



A New Era?

“The Wind Of Change Has Already Started In Ankara”



Exclusive Interview with Dr. Fuad Hussein
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A New ERA?

This may be the spring of hope, Iraqi Kurdistan and its once archrival, Turkey may finally be flirting with the idea of solving the issues that separate them and focusing on those that unite them. The Turkish journalist Pelin Turgut once wrote that for as long as she remembers, the Turkish state has had “red lines that cannot be crossed.” Unfortunately for the Kurds, one of modern Turkey’s “red lines” is “Kurdistan,” and almost all that is associated with it.

The University of Salahadin, in co-operation with the Abant Platform, a prominent Turkey-based discussion forum hosted a broad conference in February of this year on finding a common future between the Kurdish and Turkish peoples. Under the theme of “seeking peace and future together,” the two-day conference was attended by hundreds of intellectuals from both sides.

It ought to be noted that the Abant Platform is closely affiliated with the Fethullah Gulen movement which has been supportive of the ruling Justice and Development Party, AKP. The conference’s fourteen-point closure statement emphasizes on bilateral relations between the Kurdish and Turkish peoples, disregard for ethno-nationalism-based policies, calls for respect of human rights and rejects violence.



Discussion forum about future relations between Kurds and Turks at Abant Platform in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

In March, President Abdullah Gul visited Iraq to become the first Turkish President to make such a visit since the late Fahri Kuroturk had done that in 1976. While President Gul's itinerary did not include Kurdistan, he did meet with KRG's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, in Baghdad. It was also reported that the Turkish President uttered the word "Kurdistan" when describing, well... Kurdistan! President Gul's acknowledgment of Iraqi Kurds as economic and political partners sends out a clear and an unsubtle message that things are changing or at least the potential for change is there.

Turkey does, however, have an internal Kurdish problem which must be dealt with independently from Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish provinces in Turkey continue to rank behind non-Kurdish ones when it comes to per-capita GDP as documented by Natsumi Aijiki's piece in this issue. Economic development in Turkish Kurdistan must leave the realm of mere election promises and must enter the government's list of priorities.

Sometime between the February conference and President Gul's visit to Iraq, reports of an imminent pan-

Kurdish conference surfaced. The conference, according to reports from both Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey would call upon the PKK to lay down its arms. While that may prove beneficial to all parties, Turkey's post municipal elections acts against members of the DTP can only discourage the prospect of a popular Kurdish call for PKK disarmament.

Perhaps it is time for the Turkish state to begin seeing its Kurdish electorate as equal citizens with crucial powers instead of accusing them of being sympathizers of this or that group. While an era of post-PKK southeastern Turkey is yet to be seen, Ankara can help in making that possible by treating Kurdish representatives as partners in the Turkish political process.

There certainly is a long way to go before there is a comprehensive reconciliation process between Turkey and the Kurds, yet there are signs of a possible new vision and a possible new era.

An Exclusive Interview

INTERVIEW WITH DR. FUAD HUSSEIN, Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government



San Diego, California - Kurdish Herald recently had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff of the President of the Kurdistan Region, for an exclusive one-on-one interview regarding a number of issues concerning Kurds in Iraq. Dr. Hussein also serves as an official spokesman for the Kurdistan Regional Government and on behalf of the Kurdistan Presidency Council and President Massoud Barzani, he holds the rank of minister and plays a role in the KRG Council of Ministers.

Kurdish Herald: The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is perhaps the single most important achievement of the Kurdish nation in modern history. What assurances can you give the Kurdish people that this will be a lasting experience?

Dr. Fuad Hussein: I believe that the Kurdish people will give the assurances; it is not about a single person, but the Kurdish people. Kurds are united and they believe in their cause. It is true that there are sometimes differences in opinion among the people, but when it comes to the Kurdish issue – the Kurdistan issue – we are all united.

We [the Kurdish people] are now strong enough to defend our cause. I think it is clear that we are also playing an important role today in Iraqi politics. We are doing so in order to protect everything that we have achieved, and we hope to develop these achievements and to guarantee them for the next generation. We will guarantee that these developments will continue to the next generation of Kurds.

