Kurds at a Political Crossroads: The Struggle for Identity and Sovereignty

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Abstract

This research analyzes the political complexity faced by the Kurdish community in the context of the struggle for identity and sovereignty. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this research seeks to understand the dynamics of collective identity and political struggle inherent in the Kurdish community, which has long been at a complex political crossroads in the Middle East region. By focusing on issues of identity and the concept of sovereignty in a political framework, this research documents the historical journey and socio-political development of the Kurdish Community, highlighting issues related to political rights, regional autonomy, and recognition of their cultural identity. Through a comprehensive literature review and in-depth qualitative analysis, this research explores how political contention and long history have shaped the Kurdish community's perceived identity and sovereign aspirations. The results of this research reveal the complexity of the Kurds' struggle to achieve sovereignty and develop their national identity in the Middle East. With a long history of struggle to establish an independent Kurdistan state and resistance to political pressure and repression from different countries, the Kurds have shown extraordinary resilience and commitment. Although divided into various factions and involved in internal conflicts, they remained united in their demands for recognition and political freedom. A political solution that takes into account the interests and needs of the Kurds, whether in the form of an independent state or greater autonomy under existing states, is necessary to achieve stability and peace in the Middle East. International support and a commitment to understanding the history and complex dynamics affecting the Kurds can play an important role in promoting dialogue and sustainable development in the region.

Keywords: *Kurds, Identity, Sovereignty, Politics, Minority Communities, Middle East.*

1. Introduction

The Kurds have a long and varied history. They come from the Indo-European people and have lived in the mountainous areas on the border between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey for more than 8000 years (Izady, 2015). Their early history can be traced back to the documents of King Tiglath-Pileser I in the 12th century BC, who recorded the "Qurti" region on Mount Azu as one of the conquered areas (McDowall, 2021). From the beginning of the first century AD, the term "Kurd" came into general use to refer to the people living in the mountainous region stretching from around Hormuz to Anatolia (Tejel, 2020).

This assertion is also strengthened by Islamic historians, who explicitly recognize the existence

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of the Kurdish ethnicity as they acknowledge the existence of other ethnic groups such as Arabs, Persians, and Turks (Harris, 1977). Kurdish ethnic identity is also believed to originate from the Medes, an ancient kingdom in the Persian region. A long historical journey and strong cultural roots provide a strong foundation for an understanding of the rich and complex origins and identity of the Kurdish ethnic group (Yavuz, 1998). The ethnolinguistic group that historically inhabits the mountainous areas of the southern Caucasus (Zagros and Taurus mountains), which collectively constitute the geographical region of Kurdistan. This area includes northern Iraq, western and southwestern Iran, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey. Ethnic Kurds are also found in southwestern Armenia and enclaves of Azerbaijan (Kalbajar and Lachin, to the west of Nagorno Karabakh) (Fleming, 1981). They are also found in northeastern Iran, namely in Khurasan. Ethnic Kurds speak the Kurdish language which is part of Iran (Dahlman, 2002).

The exact size of the Kurdish population in the Middle East is still unknown due to the lack of recent census analysis and the reluctance of governments where the Kurds live to provide accurate data regarding their population size (Gunes et al., 2019). However, Wikipedia informs that after various international agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Sevres Agreement, and the Lausanne Agreement, the territory and ethnic Kurdish population were divided into several parts, namely Northern Kurds (Turkey) with the largest area of around 194,000 square kilometers and a population of around 13 million people; Eastern Kurds (Iran) with the second largest area of around 125,000 square kilometers and a population of around 8 million; Southern Kurds (Iraq) with the third largest area of around 72,000 square kilometers and a population of around 6 million; Western Kurds (Syria) with the fourth largest area of around 18,000 square kilometers and a population of around 1 million; and Kurdish Armenia (former Soviet Union) with an area of around 18,000 square kilometers and a population of around 1 million people (Wikipedia, 2023).

