December 2008, they played a vital role in peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts. This deployment laid

South Korea and the Kurdistan Region is built on two key pillars. “First,” he explained, “our histories share a remarkable resemblance. Both Koreans and Kurds yearn for peace. We have no history of aggression; our desire is solely self-defense.” The second pillar stems from the Zaytun Division, with more than 3,000 South Korean soldiers leaving a lasting legacy during their deployment by constructing 59 schools and 16 hospitals and contributing directly to the region’s development. Additionally, extensive media coverage in



the foundation for a unique and enduring relationship between the Kurdistan Region and South Korea.

On this momentous occasion, *Kurdistan Chronicle* sat down with South Korea’s Consul General in Erbil, Seungcheol Lim, to discuss the current state of relations and potential areas for further cooperation. According to Lim, the bond between

South Korea showcased the Kurdish people for the first time, highlighting their distinct identity within the Middle East. This exposure, Lim emphasizes, fostered positive sentiment on both sides.

“Furthermore, when ISIS made significant territorial gains in Iraq, the Kurdish people, through their brave *peshmerga* forces, stood their ground and defended



Photo: Sabir Salih

“ Our histories share a remarkable resemblance. Both Koreans and Kurds yearn for peace. We have no history of aggression; our desire is solely self-defense ”

Korean Consul General Seungcheol Lim.

“

Kurdistan can take lessons from South Korea's success by exploiting its excellent human resources and establishing trust as the foundation of its economic growth

”



Korean Consul General Seungcheol Lim.

their land. Their firm patriotism in the face of such adversity resonated deeply with the Korean people, as well as with the international community,” he added.

Lim arrived in the Kurdistan Region six months ago and shared his initial impressions. He recalled how, as his plane approached Erbil International Airport, he observed buildings, hotels, and an aura of progress akin to that of any bustling metropolis in the developed world. This surprised him, as he had expected Kurdistan to be very underdeveloped.

“After that, I met more Kurdish people and discovered their cleverness, patience, devotion, and patriotism,” he said. “I felt that the eyes of most people were alive.”

Following the withdrawal of South Korean troops from the Kurdistan Region in 2008, both parties entered a new phase of cultural exchange. Over a thousand trainees from the region visited South Korea and learned about Korean culture. K-pop and K-movies were introduced to Kurdistan society, and K-dramas were frequently broadcast on Kurdish

television channels dubbed in Kurdish. Meanwhile, Kurdish history and hospitality were introduced to Korean society.

Lim believes that the relationship can mature even further, and that it is now time for intellectuals and opinion leaders to start exchanging ideas.

“South Korea's experience can help the people of Kurdistan create an economic development strategy that will change the nature of the Kurdistan Region's economic power,” stated Consul General Lim.

## The Korean model

As an example, Lim outlined the factors that contributed to South Korea's economic success story. In the early 1960s, it was one of the poorest countries in the world, lacking financial means for economic development and relying heavily on foreign help.

He emphasized that collaboration and trust have been key drivers in South Korea's economic progress, while the Economic Planning Board (EPB) and Korea Development Institute (KDI) nurtured collaboration and confidence. The EPB provided strong leadership for coordination, whereas KDI conducted professional economic development studies that the public could trust.

Added to this was South Korean leadership's capacity to use talent, give trust, and communicate effectively, which created a synergistic effect, while the consistent dedication and intellectual rigor of the people who actively collaborated with government programs, as well as their respect for the leadership, became powerful growth engines.

Lim sees similar potential in Kurdistan. The region boasts wealthy individuals, successful companies, and a talented workforce, both domestically and abroad. However, a lack of trust hinders progress.

“If there is no trust in Kurdish society, both money and talent will flee. However, if there is trust, both talent and money will gather. You cannot suddenly create trust that does not exist. It is best to harness the trust that already exists and connect it to the economy. A system can be formed so that trust between friends and tribes becomes the driving force of economic development,” he said.

Lim also spoke about the initiative that he launched, Du Ks Eco, which stands for Korea and Kurdistan Economy, and whose basic idea is the establishment of strategies by

Kurdistani brains for Kurdistan's development.

He noted that Kurdistan will have limitless prospects if schools are constructed in line with Korean educational standards and with the vision of fostering educational synergy. For instance, Kurds who went to South Korea for training can now use their experiences to make significant contributions, paving the way for innovative educational breakthroughs.

“Kurdistan can take lessons from South Korea's success by exploiting its excellent human resources and establishing trust as the foundation of its economic growth.”

## Tourism: Beyond scenic beauty

Every day, thousands of tourists from Iraq visit the Kurdistan Region, which is rich in beautiful scenery, waterfalls, and bustling markets. According to the Kurdistan Regional Government, 35,000 Iraqi visitors spent the three-day Eid al-Fitr holiday last month in the region.

But landscapes, waterfalls, and markets are not enough; attracting more tourists, especially international visitors, requires a stronger narrative. Lim emphasized the importance of storytelling, highlighting Kurdistan's rich history, religious diversity, and unique culture. Even tragic events like Halabja, when presented thoughtfully, can hold immense historical significance.

“Look at Halabja,” he said. “Although it is a tragic story, it can be very attractive to foreign intellectual tourists.”

Lim also urged Kurds not to have a hostile attitude toward Iraqi Arabs, citing the example of Japan and Korea. “For us Japanese people were not easy to accept, but later this changed. I want to say that even now we have more opportunities to understand each other.” ●

# EDUCATION

## AUK Alumni Shaping Minds, Inspiring Success

“

AUK is not only creating a sense of community among its graduates but also inspiring them to make significant contributions to society

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*Farah Ali*

*is Alumni and Events  
Coordinator at the  
American University of  
Kurdistan (AUK) in  
Duhok.*





As the American University of Kurdistan (AUK) approaches its tenth anniversary, it is not just a milestone to celebrate; it is a moment to reflect on the significant impact of the institution on the Kurdistan Region, particularly through its alumni.

The stories of AUK's diverse alumni community mirror the institution's commitment to quality education and inclusion. At AUK, our vision is to cultivate a dynamic community of accomplished professionals and leaders who embody the values of excellence, diversity, and service. We aim to build bridges of collaboration and inspire a legacy of positive change and development.

A total of 402 young men and women have graduated from AUK. Every year we are expanding our alumni net-

work, offering graduates multiple opportunities to stay connected with their peers, acquaintances, and alma mater.

### Spotlight on exceptional alumni

We also recognize the exceptional achievements of our former students with our annual AUK Alumni Awards. Launched in 2023, these awards promote a sense of community and pride among AUK graduates by honoring their accomplishments. It is also a chance for us to shine a spotlight on individuals who have excelled in their fields and have shown exceptional dedication to their communities.

The 2023 awardees were Kajin Khalil and Negeen Saydo, who received the Alumni Community Award for their outstanding accomplishments. This year, we are introducing



an additional category: Alumni Service to Alma Mater, which aims to recognize the exceptional contributions of our alumni in supporting our beloved institution.

### Growing together: The role of the AUK Alumni Office

Our Office of Advancement, through its Alumni Relations program, is dedicated to supporting the ongoing success of our graduates. Whether our students have recently graduated or

Upon graduation, we provide alumni with email account credentials and ID cards, guaranteeing lifelong access to services, events, newsletters, and institutional updates. We also organize reunions to celebrate achievements, milestones, and shared experiences. With meticulous planning, we create memorable experiences for our alumni, creating a strong sense of community and engagement. Our recent 2023 reunion saw over 200 attendees.

alumni showcased their businesses in dedicated booths, and the network continues to grow. Additionally, we offer mini career-support workshops and collaborate with companies like JOBS.KRD to organize job fairs.

We are passionate about showcasing the remarkable journeys and successes of our alumni post-graduation and inspiring current students. You can find these narratives featured in our "Alumni of the Month Highlights" section on the AUK Giving website.



are looking to advance their careers, AUK is here to help. Our alumni can take advantage of our professional development resources to continue to learn and grow.

Our alumni program provides numerous options to stay connected with friends, classmates, and the university through annual events such as alumni reunions, career development workshops, business networks, and various other engaging activities.

In addition, we follow the professional journeys of our alumni, monitoring employment status and postgraduate paths to tailor support efforts and strengthen industry connections. Our career assistance includes promoting job opportunities and hosting networking events.

We have also launched the Alumni Business Network platform exclusively for AUK alumni, promoting collaboration and celebrating achievements. At the 2023 reunion,

AUK alumni also enjoy a range of membership benefits, including exclusive event invitations to local and international events, discounts on professional development and language courses, lifetime access to our library and its extensive resources – both in print and online – and alumni document requests.

Through these initiatives, AUK is not only creating a sense of community among its graduates but also inspiring them to make significant contributions to society. ●

## Genuine Federalism Towards Prosperity in Iraq

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Iraqis would be wise to embrace  
federalism and democracy  
”



*Hajar Sadoon*

*is a lecturer at College of  
Political Sciences at the  
University of Dubok in the  
Kurdistan Region.*



*Mohammed Tatar Khan*

*is a lecturer at College of  
Political Sciences at the  
University of Dubok in the  
Kurdistan Region.*



*Two Kurdish men engage in a discussion while sipping tea in a local teahouse.*

*Photo: Saffin Hamid*

In many ways, the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of a federal system has intensified, not reduced, the interethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq.

Most mainstream Iraqi politicians – including Kurdish politicians – agree that Iraq needs a federal system in order to survive as a coherent territorial entity. Most politicians also agree that federalism is critical for maintaining Iraq’s democracy, territorial integrity, and separation of powers, and is a vital mechanism for conflict resolution in Iraq’s divided society, which has deep-rooted communal tensions and powerful secessionist sentiments. However, even that basic agreement is now eroding as a result of intensified communal, sectarian, and ethnic tensions.

At its fundamental level, federalism is a system of government whereby sovereign power is formally divided – usually by means of a constitution – between a central authority and a number of constituent regions, so that each region retains some degree of management over its internal affairs. Despite many unique examples of federations around the world, most federal states share common features: at least two levels of government (federal and regional), with separate powers or competencies allocated to each level via a written constitution, although powers may also be shared between levels. Moreover, in meaningful federations the constitutional division of powers can be altered unilaterally by either level of government, but the consent of both levels is required through a constitutional amendment. Beyond these basic tenets of agreement, however, there is little consensus regarding specifics.

Despite calamities, tensions, and setbacks since the creation of the federal system in 2005, the Kurds in Iraq must be at the front lines in supporting its success in the country, as it is uniquely important for them. Indeed, a closer look at the trajectory and development of the Kurdish national liberation movement in Iraq reveals that Kurdish politicians deeply understood the geopolitical constraints the Kurds would face in a world not of its own making and the peculiarity of the Kurdish position in Iraq.

The Kurdish leaders also realized the significance that the international system of sovereign states placed on maintaining the territorial integrity and independence of newly established states during the post-colonial period. Moreover, there was an awareness that the post-independence map of sovereign states had been frozen, and

it had become an extremely complex matter to discuss redrawing national boundaries in the Middle East once they were affirmingly and undoubtedly established.

Based on the proceeding reality, the Kurdish leadership did wisely when it raised the slogan of “Autonomy for Kurdistan, Democracy for Iraq” after World War II. Based on this, the Kurds became the main proponents of not only gaining recognition as a separate nation within Iraq that deserves some form of autonomy, whether via federalism or confederation, but also achieving democracy, a political system seen as a panacea for states divided along communal lines.

Indeed, despite the fact the Kurds were and are constantly accused of being secessionists wishing to divide or secede from Iraq, historical evidence indicates the contrary. The emergence of the Kurdistan Region and the creation of legislative and executive institutions in the Kurdish region commonly known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were a direct result of the centrally-propelled secession committed by the Iraqi state under Saddam Hussein.

Following the First Gulf War in 1990-91, the Kurdish leaders engaged in hopeful negotiations with Saddam Hussein, hoping to crystallize democracy in Iraq and achieve some sort of autonomy for the Kurdish nation within Iraq. However, Saddam Hussein, realizing his inability to impose hegemony over the entire country in the wake of his defeat by the U.S.-led coalition forces, effectively seceded from parts of his own territory. In this way, the government of Iraq, it can be argued, set the precedent for the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish enclave in the north of the country. This was essentially a secessionism by the center, rather than a peripheral secession committed by the Kurdish minority.

Indeed, one of the first proclamations issued by the first Kurdistan National Assembly in 1992 was the declaration of federation or a federative union between the Kurdistan Region and a democratic and parliamentary Iraq. Remarkably, the declaration had dual implications, implying that not only should the Kurdistan Region be accepted as a federated region, but also the entire country should be reorganized based on federalism.

The same commitment was reemphasized during the second Iraqi state-building process in the wake of the removal of Saddam Hussein by U.S.-led coalition forces in 2003. Despite the immense pressures exerted by Kurds

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Baghdad increasingly Arabized the political space by employing the rhetoric of pan-Arab nationalism  
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in Iraq, in neighboring countries, and the diaspora, the Kurdish leadership reiterated its commitment to the territorial integrity of Iraq and to work with other Iraqi leaders to draft a constitution in 2005 that enshrined federalism as the system of government in Iraq.

Iraqis would be wise to embrace federalism and democracy. Since its creation in the 1920s, Iraq has tested

did enjoy some degree of political freedom. However, political freedom gradually diminished, and Arab governments in Baghdad increasingly Arabized the political space by employing the rhetoric of pan-Arab nationalism. This, in turn, motivated the Kurdish political identity to become more Kurdish-focused and gradually grow estranged from the wider Iraqi political domain. These political movements only led to se-

that the separation of powers, checks and balances, and political institutions that were created are uniquely modern in design with no comparable equivalent in MENA.

Indeed, the Iraqi federal system deeply differs from the example of the UAE, which is sometimes hailed as a model of federalism in MENA. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, with each emirate an



A man in Arabic attire walks down a street in Erbil.

Photo: Sajfin Hamid

multiple political systems, including absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, and systems of stratocracy, i.e. political systems controlled at the top by the military under the guise of republicanism. Over time, these evolved into the totalitarian dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

Between 1923 and 1963, Iraqis as a whole and the Kurds in particular

vere and unimaginably destructive consequences for all Iraqis in the political, economic, societal, military, and human realms.

The Iraqi federal system is indeed unique in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and could be a shining example not only for the Kurds but also for other nations and minorities in MENA. It is unique in the sense

absolute monarchy governed by a ruler, and together the seven rulers form the Federal Supreme Council, the highest executive and legislative body. On the other hand, the Constitution of Iraq stipulates the formation of political institutions that emulate those of the most modern and democratic states, with a separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial bodies. ●

## Building Bridges



*Mey Dost*

*is currently pursuing a master's degree in Digital Media Communication at RWTH University in Germany.*



*Mehmet Tanriverdi.*

Today's world is shaped by continuous global migration and cultural integration and transformation. In this context, communities in Germany are grappling with a multitude of challenges. In particular, the Kurdish community faces hurdles in managing issues of identity, inclusion, and representation, which ultimately underlines the importance of organizations that aim at addressing

these problems by fostering dialogue and promoting cultural understanding.

In this dynamic, organizations like the Kurdish Community Germany (KGD), as the sole Kurdish-German non-governmental organization (NGO) in the country, play a crucial role in building bridges between cultures, amplifying unheard voices, and

advocating for the rights of marginalized communities. With a mission to represent the interests of two million Kurds nationwide, the KGD is more than just an organization – it is a vital force shaping cultural identity and societal participation. To understand the KGD's role in the community, *Kurdistan Chronicle* sat down with founding chairman Mehmet Tanriverdi for an interview in which he shared

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The KGD is actively engaged in several projects aimed at fostering understanding and acceptance within German society  
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insights into pursuing the KGD's objectives, navigating its challenges, and celebrating its contributions to the landscape of German society.

### Current challenges

In recent years, German politics have witnessed a notable shift marked by the increasing influence of right-wing political parties such as the AfD (Alternative for Germany). Not only Kurds but also other minorities feel threatened by such ideologies. According to Tanriverdi, Turkish right-wing extremism in groups like the Grey Wolves also poses a real danger to the Kurdish community in that they perpetuate discrimination and create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. This both undermines the social fabric of German society and hampers the integration and well-being of minority groups, including Kurds. "It's important to develop awareness of intra-migrant discriminations and threats in politics and civil society. Dealing with these challenges requires efforts at both the societal and institutional levels," Tanriverdi explains.

### Social and cultural activities

Organizations like the KGD also play an essential role in shaping the cultural landscape in Germany. In a society where many cultures mix and interact, the KGD, as an umbrella association, represents Kurdish culture in Germany by financially supporting member associations and organizing concerts, film festivals, or lectures. "We ourselves carry out projects, events, and much more to enable Kurds to actively participate in society and thereby contribute to

strengthening the overall community," Tanriverdi says.

### Cooperation with other organizations

In managing the unique challenges faced by the Kurdish community in Germany, strong collaboration between organizations becomes essential. The KGD exemplifies this through its diverse array of partnerships and initiatives – both nationally and internationally.

At the national level, the KGD participates in various integration forums and initiatives, such as the Integration Summit (Integrationsgipfel) and the Integration Policy Dialogue. "The memberships of the KGD in the Network Against Racism (DGB) and in democracy centers, as well as our General Secretary's inclusion in the expert advisory board of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship, reflect the diversity of the association's scope of action," Tanriverdi states. The KGD also works closely with universities, churches, and educational institutions, stressing the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration in addressing societal challenges.

At the international level, the KGD is represented by board members in the European umbrella organization Diakurd and provides support to independent German NGOs active in Kurdish regions. A noteworthy example of this international engagement is the work and care provided by KGD advisory board member Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, who has been supporting and accompanying over one thousand Kurdish women, girls, and children during and after the atrocities committed by ISIS.

### Projects and initiatives

The KGD also plays a significant role in promoting education and integration for Kurds in Germany. Through its diversity in language, origin, and religious affiliation, the KGD can conduct culturally sensitive, target-specific integration work for a variety of migrants in Germany. Particularly active in extracurricular educational activities, the KGD offers numerous programs aimed at strengthening democracy, promoting women, and preventing extremism. "Democracy consultants who were trained under the 'We for Democracy' project are now active in the associations," Tanriverdi notes.



