

Kurdistan's Language "Problem"

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Introduction:

One quick glance at a database of Kurdish articles would provide a reader with such titles as "The Kurdish Issue", "The Kurdish Problem" or "The Kurdish Question". Kurds living in the region commonly referred to as "Kurdistan" (which is made up of the Southern territory of Turkey, Northern territory of Iraq, Western territory of Syria and Eastern territory of Iran) have for decades attempted to gain autonomy, or at the very least representation, within their host countries: this is the problem of which these various articles speak. In a sea of Middle Eastern conflicts, however, the Kurds are often forgotten. For instance, many Americans may know about the discrimination of Kurds in Turkey but may be pressed to say anything in regards to the Kurds in Iran. Without direct action to help the Kurds, protests for self-determination and independence will continue to destabilize the already teetering governments of the Middle East; land disputes will further separate communities; and relations between Middle Eastern countries will only be further strained, particularly in the Kurdistan region. Thus, it is important for the international community to be aware of the "Kurdish Problem" and furthermore be aware of the part it has played and may play in the future of the Kurdish peoples.

This paper is an attempt to provide an overview of the treatment of the Kurds within the Kurdistan region. The countries of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey share similar history in connection to the Kurds, however each deal with their "problem" by various means. Along with analyzing the treatment of the Kurds, this paper will also investigate how international intervention has affected the Kurdish population thus far and how further intervention is what may be needed to change the Kurd's current treatment. This paper will investigate the "Kurdish Problem" through the lens of language. Language was chosen as the lens because of its inextricable relationship between a nation's identity and public representation. In the modern

age, linguists who study language through a sociopolitical perspective, have discovered that language informs a society's perception of a people's identity. According to Watson (2007), "[A]ny discussion of ethnic minorities cannot ignore the question of language nor can any discussion of human rights ignore the question of linguistic rights" (p. 253). Hassanpour (1991) believes that "Silence about the linguicide of Kurdish or other languages is, I contend, a political position which cannot be justified by claims to the neutrality or autonomy of linguistics" (Hassanpour 1991). Finally, Sheyholislami (2012) aptly remarks that countries who reject the multilingualism of their nation are doing so with the intent to curtail any people or ideology not in line with the majority population. Language is thus a political tool that is used to subdue minority language speakers. Because of this, one may conclude that the best means by which to understand the status of the Kurds in Kurdistan is to investigate the treatment of the Kurdish language. That being said, this paper will also make note of the political and cultural issues the Kurds face, as these too work with language to inform the Kurdish identity.

The Kurds:

Before one understands the Kurdish problem, one must first understand who the Kurds are. Existing mainly within the Middle East, the Kurds share cultural elements with various groups, such as the Persians and Arabs. Traditionally, the Kurds are a tribal people. According to Gunter (2004), tribal allegiance often trumps that of national allegiance. Many people call the Kurds the largest nation without a state because of their diasporic condition. As stated above, the Kurds primarily live in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. This region is often referred to as "Kurdistan". There are other diasporic Kurds living in places such as Russia, the US, and Western Europe, but such populations are much smaller than those in Kurdistan (Gunter 2004). Geographically, the Kurds are mostly associated with the mountains. So much so, in fact, that

one famous Kurdish proverb states, "the Kurds have no friends but the mountains" (Gunter 2004, p. 197). It is likely this close connection to the mountains is also why many Turks disparagingly refer to the Kurds as "Mountain Turks".

It is difficult to pinpoint the demographics of the Kurds. The Kurds are often underrepresented in their host countries' censuses, and over represented by their own estimates (Gunter 2004). Along with this, exact numbers are also hard to come by due to the assimilation of many Kurds into their Arab, Persian, or Turkish majority population. According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes (2008) there are approximately 25 to 35 million Kurds in existence. Gunter (2004) calculated that there are between 25-28 million Kurds. A little under half (43%) of the Kurdish population is reported to live in Turkey, which makes it the country with the highest Kurdish population (Gunter 2004). Iran has the second largest concentration of Kurds with 31%, Iraq has the third largest at about 18%, and Syria has the least amount of Kurds at approximately 6% (Gunter 2004). Again, these numbers are merely projections and change according to each scholar.