Ethnic Kurds in the Middle East face various complex political challenges. One of the main issues is regarding the recognition of identity and the right to cultural autonomy (Vali, 1998). In addition, armed conflicts with the central government and other armed groups, especially in Iraq and Syria, have caused great suffering to the Kurdish people. Their involvement in regional conflicts has created additional tensions at the regional level, with the intervention of countries with diverse interests (Neriah, 2012). In addition, the lack of political representation in national government institutions often makes it difficult for them to fight for their political rights and aspirations effectively. All of these issues contribute to the complex and difficult political atmosphere in the Middle East, which continues to affect the lives of the Kurdish people in the region (Kaplan, 2020).

The protracted conflict faced by ethnic Kurds today largely stems from the ongoing oppression of their rights by the regime of the country they live in (Harff, 2018). When trying to fight for their rights, the ruling regime often responds with pressure and attacks, arguing that granting independence to ethnic Kurds could threaten the country's natural resources and territorial integrity (Fuller, 1993). Especially in Iraq and Syria, ethnic Kurds are increasingly united in their efforts to control the weakening central government, in the hope of realizing their long-held dream, namely the creation of a Kurdistan state (Baris, 2020). Weapons and military support from foreign parties, especially America, have strengthened their position in this battle. However, the power they have also poses a threat to the central government and neighboring countries such as Turkey (Gunter, 1993).

Kurdish endeavors to establish a sovereign state or even a self-governing zone have not

achieved desired outcomes. The Turkish state has sometimes enforced more stringent restrictions in the Southeast part of the country (Radpey, 2016). Consequently, the Kurdish region of Turkey is severely lacking in development. The Kurds in Turkey are experiencing economic underdevelopment compared to both other countries in Turkey and other nations in the Middle East (White, 1998). "Kurdish politicians and intellectuals attribute this disparity to idiosyncrasies in Turkey's economic progress." According to their analysis, Kurdistan is perceived as an internal colony, with its natural resources being exploited by Turkish and foreign corporations, which in turn invest in the region (Gunes & Yadirgi, 2020). Conversely, while the government highlights the significance of highways and infrastructure projects, Kurdish leaders have observed that the primary consequence of these transportation initiatives would be to enhance the maneuverability of Turkish security forces in the Southeast portion of the nation (Bilgen, 2018).

In addition, political institutions in the Kurdish region also face significant limitations and difficulties in operating effectively. This is partly due to years of hampering the development of local political institutions (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002). The Turkish government engaged in manipulating several traditional Kurdish elites to get them to support the government's policies, while at the same time, using repressive tactics such as the destruction of settlements or mass murder of Kurdish intellectuals (Efegil, 2011). The impact of these actions, as highlighted by Hamit Bozarslan, is an increased level of radicalization among Kurdish society, as traditional moderate forces in the region have been eliminated by the increasingly invasive repressive measures of the Turkish government. In response to these complex interactions, the Kurdish resistance movement emerged to defend the resources of cultural, social, and political power that were at the core of the fragmented Kurdish identity (Bozarslan, 2014). Therefore, in this complex context of Kurdish identity, it is crucial to acknowledge the existing diversity as well as the different effects of political and repressive interactions faced by Kurdish society.

This research aims to deepen the understanding of the division and fragmentation of identity as well as the complex historical experiences faced by ethnic Kurds during the last century in the Middle East. This research aims to analyze the impact of political policies and repression implemented by countries in the region on the Kurdish people. Apart from that, this research also aims to provide a deeper understanding of the collective identity efforts and political struggles faced by ethnic Kurds in the context of the formation of the artificial states they live in. This research has important significance in the context of understanding the political, social, and cultural dynamics that influence the Kurdish ethnicity in the Middle East. By delving into their history and experiences, it is hoped that this research will provide a broader understanding of the political and cultural challenges faced by the Kurdish community, as well as highlight the importance of recognizing collective identity and political rights for minority groups at the global level. However, this research has limitations, especially in terms of limited access to primary sources and limitations in conducting direct field research in the areas involved.