Meanwhile, the 'Encounter Creates Acceptance' project allows participants to gain insight into the workings of security authorities in Germany through personal encounters with police officers. The 'Women in Action' project aims to empower and support women through sports activities," Tanriverdi adds.

Over the course of seven years, the KGD has also conducted multiple training sessions on various topics, including intercultural opening, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism, as well as combating anti-Semitism and Islamism. These trainings help raise awareness and create an

inclusive environment that promotes the integration and participation of Kurds and other minorities in Germany. The KGD is actively engaged in several projects aimed at fostering understanding and acceptance within German society. "For several years, we have been running the 'Encounter Creates Acceptance' project, which aims to break down prejudices between young people and police officers through encounter events. Particularly, individuals who have recently arrived in Germany from countries such as Iran, Syria, or Turkey often have had frequent encounters with repressive authorities. This project seeks to build trust in German authorities among these individuals,"

Mehmet Tanriverdi tells *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Organizations like the KGD are essential for fostering dialogue between Kurds and other communities, representing Kurdish interests and aspirations, and facilitating integration efforts. They are vital platforms for promoting understanding, advocating for the rights of Kurdish individuals, and bridging cultural divides within society. Additionally, they play a crucial role in providing support, resources, and opportunities for Kurds to actively participate in civic life and contribute to the broader community in Germany. ●

# HISTORY

## Kurdistan The Cradle of Mankind



**Douglas Layton**

*is the founder of several International humanitarian organizations, an American author, businessman, and champion of human rights and religious freedom in the Middle East. He is the founder and CEO of Explore Mesopotamia.*

I just completed two months of lecture tours in southern Iraq with three groups of intrepid travelers from the United States as my guests. We had a wonderful time visiting some of the most important archeological sites in the world, many centered around what was once the heartland of Sumerian Civilization. One of my lectures, “The Fifty Firsts of Sumer,” detailed a few of the amazing inventions and innovations from those who inhabited cities like Eridu, Ur, and Uruk.

At the end of my lecture, I asked the group, “Where did these innovative Sumerians come from?” I told them I would suggest a plausible explanation when we reached the Iraq Museum at the end of our journey.

A week later, upon arriving at the museum, we walked first into the Prehistoric Hall, which houses various items that heralded written history. The first exhibit we encountered was from Shanidar Cave in Kurdistan, replete with the complete remains of a Neanderthal skeleton uncovered by the famed archeologist Ralph Solecki of Columbia University in the mid-1950s.

BUT WAIT... we are in Baghdad, not Kurdistan. Why not display remains of local Neanderthals – maybe from Ur or somewhere else in southern Iraq? The answer is simple: there are no Neanderthal caves or remains in southern Iraq.

### Two sides of the Mesopotamian coin

We frequently hear Mesopotamia referred to as the “Cradle of Civilization,” which evokes for many the fabled cities related to Sumer. But Kurdistan, as the “Cradle of Mankind,” enabled cities such as Ur and Uruk to emerge. Wanderers from the region we now call Kurdistan are believed by many scholars to have traveled south, which made the emergence of advanced civilizations possible. I told my guests, one could never understand Mesopotamia if one does not visit Kurdistan, as it is the other side of the Mesopotamian coin.

While Uruk may be the oldest city (or Eridu, if one counts it as a city), Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Yes, there are cities as old as Erbil, but they were not continuously inhabited. All the famed cities of southern Iraq disappeared when

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Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world

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rivers changed their course and irrigation canals silted up, resulting in insufficient water supplies to sustain large populations. But Kurdistan, with its many rivers, lakes, and streams, flourished and prospered while other regions withered and died.

Kurdistan boasts the remains of the Zarzian Culture, those who first planted crops and domesticated animals, succeeding the hunter-gatherer Neanderthals of the Bradost region where Shanidar is located. The oldest bridge-aqueduct ruin in the world Jerwan Aqueduct, located near Shekhan district in Duhok Governorate. There are many “firsts” of Sumer, no doubt. But there are just as many firsts in Kurdistan.

Take Shanidar Cave, the finds of which are exhibited in Baghdad as well as the Smithsonian Institute in Washing-

Welcome to Kurdistan

“THE CRADLE OF MANKIND!”



Choli Minaret, Erbil.

ton, D.C. It is perhaps the most important Neanderthal find to date, as it was the first to show that they buried their dead ritually with flowers, thus revealing the apparent care of those who mourned their loss. Solecki called them “The First Flower Children” in his book by the same name.

Shanidar showed to the world that throughout the lives of these Neanderthals, the injured had been cared for, as medicines used to treat them were buried alongside the interred. So much was found – and is still being found – that the discovery shook the intellectual world; some even dared to suggest that they are us.

I could go on extolling the virtues of combining southern Iraq and Kurdistan into a single tour, as those who do never regret it. They fully understand that one without the other is incomplete.

### **Bountiful and well documented**

Some on my tour joked that we who live in Kurdistan think everything originated here. Well... perhaps not everything. But I am certainly not alone in believing Kurdistan is equal to or surpasses any region in terms of its importance to ancient history.

In his book, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, Merhdad Izady states, “The technological advancements and discoveries made in the Kurdish highlands in the 7,000 years preceding the rise of (southern) Mesopotamia (3,000 BC) forever changed the course of human history and altered the very face of the planet. Much that was achieved later by the civilization of lowland Mesopotamia starting 5,000 years ago, began 7,000 years before that, in the bordering mountains and valleys of Kurdistan. The archeological and zoological-botanical evidence of Kurdistan’s crucial importance to the development of civilization is bountiful and well documented.”

Many archeological digs are being undertaken in Kurdistan, revealing previously unknown cities, and recent pottery discoveries are older than most found elsewhere. Could the weather and lack of water in southern Iraq and the frigid temperatures in Kurdistan be the ideal incubator for humans? Who knows? But it is undoubtedly a land worth exploring, and without the incredible adventure called Kurdistan, one can never truly understand ancient history or the origins of humanity.

Many of my guests have signed up for a tour in Kurdistan and will continue their journey into the past. No surprise.

Welcome to Kurdistan – “THE CRADLE OF MANKIND!” ●

“ It is undoubtedly a land worth exploring, and without the incredible adventure called Kurdistan, one can never truly understand ancient history or the origins of humanity. ”



**Lavin J. Putrus**  
is a civil activist who holds master degree in Plastic and Reconstructive surgery.



**Diana A. Kako**  
is an assistant lecturer at University of Dubok, College of Nursing.



**Babar Aljammoor**  
is the director at Counterpart international/USAID program.



**Raneen Taber Alkjmimi**  
is working with the UN organisations and pursuing MA in Genocide at Stockton University.

## Cybercrime Solutions for Iraq and Kurdistan

*Findings and Recommendations from the 1st IQ IVLP Network forum. Discussion for Solution: Cyber Crimes and Climate Change Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, 17 September 2023*

Last September, experts from diverse backgrounds in academia, government, and law gathered on a panel in Erbil as part of the first annual forum of the Iraq International Visitor Leadership Program (IQ IVLP) Network, a professional exchange program supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and funded by the U.S. Department of State, to discuss one of the world's most pressing challenges: cybercrime. Out of these meetings, experts analyzed the multifaceted problems arising from cybercrime and proposed a set of solutions for government policymakers and business operators alike that can address the multifaceted problems of cybercrime in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

The digital age has been a blessing in many ways, bringing many around the world closer together to share their interests and ideas. However, online seamlessness has also created new challenges, especially in keeping our online information safe. After 2003, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region opened to the world by connecting the residents to the internet, social media, and other online platforms on which financial transactions occur. While this pivotal change has transformed social and economic life, the federal government of Iraq and the KRG have struggled to provide a safe space for consumers and to regulate online content. The online space has always been exploited to destabilize

the security and coexistence in the country, most notably by extremist groups like ISIS that use online platforms to promote their ideologies.

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The complexities involved in investigating cybercrimes often impede timely and effective legal actions  
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Recently, the Iraqi federal government tried to develop a law to regulate online content, but it prompted deep disagreements among the public. Some people strongly supported this step, while others considered it an attack on their freedom of expression. Even though the drafted law by the Iraqi parliament is still under discussion, the country is facing major problems in keeping information safe and in protecting users against hate speech. Although some steps have been taken by the respective ministries of interior of both the Iraqi federal government and the KRG to treat cybercrime as equivalent to physical crime, in practice these devel-



opments have been ineffective due to the large difference between the two types of crimes.

### Context and challenges

The recent IQ IVLP Network forum in Erbil brought together the following experts to talk about these issues and suggest steps to solve them: Judge Ashti Ahmed, President of the Erbil Appellate Court; Dr. Jowan Fuad Masum, Consultant to the Iraqi Prime Minister; and Dr. Dara Sherwani, Head of the Department of Information Science at the American University of Kurdistan (AUK). In a discussion led by Dr. Salahaddin Yasin Baper, Head of the Department of Architecture at Salahaddin University-Erbil, they highlighted the major issues related to cybercrime, including identity theft and the protection of online financial life and personal information.

The panel emphasized the need to find approaches that protect people without taking away their freedom of expression. The core solution advocated by the panelists was to increase the attention that the Iraqi federal government and the KRG give to the problem and to raise people's awareness of the problem so that they can be part of the solution. It also brought up discussion of the need to bridge the gap between academic research on different solutions and governmental implementation of laws, so that everyone can work together to keep people safe on a national, local, and personal level.

In Iraq, cybercrime is amplified by a host of complex challenges that reflect broader global concerns. According to the Global Organized Crime Index, Iraq ranked eighth from 2021-2023 for cybercrime among 193 countries. In addition, a research study conducted by law firm Al-Tamimi & Company in 2017 showed that the most common

themes of cybercrime were internet fraud, identity theft, child pornography, cyber-stalking, cyber-blackmail, copyright infringement, satellite piracy, and cyberterrorism. The KRG has notably established a department within the ministry that addresses cases related to blackmailing women, a notable step of progress.

The depth of these problems and the tools in place to address them represents a huge gap. First and foremost, the presence of outdated legal frameworks mirrors the issues faced by Iraq, as laws struggle to keep up with the rapidly evolving digital terrain, leaving individuals and businesses exposed to vulnerabilities. In many cases, this problem slowed economic development, especially issues related

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The experts stressed shared responsibility to elevate community awareness about cybercrime, emphasizing education as the foremost line of defense

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to online banking and financial services.

To be sure, there is a draft law that has gone through many tiers of consultations in different ministries and security agencies, with political analysts, journalists, and more than 27 non-governmental organizations that specialize in freedom of speech weighing in on the law, which will abide by the Iraqi constitution in terms of freedom of speech while preventing defamation and hate speech and protecting users.

### Regulation and prevention

Striking this balance between security and freedom online is not a unique

predicament to Iraq and Kurdistan. One important step has been taken locally, namely the creation of an online reporting mechanism through which Iraqis can alert authorities to harmful content online, although some see this as a silencing tool and an attempt to restrict online advocacy that undermines the governments' position.

Judge Ahmed underscored how the lack of clear laws has predictably hindered the ability to investigate and prosecute cybercrimes. “We still depend on the old content creation law that was issued in 1992. The lack of revised law hinders effective investigation since we cannot fully depend on online evidence,” he argued.

The complexities involved in investigating cybercrimes often impede timely and effective legal actions. The shortage of legal cyber experts in Iraq exacerbates the struggle to combat digital threats especially when it comes to investigation. Compounding these issues is the scarcity of dedicated centers for monitoring and analyzing cyber threats, leaving digital spaces vulnerable to a multitude of emerging risks. “We still do not know what approaches are effective to address these problems, since we lack a national monitoring center that can evaluate the process,” said Dr. Masum.

Even though many sectors and stakeholders are frequently damaged by cyberattacks, the panelists cited the lack of coordination among various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, as a significant hindrance to effective threat mitigation.

Bridging the gap in cybersecurity education, both within Iraq and internationally, will be essential in empowering individuals and institutions to proactively solve cyber threats, emphasizing the pressing need for comprehensive education programs.

The international collaboration and exchange of learning will further shorten the path to a more effective solution, according to Dr. Sherwani.

“For instance, the UAE is a successful example of data protection in the region. Along with a few other countries in the Middle East, the UAE has very strict laws and technological solutions to protect the country and individuals' data from cybercrime threats,” he said. “We can take other countries as an example and tailor solutions to Iraq and Kurdistan because data is the new oil, hence; we need to protect it well.”

Finally, the absence of robust data-protection laws in Iraq and Kurdistan reflects the global challenges in regulating the collection and utilization of personal data, underscor-

ing the necessity for legal frameworks to adapt swiftly to the evolving cyber landscape and effectively address emerging threats. The importance of having a balance in regulations that simultaneously enhances cybersecurity while preserving the fundamental right to freedom of speech. This solution can be more effectively implemented by consulting members of the legal system, the security forces, and civil activists to come up with inclusive law that can be swiftly implemented.

This solution can also be adapted by learning from experience; hence, the establishment of specialized agencies and national centers dedicated to addressing cybercrimes was highlighted as a vital step, signaling a need for focused attention and resources in this critical area. Furthermore, there was a shared consensus on



ing the critical need for a more strict and uniform data protection framework. Above all, the Iraqi government has not prioritized this issue. “There is zero budget designated to addressing cybercrime in the newly released three-year approved budget,” said Dr. Masum.

### Results and recommendations

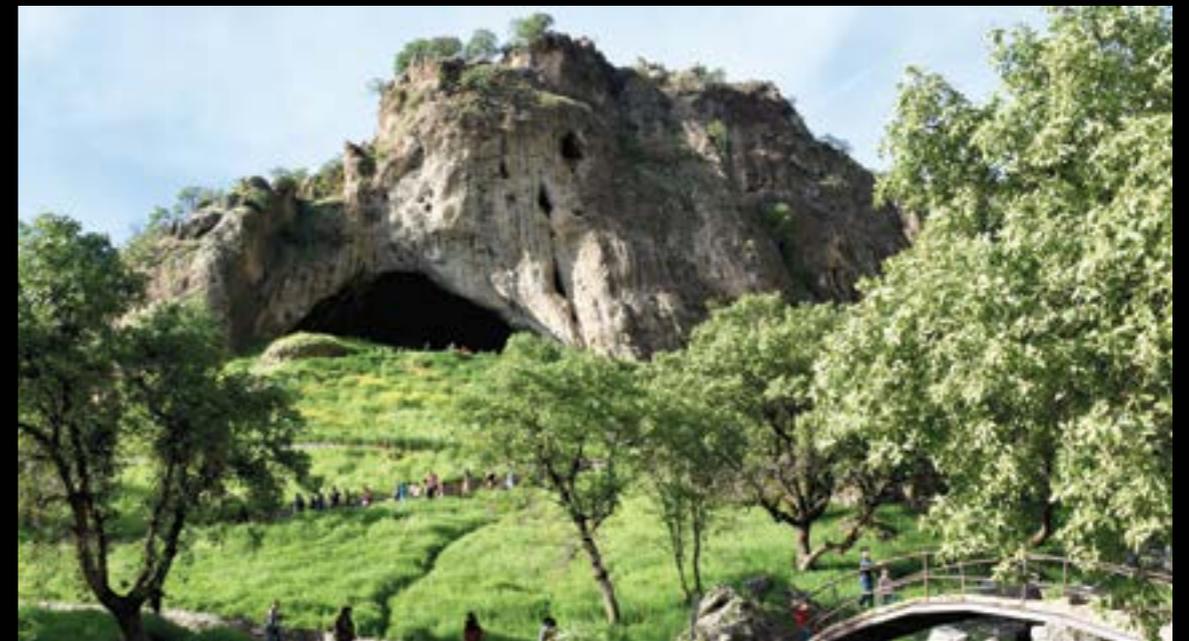
During the panel discussion, the experts proposed a series of comprehensive solutions aimed at fortifying Iraq and Kurdistan's response to cybercrime. Above all, the panelists agreed that both governments need to recognize that this is a critical issue that needs an immediate response, namely a budget, as Dr. Masum pointed out.

The panelists also urged up-to-date cyber laws, acknowl-

ing the imperative of empowering legal professionals with specialized cyber expertise, underscoring the need for capacity building within legal systems that have learned from other countries' experiences, as Dr. Sherwani underscored, who can then build a strategy tailored to Iraq and Kurdistan. The discussion also underscored the necessity of implementing robust data protection regulations to safeguard personal information from unauthorized access and misuse, recognizing the significance of a comprehensive national approach to data security. Finally, the experts stressed shared responsibility to elevate community awareness about cybercrime, emphasizing education as the foremost line of defense, and highlighting the critical role of community engagement and education in fostering a vigilant and cyber-resilient society. ●

## New Documentary Puts Shanidar Cave on the Map

Kurdistan Chronicle



Shanidar Cave, Kurdistan Region.

Secrets of the Neanderthals, a new Netflix documentary produced by the BBC, was released on May 2. The documentary follows the team led by archaeologists and conservators from Cambridge University and Liverpool John Moores University as they return to Shanidar Cave in the Kurdistan Region to continue excavations.

Narrated by Sir Patrick Stewart, famous from his role as Captain Jean-

Luc Picard in the science fiction television series Star Trek: The Next Generation, the documentary could well bring more attention to the important archeological sites found in the Kurdistan Region and help attract future foreign tourists.

Secrets of the Neanderthals features a new facial recreation of a 75,000-year-old female Neanderthal named Shanidar Z, whose flattened skull was discovered in 2018 inside a cave where

the species had repeatedly returned to lay to rest their dead.

The rebuilt skull was surface-scanned and 3D-printed, forming the basis of a reconstructed head created by world-famous Dutch hominid paleo-artists Adrie and Alfons Kennis, who built up layers of fabricated muscle and skin to reveal a face.

“The artists, Alfons and Adrie Kennis, are extremely highly regarded. Their

The recreated head of Shanidar Z.

work is in many museums. They research in exceptional detail and bring a true presence and personality to their sculptures. I think the film shows their skill and passionate interest in human evolution really well,” said Rebecca Wragg Sykes, a British Palaeolithic archaeologist who was a consultant for the documentary.