As a quick caveat, it is important to note that "The Kurds" refer to a diverse people. Both within the Kurds' host countries and within the greater Kurdish region, the Kurdish populations are varied in dialect, tribal allegiances, and politics. Steven Cook (2016) states that,

Besides the geographic distribution across Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, the Kurds are hardly a cohesive and consistent group in terms of worldview, political goals, and relationship to the states in which they live. Are the Kurds terrorists, allies in the war against the Islamic State, or a nation in need of a state? The answer is yes to all of

these, which makes things extraordinarily difficult for American policymakers and underlines why observers cannot just invoke "the Kurds".

However, today's Kurdish populations in Kurdistan are intrinsically tied together. As a minority population, the Kurds rely on all of its populations to fight against the oppressors. The situation of the Kurds in one country greatly impacts the situation of the Kurds in all neighboring countries. This is especially apparent in how the autonomy of Iraqi Kurds affects the political ambitions of the Iranian and Turkish Kurds. It is not the intention of this paper to generalize a people by invoking the term "Kurds", rather it is meant to reflect the growing solidarity and symbiotic relationship within which today's multiple Kurdish populations exist.

Finally, let us consider the linguistic characteristics of Kurdish. Kurdish is an Indo-European language most closely related to Persian (Entessar 1992). As already stated, the Kurdish language includes multiple dialects, not all of which may be mutually-intelligible. The two primary Kurdish dialects are Kurmanji and Sorani. In Iraq, Sorani is considered the dominant dialect, although there has been backlash against this by the country's Kurmanji speakers (Hassanpour 2012). In Iran, Sorani too is the dominant dialect, with the second most dominant dialect being Kermashani. In both Syria and Turkey, Kurmanji is considered the dominant language (Sheyholislami 2012). Besides these two major dialects, other Kurdish dialects are spoken throughout Kurdistan. These lesser spoken dialects include Gorani, Hewrami, and Feyli (Sheyholislami 2012; Hassanpour 2012).

Iraq:

Compared to the other countries in the Kurdistan region, Iraq promotes a progressive policy towards its Kurdish population. For instance, it is the only country in the Kurdistan region

which explicitly recognizes Kurdish as an official language (Kurdish Human Rights Project [KHRP] 2011). Along with this the Kurds in the Kurdish Autonomous Region (often referred to as Iraqi Kurdistan) have considerable autonomy. This is not to say, however, that Iraq has always treated its Kurds fairly. In the early development of the Iraqi state, Kurds were discriminated against in order to maintain union within the fragile new country. Watson (2007) remarks that the inception of nation-states by colonial powers is what has led many countries to forcefully assimilate its smaller minority groups. Although the Kurds are a considerable minority in Iraq, even they succumbed to colonial backed assimilation. During the British Mandate, for instance, both the British and the Iraqis attempted to quell the Kurdish language in order for the centralization of the Arabic language (Hassanpour 2012). Britain refused to make Kurdish an official language of Iraq and restricted the use of Kurdish in instruction. In these ways, Britain hoped to eliminate the Kurdish culture, or at the very least subdue it enough for successful Kurdish assimilation into the mainstream Arabic culture. Prior to the British Mandate, the Kurds were far more autonomous. As one of the largest languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire, they employed Kurdish in their media, education, and administration without interference (Hassanpour 2012). It was only after Britain's creation of the nation-state of Iraq was the use of Kurdish perceived as a threat against nation unity.

The end of the British Mandate, however, did not cause Iraq to roll back its policy of Kurdish assimilation (Hassanpour 2012). The Baath party, notoriously headed by Saddam Hussein, contributed to the Kurds' subjugation, possibly even more than the British did in the early 20th century. The Baath party implemented what they referred to as "Arabization" (Zanger 2002). Just like the policies implemented by the British, Arabization was meant to unify Iraq under one Arab identity. Baathist's Arabization policies included forcing out Kurds from

Kurdish prominent regions, making it harder for Kurds to own land or gain employment, and encouraging Arab men to marry Kurdish women (Zanger). In regards to education, all instruction was in Arabic (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008). Along with all these aggressions against Kurdish language and identity, the Baathist party also committed outright genocide. In 1988, the Baath party began the "Anfal Campaign" (Zanger 2002). This campaign was an attempt by Saddam and the Baathist to create a buffer between Iraq and Iran after the Iran-Iraq War (Phillips 2015) as the Baathist feared the Kurds were collaborating with Iran during the war. According to Zanger (2002), during the Anfal campaign the Iraqi government slaughtered 100,000 innocents and destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages. Hundreds of thousands were forced to leave their homes. It was only until after the end of the Baathist regime were the Kurds given equality in Iraq, and this was in no small part due to international intervention and specifically due to American intervention.