2. Literature Review

1. History of the Development of Kurdish Ethnic Independence

The Kurds have endeavored to establish a sovereign Kurdistan state since the time of the Ottoman Empire. Over time, their quest for independence expanded both in scope and transitioned from intellectual mobilization to armed conflict. In 1880, Sheikh Abdullah was revered as a heroic figure among the Kurdish population. He orchestrated coordinated

uprisings in eastern and southeastern Turkey, as well as in northern Iran, with a steadfast commitment to securing the independence of Kurdistan (Manyuan, 2017). Despite being suppressed by the Ottoman Empire and the Qajar dynasty in Persia, the Kurds were granted the opportunity, as per the Treaty of Sevres in 1919, to establish self-governing regions or sovereign states to the east of the Euphrates River, south of Armenia, and in the northern parts of Syria and Iraq, where the majority of Kurds reside. The treaty was concluded between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente powers following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I. It currently stands as the sole international legal document pertaining to Kurdish self-governance or sovereignty. Kurdish political entities in these four nations have employed it as a legal rationale for the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish nation (Radpey, 2022).

Following the conclusion of World War II, the quest for Kurdistan's independence was utilized as a strategic tool by the United States and the Soviet Union, who were vying for dominance in the Middle East (Lambert, 1997). The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was established in Mahabad in December 1945, with the support of the Soviet Union. It consisted of both an Iranian committee and an Iraqi committee. Qazi Muhammad served as the leader of the Iran committee, while Mustafa Barzani held the position of the Iraq committee's chief. The KDP declared the establishment of the "Mahabad Republic" and appointed Muhammad as the party chairman and "president" of the republic. Barzani was designated as the commander of the Kurdish forces. Their objective was to topple the feudal ruling families in Iran and Iraq, with the ultimate aim of creating a consolidated Republic of Kurdistan. The "Mahabad Republic" served as the initial phase in accordance with the party's program. Barzani assumed the position of chairman of the PPK on 16 August 1946, even though he was not physically present. From that point on, he exerted significant influence over the party. In December 1946, the Pahlavi dynasty deployed a substantial military force to eradicate the "Mahabad Republic," resulting in the elimination and capture of numerous influential individuals within the KDP. Muhammad was apprehended and executed by hanging, while Barzani was banished to the Soviet Union. Subsequently, KDP activities have been conducted covertly (Entessar, 2014).

Iraq's Faisal Dynasty was deposed in a coup led by Iraqi Army brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, who later formed the Republic of Iraq, in July 1958. Qasim implemented programs that improved relations between Iraq's Arab and Kurdish minorities. Despite initially working with the government, Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, began to quarrel with Qasim in 1959, particularly over land reform plans advocated by the Iraqi Communist Party. This disagreement caused the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to break into two factions: a traditionalist side led by Barzani and a Marxist faction led by Jalal Talabani. While Barzani supported Kurdish nationalism, tribalism, populism, and conservatism, Talabani called for more party reform in the direction of secularism and democratic socialism. The disagreements between these two factions heightened tensions, leading to Talabani's arrest and expulsion from Iraq by Barzani in 1964. However, Talabani was successful in establishing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Damascus in June 1975, resulting in the emergence of two political forces in Iraq's Kurdish independence struggle, namely the KDP and the PUK. Despite their differences, both factions are working to rebuild their organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan and renew their armed forces.

During the Gulf War, the two Kurdish powers in northern Iraq staged an uprising but were crushed by Saddam Hussein's administration. In response, the United States, Britain, and France declared a "No-Fly Zone" in northern Iraq, allowing both sides, the KDP and PUK, to

form a "state within a state" in their own regions (Malanczuk, 1991). The struggle between the KDP and the PUK lasted three years, from 1994 to 1997, until finally coming to an end in September 1998, thanks to US mediation and the signing of the Washington Agreement, which confirmed their mutual commitment to building an autonomous zone (GUNter, 1993). In contrast, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), led by Abdullah calan, was founded in Turkey in November 1978, inspired by the Kurdish independence movement in northern Iraq, with the main goal of establishing an independent and unified Kurdistan state under the ideology of Kurdish nationalism and socialism. To achieve this purpose, the PKK organized the People's Defense Forces (HPG) and the Women's Liberation Army (YJA), with bases in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Following Calan's arrest in Kenya in February 1999, new commanders such as Cemil Bayik, Murat Karaylan, and Fehman Hüseyin took his place, with Bayik currently commanding the PKK (Yarkin,2015).