KH: Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution has been postponed for much longer than the people of the disputed areas care to wait; what would you say is the most important issue preventing the implementation of this article?

Dr. F.H: I believe it is obvious what has been written in the constitution, including Article 140, is the responsibility of the Iraqi government to implement. The Iraqi government has not done this. So – let's say – there is a lack of political will to implement an article and that, of course, has to do with their ideology and their strategy.

Many people do not believe that these areas belong to Kurdistan. However, because it is an Iraqi constitutional matter, we believe in it and we will fight for it to be implemented. We are trying to reach an agreement with various political parties, and also with the [federal] government, to implement this article in order to give the population of these areas the right to choose. It is their constitutional right, which has until now been denied. It is their democratic right, which has until now also been denied.

Therefore, we are relying on the constitution to get this right back. When the populations of these areas are given the right to vote, the future of these areas will be decided.

KH: Iraqi oil minister, Hussein Shahrastani recently told Businessweek that the KRG has no right to sign contracts without public bidding. How are you resolving these issues with the federal government?

Dr. F.H: It is obvious that this is his opinion and his own wrong interpretation of the Iraqi constitution. We believe that what we have done is in accordance with the constitution and we will continue to operate this way. We hope that we can find a way to reach an agreement with the Iraqi Federal Government about this issue.

KH: Relations between the Kurdistan region and Turkey are said to be much better today than in recent years. Can you tell us where relations between the Kurdistan region and Turkey stand today and whether we should expect to see improved relations in the future?

Dr. F.H: We have, at present, a very good relationship with Turkey. We are in contact – direct contact – with the Turkish government. We are dealing with various issues related to the Kurdish and Turkish relationship. There is a huge interest in this – mutual interests on both sides – and I think the wind of change has already started in Ankara. We hope that we can develop this relationship for the better.

KH: There has been discussion of a Kurdish summit - or pan-Kurdish conference - in Erbil. This is obviously historic in that it is the first time that Kurds from all parts

of Kurdistan will be able to participate in such an event. Could you tell us a little bit about this conference?

Dr. F.H: This is an idea that had been discussed about one year ago. President Barzani brought up the idea and he discussed the matter with President Talabani. They agreed on the idea but as far as the actual conference, there is still no agreement about when it will be held and who will be participating in the conference.

However, the idea is there at present and we will need more discussion among ourselves – the Kurdish political parties – but also with various leaders of the world because it is a sensitive issue. We will see, but the idea is there.

KH: Since the idea was brought up, has there been any detailed discussion about what the focus of the conference will be?

Dr. F.H: The idea is to have a conference about how to adopt a peace program for the Kurdish issue, everywhere.

LOCAL ELECTIONS IN DIYARBAKIR

Kurdish Conference In Erbil: Is There Any Space For HOPE?

by Siyar Ozsoy

Members of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), as well as independent analysts in Turkey, described the local elections as something far more than simply a vote. For Kurds, they described the 29 March 2009 election as a “referendum on the Kurdish issue”. The election was a culmination of several salient factors including the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) uncompromising politics towards the DTP, popularly known as the “Kurdish party”; Prime Minister Recep Erdogan’s refusing to engage in dialogue with the DTP; his changing attitude after the general election of July 2007 in favor of a cross-border operation into the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) territories to attack the bases of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK); and, especially, his too ambitious desire to “conquer” Diyarbakir, Batman and Tunceli municipalities that have been ruled by the DTP since 1999.

A few weeks before the local elections, the possibility of a Kurdish conference in Erbil that aimed at finding a solution for the PKK issue found wide sympathetic expression among Turkish national media. Turkish expectations became even higher when Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was reported saying that the PKK must either leave Iraqi territories or lay down arms during his visit to Turkey.