Kurds in Iraq have a special relationship with the US which dates back to the first Gulf War. During the war, in response to the atrocities the Baathist were committing against the Kurds and other minorities, the US implemented a safe haven/no-fly zone in Northern Iraq (Romano 2010). Although not perfect, the implementation of the Safe Haven did allow the Kurds to establish their own internal government within the zone (Romano 2010). Then, after the US defeated Iraq in the first Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds were able to establish the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq (Hassanpour 2012). The US continues to back the Iraqi Kurds for strategic reasons. First, because the Iraqi Kurds are surrounded by countries against Kurdish independence, it is useful for the Kurdish government to have a friendly relationship with the US (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008). In exchange, the KRG provides the US with

oil and has committed to fight against The Kurdistan Worker's Party, otherwise known as the PKK (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008).

While The Iraqi Kurds of today face far less state discrimination and have gained a tolerated respect among the Iraqi population, they still face issues in terms of their cultural and language identity. Disputes between different dialect speakers is one such issue. The diversity of Kurdish dialects is one reason why it is difficult to mount a Kurdish revolution across borders (Gunter 2004), but even within borders determining which dialect is the best to use can cause divisions. Two major dialects, Sorani and Kormanji, are debated as the official language of Iraqi Kurdistan (Hassanpour 2012).

During the British Mandate, Sorani was used as the language of government and school instruction for the Iraqi Kurds. Although Kormanji had more literary representation, Sorani was the language of the urban Kurdish nationalist and therefore had more political power (Hassanpour 2012). Kurmanji, on the other hand, was spoken primarily by rural tribes and thus had less political influence. Although they are often referred to as dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani are not mutually intelligible, which has only added to their estrangement (Sheyholislami 2011). Both dialects lived in relative harmony until Iraq gained independence in 1931 (Hassanpour 2012). After gaining independence, the Iraqi government attempted to pit Sorani and Kormanji speakers against one another in order to keep Kurdish from being recognized as an official language. As recorded in Hassanpour (2012), in an attempt to limit Kurdish representation, Iraq passed a law which prohibited Kurdish from being recognized as an official language unless Kurdish representatives were able to "choose the type of Kurdish language they desire[d]" (Hassanpour 2012, p. 58). The Iraqi government claimed that this law was intended to unify the Kurdish people.

Interestingly, it was Kurmanji, and not Sorani, which was voted as the preferred dialect (Hassanpour 2012). However, over time Sorani would replace Kurmanji as the dominant dialect, due to standardization of Sorani and the creation of the Sorani speaking Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in 1946 (Hassanpour 2012). Today, neither Kurmanji nor Sorani can be considered the official language of Iraqi Kurdistan and there is still conflict between the two dialects. As recently as 2008, a group of Kurdish writers penned a divisive petition which they published in the Kurdish newspaper "Hawlati", calling for Sorani to be recognized as the official language of Iraqi Kurdistan (Ghazi 2009). The petitioners stated that Sorani was the language of education and was spoken by the majority of Iraqi Kurds (Hassanpour 2012). Furthermore, they stated that to allow Kurmanji and Sorani to both be official languages of Iraqi Kurdistan would only lead to divisions (Ghazi 2009).

That countries require a unifying language to function is a myth perpetuated by the creation of nation-states (Ghazi 2009). Countries around the world continue to believe this myth. Furthermore, with the onset of globalism many local languages are being looked-over for international, "lingua franca" languages such as English (Watson 2007). Watson further states that in countries where English or other European languages have taken prominence, minority language speakers have been marginalized and kept from information. In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, the debate between these two dialects may in fact create more divisions. Kurmanji speakers demand to use their language in education and administration (Hassanpour 2012). Speakers of other, less dominant dialects, such as Hawramani and Feyli, too seek representation of their language in education and administration (Ghazi 2009). The promotion of Sorani as the official language of Iraqi Kurdistan automatically subjugates all other dialects.

