

Kurdistan Chronicle



**YEZIDI ISIS
SURVIVOR EARNS
PRESTIGIOUS
GRADUATION
HONORS**



RANGE ROVER DEFENDER DISCOVERY JAGUAR

Embodying Jaguar Land Rover's Vision in Kurdistan



Sardar Trading Agencies

Baghdad: Abu Ja'far Al-Mansour Sq. Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (770) 909 4444

Erbil: Gulan St. Kurdistan, Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (750) 710 4444

www.sta.iq | info@sta.iq

Choman Mountain



Spearheading a new era of automotive experiences, Sardar Trading Agencies, the official distributor of Jaguar Land Rover in Kurdistan, embodies the brand's philosophy of Modern Luxury, Electrification, and Sustainability.

For over 15 years, Sardar Trading Agencies has cultivated a deep understanding of the Kurdish market. This expertise ensures exceptional service that upholds the rigorous standards of Jaguar Land Rover dealerships worldwide. Their commitment fosters a thriving community of auto enthusiasts, confident in the future of mobility with Sardar Trading Agencies at the helm.

Aligning with JLR's Reimagine vision, Sardar Trading Agencies prioritises sustainability. They are actively transforming their operations to be cleaner and more efficient, while collaborating with suppliers to build a future-proof, electric ecosystem. This dedication extends beyond vehicles, encompassing responsible business practices and social engagement.

Electrification is at the heart of this vision. With the launch of the all-electric Jaguar in 2026 and a fully electrified future on the horizon, Sardar Trading Agencies is poised to introduce a new era of luxury in Kurdistan.

Imagine unparalleled refinement, exhilarating performance, and cutting-edge features, all delivered with a sustainable conscience.

Sardar Trading Agencies' mission is clear: to be the leader in Kurdish automotive luxury, driven by ethical practices and a commitment to progress.

Our vision for sustainable growth extends beyond the company. We are actively contributing to Kurdish society through continuous business development initiatives. Sardar Trading Agencies believes in treating all stakeholders with respect, regardless of background or community.

We foster a culture of humanity within our team, providing employees with opportunities to build their skills through corporate training and education.

This is a future where luxury and sustainability go hand-in-hand. A future where innovation meets tradition. A future driven forward by Sardar Trading Agencies.

Celebrating Resilience, Discovery, and Identity

In this issue of Kurdistan Chronicle, we bring you stories of incredible resilience, groundbreaking discoveries, and profound reflections that highlight the rich tapestry of Kurdistan's past, present, and future. Among the featured articles, the story of Shireen Khero stands out as a testament to the indomitable spirit of the Yezidi people. Khero, a survivor of the ISIS genocide, has triumphed over unimaginable adversity to graduate with a degree in business management from the American University of Kurdistan (AUK). Her journey, culminating in being awarded the Honor of Resilience by Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, is a powerful reminder of the strength and courage that define the Kurdish people.



Nahro Zagros

Another article, "Kurdistan: A New Frontier for Archaeology," delves into the exciting developments in the field of archaeology in the region. With eleven Italian archaeological expeditions unearthing historical insights that date back thousands of years, Kurdistan is proving to be a veritable treasure trove of historical significance. Dating from the Neolithic Age to the Islamic Golden Age, these sites are shedding light on the complex and rich history of the region. The collaboration between local authorities and international experts highlights the global importance of Kurdistan's long heritage and its potential to attract academic and touristic interest alike.

In "Reimagining the Kurdish Question: Identity, Diversity, and Solidarity," Stephen Fox offers a thought-provoking exploration of the intricate dynamics of Kurdish

identity, both within the traditional boundaries of Kurdistan and among its vast diaspora. Fox's reflections on the diversity and resilience of Kurdish culture provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that shape Kurdish identity and the challenges faced by Kurds globally. His insights into the processes of identity negotiation and the importance of cultural solidarity offer a compelling perspective on the ongoing quest for Kurdish self-determination and unity.

We also highlight the groundbreaking article "Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultural Heritage," which explores efforts to preserve and promote the region's rich cultural heritage. This piece underscores the importance of protecting Kurdistan's diverse historical and cultural assets, from ancient artifacts to traditional music and dance. By safeguarding these treasures, we ensure that future generations can appreciate and learn from the region's storied past.

Meanwhile, in "Empowering Women: A New Chapter for Kurdish Society," we examine the strides being made towards gender equality in Kurdistan, highlighting the initiatives and organizations dedicated to empowering Kurdish women and providing them with education, vocational training, and opportunities for leadership. The stories of women who have broken gender and professional barriers and achieved success in various fields serve as powerful examples of the transformative effect they can have on human society.

Lastly, "The Future of Kurdish Education: Innovations and Challenges" offers an in-depth look at the evolving landscape of education in Kurdistan. From advancements in technology and curriculum development to the challenges of accessibility and quality, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the steps being implemented to equip Kurdish youth with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

These articles, along with other insightful contributions in this issue, celebrate the resilience, cultural richness, and intellectual curiosity that define the people of Kurdistan. Whether through the triumphs of individuals like Shireen Khero, the discoveries of ancient civilizations, or the ongoing discourse on identity and solidarity, the spirit of the Kurdistan people shines brightly, inspiring us all. ●

TIMELINE

MAY 2024

May 1

On Labor Day, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the role of workers in rebuilding Kurdistan.

May 3

Production was fully restored at Khor Mor gas field after drone attacks.

May 4

A delegation led by U.S. Senators Ted Budd and Joni Ernst visited the Kurdistan Region to discuss bilateral ties and expand cooperation.

The Philippines' newly appointed Ambassador to Iraq Charlie Manangan met with Kurdish leaders in Erbil for a courtesy call.

May 5

The Jordan-Kurdistan Higher Education Forum was held in Erbil to enhance academic partnership between the two nations.

May 6

A fire burned over 220 shops at the famous Qaysari Bazaar in Erbil.

The Head of the International Operations at the Medical Aid Initiative Norway Geir Fjeld visited Erbil.

May 7

Prime Minister Barzani received Spain's Ambassador to Iraq Pedro Martinez Avial to discuss bilateral ties.

May 8

Peshmerga forces defused three bombs remaining from a battle with ISIS in Chamchamal District, Sulaymaniyah Governorate.

May 9

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya met with Prime Minister Barzani in Erbil.

May 11

Christians formed a new alliance in preparation for the upcoming Kurdistan parliamentary elections.

The KRG announced two new tourist visa categories.

May 12

Prime Minister Barzani received Iraq's President Abdul Latif Rashid in Erbil, where they discussed Erbil-Baghdad relations.

48TH ANNIVERSARY OF GULLAN REVOLUTION



Speaking at an international symposium in Erbil, Prime Minister Barzani warned of the threat of climate change to the region.

The Supreme Council of the Board of Trustees of Education and Higher Education Institutions and Programs held its first meeting, overseen by Prime Minister Barzani.

May 13

Notorious human smuggler "Scorpion" was arrested in Kurdistan after the issuance of multiple international arrest warrants.

May 14

The Vatican's Ambassador to Iraq Mitja Leskovar met with

Kurdish leaders in Erbil and praised Kurdistan for promoting peaceful coexistence.

Kurdistan Region President Barzani visited Baghdad to discuss outstanding disputes.

May 16

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt visited Erbil, where he discussed energy cooperation with Prime Minister Barzani.

The Kurdistan Region commemorated the 48th anniversary of the Gullan Revolution.

May 17

The Kurdistan Region Security Council announced the capture of a senior ISIS member in Erbil.

May 18

Outgoing UNAMI head Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert visited Erbil to bid farewell to Kurdish leaders.

May 19

In a meeting with South Korea's Ambassador to Iraq Choi Sung-soo, Prime Minister Barzani stressed that the KRG seeks South Korea's experience for development.

May 21

A top Kurdish delegation attended the funeral of Iran's former President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran.

The elections branch of Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council ordered its electoral commission to allocate five quota seats for minorities in the Kurdistan Region Parliament.

May 22

First death from Crimean-Contigo hemorrhagic fever confirmed in the Kurdistan Region.

Iraq's Parliament declared Kurdish *Newroz* and the anniversary of the Halabja attack as national holidays.

May 23

Prime Minister Barzani and Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq Tariq Abdullah al-Faraj met to discuss strengthening bilateral ties.

May 26

Joined by a senior delegation from Doha, Prime Minister Barzani opened the Consulate General of Qatar in Erbil.

May 27

Romania's Ambassador to Iraq Radu Octavian Dobry visited Erbil and discussed strengthening bilateral ties with Kurdish leaders.

May 28

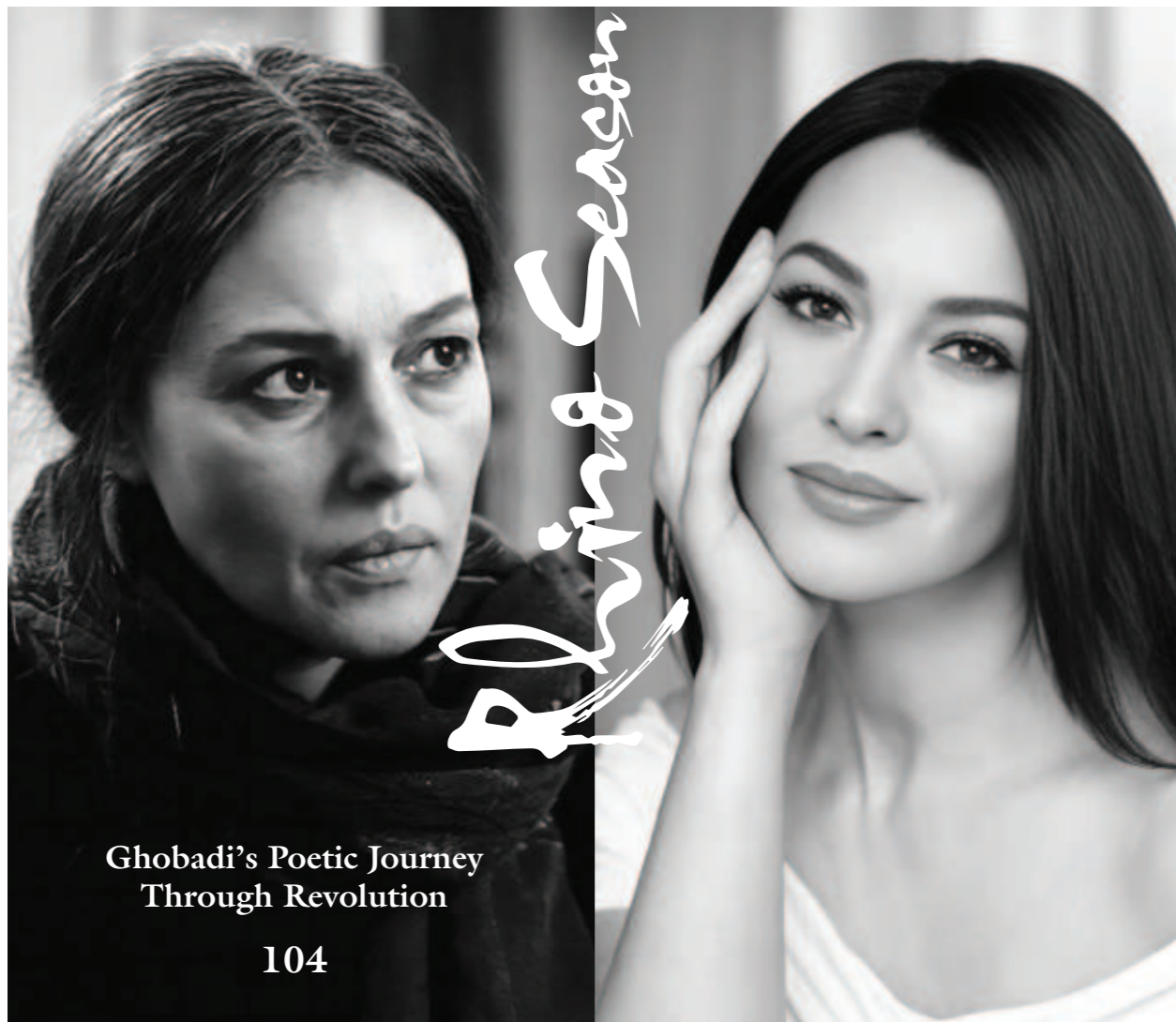
Australia's Ambassador to Iraq Glenn Miles met with Prime Minister Barzani to discuss a range of issues, including bilateral relations and upcoming elections in Kurdistan.

May 30

Prime Minister Barzani met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani in Baghdad, where they agreed on finding a solution to the outstanding disputes centered around the Iraqi Constitution. ●

CONTENTS

MAY 2024



Ghobadi's Poetic Journey
Through Revolution

104

 Kurdistan Chronicle
  Kurdistan Chronicle
  Kurdistan Chronicle
  Kurdistan Chronicle
  Kurdistan Chronicle

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
 Mohammad Dargalayi
Liaison: Aveen Howrami
US Desk: Goran Shakhawan

6-9
Chaldean Patriarch Commends Kurdish Support

10-15
Transforming Agriculture in Kurdistan



16-19
The Inspiring Journey of Shireen Khero

20-23
Enabling Refugees in Kurdistan's Education System

24-27
Reforming Accreditation in Educational System

28-31
Improving Mental Health in Kurdistan and Iraq

32-35
Kurdistan
A New Frontier for Archaeology

36-39
Acclaimed Harvard Oncologist
and Defender of Kurdish Resilience

40-43
Reimagining the Kurdish Question
Identity, Diversity, and Solidarity

44-49
Nationalism in Kurdistan
A Historical and Sociopolitical Perspective



50-52
Drinking Champagne for Love and Freedom in *The Diplomat*

54-59
Journey Through Kurdistan's Scenic Routes



62-65
Kurdistan and China
An Evolving Relationship

66-69
Empowering Kurdistan Through
Energy Diplomacy

70-73
Kurdish *Shal*
A Symbol of Cultural Authenticity

74-79
Embracing Heritage
and Inspiring Millions

80-83
Stream to Ocean
The Poems of Nazand Begikhani

84-87
Exploring Kurdish Poetic Traditions

88-91
In the Studio with
Master Calligrapher

92-95
A Story of Kurdish Struggle

96-99
Yezidi Novelist Sparks
Literary Flame in Germany

100-103
Malmime Bridges Art and Heritage

104-109
Ghobadi's Poetic Journey
Through Revolution

110-113
Falah's Artistic Journey
Through Adversity

114-117
Bridging Borders Through a Game



118-119
Poetry: Miran Abraham

120-121
Wildlife: Sabr Dri

Chaldean Patriarch Commends Kurdish Support



Wladimir van Wilgenburg

is a seasoned reporter and analyst who specializes in Kurdish affairs, and holds a Master's degree in Kurdish studies from Exeter University, UK.

On June 22, following his return to Baghdad, Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako published a letter extending his thanks and appreciation to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leadership, praising President Masoud Barzani, Nechirvan Barzani, and KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani in particular for their support.

On July 3, 2023, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid revoked a decree recognizing Cardinal Sako as the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church. Moreover, on November 14 of that year, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq rejected a complaint by the Patriarch against the decision.

In protest, Cardinal Sako moved to Erbil on July 21, 2023, where he was warmly welcomed by KRG Prime Minister Barzani and other top Kurdish leaders. The top Kurdish leaders expressed hope that the decision would be revoked and justice would prevail.

On July 18, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller expressed his concern that the cardinal's position as a respected leader of the church was under attack and called for his return to Baghdad. He also referred indirectly to



President Masoud Barzani (right) and Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako (left), Patriarch of the Chaldean Church in Iraq and the World (July 23, 2023)

“

The Christians consider the Kurdistan Region a secure haven amid the political and religious conflicts entangling Iraq

”



Masoud Barzani
masoud_barzani

برپاری گه پاندنه وهی کورسیی پاتریارکی کلدانی عێراق و جیهان ههنگاوێکی راست و له جێی خۆیهتی و دهستخۆشی له بهرێز محهمهد شیاع سودانی سهروۆکه زیرانی عێراق دهکهم.

The decision to return the seat of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Iraq and the World is a right and appropriate step and I praise Prime Minister Sudani for this decision

Photo: Adnan Barzani



Photo: Safin Hamid

Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako

Rayan al-Kildani, the leader of a Christian Popular Mobilization Forces faction known as the Babylon Movement, who was sanctioned by the U.S. government in 2019 and has aimed to undermine Patriarch Sako. Al-Kildan has reportedly attempted to seize Christian properties, parliament seats, and endowments of the Church.

On April 12, 2024, after much public pressure, Cardinal Sako returned to Baghdad on invitation from Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani. His visit to Baghdad came two days ahead of Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani's trip to the United States.

Later, on June 5, Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani reinstated

Cardinal Sako as the patriarch of the Chaldean Catholics in Iraq and the World.

"The decision to return the seat of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Iraq and the World is a right and appropriate step and I praise [Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani] for this decision," President Masoud Barzani said in a post on X on June 12.

"I also appreciate their standing by truth and what is right in how they dealt with the matter," Cardinal Sako said about the top Kurdish leaders in the June 22 letter. "Praise be to God that matters were eventually set straight by an initiative of his eminence, [Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani]."



Photo: Safin Hamid

Christians celebrating mass at a church in Erbil, Kurdistan Region

"I think there is a very great need for a clear national vision for the stability of the country, and there is no path to rectify the crises and fix matters correctly except through civilized, peaceful, wise and courageous dialogue upon which all can agree," he added.

In an interview in August 2023 with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Cardinal Sako also expressed gratitude for the respect and appreciation shown by the people of the Kurdistan Region towards religious figures of different faiths and expressed his appreciation

for the culture of coexistence in Kurdistan.

"The Christians consider the Kurdistan Region a secure haven amid the political and religious conflicts entangling Iraq, prompting them to choose to relocate there," he said. "We, in the Kurdistan Region, promote peaceful coexistence and wish for it to be a haven for every individual, irrespective of their religion."

Mohammed Salih, a senior fellow at the U.S.-based Foreign Policy

Research Institute, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the decision to reinstate Cardinal Sako as the Chaldean Patriarch was a "blow to both the Federal Supreme Court and Iraqi President Rashid, who had earlier removed Cardinal Sako from that position."

"This order is important as it seeks to appease Cardinal Sako, the Vatican, and Iraqi Christians, and is another example of circumventing the Federal Supreme Court," Salih said. ●

AGRICULTURE

Transforming Agriculture in Kurdistan



Marewan Hawramy

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



Prime Minister Barzani delivering a speech at a ceremony to lay the foundation stone for a new wholesale market in Akre

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has embarked on an ambitious journey to revitalize its agricultural sector, positioning it as a key driver of economic growth and sustainability. With agricultural reform as a top priority, the current cabinet has implemented a series of strategic initiatives aimed at boosting investment, modernizing infrastructure, and promoting local produce. These efforts are reshaping the agricultural landscape of the Kurdistan Region, paving the way for a more prosperous and self-sufficient future.

Under the leadership of the current administration, the allocation of funds to agriculture has seen an unprecedent-

ed rise. Historically, only 1.5% of the government's budget was dedicated to this vital sector but, recognizing its untapped potential and importance, the government has increased this figure to nearly 10%. This substantial boost in funding has enabled the implementation of numerous projects designed to enhance agricultural productivity, sustainability, and profitability.

Multifaceted strategy

A key aspect of the KRG's agricultural reform strategy is the licensing of new companies focused on various facets of agricultural production and processing. These new en-



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

terprises cover a wide range of activities, including the packaging and production of eggs, yogurt, milk, and olive oil. By fostering the growth of these businesses, the government aims to create a more self-sufficient agricultural industry. This not only reduces the region's reliance on imports but also ensures that high-quality, locally produced goods are available to consumers.

The government's efforts to promote local produce have yielded significant results, with some of Kurdistan's finest agricultural products gaining recognition and market presence in the Gulf region. High-quality pomegranates, apples, and honey from Kurdistan have made their way onto the shelves of Gulf markets, showcasing the region's agricultural prowess. These initiatives are opening new markets for Kurdish farmers, enhancing the global reputation of Kurdistan's agricultural products and providing a boost to the local economy.

Infrastructure development is a cornerstone of the KRG's agricultural reform agenda. Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has been a vocal advocate for these reforms, highlighting their importance in various public statements. One of the flagship projects under his administration is the new \$22-million wholesale market in Akre, which is nearing completion and aims to support local farmers and traders by providing a central hub for agricultural trade.

Prime Minister Barzani recently emphasized the significance of this project in a post on X: "Akre's new wholesale market will be completed soon. With this \$22-million investment, we are supporting our farmers and local traders on one hand and boosting the local economy with new jobs on the other." The market is expected to facilitate the efficient distribution of local produce, improve access to buyers, and stimulate economic activity in the region.

The KRG is also focused on improving agricultural practices to ensure long-term sustainability. This involves the adoption of modern farming techniques, investment in research and development,



Photo: Sabir Dri

Prime Minister Barzani visiting farmers in Bardarash District, Dubok, on June 11, 2024



and the promotion of environmental-ly friendly practices. By supporting initiatives that promote water conservation, soil health, and sustainable farming methods, the government is working to secure the future of agriculture in the Kurdistan Region.

Empowering local farmers is at the heart of the KRG's agricultural reform efforts. The government has introduced various programs to provide farmers with access to better resources, training, and technology. These programs aim to increase crop yields, reduce production costs, and improve the overall quality of produce. Additionally, by offering financial support and incentives, the KRG is encouraging more people to engage in agricultural activities, thereby strengthening the rural economy.



Photos: Sabr Dri

Future prospects and vision

The KRG's commitment to agricul-

ture reform is a testament to its vision for a diversified and resilient economy. By prioritizing this sector, the government is not only addressing immediate economic challenges, but also laying the foundation for sustainable growth and development. The reforms are expected to create numerous job opportunities, enhance food security, and improve

the standard of living for the people of the Kurdistan Region.

As these initiatives continue to take root, the Kurdistan Region is poised to become a model of agricultural excellence and innovation. The ongoing efforts to modernize infrastructure, promote local produce, and empower farmers reflect a forward-thinking approach that promises to bring long-term benefits to the region. With continued support and investment, the future of agriculture in Kurdistan looks brighter than ever. ●

The Inspiring Journey of Shireen Khero



Qassim Khidbir

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



Shireen Khero, a 30-year-old Yazidi survivor of the genocide perpetrated by ISIS, defied all odds to find a way forward. In June 2024, she graduated with a business management degree from the American University of Kurdistan (AUK) and was awarded the Honor of Resilience by Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. On graduation day, Khero felt immense happiness standing before hundreds of

people, including her sister, brother, and friends. “I felt very proud,” she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “Finally, my dream came true with an extra bonus: the Honor of Resilience from the Prime Minister, which I did not expect.”

Khero was in her last year of high school, preparing for final exams, when ISIS attacked her village, Hardan, in the Sinjar District of Nineveh Governorate. Cap-



Shireen Khero in her traditional Yazidi attire

tered with her family, she made a daring escape in February 2017 to Duhok.

Her life took an unexpected turn when she was accepted into the business management program at AUK. This opportunity marked a fresh start for her. Both the faculty and her fellow students welcomed her warmly, offering the support and inspiration she needed to continue her education.

“During my captivity, I was judged, cursed, and tortured,” said Khero. “But at AUK, everyone was nice to me. They made me feel safe.”