The Turkish government’s actions seem to be pointing at the direction of finishing off the representatives of the “Kurdish party,” be they mayors or parliamentarians, rather than to negotiate with them as partners towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. After the general elections of 2007, while totally ostracizing the DTP, Erdogan repeatedly ordered his ministers and party executives, “I want Diyarbakir” in the nationwide local elections of 2009. Criticizing the governmental, financial and legal pressures on Diyarbakir municipality and pointing at Diyarbakir’s symbolic and political centrality for the Kurds, the mayor of Diyarbakir and member of the DTP, Osman Baydemir, harshly responded to Erdogan’s desire “to conquer Diyarbakir”: “Diyarbakir is a castle for us, and it will be defended.”

The battle for Diyarbakir was one where the AKP had good reasons to think it was winnable, as evidenced by the unexpected amount of Kurdish votes it received in the 2007 elections. After his electoral victory, the Turkish prime minister had a clear change in his pre-election policy that had included signs that the AKP might even recognize the DTP as a partner for dialogue after the elections. After the victory, however, he reasoned: the DTP’s defeat in the local elections would



DTP Rally in Diyarbakir, Turkey - Photo Courtesy Luqman Barwari

mean that Kurds do not support the DTP, and, hence, there is no Kurdish question at all and no need to dialogue with the DTP. This linear logic could not capture the fact that even if the DTP is eliminated, “the Kurdish problem” will remain in its place and intact until it is pursued politically. Unfortunately the Turkish government has unwisely reduced the almost two-century-old Kurdish conflict to dynamics of local elections. In such a context, the government’s policy was to defeat the DTP in the elections, “to conquer” Diyarbakir, to show to the national and international observers that the Kurdish struggle does not enjoy the support and legitimacy it had previously enjoyed, and then to fight a final war against the PKK through a collaboration with the U.S., E.U., and Iraqi Kurds. It was within this context that a Kurdish conference under the sponsorship of Iraqi Kurdish leaders to disarm the PKK found support in the Turkish public and political circles.

Things did not go as planned for the AKP. The Kurds took the local elections as a referendum. The AKP’s using state and governmental resources to “buy votes” in exchange of delivering coal, small educational stipends, refrigerators or dishwashers; the opening of the official TRT 6 Kurdish TV channel, and the debates over Kurdology institutes at Turk-

ish universities; and the promises to “pour money into the region for development” did not bring the votes the AKP had expected (Radikal, 31 March 2009). On the contrary, the DTP could not only defend its “castle” Diyarbakir and the municipalities of Tunceli, Batman, Hakkari and Sirnak, and remarkably increased its votes, but also won the elections in Igdır, Van and Siirt; the latter two being very crucial for the AKP. The prime minister himself was elected from the Siirt province in 2002, which is also the hometown of his wife who is of Arab ethnicity. The DTP increased the number of its municipalities from 56 to 98, compared with 2004, hence scoring a clear victory.

Optimistic Kurds thought that this victory would put enough pressure on the government to begin a dialogue with the DTP for a peaceful resolution for the Kurdish issues, which would mean the end of the government’s policy “not to shake hands with the DTP” since the general elections of 2007. The PKK welcomed DTP’s election success and declared not to use arms until 1 June 2009, and extend the cease-fire if the state does not increase tension, as a political move to empower the DTP in the political process. However, the series of events that started immediately after the elections gave clear hints that a dialogue between

the Kurds and the Turkish state was still not within sight. Turkish police attacked harshly Kurdish who objected to what they believed was an election fraud by the AKP in the Agri province. Many were injured and many more were arrested or detained.

In this murky political atmosphere, on 14 April 2009 the police conducted simultaneous operations in 15 different cities, mostly located in the Kurdish region, and took more than seventy DTP executives and members under custody with the accusation that they had ties with the PKK. While strongly denying these accusations, the DTP announced that the number of its imprisoned executives and members had reached 222 as of 7 May 2009, including 3 vice-chairs of the party. In addition, the mayors of Diyarbakir and Batman received ten-month sentences for using the word "guerilla" to name the PKK members, instead of the word "terrorist," and if the Court of Appeals approves the sentence, they will also lose their posts.