Iraqi Kurdistan is also currently struggling to gain sovereignty from Iraq. A referendum seeking independence was just recently passed in 2017. This referendum, however, was not made official by the Iraqi government. Instead, the referendum was what Katy Collin (2017) refers to as "soft state building". The referendum built momentum within Iraqi Kurdistan and without. Separatist sentiment were spreading throughout Iraqi Kurdistan prior to 2017, and it was the hope of the KRG that the referendum would unify the nation (Collin 2017). Although the US and other international countries have disavowed the referendum, US media outlets like the New York Times supported the attempt at independence and Israel wholeheartedly supports an independent Kurdistan. The Jerusalem Post wrote that, "Israel has been presented with a unique opportunity to support the right of Kurds to decide for themselves if they are interested in embarking on the establishment of an independent state in northern Iraq" (JPost Editorial 2017). It is international support like this that will likely lead to an independent Kurdistan, especially when faced with such opposition from its regional neighbors.

Turkey and Iran vehemently oppose Kurdish independence. They fear that if Iraqi Kurds gain sovereignty, their own Kurdish population will follow suit (Alterman & Karlin 2017). While the US is a friend to Kurdistan, it fears that independence would lead to more regional turmoil. Considering the Middle East's relationship with its Kurdish population, the US may be validated in its fear. With so many international and regional powers against Kurdish independence, it is unlikely that the Kurds will see a sovereign state in the near future. Once the international community supports the Kurds call for independence, and once Iran and Turkey cease their discrimination against their own Kurds, then perhaps Iraqi Kurds will gain the independence they seek.

Iran:

As in Iraq, Iran has a long history of infringing on the human and linguistic rights of its Kurdish population. In the 1906 Persian was the only language given official status by the Iranian government despite the fact that half of the Iranian population at that time spoke a language other than Persian (Sheyholislami 2012). Parliament members were required to speak and write in Persian, ostracizing the non-Persian speaking population from participating in the government. Under Reza Shah, the government implemented a policy of assimilation of non-Persian speakers in an attempt to centralize the country (Sheyholislami 2012). To this end, non-Persian languages were banned. Kurdish was not allowed in schools. It was banned in government institutions. Kurdish books, often acquired from Iraq, were considered contraband. Reza Shah wanted to maintain the integrity of his state, and like his contemporaries he assumed a national language would help the process. With this notion in mind, he mercilessly attacked the Kurds. It cannot be overstated how detrimental the concept of the nation-state and the notion that one state equals one language has on minority language speakers. A national language does not unite a country, rather it disenfranchises a wide swath of a country's population which in turn only leads to disunity.

In 1946, Iranian Kurds were able to establish the Republic of Mahabad (Gresh 2009). As of today, this is the only established independent Kurdish nation to have existed. The creation of the state is thanks to the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran's (KDPI) tie to the Soviet Union, and it is only due to this foreign intervention that this republic was able to be created. Gresh (2009) notes the many success of the republic such as establishing a printing press, publishing Kurdish newspapers and journals, translating Persian textbooks to Kurdish, and creating Kurdish schools. Also during this time Iranian Kurds obtained Kurdish textbooks from Iraqi Kurdistan

(Sheyholislami 2012). This cooperative relationship between Irani Kurds and Iraqi Kurds is a pattern seen throughout Iran's history.

The Republic of Mahabad lasted only 11 months (Gresh 2009), yet even after the fall of the Republic, Iranian Kurds continued to create Kurdish media and promote Kurdish education. The two Kurdish parties in Iran promoted teaching both children and adult Kurdish and published textbooks in Kurdish as well. "The campaign [to teach Kurdish and in Kurdish] was one of the most valuable contributions of the Kurdish movement in those years because it proved that in a free Kurdistan education must be in Kurdish" (Hisami qtd. in Sheyholislami 2012). However, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Kurdish language is again facing government restrictions. By Iranian law Kurdish is banned in use for academic instruction, and yet the law does permit Kurdish literature classes (Sheyholislami 2012). While the Iranian government provides public education, it is only offered in Persian and thus prevents many Kurds from gaining an education; according to Phillips (2015), this has led to "high levels of illiteracy" among the Kurds (p.86).