Dr. Emma Pomeroy, a paleoanthropologist from Cambridge University’s Department of Archaeology who is featured in the documentary, told Kurdistan Chronicle that “the BBC contacted me after seeing one of my talks online, as they were already developing an idea for a documentary to pitch to Netflix about Neanderthals.”

“We discussed what might be possible, and the BBC developed the idea from there. Netflix then accepted the proposal for the documentary, and so filming was organized quickly,” she said.

### Building on past excavations

Pomeroy also detailed the finds from the excavations, which included Neanderthal remains, stone tools, and animal bones, all of which will be returned to the Kurdistan Region.



“The General Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage and the Directorate of Antiquities for Soran Province have generously lent these finds to us for conservation, restoration and study, but everything will be returned to Kurdistan,” she said.

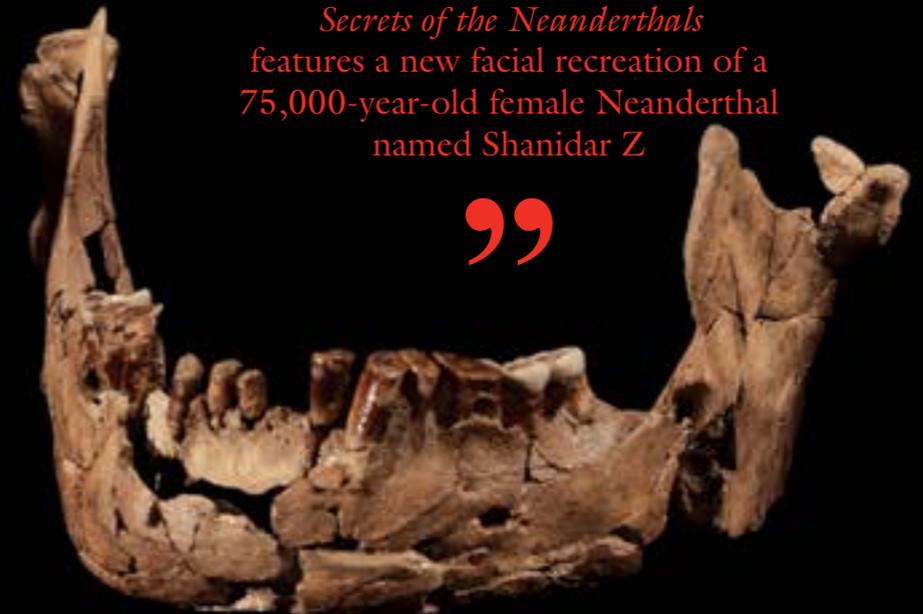
According to Pomeroy, there are many reasons why Shanidar Cave is important for Neanderthal research. “Its importance comes in part from the discoveries made between 1951 and 1960 by Ralph Solecki’s team, which really challenged some of the

stereotypes of Neanderthals as unintelligent and incapable of complex behavior, emotions, and compassion.”

U.S. archaeologist Solecki led teams from Columbia University in the 1950s, discovering the fossilized skeletons of several Neanderthals in Shanidar Cave.

“Our more recent work is shedding new light on how Neanderthals treated their dead at Shanidar Cave. One of the fascinating things about Shanidar Z is that she was part of a cluster of Neanderthal remains found in a small space right behind a big vertical rock in the center of the cave,” Pomeroy said.

“The cave is huge,” she continued, “so it seems unlikely that it’s simply chance that so many individuals were buried in exactly



the same place and that they were returning to that same spot to deposit their dead. This can suggest they might have had cultural traditions about where to place the dead that were passed on between individuals and could suggest that Shanidar Cave was a special place in the landscape for them, revealing new information about how Neanderthals understood the world around them.”

Dr. Graeme Barker, Fellow at St John’s College who is directing the new excavations at Shanidar Cave, said, “I was delighted when our project was invited to be the centerpiece of *Secrets of the Neanderthals* because I wanted the film to show how Neanderthals, our closest evolutionary cousins, were in many ways as complex as we are.”

Moreover, he said he wanted “to show that we have only been able to tell that story by examining the wonderful discoveries made by Solecki using modern archaeological techniques in the field and in the laboratory. The project is a good example of how archaeology can tell us important things about becoming human and being human.”

“Shanidar Cave is an iconic Palaeolithic site known to archaeologists all over the world because of Ralph Solecki’s discoveries, but many of the people who visit our excava-

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*Secrets of the Neanderthals* features a new facial recreation of a 75,000-year-old female Neanderthal named Shanidar Z

”



tions, Kurdish and from elsewhere, say they understand that the site is 'important and old' but are not really sure why!" Barker said.

**Inviting visitors to Kurdistan**

"I hope the Netflix documentary will make Shanidar Cave's importance for human evolution better understood by everybody – and for Kurdish people to be especially proud of having this extraordinary site as part of their heritage," Barker concluded. Barker also hopes that the reconstructed face of Shanidar Z is "recognized and celebrated by every Kurdish child

as an important part of their heritage. She deserves to be seen throughout Kurdistan and to welcome visitors to Kurdistan from the moment they arrive at Erbil Airport or Sulaymaniyah Airport, inviting them to visit her last resting place in Shanidar Cave."

Pomeroy also added that one of the things that she loves about the documentary is the "wonderful footage, which shows just how beautiful Kurdistan is, as well as the interviews with Kurdish people, in addition to demonstrating the important archaeology found in this region."

"We have always been made so welcome in Kurdistan, and it is always such a joy to return. I very much hope that in addition to providing information about the Neanderthals, the documentary shows just what a fantastic place Kurdistan is," she added.

Meanwhile, Sykes said that she hopes the film "will bring this amazing site and modern research on the Neanderthals to a much larger audience than before. Netflix has huge reach across the world, and perhaps some people with no previous interest in history might watch and enjoy it and learn new things." ●

Shanidar Platform Event just outside the pre-historic Shanidar Cave, Kurdistan.

Photo: Omed Wallati



## The Tears of Mount Sinjar



*Rabim Rashidi, a Washington DC-based Kurdish journalist, is widely recognized as "Mr. Kurd." He is focused on Kurdish affairs in Kurdistan and abroad.*

**T**he *Tears of Mount Sinjar* by Homeira Soufi is fiction inspired by real events. It is the story of Agrin, a young Kurdish Yezidi woman from the Sinjar District, whose family and thousands of others were massacred in 2014 by ISIS.

Yezidis are a religious community, numbering about one million, whose religion represents one of the world's oldest belief systems. They believe in one God called Xwede, or Ezdan, and speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish. Yezidis have endured centuries of persecution for their distinctive religious beliefs.

In August 2014, hundreds of Yezidi families were forced by ISIS to choose between death or conversion to Sunni Islam. Many fled to the Sinjar Mountains, but about 5,000 men and boys were mercilessly slaughtered and at least 10,000 women and children were enslaved and trafficked.

*The Tears of Mount Sinjar* is a novel built from first-hand accounts that present the reader with the heart-breaking realities of the invasion that destroyed Agrin's family, as well as the families of many others. Her story brings to life the ways in which she and fellow Yezidis took revenge on ISIS before she sought asylum and freedom in Australia.

### Agrin's story

Agrin, a joyful young Yezidi woman, has high hopes for a promising future for herself and her family. She lives a peaceful life in a picturesque and harmonious village in the Sinjar Mountains in Iraq. She is unaware that everything is about to change. In 2014, ISIS commences their attacks on the Kurdish Yezidi. So begins a series of endless nightmares for the Yezidi people, as ISIS carries out massacres, rapes, and wholesale kidnappings. These crimes shatter the hopes and dreams of Agrin and thousands of other people of Sinjar.

Agrin is in despair; the world has lost its value. She sees a woman fighting empty-handed with a heavily armed ISIS soldier. The woman's heroic death kindles in Agrin

a burning desire to leave, and a need to breathe for her and her people.

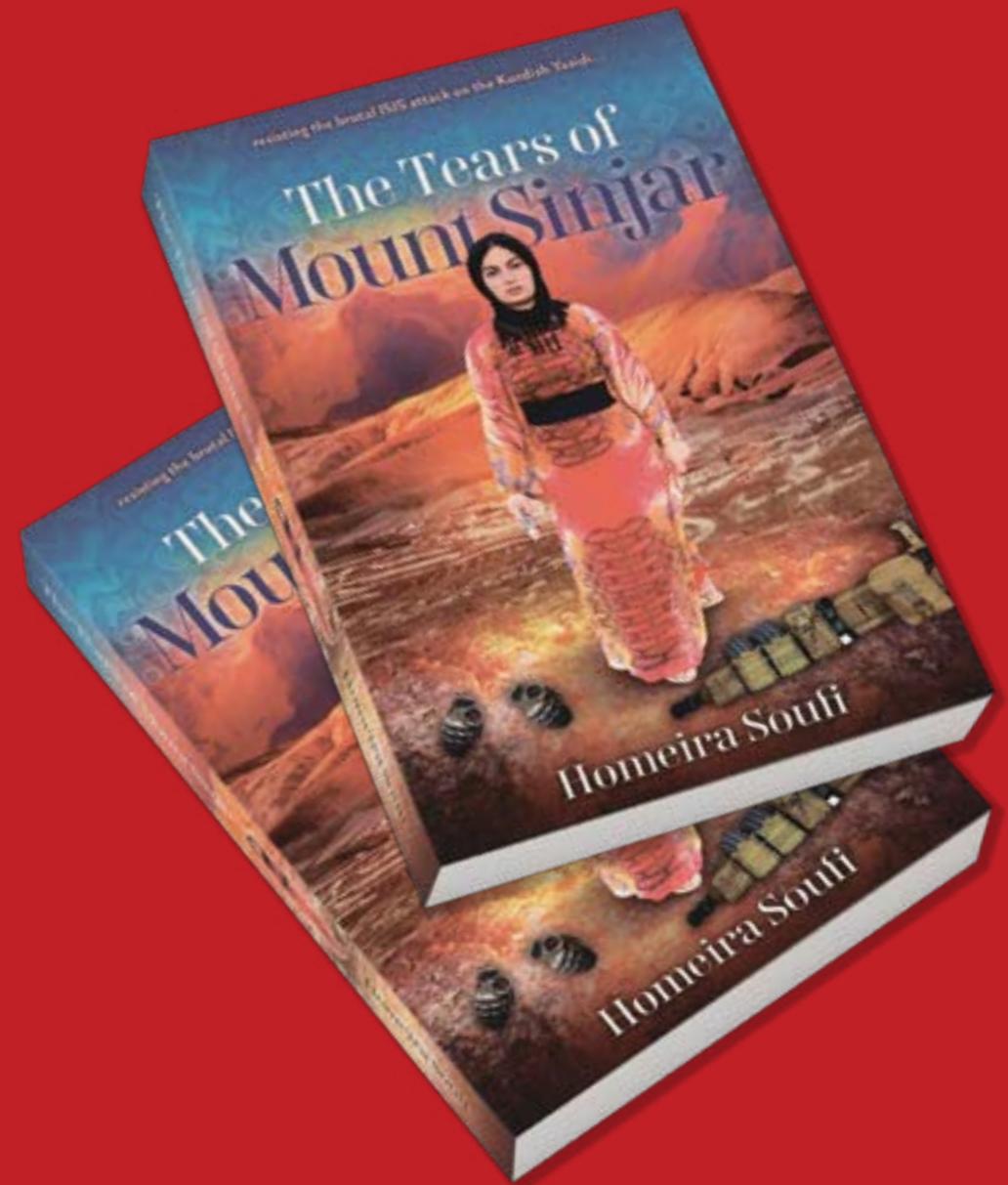
*The Tears of Mount Sinjar* is the story of the survival of the Yezidi people against almost impossible odds.

### Homeira Soufi

Homeira Soufi is a Kurdish woman born and raised in a small mountain village in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran). As a little girl she was known for writing poems and being a talented storyteller. Even her grandmother enjoyed her stories on cold winter nights, relishing the

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”



unexpected challenges and sometimes bizarre endings that Soufi crafted.

After obtaining her bachelor's degree in Persian literature from the literature faculty of Urmia University, Soufi married and migrated to Australia in 2014. As a full-time mother of two, she immersed herself in learning English at home.

Eventually, when reminiscing about the good memories of the days she used to tell stories, her friend encouraged her to write a new story.

Initially hesitant, Soufi eventually relented and began to tell a story that she had kept in her heart for seven years, a tale titled *The Tears of Mount Sinjar*. Surprisingly, she found that writing turned out to be a more ful-

filling endeavor than she could have ever imagined. Instead of orally sharing her stories, she found immense joy in guiding readers through the vivid world that she had envisioned. The experience of holding the reader's hand and leading them through her imaginative landscapes satisfied her soul in ways that go beyond words. ●



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## A Special Guest Every Month!

Season 5 - Episode 4



**Delovan Barwari**

Host

Delovan Barwari is the Director of Public and Academic Affairs at the KRG Representation in the US.



**Stephen Fox**

Guest

Stephen Fox is a PhD Student in Cultural Anthropology and a Graduate Teaching Instructor at the University of Kentucky.

Join Delovan and Stephen as they delve into the world of anthropology, inspired by the recent discovery of the Neanderthal woman, Shanadar Z, in Kurdistan's Shanadar Cave. They explore the study of anthropology's historical significance for the Kurds, its role in shaping Kurdish cultural identity, and its impact on contemporary Kurdish society.



Scan to listen to episode

Podcast also available at [pod.link/KurdistaninAmerica](https://pod.link/KurdistaninAmerica)

# Assyrian Language in *Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan*



**Ivan Jani Corbill**

is an Assyrian activist and journalist. He currently serves as the director of Assyrian Culture Center in Diyana, Kurdistan.

In light of the changing times and advancements in technology in the 1960s, General Mustafa Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Kurdistan liberation movement, recognized the need for a strong media voice. This voice would counter the Iraqi government’s false propaganda, uplift the morale of *peshmerga* fighters, and spread awareness about the revolution’s achievements among the Kurdish people, as well as regionally and internationally.

Establishing a radio station proved challenging, but with General Barzani’s unwavering determination and the relentless efforts of *peshmerga* fighters and officials, *Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan* emerged on August 20, 1963, broadcasting a range of 50 kilometers. Initially, broadcasts were limited to one hour daily in both Kurdish and Arabic.

This initial period lacked Assyrian-language programming, possibly due to a scarcity of qualified personnel. The Assyrian language presents linguistic complex-

ities, and fluency wasn’t widespread. Furthermore, successive Iraqi governments had pursued a chauvinist policy aimed at weakening Assyrian language, literature, and identity, particularly following the brutal Simele massacre of 1933. The Iraqi government viewed Assyrians with suspicion and sought to assimilate them into Arab culture by relocating them to southern and central Iraq.

### The first Assyrian voice

Although the first iteration of *Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan* lacked an Assyrian segment, Alber Khor, an Assyrian *peshmerga*, served as one of the first hosts in the Arabic language segment. Unfortunately, there is little available information about him.

Five years after its launch, in 1968, the radio station began broadcasting news, political commentary, and national songs in Assyrian for the first time. This development stemmed from two main reasons. First, General Barzani believed in the legitimate rights of Kurdistan’s diverse



Assyrian female Peshmerga Margaret George with her father (1964).

ASSYRIAN



“General Barzani believed in the legitimate rights of Kurdistan’s diverse communities and viewed them as integral to the liberation movement”

Assyrian politician and Peshmerga commander Faranso Hariri (Left) and renowned Kurdish writer, translator, and poet Hazbar.

”

communities and viewed them as integral to the liberation movement. Second, Franso Hariri, an Assyrian who had risen to become one of General Barzani’s trusted confidantes within the KDP, played a crucial role in advocating for Assyrian representation. Hariri, an intellectual, politician, and *peshmerga*, established the Assyrian section of the radio station, working as a writer, translator, and radio host.

Following a brief hiatus, the radio station resumed broadcasting on March 29, 1974, with a message from General Barzani himself. This time, broadcasts expanded to four hours daily, with the addition of the Turkmen and Assyrian language segment. The team behind the Assyrian segment grew from one to four members, delivering one hour of daily programming featuring speeches, news, statements, and Assyrian

national songs. The programming resonated with Assyrians across Iraq, Iran, and neighboring countries.

The staff of the Assyrian language segment during this period included:

- Ushana Haziran: Director and translator
- Shamasha Gorgis Shilimon: Host and translator
- Dansa Hariri: Host

- Yoshiya Tamraz: Political researcher

Additionally, Hariri made significant contributions in recruiting and guiding Assyrian intellectuals and youth to work on the Assyrian segment. Additionally, Zuhair Abdul-Masih, renowned filmmaker, worked as a director in other sections of the radio station.

Unfortunately, Assyrian language programming ceased sometime between 1980 and 1990, prior to the 1991 Iraqi uprisings. However, Assyrians continued to serve the station in other capacities, including Nisan Ushana, who remained an Arabic-language host.

Rebwar Yalda and the television era  
In 1989, Assyrian *peshmerga* and intellectuals gained a more prominent role in media in Kurdistan. Rebwar Yalda, well-known politician, assumed the responsibility of heading the KDP’s media department alongside his duties as the Secretary of the Kurdistan Democratic Students and Youth Union. Yalda’s expertise significantly elevated the KDP’s media presence.