Since graduation, Shireen’s phone has not stopped ringing. Friends and family call to congratulate her, and other members of the Yezidi community have asked about scholarships and studying at AUK.

“Khero truly embodies resilience,” said Khidher Domle, a friend of Khero who attended her graduation. “There are three reasons why she deserved the Honor of Resilience. First, after escaping ISIS, Shireen didn’t let the trauma define her. She found the strength to continue her education. Second, she tirelessly used all her connections to rescue her sister and family, who were also captured by ISIS. Third, Shireen bravely raised her voice. She traveled to cities like Baghdad to speak out about the crimes committed by ISIS and advocate for the rights and protection of the Yezidis.”

“Every university in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq has a duty to support Yezidi women survivors,” Domle added. “I urge all institutions, including private universities, to grant scholarships to these women. Education empowers them to become symbols of resilience for others and build a brighter future.”

In 2014, the Yezidi people in Iraq faced a horrific genocide perpetrated by ISIS. Thousands of Yezidi men



Shireen Khero holding her university certificate after graduation

Photo: Safin Hamid

were massacred for refusing to convert to Islam, while women and girls were abducted and enslaved. This brutal campaign forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

In 2022, a mass grave containing 60 people, including Khero’s father, was discovered in Hardan. After two years

of digging and DNA testing, Khero received her father’s remains last January and buried him in the same place.

“I am working to turn the location of the mass grave into a cemetery as a testament to the Yezidi genocide,” she said.

Khero has joined the Netherlands-based organization SEMA, the Global Network of Victims and Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence. In addition to pursuing a career in business management, she has decided to dedicate her life to advocating for the rights and protection of the Yezidi community.

Khero does not like the label of “victim,” either for herself or other Yezidi women survivors. “Life is not easy, and it’s true that I went through a bad experience,” she said.

“Without education, you’re going to continue the cycles of poverty and victimization.”

Rhodes holds a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Chicago.

He explained that when AUK negotiates funding with the U.S. Department of State to establish scholarships, they try to identify those most in need and those who would benefit most – in short, the candidates who are most motivated to take advantage of education to break the cycles

university is committed to providing access to an American-style education for the people of the Kurdistan Region, regardless of ethnicity, religion, family name, or ability to pay.

Rhodes would like to get scholarship support for Kurds living in Europe, the United States, or Canada to return to Kurdistan and study at AUK. “By studying at AUK, members of the Kurdish diaspora will be reconnected with their homeland and won’t lose their language or culture,” Rhodes said.



Photo: Farhad Abmad

“However, I want people to see me as Shireen, not as a victim. I’m not comfortable when people identify us only as victims.”

AUK President Randall Rhodes believes it is crucial for vulnerable populations to have access to higher education. He joined AUK four years ago from the American University of Armenia, where he served as provost.

“Education is the pathway to success in life,” President Rhodes believes.

of violence that have gripped the Middle East for so many years.

“For Khero, it’s very important that she moves forward and believes there is a next chapter, more to come in her life,” Rhodes added. “The greatest mission on Earth is to help others, to make sure they don’t suffer, they don’t become victims, that the chains of victimization are broken.”

According to AUK, over 72% of its students are on scholarships. The

Rhodes concluded by proposing that, if every Kurd living in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, or the United States were to sponsor one person to study in Kurdistan, it could dramatically change the global perception of the Kurdish people. This, he believes, could be a path toward ending persecution and preventing future genocides against Kurdish people, as people in all these countries will come to understand the realities of the past and present in Kurdistan. ●

Enabling Refugees in Kurdistan's Education System



Alan Hama Saeed Salih

Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Education.



Jean-Nicolas Beuze

UNHCR Representative to Iraq.

Here in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, people know what it means to flee one's home to escape violence and persecution. Every Kurdish family has experienced firsthand what it means to be a refugee. This is why when Kurds living in Syria, Türkiye, or Iran have sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region, authorities and communities, as well as the international community through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), have joined forces to welcome them.

Many in the Kurdistan Region received their education abroad, during years when numerous Iraqi Kurdish families lived in exile. Now, it is our turn to give refugee children a chance to access quality education – on equal footing with Iraqi Kurdish children. Without such opportunities to learn, interact, and play with their peers, and develop into responsible adults, refugee families would be left without hope for their future, including the hope of eventually returning to their homes and rebuilding their communities.

In most countries, refugee children are allowed to enroll in public schools, a widely accepted practice that is both cost-effective and encourages knowledge sharing. The same principle applies here. Why establish separate schools for refugees with dedicated teachers when we can invest in enhancing the capacities of our existing schools? By doing so, we can educate both communities side-by-side, fostering improved learning outcomes and brighter futures for all. Unlike constructing new facilities only for refugee children, this approach underscores the Kurdistan Region's vision for sustainability and inclusivity. As refugees eventually return home, our schools will remain.

A social transformation

In alignment with global practices, refugee children are welcomed in public schools across the Kurdistan Region through the Refugee Education Integration Policy, a policy developed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) with support from UN agencies. The policy allows refugee children to attend the same schools as Kurdish children, learn the local language by following the same curriculum, foster relationships, and pursue equal opportunities. By educating children to comprehend and appreciate each other, we are laying the foundation for a future generation that will construct a better world in Iraq and in the region.

“
In alignment with global practices, refugee children are welcomed in public schools across the Kurdistan Region
”

But what about qualified refugee teachers left without a job after fleeing their home countries? This is where the KRG has introduced a groundbreaking decision. We have allowed these educators to teach both refugee and local children in public schools in the Kurdistan Region, so long as their diplomas and professional experience met the requirements of the KRG





Photo: Rostam Aghalata

Ministry of Education, in an effort to maintain the quality of teaching in public schools.

This is more than just an educational shift; it is a social transformation. It provides qualified refugee teachers with the chance to contribute to the communities that have embraced them, an opportunity to make a positive impact on children from their communities and the children of neighboring communities.

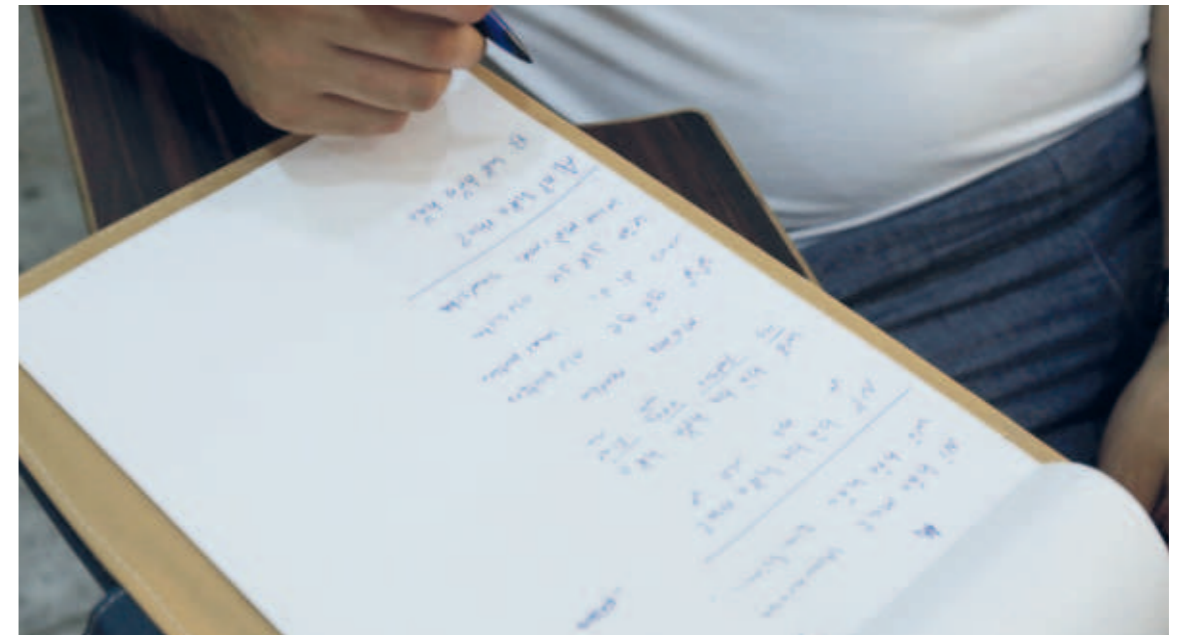
Moreover, we are creating livelihood opportunities for refugees by promoting a more sustainable and inclusive

environment. In public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the teaching language is Kurdish, following either the Sorani or Bahdini dialect (southern Kurmanji). The question arose: can refugee children adapt to this shift and can refugee teachers effectively teach in a different dialect?

Recognizing the legitimacy of these concerns, the KRG Ministry of Education and UNHCR proactively addressed them. Kurdish language classes were provided for children, teachers, and parents, whereas new

schools increased to 50,000, including 70% of school-aged Syrian refugee children, in grades one to 12, including pre-school, for the academic year 2023-2024. An additional 21,000 refugee children await their inclusion. "It is disheartening to witness valuable knowledge go to waste due to conflict," Loyal, a refugee parent from Syria, emphasizes. "We have been here for ten years and do not know when we will return home. We want our children to integrate and have the same opportunities as Iraqis."

The journey continues and, for the



environment. "Being able to work as a teacher has been a substantial opportunity in my life here," Parveen, a refugee teacher, notes. "In the school, you see teachers from the refugee and local community working together and supporting each other."

Addressing concerns and capacities

Certainly, there were initial concerns with such a policy, notably the language difference. In Syria, teachers adhered to an Arabic curriculum with students learning in Arabic, de-

teachers underwent training, and learning materials were supplied to facilitate a smooth transition for everyone involved.

In addition, by getting additional funding to rehabilitate existing schools and build new classrooms, the KRG Ministry of Education and UNHCR have enhanced the quality of the teaching environment for everyone. Some 400 qualified full-time teachers and some 700 lecturers were hired from the Syrian refugee community. Meanwhile, the overall number of children enrolled in public

sake of the local and refugee communities, their children, and their teachers, the international community must continue providing support to the KRG Ministry of Education. Let us remember that it not only takes a village to raise a child, but also teachers and a collective group of individuals dedicated to fostering inclusion. This model, supported by national and international commitment, ensures that refugees can take part in national systems and become invaluable contributors to local economies and societies. ●

Reforming Accreditation in Educational System



Honar Issa

is the Secretary-General of Kurdistan Accrediting Association for Education.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has embarked on a transformative journey to elevate the quality of education in the Kurdistan Region. The establishment of the Kurdistan Accrediting Association for Education (KAAE) signifies a crucial turning point in this endeavor, aiming to propel the education sector toward excellence and equity. The KAAE's primary mission is to establish and enforce rigorous quality assurance standards for K-12 and higher education institutions. These standards will serve as benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of schools and universities, ensuring they deliver high-quality education that aligns with international best practices. This will, in turn, necessitate a comprehensive review of current practices, followed by the development of standards encompassing various aspects of education, including mission-driven planning for their alignment with clear educational goals and objectives, effective governance and organization, curriculum alignment with 21st-century skills development, student-centered learning with the focus on promoting active learning and student engagement, effective and innovative teaching approaches, and educational evaluation that assesses the ability of institutions to achieve desired learning outcomes.

The Kurdistan Region, like many developing parts of the world, faces numerous hurdles to achieving education-related goals. Outdated curricula, insufficient resources, and a lack of a unified framework hinder progress. Additionally, the absence of a robust culture of assessment and evaluation leaves the system devoid of reliable data to guide informed decision-making.

Recognizing the critical role that education plays in overall development, the KRG has prioritized educational reform, making the KAAE's establishment not only timely, but also essential for long-term prosperity.

One of the most significant advantages of the accreditation process lies in its objectivity. Standardized and measurable benchmarks empower the KRG to objectively assess the performance of educational institutions and implement sustainable corrective actions. This objectivity is crucial for pinpointing areas for improvement and allocating resources strategically. Without such a system, educational reform efforts risk being subjective and inconsistent, leading to uneven progress across the region.

“Recognizing the critical role that education plays in overall development, the KRG has prioritized educational reform, making the KAAE's establishment not only timely, but also essential for long-term prosperity”



Photo: Safin Hamid

A key aspect of accreditation involves revising curricula to ensure alignment with established standards. This translates to developing curricula that equip students with not only essential knowledge and skills, but also the critical abilities needed to thrive in today's workforce. These crucial skills

include entrepreneurship, leadership, problem-solving, professionalism, teamwork, effective communication, and lifelong learning.

By creating a culture of continuous improvement, schools and universities will be encouraged to regularly

review and update their curricula, ensuring it remains relevant in preparing students for the future workforce.

Sustainability and transparency

Teachers and faculty members are the



Photo: Safin Hamid

pillars of quality assurance within academic institutions. Through the standards developed by KAAE, educators will be exposed to professional development programs that enhance their

The accreditation process has the potential to revolutionize resource allocation within the education sector. Currently, resource allocation in Kurdistan can be influenced by fac-

all other sectors, such as healthcare, industry, and social development, are built. However, meaningful educational reform is a long-term endeavor requiring sustained effort and



Photo: Safin Hamid

skills and equip them to effectively support the attainment of learning outcomes. Having a strong and qualified teaching force is essential for the sustainable development and effectiveness of academic institutions.

Transparency is another crucial component of the accreditation process. Making shared and informed decisions within academic institutions will strengthen their governance and organization and foster a collaborative environment that promotes progress. Publicly sharing institutional data and accreditation review results raises accountability among educational institutions. Schools and universities, aware that their progress is transparent, will be motivated to elevate their performance and meet established standards. This transparency also builds trust with students, parents, and the broader community by providing them with access to reliable information about the quality of education being provided.

“
The establishment of
the KAAE marks a
significant milestone in
the KRG’s educational
reform journey

”
tors beyond actual needs and performance. With a clear set of standards and regular assessments, resources can be directed toward areas demonstrating the greatest need and potential impact. This targeted approach ensures that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to a high-quality education.

Sustainable development hinges on a robust educational system. Education serves as the foundation upon which

commitment. The full impact of the accreditation process may take 12-15 years to fully materialize. Nevertheless, starting now lays the groundwork for a brighter future.

The establishment of the KAAE marks a significant milestone in the KRG’s educational reform journey. By creating a culture of continuous improvement, quality assurance, and transparency, the KAAE sets the stage for an education system that is effective, equitable, and well-equipped to meet the needs of the 21st century. While the process requires time and dedication, initiating it now ensures that the education system in the Kurdistan Region is well-equipped to shape a brighter future for all its citizens. Through these efforts, the KRG is demonstrating its commitment to providing high-quality education for all, laying the foundation for sustainable development and long-term prosperity. ●

Improving Mental Health in Kurdistan and Iraq



Chris Bowers

is a former UK Consul General in Erbil, has been involved in KRI since 2009 and now is a psychotherapist in UK.



Dr. Chinar Osman

is a Consultant Neurologist at the Wessex Neurological Centre in Southampton, UK.

The importance of tackling mental health problems in the Kurdistan Region, and indeed globally, is obvious – these challenges have simply not received enough attention in the Kurdistan Region, as in many parts of the Middle East. That, however, is beginning to change and, in Kurdistan, the Oxford Cognitive Therapy Center (OCTC), which is part of Oxford University, is leading the charge.

Mental health issues pose a significant risk to one's physical health, educational and work prospects, likelihood of committing a crime, and even longevity. In post-conflict zones, this is particularly acute. In addition to the personal impact on individuals, their families, and caregivers, mental health concerns come at a very high cost to economic well-being. A hallmark of a resilient community is the ability to deal with and respond effectively to peoples' mental health challenges and manage the disruption caused by them.

World Health Organization figures suggest that depression and other mental health issues are an increasing burden on societies as communicable diseases gradually recede; communities recovering from conflict are also especially vulnerable in this regard.

These factors are as prevalent in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq as elsewhere in the world, but there are other issues that compound the mental health situation. The Kurdistan Region and Iraq have faced decades of trauma and violence, with entire communities engulfed by armed conflict,

extreme political violence, and genocide. Forced migration within, into, and out of the country has been a feature for several decades, another significant contributor to trauma and depression.

Addressing the issue

The Kurdistan Regional Government has been fully supportive of the OCTC's efforts. Kurdish society is noted for its tolerance and willingness to help those who are suffering now or who have suffered in the past from the travails that have rained upon the region and its people.

The need in Iraq contrasts sharply with the provision and conception of mental health services. Only a small number of psychiatrists offer medicalized solutions, while primary health care workers receive insufficient training to detect mental health issues. This is compounded by a profound stigma that is associated with mental health in Iraq.

However, there is evidence to suggest that targeted training in cost-effective 'talking cure' therapies can begin to address the gap in Iraq and create a more 'stepped' approach, enabling a reliable referral process.

Through a project initiated and coordinated by KR-UK-IMPAKT, a UK-based non-governmental organization (NGO) of interested mental health professionals, the OCTC is training 30 Iraqi Kurds to deliver cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to other Kurds. The OCTC, which is both a part of Oxford University and



Photo: Safin Hamid

the Oxford branch of the UK's National Health Service, is a leading trainer in the UK. Conducted in teaching blocks across a calendar year, the training, much of which is done online, includes extensive ongoing supervision for trainees and is already exceeding the OCTC's expectations.

The first cohort of 30 Kurdistanis – who speak excellent English, have a background in psychology, strong interpersonal skills, and access to clients – should finish their training. What has the experience been like for them so far?

“From day one, the first benefit was getting to know everyone, forming a community. Then, we were exposed to an incredible wealth of knowledge. Initially, we just heard the name ‘Oxford’ and thought the training would be very

Online training sharply reduces costs and exposure to security issues while enabling more equitable working arrangements. The project is relatively cheap – at a cost of around £250,000 per annum – targeted, and involves a multi-year commitment of up to five years. Funding for the first two years so far has been provided by a private donor with a long-standing commitment to Iraqi Kurds, particularly those who helped journalists during the difficult times in the early 1990s. The project is seeking funding for years three to five.

The project is eminently replicable, and its project coordinators are ready to bring their experience into other settings.



hard – but no. They're working with us to make difficult material more approachable. It's not easy, but they make it easy. The trainers are so kind with us, and we are very grateful to them.”

Efficiently building foundations

The OCTC trainers are delighted with the project so far and are eager to enact the five-year goal of building the foundations of a modern mental health service in a part of the world that desperately needs it. Included in this goal is creating a regulatory framework and a market for psychotherapists in the Kurdistan Region.

The project depends on the services of the European Technology and Training Center, an experienced training organization based across Iraq, to recruit candidates, ensure good trainer-trainee liaison, and to manage relations with the authorities, who have been supportive. The wider team, led by KR-UK-IMPAKT, have worked pro bono so far to help negotiate any cultural issues that emerge.

CBT, a highly effective treatment for most common mental health issues, also provides an entry point to a range of situations and areas of focus.

Initial discussions suggest that a CBT training intervention could prove a useful, targeted tool in Iraq, particularly in areas liberated from ISIS. For instance, CBT training can help the families of missing persons and those searching for or who have found the remains of loved ones. It can also help those suffering from ambiguous loss and traumatic memories.

There can be a wide variability in people's ability to cope with, and adjust to, the absence or death of someone close to them. This includes a constellation of beliefs: a griever's thoughts about the circumstances of the death, their feelings about the person who died, their reflections on the relationship with that person, and their assessment of their own ability to survive the loss. Uncertainty adds another complicating dimension to adaptation that needs careful and qualified help.



Taking a step-back, the Yezidi genocide crisis marked an inflection point for the global humanitarian community. ISIS's rape and torture of women and young girls meant that the victims' needs were as much psy-

Kurds who had the right language skills, experience, training, and expertise to address the deep trauma that many Yezidis were suffering from and continue to suffer from to this day.

host community – itself bereft of talking cure therapists.

In short, there is no health without mental health. The OCTC has started to deliver CBT training in the Kurdistan Region with best-in-class UK



chological as they were physical. The responses of the UN and NGOs in providing food and shelter for the Yezidis were necessary, but insufficient. Many NGOs struggled to find

This is ultimately because psychotherapeutic techniques are in their infancy in Kurdistan, Iraq and the Middle East. There is no qualified wellspring of expertise to draw upon from the

trainers cheaply and effectively, thus laying the foundations for a comprehensive and resilient system for the treatment of mental health issues in the region and beyond. ●

Kurdistan A New Frontier for Archaeology

Kurdistan Chronicle

An exhibition in Erbil organized by the Consulate of Italy in Erbil showcased 11 Italian archaeological excavations in the Kurdistan Region, demonstrating the region's potential for rich discoveries and highlighting sites that date back thousands of years.

Archaeologists working on these projects emphasize that the Kurdistan Region offers considerable opportunities for archaeological excavations, as much of the area remains unexplored.

"The Kurdistan Region has huge potential because it only opened to archaeology 10 years ago," Paola Sconzo, Assistant Professor of Near Eastern and Phoenician Archaeology at the University of Palermo in Italy, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

"So, there are areas like the area north of Erbil immediately north of Duhok that have been explored only recently. What we have been doing in recent years is really pioneering work in areas that were unreachable by foreigners before. It's a playground for us."

Sconzo is part of the ReLand project, formed in January 2023 through collaboration between the University of Palermo

and the General Directorate of Antiquities of Duhok, focusing on the impact of water level fluctuations on archaeological sites in the Mosul Dam basin, which counts over 275 archaeological sites.

"We began just last year. It's a new project. Within a year, Mosul Dam experienced a 40-meter fluctuation in water levels. This means sites are mostly submerged in January and fully submerged now, causing damage and erosion," said Sconzo.

"We are working together with the Director General of Antiquities of Duhok to try to establish a protocol for monitoring, safeguarding, and recording all of the heritage that is being lost year by year."

Sconzo noted that she has never felt unsafe in the Kurdistan Region, adding that it is a very nice place to work.

"I have been working in Kurdistan for 10 years. I was working with the German Mission before in this region and regularly participate in surveys. I have always felt safe. I trust the people who are guiding me, and the Director General of Antiquities is taking care of everyone."

Luca Peyronel, Professor at the University

of Milan in Italy, who is involved in an Italian archaeological expedition in the Erbil Plain, highlighted that most archaeological projects started in the Kurdistan Region around 2010.