Turkey has circulated the impression that Calan betrayed the PKK and gave the government secret information, causing internal turmoil inside the party. This technique was successful in driving some key members and grassroots cadres out of the party. The PKK Central Committee worked to improve Calan's prison circumstances through various measures in order to regain cohesion and combat efficiency (Marcus, 2007). In 2007, Bayik declared that Calan had not surrendered and that his ideas will continue to steer the party's struggle. Following that, the PKK increased its social base in Kurdish areas of Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and the armed forces were reduced to roughly 30,000 soldiers. In Syria, the PKK was successful in establishing the "Northern Syrian Democratic Federation," which serves as a government structure with legislative and judicial branches and operates the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. The PKK penetrated this system via the Democratic Union Party (PYD). At the time, the PKK's central department, led by Bayik, was a significant aspect of the "Federation," keeping contact with their bases in the Qandil Mountains and leading operations in southeastern Turkey (Ozcelik, 2020).

2. Political Problems Faced by the Kurdish Ethnicity

The arrest of Abdullah Ocalan on Monday (15 February 1999) in Nairobi, Kenya by a Turkish special forces unit has caused a reaction from most of the Kurdish immigrant community in Western Europe, England, and even as far as Canada and Australia (Gibert, 1999). In Germany, there were massive demonstrations. to resist the arrest of Ocalan. This arrest received wide coverage from the mass media in many countries, thus providing momentum for the Kurdish ethnic group to spread the word about their struggle so far. Abdullah Ocalan, who is a Marxist and is a symbol of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey, became the main target of the Turkish military, especially after he founded a military faction in the PKK organization in 1984, which he led for almost fifteen years. Ocalan avoided pursuit by the Turkish military and controlled his organization from Syria, a country Turkey considers to be the protector of the Kurdish ethnic struggle (Trilsch & Ruth, 2006).

The spread of the Kurdish ethnicity covering four countries means that the Kurdish problem is not just a domestic problem for one country (in this case Turkey). The presence of a large Kurdish population in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran means that since the era of the formation of modern states in the Middle East region, Kurdish ethnicity has been a factor and has periodically become a determining factor in relations between countries in the region. For Türkiye, the Kurdish problem is related to one another (Hirschler, 2001). This can be seen when Turkey's neighboring countries use the Kurdish issue to weaken its position. The Kurdish problem itself for Turkey and its neighboring countries, especially Iraq and Iran, has given rise

to almost the same interest in overcoming the Kurdish problem (Smoer & Liaras, 2010).

The cross-border conflict over the Kurdish issue means that Turkey cannot dominantly determine policies relating to the Middle East region. The Ankara government inevitably has to pay attention to developments in the Kurdish problem occurring in its neighboring countries (Içduygu dkk, 1999). For example: the rise of Kurds in Iran in January and February 1979 caused by the weakening and fall of the power of the Shah of Iran raised the hopes of ethnic Kurds in Turkey while increasing instability in the border areas of the two countries. The Ankara government must also pay attention to the policies implemented by its neighboring countries to overcome the problem of the spread of the Kurdish population (Barkey, 2000). The improvement in conditions obtained by the Kurds in Iraq which was a continuation of the 1958 Revolution has helped give the Kurds an impetus for the creation of new momentum in Turkey. More importantly, the Baghdad Government's policy towards the Kurdish population since 1974 has been exploited by the Turkish Kurdish opposition to demand the same rights received by Kurds in Iraq. Since 1991, Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed broad political and cultural rights. These rights cannot be obtained by Turkish Kurds, including official statements of the implementation of autonomy regarding political, language, and cultural rights (Natali, 2005).