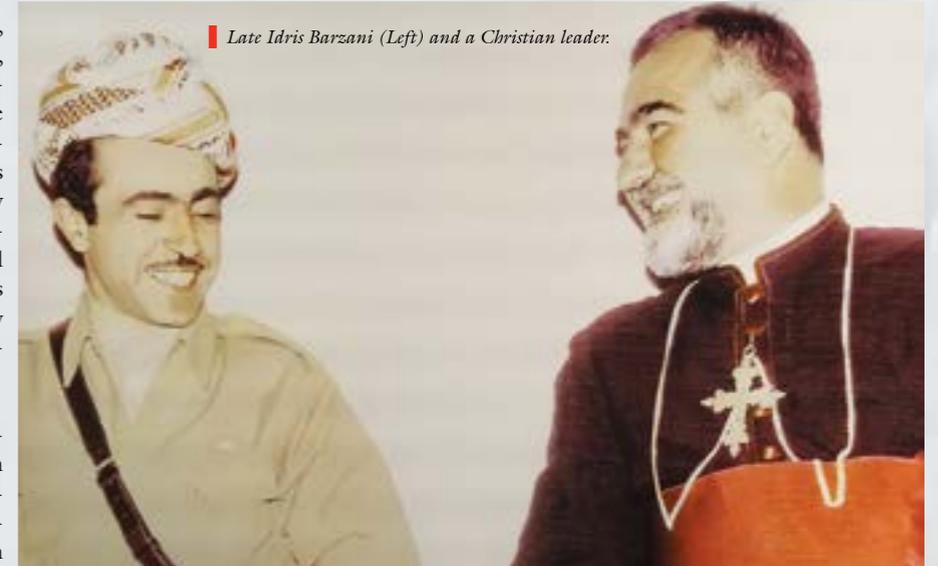
In February 1992, Yalda was entrusted with establishing and managing Kurdistan Television, the main Kurdish television channel. His leadership ushered in a new era for the KDP’s media. Under his guidance, a weekly Assyrian program titled “Mardutan” (“Our Culture” in Assyrian) was launched in 1992, hosted by Joseph Rasho, marking the first Assyrian program to grace the television screen in the world.

Yalda’s expertise ultimately led him to become a founding member of the Kurdistan Satellite Corporation in 1999, known today as *Kurdistan*

*TV*. He served as the head of the Kurdistan Central Radio and Television Corporation from February 13, 2000, until 2004, when the TV station was officially handed over to the KDP bureau.

With *Kurdistan TV*’s transition to satellite broadcasting, dedicated Assyrian language programming was established in 2001 and functioned alongside programming in other languages, producing and presenting news, reports, and programs in Assyrian. This service continued until 2008, with notable journalistic contributions from the following people:

- Nawzar Pauls: Presenter and news reporter
- Baul Mate: Head of the Assyrian section, translator, writer, and news reporter



Late Idris Barzani (Left) and a Christian leader.

- Farid Ayubkhan: Presenter
- Amanwel Yaqub: Technical team collaborator (though not directly part of the Assyrian section)

Following the end of Assyrian language programming, Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Transportations and Communications Ano Jawhar collaborated with a group of journalists to present a special weekly program called “Suraya,” but the program unfortunately only

had a short run.

In recognition of the Assyrian community’s contributions to media in Kurdistan, former Kurdistan Region president and head of the KDP Masoud Barzani once again appointed an Assyrian journalist, Ninos Nimrod, as the General Director of *Kurdistan TV* on February 17, 2020. *Kurdistan TV* holds significance not only for the KDP but also on a regional and national level, delivering news as the primary official channel of the KDP. Nimrod, with his extensive media experience, is a trusted and skilled KDP cadre who serves as a media advisor to former President Barzani.

The Assyrians have thus played a vital role in establishing and developing the KDP’s media, and by extension, Kurdistan’s media landscape. They

have become an integral part of this significant history, continuing to make sacrifices and contribute with loyalty and skill at all levels to serve the legitimate cause of the Kurdish people. Their dedication lays the foundation for a democratic and developed Kurdistan where all ethnic, religious, and ideological groups can coexist peacefully and freely under a strong and service-oriented government. ●

## Rewan Radio A Voice for the Kurds



**Rohat Alakom**

*is a Kurdish writer from Turkey. He has penned around 15 books on culture and history published in Kurdish, Turkish and Swedish. Some of his reviews have also been translated into other languages.*

The sound of my mother's voice urging me to "press that button and turn the radio on" is a key memory from my childhood. Back then, in the absence of the internet and social media, Radio Rewan was our window to the world.

Kurdish music filled our home, punctuated by listener requests for their favorite songs. Radio announcers meticulously read out names and locations, sometimes extending the suspense.

During summer trips to Kars, a Kurdish-populated area in eastern Turkey, the sight of Mount Agri (known to Europeans as Mount Ararat) and the distant city of Yerevan would instantly conjure up Radio Rewan. Its broadcasts were crystal clear, thanks to the region's proximity to Armenia.

The radio station was known by many names: Radio Rewan, the Kurdish section of Public Radio of Armenia, Kurdish Radio, or the Kurdish broadcasting of Radio Rewan.

### A haven for Kurdish culture

Despite the animosity towards Armenia and the Soviet Union in 1970s Turkey, Radio Rewan's broadcasts offered a lifeline. News and songs in urdish language resonated deeply. The frequent use of the word "Qers" – the Kurdish name for the city of Kars – resonated in particular, a reminder of the Kurdish heritage of the land we inhabited.

The history of Radio Rewan is intertwined with Kurdish music and the rich musical traditions of Eastern Anatolia and Armenia. Many renowned Kurdish *dengbeji* (folk singers) and musicians have graced its studios, enriching its legacy. Sadly, many have passed away, while others have emigrated. The sounds of the flute, drum, and *mey* (lute) have blended with the voices of singers and musicians over the years, creating

a unique sonic tapestry. Egide Cimo stands out as one of Radio Rewan's most influential Kurdish artist and musicians.

### Uncovering the origins

For a long time, many believed that Radio Rewan was founded in 1930, lacking concrete evidence. However, *My Memories*, Frida Haji Jawari's 2010 memoir, sheds light on its ear-

lier inception. Her parents, Zeyneb Ibo and Hacıye Cindi, worked as hosts from 1930 to 1937, broadcasting news, short stories, and poems in Kurdish. Initially, broadcasts lasted five minutes, but gradually extended to fifteen. Frida Haji Jawari published a photograph of a document written by Yexish Hovanesyan, the head of the Public Radio of Armenia.

Radio Rewan's official founding year



People listening to the radio.

“  
The history of Radio Rewan is intertwined with Kurdish music and the rich musical traditions of Eastern Anatolia and Armenia  
”

is recognized as 1955. It functioned in tandem with , a Kurdish newspaper, representing the first time that Kurds in Armenia had access to two such significant media resources. Funded and protected by the state, these outlets provided a platform for Kurdish voices for many years. Meanwhile, millions of Kurds in Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Turkey) remained deprived of such a right, silenced by Turkish authorities.

### Guiding hands

The Kurdish section of Public Radio of Armenia launched test broadcasts in early 1955 and transitioned to regular programming in 1957. Jasim Jalil served as the head of the station for several years. His family also made significant contributions: his daughter Jamila Jalil worked as a host for

“  
Radio Rewan’s official  
founding year is  
recognized as 1955

”

Following Khalil Muradov’s passing, Ahmed Gog assumed leadership.

### Inside the studios

Established in 1927, Public Radio of Armenia celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1977, with the Kurdish newspaper

tion. Their son Temur Khalil, who currently resides in Sweden, also worked as an editor from 1981 to 1984. In 2024, a party was held in Stockholm in honor of what would have been Khalil Muradov’s 100th birthday, attracting Kurds from Georgia who shared their memories of him.

Both Jasim Jalil and Khalil Muradov were well-known writers, and their families played a pivotal role in shaping Radio Rewan’s cultural impact. Fol-



A group of students listening to the radio in Armenia.

35 years, his son Ordikhan Jalil was host for a few years, and Gulizar Jasim also served a brief stint as a host.

Khalil Muradov took over in 1957 and remained at the helm for 24 years. His wife, Ezniva Rashid, predated him as a radio host, ultimately dedicating 27 years to the sta-

tion. This included a fascinating article by Baba, offering a glimpse into the daily operations of the Kurdish Department during that era. After preparing news for local and international audiences, personalities like Kerem Seyad, Ezniva Rashid, and Seva-za Evdo took turns presenting the broadcasts. Translators



like Iskhane Eslan also played a crucial role in translating foreign language content into Kurdish.

### Documenting the legacy

Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in Radio Rewan’s archives

notations and lyrics, available in digital format for listening and reading on the internet.

My own research on the newspaper unearthed a treasure trove of articles and news items about Radio Rewan.



Yerevan Radio Headquarters.

and influence. Books by Zeri Inanc, Javad Marvani, and Kamran Elend explore the station’s impact in Turkey. Interviews and features have also been published. Zeri Inanc’s bilingual Kurdish-Turkish book, *The Voice of Kurds in Radio Yerevan*, published in 2017, is a compilation of interviews and articles on Radio Rewan published by the Ismail Besikci Foundation. An accompanying interview with the author appeared in *Agos* newspaper in February 2017.

Another notable work is the four-volume collection titled *Songs of Yerevan Radio Archive*, featuring 915 tracks with musical

The archived photographs of singers and artists, unseen elsewhere, were a particular delight. Ten of these photographs found their way into my March 2023 article titled “Kurdish Radio in a ” published in *Gazete Duvar*, and later, into my book on newspaper.

This historical photograph depicts a group of Kurdish students present at the inauguration of Radio Rewan in 1955. From the front row (left to right): Ordikhane Jalil (holding a symbol), Jalil Jalil, Sima Semend, Seref Esir. In the second row (left to right): Emma Usiv, Majite Bisho, and Ilice Rashid.

### Sima Semend: A literary voice

Sima Semend joined Radio Rewan in 1963, dedicating nearly four decades to the station. Rising through the ranks, she eventually headed the literature department. Her contributions included numerous programs exploring Kurdish and Armenian literature, as well as the experiences of Kurdish women. A list of these programs is included in her book , published in 2009. Particularly popular were her reports on Kurdish women, totaling around 46. Her husband, Karlen Cacan, also played a part in ’s history. Their complementary roles in the publishing world and their dedication to Armenian and Kurdish culture are a testament to their partnership (see my article: “Sima Semend: “Qiza kurde aza, binivise...,” published in *Gazete Duvar* in December 2023).

### Aslik Qadir: A star takes the stage

Another source of personal satisfaction was meeting the renowned and legendary singer, Aslika Qadir. After immigrating to Germany in 1991, her Kurdish memoirs were published in Istanbul in 2023. Reading her book provided a deeper understanding of this remarkable Kurdish artist. I also contributed an introduction to her work in an article in the magazine *Nûbihar*. ●

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## Developing Agricultural Industry



**Saman Shali**

*is a political analyst, has been passionately involved in advocating for Kurdish rights since the mid-1970s.*

The history of the development of agriculture spans thousands of years. It varies greatly depending on geographical location, technological advancements, cultural practices, and environmental factors.

The transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture marked a significant milestone in human history. This shift occurred independently in regions around the world between 10,000 and 4,000 BC, depending on factors such as the availability of suitable plant and animal species for domestication.

Early agriculturalists began selectively breeding wild plants and animals to enhance desirable traits, such as larger seeds, increased yield, or docility. This process led to the domestication of crops like wheat, barley, rice, and maize and animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs.

The first signs of agriculture in what is now the Kurdistan Region were observed at the Charmo site, which dates to 7,500 BC. Today, the agricultural sector plays an essential role in the economy of rural areas.

In the mid-20th century, advancements in plant breeding, agrochemicals, and irrigation technologies led to the Green Revolution, which dramatically increased agricultural productivity and helped alleviate hunger in many parts of the world. High-yielding crop varieties, such as wheat and rice, and synthetic fertilizers and pesticides became widely adopted.

Developing the agricultural industry in the Kurdistan Region requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the various challenges facing farmers and agriculture in a way that complements the region's resources and potential. Below are some strategies that the government can consider to protect and revive agriculture in the region:

**1. Investment in infrastructure:** Improving infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, storage facilities, and market access is essential for supporting agricultural development.

“  
The first signs of agriculture in what is now the Kurdistan Region were observed at the Charmo site, which dates to 7,500 BC  
”

This development includes upgrading rural roads to facilitate the transportation of goods, modernizing irrigation systems to increase water efficiency, and establishing cold storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses.

**2. Promotion of modern farming practices:** Encouraging the adoption of modern farming techniques and

technologies can boost productivity and efficiency in agriculture. This promotion may involve providing training, extension services, and access to inputs such as high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. Demonstrations of best practices and pilot projects can help showcase the benefits of modern methods to farmers.

**3. Diversification of crops and livestock:** Promoting crop diversification and the development of high-value crops can enhance resilience to climate change and market fluctuations. Additionally, supporting the growth of livestock production through improved breeding, animal healthcare, and feed management can contribute to food security and economic growth.

**4. Support for smallholder farmers:** Smallholder farmers constitute a significant portion of the agricultural sector in many regions, including the Kurdistan Region. Providing them



*Photo: Safin Hamid*

with access to credit, insurance, and marketing support can help improve their livelihoods and productivity. Initiatives such as farmer cooperatives and producer organizations can also facilitate collective action and bargaining power. The government should also ban the import of agricultural and animal products to allow the sales of local production, which will help farmers increase their production in the future.

**6. Market development and value-chain integration:** Strengthening market linkages and value chains is crucial for connecting farmers to markets and improving their access to inputs, information, and credit. This information may involve establishing market infrastructure, promoting agro-processing industries, and fostering partnerships between farmers, traders, processors, and retailers.

**8. Climate resilience and adaptation:** Given the vulnerability of agriculture to climate change, integrating climate resilience and adaptation strategies into agricultural planning and development is crucial. This planning may involve promoting drought-resistant crops, water-saving technologies, and climate-smart agricultural practices that enhance resilience to extreme weather events and variability in precipitation patterns.

ment must work seriously to preserve agricultural lands because, in previous years, agricultural lands were allocated to residential projects, which harm the agricultural economy and threaten food security.

By implementing these strategies in a coordinated and collaborative manner, the Kurdistan Region can unlock the full potential of its agricultural sector, contribute to food security, economic growth, and rural development,



Photo: Safin Hamid

**5. Sustainable land management:** Sustainable land management practices, such as conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and soil conservation measures, can help mitigate soil erosion, degradation, and desertification. These practices contribute to long-term soil health and productivity while preserving natural resources for future generations.

**7. Policy and regulatory reforms:** An enabling policy environment supports agricultural development. This development includes policies that promote investment, land tenure security, agricultural research and innovation, and market liberalization. Regulatory reforms to streamline procedures, reduce bureaucracy, and ensure food safety and quality standards can also facilitate growth in the sector.

**9. Supporting the regional government:** Providing banking facilities to farmers to develop their businesses with long-term, low-interest loans, distributing agricultural lands to graduates of agricultural colleges and institutes, and encouraging them to invest in their fields of specialization can help bolster the sector. The govern-

and improve the livelihoods of its farming communities. Overall, the development of the agricultural industry has been a complex and ongoing process shaped by human ingenuity, cultural practices, and environmental factors, with each stage building upon the innovations and knowledge of previous generations. ●

## Kurdish Spirit in the United States of America



*Shamal Abdulla*

*is a journalist with 18 years of experience in the field. He has held a number of prestigious positions, including news director at Kurdistan 24 and the editor-in-chief of BasNews.*



**Bakhtiar Dargalayi at a Newroz event in Chicago, Illinois (1979).**

**B**akhtiyar Dargali was born in 1960 in the village of Dargala, in the Balakayati/Rawanduz area of the Kurdistan Region. Known for its breathtaking beauty, Dargala frequently housed peshmerga fighters and its residents were constantly dreaming of revolution. His family was also woven into the fabric of the Kurdistan liberation movement, with his father, grandfather and uncles fought alongside the iconic leader General Mustafa Barzani.

“  
**Dargali’s path to the United States intertwined with the legacy of General Barzani**  
”

From his earliest moments, Dargali thus witnessed the Kurdish struggle, and a deep longing for a free Kurdistan profoundly shaped his life. Even his education began in this revolutionary environment. This background fueled Dargali’s passion to create better conditions for workers that can provide healthier, more secure livelihoods for them and their families.

After completing his studies and working various jobs, Dargali co-founded a company that provides consultation



**President Masoud Barzani and Izzet Dargalayi.**



*Bakhtiar Dargalayi at the company where he works and is a partner.*

services for businesses and institutions to design optimal working environments.

“My experiences instilled in me a deep appreciation for a fostering a favorable living and work environment,” he explains. “That’s why I am so meticulous about improving it.”

Dargali’s company, ESEI, boasts high-quality equipment and a dedication to excellence in their field. While financial success is a factor, the company’s core mission is to create positive and comfortable work environments. They view themselves as environmental stewards as well, translating their love for the Kurdistan Region’s rich nature into their work.

### Formation in the United States

Dargali’s determination first led him to pursue an engineering degree from

the University of Tennessee. His brother, Kamaran, also flourished, graduating with a degree in management from the same university.

“The United States holds a special place in my heart, just as the Kurdistan Region does,” Dargali declares, his voice filled with pride. He speaks of the opportunity the country offered him after the hardships he endured. The United States became the stage for his success story, granting him a comfortable and fulfilling life.

Dargali’s path to the United States intertwined with the legacy of General Barzani. Political upheaval forced his family to seek refuge in Iran during the 1970s, a period marked by immense longing and the fading hope for a Kurdish revolution. Thanks to Barzani’s efforts, Dargali and his brother received the chance to study and build a new life in the United States through a refugee and asy-

lum program. They never forgot the words of their parents and Barzani, urging them to become ambassadors for their people’s cause. This responsibility has fueled Dargali’s lifelong commitment to defending his homeland’s aspirations.

Years later, fate brought Dargali face-to-face with his ailing leader when Barzani sought cancer treatment in the United States. This reunion was bittersweet, marked by both joy and grief. It was also during this visit that Dargali was reunited with his father, Ezzat Sulaiman Dargali, who was summoned by the Iraqi President to deliver messages to Mustafa Barzani. The Iraqi regime wanted to calm the revolt in Kurdistan with Barzani’s help, but Barzani refused Iraq’s mischievous overtures and implored them to stop its Arabization policy and destruction of Kurdistan’s countryside.



*Bakhtiar Dargalayi atop Rocky Mountain Park, Colorado (2022).*



*Bakhtiar Dargalayi’s children (Kani, Shwan and Aran) celebrating graduation.*

In the United States, Dargali has long been a vocal advocate for Kurdish rights, proudly participating in marches and demonstrations. “We traveled across multiple states to support Kurdistan,” he recounts. “Washington, D.C. and New York City saw us rallying for our people’s demands and seeking international aid.”

The 2003 liberation of Iraq by the United States offered another opportunity for Dargali to express his solidarity. He actively participated in the 2005 elections, even traveling a grueling 24 hours by bus to register and vote.