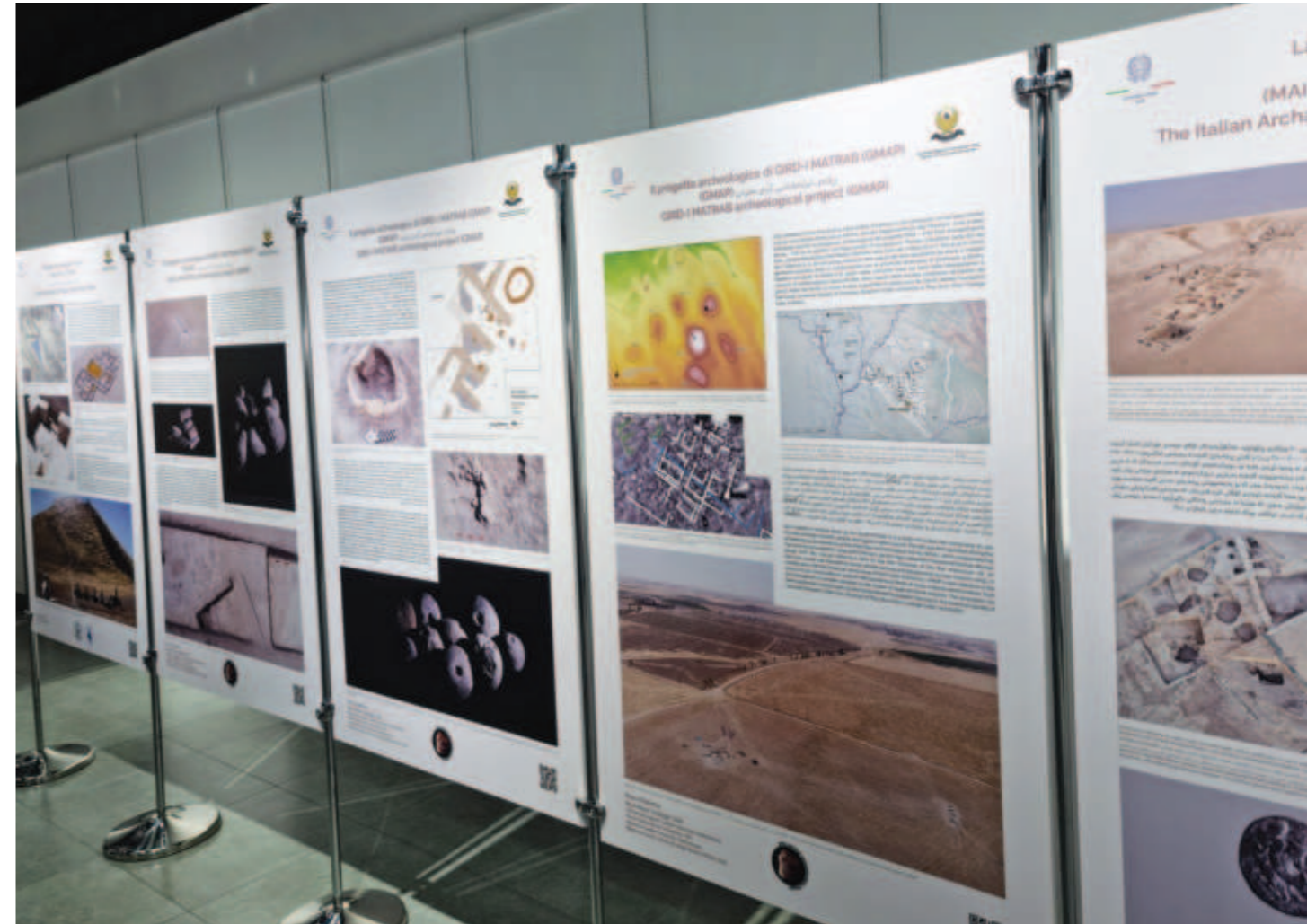
"The Kurdistan Region is almost unknown in terms of ancient history. We currently have many expeditions here, at least 11 Italian expeditions, but there are also expeditions headed by other countries. They cooperate with

wa and Aliawa, situated in the southwestern region of the Erbil Plain.

These excavations offer insights into complex relationships between human communities and the natural environment, from the emergence of the first settled villages in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (5th and 4th millennia BC), then in the Bronze Age (3rd and 2nd millennia BC) as well as the era of the great empires in

between the Tigris Valley and the Zagros Mountains. Important trade routes crossed in this region. We also discovered the region's first Neolithic population here," Peyronel added.

"The first signs of agriculture in the region date to the 6th and 5th millennia BC. That's important to know when first surveying the region. Later we see traces of initial socio-economic complexity of the world's first cities in



Italian Archaeological Exhibition in Erbil

local archaeologists, especially on the Erbil Plain."

In this capacity, Peyronel has participated in excavations at sites like Hela-

the 1st millennium BC, and beyond into the Islamic period.

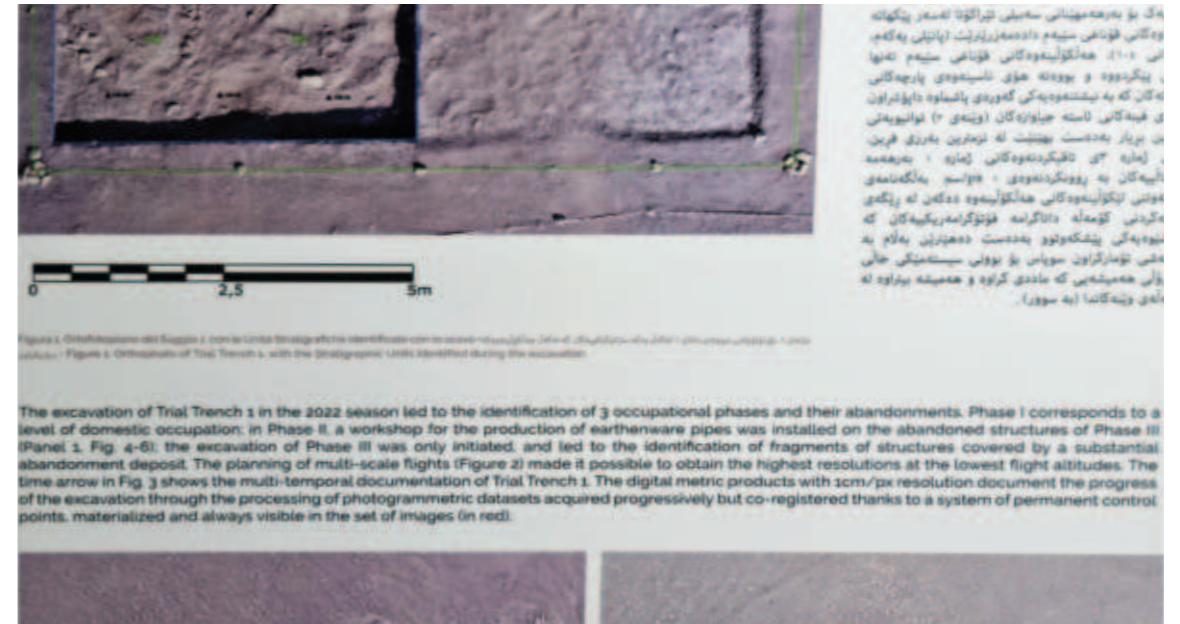
"The plain is very important because of its crucial strategic position

northern Mesopotamia and how they developed into regional kingdoms during the Bronze Age."

Valentina Vezzoli, faculty member



Italy's Consul General Michele Camerota and KRG Minister of Municipality and Tourism Sasan Othman Awni Habib at the Italian Archaeological Exhibition in Erbil



The excavation of Trial Trench 1 in the 2022 season led to the identification of 3 occupational phases and their abandonments. Phase I corresponds to a level of domestic occupation; in Phase II, a workshop for the production of earthenware pipes was installed on the abandoned structures of Phase III (Panel 1, Fig. 4-6); the excavation of Phase III was only initiated, and led to the identification of fragments of structures covered by a substantial abandonment deposit. The planning of multi-scale flights (Figure 2) made it possible to obtain the highest resolutions at the lowest flight altitudes. The time arrow in Fig. 3 shows the multi-temporal documentation of Trial Trench 1. The digital metric products with 1cm/px resolution document the progress of the excavation through the processing of photogrammetric datasets acquired progressively but co-registered thanks to a system of permanent control points, materialized and always visible in the set of images (in red).

with a focus on Islamic archeology at the University of Udine, is studying the site of Bazhera near Akre. The site is part of a three-year project that features the remains of a structure used as a secure facility for merchants and travelers to rest and trade (caravanserai), the excavation of which will shed light on the settlement of this region during the Islamic period.

“Islamic archaeology is a field not yet well studied in the region, although it is really rich in that regard. International archaeological projects in the region show that there are many rural and urban sites with tremendous potential from the Islamic period. It’s very interesting.”

She added that the Consulate of Italy in Erbil and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) General Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage were very supportive of these archaeological missions. “We are collaborating with them on various projects.”

Her team lives in Akre. “It’s a very nice city, with great food and very nice people. We really love the area,” she said.

Jesper Eidem, Associate Professor at

the University of Pisa in Italy, works on the Tell Shemshara site in Ranya Plain near Lake Dokan, which is one of the most famous archaeological sites in the Kurdistan Region.

Danish and Iraqi excavations carried out in this area in the 1950s unearthed the remains of an ancient Babylonian palace, including important cuneiform tablets dating back 4,000 years.

Eidem said before 2003 that it was impossible to work in the Kurdistan Region due to a civil war that began in the 1990s. “However, in recent years, the KRG has been very active in promoting archeology.”

“We must continue our efforts to find more. It’s very important because the lake’s water level goes up and down every year and eats away at the site, so every year some of it is lost. It’s a race against time.”

Italian Consul in Erbil Michele Camerota told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the Italian archaeological missions represent the “best example of cultural and scientific collaboration with the Kurdish Region and with the whole of Iraq, of which Italy holds the record.”

He noted that the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation has also provided a grant in Faida and Khinis in Duhok Governorate, “where the team from the University of Udine discovered some Assyrian rock reliefs of immense value along the irrigation system dated to the time of King Sennacherib.”

“In recent years, Kurdistan has emerged as a new frontier of the world archaeology itineraries, thanks to both the warm hospitality of the locals and for the general conditions in the field. We believe, in agreement with the Kurdish authorities, that preserving and enhancing the legacies of the different eras and civilizations has the ultimate purpose of affirming the value of culture as a driver for tourist attraction,” Camerota said.

“Moreover, the local population is already involved in various ways with the activities carried out by the archaeologists, which creates job opportunities for the community. Our final aim is to further promote local awareness to contribute to the enhancement of this priceless universal heritage.” ●

Acclaimed Harvard Oncologist and Defender of Kurdish Resilience

Kurdistan Chronicle

Dr. Aram Ghalali, a distinguished oncologist and biotechnologist at Harvard Medical School, was honored earlier this year in Marquis Who's Who as one of 2024's Top Educators and Top Scientists for his "dedication, achievements, and leadership in surgical instruction," according to the company's website. These recognitions underline not only Ghalali's contributions to the field of medical education, but also the resilience, determination, and talent that he has demonstrated to reach this point.

Born in Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region, Ghalali has faced adversity throughout his life. When Ghalali was nine years old, his father, who had dedicated his life to serving the people of Kurdistan, was tragically assassinated. When he was 14, he and his family made the difficult decision to leave Kurdistan behind and seek refuge in Sweden amid a civil war.

The arduous journey to Sweden took two years, with the family making the journey across Europe largely on foot. At one point on the journey, they were separated from each other, and Ghalali arrived in Sweden at the age of 16 not knowing where his family members were. Fate, however, smiled upon him, and he was

soon reunited with his loved ones. It was during his time in Sweden that his passion for medicine and scientific research began to blossom. Inspired by his experiences and driven by a desire to make a difference, he embarked on a remarkable academic journey.

Substantive research

As a child, Ghalali was placed in a vocational school. He had missed schooling for several years, but his strong desire to learn was quickly recognized. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in biotechnology and a

“
In 2017, he received an offer from Harvard Medical School for a second postdoctoral fellowship in oncology and cancer biology
”

Bachelor of Science in chemical engineering from Mälardalens University in Eskilstuna, Sweden, and then went on to receive two master's degrees: one in quality assessment in pharmaceutical sciences/biotechnology and another in cancer prevention and pharmacy design.

Later, he earned a doctorate in cellular signaling pathway and epigenetics from the Karolinska Institute in Solna, Sweden, where he worked as a postdoctoral researcher in environmental toxicology. In 2017, he received an offer from Harvard Medical School for a second postdoctoral fellowship in oncology and cancer biology. Four years later, he was promoted to the faculty at Harvard, where he began focusing on research concerning brain cancer in children and aggressive prostate cancer. He remains an assistant professor at the Karolinska Institute.

I met Ghalali at Boston's Children's Hospital in May 2024, and he accompanied me across the street to the hospital's lab, where he spends most of his time researching and conducting scientific experiments.

Before jumping

into questions related to his homeland and being a Kurd, I wanted to know more about his vascular biology research. After explaining cometabolism and drug development for late-stage forms of cancer, Ghalali mentioned several interesting findings that he hopes will make a difference for patients.

For example, new diagnostic biomarkers could be used to determine whether a patient has a particular medical condition for which treatment may be indicated, such as for different brain vascular abnormalities or diseases. Ghalali is also in the process of publishing his latest findings on the most aggressive form of medulloblastoma, a type of childhood brain cancer. This study examined hundreds of patients, finding a protein that can be targeted by a new medication that might lead to a better prognosis.

His team at Harvard also studies the deadliest form of brain cancer in children – diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma – and has made notable strides. Ghalali works on several other projects as well, including developing alternative therapy options and new treatments.

Scientific research on Halabja

Shifting to more personal matters, I wondered how Ghalali felt as a stateless Kurd teaching at one of the best universities in the world. "Statelessness is a strength, not a weakness," he said. "The political condition and de facto statelessness of the Kurds is proof of their resilience, emphasizing the continued survival of the Kurdish people. Therefore, there is nothing too special about a Kurd being able to reach Harvard. Kurds can reach any place of excellence if the opportunity exists. I am honored to represent my nation in a positive way. My Kurdish

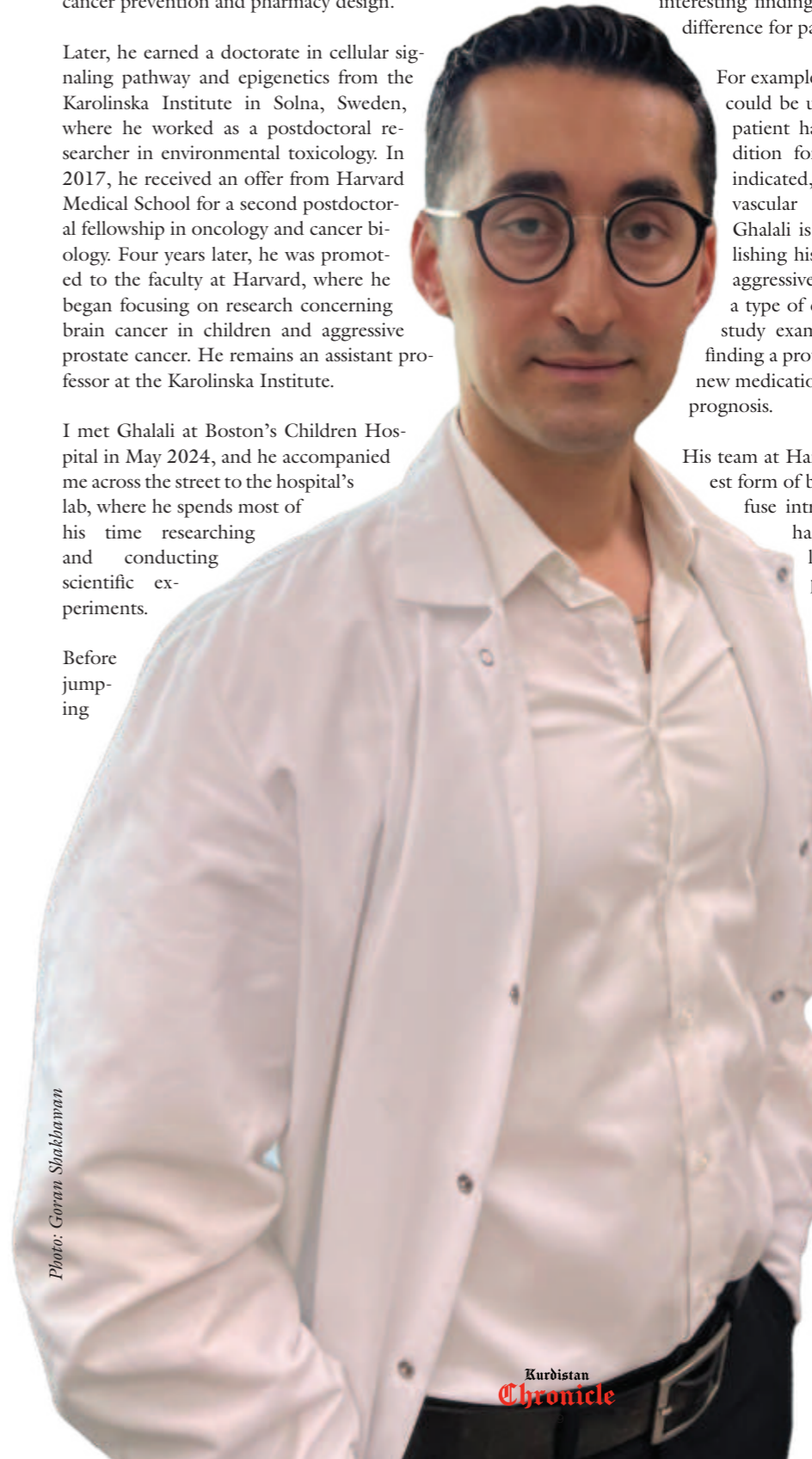


Photo: Goran Shakhawan

Reimagining the Kurdish Question Identity, Diversity, and Solidarity



Stephen Fox

earned a Bachelor of Science in Anthropology from Oregon State University, a Master of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Idaho and is now a 3rd Year Ph.D. student of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. As a Cultural Anthropologist, Mr. Fox's primary interests include Kurdish culture and history, the anthropology of policy, migration, anthropology of the Middle East, identity negotiation, conflict negotiation, and the human impacts of climate change.

When I was invited to contribute an article for *Kurdistan Chronicle*, I spent several hours in deep reflection. Over the last ten years, I have written hundreds, perhaps thousands of pages for my anthropology classes, my master's thesis, and most recently, my

Ph.D. dissertation. How do I choose a topic from among them to share? Equally challenging is the nervousness I feel when sharing my work with Kurdish people. Although I love to speak publicly, teach anthropology, and present my findings, I am, above all, a student of the Kurdish

people. I do not dare attempt to tell Kurds what it means to be Kurdish. After much contemplation, I remembered the words of one of my Kurdish friends,

"Whenever people research Kurds, it's always along the lines of should Kurds have statehood or do they deserve independence? But nothing really about the dynamics of what makes us the way we are. Why are we so scattered? Why have we relocated? So your research is definitely something that's going to be very important in understanding the trajectory of Kurds everywhere."

Understanding the trajectory of Kurds everywhere. This profound statement hints at a remarkable as-

pect often overlooked in discussions about Kurdish people: the diversity of Kurdish identity. Its complexity goes far beyond political aspirations. It encompasses the intricacies of their linguistic diversity, religious plurality, and cultural traditions. Understanding the Kurdish experience involves a comprehensive examination of the nuanced, multifaceted nature of Kurdish identity across different regions of Kurdistan and in the diaspora.

Kurdish communities across the four regions of Kurdistan each contribute unique elements to a vibrant and enduring Kurdish identity. This diversity is evident in their various linguistic dialects, including Kurmanji, Sorani, and Pehlewani. The religious land-

scape is equally rich, encompassing Islam, Judaism, Yezidism, Christianity, Alevism, and Zoroastrianism. Politically, while the vision for Kurdish autonomy differs by region, Kurds are united in their pursuit of self-determination. Culturally, the distinct traditions, music, dance, and cuisine of each Kurdish area underscore both their individuality and shared heritage. Together, these elements form a resilient and dynamic identity celebrated by Kurds around the world.

Identity negotiation

For my master's research, I explored how Kurds express their identities differently within Kurdistan and in the diaspora. In anthropology, this is known as "identity negotiation" – a



Photo: Safin Hamid



dynamic process where individuals and groups continuously define their identities through interactions with others and in varying social contexts. With respect to how migration shapes and influences identity negotiation, anthropologists observe how people assimilate, integrate, or isolate in their adoptive countries. Assimilation refers to the process by which migrants gradually accept the cultural norms, values, and practices of the host society, often losing their native cultural identity in the process. Integration involves migrants maintaining their distinct cultural identity while also participating in the social, economic, and political life of the host society. This process emphasizes mutual accommodation and acceptance between migrants and the host population. Isolation occurs when migrants remain separated from the host society, often maintaining economic, social, and linguistic separation.

In both Kurdistan and the diaspora, Kurds navigate multiple, intersecting identities such as ethnicity, gender roles, and nationality. In anthropology, these labels are known as “identity markers,” which can sometimes conflict or require prioritization depending on the context. Power dynamics significantly influence this negotiation process, especially between dominant and marginalized groups. Marginalized groups often must negotiate their identities in environments that devalue or stereotype them. This process is dynamic, evolving as individuals encounter new experiences, relationships, and environments. This evolution leads to the integration of new aspects into one’s identity or the redefinition of existing ones.

Seeking validation and acceptance is a crucial part of identity negotiation, as it helps individuals feel secure and authentic in their self-presentation. Overall, identity negotiation is essential for personal well-being and social cohesion. It enables individu-

als and groups to navigate complex social landscapes, fosters understanding and acceptance in diverse societies, and allows for the development of a coherent and resilient sense of self.

Extensive interviews for my research suggest that in the Middle East, Kurdish culture and identity are shaped by social, linguistic, religious, political, economic, and geographical conditions. Türkiye, Iran, Iraq, and Syria each reflect a diverse set of cultures, traditions, and ideologies in their national contexts. Relationships between Turkish Kurds and Syrian Kurds do not resemble those between Iraqi Kurds and Iranian Kurds. The absence of a common language, along with competing economic and political interests, make Kurdish identity an ambiguous and fractured concept within Kurdistan. Furthermore, the denial of Kurdish ethnic identity by dominant Middle Eastern nations, with only sparse acknowledgment from nations outside the region, has further complicated the issue. The construction of identity without collective agreement is problematic. Nevertheless, Kurdish people have endured violent opposition to assert their unique place among world cultures.

For many Kurds, the challenge of identity negotiation is a reconciliation between the past and the present, between aspirations and reality. Their initial cultural spaces – homes and birthplaces – are extraordinarily dissimilar and cannot be neatly encapsulated under a single label. One person I interviewed described this struggle, saying, “I feel like the culture repels me, and I repel the culture ... it’s a very conflicting feeling. I don’t think it’s just me. I found that a lot of people who are in my position, who come to a Western society at a young age and have grown up there, have this sort of a conflict where they can’t find peace ... I’m not this, but I’m not that either.”

Another person shared, “I am a prisoner of my culture.” These reflections suggest profound internal and external obstacles faced by Kurds in the diaspora as they navigate a sense of belonging and identity in host countries. They are caught between the pull of their cultural heritage and the push of their adopted societies, highlighting the complexity and emotional weight of forging an identity that encompasses both worlds.

In the diaspora, the shared identity among Kurds becomes more cohesive, overshadowing the divisions that exist in Kurdistan. Having been targets of oppression for so long, values such as fairness and equity hold profound significance for the Kurdish people. Kurds are deeply committed to their families and are known for their creativity, entrepreneurship, ambition, and patriotism. Despite thousands of years of history, it is only recently that Kurds are beginning to express who they are fully and freely.

It is both fascinating and perhaps a cruel irony that the full realization of Kurdish solidarity and identity is being achieved in multicultural environments, where Kurds adopt a shared language that is not a Kurdish dialect. While the social, political, linguistic, and religious differences present in Kurdistan also exist in the diaspora, they do not result in significant conflict.

The history of the Kurdish people represents millennia of struggle, survival, and the quest for an independent Kurdish state where Kurdish culture and identity can be fully expressed, free from any debate over their personhood or right to exist. My deepest hope is for a unified Kurdish people, both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, to find strength, solidarity, and peace in their shared heritage and aspirations. ●

Nationalism in Kurdistan A Historical and Sociopolitical Perspective



İbrahim Gürbüz

is the head of the Ismail Beşikçi Foundation.