Even though the scale and form are different in each place, the condition of the Kurdish ethnic group generally shows almost the same symptoms, namely: first, the Kurdish region overlaps with the borders of the nation-state so that they are considered an obstacle to national security and are very vulnerable to being exploited or manipulated. by regional and international powers. Second, Kurdish areas in these countries are usually poor, areas with minimal economic growth and are systematically marginalized from economic centers. Third, as a result of the dynamics of the assimilation process, the pressure and resilience of the Kurdish ethnic group in each country are greatly influenced by the direction and results of the Kurdish ethnic struggle in other neighboring countries. Fourth, Kurdish society itself is a complex society with various policies, ideologies, social classes, and dialects and has many clans. So the conflict against the Kurds is very difficult to define from just one area and aspect.

3. Method

The author employed a qualitative descriptive methodology in this study. Qualitative, descriptive research involves formulating a problem that directs the exploration and comprehensive examination of a social issue. Bogdan and Taylor, as cited by Creswell & Poth (2016), define a qualitative approach as a research methodology that generates descriptive data through the collection of written or spoken words from individuals and observations of their behavior. Qualitative research centers on the examination of social phenomena, with a particular emphasis on capturing the subjective experiences and perspectives of the individuals involved in the study. A qualitative approach is a research method that seeks to comprehend the phenomena encountered by research participants, such as behavior, perceptions, interests, motives, and actions, through the use of descriptive language and words. This qualitative methodology seeks to get comprehensive insights into the Kurds' political dynamics, particularly their pursuit of identity and self-governance. This study employs qualitative data. Qualitative data refers to information that is gathered in the form of words or visuals, as opposed to numerical values. The dataset include interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official materials. The researchers utilized a data source consisting of literature collected from diverse and pertinent sources for their study. Subsequently, the collected data is scrutinized through the utilization of data reduction techniques, data display, and drawing conclusions. The reference "Miles & Huberman 1994" is mentioned.

4. Results And Discussion

1. Identity Problems Faced by Ethnic Kurds

The Kurds, with a population of more than 30 million people, are generally recognized as the world's largest ethnic group not to have their state. They live primarily in the region called "Kurdistan," which includes parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Although they are identified as one ethnic group, Kurds are a heterogeneous group, divided by differences in religion, class, gender, dialect, and alphabet. This internal diversity gives them a complex and unique identity, which sometimes creates internal tensions. Despite these internal differences, most Kurds have a strong sense of ethnic identity, which forms the basis of their political struggle in the Middle East region (Van Bruinessen, 2005).

The history of the Kurds is full of conflict with the majority government in the country where they live. Political injustice, violated human rights, and discriminatory treatment have driven mass migration out of the Middle East region since the 1970s. Governments in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria have frequently implemented repressive policies against Kurds, limiting their cultural and political autonomy and repressing their rights. As a result, many members of the Kurdish tribe were forced to flee abroad in search of protection and a safer life, leaving their homeland behind and telling stories of the suffering and hardships they experienced. Their struggle for recognition of their identity and equal rights remains a central theme in Kurdish history and culture (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007).

The Kurdish minority group has long attracted the interest of researchers in attempts to understand the dynamics of their collective identity and belonging. This is especially interesting because the Kurds are one of the ethnic groups that do not yet have a special nation-state for them. As a result, the challenges faced by Kurds in building a collective identity and a strong sense of belonging in a region where their identity is often debated is very interesting to research. As an ethnic group spread across various Middle Eastern and European countries, they face various challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage and language while interacting with the majority culture in the countries where they have settled (Yavuz, 1998).

