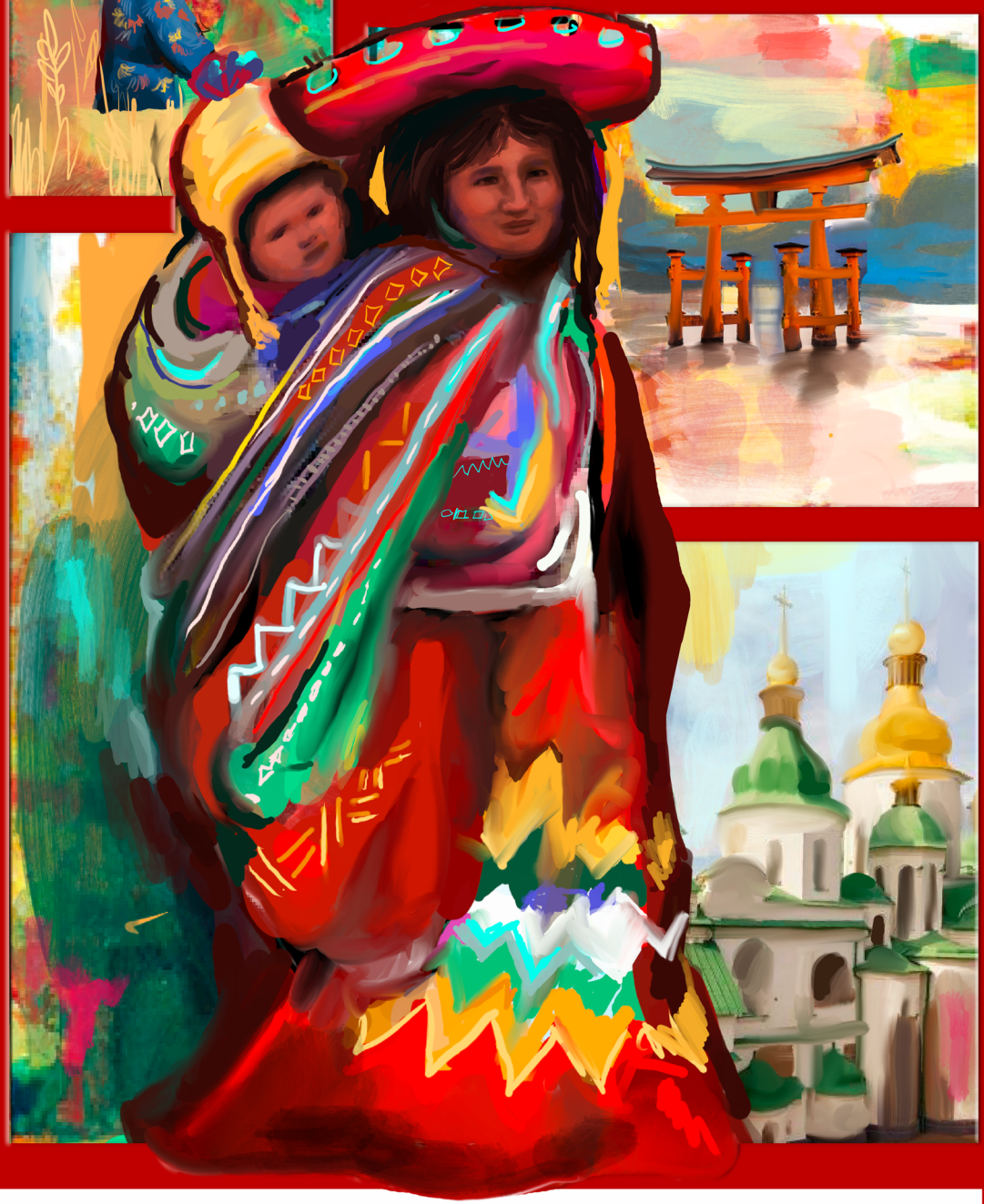
The Cornell Diplomat



Culture and Heritage

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Foreword

From the President, Vice President and Editor-in-Chief

By Sanjana Kaicker, Michael Dekhtyar, and Joanne Yang

May 2023
To our readers,

Four years ago, The Cornell Diplomat was founded with the goal of sharing student perspectives on global challenges. Each semester, we bring together talented writers, editors and artists to create an accessible and engaging magazine that brings to light international topics not frequently considered mainstream discourse. Our past issues have tackled subjects such as regime stability, the politicization of gender, the geopolitics of resources, the influence of borders, civil disobedience, the role of the youth, and power projections.

In our ninth issue, Culture and Heritage, our editors and writers explored stories surrounding the impact of climate change on indigenous people's culture and the importance of mother tongue education for countries in Africa. We dug deep to bring you unique analyses of the lingual roots of Kurdish nationalism, Chechnya's warrior culture, and more. We also raised awareness of the systematic destruction of historic Islamic holy sites and Armenian heritage sites to highlight the importance of preserving and appreciating diverse cultures and heritages around the world.

The Diplomat has always been a medium for intriguing and factual storytelling that weaves together diverse perspectives on global issues. We are incredibly proud of the role The Diplomat has played in informing the Cornell community on international and current affairs over the past four years, and we are immensely grateful for the invaluable work of all our members.

Sincerely,
Sanjana Kaicker *(President)*
Michael Dekhtyar *(Vice President)*
Joanne Yang *(Editor-in-Chief)*

Special thanks to the SAFC and the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies

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Cultural Erasure in the Modern Day:

The Destruction of Armenian Heritage Sites in Azerbaijan

By Ethan Kellogg

Overview

With the war in Ukraine still raging, the world has become reacquainted with the unresolved conflicts within the former Soviet Union. One such conflict involves the Nagorno-Karabakh region, a de jure territory of Azerbaijan that is largely administered by the self-declared, majority ethnically Armenian "Republic of Artsakh." Two recent wars were fought over the region, in the early 1990s and in 2020. This conflict has become fundamental to the development of national identity in both countries: Billboards in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku declare that "Karabakh is Azerbaijan" and protests in Armenia's Yerevan reject any concession of Artsakhi land.[1] [2] An often-overlooked consequence of this conflict is the destruction of cultural heritage sites—particularly Armenian ones within Azerbaijani-held territory—as a means to rewrite regional history to conform with modern borders. Thanks to the efforts of Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW), a research initiative led by archeologists from Cornell and Purdue Universities, there is now significant documentation of an active effort to dismantle Armenian cultural history. This wide-spread destruction has taken place since at least the late 1990s, primarily in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan, eliminating millennia of artifacts and altering the ethnic and cultural makeup of the region in a manner that may constitute cultural genocide.