There have been a few attempts to establish informal Kurdish institutions. Sheyholislami (2012) makes note of one of these schools: the Cultural and Teaching Society of Soma: Kurdish Learning School (otherwise known as Soma). Soma not only teaches spoken Kurdish, but it also instructs students in written Kurdish and in Kurdish literature (Sheyholislami 2012). As Soma is a private school that does not receive any support from the Iranian government, the school is perpetually in financial straits (Sheyholislami, 2012), and the cost of attending this school is high. Sheyholislami (2011) states, "not many people can afford the cost of private lessons, especially to learn how to read and write a language only for intrinsic reason and not for gaining external rewards". Sheyholislami further states that even with students' tuition the school cannot

afford materials, nor can they pay their instructors. Even though Iranian laws permits the instruction of Kurdish literature in government sponsored schools, this policy has not been implemented. Expensive private schools like Soma are therefore the only institutions where Iranian Kurds can learn their language in a formal setting.

Just as teaching Kurdish literature is nominally legal, so too is the broadcasting and circulation of Kurdish media. All Kurdish publications have to be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and very little content besides religious and cultural material gets past the ministry's inspection. If publications are granted approval, they then receive no financial support from the government. One Kurdish publication, *Sirwe*, did received financial support for some time, but many Kurdish scholars felt that the government's support restricted *Sirwe's* objectivity. According to Sheyholislami (2012), "the central government had its own propaganda objecting in supporting *Sirwe*...the authorities probably hoped that having a controlled, well circulated Kurdish magazine would quench the thirst of Kurdish readers and writers for a literary venue" (p.33). *Sirwe's* last publication was published in 2010. In that same year, an Iranian bookkeeper was arrested for "collecting and selling Kurdish books" (qtd. in Sheyholislami 2012, p.34). He was sentenced to 2 years in jail and was fined. As for broadcast media, the Iranian government offers state sponsored Kurdish programs, but just as with print media, broadcast media is tightly restricted (Sheyholislami 2012). In an attempt to bypass the government's regulations, many Iranian Kurds illegally possess satellite T.V. Satellite T.V. gives Iranian Kurds access to international broadcast from the U.S., Europe, and Iraq (Gresh 2009). In effect, the globalization of media has given Iranian Kurds greater allowance to interact with their language.

Today, Persian continues to be considered the one and only official language in Iran (KHRP 2011), and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) denies any culpability that its language policy disenfranchises its minority language speakers. The IRI boasts that the Islamic religion, not ethnicity, is what ties the Iranian nation together (Sheyholislami 2012) and maintains that all citizens are equal "in conformity with Islamic criteria"; yet, as noted in the KHRP Briefing (2011), "in the absence of a definition for the term 'Islamic criteria'... the Iranian authorities have a wide discretion in deciding whether the exercise of minority language rights is in accordance with Islamic principles" (p.9). According to Khomeini, the inaugural leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is no such thing as minority groups under Islam. As quoted in Entessar (1992), Khomeini stated that "There is no difference between Muslims who speak different languages... it is very probable that such problems have been created by those who do not wish the Muslim countries to be united" (p.23). Such logic removes any burden of language equality from the Iranian government's shoulders.

Iran is now facing an increasingly demanding Kurdish population made only bolder through the years by the success of their Kurdish neighbors in Iraq. The creation of the Kurdish Regional Government, for instance, rejuvenated the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iran (Gresh 2009), and the Iraqi Kurd's 2017 independence referendum has only further fanned the fires. During this turbulent, watershed moment in the Middle East, onset by the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War, and most recently the tenuous relationship between Iran and the United States' current administration, Iran must respond to its Kurdish population's unrest lest they incite more conflict.

Syria:

With the least amount of Kurds residing within its borders, there is less information on Syrian Kurds than on the Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Turkey. However, the status of the Syrian Kurds may in fact be one of the most important issues of the 21st century. Syrian Kurds are known most recently because of their integral part in the war against ISIS. In an effort to showcase their prowess as a nation and their resolve against authoritarianism, the Kurdish party in Syria, known as the YPG, has spearheaded the fight against ISIS (Kaya & Whiting 2017). It is the party's hope that such aggression will gain them international support and propel them closer towards Kurdish independence. Prior to the war on ISIS, however, the Kurds in Syria fought a different war, one against the rising tide of Syrian nationalism (Ziadeh 2009). Similar to Iraq and other newly forged Arab countries in the 50s and 60s, nationalistic sentiment in Syria led the government to view any non-Arab entity as a threat to the country's unity. As such, the Syrian government created policies which intended to erase the ethnic identity of the Kurds. In 1962, for instance, over 100,000 Kurds were revoked of their citizenship under the pretense that they or their family had illegally emigrated from Turkey to Syria (Ziadeh 2009). By revoking their citizenship, the Syrian government forced the Kurds out of public life; they were denied the right to vote, own private property, or work in the public sector (Ziadeh 2009). In addition to this, many Kurds now carried the title of "foreigner" in their own country. Thus, the Syrian government quite literally erased the Kurdish population from their census, without having to expel any person abroad.