Previous research has paid special attention to the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, especially to the first generation of migrants, and their struggle to maintain transnational ties with their homeland. This study of the Kurdish diaspora has highlighted how first-generation Kurds maintained and strengthened their identity through transnational networks and active participation in political struggles in their homeland. However, more detailed research on how second-generation Kurds develop and strengthen their sense of belonging, both to their Kurdish identity and to the society in which they grew up, is still very limited. A study that focuses on the mechanisms used by second-generation Kurds to maintain their identity while adapting to the culture and society in which they live would provide important insights into how minority groups build relationships with their identity and the society around them.

The statement that the younger generation of Kurds often feel like "others" in the context of Kurdish identity highlights the differences in experiences and exploration of identity between the first and second generations of Kurds. Younger generations of Kurds who grew up in a different society from their parents and have less direct exposure to Kurdish culture and traditions may feel feelings of alienation or significant difference from the rest of the Kurdish community. This may occur because second-generation Kurds often feel attracted to the majority culture of the country in which they grew up and feel more attached to that culture than to Kurdish culture (Maisel, 2018).

Additionally, migration and acculturation experiences may also influence the way second-generation Kurds view their own identity. Although they remain aware of their cultural and historical heritage, the younger generation of Kurds are often faced with pressure to conform to the majority society in which they live. As they grow and become involved in the social, cultural, and political life of their new environment, they may develop an identity consisting of many different cultural elements, reflecting their complex and multi-dimensional experiences.

Thus, the feeling of being an "other" in the context of Kurdish identity not only reflects the complexity of the identity of second-generation Kurds but also highlights their struggle to find a place in two culturally different worlds. In trying to navigate and accommodate both identities, young Kurds are often faced with significant internal challenges, which include feelings of isolation, dual identities, and pressure to conform to the cultural and social expectations of the society around them. As a result, the formation of their identities is often the result of a struggle between their cultural heritage and the pressures of the social environment in which they grew up (Gourlay, 20180.

Many young or second-generation Kurds express significant differences in values between their views and those of more traditional Kurdish communities in their homelands or first-generation Kurdish communities in European countries or other places where they have immigrated. They rejected several cultural norms considered "Kurdish values" which were considered to hinder them from expressing their identity and personal freedom. For example, some of them noticed differences in perceptions of clothing and lifestyle between traditional Kurdish culture and more liberal Western culture. One respondent explained how his experience of wearing shorts in front of his Kurdish family and relatives in his hometown often led to opposition and disapproval. Although he understands that these norms stem from their conservative culture, he perceives these pressures as restrictions that harm his freedom and personal expression.

In addition, a more open view of the role of women in Western society compared to the more patriarchal traditions in Kurdish culture, is one of the main drivers in their rejection of cultural values that limit women. They feel that the greater freedom afforded to women in Western culture allows them to pursue their ambitions and aspirations without the restrictions imposed by more traditional Kurdish culture. Ultimately, these differences in values often influence the formation of their identity, with some of them feeling a strong urge to adopt values and lifestyles that are more in line with the society in which they live, while still respecting and appreciating their cultural roots. This reflects their struggle to find a balance between their assumed cultural identity and the cultural identity they actively choose as part of the larger society. The various identities of the Kurdish ethnic group, which are heavily influenced by the countries where they immigrated, are enough to influence the self-identity of the Kurdish people themselves, making it difficult for the Kurds to express their identity and identity which is useful for the struggle for independence and sovereignty of the Turkish nation as a country. As a minority group spread across many countries, Kurds have experienced pressure to conform to the majority culture around them. This has created a dilemma for them in expressing their own cultural identity and identity. The cultural influence of the country in which they live has led to the adoption of different values and norms, which in turn can blur their ethnic and national identity.

The cultural influence of the country where they live can also influence the Kurds' efforts to fight for their independence and sovereignty as a nation. The experience of living in different cultures often forms diverse and complex perspectives on the concepts of nationhood and

independence. In some cases, cultural assimilation with the majority of society can create challenges in maintaining and fighting for a unique cultural identity. It could also complicate Kurds' efforts to unite their struggle for greater recognition and autonomy in the countries where they live. The difficulties faced by the Kurds in expressing their identity and identity can also become obstacles in fighting for their independence and sovereignty as a nation. The conflict between an identity influenced by the culture of the country in which they live and an identity rooted in Kurdish culture can give rise to internal divisions and tensions. To achieve the goal of independence and sovereignty, the Kurds need to overcome these differences and find a way to unite their diverse cultural identities into a unifying force in their struggle.