Why are Armenia and Azerbaijan fighting?

Nagorno-Karabakh and neighboring regions have been historically populated by both Armenians, who are predominantly Armenian Apostolic Christians, and Azerbaijanis, who are predominantly Shia Muslims. As in much of the former Soviet Union, these two communities have been historically intertwined. Prior to World War One, the two ethnicities were not segregated into fully defined "regions," with neighboring villages and towns subscribing to different religions, customs, and traditions.[3] The incompatibility of this cultural heterogeneity with the idea of the nation-state manifested itself when Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. The two fledgling countries immediately fought a war over Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and the Zangezur region—a conflict that ended with the Red Army's invasion of the Southern Caucasus in 1920. The issue was settled when Moscow granted most of Zangezur to Armenia and categorized Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh as "autonomous" regions of Azerbaijan.[4] [5] While these regions' demographics have changed over time, they remained culturally diverse in population and/or heritage throughout most of the twentieth century. In the 1926 Soviet census, Nagorno-Karabakh was reported to be approximately 89.2% Armenian.[6] This Armenian majority remained through 1989, when the region was home to 145,593 Armenians (76.4%), 42,871 Azerbaijanis (22.4%), and a variety of other groups such as Russians, Kurds, Greeks, and Assyrians.[7] In contrast, driven by factors such as the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian-Azerbaijani War, and the population redistributions during the Soviet era, the Armenian population of Nakhchivan fell from 34.4% in 1897 to 0.6% in 1989.[8] [9] But hundreds of Armenian cultural sites and markers remained, acting as a reminder of the large community that had once lived there.

As Moscow once again lost its grip over the South Caucasus, dormant ethnic tensions flared between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Sporadic fighting between civilians from 1988 to 1991, such as the Sumgait and Baku pogroms targeting Armenians, and the Gugark pogrom and Khojaly massacre targeting Azerbaijanis, escalated into the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Tensions worsened when the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast voted to join the Armenian SSR in 1988, and military action followed when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991.[10] In the following months, Nagorno-Karabakh—still internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan—declared independence as the Republic of Artsakh.[11] Azerbaijani and Artsakhi forces clashed for two years, burning

villages and forcing civilians from their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Over a million people were forced to flee—from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia; from Armenia to Azerbaijan; and from Armenian-occupied sectors of Azerbaijan to other Azeri villages."[12] A 1994 ceasefire effectively left the still unrecognized Republic of Artsakh in control of most of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven neighboring Azerbaijani districts.[13]

War returned to Nagorno-Karabakh for a brief but violent six weeks in 2020 as Azerbaijani forces quickly overran much of Artsakh's southern flank, forcing the small republic to cede control of all territory outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, along with a portion of that region. Russian peacekeepers supervised the ensuing ceasefire to ensure that the Lachin humanitarian corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia remains open for civilian use. There have been skirmishes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces as well as a blockade of the Lachin corridor in the ensuing years, but territorial holdings remain largely unchanged.[14] [15] However, with a delineated zone of control which now places ethnically Armenian communities in Azerbaijani hands, concerns over the treatment of cultural heritage sites have grown.

Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan

Nakhchivan, despite not being a major area of contention in the modern Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, has been central to Azerbaijan's destruction of Armenian cultural heritage. Although the region's population is almost fully Azerbaijani in 2023, Armenians have contributed significantly to Nakhchivan's medieval and pre-modern history, which undermines the nationalist idea of Nakhchivan as being inherently Azerbaijani. But beginning in at least 1997, monasteries, churches, and graveyards have been gradually and quietly demolished, often to be replaced with symbols of Azerbaijani nationality. Through CHW's work using satellite imagery to catalog historically significant Armenian cultural sites, researchers discovered that 108 such sites—around 98% of those existing prior to independence from the Soviet Union—have been demolished.[16]

Particularly significant sites, such as the Cemetery of Old Jugha (Julfa), have been part of Azerbaijan's intentional demolitions. This primarily Armenian Apostolic cemetery was the first site where destruction was directly observed, as "eye-witnesses from the Iranian border zone" watched while cranes excavated tombstones and bulldozers flattened the ground. Attempting to hide the cemetery's destruction, Azerbaijani authorities restricted movement near the site. A report by the International Council on Monuments and Sites in 2007 found that, following the site's destruction, the Azerbaijani military "stationed a firing range on the Julfa Cemetery and turned the site into a 'military zone' so that it could ban foreign missions and observers from entering it," preventing both a delegation from the European Parliament and the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Matthew Bryza, from examining the site.[17] Other destroyed Armenian sites include the abandoned villages surrounding the Church of Mijin Ankuzik/Anzur and St. Gevorg Church of Nor Poradasht, where bulldozers removed evidence of prior Armenian habitation.[18] Parallels throughout the region were found by CHW, suggesting that these demolitions were part of an orchestrated campaign to erase Nakhchivan's Armenian history.