To comprehend the historical trajectory of the Kurdish intellectual heritage, it is imperative to undertake a brief retrospective historical analysis. Beginning from the late Ottoman Empire period, we will examine the impact of colonial-assimilation policies implemented during the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and Kemalist eras on the development of the intellectual potential underpinning national and historical consciousness. Subsequently, we will attempt to elucidate the intellectual and cognitive consequences on Kurdish society and its intelligentsia of the displacement of Kurdish elites and intellectuals from Kurdistan, illustrating this impact with examples. Before delving into the devastation wrought

upon the intellectual accumulation in Kurdistan, we will also touch upon the concept of nationalism. In this context, we will explore themes such as diaspora nationalism, ethnic nationalism, and territorial nationalism, providing an outline of the main contours of the issue.

To facilitate a deeper understanding of these subjects, it is advantageous to first examine the observations of two eminent theorists of nationalism: Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith.

Benedict Anderson was a renowned political scientist and historian of Anglo-Irish descent. His 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and*



Photo: Sefin Hamid

“
Kurds were indoctrinated within
the Ottoman and subsequently
Turkish educational systems,
particularly in centers like Istanbul
”

Spread of Nationalism has since become a seminal text in the field of nationalism studies. According to Anderson, the formation and dissemination of nationalism transpired through elements such as the modernization process, the development of the press and printing technologies, and language standardization.

Particularly, the role of language and printing presses was pivotal in the emergence of modern nation-states.

An essential aspect of Anderson’s theory of nationalism is diaspora nationalism. Diaspora nationalists harbor the desire to maintain their national identity while simultaneously not wishing

to sever ties with the society in which they live. In other words, this type of nationalism functions as a “phantom foundation” for individuals who seek to experience a national connection but do not actually wish to detach from diaspora communities. This nationalism encompasses a longing for a lost homeland while also internal-

izing the society in which they reside as their homeland. For instance, the sentiments of some Kurdish intellectuals in Sweden are grounded in these principles. The concept of the “shared homeland” represents a much earlier stage in this context.

British historical sociologist Anthony D. Smith, meanwhile, categorized

nationalisms into two primary types: “ethnic” and “territorial.” According to this classification, territorial nationalism is distinguished from ethnic nationalism, which emphasizes ethnic continuity, by its attribution of sanctity to a specific piece of land and its identification of the community’s existence with that territory. Territorial nationalism is, by nature, focused on

founding a nation-state. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism does not focus on territory and, therefore, does not entail demands for independence and statehood; instead, it expresses the desire to exist culturally within the country in which it resides.

Considering this theoretical framework, when we examine the concept of Kurdistan and Kurdish nationalism, we observe how the social fabric and intellectual accumulation of Kurdish society have been devastated through processes of exile, plunder, denial, and assimilation. The centralization policies initiated by the Ottoman Empire in the first quarter of the 19th century, particularly the Tanzimat reforms launched by the 1839 Edict of Gulhane, aimed to abolish the administrative and political status of the Kurdish emirates. This was a maneuver to re-colonize and annex Kurdistan. To achieve this, efforts were made to dismantle political and administrative structures such as Kurdish *mirs* and the emirate system, as well as to persecute Kurdish intellectuals.

The operation initiated with this rationale was concluded in the mid-19th century. Kurdish *mirs* and their families were exiled from Kurdistan and relocated to Istanbul and other regions of the Ottoman Empire. Emergent Turkish nationalism, rooted in the late Ottoman period, perpetuated its colonial policy towards the Kurds and Kurdistan during the era of the CUP. The resolutions made at the secret CUP congress held in Salonica in 1911 were meticulously implemented, resulting in the continuation of policies of exile, demographic restructuring, and colonial assimilation.

Additionally, the development of land-based nationalism was hindered by the displacement of Kurdish intellectuals from their ancestral lands. Turkish nationalism has largely achieved its goals by leaving the Kurds leaderless and devoid of intellectuals, and by relentlessly pursuing

the assimilation of Kurds and other ethnic groups within former Ottoman territories. This rupture has deeply affected Kurdish intellectual circles, particularly obstructing the formation of homeland-based nationalism.

As I mentioned earlier, nationalist thought typically evolves and spreads through instruments such as schools, universities, and printed materials established on national territory. However, the Kurdish community and its intellectuals have been deprived of these instruments. Deprived of these opportunities, Kurds were in-

In certain regions of Kurdistan, notably Barzan and Behdinan, which Ottoman-Turkish, Persian, and Arab colonizers invaded multiple times but failed to annex, the colonial assimilation policy could not be implemented. Consequently, in these regions, the intellectual accumulation that emerged, particularly in the *madrasas*, contributed to the development of land-based Kurdish nationalism. However, in regions where Kurdish leaders and intellectuals were exiled, where Kurdish *mutasarrifs* (provincial governors) and military commanders were appointed to the upper

the development of land-based nationalism.

The pioneers of Ottoman-Turkish assimilation policies, by orchestrating the exile of Kurdish intellectuals from their lands to hinder the formation of homeland-based nationalist thought, demonstrated their expertise in large-scale social engineering. Musa Anter, a Kurdish intellectual who was exiled to Istanbul by the Diyarbakir Police Department and lived in Istanbul for a long time, stated that “we cannot do without Bodrum and Izmir,” an indication of the impact of exile on



■ Ghazi Mobammad saluting peshmerga comrades while declaring the Republic of Mahabad in 1946

doctrinated within the Ottoman and subsequently Turkish educational systems, particularly in centers like Istanbul. Consequently, while Arab, Greek, and Bulgarian intellectuals demanded independent states, Kurdish intellectuals defended the unity of the Ottoman Empire. During this process, Kurds demanded language and cultural rights within the unity of the Ottoman Empire but did not demand freedom and independence. Therefore, land-based national consciousness did not develop among Kurdish intellectuals educated outside of Kurdistan.

cadres of the Ottoman Empire, and where colonial annexation occurred, a “landless” nationalism developed with a focus on the unity of the Empire and state.

Despite the strong longing for their homeland among Kurdish intellectuals in the diaspora, land-based nationalism did not develop. The reason is clear: these intellectuals were disconnected from their ancestral society and land. Their material conditions shaped their thoughts. Diaspora intellectuals romanticize and idealize their homeland due to their separation from the land, ultimately hindering

nationalist thought.

In the early 1900s, many Kurdish intellectuals living in exile, especially in Istanbul, Paris, and Cairo, advocated for the unity of the Ottoman Empire, even though they had once aligned themselves with the CUP movement. Meanwhile, other constituent ethnicities of the Ottoman Empire advocated for an independent state. For instance, Sharif Hussein of Mecca, through his diplomatic communications with British military diplomats, orchestrated the establishment of separate states for Arabs in former Ottoman territories, with himself as

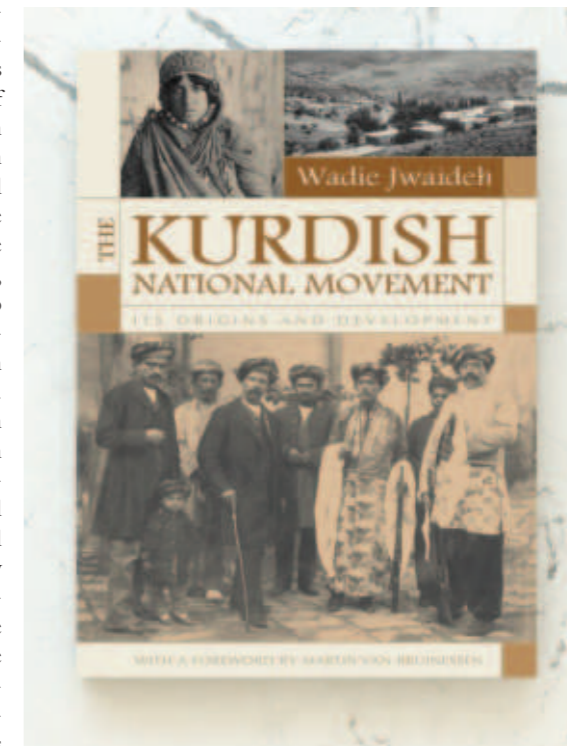
the King of Saudi Arabia, his eldest son Abdullah as the King of Jordan, and his younger son Faisal as the King of Iraq, stating “we do not want the Ottomans, we do not want the Sultan, we want an independent state.” During this period, Turkish intellectuals also sought the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and struggled for the establishment of a Turkish state. Similarly, Balkan nations gained their independence through the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds, however, only demanded language and cultural rights within the unity of the Ottoman Empire.

The exile of Kurdish intellectuals from Kurdistan and their detachment from Kurdish society prevented the formation of a widely accepted concept of land-based nationalism. Therefore, there was no demand for independence. Apart from Emin Ali Bedir Khan, Abdurrezzak Bedir Khan, Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani, and Haji Qadir Koyi, most intellectuals advocated for the unity of the Ottoman Empire. In the breakup of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, all the nations in the Balkans and the Middle East gained independence, whereas the Kurds, due to their lack of demand for independence, did not even achieve a mandate status. If the *mirs* had not been liquidated in the mid-19th century and Kurdish intellectuals had not been detached from their lands, land-based nationalism would likely have developed in Kurdistan, and Kurds could have had an independent state following World War I. Ottoman-Turkish thought recognized this possibility, thus taking measures to prevent it by removing the leading figures of Kurdish society from Kurdistan.

Moreover, I would like to draw attention to a phenomenon that warrants

“
The exile of Kurdish intellectuals from Kurdistan and their detachment from Kurdish society prevented the formation of a widely accepted concept of land-based nationalism
”

additional study. It is possible to observe even today the political differences between regions in Kurdistan where *mutasarrifs* and military com-



manders were appointed by the Ottomans and those where they were not. For example, on the whole no colonial empires appointed commanders and *mutasarrifs* from the Barzan-Be-

hdinan region. Therefore, education and teaching were conducted in *madrasas* in these areas, and printed materials also emerged. This pattern is evident in the lives of notable Kurdish intellectuals such as Hizni Mukriyani, who first established a printing press in Aleppo and later moved it to Rawanduz. From this, we see that *madrasas* served as schools and centers for the publishing activities necessary for the development of land-based nationalism in Southern and Eastern Kurdistan, where colonial annexation did not take place.

Additionally, Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani, a prominent leader in the Barzan-Behdinan region, conducted a struggle for independence and for the use of the Kurdish language on his own land. This example demonstrates that a continued connection to the land shaped a form of land-based nationalism. Today, while political actors from this region demand independence and statehood, most political leaders raised in regions where land-based nationalism did not develop and where commanders and *mutasarrifs* were appointed by colonial states advocate for the unity and democratization of the nation-states of Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

As a result, there is a great similarity between the advocacy for the unity of the Ottoman Empire by a large section of Kurdish intellectuals and politicians based in Istanbul in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the advocacy for unity and democratization in Türkiye by mainstream Kurdish politics in Northern Kurdistan today. Likewise, land-based nationalists represented by Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani in the early 1900s advocated for language and independence at that time, just as Kurdish political actors from those regions demand independence and statehood. ●

Drinking Champagne for Love and Freedom in *The Diplomat*



Kani Xulam

is a commentator on the history and politics of Kurdistan and an advocate for the Kurdish people's right to self-determination. He serves as the director of the American Kurdish Information Network.

An American woman married to a Kurdish man recommended a book to me while we were enjoying tea and pastries in their living room. The book, titled *The Diplomat*, is authored by James Aldridge. This scene comes to mind when Botan Tahseen of the *Kurdistan Chronicle* approaches me for a submission to his magazine. I re-read the book last week and thought, "Yes, I can write a review for him."

"Happiness," says the American historian David McCullough, "makes people think better."

“

Lord Essex wants to keep the British in, the Russians out, and the Kurds and the Azeris down

”

Living in a corner of the world that produces a lot of misery and bad thinking – and beheadings too! – could art be the remedy for our ills? After reading the 1949 novel *The Diplomat* by Australian writer James Aldridge, the resounding answer is: Yes, it can!

The Diplomat spans the three capital cities of London, Moscow, and Tehran, but Kurdistan is at the heart of the story, taking up the age-old struggle of the Kurds

for a place of their own under the sun. The main theme of the novel is liberty, which finds its nemesis in an equally powerful theme of order, the old, traditional variety of order that is. If you liked the movie *Braveheart*, you will enjoy *The Diplomat*.

World War II has just ended and the Cold War has yet to begin, but the world's countries are already forced to choose sides between the Western capitalist world and the Soviet socialist one. London and Moscow will decide on which side Iran will fall.

The story's three leading characters – the diplomat Lord Harold Essex, his assistant Ivre Angus MacGregor or Mac, and their assistant Katherine Clive – undertake a powerful journey across the regions within and around Kurdistan.

First to Moscow

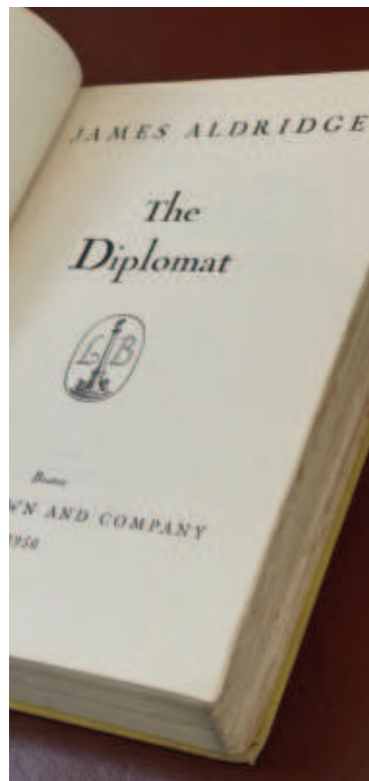
We already know what happens to Iran. With a bit of help from the United States, the British prevail and the Soviets withdraw, but the book describes how London and Moscow fight over the prize. If the Russians had stayed in Iran, the Republic of Mahabad and the Azerbaijan People's Government might still exist today.

The novel starts with a plane ride from London to Moscow in December 1945 carrying Lord Essex and Mac, as well as some Soviet natives who are heading home. Flying through inclement weather, the plane crashes in a field of snow near the Soviet capital. The plane is damaged, but the passengers survive, and Lord Essex and Mac make it to Moscow by sled and car.



What Lord Essex wants to do in Iran is identical to what Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, the first Secretary General of the NATO, would later do in Europe: keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down. More specifically, Lord Essex wants to keep the British in, the Russians out, and the Kurds and the Azeris down, so that a grateful Shah would then favor the British in Tehran.

That is the ultimate plan. But then there are events, pesky unplanned occurrences that rattle the best of plots, that bring Lord Essex and Mac face-to-face first in Iran and then in



London. The fact that the cause of Kurdish freedom ruptures their relationship makes you want to uncork a bottle of champagne at this point.

But let the champagne chill a little longer until you, dear reader, reach the end of this review. Lord Essex speaks neither Russian nor Persian, but Mac grew up in Iran and speaks both nearly fluently. He also knows something else: that freedom is the

birthright of the Kurds and their neighbors, the Azeris.

In Moscow, the meetings with the Russians do not go well. Meanwhile, at the British Embassy, the encounters with the embassy staff spark an unexpected romance. First, Mac falls head over heels in love with Katherine, but Lord Essex thinks she should belong to him. This tension adds flavor to the days in Moscow until Stalin finally says he is ready to receive Lord Essex.

The plan in Iran

The Russian leader has stationed troops in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan since 1941, with both provinces practicing self-rule. Stalin knows that neither the Kurds nor the Azeris want to submit to the Shah and urges Lord Essex to visit the region to find out for himself.

“
Like the Kurds, we
have been defeated, but
never conquered
”

Lord Essex and Mac do just that. After landing in Tehran, instead of directly driving to Tabriz, the larger challenge, Lord Essex suggests that they take a detour through Kurdistan. While preparing for the trip, Katherine joins them. With the embassy driver at their command, they head toward the mountains, the land of the Kurds.

Once there, they meet a Yezidi leader, who gives them an earful. He tells them how they worship their archangel, *Tawusi Melek*.

But what pleases Katherine even more is what the non-Yezidi Persians

say about the faith of the Yezidi: that they worship the Devil, the fallen angel, because the Devil is stronger than God. And what is their proof for that? “Because it is quite obvious from the amount of evil on earth that God is not all-powerful.”

Finally, they meet the Kurds. Mac, a Scotsman, sympathizes with their struggle for self-determination. When a Kurd named Salim asks him if the Scottish were conquered by the English, Mac responds, “like the Kurds, we have been defeated, but never conquered.”

Lord Essex, on the other hand, is on another planet. He cares only for two things: the oil fields of Abadan in Iran and those of Mosul and Kirkuk in Iraq.

If the Republic of Mahabad stays intact, the oil fields of Mosul may be in jeopardy, as the Kurds in Iraq may seek their annexation into Kurdistan proper, muses the diplomat. He locates Kurds who oppose the Republic of Mahabad and bribes them. This infuriates Mac. Nevertheless, the seeds of the conflict are sown. In London, the battle lines are drawn.

Lord Essex’s mission looks like a slam-dunk, until Mac decides to take the matter into his own hands and, with the able help of Katherine, connects with journalists and key members of the British Parliament.

In the ensuing debate in the House of Commons, the Tories cry wolf and want to punish Mac for blowing the whistle on Lord Essex. The Labour Party rises to his defense. At this point, the English language reaches new heights of eloquence that make you want to be alive just to see how it is done!

Something else happens after that magnificent verbal jousting: Katherine finally dumps Lord Essex and chooses Mac. Now is the time to pour that champagne and give a toast to love and freedom! ●



Discover the Kurdistan in America Podcast
The official podcast of the KRG Representation in the US

Your gateway to the rich ties between Kurdistan and the United States

A Special Guest Every Month!

Season 5 - Episode 5



Delovan Barwari

Host

Delovan Barwari is the Director of Academic Affairs and Strategic Initiatives at the KRG Representation in the United States.



Dr. Carolyn Melby

Guest

Dr. Carolyn Melby is the Co-Founder and Treasurer of the NMDC Foundation. She holds a PhD and is an RN, ANP, and CCH Global Health Consultant.

Join Delovan and Dr. Carolyn Melby as they discuss the mission and vision of the Kurdistan Nursing and Midwifery Development Foundation, as well as the current challenges facing the nursing sector in Kurdistan.



Scan to listen to episode

Podcast also available at pod.link/KurdistaninAmerica

ADVENTURE

Journey Through Kurdistan's Scenic Routes



Leon McCarron

is a writer, broadcaster, and hiking trail designer from Northern Ireland. He authored "Wounded Tigris: A River Journey through the Cradle of Civilisation" and has traveled over 50,000 km by human power in the past decade.

The Zagros Mountain Trail (ZMT) is a 215-kilometer-long route that runs west to east through the mountains of the Kurdistan Region. The project joins together pre-existing pathways, many of which have been used for hundreds of years by the communities who live there. The ambition of the ZMT is to reimagine these traditional paths as a modern-day cultural route that can be enjoyed by both local and inter-

national walkers. Those who travel on the trail meet with guides from each area and can spend evenings in village homes. Through those interactions, and the striking sights and scenery, they begin to learn the story of Kurdistan, as told via a journey on foot.

The ZMT concept has been a work-in-progress since 2016, but has only recently opened to the public. At this point, all visitors are encouraged to

walk with local guides so that they contribute to the economy of the areas they pass through. Additionally, with every journey on the path led by someone from the community, the project will always belong to those who live on the trail.

Every visitor to the ZMT is equally important and receives the same hospitality and welcome, regardless of where they are from. Sometimes,



“

The U.S. Consul General in Erbil Mark Stroh, several of his staff, and others made the journey through the first stage of the ZMT

”

however, there are those for whom the visit holds an extra layer of meaning. At the end of May 2024, the U.S. Consul General in Erbil Mark Stroh, several of his staff, and others made the journey through the first stage of the ZMT: walking between the villages of Shush and Gundik. For those associated with the project, visits like this recognize the values and goals of the initiative, and are an opportunity to showcase the elements that make the region so special to a new and different demographic.

Breakfast first

Consul General Stroh and his team arrived at Shush early on a Tuesday morning. His first stop was the home of the village mukhtar Nader Mustafa, the head of the local government, whose family had prepared breakfast for the entourage. It was almost certainly the largest single group to visit this part of the ZMT, but the fifty or so guests were presented with a generous spread of olives, cheese, eggs, freshly baked bread, fruit from the trees behind the house, and an array of honey and jam. When I first started walking in Kurdistan, in 2016, I was told by a village host one morning that any journey on foot is only as successful as the breakfast that precedes it, and I am often reminded how true that is. As the route leaves Shush it passes by a graveyard with simple upright stones that mark the resting places of one-time Jewish and Christian residents of the village. The Jewish heritage is particularly prominent, and just a few hundred meters along the trail is a recently renovated synagogue dedicated to the Prophet Ezekiel. It is hidden from view at first, with its stone roof

covered by grass so that it blends into the hillside, but from below the exterior and low doorway become clear. By some estimates the initial structure of the synagogue was first built 700 years ago, and it remained in use until 1948. The recent rehabilitation of the site was catalyzed by a visit from a previous U.S. Consul General in 2020.



Close by is a stone arch over a natural spring, which Mustafa also attributes to the Jewish community. “Shush was always known for its diversity,” he told the Consul General. “We’re proud that so many different people have lived side by side here.”

Safe, beautiful, and accessible

The group walked for a few hours along the shepherds’ tracks that wind out of Shush and along a small valley bounded on one side by high, craggy limestone and on the other by a lower, sharper ridge, with seams of rust and golden soil shining through. These hills are the final barrier before the great plains begin beyond, stretching out toward Mosul and the south.



As we moved, small groups split off to walk together and talk: American diplomats and members of the local community; outdoor tourism advocates and English language teachers. This is the beauty of a trail – it connects travelers to the heritage of the location, but also makes space for spontaneous conversations, and brings together people that might otherwise rarely get a chance to meet. Omer Chomani, owner and founder of tourism company VIKurdistan who helped facilitate the walk, said that this is one of his favorite thing



about tourism: watching people have new experiences together.

The route of the trail descends from a high point towards the village of Gundik, nestled around a series of springs that feed bright, bountiful orchards. There, the group stopped one last time at the remains of the Mar Odisho monastery. Its glory has faded, but the 400-year old walls still stand, and the rooms suggest what it might have looked like in the past. On the opposite hillside is a large cave where reliefs carved into the rock date to around 3,000 BC, making them some of the oldest and most important in the region. Like so many sites here, much remains unknown, awaiting further exploration.

“I was really stunned by the beauty of the landscape along

the ZMT,” said Consul General Stroh in Gundik, where his journey finished. He was deeply impressed by the kindness and generosity of spirit of the locals, he added. “We hope it encourages more people from Iraq and around the world to visit, and to help develop the local economy.”

Miran Dizayee, one of the key figures in the founding of the ZMT, explained that events like this are important because they help show others that the trail is safe, beautiful, and accessible, and because the at-

tention builds civic pride to those living along its route. Mustafa summed it up, saying “our homes are always open to everyone. I hope this is one of many trips where people from all over the world come to experience the beauty of Kurdistan.” ●





Sardar Trading Agencies

Baghdad: Abu Ja'far Al-Mansour Sq. Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (770) 909 4444

Erbil: Gulan St. Kurdistan, Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (750) 710 4444

www.sta.iq | info@sta.iq

Kurdistan and China An Evolving Relationship



Janghis Awakalay

is an experienced
International Political
Observer and Analyst
with over 15 years in
international relations.