2. The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Political Context of the Kurdish Nation

The history of the Kurdish Community's struggle reflects the challenges and obstacles they faced in establishing their sovereignty and gaining recognition of their cultural identity. From Syria to Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, their efforts to gain autonomy and recognition have been met with repressive measures and restrictions imposed by ruling governments. Although some political efforts such as the establishment of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria and the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq provided temporary hope, outside intervention and repressive policies of the countries they live in have hindered their development (Darici, 2015).

In Syria, although Kurds were given important military positions initially, relations between the government and the Kurdish Community soon deteriorated. Kurdish culture was banned and Kurdish community gatherings were suppressed by the government, posing a major challenge to Kurds' efforts to fight for their autonomy and political rights in the country. In Turkey, restrictions on Kurdish political and cultural initiatives have been a major focus of the government, with the Kurdish language being banned from broadcasting and publishing. Although the political divide in Turkey is more abstract, these detrimental government actions have hindered the positive steps taken by the Kurdish Community. However, despite all the restrictions and pressures faced by the Kurds, they continue to show resilience and determination in their struggle. They have succeeded in building cross-border solidarity and unity, showing strong determination to achieve greater autonomy and recognition. Despite obstacles from the countries where they live, they continue to find creative and strategic ways to adapt and fight for common goals. Overall, the journey of the Kurdish Community's struggle reflects their determination and resilience in facing complex political and cultural challenges in various countries (Tejel, 2015).

To address the complex political and security challenges faced by the Kurdish Community in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, most Kurdish political forces have adopted a pragmatic approach focused on achieving autonomy under the framework of the Iraqi state. Recognizing that a direct attempt to establish an independent Kurdish state could trigger a harsh military response and intervention from neighboring states, the Kurds have attempted to achieve their sovereignty and cultural recognition through more strategic political channels. Despite continuing to advocate for greater political rights and autonomy, Kurdish political forces recognize the need to work within the existing political system to advance their interests without provoking an aggressive response from the existing government. It is within this framework that their efforts to achieve autonomy and cultural recognition continue, with a focus on broader political and diplomatic negotiations in Iraq and in the Middle East region as a whole (Demir, 2016).

The leadership's policy of adopting a pragmatic approach to fighting for Kurdish independence has played an important role in securing the Kurdistan region's broader autonomous status in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. The main leaders of Kurdish political forces have consistently emphasized their commitment to the territorial integrity of existing states while continuing to fight for greater autonomy for the Kurdish community (Halhalli, 2018). In Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been the main vehicle for Kurdish autonomy-building efforts since the early 1990s, with Kurdish leaders openly asserting their attachment to Baghdad while consolidating their de facto autonomous status in the region. Over time, the strategy used has focused on increasing and strengthening the territory of a "state within a state," allowing Kurds to maintain their identity and culture while remaining under existing legal and institutional umbrellas. This has allowed them to gain greater political power and more significant influence at local and national levels while continuing to strive to realize greater political rights for the Kurdish community as a whole.

The turbulent and changing political conditions in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey have provided the Kurds in Iraq with an opportunity to strengthen their position in the region and gain wider recognition of their near-independent status. Continued instability in the region has prompted the Kurds to take more proactive steps in their efforts to achieve greater independence or autonomy. Despite the enormous challenges they face, especially related to internal divisions and dissent, Kurdish groups have demonstrated resilience and a strong determination to maintain their national identity.