Many destroyed Armenian sites have been replaced by symbols of Azerbaijani nationality. CHW was able to find five such cases of replacement. Two notable examples are the St. Tovma Monastery of Agulis and the New Armenian Cemetery of Nakhchivan. According to CHW, "St. Tovma (St. Thomas) Monastery was one of the most important religious centers in medieval Armenia." The monastery remained in good condition when documented by historian Argam Ayvazyan in the late Soviet era. But satellite imagery shows that, starting around the year 2000, the complex had been slowly dismantled; it was completely razed in 2009. In 2014, a Shia mosque was built in its place, transforming the site into a symbol of Azerbaijani religious identity.[19] Ayvazyan also documented the New Armenian Cemetery of Nakhchivan, where he recorded approximately one thousand tombstones, many of which had Armenian inscriptions. According to satellite imagery, this was also slowly demolished during the 2000s. By 2013, construction was underway for the State Flag Square and Museum of Nakhchivan: a large complex with a 57-meter flagpole dedicated to Azerbaijani history and culture.[20] [21] [22] Both sites are clear examples of the state's attempts to promote a skewed, wholly-Azerbaijani historical narrative.

Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh

Following the capture of majority-Armenian villages in 2020, the cultural erasure seen in Nakhchivan began to be repeated in Nagorno-Karabakh as authorities destroyed Armenian churches, cemeteries, museums, and other culturally significant sites. According to CHW, seven sites have been fully destroyed, eight were damaged, and fifteen have been categorized as "threatened."[23] The government is employing many of the same tools used in Nakhchivan to rewrite regional history, making captured areas appear to be homogeneously Azerbaijani.

For example, the Azerbaijani government destroyed churches and reclassified them as "Caucasian Albanian"—a regional ethnic group from the Middle Ages that Azeri nationalists claim are forebears of Azerbaijanis.[24] However, unlike in Nakhchivan, these sites are now being demolished within active Armenian communities, resulting in the destruction of civilian infrastructure. For instance, the St. Sargis Church in the village of Mokhrenes/Susanlyg, which had been in service until 2020, was destroyed around early to mid-2022. Satellite images showed the church and the village around it completely intact in

October 2021 and March 2022—while images from July 2022 showed that the church and much of the surrounding village had been razed. Beyond just destroying this site of Armenian religious identity, the Azerbaijani government reclassified the church as an Albanian temple, denying any relationship between the village's history and its Armenian population.[25] The local cemetery narrowly avoided the destruction the rest of the village faced, but CHW judged that because of "the apparent targeting of Mokhrenes for demolition, the historic cemetery is designated as threatened."[26]

Because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's notoriety, supranational organizations have taken notice of the erasure of Armenian cultural heritage in the region. In March 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Azerbaijan's policy of cultural erasure and called on the government to allow international observers from organizations such as UNESCO to access known Armenian cultural sites to ensure their preservation.[27] The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a similar resolution.[28] However, these organizations can do little of practical value: The EU has no authority in Azerbaijan, and there is no binding framework permitting action by the Council of Europe.[29] Ineffective outside intervention led experts on Caucasian cultures and archaeology to seek assistance from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Stopping the Erasure

In 2021, Armenia filed a case with the ICJ, accusing the Azerbaijani government of violating the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) because of its mistreatment of Armenian cultural sites. CHW presented satellite imagery as evidence, demonstrating that Azerbaijani authorities have conducted a secretive campaign of cultural erasure in Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh.[30] Deliberations lasted until December 2021, with the ICJ deciding that Azerbaijan's actions did violate CERD. As a result, Azerbaijan was ordered to prohibit such acts of vandalism and punish those who contributed to the destruction of cultural sites.[31] Lori Khatchadourian, an associate professor at the Cornell University Department of Near Eastern Studies who helped create CHW, said that the decision "sets a new precedent for cultural heritage protection globally." She further stated that categorization of abuses of heritage as racial discrimination gives hope that "this ruling will deter the egregious acts of damage and destruction that we have documented over the past year."[32]

Regrettably, destruction of cultural heritage sites continued following the ICJ decision, as the events that transpired in Mokhrenes/Susanlyg occurred several months after the case had been decided. Thus, the ability of the international community to prevent further cultural erasure remains in doubt. Several countries, such as Russia and Türkiye, have significant military, political, and economic ties to the region, yet have done little to directly resolve the crisis. Russia, which is nominally an Armenian ally, has only asked for assurances of "preservation and normal operation" of heritage sites, not instituting diplomatic or economic punishments on Azerbaijan.[33] Russian pressure seems even less likely because of the war in Ukraine, which has led to Russian troop withdrawals from the Southern Caucasus and a refusal to intervene during the September 2022 Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes, all of which has caused Armenian-Russian relations to reach their lowest point since independence.[34] Türkiye's position as Azerbaijan's closest partner puts it in a position to pressure the government to end the erasure, but it has so-far remained silent on the issue and generally supportive of Azerbaijan's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[35] It therefore may take significant pressure from more distant third-parties to effect measurable changes in Azerbaijani policy towards Armenian cultural heritage.

Cultural Genocide?

There is now an open question over how to label Azerbaijan's actions in Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh: Has this become, or is it becoming, a cultural genocide? According to Associate Professor Payam Akhavan of McGill University, while "Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group… Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group."[36] Simon Maghakyan, an international relations researcher who co-authored a report on monument loss in 2019, has labeled this erasure of heritage sites as cultural genocide.[37] It is unclear whether Azerbaijan's actions in Nakhchivan would fit the definition, as cultural genocide is typically conducted against a community that still lives in the territory where cultural heritage is being destroyed. But by this definition, the destruction unleashed on Mokhrenes/Susanlyg in Nagorno-Karabakh could well be the start of an operation that can be labeled "cultural genocide," as cultural heritage sites were destroyed in the presence of large Armenian population. This question will be answered within the coming months and years as the Azerbaijani government's plans in Nagorno-Karabakh are revealed.

Conclusion

Armenia and Azerbaijan have a century-long history of conflict and cultural erasure perpetrated by zealous nationalists and governments. While these episodes of bigotry have often manifested in direct violence, the recent destruction of heritage sites in Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh has demonstrated that it can manifest in non-direct forms as well. The international community has intervened to declare Azerbaijani treatment of Armenian sites illegal under international law, creating a standard by which the destruction of heritage can be prosecuted. But little concrete action has been taken by the international community against the Azerbaijani government: the abuses continue, leading to the continuation of a cycle of symbolic nationalist violence.