DTP's chair Mr. Ahmet Turk and other party executives evaluated these events as the government's retaliation and revenge for its failure in the local elections. According to the DTP, the operation has no legal basis; it is an undemocratic intervention designed to exclude the Kurds from the sphere of democratic politics. On 23 April 2009, the DTP parliamentarians did not participate in the official National Sovereignty and Children Holiday, and organized a sit-in at the Turkish parliament until the next morning. On the same day, a fourteen-year-old Kurdish boy in Hakkari who protested the operation against the DTP was terribly beaten by a Turkish Special Forces member. The scenes of this event found wide expression in some Turkish television stations. Another young boy was killed in the same protest. A few days later, in Cizre, yet another Kurdish boy suffered a severe head injury after being hit by a gas bomb.

While the military operations of the Turkish army expanded to rural Kurdish areas and pressures on the Kurds in the city centers increased, clashes between the Turkish military and the PKK on 29 April 2009 resulted in the deaths of nine Turkish soldiers in the Lice district of Diyarbakir. On 3 May 2009, the DTP responded to the mass arrests against their party with a two-day hunger strike in Diyarbakir with the participation of its chair, executives, mayors, and parliamentarians and ten to fifteen thousand local people. The chair of the DTP, Mr. Ahmet Turk, claimed that the police operations against his party were destroying the possibility of a democratic and peaceful solution, alienating the Kurds from legal/democratic politics, and encouraging them to fight in the mountains. Certainly, recent events have resulted in increased tensions throughout the region and have already begun heightening the conflict.

The DTP's victory in the local elections and the escalation of state repression, political tensions have changed the context and nature of the debate over the prospective Kurdish conference that is to be held in Erbil. The original support of the government for such a conference was based on the expectation that the DTP would fail in the local elections. In the midst of all this political turmoil, however, some Kurds, including DTP leaders are entertaining the idea of a Kurd-

ish conference of another kind; one that is not aimed solely for the disarmament of any single Kurdish group, but that would instead include all major Kurdish groups and be focused on creating a concerted political vision to formulate peaceful and democratic solutions for the multiple problems that the Kurds experience in the various states of the Middle East. Clearly, the Kurdish issue has transcended national boundaries and a larger regional and global perspective is needed.

Kurdish political dynamism has structurally been a source of conflict and instability in the region, while the countries wherein the Kurds reside have feared inter-Kurdish solidarities as threats to their national unity and territorial integrity. While regional power balances and especially pressures from Turkey are big obstacles in front of a Kurdish conference to facilitate inter-Kurdish solidarities, the aspirations and hopes of many Kurds still lie in there. Additionally, increasing social and political exchanges among Kurdish communities across the borders may produce a political vision full of potential for peace that has not been imagined yet.

Siyar Ozsoy is a PhD candidate at the Social and Cultural Anthropology Department of the University of Texas at Austin. His work is concerned with questions of violence, state formation, nationalism, neoliberalism, multiculturalism, civil society, which he has extensively researched within the context of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Siyar Ozsoy also completed research in Diyarbakir on the transformation of Kurdish politics as well as its current situation within the larger context of Turkey's ongoing accession to the European Union and the changing status of Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan. 

INCOME DISPARITY IN SOUTHEAST TURKEY



by **Natsumi Ajiki**

There is a lot to celebrate about the prospect of KRG-Turkey relations. However, it bears mention that there are serious issues within Turkey which must be addressed if and when Turkey attempts to solve its own Kurdish question, as it is sometimes called, that have little or no connection to Iraqi Kurdistan. One of the most significant issues falling within this category is the income disparity between the Kurdish and non-Kurdish regions within Turkey.