The rise of the Baath party only increased nationalistic idealism. Like in Iraq, the Baath party implemented policies intended to wipe out the Kurds. For example, under the "Arab belt" draft, thousands of Arabs set up settlements in Kurdish dominant villages, forcing out the Kurds

already residing on the land and diluting the social power of the Kurds who remained among the Arabs (Hassanpour 2008; Ziadeh 2009). Arabs were sent to these Kurdish dominant village allegedly so that the Kurds could be 'watched until their dispersion' (Hassanpour 2008). Although this policy soon ended due to a rift in the Baath party, the effects of the Baath's Arabization policy are still felt to this day.

In terms of language policy, the Syrian government, like its neighbors, has a history of devaluing and restricting the Kurdish language. Talib Hilal, "Arabization Mastermind" and comrade of President Hafiz al-Assad, called Kurdish, "an unintelligible language which was used to conceal treason and separatist plotting" (qtd. in Phillips 2015, p.153). He also wrote that, "The Kurdish question, now that the Kurds are organizing themselves, is simply a malignant tumor which has developed in a part of the body of the Arab nation" (qtd. in Phillips 2015, p.153). During Hafiz al-Assad's government, Kurdish was forbidden to be used in the media, in private schools, and in conducting business. Names of Kurdish villages and street were Arabized and parent were even barred from giving their children Kurdish names (Phillips 2015). Today, Syria does not recognize Kurdish as an official language and still does not allow it to be taught in school (Kajjo & Sinclair 2011). "Kurdish children are not allowed to study Kurdish in schools and Kurdish teachers are forbidden to employ it during classroom instruction. Children are also forbidden to learn Kurdish through alternative means" (Ziadeh 2009). Other minority groups such as the Assyrian and Armenians of Syria have been allowed to run private schools where they can teach their language. Kurdish, however, is denied this right (KHRP 2011). Furthermore, the government continues to enforce policies which ban the use of Kurdish in public and in the workplace (Kajjo & Sinclair 2011). Publications in Kurdish are also forbidden (Ziadeh 2009).

In recent years, however the Kurds have gained some support from the Syrian government. According to Kaya and Whiting (2017), the Kurds action against ISIS insurgents has even put them in the good graces of Bashir Assad, Syria's current despot. For instance, Assad has removed some of his military forces from Northern Syria where most of the country's Kurdish population reside (Kaya & Whiting 2017). There is question as to whether this relationship will continue after the war and once (that is, if) the Assad regime re-stabilizes; Assad's government will certainly wish to reign in the Kurdish party so as to quell any notions of secession.

Still, their apparent good natured relationship with Syria's dictator weakens the Kurds status as a democratic, anti-authoritarian nation and may be why international powers such as the US are wary to support the Kurdish fighters in Syria. The US has perpetually employed a spasmodic policy towards the Kurds. On the one hand, the Kurds have been keys fighters in the war against ISIS, which has led the US military to side with the Kurds during battle. On the other hand, to support the Kurds in Syria is to not only to inadvertently support Assad but is also to upset the relationship the US has with Turkey. Kaya and Whiting (2017) are apt to point out that the US has in the past supported Turkey authority over Kurdish aspirations and nothing shows a change in this policy. Regardless, the Syrian War has given the Kurds in Syria more autonomy which will likely cause drastic change throughout the Middle East in the near future.

Turkey:

Turkey is the most notorious country in terms of Kurdish language discrimination and it is the country with the most severe anti-Kurdish policies still in effect today. Its adamancy in dispelling any non-Turkish cultural artifact, including the Kurdish language, stems from the

country's notion that a unified ethnic identity equals a unified state. However, just like its neighbors, Turkey's quest for unify has only led to divisions.