The Archaeology of Power:

Saudi Arabia and Heritage Destruction in the Middle East

By Brando Sell

In 1925, Saudi forces captured the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and immediately destroyed the tomb of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the mausoleums of several Shi'a Imams' tombs that had stood for centuries on end.[1] These demolitions were motivated by the iconoclastic Wahhabist movement, a school of Islamic fundamentalism that is officially endorsed by the Saudi government.[2] Wahhabist clerics, from whom the Saudi state derives much of its legitimacy, advocate for the destruction of historic sites, such as the shrines of Sunni and Shi'a saints, and sites associated with the Prophet Muhammad and his family, including their homes in Mecca and Medina.[3] Wahhabists view veneration and visitation of holy sites as idolatry, and as non-Islamic, and consequently support the destruction of sites to prevent further veneration.[4] This policy of destruction has been thoroughly adopted by the Saudi state, which draws support from its "radical religious demographic," and continues to this day, in the two holy cities as well as across Saudi Arabia.[5] Saudi Arabia's destruction of historic Islamic holy sites and heritage sites represents an ideologically-driven mission of erasure of non-Wahhabi and Shi'i presence in the Middle East and a threat to regional stability.

Domestic challenges

The extent of cultural destruction in Saudi Arabia is staggering. Government-sponsored demolitions have erased enormous amounts of history in the region. The government has destroyed 98% of the nation's historic sites, including 95% of historic buildings in Mecca alone.[6] [7] The rampant demolition of heritage sites in Saudi Arabia can be linked directly to the Wahhabist distaste for venerating or visiting holy sites related to the Prophet Muhammad, Imams, or saints, Sunni or Shi'a. As mentioned above, Wahhabists view both practices as idolatry; they claim that these practices constitute worshiping something other than God.[8] Wahhabism has thus historically declared various "practices, groups, and areas" generally considered Islamic as takfir al-mu'ayyan, or "non-Muslim."[9] These groups' historic sites are, for Wahhabists, monuments to idolatry and nonbelief. Wahhabist intolerance has been wholly folded into the ideology of the Saudi state, after being first adopted by the al-Saud family in 1744.[10] The replacement of Islamic sites with commercial development is an intentional denigration.[11] In Mecca, luxury hotels for wealthy pilgrims on the umrah or hajj, like the newly built Abraj-al-bait, loom over the Great Mosque (which contains the Kaaba), dwarfing the most sacred site in Islam.[12] Abbasid-era pillars in the Great Mosque have also been removed. Other examples include the site of the tomb of Khadija, mentioned earlier, which has been covered with bathrooms for pilgrims, and the house of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, which has been replaced with a hotel and a Burger King.[13] The Saudi government has also proposed moving the Prophet Muhammad's body from its traditional sacred place in al-Masjid al-Nabawi mosque in Medina to an "anonymous grave."[14] There has been a vast increase in the number of Muslim pilgrims to Mecca, who require housing, but this blatant devastation of regional heritage is not undertaken for purely practical purposes. Indeed, commercial necessity and commercialization caused much of the destruction in Mecca and Medina, but the rampant demolition of heritage is a "deliberate cost" of the new construction, a useful excuse for the effacement of culture and the past in Saudi Arabia.[15]

Saudi Arabia's destruction of historic Islamic holy sites and heritage sites represents an ideologically-driven mission of erasure of non-Wahhabi and Shi'i presence in the Middle East and a threat to regional stability.

Internally, this intolerance and cultural destruction is part and parcel with Saudi Arabia's larger program of persecution towards non-Wahhabist Muslims, which includes intentional discrimination against Shi'is in employment and education.[16] The Saudi state identifies itself as a spreader of "the true message of Islam" across the world through the Muslim World League and other tools of influence and propaganda.[17] By the early 2000s, the Saudi government had spent at least $90 billion on this project, which in reality spreads Wahhabist ideology "beyond [Saudi Arabia's] borders."[18] Discrimination

and cultural destruction are an internal counterpart to the Kingdom's "historic export" of extremism.[19] Saudi Arabia's cultural destruction has had consequences far beyond Saudi's borders and control. It is worth mentioning that the Islamic State, also notorious for its destruction of heritage sites, utilized Saudi textbooks in its educational system "throughout 2015."[20 21]

Foreign challenges

The destruction of non-Wahhabi and Shi'a Islamic sites is not simply a domestic problem in Saudi Arabia. Combined with discrimination and other extremist policies, as well as underlying tensions in the region, these demolitions can also lead to significant instability and endanger regional peace.

For example, the geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been deeply influenced by Saudi Arabia's destruction of Islamic heritage.[22] Iran, a Shi'a theocracy, is especially irate regarding religious site destruction, as many of these sites are holy to Shi'is.[23] Iran's foreign policy is predicated upon supporting foreign Shi'i movements and Shi'ism abroad more generally, as in the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon; Iran therefore expresses outrage at the destruction of Shi'a sites.[24] The destruction of Islamic sites (and subsequent stirring of sectarian violence) is particularly delicate given Iran's direct support of the Houthi movement, a group currently engaged in a civil war with Saudi Arabia in Yemen.[25] The Houthis have, as a result, attacked several civilian sites in Saudi Arabia.[26] Additionally, a demolition of "historic" Shi'i homes in 2017 led to armed violence between Saudi forces and Shi'i residents. Saudi Arabia subsequently accused Iran of bankrolling the militants.[27] Given the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, part of Iran's criticism is also pragmatic in nature, a desire by Iranian leadership to take advantage of an opportunity for confrontation with Saudi Arabia, to which sectarian grievances lend themselves well.[28]

Turkey has also experienced tensions with the Kingdom over its destruction of historic sites. For example, in 2002, Saudi Arabia destroyed an Ottoman-era fort built in 1781 overlooking the Great Mosque, a site of considerable historic importance in its own right and a vestige of Ottoman control of the holiest city in Islam.[29] Turkey voiced significant protest after the fort's destruction, with its minister of culture, M. Istemihan Talay, calling the demolition "no different from the pulling down of the Buddha monuments [by the Taliban] in Afghanistan."[30] Turkey-Saudi Arabia relations have always been tense—from 2017 until 2022, Saudi Arabia boycotted Turkish goods— but destruction of heritage, especially in a region previously controlled by the Ottomans, strikes at the heart of Turkish identity and history.[31] Saudi Arabia, similarly, has a program of destroying old Ottoman mosques and monuments in the Balkans, in what is not only an attempt to erase history but a move with additional cultural and geopolitical implications.[32]