While precise data concerning the economic circumstances of various regions in Turkey is difficult to come by, the available data, albeit somewhat dated, shows great gaps between the per capita income levels between citizens of Turkey living in predominantly Kurdish districts as compared to those in non-Kurdish districts. The New York Times on November 2, 2007 published an article on the matter, "As Kurds' Status Improves, Sup-

DATA ON REGIONAL INCOME LEVELS	
Level 2 Statistical Regional Units GDP per capita-index values (2001)	
TR10 (Istanbul)	143
TR 51 (Ankara)	128
TR 31 (Izmir)	150
TR 41 (Bilecik, Bursa, Eskisehir)	117
TR 42 (Bolu, Düzce, Kocaeli, Sakarya, Yalova)	191
TR 21 (Edirne, Kirklareli, Tekirdag)	127
TR 62 (Adana, Mersin)	111
TR 32 (Aydin, Denizli, Mugla)	113
TR 61 (Antalya, Burdur, Isparta)	95
TR 22 (Balikesir, Çanakkale)	98
TR 81 (Bartın, Karabük, Zonguldak)	108
TR 33 (Afyon, Kütahya, Manisa, Usak)	88
TR 52 (Karaman, Konya)	75
TR C1 (Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis)	65
TR 63 (Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye)	74
TR 72 (Kayseri, Sivas, Yozgat)	66
TR 71 (Aksaray, Kirikkale, Kirsehir, Nevsehir, Nigde)	85
TR 83 (Amasya, Çorum, Samsun, Tokat)	73
TR 90 (Artvin, Giresun, Gümüşhane, Rize, Trabzon, Ordu)	67
TR B1 (Bingöl, Elazığ, Malatya, Tunceli)	67
TR B2 (Çankiri, Kastamonu, Sinop)	70
TR A1 (Bayburt, Erzincan, Erzurum)	50
TR C2 (Diyarbakir, Sanliurfa)	54
TR C3 (Batman, Mardin, Siirt, Sirnak)	46
TR A2 (Agri, Ardahan, Iğdir, Kars)	34
TR B2 (Bitlis, Hakkari, Mus, Van)	35
Turkey	100

port for Militants Erodes in Turkey," which stated that as many as 60% of the Kurds are still below the poverty threshold in Turkey.

Furthermore, The Human Development Report, a publication of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for 2008 examines income disparities within Turkey on the basis of 2001 GDP per capita index value provided by TURKSTAT. The TURKSTAT data on regional income levels are composed of 26 Level 2 Statistical Regional Units, with a regional unit being comprised of one or more of Turkey's 81 provinces. Then, each regional unit is indexed against the mean (Turkey=100) as shown on the right.

If we define a Kurdish regional unit as a province with a majority Kurdish population, then, according to the data, all of the Kurdish regional units' per capita GDP are lower than non-Kurdish regional units, ranging from 34 % to 67% of the mean per capita GDP for citizen of Turkey. The poorest three regional units are all predominantly Kurdish: Agri/ Ardahan/ Iğdir/ Kars on Turkey's eastern border, at 34, followed by Bitlis/ Hakkari/ Mus/ Van in the southeast at 35, and then by Batman/ Mardin/ Siirt/ Sirnak nearby at 46. Additionally, when Kurdish regional units are compared to the richest regional units, such as Bolu/ Düzce/ Kocaeli/ Sakarya/ Yalova (near Istanbul) at 191, Izmir in the west at 150, and Istanbul at 143, income disparities are even more significant.

Indeed, the pure data in and of itself does not tell the full story. It must be recognized that a large number of Turkish police officers and military and intelligence personnel who are stationed in Kurdish provinces receive much higher wages than locals. Members of the Turkish security forces who work in Kurdish areas are almost always from majority Turkish areas of the country. They are frequently housed highly fortified, protected compounds within Kurdish areas and do not live among the masses. If their incomes are considered in the calculation of the means for the regions, this data may actually overestimate income levels in Kurdish provinces and thus understate the true magnitude of the regional income disparity.

Legal, social and political institutions need to articulate and guarantee a course of public policies that will effect greater equality and long-term economic security. This means taking concrete steps in terms of income distribution and redistribution, access to educational and professional opportunities, and social assistance in order to alleviate poverty. Without such efforts, economic inequality will continue to drive strife within Turkey and provide an obvious counterpoint to those who assert that today's Turkey is a monolith that is merely threatened by a vaguely defined "terrorist" threat.