The relationship between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), particularly the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and China has been evolving significantly in recent years. This relationship, largely driven by economic interests, reflects broader geopolitical shifts and the growing influence of China in the Middle East. This article unpacks several key developments that highlight how China has increased its engagement with Iraq and the KRI.

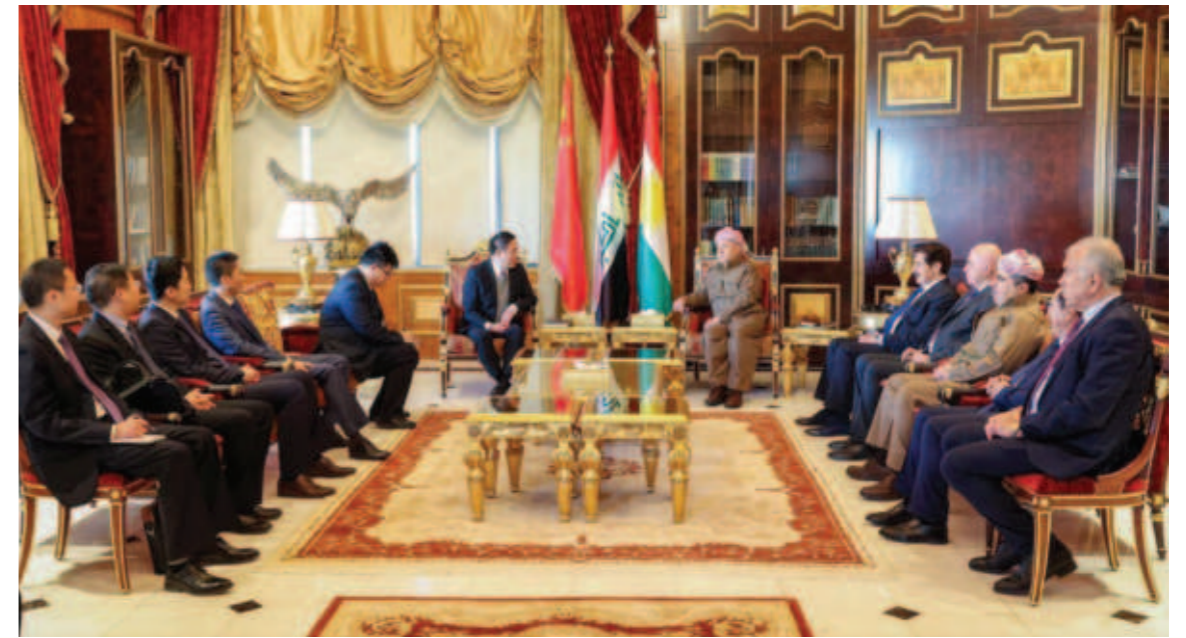
Support during the pandemic: The Covid-19 pandemic played a crucial role in strengthening China's presence in the Middle East, including Iraq and the KRI. China supplied vaccines and medical supplies to the region, garnering significant appreciation from regional officials and the public during the pandemic. This aid came at a time when concerns were heightened about a potential U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and northeastern Syria. Furthermore, China's mediation efforts between Middle Eastern rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, and other activities in the region have prompted closer relations with China.

Diversification beyond oil: Traditionally, China's relationship with Iraq centered around oil. However, this dynamic has evolved. To be sure, the KRI's rich oil reserves have attracted significant Chinese investment due to China's global strategy to secure energy resources. In 2009, Sinopec acquired Addax Petroleum, which held substantial oil assets in the KRI. Similarly, the China National Petroleum Corporation has been involved in exploration and production activities in the region.

Yet, at the same time, Chinese companies are now securing contracts in various sectors, including infrastructure and development projects in the KRI. For instance, the KRG recently signed a memorandum of understanding with PowerChina International Group to construct four dams in the region. Chinese companies often outpace Western firms due to their flexibility and state-owned status, allowing them to offer more attractive deals. One notable project is the \$5 billion Happy City residential and leisure development in Erbil, signaling China's commitment to expanding its footprint in the region beyond the oil sector. Additionally, there are plans to build a Consulate General building on a 30,000-square meter plot of land.

Diplomatic relations: Before the 2000s, the relationship between the KRI and China was minimal due to the KRI's lack of formal international recognition and its complex political status within Iraq. However, after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the KRI became more stable and semi-autonomous, paving the way for increased international engagement, including with China.

China's approach to diplomatic relations with Iraq and the KRI emphasizes respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal politics. Chinese academics argue that China views the KRI as representative of the Kurdish people in Iraq, who are estimated to number over 6 million, and thus gives special status to the relationship. Although China does not officially recognize the KRI as a separate state, it engages with the KRG through diplomatic channels in Baghdad and directly with the KRG's representatives. China also has



President Masoud Barzani (right) during his meeting with Zhu Rui (left), Assistant Minister of the International Department of the Communist Central Committee, on February 13, 2023



Janghis Awakalay in Kurdish attire visiting the Great Wall of China

good relations with the political parties in the KRI, which helps strengthen bilateral relations.

Cultural and educational exchanges: Chinese universities offer scholarships to Kurdish students, fostering better understanding and long-term relationships. Initiatives to promote Chinese culture in the KRI and Kurdish culture in China, such as language

courses and cultural festivals, have also been implemented. China's soft power strategy in the KRI includes establishing language centers, offering fellowships, and forming educational partnerships. For instance, Huawei's Information and Communication Technology academies provide training and certification, enhancing local employment prospects. Continuous courses support public employees and

institutions in performing better and making improvements in their workplaces.

Regional stability and security: China values the stability of the KRI due to its strategic location and economic potential. Ensuring a stable environment in the KRI is crucial for the safety of Chinese investments and personnel. Consistent with its broad-



Photo: Saifin Hamid

“

China National Petroleum Corporation has been involved in exploration and production activities in the region

”



er foreign policy, China adheres to a principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, focusing on economic and trade relations while avoiding entanglement in local political conflicts.

In this context, the KRG has sought to expand trade relations with China, exporting oil and other commodities. In return, Chinese goods and services have increasingly penetrated the Kurdish market. Regular exchanges of business delegations between the KRI and China have been organized to explore further opportunities for cooperation. Despite the growth in economic engagements, the KRI has

little presence or influence in China, reflecting the asymmetry in their interactions.

Future prospects: The future of the China-KRI relationship is likely to be influenced by broader geopolitical trends. China is one of the largest markets for Kurdish businessmen and traders due to its competitive prices. This trend is expected to foster exchanges and cultural engagement, increasing Kurdish interest in China for education, business, and tourism.

The KRG must continue to maintain good and beneficial relations with

both China and the United States, among other countries, to ensure the region's interests are protected. China's involvement in the KRI is growing, characterized by significant economic and soft power initiatives. However, the relationship faces challenges, including political asymmetry, regional dynamics, and the U.S.-China global rivalry. As both sides pursue their respective interests, the relationship will likely remain complex and multifaceted. Balancing ties with both superpowers is crucial for the KRG to ensure long-term benefits while navigating the geopolitical complexities of the evolving global order. ●

Empowering Kurdistan Through Energy Diplomacy



Sherzad Ahmed Shahab

is a PhD candidate in Financial Economics, School of Economics, Finance, and Banking, Northern University of Malaysia.

The Kurdistan Region has long been known for its substantial hydrocarbon reserves, making energy diplomacy a central pillar of its economic and political strategy. With the Kurdistan Regional Government estimating the region to possess 45 billion barrels of oil reserves and as much as 200 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves – each respectively about 3% of total global reserves – the Kurdistan Region’s resource wealth positions it as a pivotal energy player in the Middle East and world.

The Kurdistan Region’s use of energy diplomacy seeks to harness these resources and advance its domestic economic agenda, while helping to provide energy security for the world. Yet energy diplomacy requires that nations work together to foster geopolitical security, economic collaboration, and environmental sustainability.

Strategic diplomacy

Under the guidance of KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, the Kurdistan Region has

“

Under the guidance of KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, the Kurdistan Region has intensified efforts to diversify its energy export routes and attract foreign investment

”

Photo: Safin Hamid

intensified efforts to diversify its energy export routes and attract foreign investment. In 2023, a landmark \$5-billion investment deal with major international energy firms was signed that would double the region's oil-production capacity from 450,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 900,000 bpd by 2025. This significant investment speaks to the region's latent productive potential and enhances its geopolitical leverage.

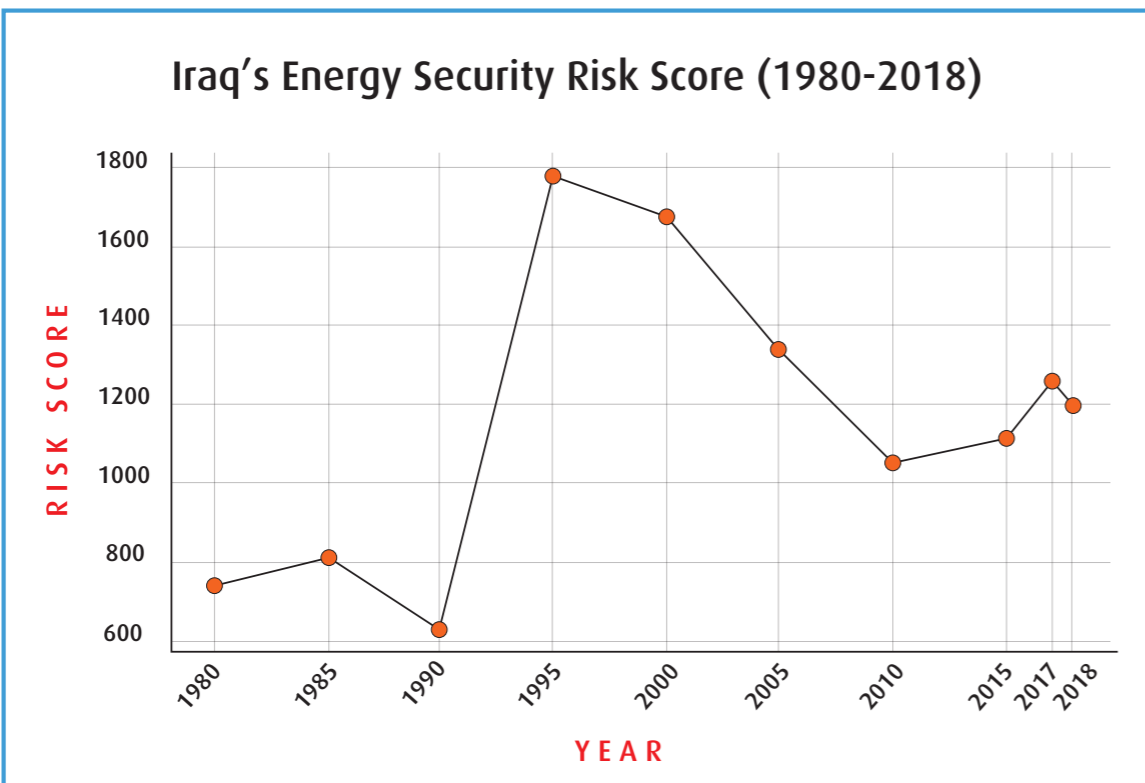
The International Energy Agency defines energy security in the short and long-term. In the short term, energy security encompasses the resilience of energy infrastructure to adapt swiftly to abrupt fluctuations in supply and demand, but in the long term, it involves the alignment of energy supply with economic growth and environmental sustainability. This dual framework underpins the Kurdistan Region's diplomatic and economic initiatives: to ensure that its energy supply chains remain robust and to adapt to global market dynamics and environmental directives. A pivotal focus of the Kurdistan Region's energy diplomacy has been negotiating with the Iraqi federal government to resolve the long-standing dispute over oil revenue sharing. The breakthrough agreement in 2023, which stipulated a fair revenue-sharing formula that ensured 17% of the federal oil revenue for the Kurdistan Region, paved the way for economic stability and growth. This resolution is expected to unlock further exploration and production activities, with oil-export revenues projected to rise 30% in the next two years, significantly bolstering the Kurdistan

Region's fiscal position. The Iraqis have still not adhered to the agreement, delaying the resumption of Kurdistan Region's oil exports to Türkiye, halted since February 2023.

The strategic use of energy diplomacy has significant economic implications for the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. The anticipated increase in oil production and exports is projected to boost the region's GDP by at least 8% annually over the next five years. Moreover, the energy sector's expansion is expected to create over 20,000 new jobs by 2025, reducing unemployment and stimulating economic activity across ancillary industries.

Managing risk

The Energy Security Risk Score, as calculated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute, reveals the volatile history of Iraq's oil sector. Starting from a score of 742 in 1980, Iraq's energy security risk peaked in 1993 at 1784, underscoring the severe challenges of sanctions following the Gulf War as well as enduring geopolitical tensions in the region. After 2003, conflict and reconstruction created further volatility until steady, gradual improvement in the 2010s. For the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, managing these risks is crucial for sustaining economic growth and ensuring reliable energy supplies domestically and internationally.



As the Kurdistan Region continues to harness its significant energy resources and strengthen its position in the global energy market, the path forward requires a multifaceted approach. To this end, the Kurdistan Region should prioritize economic diversification beyond the energy sector, investing in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and technology, to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and build a more resilient economy. Additionally, fostering an environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation will be crucial, which necessitates creating policies that support small and medium-sized enterprises, streamlining regulatory frameworks, and enhancing access to finance for startups.

Moreover, the Kurdistan Region should continue to strengthen its international relationships in energy diplomacy and work to attract foreign investment across various industries. Enhancing transparency, governance, and legal frameworks will be key to building investor confidence, while education and workforce development tailored to the needs of a diversifying economy will ensure that the Kurdistan Region has the skilled labor force required to drive future growth.

Finally, the Kurdistan Region should invest in sustainable practices and renewable energy sources and technologies to address both environmental concerns and energy security. Renewable energy projects, such as solar and

wind power, can provide clean alternatives that complement the region's existing energy portfolio and stimulate new avenues for international collaboration and funding.

The Kurdistan Region's use of energy diplomacy underscores its proactive stance in utilizing natural resources for economic gain and stability. Emphasizing diversification, the Kurdistan Region aims to broaden its economic base, while fostering an environment that attracts foreign investment and encourages innovation. With a focus on sustainable energy and international cooperation, the Kurdistan Region can navigate global energy dynamics effectively, ensure a prosperous future for its citizens, and become a significant contributor to global energy security. ●

Kurdish *Shal* A Symbol of Cultural Authenticity



Peshraw Mahdi

is a freelance journalist and photographer with substantial experience in the field, having worked for numerous media agencies over several years. He has won multiple awards in photojournalism.

Kurdish attire stands out as a distinctive feature of the nation's cultural identity, showcasing unique symbols like the *Shal*, which holds significant folkloric value among the Kurdish people. This traditional garment is donned in various styles across all the different regions of Kurdistan, with each region contributing its own nuances to the overall aesthetic.

The attire worn by Kurdish men and women reflects the diverse characteristics of different Kurdish regions. From mountainous terrains to desert landscapes, Kurdish clothing adapts to local environments, with variations in style and fit noticeable across different geographies.

Historically, the *Shal* has been associated with Kurdish regions like Bahdinan and

Hawraman, where it has been worn for generations, shaping its design and significance over time. Today, it stands as a quintessential element of Kurdish attire, evolving in terms of color, design, and craftsmanship. While traditional *Shals* were limited in color options, contemporary versions offer a wider spectrum.

In the marketplace, *Shals* are categorized into three main types: Ranya, Bahdinan (especially Zakho city), and Hawraman, each distinguished by its sewing methods and pricing. Zakho *Shals* are renowned for their meticulous craftsmanship and command the highest prices due to the quality of materials and intricate preparation process, which utilizes premium Marz hair.

Typically reserved for special occasions like weddings and festivals, *Shals* are trea-

“

Historically, the *Shal* has been associated with Kurdish regions like Bahdinan and Hawraman

”



A man in traditional Kurdish costume

Photos: Peshraw Mahdi





A man in traditional Kurdish costume



A group of men dancing in traditional Kurdish clothing



A man tailoring Kurdish clothing

Photos: Fesbram Mabdi

sured for their longevity and durability, lasting up to 30 to 35 years with minimal maintenance. They are particularly favored during festivities like *Newroz*, contributing to the cultural fabric of Kurdish celebrations.

The revival and preservation of Kurdish clothing, including the iconic *Shal*, hold cultural significance, as these garments serve as tangible links to Kurdish heritage. While traditional production methods have waned over time, there is a renewed interest in preserving these artisanal practices, ensuring that future generations remain connected to their cultural roots.

Adel Ali, a *Shal* vendor in Halabja, attests to the enduring appeal of these garments, especially during festive seasons like *Newroz* and *Ramadan*. The intricate sewing process, involving lengths of fabric up to 25 meters, highlights the craftsmanship and attention to detail involved in creating each *Shal*.

From sourcing raw materials like wool from sheep or goats to the intricate dyeing and weaving processes, crafting a *Shal* is a labor-intensive endeavor that requires skill and precision. The wool is meticulously washed, cut, and dyed before being woven into fabric using specialized machinery and techniques, culminating in the creation of this iconic Kurdish garment.

In essence, Kurdish clothing, epitomized by the timeless *Shal*, embodies the rich tapestry of Kurdish culture, weaving history, tradition, and craftsmanship into every thread. As efforts to preserve and promote these cultural treasures continue, they serve as enduring symbols of Kurdish identity and pride. ●

Embracing Heritage and Inspiring Millions



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.

With over one million Instagram followers, Sazan Hendrix is a well-known Kurdish-American author, entrepreneur, YouTuber, and digital influencer. She started her blogging journey in 2011 and subsequently modeled for Tommy Hilfiger. Along with her husband Stevie, she hosted a popular podcast, *The Good Life*. The couple leans into the idea of finding joy in simplicity, something they focus on in their podcast as well as their new book, *A Real Good Life: Discover the Simple Moments That Bring Joy, Connection, and Love*. Recently, Sazan sat down with *Kurdistan Chronicle* for an exclusive interview.



Sazan was born in 1989 in the United States after her parents immigrated there from the Kurdistan Region in search of a better life. "Growing up in Dallas and then moving around the country, I've always been deeply rooted in my Kurdish heritage while embracing the opportunities and experiences in the United States, a place I consider home," she says.

Sazan's background is diverse, blending traditional Kurdish values with the modern American way of life. She pursued her education in the United States, studying broadcast and media at the University of North Texas, which laid the foundation for her career in the digital space.

"I feel deeply honored and humbled to be living my purpose as an author, digital influencer, and entrepreneur, where I strive to inspire others by sharing the profound moments of both chaos and magic that fill my daily life," she says. Over the last decade, she has cultivated an online community reaching millions, and yet, she senses this journey has just begun. Sazan currently resides in Austin, Texas, with her loving husband and their three beautiful children, cherishing each moment as an opportunity to spread love, light, and positivity.

Not forgetting Kurdistan

Despite being born and raised in the United States, Sazan speaks fluent Kurdish. I was curious to know how she had managed to learn the language so well. I also observed that her husband Stevie, who is an American, and their children also spoke Kurdish and asked how that came to be. Sazan was eager to answer this question.

"I've always maintained a strong connection to my Kurdish roots, including fluency in the language," she says. She learned Kurdish primarily from

her parents, who made it a priority to pass down the language and culture to her and her four siblings. "Now, I'm passionate about paying it forward and passing on this invaluable heritage to my own children, ensuring they grow up with a deep appreciation for their Kurdish identity," she says.

Through language, food, and music, Sazan aims to instill a sense of pride in her children's heritage and nurture a connection to her ancestral homeland



The children of Kurdish immigrants play an important role in instilling the culture and language in their children. They also expect their kids to preserve this culture and abide by it. In Sazan's case, she decided to break through cultural barriers and navigate her own desires, goals, and dreams.

"Marrying my best friend wasn't without its hardships and trials," Sazan admits. "In our family, we loved hard, and there was a time when they strug-

gled to accept my decision to marry outside our culture. Their lack of support was difficult to bear."

Although the couple encountered many challenges before Sazan's family accepted Stevie, today they adore him even more than they do Sazan! "It's remarkable how he shares my passion for our heritage and wholeheartedly supports our efforts to instill Kurdish values in our children," she says.

Their shared commitment in honoring Sazan's roots has strengthened their bond and created a beautiful fusion of traditions within their family dynamic. Sazan has shared her love story countless times, hoping to inspire other young girls facing similar obstacles.

When asked about the differences and similarities she sees between Kurdistan and the United States in regard to culture and values, she believes that, like two distinct landscapes, Kurdish and American cultures are shaped by their own histories and societal narratives. Each holds its reservoir of strengths and challenges, reminiscent of the peaks and valleys of a mountain range. Growing up in the United States, Sazan has been immersed in a landscape abundant with opportunities and freedoms, yet a profound connection to Kurdistan runs deep within

her. Her family's story, akin to that of countless Kurdish families worldwide, resonates with tales of courage, sacrifice, and the indomitable spirit of the Kurds.

"I take great pride in this heritage. It's an integral part of my journey and will always remain so," she says.

Preserving and promoting Kurdish culture is deeply personal for Sazan and her family. One way they actively do this is through weekly family

“
Sazan Hendrix
is a well-known
Kurdish-American
author, entrepreneur,
YouTuber, and digital
influencer
”





nights, where they come together to celebrate their culture and open their home to others.

“Hospitality is one of the greatest forms of love, and I believe it can move mountains. Whether it is cooking traditional Kurdish dishes, sharing stories from our homeland, or listening to Kurdish music, these intentional gatherings serve as a reminder of who we are and where we come from,” Sazan says.

“My hope is that through my large platform I can invite others into our culture to ensure that Kurdish heritage continues to thrive for generations to come,” she says.

A Real Good Life

Sazan’s last visit to the Kurdistan region was back in 2015. Eager to know if she had any future plans to visit the Kurdistan Region, I asked what she thought about the current state of development and tourism in the region. She describes the trip as a deeply personal journey that stirred her soul and reignited her passion for preserving Kurdish culture.

“Core memories from that trip are marked in my heart: wandering through bustling markets filled with vibrant colors and the aroma of spices, savoring the flavors of delicious Kurdish cuisine, and experiencing the slower pace of life with distant relatives who live there – a pace I’ve come to appreciate even more in today’s distracted world,” she reminisced.

While Sazan does not have any immediate plans to visit again, she hopes to return one day with her entire family, to share with them the beauty and resilience of her homeland. In terms of development and tourism, Sazan notes that “Kurdistan has made significant strides in recent years, drawing visitors with its breathtaking landscapes, rich history, and vibrant culture. It’s the one place in the Middle East that I believe is so magical and peaceful.”



When I ask Sazan about what shaped the person she is today, she immediately reminisces about her childhood and the values of resilience, perseverance, and family unity that her parents instilled in her. Growing up as part of the Kurdish diaspora, she learned the importance of staying true to her roots while embracing the opportunities that life presents.

“These values have guided me through life’s challenges and shaped the person I am today: a proud Kurdish woman with a passion for sharing my heart and soul with the world,” she says.