Heritage destruction as warfare

The Saudi government's erasure of history and heritage destruction is not only occurring within its borders, but also outside of Saudi territory, especially in Yemen. The Yemeni civil war, a complex conflict in its own right, is an expression of the long-term Iran-Saudi proxy war, with Iran supporting the Shi'i Houthi rebels in the north and Saudi Arabia (and its international coalition of partners, including the United States) siding with the mostly Sunni government forces, based in the south and east of the country.[33] During the war, countless Yemeni historic sites have been destroyed. According to the official Yemeni count, "damaged or destroyed [historical sites] exceed seventy-eight."[34] Fifty-nine of these sites, three of which were UNESCO World Heritage Sites, were destroyed by Saudi bombs.[35] This damage is "intentional," undertaken with the express purpose of the "erasure of [the] cultural identity of the Yemeni people".[36] The destruction of Yemeni heritage is part of Saudi Arabia's "archaeology of power": destroying history and culture that is non-Saudi and non-Wahhabi purposely.[37] In Yemen, heritage destruction and underlying geopolitical and religious tensions have become part of a dangerous proxy war.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's erasure of non-Wahhabist Muslim cultural and historic sites both within and without Saudi Arabia represents a distinct threat to regional stability and to the region's traditional heritage. There is hope, however, that these developments are slowing. Saudi Arabia, on the surface, appears to be reconsidering its previous modus operandi. The Kingdom recently contributed $25 million to UNESCO for the protection of heritage sites.[38] Whether this charitable impulse will translate into protection of heritage sites in fact remains to be seen.

Cultural destruction across the world—whether it be ISIS's destruction of Buddhist statues, China's demolition of traditional historic districts in its cities, or Saudi Arabia's wholesale erasure of its distinct Islamic heritage—is not an isolated problem. These demolitions have consequences far beyond geopolitics: cultural sites have inherent value in themselves, and the brazen pursuit of commercial development, of radical religious ideology, or both, can lead to the destruction of beautiful, important, and sacred places that are essential to our understanding of the present and, more to the point, of the past. The leveling of historic sites in Saudi Arabia, and in the broader Middle East, is putting at risk our ability to make sense of the past and engage with history.

Empowering Africa:
The Importance of Mother Tongue Education

By Ria Sodhi

Background

Mother tongue refers to the first language a person learns and uses in their early childhood, typically from their parents or immediate family members. It is the language that a person is most familiar with, and it often carries cultural and emotional significance as well. Africa is a continent with great linguistic diversity, and as a result there are many mother tongues spoken across the continent. It is estimated that there are over 2,000 different languages spoken in Africa, with some sources estimating the number to be as high as 3,000. Each language has its own unique history, culture, and way of expressing ideas and communicating. While some African countries have adopted a dominant official language such as English, French, and Portuguese, in order to improve communication, many people still use their mother tongue in their daily lives, particularly in rural areas.

In developing nations, teaching in an official language such as English has been shown to hinder children's overall educational advancement.[1] In many isolated rural areas, children speak a language different from the dominant official language at home. Typically, children in K-2nd grade receive education in their native language, but in third or fourth grade, they begin receiving instruction primarily in their national language . As a result, many students fall behind in their coursework and drop out since they can not communicate with their instructors clearly. In 2000, 84% of elementary teachers had the bare minimum of qualifications, but by 2019, only 65% did.[2] In fact, 40% of students worldwide enroll in classes where the instructors expect them to learn in a language they do not speak.[3] Organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO advocate for mother tongue education because of the many benefits it can provide to both students and communities.

The benefits of mother tongue education for African students are evident in research findings, which indicate that the use of a student's first language for the first few years of schooling leads to better academic performance, increased completion rates and ultimately equips students with the necessary tools to excel in their education.[4] Implementing mother tongue education into practice can usually be expensive and time-consuming, especially for the educational institutions, and local governments, but studies show that teaching in the mother tongue increases academic success while lowering dropout rates by as much as 50%.[5] Mother tongue education is an essential aspect of education in Africa, proven to enhance academic achievement by dismantling language barriers and equipping students with the necessary tools to excel academically.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asserts that children learn more effectively when they receive instruction in a language they can comprehend. This is because children's brains are naturally wired to acquire and process language more efficiently when they can understand what is being said, which helps them to build a strong foundation for learning. Numerous studies have shown that children's brains are naturally wired to acquire and process language more efficiently when they can understand what is being said. For instance, a study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology found that students who received early literacy instruction in their first language had better reading comprehension skills in both their first language and the second language they learned later.[6] This finding supports the

idea that teaching in the mother tongue helps to build a strong foundation for learning, which can lead to better academic outcomes and lower dropout rates. UNESCO further emphasizes that mother tongue education is a key factor in achieving quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially in low-income countries.

Additionally, a UNESCO report in 2019 found that only about 15% of African children complete primary education with proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics and that mother tongue instruction could help improve educational outcomes in the region.[7] Starting school in a language other than the student's mother tongue creates a barrier because it shifts the emphasis of instruction from being learner-centered to teacher-centered. Even when students are confused, they do not seek clarification or ask inquiries. They do not discover a link between experiences at home and in school.This concept reinforces passiveness and silence in the classroom, which in turn suppresses the potential and freedom of expression of the young learners. The language barrier resulting from this circumstance lessens the young people's enthusiasm, stifles their inventiveness, and makes learning unpleasant.