Hewler Post: “How do you spell ‘Kurdistan’ in Turkish?”

by Servet Tosun

On Newroz day, March 21, 2009, the Kurdistan Regional Government launched Hewler Post, an online newspaper-type publication in Turkish, posted in a well presented, professional PDF format. Despite the fact that Turkey enjoys trade contracts stemming out of Kurdistan, it fails to recognize the existence of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a legally sanctioned entity per the Iraqi constitution. Recent developments, however, may have compelled Turkey to realize that the Iraqi Kurds' achievements over the past two decades, and especially since 2003, need to be accepted, even if grudgingly so, and recognized.

Hewler Post is a child of the thinking that we need to hear each other out, that the Kurdish message is neither racist nor does it threaten Turkey's security, that message, however is too often lost in translation. Published in Erbil, Hewler Post is the first Turkish publication in Iraqi Kurdistan. Its chief editor, Rebwar Kerim Weli stated in the pilot issue that now more than ever there is an urgent need for the Kurds to release a publication in Turkish.

The mission of Hewler Post is explained by Mr. Weli in the first issue under the title of “Why a Turkish Newspaper?” The biggest problem between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey is the problem of “understanding,” Mr. Weli says, and points out the importance of the mutual understanding between both sides. “Turkey is the door to our dreams for reaching democracy and civilization,” he writes.

Another Hewler Post columnist, Remzi Peseng, also talks about the importance of building relations with Turkey, Mr. Peseng states that in the developed world, paradoxical political developments are unavoidable. Mr. Peseng places emphasis on the importance of socio-economic relations across borders by using the relations between the Spanish government and the Catalan people as an example. According to Mr. Peseng, after Spain entered the European Union, it developed diplomatic relations with Catalans which resulted in tremendous socio-economic progress. This example shows that with the growth of socio-economic relations, each party can become more politically flexible. That thinking seems to be shared by the KRG.

While these steps certainly contribute to the normalization process, there is much that is needed of Turkey. As long as Turkey sees the mere utterance of the word “Kurdistan” as taboo, there is little chance for any comprehensive understanding between the two sides. Stating that the problem is one of communication only is a rather simplified way of looking at KRG-Turkey relations, as it ignores a number of obvious central issues that must be addressed.

The Hewler Post seems designed to function as a tool for communication with Turkey by using Turkish medium, but it is not enough if indeed it is attempting to bridge the gap between the two groups. Thusfar, the publication makes no effort to address Turkish intransigence with respect to the Kurdish question. Mr. Weli wants to use Turkish language to explain what the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan really want and how they see the Turks. I respectfully would like to remind him, however, that the many Kurds in Turkey already know how to speak Turkish. These Kurds have attempted to express their interests to the Turkish establishment using the Turkish language, but still Turkey has difficulty hearing them due to a combination of enforced ignorance and oppressive measures against certain types of expression. Therefore, writing in Turkish may not be enough for opening a communication between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine true understanding unless the Turkish side also makes an effort to listen.

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF KURDISH MUSIC

by Natsumi Ajiki



The roots of Mr. Aksoy's dedication to music lies in his early childhood when his father began teaching him the art of baglama, an instrument of special symbolic importance for the Kurdish Alevi minority in Turkey. Born and raised near Antakya, Turkey where Kurds, Arabs, Turks, Assyrians and Jews lived, Mr. Aksoy developed an interest in the multi-ethnic traditions. He became a member of the band *Kardes Türküler* (Ballads of Fraternity) from 1995 to 2003 as an arranger, composer and performer. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Ethnomusicology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Ethnomusicology, according to Mr. Aksoy, looks at music from an anthropological perspective to understand the music in its social and cultural context, taking into account music's forms of expressions, the settings, the interactions, instruments, musical practices and rituals.