As a stateless Kurd, Sazan’s journey in the United States has been both rewarding and bittersweet. While she has found success and fulfillment, the absence of a Kurdish homeland always weighs heavily on her heart. “However, it has also fueled my determination to conquer my greatest fears, inspire others through faith, and be a strong voice for my people to preserve our culture in any way I can,” she says.

Sazan and her husband Stevie co-authored *A Real Good Life: Discover*

the Simple Moments That Bring Joy, Connection, and Love, which was published in October 2023. Sazan explains that this debut book is more than just a book for her; it’s a reflection of her soul and the lessons that she has learned along the way. “Through personal anecdotes, practical advice, and inspirational insights, I aim to empower Kurdish girls to pursue their dreams, embrace their heritage, and live their best lives,” she says.

Sazan hopes that this book serves as a guiding light for young women, inspiring them to defy expectations, break barriers, and pave new paths to success.

Sazan has several exciting projects and collaborations in the works. Professionally, her aspirations are to continue growing her brand, expanding her reach, and using her platform to advocate for issues that matter to her. In terms of personal goals, “my hope is to raise my children with a deep appreciation for their Kurdish heritage and instill in them the values of compassion, resilience, and self-confidence that have guided me throughout my life,” Sazan says. ●

Stream to Ocean The Poems of Nazand Begikhani



Richard McKane

was a renowned translator and poet (1947 - 2016). He studied Russian at Oxford and translated Anna Akhmatova's Selected Poems. He translated works by Oktay Rifat, Nâzım Hikmet, and others, and published poetry collections such as Türkiye Poems and Coffee House Poems.

"Stream To Ocean: The Poems of Nazand Begikhani," originally published by Richard McKane in Bells of Speech in 2006, explores the powerful poetry of Nazand Begikhani, a Kurdish poet whose work reflects her exile and the Kurdish struggle. McKane highlights Begikhani's role as a voice for Kurdish women and her ability to write in multiple languages, translating works of T.S. Eliot and Baudelaire. Despite personal tragedies, including the loss of family members to Saddam Hussein's regime, Begikhani remains a staunch advocate for human rights. McKane argues that Begikhani's poetry combines philosophical insights with a quest for identity and justice, making her an essential literary figure who bridges cultural divides. Due to the article's significance and McKane's esteemed reputation, we seek to republish it with Nazand Begikhani's permission, as she holds authority over its content

Time flows through Nazand Begikhani's poems like a river: the stream of her childhood becomes the mighty Tigris, then she finds herself washed up in exile on the Atlantic Ocean, or by the banks of the Loire Rive

But she is not prepared to just float with the current of tradition. In her poems, she rages against the Anfal Campaign, the genocidal operation carried out against Kurdish civilians at the end of the 1980s; she fights against honor killings, and she fights for the perception of the Kurds in the West. These are painful poems, but pain expressed, of women, of the Kurdish peoples, needs to be witnessed above all by poets and their readers. Politicians of all hues, around the world, have let down the Kurds.

It is to the exiled Kurdish poets Sherko Bekas, Nazand Begikhani and the younger poet Choman Hardi that we must turn for the true voices – now in English – of the Kurds. They represent a moral philos-

ophy in a world that is without it, in the same way that Osip Mandelstam's work outlived Stalin.

Writing in exile is always a double-edged sword, involving not so much nostalgia as sharp longing, not so much sentimentality as twin – or, in Nazand's case – quadruple mentalities. Born and raised in Iraq, she is fluent in Arabic and both her French and English are strong enough to self-translate – hardly surprising since she studied in the Sorbonne and has lived several years in France and translated T.S. Eliot and Charles Baudelaire into Kurdish.

She seems to have learnt from Eliot's sense of time; her statement on the Loire river, "This is a dry time," seems to me to be Eliotesque. One can only imagine the sheer concentration and cultural awareness necessary to translate Eliot and Baudelaire and how it would enrich Kurdish poetry and Nazand's own.

I was surprised to see that her first dis-



Nazand Begikhani

sertation in 1987 at Mosul University was on men-women relationships in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. Earlier, she obtained her MA on the influence of English romanticism, particularly Shelley, on modern Kurdish poetry, and her Ph.D. on the image of Kurdish women in European literature from Sorbonne University.

Nazand is a survivor of genocide; two of her brothers were executed in Saddam Hussein's prisons and her third brother, who managed to flee, was killed in Germany. Her father was one of the first victims of the Ba'athist regime in 1968. Nazand fled death in 1987 but did not give up hope; she obtained a scholarship from the French Foreign Ministry and continued her studies at the Sorbonne. According to Nazand, "you can only overcome your pain and an-

ger through artistic creation, through poetry."

When you meet Nazand, she is a tall, elegant, soft-spoken, and calm person who can slip with ease between French and English. Her gentleness does not so much conceal her burning passion for human rights as accentuate it. She is that rare person who believes in dialogue and somehow retains respect for and from the many sides of the Kurdish question. She is one of the leaders of the campaign against honor killings and is an activist for the status of Kurdish women.

It was at a meeting of Exiled Writers' Ink that first I saw the film of the poison gas massacre at Halabja, shot by an Iranian journalist. The silent camera captured fresh corpses in multicolored clothes and zoomed into rooms

where whole families lay freshly gassed. After the film, the poets' and writers' words, our words, seemed so inadequate to express our horror at one of the most barbarous massacres of the 20th century, perpetrated by the perpetrator of the lesser known Anfal Campaign: Saddam Hussein.

Reader, I am not making politics – these are the universal symbols against which all modern Kurdish poems are written.

In the poem "My Body is Mine" we find Nazand defending the female body against the sinister *them*. The poem concludes "but I was one and they were all," which has a macabre, clashing ring with the musketeers' refrain: "One for all, and all for one."

But in reading Nazand's poems it is



easy for us to stand in solidarity with her. In "Dreams" she offers: "I reconcile God and the snake / in my dreams / I cleanse Eve's sins / and return Adam to paradise." How poignant are these lines when we think now of what is happening in Iraq, where the Garden of Eden – let alone the Tower of Babel – is meant to have been. I will not reveal the secrets held or withheld in the poem "Prayer," but they are startling and quite revelatory to those who attempt to right the world with human rights.

Although Nazand's poems contain many mentions of frontiers, I think she should be an honorary poet of Doctors Without Borders: she is

treating human souls in acute conditions, calmly under the fire of recent events in these elegant poems. There are many poems dedicated to her mother. The end of "God is not dead for my mother" is a brilliant example of language having two equally powerful meanings:

when you can trace the white wings of your dead children flying over the path of light in the azure of the sky

you don't need God to die

In the short poem "Journey," Nazand indicates the powerful search for herself – and for expression:

*I went on
Beyond things
Beyond words
Beyond the body
Beyond the wind
Then I came across myself
But it is in the shortest poems that the poet is often at her most philosophical:
... Knowledge is not about knowing*

but about looking through a smiling window

*reflecting a different image
Even personal happiness becomes a steep climb in "Voice":
Happiness is a ladder
Let's climb it together ●*

Exploring Kurdish Poetic Traditions



Abdullah Incekan
is a Kurdish writer and expert in German and Turkish language, literature, and culture.

For the most part, the Kurds tend to garner the attention of the world only during major political events, such as the advent of ISIS in the Middle East. This attention, however, quickly fades. As a result, their artistic and literary work, along with other aspects of their history and culture, remain largely unknown to the global public.

When learning about the Kurds, borders and divisions feature prominently. Few indigenous groups have faced as many literal and figurative barriers as the Kurds, who have lived between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers for thousands of years. Since there is not enough room here to describe all the political, geographical, and historical barriers that have shaped the experiences of the Kurds, I will focus on some of them as they pertain to Kurdish poetry.

Classical literature

From the manuscripts that have survived to this day, we know that Kurdish literature emerged in the Middle Ages. The first lyrical texts come from Baba Tahir, who was born in 1010 and wrote his quatrains in the Luri dialect of Kurdish. The term Luri dialect points to one of the key difficulties regarding language within the Kurdish community: its spoken varieties can differ greatly from one another.

In addition to Luri, classical literature written in the Kurmanji dialect flourished under the rule of various Kurdish dynasties and emirates from the 16th century onward. Parallel to the literature of the neighboring Arab and Persian peoples, diwans (collections of poems) by writers

such as Ali Hariri (1010-1079), Melaye Ciziri (1570-1640), and Feqiye Teyran (1561-1640) were promoted during these dynasties and have been generously received up to our time.

Among the classics, however, Ehmede Xani (1650-1707) stands out. His love epic *Mem and Zin*, written before the French Revolution, alludes to aspects of identify and implores the Kurds to elevate their language as a tool for bolstering their power over their territories. In a 1694 *mathnawi* (a poem written in rhyming couplets), he evokes national ideas, for instance by starting the action of the poem on *Newroz*, the Kurdish New Year.

In the Sorani dialect, written literature developed from the 18th century onwards. Literature in Zazaki emerged only at the end of the 20th century.

As the Kurdish dynasties declined in the 19th century, so did Kurdish language and literature. After World War I, these dynasties disappeared completely from the map, replaced by the creation of four European-enabled nation states in the region. The basis for Kurdish self-preservation also disappeared, and the societal divisions that were forged remain in place today.

Political framework

Since then, Kurdish language and literature have taken different paths in different countries. In the former Soviet Union, which had a small number of Kurdish speakers, the Kurdish language was promoted during Lenin's time and after Stalin's death. There, it was present in

schools and media until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, due to the politics of the Cold War, there was little exchange between those engaging with the language in the Soviet Union and Kurds in other states.

Following the 1923 founding of Turkiye, where most Kurds live, the Kurdish language suffered major repression. Kurdish was legally banned by the state until 1991, when the law

Written Kurdish is usually learned autodidactically.

In Syria, Kurdish was tolerated in the press during the French mandate but was banned in the 1950s. With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, however, Kurdish became the official language in the Kurdish-majority areas.

In Iraq, Kurds faced persecution and

There has never been an explicit ban on Kurdish in Iran; like in Iraq, Kurdish media and publications were permitted but the language was also absent from public life.

In addition to this politically complex and repressive approach to the Kurdish language, there is another set of barriers for Kurdish: it is written in the respective country's alphabet that is then modified for Kurdish. This



Statues of famous Kurdish poets in Sulaymaniyah Park

was repealed. Despite this positive step, Turkiye is still a long way from a complete normalization. Kurdish remains absent from public life, apart from a two-hour elective course in middle school and a few Kurdish departments at select universities. While there has been some progress in private media, there is a complete lack of support and funding by the state.

genocide from the 1920s to 1991. However, the language was not always banned; Kurdish radio broadcasts and publications were allowed, and Kurdish was taught as a language in schools, despite being disallowed during various periods. Since 1991, Kurdish has been the official language in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

means that Kurds use the Cyrillic, Arabic, or Latin alphabets depending on which country they are from.

Modern poetry

Poetry was the primary genre among the Kurds until the middle of the 20th century, but modern Kurdish poetry has its roots in the work of the 19th



Portrait of Ahmadi Khani, painted by Saadat Barzani

century poet Hacı Qadir Koyi (1817-1897). Koyi's poetry remains true to classic poetical forms like the *ghazal* or *qasida*, but in terms of content it expresses aspects and themes of modern national life, such as the right of self-determination of peoples, as well as technical developments.

Koyi brings a romanticizing, heroic imagery to Kurdish poetry, which represents a turning point from poetry's focus on religious and ascetic themes and ideas. This change accelerated at the start of the 20th century for two reasons. First, from 1898 onwards, Kurds began to publish magazines and newspapers in which these texts were disseminated. Second, the number of people attending state schools increased, helping to form a more worldly, secular class than that formed by the classical religious schools (*madrassas*).

Koyi's poems were published posthumously in the newspaper *Jin (Life)* in Istanbul in 1918. In the same magazine, the poet Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu (1890-1958) introduced a new style by integrating elements of spoken language, which was free from formal rules, into Kurdish poetry. Zapsu abandoned the structure and subject matter of classical poetry and used rhythm and symbolism as the basic elements of his poems, which focused on political and social themes.

Other themes and forms also found their way into Kurdish poetry. Modern forms began to be published, including lyrical poetry, sonnets, ballads, haikus, free verse, and even newer experimental varieties, alongside the *ghazal* or *qasida*. The classical forms did not disappear; instead, they continued to exist alongside modern varieties of poetry until the middle of the 20th century.

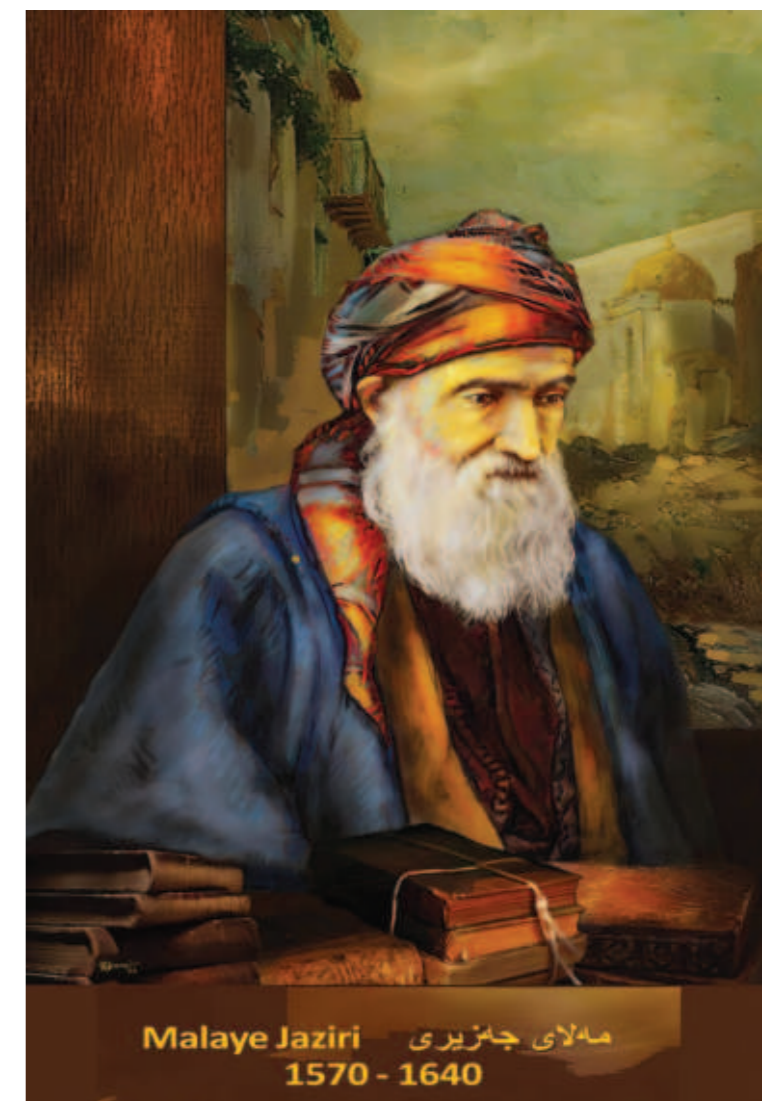
Although modern Kurdish poetry publications do not show linear development – they either continued to publish where they had been established or changed their place of

publication (for example, from Cairo to Geneva) – Kurdish poetry has constantly reinvented itself and interacted with world poetry.

Up to the end of the 20th century, Kurdish poetry primarily dealt with socio-political themes such as the division of Kurdistan, linguistic repression, force and reprisal, imprisonment and detention, questions of

which are synonymous with the land, are used along with elements from folklore and mythology. Over time, mythological images and metaphors from other cultures have also increasingly made appearances in Kurdish poetry.

More recently, new forces and themes have shaped Kurdish poetry, including urbanization, the anonymity of



identity, nature, and migration. The imagery used to describe these themes, however, is strongly influenced by the natural surroundings of Kurdistan. Words such as *gul* (rose), *berf* (snow), and *ciya* (mountain),

city life, individuality, philosophical-existential questions, feminist approaches, and migration, as well as the quotidian joys and challenges of the poets conveying their individual and collective experiences. ●

In the Studio with Master Calligrapher

Kurdistan Chronicle

In his studio on the outskirts of Erbil, master calligrapher Bjar Erbili is surrounded by the warm glow of creativity. He dips his delicate broad-edged nib and brushes in ink, his movements filled with the quiet focus of a man possessed by his passion. The room is a witness to his talent, adorned with samples of his work, such as beautifully written gold-painted verses of the Quran and poems by notable Kurdish and Arab poets. A single copy of the Quran holds a special place in the center of the room, on a big table; it is a copy of the Quran that Bjar wrote for Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the former president of the UAE.

“Without love, one cannot hope to find true success,” Bjar says, putting the finishing touches on his latest piece, his voice a gentle echo in this art-filled haven.

Bjar Kareem Salim, better known as Bjar Erbili, is a 61-year-old from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region. Born into a family that adored art and music, Bjar developed a love for calligraphy in his childhood. The word itself, derived from the Greek word for “beautiful,” kallos, meaning “the art of beautiful handwriting.”

“Even as a child, teachers would seek me out, requesting that I write names for them in calligraphy,” he recalls, a hint of nostalgia in his voice.

After studying ceramics and sculpture at the University of Baghdad’s College of Fine Arts, Bjar decided to work as a calligrapher after graduation, which was his genuine passion.

His talent has garnered him international acclaim, with awards adorning his achievements from prestigious competitions in Istanbul and Dubai. In 2012, a remarkable opportunity arose. From a pool of 128 exceptionally skilled calligraphers gathered in Dubai, Bjar was entrusted with the monumental task of crafting an edition of the Quran for Sheikh Khalifa commissioned by Dubai’s current ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The honor was a proof to Bjar’s exceptional understanding of the specific rules, styles, and order required for scripting the Quran.

It took Bjar three years to finish writing this calligraphic edition of the Quran, some two million copies of which have been printed and distributed in UAE.

“
*Erbil has the finest calligraphers
in the world*
”



Bjar Erbili in his art studio

Photo: Sajfin Hamid



Photos: Saffin Hamid



“Erbil has the finest calligraphers in the world”

Islamic calligraphy began in the 7th century in the city of Kufa in the south of Iraq as a method of creating copies of the Quran. Indeed, the earliest known examples of writing in the world were produced around 3,200 BC in Uruk in what is now Iraq, a testimony to the deep connection this region holds with the written word.

Bjar believes there is a reason calligraphy has flourished in Islamic culture. With the depiction of human figures discouraged, calligraphy offered a sublime alternative, a way to express the divine through the elegant dance of the script.

After the art first developed in Kufa, the Abbasid Caliphate founded a calligraphy school

in Baghdad, followed by an Ottoman school in Istanbul, and Iranian schools in Isfahan and Tabriz.

In 2018, Bjar founded Erbil Calligraphy School. “I established the school of Erbil because I strongly believe Erbil now has the finest calligraphers in the world,” he states with assurance.

The school is a vibrant hub, attracting dozens of aspiring artists from across Kurdistan. Membership transcends mere talent; Bjar seeks individuals who embody the values of humanity, peace, and coexistence. His vision is ambitious: to transform Erbil into a global calligraphy capital and a stage

for international competitions. To achieve this, he hopes for support from the Kurdistan Regional Government.

He also hopes to write the Kurdistan edition of the Quran, as well as a compilation of poems by well-known Kurdish poets such as Nali, Ehmede Xani, and Haji Qadri Koyi.

Twice a week, the air crackles with a quiet passion, as calligraphers gather at Bjar’s home. They discuss the perfect curve of a letter, the subtle weight of a word, the whisper of the brush against paper. Bjar, a devoted custodian, houses a collection of papers

worth \$20,000 – papers crafted to endure for over 200 years, each blank page a canvas for future masterpieces. The calligraphers are not concerned with the future of calligraphy in the age of technology and artificial intelligence.

They remarked that calligraphy is similar to the art of weaving carpets; there is a significant difference in value and taste between a factory-made carpet and a hand-made carpet, and the same is true for writing.

And indeed, young blood continues to join the calligraphy ranks, drawn to the timeless art. ●

A Story of Kurdish Struggle

Kurdistan Chronicle

Award-winning writer and UK-based film director Kae Bahar, who was born in Kirkuk during the regime of Saddam Hussein, is set to publish a new book, *The Good, the Bad, and the Gringo*, with Afsana Press on October 9, 2024. Originally published in 2015 as *Letters From A Kurd*, Afsana Press has agreed to re-release the book under its new title.

“The book is available via the Afsana Press website and platforms like Waterstone and Amazon for pre-order. Soon it will reach bookshops across the Kurdistan Region and, hopefully, I will get it to high schools and universities by including it in the curriculum,” Bahar said.

“At the age of fourteen, I was arrested by the dictator’s secret police and sentenced to death for no other reason than being a Kurd, although I was miraculously saved. While the novel is not autobiographical, I do share many sentiments with Merywan Rashaba, my protagonist, such as a deep passion for film and a profound love for Kurdistan,” Bahar told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Kurdish literature on the world market

“Kurdistan and Kurdish independence are the central themes of my story. Freedom has always been our dream since it was taken away from us and, for the first time, this is being expressed through a work of fiction. I believe the call for Kurdish independence is legitimate and deserves international recognition. In this regard, we can say *The Good, the Bad, and the Gringo* is the first novel about patriotism,

“

The Good, the Bad, and the Gringo is the first novel about patriotism, freedom, and the long-awaited desire to create an independent Kurdistan

”





freedom, and the long-awaited desire to create an independent Kurdistan.”

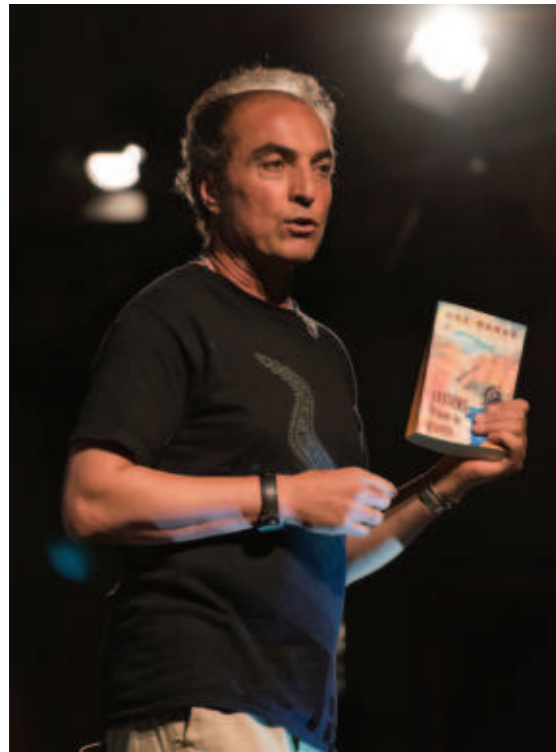
However, Bahar added that a complex political situation overshadows his protagonist’s hopes and dreams. “From a young age, Rashaba is forced to fight for survival on three fronts simultaneously; against his illiterate, merciless, and devoutly religious father, against a narrow-minded and intolerant society, and against the tyranny of the oppressive regime under which he is growing up.”

“Ever since I left my beloved Kurdistan and arrived in Europe in 1980, I have always wanted to write a novel alongside my acting and filmmaking,” he added. “This was motivated by the fact that I could not find one work of fiction or novel written by a Kurd in any bookshop or library anywhere in Europe.”

He said that he had searched bookshops in Rome, Paris, Berlin, London, and “many other cities and was saddened and deeply frustrated to find nothing. It was disappointing that after a century of armed struggle and so much sacrifice, we did not have any literary work on the world market.”