### Lifelong ambassador for his people’s cause

Following the Kurdish uprising in 1991, Dargali returned to the Kurdistan Region several times, reaffirming his connection to his homeland. He married a Kurdish woman and together they built a beautiful family.

The 2017 Kurdistan Region independence referendum marked a particularly joyous chapter in Dargali’s life. He visited Kurdistan frequently during this period, often meeting with then Kurdistan Regional Government President Masoud Barzani, the top Kurdish leader and son of Mustafa Barzani.

“President Barzani is a leader unlike any other in Kurdistan’s history,” Dargali says with admiration. “He would make any sacrifice to realize his people’s dreams. Unfortunately, global politics trumped the Kurdish people’s aspirations once again.”

Despite the vast physical distance and time difference separating him from the Kurdistan Region, Dargali remains deeply

Bakhtiar Dargalayi with his mother and younger brother in Mahabad, Iranian Kurdistan.



connected to his homeland. Social media allows him to stay updated on Kurdish life, sharing news and developments with his community.

Dargali vividly recalls an encounter with U.S. Senator (Texas) Ted Cruz. “At a Kurdish cultural event, I approached the senator in our traditional attire,” he relates. “I urged him to remember the Kurds, the United States’ loyal allies in the region. We are grateful to the United States for liberating us from Saddam Hussein, but continued U.S.-Kurdistan friendship is essential.”

Senator Cruz expressed his appreciation for Dargali’s advocacy during their encounter.

Dargali’s office proudly displays a well-worn letter that his father sent in 1976. The letter, a powerful symbol of his father’s unwavering support, reads: “My sons, as a devoted father, I urge you to excel in everything you do. Never neglect your education. If you work during the day, dedicate nights to studying, and vice versa. Persistence in learning is key. Through education, you can serve your community effectively.”



Bakhtiar with his brother Kamaran



(From left) President Masoud Barzani, the late Mustafa Barzani, Mam Izzet Dargalayi.



Bakhtiar Dargalayi alongside other Kurds leading a demonstration in Atlantic in support of Kurdistan.



(From left) Bakhtiar Dargalayi and General Ernie Audino in New York City (2016).



Allea and Bakhtiar showing their love story featured in a US newspaper.

These words resonate deeply with Dargali. “Fulfilling my father’s wish for me to become a Kurdish ambassador to the United States has been my lifelong mission,” he declares with conviction. “I will relentlessly defend the rights of the Kurdish people, serv-

ing as their unwavering advocate until they achieve their aspirations for a free and independent Kurdistan.”

Dargali’s unwavering dedication to his homeland, coupled with his success in the United States, exemplifies

the enduring spirit of the Kurdish people. Through his advocacy and unwavering commitment, he continues to fight for the Kurdish cause, ensuring that the world remembers the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. ●

## An Autistic Migrant

Kurdistan Chronicle

Majid Nuri's memoir, *An Autistic Migrant: From Erbil to Luxila*, stands as a testament to the enduring power of love and the resilience of the human spirit. In this profound narrative, Nuri invites readers into the intimate world of his son, Pshtiwan, whose battle with severe autism becomes a poignant exploration of the complexities of neurodiversity and the transformative potential of empathy and understanding.

At the heart of Nuri's memoir lies the profound bond between father and son, a bond that transcends the limitations of language and defies the constraints of Pshtiwan's condition. From the moment of Pshtiwan's diagnosis in Erbil to their subsequent migration to Luxila, Sweden, Nuri navigates the challenges of raising a child with autism with unwavering devotion and unconditional love. Through his eloquent prose, Nuri paints a vivid portrait of their shared experiences, from the everyday struggles to the moments of profound connection and joy that punctuate their journey.

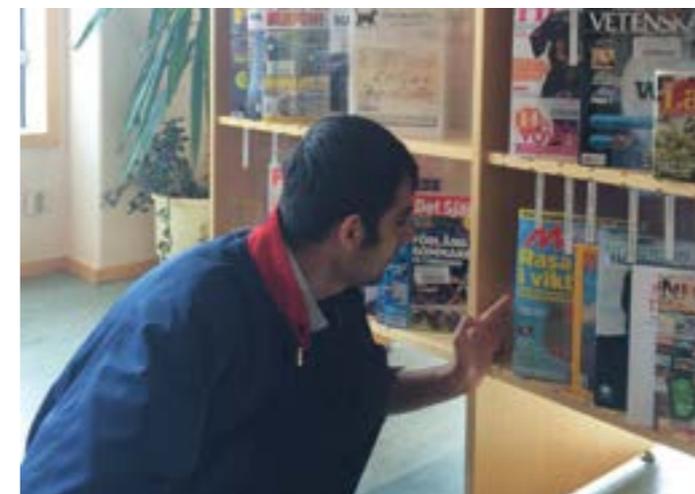
As Nuri reflects on his role as a father and caregiver, he grapples with the complexities of raising a child with severe autism. He confronts the harsh realities of stigma



The cover page of Majid Nuri's book titled "From Erbil to Luxila."

and misunderstanding that often surround the condition, while also celebrating the unique gifts and perspectives that Pshtiwan brings to his life. Through poignant anecdotes and heartfelt reflections, Nuri lays bare the sacrifices he has made to ensure Pshtiwan's well-being, forgoing his own ambitions and desires to be a constant source of support and stability for his son.

“  
Nuri navigates the challenges of raising a child with autism with unwavering devotion and unconditional love  
”



Central to Nuri's memoir is the theme of acceptance and understanding, as he strives to create a world where individuals with autism are valued and embraced for who they are. Through Pshtiwan's eyes, readers are invited to see the world with fresh perspective, to appreciate the beauty and wonder that can be found in even the most ordinary moments. From the simple pleasure of feeling the snow beneath his fingertips to the sheer joy of discovering a new language, Pshtiwan's journey is marked by moments of awe and fascination that serve as a powerful reminder of the richness of the human experience.

But Nuri does not shy away from the challenges that autism presents, acknowledging the emotional toll it can take on individuals and their families. He grapples with feelings of guilt and inadequacy, wondering if he is doing enough to support his son and help him navigate the complexities of the world. Through his candid reflections, Nuri invites readers to confront their own preconceptions and biases about autism, urging them to see beyond the labels and stereotypes that too often define individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders.

In sharing Pshtiwan's story with the world, Nuri hopes to foster a greater sense of empathy and compassion for individuals with autism and their families. He calls for a more inclusive society, one that recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their neurodiversity. Through his memoir, Nuri seeks to challenge the stigma and discrimination that too often surround autism, advocating for greater awareness and acceptance within communities and institutions alike.

*An Autistic Migrant: From Erbil to Luxila* is more than just a memoir; it is a call to action, a plea for a world where individuals with autism are valued and embraced for who they are. Through his powerful storytelling and heartfelt reflections, Nuri invites readers to join him on a journey of discovery and understanding, one that celebrates the unique gifts and perspectives of neurodiversity. In doing so, he reminds us that love has the power to transcend even the greatest of obstacles and that true understanding begins with empathy and compassion. ●

## The Poetry of Qubadi Jalizada

*This article is part of a critical study about the poet's works.*



**Fazil Shawro**

*is a Kurdish poet and educator. He has published several literary works. He is a member of the Kurdish Writers Union and has received multiple awards for his contributions to literature and education.*

**B**orn in 1953, Qubadi Jalizada is one of the most prominent and distinguished poets in the contemporary Kurdish literary scene in the Kurdistan Region. Throughout his career he has successfully created a modern poetry school and gained recognition as a towering figure in Kurdish literature who is admired by thousands of fans.

Jalizada published his first poem in the monthly *Erbil Council Magazine* in 1973 while he was a student at Baghdad University College of Law. Since then, he has published 16 collections of his poetry. The poet's 45 years of experience in writing poetry can be classified into various phases, according to the form, language, and style of the poems.

### The evolution of a poet

The poems of the 1988 collection *A White Bearded Pen* can be considered the poet's first steps into the literary world. Jalizada shows his poetic talent in composing profound verses; however, the influence of two great Kurdish poets is clear in his work. He is much affected by the expressions of the beauty of nature used by Abdullah Goran (1904-1962) and is trying to imitate the pure and effective language used by the Kurdish famous poet Hemin Mokuryani (1921-1986).

In 1988, at the end of the Iraq-Iran War, the Iraqi army launched a brutal and aggressive attack on Southern Kurdistan (what is now the Kurdistan Region of Iraq). Approximately 182,000 civilians were killed and about 4,000 villages and towns were demolished. The poems of *The Black Fog*, a collection published in 1990, express the cries, protests, and

wounds of these innocent victims. The poet did his best to record the oppression and tyranny of the genocidal attacks and to channel the screams of the persecuted women of his country. During this phase the poet sought a new style of language for his verses.

Jalizada's next phase of work echoes perhaps his loudest narrative voice. In these poems, the poet's language is sharpened with deep and influential lexical, idiomatic and cultural terms. Here we see his rebellion against the expired traditional concepts, beliefs, and customs of his society. These cutting, rebellious, and secular poems pushed several religious clerks and preachers to insult him during their khutbahs (Friday sermons at mosques). Jalizada was even brought to court by the accusation that he was an atheist propagandizing against God, though in fact his only sin was calling for serious and practical progress for the freedom of women. Examples of this stage of the poet's work can be found in the following collections: *The Heaven's Scaffolds* (1997), *Always Face to Face with God, Always Drunk* (2001), *The Martyr Walks Alone* (2005), and *The Sun in the Broken Glass* (2006).

Next, Jalizada began expanding into new thematic territory. Hama Saeed Hassan, a Kurdish critic, describes Jalizada as the king of Kurdish erotic poems. Speaking frankly, one can trace the poet's excursions into this topic from the very beginning of his career. The characteristics of Jalizada's erotic poems include a soft, magical, and imaginative language that he uses to discover and explore the erotic world, a field that had never been explored by other Kurdish poets before. The images, composition, and forms he uses



Qubadi  
Jalizada

are truly unique. The poems of *Van Erotic* (2007) and *The Snow's Bras are Full of Starlings* (2010) are the best examples of this phase.

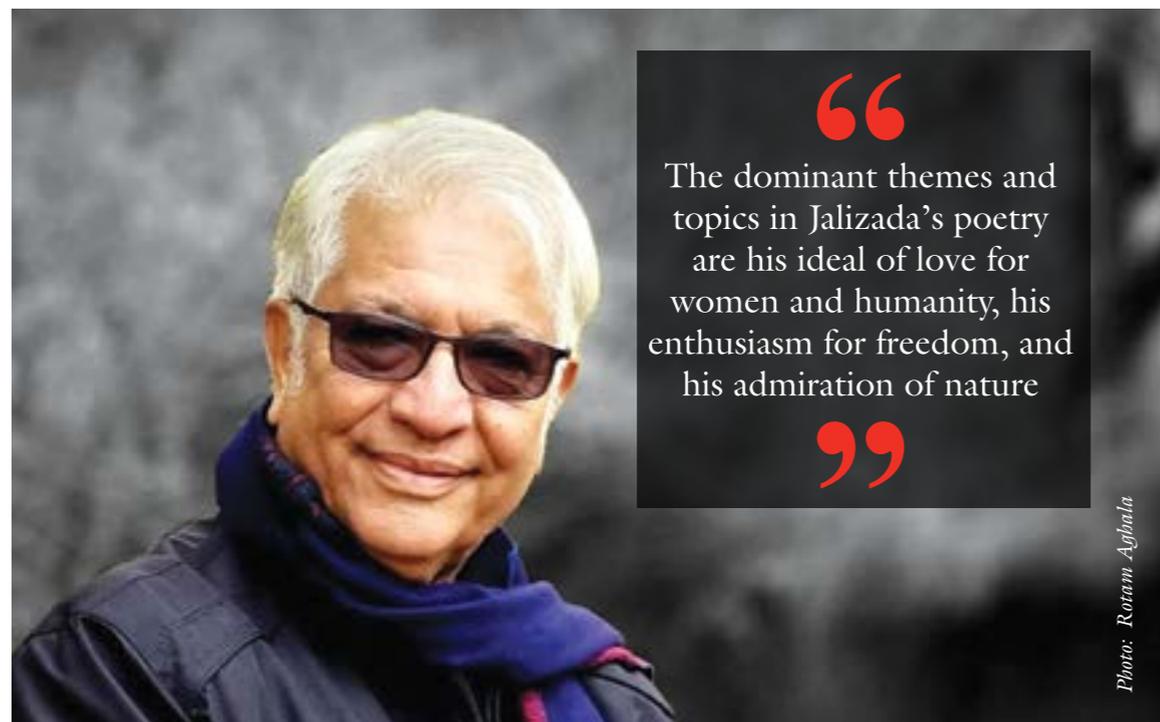
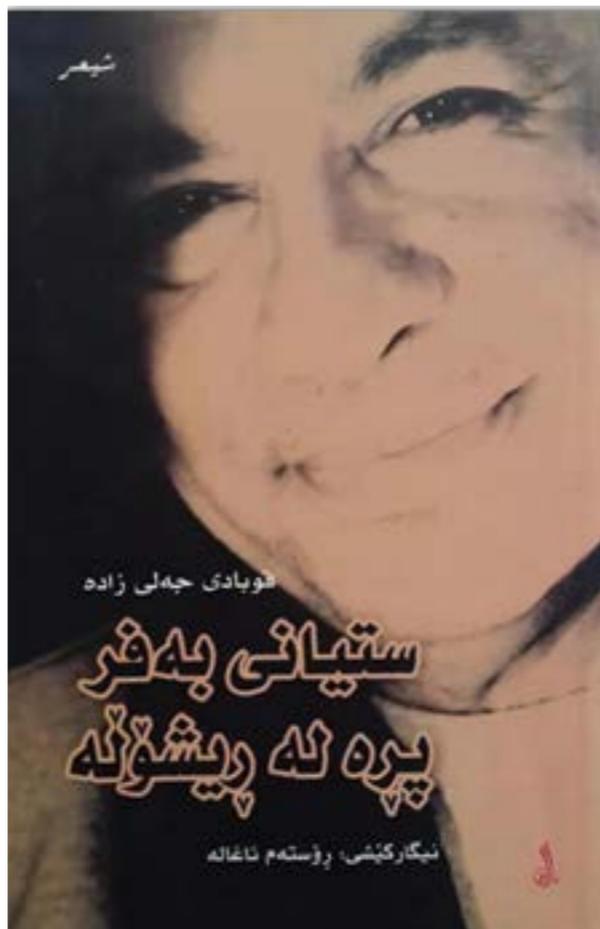
After drinking deeply from the wells of experience and timeless wisdom, Jalizada has matured as a poet and assumed a cosmopolitan approach, through which he uses poetry as a new means for dialogue in our networked world. His collection *Qubad's Hiaku Poems* (2017) best exemplifies this approach, while his latest work explores the challenges and limits of creating universal views in a global age. Today, Jalizada is writing his verses in the Kurdish language, but he considers himself an international poet, engaged in conversation with everyone and everywhere on this earth.

### Becoming an anti-war poet

In his 1940 letter "To Every Briton," Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) said, "I appeal for cessation of hostilities, not because you are too exhausted to fight, but because war is bad in essence."

Jalizada may be one of the few poets in the Middle East who comprehensively understands the hidden symbols of Gandhi's expression, not only because he is a sensitive poet but because he himself is one of the victims of the seemingly endless fighting and wars in his region.

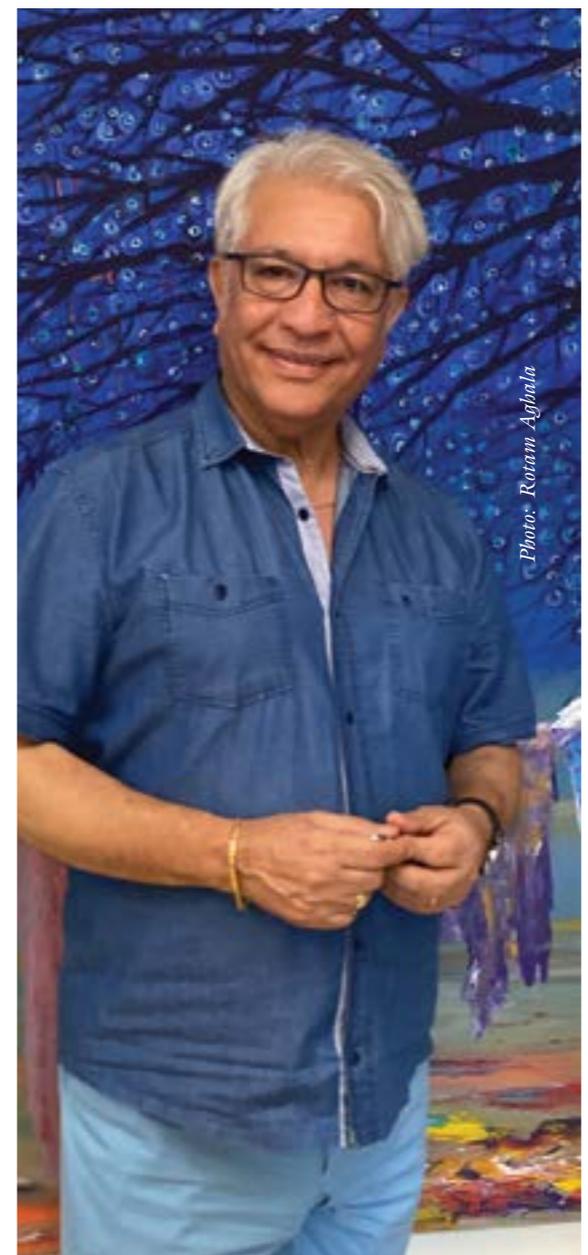
During the 64 years of Jalizada's life, the fighter jets have flown overhead constantly, the guns have not been silenced for a single day. The poet lived jumping from war



to war; the Kurds fighting the Iraqi, Turkish, French, and Syrian regimes, the Iran-Iraq War, Arab-Israeli wars, the Gulf Wars...the list goes on. The bloody turmoil of the Middle East and of his homeland, Kurdistan, has taught him that war is the most destructive means to deprive us from our humanity and that man has never invented a tool worse than war.