Mr. Aksoy's PhD dissertation deals with Kurdish musicians who are political exiles in Europe, and their political activities. His research involve with the way in which a certain Kurdish nationalism or Kurdishness is emerged, described and perpetuated with the help of music and within their music. Mr. Aksoy adheres to Benedict Anderson's school of thought insofar as seeing the concept of "nation" as an imaginary thing. The nation building process for Kurds requires a more homogeneous definition of the nation not only as a sense of belonging, but also as a framework for political identity. Some Kurdish musicians use their music to promote their nation-building projects despite not having a unique language, religion, or even alphabet to unite all

the Kurds. His goal is to understand such intricate of issues as the dynamic relationship between Kurdish music making and nationalism as a way of life and how they are interconnected.

Growing up in a multi-ethnic neighborhood, Mr. Aksoy's only memory of Kurdish music in his early childhood is his grandmother's singing Kurdish laments for her late husband. Mr. Aksoy's passion in studying Kurdish Ethnomusicology is, therefore, a part of his journey to search for his own identity which has been systematically denied and modified since his birth. Mr. Aksoy expresses the link between identity and music in a Kurdish context, "music serves as a medium of expression for the peoples' identities while music becomes a medium of manifestation for the Kurds."

Mr. Aksoy's main observation concerning the future of Kurdish music is that there have not been powerful institutions that can lead the efforts of archiving and recording Kurdish music, given the physical, linguistic and socio-political disintegration of Kurdish communities. As a result, many Kurdish musicians often have had strong ties with Iranians, Turks and Arabs in order to propagate their music throughout history. In Turkey Kurds used to bury their music cassettes to protect them from Turkish military forces and village guards. In the present, there is a trend in which some Kurdish musicians take what is 'left' as Kurdish music and mix it with rap and classical music in an effort to shape the future of Kurdish music.

However, there is a possibility of leading Kurdish music in an authentic way to shape its future. According to Mr. Aksoy, the rights of an unreleased TRT music archive, which Turkish musicologists recorded in various provinces in Turkey until 1970s, have been sold to Kalan Music Production in Istanbul. Producers at Kalan are currently in the process of re-issuing old tunes, which include Kurdish ones aside from other folk tunes. When old Kurdish music is recovered from the archives it may offer opportunities for Kurdish musicians to finally research the first recordings of Kurdish folk tunes recorded in Turkey. It is not to say which ethnic group owns what music, or which instruments belong to whom. Rather, Mr. Aksoy beautifully hopes that, "it should be a turning point at which people come to the realization that music belongs to all of us."

Ambassador of Kurdish Poetry, Badal Revo Mizori

By Vahal A. Abdulrahman



The only genuine way to hear “the other,” is to read his poetry, that belief leads the Kurdish poet, Badal Revo Mizori to translate the poetry of his fellow Kurmanci-writing poets into Arabic and distributes them widely through the Arabic World Wide Web circles.

In 1991, Mizori left his native Musil and settled in Graz, Austria where he still resides. Mizori is the unquestionable ambassador of Kurdish poetry to the Arab world. Born in the small village of Sheikh Hassan and raised in the predominantly Sunni Arab city of Musil, Badal Revo Mizori possesses an enviable command of the Arabic language and uses that skill to reveal to the Arab world the depths of Kurdish pain and hopes through translating the works of Kurdish poets into Arabic.

Life in exile often leads people to build imaginary bridges between themselves and the place they once called home. Mizori’s bridge and battle with the bitterness of exile is through translating Kurdish poems into Arabic, for an audience that arguably matters the most.

The grey-haired, 49 year old Mizori doesn’t represent any government or any nation, what he represents is something far more exquisite, poetry. Hundreds of Kurdish poems by tens of poets have been translated by Badal Revo Mizori in the past few years alone. The translated poems are then sent around to thousands of Arabic poetry fans whose forums and websites ensure that hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Arabophones have access to the depths of the Kurdish psyche.

Mizori recently told me that translation of poetry is the most important form of communication between civilizations. As an idealist who appreciates poetry, I must say that I agree with Mizori; in a world where Westerners read translations of Qabbnai and Darwish and Arabs and Muslims read translations of Poe and Frost, perhaps we could hear each other better.