Turkey's anti-Kurdish policies began around the end of the Ottoman Empire. Prior to its fall, the Ottoman Empire boasted multiple ethnicities who coexisted within its borders in relative harmony. However, by 1923 the Ottoman Empire was no more and, through the Treaty of Lausanne, the Republic of Turkey was born (Zeydanlioğlu 2012). The founder of the country, Mustafa Kemal (better known as Atatürk), believed that the diversity of the Ottoman Empire is what led to its fall. He felt the Ottoman Empire had set itself up for foreign intervention and uprisings from minority populations (Zeydanlioğlu 2012). As such, Atatürk began the process of "Turkifying" Turkey's minority population.

Like Arabization, Turkification meant a series of policies which restricted the cultural and language rights of minority groups such as the Kurds. Turkification included forcing all institutions to use Turkish only; Turkish was the language of schools, laws, and media. Public use of Kurdish was prohibited and the Parliament was closed "to the Kurds who would resist forgetting, delaying, or canceling their identity" (Uçarlar qtd in Fernandes 2012, p.89). Non-Turkish city names were banned and replaced with Turkish ones (Fernandes 2012). Under the Surname Law, all Turkish residents were forced to adopt Turkish last names (Zeydanlioğlu 2012).

In addition to the legal restrictions on Kurdish, Turkification included the dissemination of the idea that the Kurds were a primitive people, lesser than the mighty Turk. Atatürk wished to show to the west that Turkey was a "civilized" nation whose job it was to civilize its "primitive" minorities. The Kurds were one such primitive people. "Kurds were called *kuyruklu*

kurt, meaning "Kurd with a tail", or *kiro*, meaning "uncivilized, uneducated, rude, worthless, one who knows nothing" (Ataturk qtd. in Fernandes 2012, p.87). The Turkish government presented this narrative in the media and in the classroom and textbooks. Even today this narrative affects Turkish society (Zeydanlioğlu 2012).

Ataturk's reforms, and subsequent destruction of the non-Turkish populations, were an attempt at globalization and modernization. They were meant to "break Turkey's ties with the Islamic east and to facilitate communication domestically as well as with the western world" (Geoffery Lewis qtd in Zeydanlioğlu 2012, p.102). Ataturk wanted to shed the idea that Turkey was an "eastern", backwards country and instead prove to the western world that Turkey belonged in their circle (Fernandes 2012).

In the modern age, Turkey has made weak attempts to provide some language liberty to the Kurds. This effort has occurred only because Turkey still seeks a position in the EU, and it can only obtain a bid so long as "the candidate state has institutions to preserve democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the recognition and protection of minority rights" (Zeydanlioğlu 2012). Some reforms include permitting parents to give their children Kurdish names and allowing the creation of private Kurdish language school. These reforms, however, are not without their numerous caveats. For example, parents may give their child a Kurdish name so long as it is not deemed "subversive", which is an ambiguous term destined to be over implemented. As for the language schools, "courses could only last for 10 weeks and no more than 18 hours per week and were for adults only" (Zeydanlioğlu 2012). Like in Iran, these private schools are unsurpassably expensive and receive no financial support from the government.

Even with these "reforms", children are still forbidden from learning their mother tongue in school, and teachers are forbidden from using Kurdish in instruction (Sheyholislami 2011). Boarding schools intent on replacing Kurdish children's language and cultural identity to that of Turkish, continue to crop up in Kurdish regions (Fernandes 2012). Children's programming in Kurdish is forbidden and any Kurdish broadcaster must first "present an *affidavit*' clarifying their intentions and behavior, 'stating that they will not broadcast...programs with the aim of teaching that language'" (Jon Rud qtd in Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008, p. 46).

Modern Turkey has also branded the Kurdish people as "terrorists" and this is most exemplified in their treatment of the Kurdish Worker's Party, otherwise known as the PKK. The PKK began in the 1970's as a left leaning political party that advocated for Kurdish nationalism and, ultimately, Kurdish independence. As a political party in a democratic nation, the PKK was not inherently a terrorist organization. However, Turkey feared that party's nationalistic zeal would lead to ethnic upheaval. In response to the party, in 1982 the Turkish military, who at the time controlled the government, wrote in Turkey's new constitution that, "no political party may concern itself with the defense, development, or diffusion of any non-Turkish language or culture, nor may they seek to create minorities within our frontiers or to destroy our national unity" (qtd. in Entessar 1992, p.96). The Turkish government also intensified its persecution of Kurdish "dissidents". Prosecution of Kurdish nationalists and was rampant in the 1980's, and the government attempted to achieve "some support among the Kurds by portraying the Kurdish guerillas, particularly the PKK forces, as terrorists bent on aggrandizing their own fortunes at the expense of the Kurdish population" (Entessar 1992, p.97). This is not to say that the PKK is an innocent. PKK dissidents have attacked and killed both Turkish government officials and Kurdish civilians (Entessar 1992). As Entessar (1992) pointedly states, "human rights abuses are

committed on both sides" (p.103). It is not the purpose of this paper to determine whether or not the PKK is a terrorist organization, but it is important to discuss the PKK because of its important role in the Turkish-Kurdish narrative.