The poet rebukes those who invade his homeland and glorifies the martyrs, but never encourages murdering and destruction.

The style and technique the poet employs to condemn conflict aims to display the harmful inheritance and out-



comes of war and to manifest his appeal to consolidate human friendship everywhere.

The poem "Ceasefire" is decorated with manifold poetic images and artful sketches to draw our attention to war's experiences and effects. Jalizada paints the aftermath so effectively and persuasively that the reader feels ashamed of and scorns all weapons of war.

### Ceasefire

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, to what avail,  
When the moon has lost one of her breasts to it?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what hope does it offer,  
When the snow's lips are stained with blood?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what does dancing mean,  
When the butterflies were blocked  
From entering the garden?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what use are flowers,  
When the parks are full of  
Handicapped people and widows?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what music is there to play,  
When the nightingale is dressed in black forever?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what value does glory have,  
When the martyr is depressed and vagrant?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what is life,  
When the gravedigger  
Has yet to lay down the pickaxe?

The fighting has stopped...  
Now, what kind of peace is it,  
When war is always going on?

The dominant themes and topics in Jalizada's poetry are his ideal of love for women and humanity, his enthusiasm for freedom, and his admiration of nature. His way of depicting nature and the inner life of human beings is unique within Kurdish literature. Here and through other aspects, Jalizada reveals a kinship with many well-known Eastern poets. He remains faithful to his personal vision of reality and the whole universe can be seen in his unique style, expression, and imagery. Today he is known as the king of Kurdish erotic poetry and possesses an unmistakable poetic language all his own. ●

## Kurdish *Gelims* Woven History



*Arez Barzinji*

*Arez Barzinji is a development economist who holds an MA degree in Global Political Economy and Development from the University of Kassel, Germany.*

The oriental rug manifests the social structures and manufacturing traditions of various cultures, shaped by the historical context of the Middle East and Central Asia. Prior to the 1970s, Western studies focused mainly on urban-knotted pile rugs, neglecting rural flatweaves. Since then, flatweaves have grown in popularity, attracting increased scholarly attention.



Kurdish floor textiles received catalog treatment for the first time in 1983 in *Discoveries From Kurdish Looms* by R. D. Biggs, shedding light on hitherto obscure categories like Iraqi Kurdish and Khorasani weavings. U.S. diplomat and textile expert William L. Eagleton argues that *Kurdish rugs*, particularly *bijar* and *Senneh gelim*, were undervalued due

to merchants' reluctance to label them as Kurdish, affecting their market value. Plainly said, as a stateless nomadic people, the Kurds were seen as makers of inferior products by uneducated consumers.

According to Eagleton, the gradual weakening of the tribal structures of Kurds in Turkey made tribal geographic characteristics less relevant in studying Kurdish weaving. Nevertheless, *Kurdish rugs* have distinct characteristics, such as color-banded borders, thick braided warp ends, and specific regional palettes and patterns. Some weavings have unique names like "wedding shoes," which features S-shaped motifs, and "divorce your wife," reflecting their cultural symbolism.

"The horizontal bands of sideways S-shaped motifs are called 'wedding shoes' because such *gelims* are given by the girl's parents to the wedding couple ... A weft-warp (*jajim*) flatweave of the Jalali tribe near the Iranian border is called 'divorce your wife' because failure with this difficult technique is said to be grounds for divorce," Eagleton explained in his 1988 book *Introduction to Kurdish Rugs*.

### State of the art

Weaving design is shaped by the interaction of structure, technique, and pattern. Colors blend with three-dimensional structures and weaving techniques to create the two-dimensional designs and patterns that distinguish textile arts. Knot density, influenced by factors like the number of ground wefts between knot rows and whether they are symmetrical (from eastern Turkey) or asymmetrical (*Senneh*) from eastern Iran, for example,



“

*Senneh gelims* reflect the urban artistic traditions of commercially woven textiles

”

also plays a crucial role. Weavers manipulate the yarn to integrate patterns into the fabric’s structure, which is especially evident in flatweaves like slit and dovetailed tapestries, as well as in counted-thread embroidery.

**Tribal geographic signifiers of Kurdish textiles**

Three majority-Kurdish regions in Turkey share similar weaving traditions: the far east south of Lake Van, the far east north of Lake Van, and all districts west of Lake Van.



An example of a Van Kurdish gelim (kelim)

In Iraq, traditional rugs or glims were produced in three main locations: the Erbil plain, whose weaving tradition was influenced by Iranian designs such as *Senneh gemil* in the 18th century; the northeastern Erbil area,

where the Herki, Surchi, and Keylani tribes weave rugs; and the northern area of Mosul, famous for its *gelims*.



An example of a rural flatweave or *barr*, comprised of two pieces sewn together, made by the Herroti tribe in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Mid-twentieth century. Courtesy of the Kurdish Textile Museum, Erbil.

Meanwhile, in the northern mountains of Caucasia, Khorasani or Kurmanji Kurds have been prominent warriors for centuries. The majority were settled there by the Safavid kings to act as cannon fodder: hu-



Kurmanj Rug: Khazai Rugs

man shields against Uzbek invaders. Nonetheless, historical references in the Persian administrative archives indicate that Kurds were present in Khorasan’s mountains before the Safavid period.

***Senneh gelim*: urbanization and commercialization of nomadic gelims**

*Senneh gelim*, also known as *sojaee*, emerged in the 18th century in Sanandaj, Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran), blending Safavid urban carpet industries with preceding Kurdish tribal weaving traditions. These *gelims*, characterized by intricate designs and high-quality materials like wool, silk, and cotton, competed with Safavid silk *gelims* in artistry. The tradition flourished under the Ardlan Kurdish principality (1169-1867), which controlled trade routes linked to the Silk Road through Kermanshah, with Sanandaj as their capital.

Despite the rapid commercialization of knotted pile carpets under the newly introduced European capitalist mode of production in the late 19th century, *Senneh gelim* production remained relatively untouched due to the lesser value attributed to flatweaves. Ultimately, *Senneh gelim* gained traction in the 1970s with the Western demand for traditional textiles, subsidized by the Pahlavi governments’ initiatives (1941-1979) to revive cultural diversity. Today, it continues as a cottage industry and source of income for Kurdish women in Sanandaj and other parts of Iran’s Kurdistan Province.

**Techniques and characteristics**

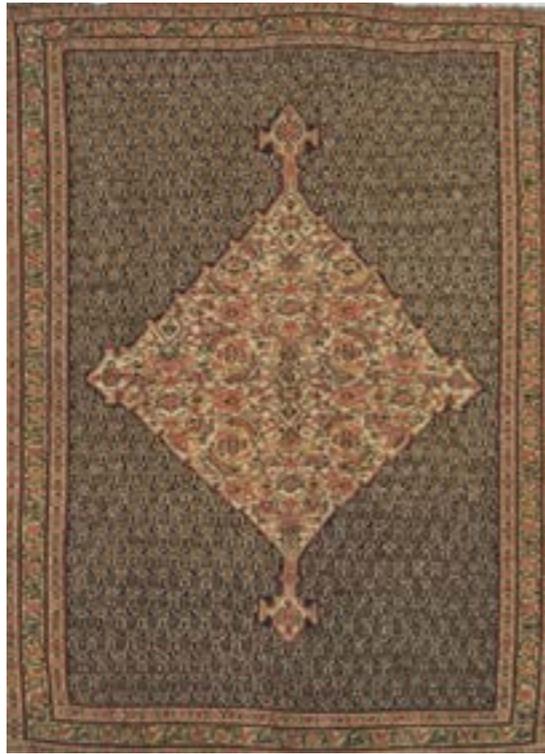
*Senneh gelims*, distinguished by their tiny repeating patterns, stand out from other Middle Eastern flatweaves for their curvilinear designs and slit tapestry weave. Unlike nomadic flatweaves, which boast geometric patterns, *senneh gelims* reflect the urban artistic traditions of commercially woven textiles. Traditionally, wool



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The Kurds consider the serpent a symbol of luck, abundance, strength, and immortality, often decorating their walls, chests, and textiles with motifs of Shahmaran

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A *Senneh gelim*, an example of urban weaving, 19th century, Sanandaj. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum (accession number: 321-1896).

was used for both warp and weft, though contemporary production sometimes blends in cotton to the rugs. Weaving techniques involve memorization and imagination (*hefzi-baaf* and *zehni-baaf*) rather than solely relying on visual guides like swatches, with patterns borrowed from traditional pile carpets and other flatweave designs.

Popular patterns, such as *herati* (the fish), *gol-o-goldān* (flower and vase), *kochke-kolo*, and *gol-e-chāi* were influenced by Safavid and Qajar designs, while others reflect



A *Senneh gelim* with the *naghsh-e-yahood* or the Jewish pattern, on display for sale in the Sanandaj bazaar. One can repeatedly see such designs on prayer rugs at mosques in Southern and Eastern Kurdistan, demonstrating the importance of religious coexistence in Kurdish culture.

Kurdish geohistorical contexts, like the *qafqāzi* (Caucasian) design and the Moses snakeheads motif, the latter of which hints at Judaism's ancient presence in Kurdish regions. Many artisans in Sanandaj recall their mothers and grandmothers making pile carpets and other indigenous flatweaves such as *mowj*, *barr*, and *jajim*.

### Snakes and women: Kurdish *gelims*' omnipresent motifs

The earliest-known rugs from the Caucasus are referred to as dragon rugs, which date to the time when the Safavid Empire expanded northwest into southern regions of the Caucasus. During the late 16th century, Shah Abbas I (1588-1629) actively promoted economic growth across his empire by incorporating the flatweave into the formal economy. However, the presence of the dragon motif in the region predates the arrival of the Safavids by almost five centuries. For instance, similar designs appear in rugs associated with the Kurdish tribes of the region of Karabakh, while flowered motifs are more common in rugs from regions in the eastern Caucasus like Shirvan and Dagestan.

It is worth noting that the oldest Kurdish legend of the slaying of a dragon is documented in the Zoroastrian holy book of Avesta (1500-600 BC), where the heroic deeds of Garshasp, known as the dragon slayer, are recounted. Shahmaran, the Queen of Snakes, is a mythical creature in Kurdish folklore depicted as part-woman, part-snake. The Kurds consider the serpent a symbol of luck, abundance, strength, and immortality, often decorating their walls, chests, and textiles with motifs of Shahmaran, a practice especially prevalent among Yezidi communities. The S-shaped or snake (dragon) motifs, in particular, can be observed on traditional flatweaves in households and public places across Kurdish-populated areas of Iran and Iraq.

When it comes to range, Kurdish weavers – predominantly women – draw inspiration from their surroundings, translating natural shapes into abstract and geometric design elements and showcasing their creativity and spontaneity. Traditional Kurdish weavings feature vivid, vibrant colors, mainly red and blue, with weavers occasionally incorporating pinks and oranges to form mesmerizing optical illusions. Kurmanj women in Khorasan, renowned for their colorful attire, infuse their hand-woven pieces with vivid shades. They typically avoid loom drawings, instead following patterns from existing pieces – in the same spirit as graffiti artists – reflecting the weavers' emotional states at the time. Such levels of dexterity and fluidity are missing in the traditional textiles of the surrounding cultures.

### A future for flatweaves

Due to the adverse effects of globalization such as economy of scales, comparative disadvantage, and stagnat-



ing purchasing power, more competitive products from Iran and Turkey began to undermine the production of flatweaves in the Kurdistan Region in the 20th century. However, thanks to the Ninth Cabinet's objective of diversifying the economy through supporting local production, the weaving tradition in the Kurdistan Region is resurging in parallel with the increasing demand from the growing tourism sector and the growth of the local middle class who prefer authentic handmade weaves over industrially manufactured products.

Historically, Kurdish textiles have exhibited considerable diversity due to the fragmented nature of Kurdish society, comprising numerous autonomous clans and tribes. Limited communication, lack of statehood, and tribal rivalries further contributed to diverse artistic traditions and cultural practices among Kurdish weavers.



Despite this diversity, Kurdish flatweaves shared commonalities such as weaving techniques, social dimensions, and economic functions, setting them apart from other cultural and linguistic groups such as Arabs, Qashqais, Shahsevans, and Turks.

From an eco-social perspective, many variegated designs may have Kurdish origins. Nomadic communities, particularly Kurds, often had access to extended terrains, allowing them to gather a variety of herbs and plants that provided them with a wider range of pigments for colorization. In terms of practicality, flatweaves are more durable, portable, and less prone to absorbing dirt compared to knotted pile carpets.

Today, Kurdish *gelims* remain predominant in both production and consumption among tribal and non-tribal peoples due to their compatibility with the nomadic lifestyle. ●

## The Voice of Harmony



*Jan Dost*

*is a prolific Kurdish poet, writer and translator. He has published several novels and translated a number of Kurdish literary masterpieces.*



*Ibrahim Keivo playing his string instrument.*

I met the singer Ibrahim Keivo in Al-Hasakah, a city in Western Kurdistan (northeastern Syria), about 30 years ago, in 1993 to be exact. Back then he was not that well-known except by a close circle of local people. Fast forward to today, I was about to conduct an interview with the famous musician Nuri Iskander, as I was working as a correspondent for *Welat newspaper*, which used to be published in Istanbul. I had lost contact with Keivo because I had re-settled in Europe, whereas he remained in the country.

I had not heard from him since until he, too, immigrated to Europe, and his fame began to grow with his wonderful concert performances, most notably in the famous Morgenland Festival. He captured my attention

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I am Armenian, and Kurdish was a language passed down to me from my father and grandfather

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since he, among other Armenian singers, sang in Kurdish. I was eager to interview Keivo and learn more about his life and journey in music. He proved receptive to my approach and patiently answered all of my many questions.

#### First roots

Thanks to the coexistence between Armenians and Kurds throughout history, great Armenian singers have been singing in Kurdish and enriching Kurdish music for nearly a century. Keivo, being Armenian from the Western Kurdistan, Kurdish region in Syria, is a case in point. He embodies a wonderful musical blend between the two neighboring peoples, who

share so much in terms of history, geography, and dispositions as music-loving societies.

I first asked why he chose to sing in Kurdish. “I am Armenian, and Kurdish was a language passed down to me from my father and grandfather. It has been our language for generations, tracing back to my grandfather’s time. He fled the city of Van as a child to escape the threat of violence during the Armenian massacres in 1914 and sought refuge among the Yezidi Kurds. Despite being just eight years old at the time, he retained fluency in Armenian. Over time, however, he fully embraced the culture, customs, and traditions of the Yezidi Kurdish community,” Keivo elaborates.

“He settled in the village of Al-Quriyah, nestled within Viransehir (in Turkey), where he spent his formative years. Among the Yezidis, he was able to retain his religion, as the Yezidis, unlike other religious groups, abstain from proselytization,” he explains.

Indeed, it was within the Yezidi Kurdish community that the young boy’s language remained intact until he married an Armenian woman, also a survivor of the massacres. “My grandfather delayed starting a family until he relocated to the village of Doker, a settlement established by the Yezidis near the town of Amuda in Western Kurdistan. It was there that he welcomed a daughter and a son, my father,” Keivo narrates.

#### The Kurdish language: A melody of home and heritage

“We spoke Kurdish – my father, my aunt, my brothers, and I,” reminisces Keivo. “Sometimes, my grandfather would teach us Armenian. My mother, an Armenian from Mardin, was deeply immersed in Kurdish culture. Kurdish was the language that bound our family together, the medium through which we communicated. When I sing in Kurdish, it’s like singing in my mother tongue – it feels natural and comforting, like an inte-

gral part of my life.”

Elaborating on his choice to sing in Kurdish, Keivo adds, “We hail from Mesopotamia, a region characterized by its diversity of peoples, sects, and religions. While I introduce myself as a singer from Mesopotamia in every concert, Kurdish culture strongly influences the essence of my art. The instruments I use – the *buzuq*, *tanbur*, *saz*, and *baglama* – are deeply rooted in Kurdish tradition, further enriching the authenticity of my performances.”

Continuing the conversation, Keivo reflects on the richness of the Kurdish language, stating,

“The Kurdish dictionary is remarkably comprehensive, with words that aptly express a wide range of emotions, coupled with the diversity of its dialects.”

#### Armenian stars in the Kurdish singing sky

The historical interaction between Armenians and Kurds is a fascinating and enduring phenomenon. These two peoples have shared the same geography for thousands of years, influencing one another in various aspects of life. Despite their distinct religions, with Armenians primarily being Christians and Kurds predominantly Muslims, their relationship has generally been positive throughout history. However, during the tragic massacres of 1914-1915, the Ottoman authorities manipulated the religious sentiments of some Kurds to incite hatred against their neighbors, leading a few to participate in the mass killings. Despite this, many Kurds and Yezidis helped save hundreds of thousands of Armenians.

In a video-taped interview, the late artist Aram Tigran spoke about this period, sharing his father’s testimony: “My father used to say that we owe the Kurds our lives. We must remember this.” Keivo further elaborates on this harmonious relationship: “many Armenian musicians made significant contributions to Kurdish art and music. Figures like Aram Tigran and Garabet Xaco stand out, as well as Kevork, a talented musician from Qamishli who played the *tanbour* and sang fluently in both Armenian and Kurdish.” These stories serve as poignant reminders of the bonds forged between Armenians and Kurds, transcending their differences and reinforcing a shared cultural heritage.

Keivo confirms that many cities were culturally diverse, with Kurds and Armenians living together and influencing one another. “The Kurdish and Armenian songs share the same roots,” says Keivo, paraphrasing the renowned Armenian scholar, priest, and musicologist Soghomon Soghomonian, widely known as Komitas, who collected Armenian folk songs and drew many comparisons between Kurdish and Armenian music. “The slight difference lies in the Armenians having church music due to

their religion,” Keivo adds. Nevertheless, “coexistence has naturally led to the two peoples’ music resembling one another, which is only self-evident.”

#### Stroke of luck and great success

“In Europe, your art gained significant reach. Doors opened for you, and you left a distinctive mark on Kurdish music in the diaspora. Can you share more about that experience?” I ask Keivo, curious about how he

achieved such a remarkable presence at international music festivals in Germany and beyond, as seen through YouTube.