Despite research demonstrating that learning in their mother tongue is more effective, a majority of African students often commence their education in a foreign language. This unfortunate practice results in poor outcomes, high dropout rates, and diminished enthusiasm for learning. For instance, a survey conducted by KNEC in Kenya revealed that 52% of 3rd grade students cannot read correctly, and up to 60% have failed a class and repeated it.[8] The survey conducted by KNEC in Kenya revealing that a significant percentage of 3rd-grade students cannot read correctly and have failed a class is not solely attributed to educational policies but also to the language of instruction. In Kenya, the official language of instruction is English, which is not the native language for most students. Studies have shown that students who are not taught in their first language often struggle to grasp concepts and are more likely to fail or repeat classes.

Additionally, lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teacher training also contribute to poor academic performance. Therefore, language of instruction plays a crucial role in the educational outcomes of students, and policymakers must consider it when formulating education policies. The issue was exacerbated in rural places, when kids hardly ever have any contact with English outside of the classroom. For example, a former administrative region in Kenya, Nyanza Province: "Nyanza Province had the highest number of repeaters, at 69%, followed by Eastern 67%, Western 60% and Coast 58%."[9] For education to be effective, the syllabus's approach and material must be tailored to the requirements and skills of the students, and the goals must be expressed in terms of how the students should behave. When learning begins in a language that is unfamiliar to the student, students experience a much greater barrier and dissatisfaction. It would be detrimental to recognized educational principles to anticipate a child's acquisition of a new language while also establishing literacy and other abilities solely in this new language. Requesting fluency in reading and writing before acquiring a sufficient level of language comprehension is analogous to requiring one to run before mastering the art of standing upright.

History

The history of mother tongue education in Africa extends back to the pre-colonial era, when African societies had their own languages, traditions, and educational systems. European powers forced their languages and education systems on African communities during the colonial period. As a result, African languages have been marginalized and stigmatized, and European languages have been used as the medium of teaching in schools. Rather than supporting the intellectual and cultural growth of African nations, the colonial education system was designed to produce a workforce that would serve European interests. Following independence, several African countries began to reconsider their educational institutions, as well as the importance of African languages in education.[10] A mother tongue education movement gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Tanzania, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. The goal of the movement was to promote the use of African languages in schools as a means of developing national unity, cultural identity, and academic accomplishment. In Tanzania, for example, in the early 1970s, the government implemented a strategy of Swahili medium education.[11] This policy sought to make Swahili, a widely spoken African language, the predominant language of education. The policy was successful in ex-

European powers forced their languages and education systems on African cultures during the colonial era, resulting in the marginalization and stigmatization of African languages.

tending access to school for rural children who could not speak English, the colonial language of teaching.[12] Other countries, such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, adopted similar approaches. Many African countries have now implemented laws that encourage the use of mother tongue instruction in early childhood education, with the goal of establishing a strong foundation for academic accomplishment and cultural identity. However, due to a lack of competent teachers, insufficient resources, and the dominance of European languages in higher education and the labor market, implementing these goals remains a struggle.

African children are exposed to the cultural customs, myths, and histories ingrained in their language when they are taught in their native tongue. This encourages kids to value and respect their language and culture while instilling a sense of pride in their cultural history. This, in turn, promotes cultural diversity and understanding, both of which are necessary for the development of strong and cohesive civilizations.[13] The development of mother tongue education has been considered as a strategy to mitigate the detrimental impacts of colonialism on African languages and cultures in many African countries. European powers forced their languages and education systems on African cultures during the colonial era, resulting in the marginalization and stigmatization of African languages. This resulted in Africans losing their cultural identity and feeling inferior.

Many African governments are now developing laws that encourage the use of mother tongue instruction in schools in order to reaffirm the relevance of African languages and cultures. In South Africa, for example, the government has adopted a multilingual education programme that aims to promote the use of African languages in classrooms. The employment of Swahili as a medium of teaching in Tanzania has aided in the promotion of national unity and cultural identity. Overall, mother tongue education is critical to preserve Africa's rich cultural history. African countries are taking vital steps to maintain their unique cultural identities and to establish strong and cohesive communities based on cultural diversity and understanding by encouraging the use of African languages in schools.[14]

Myths on multilingualism

Rural parents in Kenya and Uganda are concerned that their children may fall behind their urban peers who begin their education in English and won't be able to compete because they may not understand the class material adequately.[15] These parents prefer that their children skip their mother tongue education altogether and go straight to learning English. In Zimbabwe, studies showed that "parents and children had a more positive attitude towards English than the mother tongue as the language of instruction at infant level."[16] According to the parents, "the child who uses English grows up understanding the subject matter better while the use of the mother tongue would hamper understanding in the child."[17]

However, research has shown that starting education in a child's mother tongue can lead to better learning outcomes and higher academic achievement.[18] When children are taught in a language that they are most familiar with, they are more likely to understand the material being taught and retain that knowledge. This is because they do not have to spend as much time translating the material from a foreign language to their own language, which can be a barrier to learning. By starting education in a child's native tongue, they are able to develop a strong foundation in their language, which can help them to learn other languages later on. For instance, a UNESCO study revealed that children in Ethiopia who received instruction in their native language outperformed those who got instruction in a foreign language on standardized tests.[19] Many parents, who are unaware of their children's linguistic abilities, think that adding too many languages to the school system will hinder students' ability to study.

Another common misconception is that speaking in one's mother tongue while in school prevents one from learning since mother tongues are unable to express the sophisticated concepts that are taught in official language education. There is a misunderstanding that these native tongue languages cannot be used in modern commercial, technological, and educational endeavors, however, linguistically, this misunderstanding is false. A report by UNESCO found that mother tongue-based multilingual education can improve access to quality education and increase the retention and achievement rates of students.[20] Furthermore, there are many examples of successful modern-day usage of mother tongue languages in various fields, such as technology, medicine, and commerce. Therefore, the idea that mother tongues are unable to express sophisticated concepts is a misconception that does not align with the current linguistic research and practical experience.