In 2011, once he was confident with his English, he decided to take on the challenge of writing the first Kurdish novel in English. “My intention was to engage the world’s readership and take them on an amazing journey to Kurdistan through Rashaba’s story. This has been one of the greatest challenges of my life.”

Bahar paused his acting work, abandoned filmmaking, and locked himself in a room where he wrote sixteen to eighteen hours every day for two years. Moreover, he was forced to sell his house in the UK. “Thankfully my wife, Josie Bahar, stood by me rather than divorcing me. She also designed the cover page for the book and was very proud of her work and its contribution toward Kurdish independence,” he said.



“After two years of writing full time, and a year of re-writing and editing, at last, I had a completed manuscript that I could send out to publishers. After contacting several literary agents and getting heartbreaking rejections, a year passed before Brie Burkeman fell in love with it and started sending it to publishers. Faber & Faber was interested but that didn’t work out. Soon after, we approached Yolk, a new publisher who was going to give their maximum attention to the book and its marketing. I will never forget the day we celebrated the book launch at the London Review Bookshop in the presence of some 150 guests.”

“That evening, the fantastic feeling of achievement justified four years of working for free, without getting a

Kurd in the title would help sales, but we were wrong.”

“Despite all our tragedies, including the Anfal Campaign, chemical gas attacks, mass exodus, and the war against ISIS, most of the world still doesn’t know about the Kurds. Sadly, my publisher’s health suddenly deteriorated, and he had to close his business. Therefore, my book, despite being in demand and receiving many five-star reviews on Goodreads, Amazon, and Waterstones, soon went out of print. After that, I was too busy with my filmmaking and planned to wait until I made my first feature film and gained some international recognition, which would help with the re-publication of the book.”



penny, taking a gamble where I didn’t know if my book was going to be published.”

A story about all Kurds

The book was published in March 2015 under the title of *Letters From A Kurd*. “At the time the Kurdish *peshmerga* were fighting ISIS, and the world seemed to wake up to the Kurdish call for freedom. Therefore, we thought that having the word

However, Afsana Press, a new publishing house in London read the book, were fascinated by the story, and decided to publish it again. “For this second edition, we agreed on the new title of *The Good, the Bad, and the Gringo*, which is the most appropriate title for the story and very dear to me.”

Bahar hopes to get support from the Kurdistan Region’s Council of Ministers to publish “the novel in differ-

ent languages in every country where there is Kurdish representation.”

“Apart from having them give away the book in their country of residence as a gift, I also aim to approach publishers to publish the book in languages like French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Frankly, I believe *The Good, the Bad, and the Gringo* is one of the best representations of the Kurds and Kurdistan. I would deeply appreciate the support of Kurds worldwide in making sure the book will not go unnoticed in the very competitive world market.

Moreover, Bahar will do a book launch at Stanfords Bookshop in Covent Garden in the center of London on October 9, 2024.

“This gives me four more months to get the news of the re-publication of the book out there, do effective marketing, and get some supporters on board, including Kurdish leaders, organizations, TV channels, social media influencers, friends, and others, to review and talk about the book. I spent four years writing the book, but Merywan’s story is about all of us Kurds, not only those from Southern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), but also other parts of Kurdistan.” ●

Yezidi Novelist Sparks Literary Flame in Germany



Kamaran Hoc

is a Kurdish writer and translator based in Germany. He has translated numerous books and novels from German to Arabic.

Ronya Othmann was born in Munich, Germany, in 1992 to a Yezidi father and a German mother. Currently a university student, she writes essays, prose, and poetry. Her literary work has garnered her numerous awards, including the Open Mike Poetry Prize, the Usedom Literature Prize, and the Caroline Schlegel Essay Award. In 2020, she published her debut novel, *The Summers*, which won the Mara Cassens Prize. In 2021, she earned further recognition for her poetry anthology *Crimes*. Her most recent book, *Seventy-four*, was published in 2024.

The Summers

In her first novel, *The Summers*, Ronya Othmann introduces Layla, a young woman named after Layla Qasim. Layla is raised near Munich but visits her Yezidi Kurdish family in Syria every summer. Layla's father once lived in a Kurdish village on the Turkish border and endured the fate of the so-called "Al-Hasakah foreigners" – Kurds denied Syrian citizenship or stripped of it by the Syrian Ba'athist regime. Arrested, he fled to Germany in the 1980s. During her visits, Layla experiences the simple, innocent life in the village despite the challenges the villagers face, including racial discrimination in nearby cities like Qamishli. She is enchanted by the small joys and gains insights into Kurdish life.

Layla, who is learning Kurdish from her father, is bewildered when she is prevented from speaking the language at Syrian airports and by the ubiquity of the portraits and photos of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad – at her age, she is not even familiar with her own German

president or politics more broadly. Meanwhile, her German mother finds joy and warmth in the village, shedding her usually strict demeanor. However, these moments of happiness are abruptly interrupted in 2014 when ISIS sweeps through the region, targeting Yezidi villages in a brutal campaign. From Germany, Layla feels helpless as she watches her father's anguish over the terrifying news of their family's plight.

Layla's family does what they can to help from afar, including facilitating her grandmother's relocation to Germany. This return to her roots helps Layla reconnect with her extended family and their Yezidi traditions, though her grandmother struggles to adapt to her new environment. In exile and cut off from her homeland, she slowly withers away, longing for the orchards and neighbors she left behind.

Seventy-four

In her novel *Seventy-four*, Othmann revisits the Yezidis' harrowing history of persecution, specifically focusing on the genocide inflicted upon them by ISIS, which the Yezidis refer to as the faraman. The title, *Seventy-four*, references the fact that the attack by ISIS was the 74th genocidal campaign in Yezidi history. This atrocity has been recognized as a genocidal crime by Germany, where the largest Yezidi diaspora lives.

Drawing from her personal observations during a visit to refugee camps in Kurdistan, Othmann crafts a realistic narrative devoid of fictional embellishments. She lets the victims' voices guide the story, providing their testimonies directly to the reader and refraining from editorial inter-



“

In her novel *Seventy-four*, Othmann revisits the Yezidis' harrowing history of persecution, specifically focusing on the genocide inflicted upon them by ISIS

”



vention. Her narrative also addresses the return of ISIS criminals to Germany, particularly German women brought back from detention camps with their children, who were born during the so-called caliphate.

Through this unflinching work, Othmann brings the German audience closer to the plight of the Yazidis, giving a voice to their suffering while exposing the brutality of ISIS. Her book stands as another testament to her commitment to bringing the Kurdish cause to the fore and advocating for the Yazidis' right to a dignified and free existence.

“
The poems capture the
sorrow and anguish
of regions like Afrin,
Mosul, and Nineveh,
where Kurds have been
victims of both regional
and global conflicts

”

collection, titled “Countdown to the Explosion,” illustrates the power of Othmann’s words:

*You should read the stones
Upside down. To begin at the domes,
the domes are daughters of the sun,
sun rays. But the dome collapsed, the
dome without a column and without
a base.
After the explosion, it fell three meters
and ten centimeters more.
If you count the number of pebbles to
reach the building,
The result will be a temple.’*

Othmann holds society and humanity accountable for treating these *crimes*



Crimes

Othmann released her first poetry collection, *Crimes*, a year after her debut novel. As the title suggests, the collection confronts atrocities committed against humanity, focusing on the tragedies endured by the Kurdish people. The poems capture the

sorrow and anguish of regions like Afrin, Mosul, and Nineveh, where Kurds have been victims of both regional and global conflicts. With unflinching and poignant language, her poems resonate deeply, bearing witness to the wounds inflicted by these “*crimes*.”

One of the standout poems in the

as if they were normal occurrences. In “Burning Trees,” she laments: *‘It’s like we don’t know anything. As if we don’t know, nature is forbidden despite everything, and the sky is still a lie. Its blue is flawless. This is what can be said about it.’* ●

Malmime Bridges Art and Heritage



Bakir Shwani

is a Kurdish writer and translator based in Germany. He has translated several acclaimed novels into Kurdish. Schwani was born in Kirkuk and studied geology in Baghdad before moving to Germany and obtaining a degree in oriental studies at the University of Bonn.

Last May, the Goethe-Institut, a non-profit German cultural association, invited a group of artists to Erbil to participate in various activities. Among the invitees were two Kurdish citizens living in Germany, one of whom was the painter Hasan Hüseyin Deveci, who is also known by his artistic name Malmime. Born in 1972 in the Kurdish village of Kulu in Konya, Türkiye, Malmime says that his family descends from Kurds exiled to central Anatolia by the Ottomans roughly 400 years ago. Despite this exile, the family preserved its Kurdish language and culture, and Malmime, the name of one of his grandmothers. The artist has

stitit would invite him to Erbil. Beyond being an artist, he works as an art therapist and educator, engaging in art projects throughout Germany, particularly in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Between 2003 and 2024, Malmime has showcased his work in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and Austria, with his joint exhibition in Kurdistan being a notable highlight. One of his proudest achievements is his participation in the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 alongside 13 other artists from all parts of Kurdistan. He is also a member of several international artists' organizations, including the Interna-



Kurdish artist Hasan Hüseyin Deveci

lived in Germany since 1994 and studied painting in Cologne, where he learned the Kurdish Kurmanci dialect academically at the age of 31.

Malmime's biography makes it clear why a significant institution like the Goethe-In-

tional Society of Fine Arts in Berlin and the International Association of Plastic Arts.

Coming to Erbil

Malmime's visit to Erbil had two main



“
Malmime believes that art and culture in Kurdistan are like undiscovered treasures
”



purposes. The first was to open an exhibition exploring the relationship between art and music. Malmime has been experimenting with a technique of “painting the melody of music” for nearly seven years and was able to showcase several large paintings in Erbil for the first time. The second purpose was to conduct a three-day workshop on the relationship between art and the environment, which was attended by 15 artists.

Malmime explains that his visit to Erbil aimed to build a bridge between Middle Eastern art and the Western world, and to allow him to reconnect with his homeland on a personal and artistic level. Having been born and raised in Türkiye and then settling in Germany, this trip was his first visit to the Kurdistan Region, allowing him to spend time among his people and gain new experiences. He describes his time in Erbil



Additionally, he writes: “With my art, I want to create new perspectives and viewpoints to perceive and interpret reality. I want to lead the viewer behind the scenes of reality and encourage them to engage with the symbolism of reality.”

He did highlight that it was discouraging to see so much litter around the city. “The prevalent garbage saddened me, especially given my environmental project. The population’s indifference towards the environment was also disappointing, but I am optimistic that through work and projects like mine, people will become more environmentally conscious,” he said.

Malmime believes that art and culture in Kurdistan are like undiscovered treasures and that, with the cooperation of specialized institutions in Kurdistan, he will do his utmost to uncover these treasures and strengthen the artistic connection between Kurdistan, Germany, and the world.

“There are both very rich and poor people in Kurdistan, but they all share a hospitality and kindness that preserve values we rarely find in Europe. In short, I fell in love with the

“ The feelings, experiences, and visions I gained in Kurdistan are so profound that I believe they could fill the pages of a book ”

as the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, not just for himself, but also for his ancestors, who longed to visit their historic homeland.

Malmime elaborates on his artistic message in German on his website: “I give my characters their posture and the viewers give them a soul. There should be a connection between the viewer and art, which evokes memories and experiences in the viewer or arouses fantasies and dreams. My figures often have a function like I do. They have their own way and life, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. With this purpose, they not only act out something, but often they reenact something.”

Artistic connections

In speaking with Kurdistan Chronicle, Malmime recounted his experiences in Kurdistan, including speaking to the police in Kurdish for the first time in his life. He reflected on the positive impact of seeing the Kurdistan flag in public and private spaces.

“Although I was legally in a foreign country, I had a strong feeling of belonging during my two-week stay. The nature of the country, especially the unique mountains of Kurdistan, impressed me deeply. There’s great potential for attracting tourists from all over the world,” Malmime exclaimed.

Kurdistan Region and plan to include it in my future personal and artistic projects. My goal is to share my experiences with Kurdistan and help young artists adopt new perspectives, becoming representatives and flag bearers of Kurdish art, blending it with world art,” he explained.

Malmime is currently discussing with his wife and children the possibility of including Kurdistan in their annual travel plans. He feels a strong connection to the region and wants his children to develop a spiritual bond with their ancestral land. “The feelings, experiences, and visions I gained in Kurdistan are so profound that I believe they could fill the pages of a book,” Malmime concluded. ●

Ghobadi's Poetic Journey Through Revolution



Riyadh Hammadi

a writer and literature critic from Yemen, is renowned for translating numerous literary works from English into Arabic.

In his 2012 film *Rhino Season*, Kurdish filmmaker Bahman Ghobadi, known for war-time dramas *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) and *Turtles Can Fly* (2004), adapts a poetic tone and language to portray Iran during two distinct eras: the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Republic. The contrast between these two eras is highlighted by dark colors, shadows, basements, prisons, and barriers that are prevalent during the Islamic Republic.

era as dreamers, free to express themselves in a civic state, whereas religious extremism instills a tyranny over such expression during the Islamic Republic.

Throughout the film, Ghobadi actually uses a poem to narrate the poet's fate.

Carry the walls on your shoulders and leave. You are being chased by a spider that is weaving its threads around you. There is a

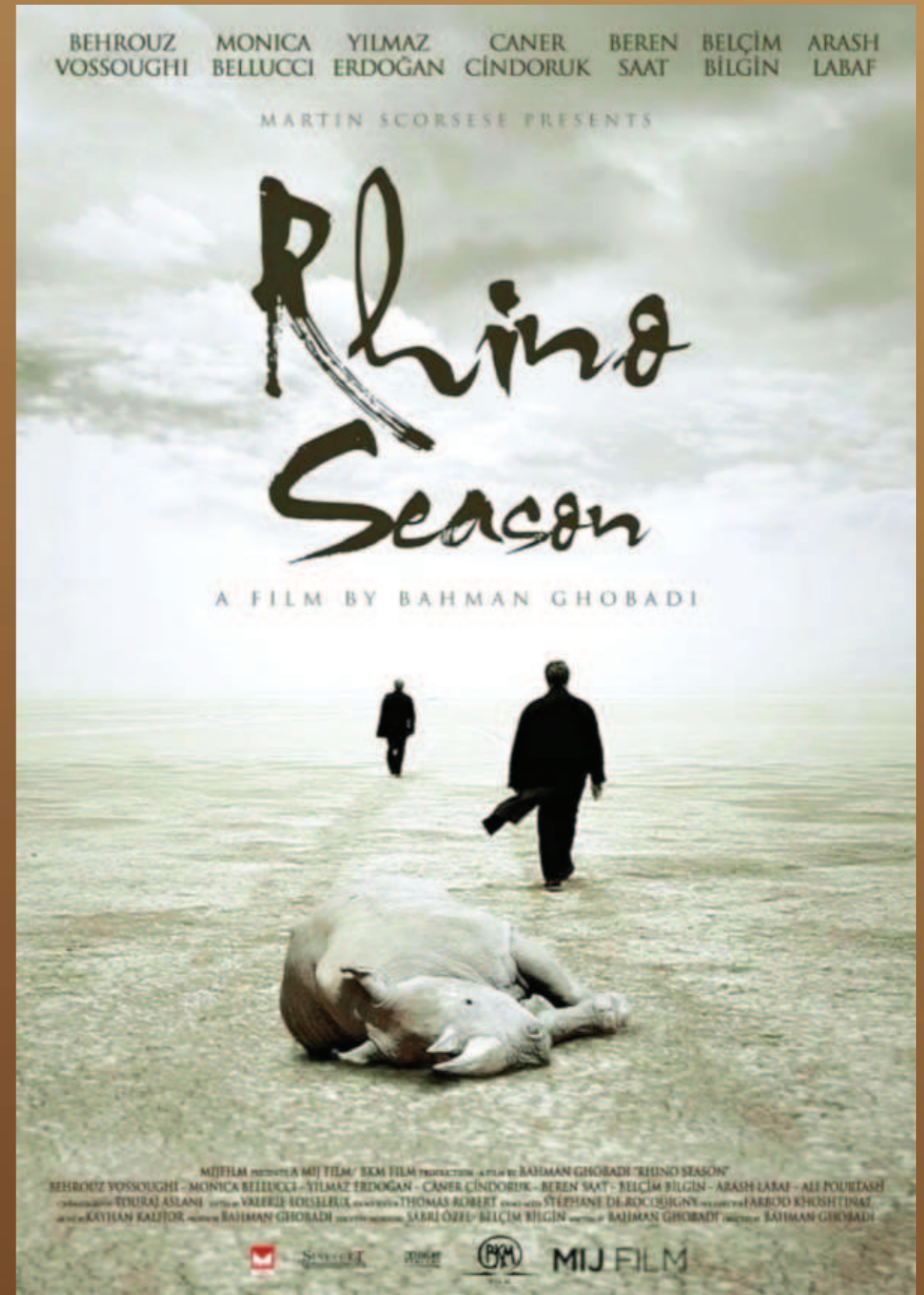


From left: Bahman Ghobadi, Monica Bellucci, Behrouz Vossoughi

This visual language effectively depicts the tragic state of Iran after the revolution, a place filled with fabricated charges, murder, and rape.

The contrast between the two eras is also illustrated through the poetry symposiums during the Pahlavi dynasty compared to the sectarian sorting during the Islamic Republic, for instance the interrogation of the Sunni poet and his Shi'a wife in prison. Poets are seen in the first

thorn stuck in your throat. When the poem dies in you, its corpse will rot, and its smell will emanate. The corpse that remains of you falls from the eyelid of a half-asleep and half-awake horse. You are a salt field blown by the wind. Your grave is visible, and the chariot of prayers revolves around itself, scattering curses in the cursed land. There are lifeless bodies along with hidden living bodies. The air is a dagger, and the water is a dagger, only the one living on the borders will create a land.





Kurdish filmmaker Bahman Ghobadi

Mina (played by Monica Bellucci) is the wife of the main character and poet Sahel. In a key moment, she tattoos the last phrase of the poem on the back of a seashore, symbolizing that the homeland is no longer a suitable place for living.

Revolution means revenge

Ghobadi dedicates his film to the memory of Sane Jaleh and Farzad Kamangar. Jaleh, an Iranian student, was fatally shot during the demonstrations on February 14, 2011, in Tehran. Kamangar, an Iranian-Kurdish teacher, poet, and journalist, was executed on May 9, 2010, on charges of “enmity against Allah,” belonging to the Kurdistan Free Life Party, and participating in bomb attacks – charges that his lawyer argued were fabricated. Ghobadi also dedicates his film to all political prisoners still detained in the prisons of the Islamic Republic.

Rhino Season is based on the true story of an Iranian-Kurdish poet known by the pseudonym Sadegh Kamangar, who endured 27 years in Islamic Republic prisons. During his imprisonment, his family was falsely informed of his death, leading them to mourn over a fake grave for decades, a deception that deeply impacted the poet, his family, and countless others.

The poet’s story is not an isolated case. The portrayal of Mina’s rape by Akbar Rezaei, one of the revolution’s loyalists, while in prison, symbolizes the abuse of authority and the oppression of the Iranian people. But there is also a personal motive for revenge and one that accompanies coups and revolutions. In this case, it was Rezaei’s unrequited love for Mina, the daughter of one of the Shah’s generals. After he confesses his love to her, she tells her father, who beats and expels him.

After the revolution breaks out, and the Islamists seized power, Rezaei assumes a prominent position and is able to seize the general’s house and arrest Mina and Sahel on fabricated charges of conspiring against the

Islamic Republic by writing poems. Sahel is sentenced to 30 years in prison and Mina to 10 years. After being raped, Mina gives birth to twins, is released, and is told that her husband has died, leading her to mourn over his fake grave.

Allusion to Isabel Allende

In a similar vein, novelist Marina Nemat recounts her arrest and torture at the age of sixteen following the rise of the Islamists to power in her 2007 memoir *The Prisoner of Tebran*. She later describes being compelled to marry her torturer Ali in order to secure her release. Similarly, the 2008 Spanish film *The Anarchist Wife* fol-

lowers the story of Manuela and her husband Justo as they resist Franco’s supporters during the Spanish Civil War. After Franco’s ascent to power, Justo flees while Manuela remains behind, and their servant seizes control of their house with the assistance of his son, a member of Franco’s party. This transformation, where the wealthy are reduced to beggars and the servants become masters, underscores how coups serve personal interests and create opportunities to get revenge.

bel Allende’s 1982 novel *The House of Spirits*, which is set in Chile. In the story, Alba and Pedro fall in love with each other, unaware that they are daughter and father. When Alba matures and goes to college, where she meets Miguel, which whom she has a love affair. After the military coup against the elected government, Alba, the granddaughter of Esteban Trueba from his daughter Blanca, is arrested and tortured by Colonel Esteban Garcia, who is also the grandson of Esteban Trueba from his illegitimate son, to whom Pancha Garcia had given birth to after being raped by Esteban Trueba. Driven by his hatred and suffering, Colonel Garcia tortures Alba to impel her to reveal Miguel’s hide-

These alternations affect the sequence of events, concluding in both the film and novel with Esteban Trueba helping Miguel/Pedro’s escape to Canada, with Blanca/Alba following him.

In Ghobadi’s film, Sahel searches for his wife Mina after his release from prison, eventually locating her in Istanbul. However, he hesitates to approach her and instead observes her from distance, grappling with the psychological barrier preventing them from reuniting.

This barrier is visually and tangibly depicted through glass barriers that symbolize Sahel’s ongoing imprisonment in various aspects of life. Even-

the post-revolution generation. It encapsulates their profound sense of loss and the complexity of their quest for redemption, transcending the confines of Iran’s borders.

An impossible reunion

The film opens with Sahel’s release in 2009, but then flashes back to Tehran in 1977, the moment Sahel signs his poetry collection, *The Rhino’s Last Poem*, before jumping forward to Istanbul in 2010. There’s a thematic link between the title of the collection and the film that is laid plain by two rhinoceros-related scenes: a car colliding with one, and another where a rhinoceros floats on water. Despite

as he drives with Rezaei, appearing more like a corpse than a living being.

A person emerging from the tyrannical prisons of the Islamic Republic is inevitably transformed. For Sahel, the echoes of cell gates closing persistently haunt him even as he is driving. These sounds act as a bridge between two worlds – the realm of the detainee and the world beyond – constantly evoking memories of his imprisonment and impeding his path to a normal life. Sahel’s fate seems foretold, his body destined to reunite with the soul that perished within those prison walls years ago. With his eventual demise, the poet finds liberation, finally freed from the confines of his physical and spiritual prison.

The film’s torture scenes are depicted solely through flashbacks. Sahel is released upon serving his prison term, and an employee named Savak retrieves his file from the archives. In Persian, this name alludes to the Shah’s intelligence and national security service, or so-called secret police, and its inclusion suggests that, despite the change in regime, repression and persecution have persisted over time.

After leaving prison, reality appears fragmented and distorted to Sahel. He is haunted by nightmares and hallucinations, and the prospect of revenge seems an extension of the hunt for a herd of rhinoceroses. However, he ultimately realizes that revenge is futile or impossible and acknowledges that it is more effective to end his own torment and rid himself of suffering.