He shared with me that he wanted Kurdish songs to break free from traditional forms that relied heavily on instruments like the oud, tanbur, and buzuq. “I envisioned reaching a Western European audience in a different way,” he says, recounting how luck smiled upon him when he met the organizers of the Morgenland Festival, held annually in the German city of Osnabruck, which focuses on blending Eastern and Western music.

Before this opportunity, Keivo had participated with his great musical mentor, the late Syrian musician Nuri Iskandar, in an important event in the Netherlands

where they presented a significant work. Of Syriac origin, Iskandar composed the music for the play *The Bac-*



*chae*, while Keivo was given the lead singing role, performing solo in sixteen scenes. “I performed the play in renowned theaters and opera houses across Europe, most notably at the Acropolis Theater in Athens and in Thessaloniki,” Keivo shares with enthusiasm.

Since then, he has forged strong relationships with influential international musicians who have helped propel him to fame. “Even while in Syria, I participated in international festivals, including those held at the Opera House, where I presented unique music in collaboration with jazz bands, which weren’t widely known in Arab countries,” Keivo adds, explaining how these conditions helped his music gain widespread recognition and earn him international accolades, including the Golden Ormina Award at the Fifth Syrian Song Festival in Alep-

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I envisioned reaching a Western European audience in a different way

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po in 1998 and the French Charles Croce Prize in 2010.

When I ask him about the Morgenland Festival, he explains that he and artist Aynur Dogan performed the song “*Kece Kurda*” (Kurdish Girl) alongside the Chambermusik Symphony Orchestra. “I believe we successfully elevated the Kurdish song beyond its classical framework and brought it to a beautiful position that attracted considerable attention,” he says confidently. “In that particular concert, the music was arranged by leading German musician and composer Wolf Kerschek.”

Keivo fondly recalls memorable mo-

ments from that significant performance, which has reached nearly 35 million views on YouTube. “We also presented Kurdish songs in the flamenco style,” Keivo says, adding, “We have extensive experience in this genre in Spain and Spanish-speaking countries, thanks to the musician Ghani Mirzo. Our work left a powerful impression on the audience.”

### Summer festival in the Kurdistan Region

In 2013, Keivo visited the Kurdistan Region to celebrate a music festival. He shared the behind-the-scenes challenges that he and Mirzo faced during the organization of the event. “I went to Kurdistan to participate in a music festival organized by Morgenland. A year prior, we had celebrated the Kurdish art festival in Osnabruck. Afterward, we reached out to the festival director Michael Dreyer, whom I had known since he visited me in Al-Hasakah along with a filmmaker to create a documentary about me. We tried tirelessly to convince him to replicate the festival in Kurdistan. After having many conversations with the relevant authorities in Kurdistan and overcoming several difficulties, we finally agreed to host the Kurdish music festival in Erbil.”

Around a hundred musicians participated in the event, which was called Summer Festival and opened with a grand ceremony in Saad Abdullah Hall. It was attended by over 2,000 people, including representatives from the diplomatic missions of various countries. “We began with Ghani Mirzo’s band and international musicians like the renowned clarinetist Kenan Al-Azmeh from Syria and percussionist Ronnie Barrak from Lebanon. We were also joined by a large German choir from the Osnabruck Church,” Keivo explains.

When I ask if he has returned to Kurdistan since that memorable festival, Keivo replies, “Yes. Last year, 2023, we participated in a musical event supporting the victims of the

1988 Halabja massacre and those affected by the 2014 Yezidi Sinjar tragedy. This was organized by the Goethe Institute in Erbil, with active participation from the Mirzo Music Ensemble and German musicians.”

### The butterfly effect: Music nurturing coexistence

In a world dominated by wars and ravaged by crises, people search for soft power – a rock to cling to in the face of a torrential river. Music, along with other forms of art such as painting, literature, and sports, provides an opportunity to spread a culture of tolerance, build bridges, or repair what has been destroyed. Wanting to hear the perspective of this multicultural musician, I asked Keivo about the role that art can play in fostering coexistence and reducing hate.

Keivo, who was awarded the Shield of Excellence this year for his efforts in promoting love and tolerance, shares his thoughts. “I always say that the sound of music is louder than the sound of weapons. Music is the language of the world and allows hearts to communicate. Sometimes I see people crying emotionally at my concerts, even if they don’t understand the lyrics of the songs. Music transcends language barriers because it’s the language of feelings, connecting people in a beautiful, shared framework. For instance, when I sing rhythmic dance songs, Kurds and Armenians hold hands and dance together. Others who don’t know the dance origins or understand the lyrics spontaneously join in. Soon, Germans, Americans, Belgians, and others are forming a large dance circle. This is what music can do.”

Keivo continues enthusiastically, almost as if I can hear his heartbeat: “I had a special experience on stage when I performed the song *Kece Kurda* with Aynur [Dogan]. I’m Armenian, Aynur is Kurdish, and the maestro, Naci, is Turkish. The orchestra members hailed from all over: the



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United States, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Syria. What better example could there be of bringing people together? “The audience loved what we presented. It was a beautiful, civilized image that reflects coexistence in our region. At the end of the performance, the audience stood and applauded for over five minutes. Naci hugged me, and I whispered to him, ‘Did you see what music can do, Naci?’”

As our conversation nears its end, I ask Keivo if he has sung in languages other than Kurdish and Arabic. He replies, “Of course, yes. I don’t only

sing in Kurdish; I sing in almost all Mesopotamian languages: Armenian, Assyrian, Arabic, and Syriac. Music is a unifying force. As I said, it’s the language of feelings. Beautiful music demands your attention, even if it’s the music of your enemies.”

This sentiment resonates deeply. Yes, beautiful music compels you to listen, even if it’s from your enemies. I would add that music and other arts can reduce hostility, which is desperately needed in these times of unwarranted enmity. ●

# CULTURE

## Traditional Kurdish Attire



*Fatmah Qasim Habib*

*is a journalist, artist, translator, writer, poet, and art designer who has organized numerous art exhibitions in both the Kurdistan Region and internationally.*



Kurdish clothing holds historical roots tracing back to ancient times and stands as a distinctive symbol of Kurdish heritage and identity, becoming a cherished national emblem. Moreover, the quality of fabric and craftsmanship have continually progressed, preserving its traditional essence while adapting to contemporary styles.

While the manner of wearing Kurdish clothing varies across regions within Kurdistan, it is prominently displayed during significant occasions, celebrations, and festivities. The Kurdish New Year, or *Newroz*, celebration holds particular significance among Kurds, with a vast majority both within and outside the Kurdistan Region choosing to showcase their Kurdish attire.

During *Newroz* 2024 (on March 21), the Kurdish clothing market was abuzz with activity from both customers and sellers. Notably, female Kurdish clothing artisans experienced a substantial increase in demand for *Newroz* attire compared to previous years. This year, the surge in demand—approximately 75% higher than in previous years—also led to a revival of interest in classic Kurdish clothing designs

“**Kurdish clothing is distinct from others due to the multitude of pieces worn by both men and women and the vibrant colors of fabrics used, particularly by women**”

### Going global

Within the Kurdistan Region, numerous women entrepreneurs have established well-regarded Kurdish clothing brands. Engaging in design, tailoring, and the meticulous craft of Kurdish attire, they have gained substantial popularity not only within Kurdistan, but also internationally, thus helping to preserve Kurdistan’s rich heritage while introducing it to the global stage.

In the city of Sulaymaniyah, Nihayat Mohammed has already achieved renown for her brand in Kurdistan and abroad. A designer, tailor, and owner of the esteemed NT Fashion brand, Nihayat provided a glimpse into her professional journey in an interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “I began learning the art of tailoring, particularly Kurdish clothing, in 1985 under

the tutelage of my mother, a respected tailor in Halabja. For over 32 years, I have pursued this craft independently. In 2016, I established NT Fashion, aiming to reach audiences beyond Kurdistan. Over the years, I’ve observed a consistent rise in demand for Kurdish attire during *Newroz* celebrations, festivals, and events,” she says.

“Every year, I design new Kurdish clothing. Before September 2023, I prepared a design for the upcoming year. The fabric, stitching, and embroidery comprise a blend of both old and modern styles. The designs draw inspiration from the styles of the 1970s and 1980s, with the older styles accounting for roughly 70% of the final design. The idea for this year’s design struck me when I looked at my mother’s and grandmother’s old attire. We call the design *gul xanm*. It features specific and highly popular fabric colors for *Newroz*, including gold, red, and green,” Nihayat explains.

According to Nihayat, Kurdish women’s attire typically consists of a long dress with a very short jacket known as a *yek* or *kawa*. The head covering is known by different names such as *klaw*, *mushki*, and *bushi* and varies in size, materials used, and colors. Women often embellish their clothing with metal-





Photos: Nasih Ali Xayat

lic pieces, especially gold,” she notes. “Those who are more affluent might wear gold belts around their waist, while those with limited resources opt for accessories made of metal painted in gold or crafted by us according to their preferences.”

After completing the designs, Nihayat and her team present samples to merchants. Based on the design and color, the merchants manufacture them in China or occasionally import ready-made pieces of fabric either from Pakistan or, more often, Dubai. They begin to receive orders in September.

In terms of demand, Nihayat said that volume of orders was greatest in the Kurdistan Region and the UK, Dubai, Germany, Iran, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States.

*Newroz* designs can range in cost based on the customer’s preferences: “The prices for our Kurdish women’s clothing vary depending on the fabric type. Non-handmade garments cost around \$100, while handmade, embroidered clothing ranges from \$200 to \$600. Traditional hats, crafted by hand, range from \$50 to \$200,” Nihayat says.

#### Year-round enterprise

Nihayat explains more about the work process at the NT Fashion factory. A

team of eight women works every day except Fridays and Saturdays, from 8 am to 6 pm, doing tailoring and embroidery. “Additionally, apart from supervising, I engage in design and tailoring as well,” she says.

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As the last *Newroz* celebrations approached, the pace accelerated, often requiring work until midnight due to the high number of women with last-minute requests. “Fortunately, we were able to promptly fulfill their requests. On average, we tailored and embroidered between six and eight

pieces each day. This process continues into the months after *Newroz*, ahead of other holidays such as Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, and with ad hoc demands from women for specific celebrations and events,” says Nihayat.

The hard work is all worth it for Nihayat, not simply from a commercial perspective, but because she is so passionate about her craft and its importance. “Fashion stands as a significant reflection of a nation’s culture, heritage, and civilization, and Kurdish clothing is distinct from others due to the multitude of pieces worn by both men and women and the vibrant colors of fabrics used, particularly by women,” she notes.

“By adorning themselves with these colorful garments, Kurds showcased the essence of Kurdistan’s mountains, climate, and nature, affirming their Kurdish identity and celebrating their new year,” she continues.

She also is working to build the industry so that it has a more sustainable and unique future. “For three years now, I’ve been teaching numerous women in and outside Sulaymaniyah the art of tailoring, aiming for them to start working in this field, promoting Kurdish clothing and earning a livelihood through their work,” she says. ●

## The Roots of Govend



Rumet Serhat

*Born in Istanbul, finished his Bachelor of Arts in 2001 in Near East University on Business Administration. Began his career on marketing 2003 and since 2007 on media sales. One of the founding members of IMC TV in 2009, he transferred to journalism part of the media with Bas News till 2016. Since 2017 he is doing freelance interviews in Turkish and English for various websites. He is currently International Relations (in English) student in the Anatolian University.*

# Arjen Brusk



We all require a language to communicate. Spoken language is our most common form, but written and visual communication can also convey meaningful information and emotion between humans. Sometimes, body language can express more than words do. Art is another a form of communication. For instance, Picasso's painting *Guernica* communicates much about the horrors of war, while Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" in his Ninth Symphony immediately lifts our spirits.

Despite the persistent challenges of assimilation that Kurdish culture and language have endured over the past century in Turkey, one aspect of Kurdish art has defiantly resisted these forces. *Govend*, a traditional Kurdish dance, stands as a beacon of cultural resilience amidst adversity. In a recent interview for *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Arjen Brusk, an accomplished artist and dance instructor, shared insights into the significance of *govend* as a cultural treasure. As the founder of *Govend Istanbul* and GOVENDISTAN, Brusk's passion for preserving and promoting Kurdish heritage shines through in his dedication to this ancient art form, which many regard not only as art but also as a precursor to artistic expression.

**RS:** I would like to start by asking, is it *halay* or *govend*?

**AB:** I would like to counter with a question: what do you think *halay* is? The word *halay* is rooted in the word *hulkirin/hilkirin* in Kurdish, meaning "shoulder rising", a bouncing movement. *Hal* means jumping or bouncing; *halay* comes from the word *hilayi/helayi/holayi*. A century ago, during the creation of a national identity in Turkey, existing multicultural elements were identified as Turkish folklore. It was taught in folklore lessons that *halay* means "the dance of the people of 'alay'", danced in the east and southeast of Turkey. With this, the dance's



Kurdish cultural roots were officially erased.

This was the same era when the myth was propagated that Kurds were "Mountain Turks", with the sound made by stepping on snow ("kart-kurt") posited as the root of the term "Kurd". This was a major step in denying Kurdish identity. There is even a false history to describe the roots of *halay*: coming from Central Asia, *halay* dancers settled here, *horon* dancers settled in the Black Sea region, *zeybek* dancers settled in the Aegean region. That's why the word *halay* has become a part of the language. It has been around for 50 years, with Turkish national folk-dance teams declaring it the "dance of the people of 'the regiment'" and "the name of the dances of the eastern and southeastern region". Today, even in Diyarbakir it is referred to as *Diyarbakir halayi*; when you call it by its the proper name, *govenda Amede*, people get confused. *Halay* is just the Kurdish name of a movement within *govend*. In general, jumping, moving down, right, left, in place are elements of dances all over the world, as well as in this dance, which Kurds call *govend*.

**RS:** So, what is *govend*, then?

**AB:** No one had studied the word's etymology before, so I researched it myself. My theory is that it must have come from the term *gotin u vendin*. When we look at the context in Kurdish, *gotin* means "to say", and *vend* means "to move", so the phrase means "saying and moving". The interesting aspect here is that you can either sing a song to tell a story, which we call *chirokbej*, about, for example, the eagle hunting the fox in the Bingöl mountains. You can also tell a story without saying anything through dance, sounds, and movements.

**RS:** So, *govend* is not just a dance, with its theatrical mise-en-scène, but also the transmission of cultural heritage due to its diversity of forms.

**AB:** Indeed, storytelling, music, theatrical performance, dance, *dengbej*, and many other elements are included. The sum of these is *govend*; *gotin u vendin*, that is, "to say and to do". *Vend* also has a more ritualistic meaning. Therefore, *halay* is part of an act and *govend* is the whole.

**RS:** There is a very popular genre of *govend* generally known as *şemame*. What can you say about it?

**AB:** It became famous with the song *Şemame*, a song in which the singer compares the woman he loves to the *şemok* fruit—that is, a watermelon. Thus, *şemame* is actually advanced *şexani* patterns, featuring more stagnant steps. The patterns started to be performed with the song, so different *şemames* with similar songs may also emerge. Of course, there is a village called *Shekhan* in the Kurdistan Region and it can be called the dance of that village. However, if we look at the root of the word, it is related to *şêx*, that is; the dance of "sheikhs" and "masters".

**RS:** In *govend* the man shows himself to the gathered crowd. Is it possible for women to show themselves too?

**AB:** Of course, this exists, not with off-key movements, but with mastery and dignified movements. For example, in Mardin there is *rehani*, which we can call the bridegroom's special *govend*. It is a very dignified dance, where men and women dance opposite each other, moving toward the right, with simple steps. At most they just snap their fingers. While it is intended primarily for the bride and groom, young people get up and do it together.

Everywhere, men and women, brides and grooms dance together, only the Kurds have not named it specifically. Outsiders call these dances by the names of Turkish folk dances. In Mardin, we find the designation *rehani*, and we also find *çiftetelli*. Its real name is *çiftatili*. The corruption



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From the Kurdish language Kurds created the *govend*, *klam*, *dengbej*, Kurdish literature, and its derivatives, but today *govend* is creating Kurds  
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of the Kurdish word *çiftatiliya* resulted in *çiftetelli*, which is Turkish for "paired hands". It is a dance in which much choreography can be produced by snapping the fingers to create the desired improvisation.

**RS:** I have another question about cultural erosion. Kurds now call coming to the middle in *govend* "*köçek*". But *köçek* is a dance performed by men wearing skirts at weddings in Kastamonu. What is the name of that movement in a Kurdish context?

**AB:** The basis of *govend* is the idea of acting together and being united, whether hand in hand, finger to finger, or shoulder to shoulder. After a certain point in *govend*, it is not enough for the person in charge, and he or she wants to do more. This is the moment of emergence. The person who emerges can tease someone, tell jokes, tell stories, and imitate people with the actions he or she makes in the center. If it is successful, the dancers sit and applaud in support. There are still places where this is done. Of course, when this movement is taken from that environment and called by the term *köçek* in folk dance practices and competitions for several years, people get used to it. *Govend* can be done with one person, or with many by uniting hands. From this point of view, what Michael Jackson did was also *govend*.

**RS:** Finally, did the Kurds create the *govend* or did the *govend* create the Kurds?

**AB:** From the Kurdish language Kurds created the *govend*, *klam*, *dengbej*, Kurdish literature, and its derivatives, but today *govend* is creating Kurds. Even *tekno halay* is proof of this; it is a haven where the youth take shelter. They take techno and apply it to *govend*, but still in their form. The Kurds created *govend*, and now *govend* is creating the Kurds. ●

## Harnessing the Canvas to Inspire



*Sardar Sattar*

*is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.*

**B**orn as a refugee, she always felt her identity to be denied, the struggle of her people to be overlooked, and the desire for a free homeland to be rejected. In a world like this, she found peace in art, to express herself through colorful brushstrokes. This is the story of Saadat Barzani, a well-respected artist in the Kurdistan Region.