Mother tongue education

Using mother tongue instruction in the classroom allows children to connect their experiences of learning at home with learning at school, resulting in better academic development, higher levels of literacy, increased participation, and reduced workload for teachers. Research has shown that a strong foundation in the first language can facilitate learning in subsequent languages and improve reading and comprehension skills. In addition, mother tongue instruction has been found to be more effective than colonial language systems in promoting literacy and cognitive development, and it

can improve both student and teacher performance in non-native language learning situations. Rajesh Ramachandran, a postdoctoral researcher at Heidelberg University, has also looked into the effects of colonial systems and found that mother tongue instruction has a positive impact. Ramachandran calculated that 69% of adults with five years of schooling in systems that used indigenous languages could read a whole sentence, compared to 41% in colonial or mixed language systems, in international research released by UNESCO.[21] This literacy difference increased from 28 to 40 percentage points once age, religion, and place of residence were taken into account. Children who are studying in their mother tongue are also encouraged to actively participate in the learning process since they understand the topic being taught and can confidently respond to questions.[22] It is worth noting that teaching in native languages does not necessarily have to cause a decline in English or French proficiency. Many African countries use English or French as the official language of instruction alongside the local languages. In these cases, students can still learn English or French as a second or third language while receiving primary education in their mother tongue. Additionally, some studies have suggested that students who learn in their mother tongue tend to be more proficient in other languages as well because they have a strong foundation in language learning.[23]

A study conducted in Kenya, a nation with two official languages and 66 regional dialects, revealed that there are frequent linguistic hurdles in the classroom. The majority of kids in Marsabit speak Borana as their first language. Once they begin school, they must learn Swahili and English so that they can communicate with their teachers. The outcomes are devastating in terms of education. The idea of teachers leading earlier grades in the kids' first language is one way to overcome these language hurdles. As explained by Wendy Erasmus in Kenya, "children can get comfortable with reading and writing in a language that they know." "Then over year three and four they phase into English and Swahili. What we've seen is terribly exciting… an impressive increase in these children's ability to read and write." This approach is in line with the UNESCO recommendation for early mother tongue instruction. Gains from this early instruction will be maintained as pupils go into national language programs. Additionally essential to success is bilingual teacher training.

Overall, success in early learning depends on a curriculum that is based in the child's own language, culture, and surroundings as well as on reading and teaching resources that are suitable and created locally. Early education in the home language supports child-centric strategies in multilingual settings. It starts off with the well-known before gradually introducing fresh facts. It encourages curiosity, encourages more participation, and makes the transition from the home to the classroom easier. This prepares young students for learning to read by fostering fluency and confidence in both their home language and, eventually, other languages as needed.

Conclusion

In order to promote mother language education in Africa, governments, educators, and communities must work together. It is crucial for Africa's education system to value native languages as critical learning aids. Local languages should be recognised as crucial components of the education system by African governments, and they should be recognised and promoted in the same manner that other languages are. One strategy to accomplish this is to enact policies that encourage the use of local languages as a medium of instruction. African governments should promote the use of local languages in the classroom and ensure that children have the opportunity to learn and use their mother tongue as a learning tool.[24]

This can be accomplished through enacting rules that encourage the use of local languages as a medium of instruction, as well as by giving incentives and support to teachers who specialize in teaching in local languages. African governments should not only promote the use of local languages as a medium of education, but also provide resources and help to instructors who specialize in teaching in local languages. This can become a possibility through providing instructors with training and professional development opportunities, as well as ensuring that instructional materials and textbooks are available in local languages. By respecting local languages as vital learning aids, African countries can ensure that all students have access to high-quality education that is relevant to their local context. Local languages can assist children develop a feeling of pride and identity while also contributing to the preservation of local cultures and customs. Finally, considering indigenous languages as key learning aids is critical for developing inclusive and culturally responsive education in Africa.[25]

African governments should not only promote the use of local languages as a medium of education, but also provide resources and help to instructors who specialize in teaching in local languages.

Chechnya's Warrior Culture:

Masculinity, Militarization, and MMA

By Cassidy Keppler

Introduction

Chechnya is a small, semi-autonomous republic in the Russian Federation led by Ramzan Kadyrov, a controversial Chechen warlord with close ties to Vladimir Putin. Despite its small size, Chechnya has played an important role in international affairs, often attracting attention due to its outsized participation in Russian and regional conflicts. It has a tumultuous history; it battled Russian imperial occupation throughout the 19th century, experienced Stalinist deportations in the 1940s, and more recently fought for independence from Russia in the two Chechen wars in the 1990s. However, today, Chechnya has become well-known for the success of its fighters in the Ultimate Fighting Championship, (UFC), the presence of its military in Russia's international armed conflicts, and the persecution of LGBTQ+ community across the republic.

Underpinning its contemporary role in global affairs lies a strong tradition of warrior culture that encourages men to become excellent physical fighters and to embody traditional notions of masculinity. The development of this culture was often necessary due to the nation's long history of warfare and battle; becoming a proud fighter was necessary to ensure the security and survival of the Chechen identity.[1] Today, considering Chechnya's inextricable links to Russia and its strong support for Russian military incursions, it is more relevant than ever to understand how and why Chechen culture produces so many fighters. Chechnya's violent and painful history has informed the development of its contemporary warrior culture, in which being a strong and skilled fighter is highly valued and fostered through militarization, rhetoric on masculinity, and national sport.

Militarization

Russia historically viewed the broader Caucasus mountain region in Central Asia as a strategic location that was critical to the power and security of its empire. Consequently, Russia invaded the region first in the 19th century, seeking to dominate diverse Caucasian ethnic groups like the Chechens, and integrate them into the Russian empire. In order to avoid assimilation and maintain their independence from Russia, Chechnya fought wars and foreign invasions for centuries, necessities for national survival. During the 19th century, the Russians used brutal military tactics against the Chechens like guerilla warfare, scorched earth tactics, and forced deportation, which were meant to suppress and subjugate Chechen nationalist movements.[2] However, Chechnya's mountainous landscape made the Chechen people also skilled at urban warfare, baffling the Russian conception of warfare in the 19th century and further antagonizing the Russian incursion. As a result of the heightened hostility and military challenges, Russians attributed their military losses in the region to the Chechen's superior fighting skills and their primitive, "beast-like" fighting methods. Thus, Russians inadvertently contributed to reinforcing Chechen warrior culture and also reinforcing their international reputation as "excellent, fierce fighters."[3]

> "Every Chechen man is first a warrior."