The development of the Kurdish national movement has experienced ups and downs over the centuries, but Kurdish national consciousness and identity have developed since ancient times. The Kurds have experienced a long and fraught history, and their desire to achieve an independent state or greater autonomous status has been an integral part of their journey. Although the process of Kurdish nation-building has not always been smooth, the Kurds' national consciousness and self-definition have developed significantly, even more so than many other national groups that have gained independence in the 20th century. With political dynamics and continuous change, the Kurds continue to strive to take a greater role on the global political stage and fight for their political and cultural rights amidst a rapidly changing environment (Eppel, 2014).

The potential for the formation of an independent Kurdish state has major implications for political conditions in the Middle East as a whole. If Syria and Iraq disintegrate, there would be a real opportunity for the creation of an independent Kurdish state in the region. However, if the two countries can maintain their unity and adopt a model of federalism, the Kurds will likely continue to seek to expand their autonomous regions within the existing state framework. Nevertheless, the inflexible attitude of Turkey and Iran towards Kurdish demands for autonomy could hinder the process of achieving a peaceful solution that meets the nationalist aspirations of the Kurds. Thus, the establishment of an independent Kurdish state or the possibility of wider recognition of Kurdish autonomy will significantly influence political and security dynamics in the Middle East, as well as change the political landscape of countries in the region.

A political solution that meets the national aspirations of the Kurds, whether in the form of a fully independent Kurdish state or a large autonomous region under the auspices of existing states, is an important step towards achieving stability, peace, and development progress in the Middle East region. Building an independent state for the Kurds will allow them to manage their own natural and cultural resources, facilitate infrastructure development, and advance the

social and economic life of the Kurdish people. By having an independent political entity, the Kurds will be able to take an active role in the regional peace process, working with neighboring countries to promote stability and cross-border cooperation.

On the other hand, the option of achieving broad autonomy under existing states may also provide a more realistic solution in the complex political and security context of the Middle East. By expanding Kurdish regional autonomy, Kurds will be able to maintain their own identity, culture, and language, while remaining connected to the central governments of the countries in which they live. Greater autonomy could provide Kurds with the freedom to manage their internal affairs, including educational, cultural, and economic matters, which in turn would allow them to develop their potential and strengthen social and political ties within Kurdish society.

However, regardless of the form of political solution taken, it is important for all parties involved, both the Kurds and governments of Middle Eastern countries, to engage in constructive and open dialogue, as well as a commitment to reaching a mutually beneficial consensus. The involvement of the international community and diplomatic institutions is also needed to support and facilitate the negotiation process, as well as to ensure that the resulting solutions take into account the interests and needs of all parties involved. With shared commitment and solid cooperation, there will be greater opportunities to achieve a sustainable and stable political solution for Kurdish national aspirations in the Middle East.

5. Conclusion

This research highlights the complexities and challenges faced by Kurds in achieving sovereignty and developing their national identity in a diverse and often conflicted region of the Middle East. From their history of struggle to establish an independent Kurdistan state to their experience in maintaining cultural and political identity amidst the pressures of their host countries, the Kurds have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and fortitude. Although the various Kurdish political factions are divided and sometimes involved in internal conflicts, their unity in the pursuit of sovereignty and international recognition has been an important aspect of their struggle. Amid political change and instability in the Middle East, the international community needs to pay attention to and support the national aspirations of the Kurds, and act as a mediator in facilitating dialogue between the Kurds and the governments of the countries where they live. A political solution that meets the needs and interests of all parties involved, whether in the form of an independent Kurdish state or greater autonomy under existing states, is a step that needs to be seriously considered. On the road to a sustainable political settlement, the Kurds need to continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation among their political factions, as well as to expand international networks and support. Improving education, social welfare and strengthening culture will play a key role in strengthening Kurdish national identity and preparing the younger generation of Kurds to face future political and social challenges. By understanding the history and complex dynamics affecting the Kurds, the international community can make a more significant contribution to promoting peace, stability, and progress in the Middle East region as a whole. By paying attention to the aspirations and needs of the Kurds, and by ensuring their participation in relevant policy development processes, we can build stronger foundations for realizing peace and equality in a region that is constantly plagued by conflict and political tension.

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