Following the 1975 Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq, which led to massive displacement of Iraqi Kurds, Barzani's family—whose men served as peshmerga fighters in Kurdish revolutions—fled to Iran and settled in Arak County in Markazi Province. A few years after living in exile, Saadat was born in 1981. Life as a refugee is never easy, but Barzani turned it into an opportunity to explore the culture of the host country and venture into a larger world

“Living away from my homeland made me feel like an outsider, but it also cultivated my love for my homeland,” Barzani told *Kurdistan Chronicle* during an interview.

### Grafting inspirations into meaning

Barzani spent years practicing her art under the supervision of well-known painters. However, creating a colorful painting to decorate a wall was not her ultimate goal. Alongside her pursuit of art, she dedicated years to studying the philosophy of art, history, and culture; perhaps this is why all her artworks evidently carry a message or tell a story.

From the very beginning, engaging in a discussion with Barzani felt different than

other encounters I have had as a journalist. When she spoke about a blank canvas and the oil paints on her pallet, she described them as a lover and the beloved. Curious, I asked her how she conceived of her role as the artist between these two humanized objects. She smiled. “I’m only grafting them together,” she replied.

Looking at the paintings in her cozy workshop, it became apparent that Barzani has picked a specific tone of colors for her paintings. When asked about this, she revealed that traditional Kurdish carpets are the source of her inspiration. Additionally, she draws inspiration from the vivid colors used in Iranian architecture from the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar periods.

“  
Living away from my  
homeland made me feel  
like an outsider

”

When asked about her style, Barzani explained that she had started with classical realism – an artistic movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries – but over time, she has ventured into other schools of painting, including symbolism and surrealism. She believes that symbolism allows her to infuse her Kurdish culture and history onto the canvas, enriching the narrative of her artwork. Meanwhile, surrealism, she says, enables her to expand



her imagination and transcend the limitations of realism.

### Artists bear responsibility

Barzani believes that her responsibility as an artist extends beyond creating quality artwork. She acknowledges that an artist is not only required to be a responsible member of society, but also inspire her audience to grow.

lead their audiences to see and experience bigger and better worlds,” Barzani argued.

When meeting with female artists, businesswomen, politicians, and athletes, I always ask the same question: How would you work to inspire other women in Kurdistan? When I asked Barzani, however, her answer was not what I was expecting.

“For instance, I painted the female Kurdish poet and historian Mastourch Ardalan because she was a brave woman in a traditional environment who fought to promote her people’s culture. But this characterization is also true for men like Kurdish freedom fighter Ihsan Nouri Pasha,” she explained.

This discussion led me to a very sen-

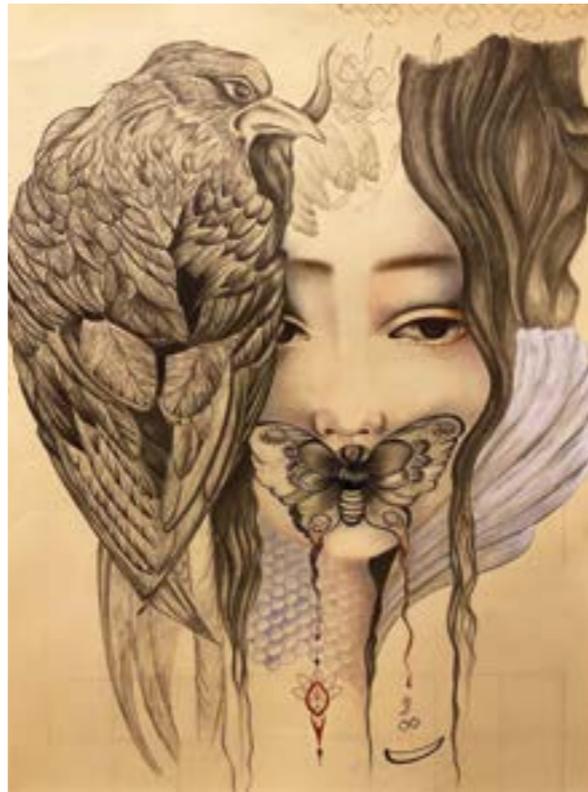


“I must first work on myself to grow intellectually. I need to be well educated in order to be able to raise the awareness of the people around me. An artist should behave in a way that makes them an example for people to look up to. However, that does not mean limiting oneself to conventional patterns. Artists should break the bubbles around their societies and

She explained that her aim is to inspire people regardless of their gender. Although she agreed that promoting women in a male-dominated society is important, she stressed that she cannot specifically decide to paint or tell the story of a woman only “because this inherently limits the artist,” she said.

sitive and somewhat controversial question. When I asked whether she sees herself as a feminist, Barzani not only bravely voiced her opinion, but also confidently asserted her stance.

“I don’t see myself as a feminist. I actually don’t understand the philosophy behind it, as it is getting more and more complicated and confusing



“

I painted the female Kurdish poet and historian Mastoureh Ardlan because she was a brave woman in a traditional environment who fought to promote her people’s culture

”

these days. I am in favor of women being treated equally and allowed to thrive. But sometimes I’m afraid that some feminist groups go to extremes. I am fighting for human rights, not a specific gender. Neither men nor women should reject the rights of the other because they have no right to do so.”

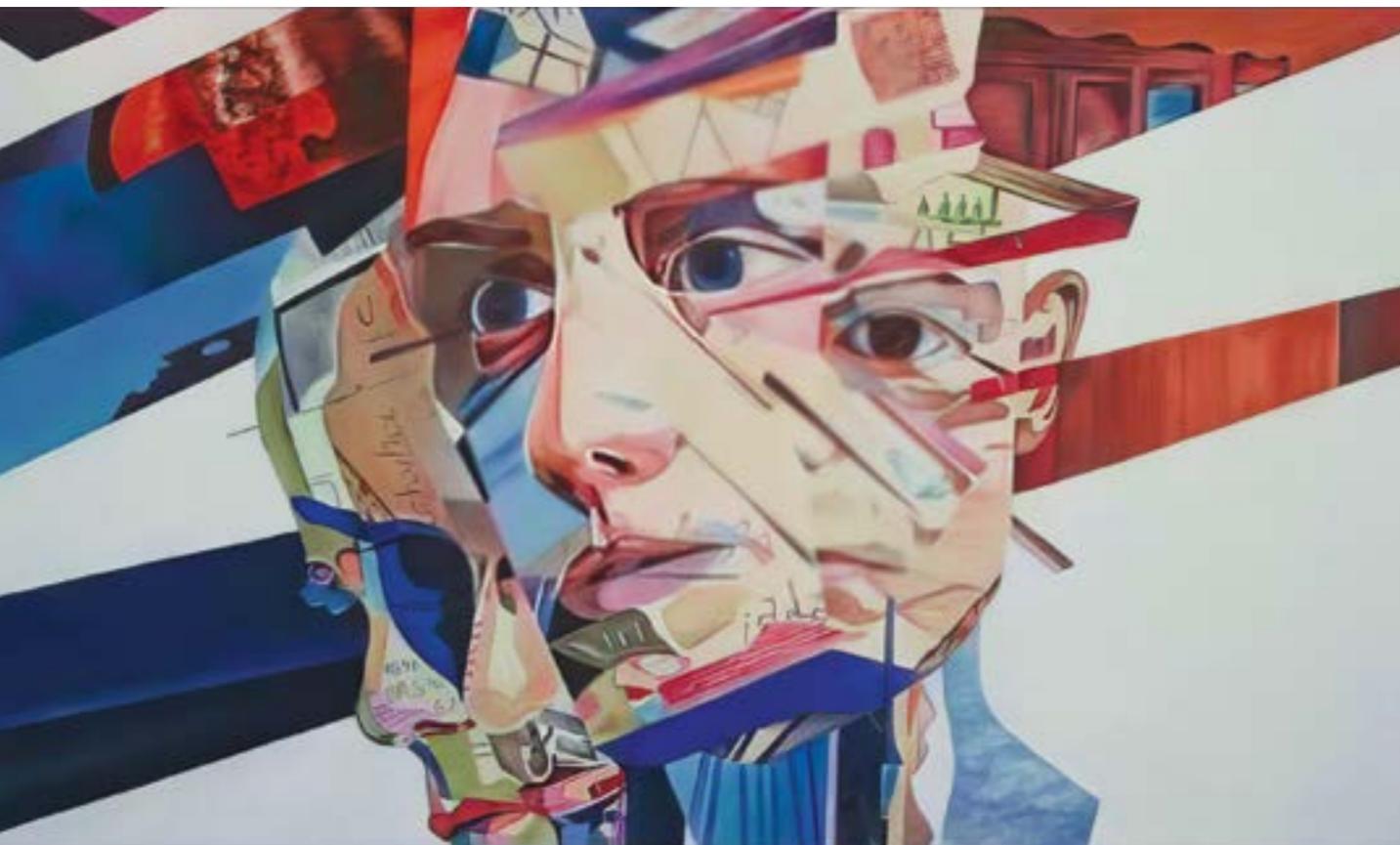
**Peace and art**

As I concluded the interview, I asked Barzani about her wishes for the future. She expressed her hope to see her art have a positive impact on the people around her.

“I would like to narrate the history of my people through my brushstrokes. I hope that future generations will learn about their past through artistic work. Furthermore, I aspire to one day present these colorful stories on an international stage.”

In closing, Barzani shed light on the shared suffering of societies around the world. She wished that artists would utilize their power to promote “peaceful policies” around the world.

She noted that undertaking such a task – standing up against weapons with a paintbrush – remains immensely difficult. However, she believes that unity among artists would help make this more possible by bringing different peoples together, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and beliefs. ●



## Empowering Change Through Education



*Goran Shakhawan*

*is a Kurdish-American journalist and author based in the United States. He has covered news for several Kurdish news outlets and was a former senior correspondent for Kurdistan24 in Erbil and Washington D.C. He has published several books in Kurdish.*

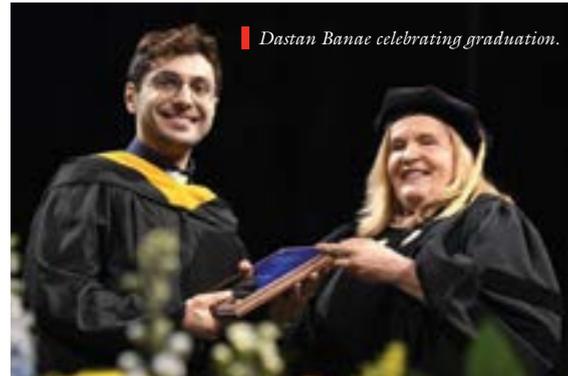
“  
Banae feels incredibly fulfilled teaching at an esteemed university in the United States  
”



*Dastan Banae running in a tournament.*

Kurdistan is brimming with stories of people who have left their homeland and gone on to achieve great success in other countries. These valued members of the Kurdish diaspora succeed because of their own efforts and dedications across countless areas from art, business, entertainment, finance, health, and even in bureaucracies or services of the governments of their new home countries.

In the field of education, Dastan Banae is one such success story. Banae recently received the Excellence in Teaching



Dastan Banae celebrating graduation.

Award at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) in the United States.

Hailing from Shaqlawa, a historic city in the Kurdistan Region northeast of Erbil flanked by the Safeen and Sork mountains. He holds a bachelor's degree in software engineering and a master's in information technology from SNHU, but came to the United States in 2012 to complete his education. He is a developer and instructor at SNHU and Simmons University in Boston.

When I ask Banae about why he had received the Excellence in Teaching Award at SNHU and how he felt about it, he eagerly begins to share his story.

"The Excellence in Teaching Award in 2023 was particularly meaningful because the students chose the nominees, and the winner was announced at the commencement ceremony in front of thousands of people," he explains.

This recognition is a significant achievement for anyone, but for him, it was incredibly gratifying as a newcomer to this community. As he highlights, he has dedicated himself to serving the country and building his career.

"Being an immigrant comes with its own set of challenges," he admits. "But, seeing the results of my hard work and dedication is truly rewarding."

Many people in Kurdistan celebrated Banae receiving this award. Their joy – especially that of his beloved family –

added an extra layer of happiness to the experience.

Banae feels incredibly fulfilled teaching at an esteemed university in the United States. His background as a Kurd has dramatically influenced his academic and professional journey. He is from a region with unique challenges and struggles, but he has developed resilience, determination, and a deep appreciation for education as a means of empowerment and change.

### Connections and collaborations

As an immigrant and member of the Kurdish community, Banae has instilled in himself a strong sense of responsibility to positively impact his personal and professional endeavors.

His experience teaching at SNHU allows him to contribute to his students' academic and intellectual growth, while also representing and advocating for his heritage on a global platform. "It's a privilege and an honor to use my background and experiences to enrich the educational environment and foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation."



In the years ahead, Banae plans to pursue doctoral studies in artificial intelligence (AI), focusing on advancing his understanding and expertise in this rapidly evolving field. He is currently supervising AI projects with his students and managing an AI community of practice at work. He has also suggested to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that growth and development in this field should be considered, particularly with strategic investments and

collaborations aimed at harnessing AI to support the region's progress.

Banae also believes that universities in Kurdistan Region need to think about investing in AI by opening college branches, experimenting with labs, and collaborating with global partners.

Even though Banae is teaching in the United States, he has collaborated with various universities and individuals in Kurdistan. In 2019, he was involved in efforts to establish a partnership between SNHU and the American University of Kurdistan to offer refugees bachelor's degrees. Additionally, he supervised automation processes at the University of Sulaymaniyah. He is eager to foster such connections and collaborations further, leveraging his expertise to support the growth of these developing universities.

"My love and passion for Kurdistan drive my desire to contribute to its advancement and development. And I am willing to help whenever and wherever they need me," he said.

When I asked Dastan how he can establish a connection between SNHU and universities in Kurdistan, he explained that SNHU is one of the most innovative universities in the United States and has much to offer when it comes to technological innovation and process automation. It is also one of the largest online schools in the country, with over 200,000 students.

"The KRG can use my connections with SNHU to build a communication and collaboration bridge," he says.

Apart from his teaching, Dastan is an avid real estate investor with properties in Florida and Wisconsin. He enjoys buying and investing in houses as part of his financial portfolio.

Beyond real estate, he is passionate about athletics, particularly long-distance running. He actively participates in marathons and half marathons, with a personal goal of completing the half marathons for all 50 U.S. states. He is also a member of the Greater Manchester Running Club, one of city's oldest running clubs.

He firmly believes in the importance of work-life balance and makes it a point to dedicate time to his hobbies and personal well-being. This includes spending his free time traveling to different parts of the world three to four times a year. ●



# BOTANY

## *Rivas* Nature's Remedy



*Yassin Ahmed Rashid*  
is a University Professor  
and Expert in Botany



Photo: Feshray Mahdi



**R***ivas*, a variety of wild rhubarb (*Rheum ribes*), is a natural, seasonal plant often regarded as a natural remedy due to its wide range of therapeutic properties. The people of the Kurdistan Region and many other regions around the world have relied on it for generations as both food and medicine. Abundant in the mountainous areas, particularly on Mount Qalandar in Soran District east of Erbil, it appears each spring and is eagerly anticipated.

### Food and medicine

*Rivas* is part of the *Polygonaceae* family and thrives at elevations between 1,000 and 4,000 meters above sea level, nestled among stones and cliffs in temperate and subtropical regions like Western Asia. It is native to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, the Kurdistan Region, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Harvested as a commercial vegetable, it is gathered from the wild in Anatolia, the Kurdistan Region, and northwestern Iran early in the spring.

Some people mistakenly think it is a fruit because of its unique flavor, which is reminiscent of green apple with a blend of sweetness and tartness. It is commonly used in sweets and pies with a bit of sugar to accentuate its distinctive taste. However, *rivas* is actually a vegetable.

Swedish taxonomist Carolus Linnaeus first described it in 1753, naming it *Rheum ribes*. The term “ribes,” which first appeared in the Medieval medical botany book *The Book of Simple Medicaments*, is derived from the Arabic word “ribas,” while “rheum” originates from the Greek word “rheon,” used by Greek physician Dioscorides to describe medicinal rhubarb, which likely derives from the ancient Persian word “*rewend*,” believed to refer to this specific variety.

The flower-bearing stalks are the edible parts of the plant. The stalks are sliced and cooked with eggs in Turkey to make a dish known as *iskinli yumurta*, whereas in Iran its enjoyed as *khoresh rivas*, or rhubarb stew. In Turkey, Syria, the Kurdistan Region, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, locals also often consume the stalks raw in salads or sell them in local markets.

### A divine pharmacy

*Rivas* is considered one of the most essential medicinal plants in many parts of West Asia, providing vitamins A, B, and C. In traditional herbal medicine, the root is used to treat diabetes, hemorrhoids, ulcers, and diarrhea, and to stimulate digestion and appetite. In the Kurdistan Region, herbalists utilize the plant’s dried parts and roots to treat anemia, loss of appetite, weakness, anxiety, depression, and diabetes and to im-



Photos: Peshraw Mahabi



prove cardiovascular health. In Iran, it is valued as a pain reliever and mood enhancer.

The benefits of *rivas* extend beyond these uses. It may alleviate symptoms of some liver diseases, provide antioxidants that lower the risk of cataracts and cancer, and treat oral ulcers. It can also reduce symptoms of chronic pancreatitis, relieve menstrual pain, regulate blood sugar, and promote brain health.

However, excessive consumption of *rivas* can sometimes cause health issues. It is best to consume the stalks only and avoid the leaves, which can contain harmful substances. Cooking can reduce these harmful substances, so it's advised to avoid eating rhubarb raw. ●

# The Horned Lark

The horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), known as *larki quchdar* in Kurdistan, is a mountain-dwelling bird distinguished by its unique horns and rapid color changes. During breeding season, males court females with singing and aerial displays. Females primarily handle nest construction and egg-laying in holes in the ground. Both parents care for the young during an 8-10 day breeding period. Key details:

Scientific classification: Domain: *Eukaryota*, Kingdom: *Animalia*, Phylum: *Chordata*, Class: *Aves*, Order: *Passeriformes*, Family: *Alaudidae*, Genus: *Eremophila*, Species: *E. alpestris*

## Measurements

Length: 16-20 centimeters

Weight: 28-48 grams

Wingspan: 30-34 cm





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Fankawari Music Band performing at the famous Citadel of Erbil

Los Angeles