Finally, this paper must note how the international world has responded to the Turkish Kurds. In Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the Kurds are a supported minority. Turkey's policy of Kurdish discrimination, however, is perpetuated by the international world, and especially by the US. For instance, in order to maintain their Middle Eastern hegemony and unrestricted access to oil and water resources in the region, the United States must support Turkey and its treatment of its Kurdish population. Turkey is a strategic ally for the US: it provides military support to the US, it has aligned itself as a key ally in the "war against terror", and it maintains itself as a "pivot state" for the United States and Israel (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008, p. 60). With this relationship at stake, the US must therefore tread carefully in its support for the Kurds. The US knows that Turkey is an indispensable ally in the Middle East, and while the US may support the KRG in Iraq, the political climate in the region makes it difficult for the United States to enact a blanket Kurdish policy.

That being said, the US is still supporting Turkey in genocide. They supply weapons to their Turkish allies which in turn are used to fight "terrorists"—i.e. the PKK. According to *Jane's Defense Weekly*, "a high proportion of defense equipment supplied to Turkey in operations against the PKK...military assistance to Turkey has even included the use of American soldiers" (qtd in Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008, p. 61). Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes (2008) also report that US F-16 fighter jets were used in the 1990s by Turkey to attack Kurdish villages in Northern Kurdistan. The US, however, is not the only country complicit in the suppression of Turkish Kurds. Britain, who Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes (2008) state is

part of "the coalition of the willing", has allowed discriminatory policy to continue in Turkey under the guise of fighting terrorism. In effect, Turkey is calling its Kurdish population "terrorist" and the US and Britain are not challenging that notion.

Turkey is by far the worst perpetrator of cultural and linguistic genocide within the Kurdistan region. It knowingly subjugates its minority ethnicities through both government policy and violence. Unlike in Iran or Syria, who attempt some linguistic freedoms, Turkey denies its Kurds any. Turkey will continue its treatment of the Kurds unless there is some international consequence. Currently, Turkey is secure in the knowledge that the US and Britain will continue to support its cultural genocide. As a member of NATO, however, the US and Britain must hold Turkey to higher standards. Furthermore, while the PKK has performed terrorist acts, this in no way means that the whole of the Turkish Kurdish population should be marked as "terrorists". Turkey is denying its people freedom to exist, freedom to speak, and that should not be stood for.

Implications and Conclusion:

The intention of this paper is not to advocate for Kurdish independence, nor is it to imply that a unified Pan-Kurdish nation is favorable, or even probable. Rather it is meant to illustrate the many violations against the Kurds and their language. Especially in countries such as Turkey and Iran, the Kurdish language is subdued by nationalists who believe that in order to unify a country there must be no diversity of ethnicity or of language. Excluding present day Iraq, in each country listed above there exists a language policy which attempts to erase the Kurds through linguicide. The idea is that in order to solve the "Kurdish problem", one must erase all notions of the Kurdish people. Especially with consideration to the US's different treatment of the Kurds in Iraq versus the Kurds in Turkey, this paper agrees with Watson (2007) that, "the

international community shows double standards in its pronouncement and dealings with [the Kurds] plight. Without international intervention, and equal treatment throughout the Kurdistan region, the Kurds will continue to be discriminated against. Such intervention needs not be more than recognition of the Kurds and support of their linguistic rights.

The fate of the Kurds is extremely important in the 21st century. The Middle East is experiencing a watershed moment, and the Kurds in all parts of the Kurdistan region are being affected. In Iraq, the Kurds are on the precipice of independence; in Iran, Kurdish nationalism is on the rise; in Syria and Turkey, the Syrian Civil War has put into to question what role the Kurds will play in the future of terrorism and regional stability. The Kurds are a powerful minority in the Middle East. Their current quest for liberty and autonomy may very well reshape the Middle East forever.

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