The director dedicates the final scene to Sahel. It is deeply surreal. Sahel emerges from his car, smokes a cigarette, and then walks down a road on dry, cracked ground. Eventually he disappears on the horizon amid a gradual whiteness that subsumes the screen. This poetic imagery, used so well throughout the film, suggests that the poet’s essence will endure through his poems, while the darkness of tyranny will consume itself. ●



“
Rhino Season is based on the true story of an Iranian-Kurdish poet known by the pseudonym Sadegh Kamangar
 ”

lowers the story of Manuela and her husband Justo as they resist Franco’s supporters during the Spanish Civil War. After Franco’s ascent to power, Justo flees while Manuela remains behind, and their servant seizes control of their house with the assistance of his son, a member of Franco’s party. This transformation, where the wealthy are reduced to beggars and the servants become masters, underscores how coups serve personal interests and create opportunities to get revenge.

The theme of revenge resonates throughout Ghobadi’s film and aligns closely with the narrative arc of Isa-

out and then rapes her, completing the cycle of rape that his grandfather began.

While in detention, Alba wishes for death, but the visits of her grandmother Clara give her hope. She learns that she has become pregnant, but it was unknown whether the child was Miguel’s or the result of her rape. Nevertheless, she makes the courageous choice to love her child and put an end to the cycle of hatred by refraining from seeking revenge.

The adaptation of Allende’s novel into a film involves significant changes, such as assigning the role of Miguel to Pedro and of Alba to Blanca.

tually, Sahel encounters his daughter by chance, who is working as a prostitute to raise money for their immigration to Europe. One night, she accompanies her friend to his house and has sex with him while he’s drunk. When Sahel wakes up in the morning, he notices a tattoo on her shoulder, bearing a quote from one of his poems.

His shock deepens when her friend reveals that the tattoo was inked by her mother Mina. The ambiguity surrounding the parentage of Mina’s twins – whether they are Sahel’s or Akbar Rezaei’s – serves as a poignant reflection of the intricate identity of

these connections, the relationship between the title and the content remains somewhat distant, immersed with the poetic beauty that pervades the film’s spirit.

When Sahel finds Mina, she senses his presence but doubts his identity, leading to a non-traditional reunion for a long-separated couple. Their experiences in prison have drained them of vitality, leaving them as mere shadows of their former selves. Typically, a reunion would be filled with longing and eagerness, but prison has robbed them of life, particularly Sahel. He is consumed by a desire for revenge, leaving him devoid of any signs of life

Falah's Artistic Journey Through Adversity



Sarwa Azeez

is Kurdish poet, researcher, and translator. Her work has appeared in many publications such as *Parentheses Journal*, *Writing for A Woman's Voice*, *Notre Dame Literary*, *The International Journal of Genocide Studies and Prevention*, *Wingless Dreamer* and elsewhere.

In 1993, in the middle of all the chaos in Iraq, a Yezidi boy in primary school finds comfort in watching cartoons on TV. Whenever the power goes out – which happens a lot – he misses those bright, lively characters. Even in the dark, he can picture them in his mind, colorful and spirited. He grabs his pencil and starts sketching, determined to keep them alive. That's how Falah's journey began, turning the gloom around him into something brighter with his imagination.

Although Falah survived the 2014 Yezidi genocide, he was deeply hurt by losing so

many fellow refugees art, computer skills, and English. As a translator for the nonprofit Habibi International, Falah continues his commitment to community enrichment. Based in Germany, he works to spread his humanitarian message despite the many challenges he has faced.

Mass Escape

The painting *The Mass Escape* portrays the poignant journey of the Yezidi people escaping from ISIS. Central to the image is a Yezidi mother, cradling her baby, walking alongside her two daughters through



many people he cared about. Again, he found peace in his art. Painting helped him fend off the sadness, telling his own story of strength and bravery with every brushstroke.

Co-founding a charity in 2013, Falah showed solidarity during the 2014 Yezidi genocide by using art to convey survival stories. His paintings now grace international exhibitions, while he teaches his

landscapes filled with uncertainty, where swirling dust obscures their path.

In the distance, a crowd of fellow Yezidis moves onward, their urgent need evident. High above them, a fragile boundary separates the earth from the sky, subtly hinting at their precarious position. Each step they take resonates with the weight of history and the uncertainty of their future, teetering on the brink of the unknown.



Window of Hope

Through the *Window of Hope*, a Yezidi boy stands poised before an open window, whose glass once shielded him from the outside world but is now replaced by mere curtains fluttering in the wind. Behind him looms the dark interior of an unfinished building, a skeletal testament to a world in flux, its raw construction mirroring the uncertain landscape of post-war existence.

In the boy's posture, the viewer glimpses the weight of the world upon his young shoulders. With elbows resting on the windowsill and hands clasped in quiet contemplation, he gazes outward with an intensity that belies his tender years. His eyes, windows to the soul, peer into the abyss of the future, seeking answers amid the chaos and wreckage of the past.

At this precise moment, we see more than just a boy. What we see is the embodiment of strength within the wreckage.



“

Although Falah survived the 2014 Yezidi genocide, he was deeply hurt by losing so many people he cared about

”

Yezidi Girls in Lalish

In *Yezidi Girls In Lalish*, the figures adorned in white garments and delicate scarves serve as vessels of spirituality, while the weathered, earth-toned walls of the ancient temple evoke a profound sense of history and ancestral connection.

Their faces, bathed in the soft glow of sunlight, reflect not only the interplay of light and shadow, but also a profound bond with the essence of Yezidi culture. This intricate dance between light and form transforms the canvas into a sacred shrine, where the unity between the people and their homeland is celebrated.

The painting tells a story of symbiosis. The contours of their features echo through the rolling hills and valleys they call home, weaving together a narrative of identity inseparable from the land itself.



Falah's Resilient Brushstrokes

In a world often numbed by indifference, Falah's art emerges as a vital testament to resilience and endurance. Through his masterful strokes, he eloquently captures the unyielding spirit of the Yezidi community, underscoring the fact that, despite attempts

to erase their existence and strip them of their dignity, their imagination remains undefeated.

In depicting Yezidi women and children, Falah's work poignantly underscores the absence of men lost to genocide, while the haunting sorrow in their eyes echoes the harrowing ordeals endured by countless women

subjected to enslavement, violence, and exploitation at the hands of adversaries.

Through his artistry, Falah not only encapsulates the suffering and fortitude of his people, but also amplifies their voices, ensuring that their narratives endure, neither forgotten nor silenced. ●

Bridging Borders Through a Game



Mohammad Dargalayi
is a journalist and photographer with 14 years of experience. He is a member of IFJ Global.

Kurdistan Railways is a five-player strategy board game similar to Monopoly that was created by Alan Salah, a young Kurdish entrepreneur.

Featuring a map of Kurdistan with the names of all its major cities, the game's purpose is to educate the younger generation and foreigners about Kurdistan. The new generation, due to their different lifestyle, may not know much about their nation and country and conveying such information through games can be more engaging. The game can also provide valuable information and make it easy for foreigners to learn about Kurdistan.

While many countries have their own versions of such games, the story behind Kurdistan Railways is unique.

Born in Aleppo, Syria in 1988, Salah lived in Damascus and is the son of a Kurdish writer and politician. "My father is from Barwari Bala in the Kurdistan Region, and my mother is from Afrin in Western Kurdistan (northeastern Syria). But my family's roots are from Jalawla in the Diyala Governorate of the Kurdistan Region. My grandfather was registered in Jalawla during the 1957 census while serving as part of the Royal Iraqi Army, and so our identity card lists us



Alan Salah sharing his boardgame Kurdistan Railways

as from Jalawla. Later, my father went to Mosul to study but was asked to become a Ba'athist to continue, but he refused, instead joining the *peshmerga* forces in Behdinan (aka Badinan). He went to Iran and then to Syria, where he married Salah's mother. "We stayed in Syria until the fall of Saddam Hussein before returning to the Kurdistan Region," Salah recounted.

While in Syria, he graduated as an architectural engineer in Damascus. He now runs a design company in Erbil. Often, the most difficult question he faces is where he is from.

"This identity crisis drives my interest in working on Kurdistan's identity, as it encompasses the details of my life and succinctly answers this difficult question."

Trains, games, and strategy

Salah's love of board games as a child drove him to create Kurdistan Railways. "I often thought there should be such a game for Kurdistan because it expands the brain and provides learning opportunities. I have several foreign friends who introduced me to a similar game, with each country



Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi



Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi

having its own version. This inspired me to create one for Kurdistan,” he related.

Salah’s childhood love for riding trains also proved inspirational. “In Syria, it took four hours to reach Aleppo by bus from Damascus, but seven hours by train. I always traveled by train for the joy it brought. I dreamed of one day taking a train from Afrin to Zakho or other parts of Kurdistan, bringing Afrin’s olives to my uncles in Duhok and the famous apples of Badinan to Afrin,” he said.

Kurdistan Railways imagines a railway connecting Kurdistan’s cities and helps players learn about the geographical boundaries that are demographically considered Kurdish territory. “When I saw Monopoly and decided to create a Kurdish version, I thought this was the best way to fulfill my dream of traveling all over Kurdistan by train,” he explained.

While some may dispute the accuracy of the game’s map, it is inspired by a map published in 2012 by the Institute for Kurdish Studies in Paris, based on research and historical sources. The map does not show the political boundaries of a proposed state and does not aim to promote any separatist ideas. It is purely for educational and entertainment purposes.

Creating the game took about three years, although producing and distributing it took six months. Salah started with the map, knowing that even a small mistake could ruin the project.

Anyone over the age of eight can play and understand the game. As a strategy game for five players, it requires a lot of thinking. Players win by completing all their tickets, creating the longest path, and blocking their opponents. Playing time ranges from 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the players’ skill and experience, with more experienced players often finishing more quickly.

The game includes two types of cards: long-range and short-range, with train cards indicating from which city the player is traveling. The railroads are color-coded, and the cards feature iconic Kurdish elements, such as traditional clothing patterns and symbols of Kurdish culture.

Building “existence”

Kurdistan Railways is the first Kurdish board game registered with the Kurd-



Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi



istan Regional Government Ministry of Culture and Youth, but Salah has pledged that it will not be used for political purposes. The game package clearly states that it is not affiliated with any political party and is solely for learning and entertainment.

Today, young people are enjoying the game in some cafeterias in Erbil, and it is available in most libraries. Half of Salah’s customers are Kurds, and the other half are foreigners living in Kurdistan. The game is also sold in Germany, France, Switzerland, and the United States.

Salah mentioned that Kurds born in other countries benefit from the game, as it helps them learn about their identity and homeland. The game is written in Kurdish using Latin characters, making it accessible to both Kurds and non-Kurds. One of his goals was to present Kurdistan’s identity to the world, detached from politics and war.

For first-time buyers, there are tutorial booklets in both Kurdish and English, and a QR code on the box provides access to an online tutorial.

Feedback from those who have played the game has been very positive, especially from foreigners who have learned the Kurdish Latin alphabet, seen the map of Kurdistan, and learned the names of Kurdish cities by playing the game.

This game is part of Salah’s larger project called habun (existence), which includes additional game projects.

“As Kurds, we face existential challenges, so I want my projects to reflect our identity. Besides Kurdistan Railways, I am working on four other games. My second

project is a paper game called Legend of Newroz, but I am seeking a sponsor as it requires a significant budget to create. I prepared the first project at my own expense, printing 500 copies,” he said. ●



Miran Abraham

LOST

In every city I visit,
I yearn for a local pub,
where the walls are soaked with stories,
and the air is filled with the smoke of a thousand thoughts.

I want to get lost in strange neighborhoods,
cross the streets where unfamiliar faces
tell the living history of the city.

I search for a drug dealer,
to wander together into the dark depths
of the unknown, where reality dissolves.

I crave for a kind old whore,
resembling my mother, a familiar refuge
where I can share and alleviate my deepest fears.

In every city I visit,
I yearn for an absurdist soul,
crazy, unemployed, wandering through the streets,
kicking empty cans, embracing madness.

I long for a child as a friend,
who laughs loudly at my words,
my movements, and is curious about my presence.

I hope to meet a writer,
to dive together into a corner of the local pub,
letting our thoughts roam freely in streams of words.

I want to visit old faithful books with my pen,
to toast for one night on the naked words
and wander through the stories that dwell on the pages.

In every city I visit,
I search for a pet store full of aquariums,
where the scent of the sea storms my thoughts
and forever lingers in my memories.

I yearn for my fellow countrymen,
to come together, delve into the past,
and embark on a journey to our homeland through our
dreams.

I compare the streets, trees, and shrubs,
searching for places reminiscent of my past
I scour for fortune seekers, ugly fools, vagrants,
and those born too late or in the wrong way.

In every city I visit,
I hope to find a pianist in the local pub,
playing music late into the night
for the city's unfortunate ones.

I seek out my father,
walk past his eyes, show that I have grown,
take his hand, and walk beside him in his shadow,
through unfamiliar streets, across the entire city,
stacking diplomas that I give him as a gift.
I believe in everything, father, except what is yours.
I love strong drink and share the bed with every woman,
father; I curse, scream, and get lost, just like you.

He is in me, standing beside me,
always behind me.
Never am I alone.

I hope to find an ugly, bald street,
full of holes, without lampposts, sidewalks, crosswalks, fences,
colored houses with large high windows with no curtains,
a city with an ordinary school and a local pub.
I want to fall in love with a homeless person,
to discover secret dark sleeping spots in the city.

In every city I visit,
I am searching for the escaped characters
from my first story,
the air that needed more space,
The woman in the blue dress,
with whom I wanted to travel
through the streets of strange lands that had never seen a woman in a blue dress walking
down them.

In every city I visit,
I delve into the silence of the local pub,
late into the night, looking at myself through the eyes of others.

SABR DRI



Francolinus Francolinus

One of the most pleasant and loudest songs you can hear near rivers and other bodies of water in Kurdistan is the voice of the male black francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*). This bird, weighing around 453 grams and measuring 33 to 36 centimeters, is distinguished by its chestnut collar, white markings on its flanks, a white cheek spot, and golden brown wings with tawny-buff streaks. The male's crimson to reddish-brown neck and legs contrast with the female's mostly brown plumage, which features a chestnut hind neck and broader brown bars on the lower back and tail. The black francolin is a resident breeder in all parts of Kurdistan and extends eastwards to southwestern Turkmenistan, northeastern India, and northern Bangladesh. However, its range has diminished due to over-hunting, leaving fragmented populations in some areas.

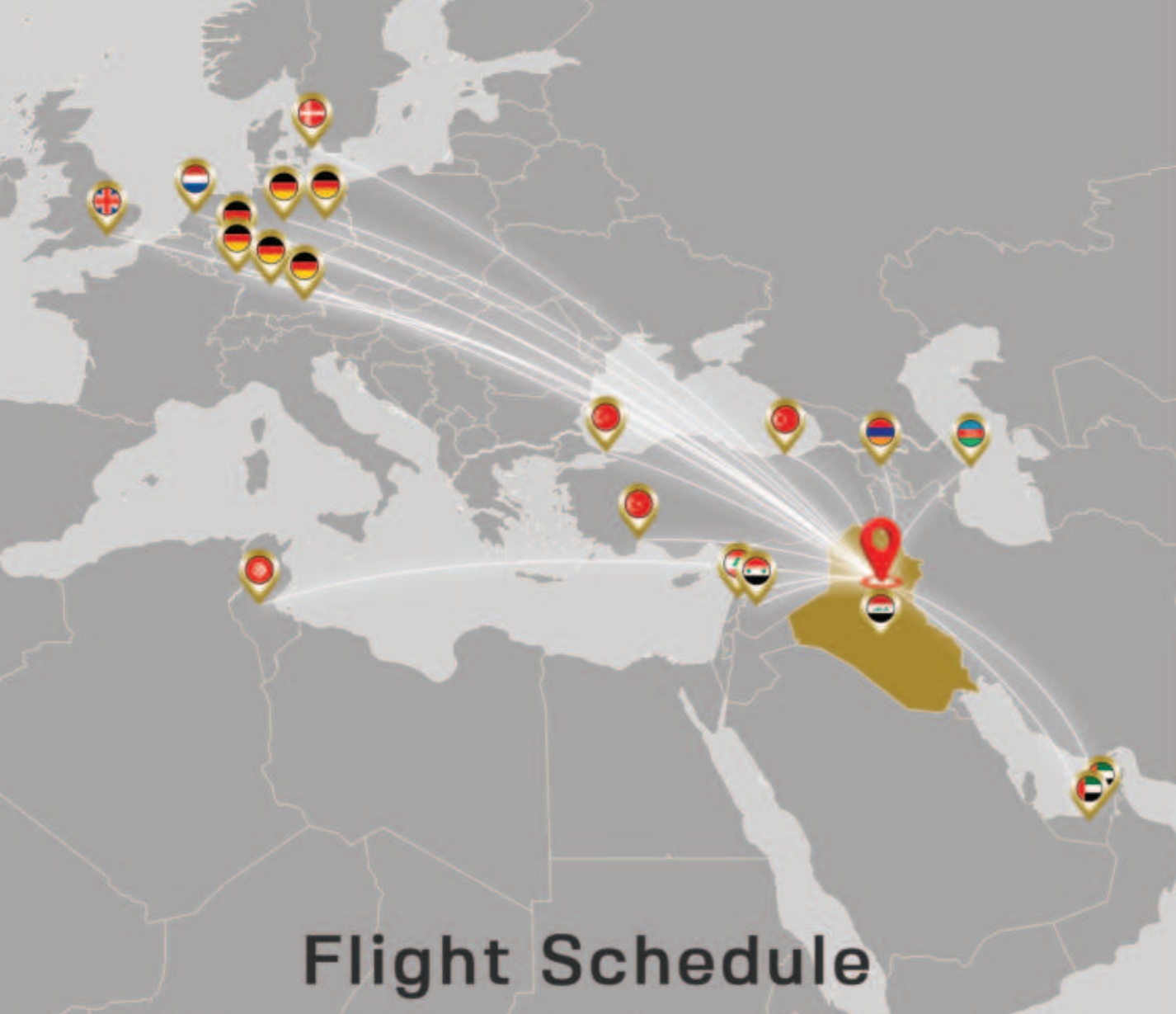


Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Galliformes
Family: Phasianidae
Genus: *Francolinus*
Species: *F. francolinus*

Binomial name

Francolinus francolinus



Flight Schedule

Saturday	COPENHAGEN	DÜSSELDORF	ISTANBUL	DAMASCUS	BEIRUT	ANTALYA	
Sunday	COPENHAGEN	FRANKFURT	HANNOVER	DAMASCUS	YEREVAN	BAGHDAD	
Monday	BERLIN	BAGHDAD	ISTANBUL	BEIRUT			
Tuesday	DÜSSELDORF	COPENHAGEN	AMSTERDAM	ISTANBUL			
Wednesday	COLOGNE	HANNOVER	ISTANBUL	DAMASCUS			
Thursday	DÜSSELDORF	MUNICH	ISTANBUL	DAMASCUS			
Friday	LONDON	AMSTERDAM	COLOGNE	DAMASCUS	BAKU	BEIRUT	TRABZON



+964 750 243 7878

+964 772 243 7878

www.flyerbil.com

Mohammed Ghafoor Majid

Mr. Mohammad Khoshnaw founded Das Food Industries in 2020. He is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Erbil-based manufacturing compound, which is the largest wheat-based food production factory in Iraq.

His leadership ensured Das Food Industries great success despite the company's young portfolio. He has been essential to developing Iraq's wheat trade, quickly becoming a leading figure in the wheat trade both in Iraq and the region.

DAS is a subsidiary of Khoshnaw Company, which is well known for its successful businesses for more than Four decades.

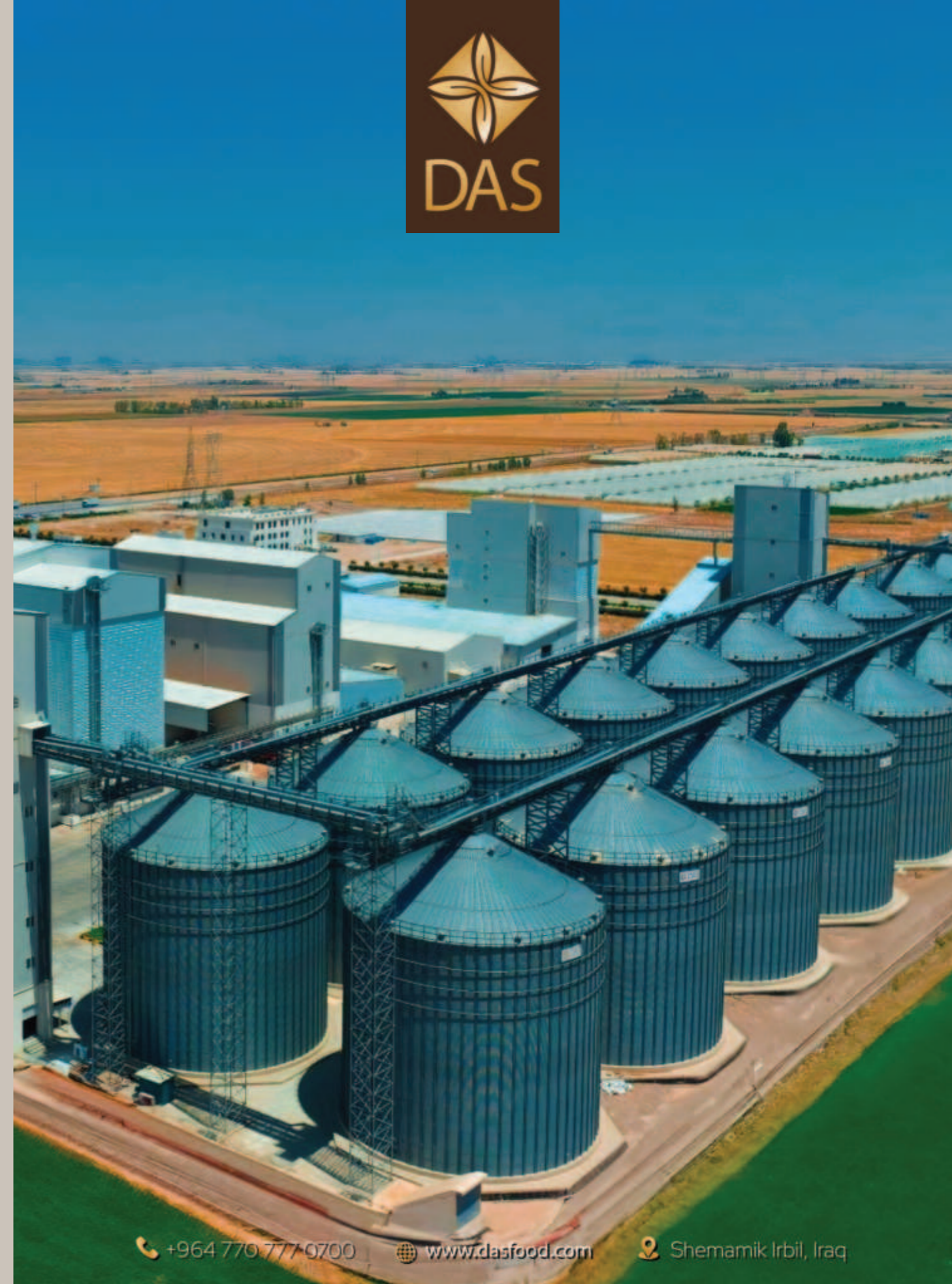




Photo Credit: Zagros Mountain Trail