Today, the Russian state relies on Chechen fighters and its warrior culture to support its foreign incursions. Kadyrov's robust security apparatus and state military provide support to Putin in Syria, Ukraine, and the Central African Republic.[4] Chechen fighters' reputation for ruthlessness, skill, and stamina in battle also make them an important psychological weapon for Russia, since the presence of Chechen fighters in any conflict invokes fear and self-doubt in the opponent, while strengthening the perception of Russian power.[5] Furthermore, since the aftermath of the Chechen wars led to high unemployment and economic stagnation, the only viable opportunities for citizens are available in the security services or the military. According to Chechen social standards, these occupations are perceived to be lucrative and prestigious due to their association with fighting and combat.[6] Therefore, a career in the military or security is often the only opportunity for men to elevate their social status and economic security without jeopardizing their cultural traditions.[7]

Rhetoric on masculinity

"Every Chechen man is first a warrior." This Chechen expression highlights the importance of fighting in Chechen cultural understanding of masculinity and what the role of a man should be in society. These sentiments became internationally relevant in 2018, when the Chechen state was accused by the international community of purging society of LGBTQ+ members, with Kadyrov even going as far as to claim that "there are no gays in Chechnya".[8] Namely, Chechen society prizes machismo and conservative, patriarchal values. Macho culture and narrow perceptions of masculinity

further extends to LGBTQ+ rights, where men are persecuted, murdered, or kidnapped and tortured for being gay.[9]

Moreover, it is considered the gravest sin for a man to be gay because it violates Chechen social mores and its hierarchy about masculinity and combat culture. According to this logic, a gay man cannot be a "real man" because it implies that he willingly emasculates himself and he is spiritually and physically weak. Any suspicion of homosexuality stains the social status of the entire family for generations.[10] As a result, contemporary Chechen rhetoric about masculinity upholds the idea of a physically strong man, a "warrior," as the ideal to strive for, it undermines any notion of masculinity that deviates from this ideal.[11]

Kadyrov's fight clubs

Since violence has been such a large part of Chechen history, many fathers enrolled their sons in fighting or wrestling clubs so they could train and protect themselves in everyday life or an armed conflict. Families still uphold this tradition by strongly encouraging young boys to fight one another, even in casual settings. A son who is a brave and skilled fighter is a great source of pride and honor for a Chechen family, because it signals his readiness to protect and defend the nation from external threats. This mentality, coupled with the Soviet Union's legacy of sponsoring and expanding martial art combat sports like sambo, allowed Chechnya to foster its fighting traditions through a network of pre-existing fight clubs.

Today, Kadyrov sponsors modernized fight clubs and recruits Chechen boys and young men to participate in fighting as a national sport. Named after Kadyrov's father, Akhmat Kadyrov, the sports club "FC Akhmat Grozny" and stadium "Akhmat Arena" are part of a broader campaign to promote Chechen fighters, physical culture and combat sports in Chechen society.[12] In an authoritarian and heavily censored society still grappling with collective trauma and devastation after two wars against Russia, state-approved cultural symbols and activities like combat sports became a safe way for Chechens to reconcile their ancient cultural traditions with their post-war realities.

UFC: a national sport

Chechnya and the North Caucasus region produce many famous UFC fighters like Khabib Nurmagomedov from Dagestan or Khamzat Chimaev from Chechnya. Due to UFC's global popularity, these famous fighters represent their small, relatively unknown nations on the world stage. However, Chechen fighters are distinguished from other famous fighters because of their involvement in Chechen politics or personal affiliation with Ramzon Kadryov's fight clubs.[13] Kadyrov personally intervenes in UFC affairs concerning Chechen fighters and uses their image to bolster a national identity centered around a warrior tradition. For example, when Khamzat Chimaev got into a physical fight with Daghestani mixed martial artist Abubakar Nurmagomedov after a UFC fight night, Kadyrov took credit for resolving the conflict. He posted a screenshot of himself video chatting with the two fighters and credited himself with personally ensuring there were no problems between the men.

It is important to Kadyrov to demonstrate his personal and political attachment to sport, especially UFC. UFC not only reinforces Chechnya's warrior tradition through sponsoring its fighters, but it offers a convenient vehicle for Kadyrov to project an international image of Chechens as strong, tough fighters to be respected rather than humiliated. Furthermore, UFC provides an extremely lucrative and popular international platform in which Kadyrov can exert his own power and bolster his relevance in order to reinforce Russian economic and political support for Chechnya.[14] This platform is significant for Kadyrov because without Russia's continued economic and political support for Chechnya, the republic would face even more underdevelopment and fragility.

Conclusion

Chechnya's violent history of war, invasion, and forced deportation contributed to the development of a warrior culture that produces skilled fighters. Although this tradition originally developed out of a necessity to defend and protect the nation's survival, today it has acquired international political and cultural relevance. Chechnya capitalizes on the foundation of its combat culture by creating a society of excellent fighters who successfully fight alongside the Russians in international conflicts, yet clearly distinguish themselves as Chechens in order to project an image of Chechnya's superior fighting ability and toughness.[15] Additionally, national sport reproduces Chechen warrior culture by highlighting historical cultural values, establishing fight clubs, and using poor economic conditions to encourage Chechen men to participate and perpetuate combat culture in the military or UFC. Chechnya's anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and policies further reinforce notions of a warrior culture that eliminates any perceived sign of weakness or passivity, while aligning with traditional Chechen conceptions of masculinity. Today, the state promotes and instrumentalizes Chechnya's deeply embedded combat culture and warrior tradition through fighting in Russia's military incursions, participating in UFC and fight clubs, and enforcing strict notions of masculinity, in order to bolster Chechnya's international relevance and national security. Chechen warrior culture and its historical relationship with Russia has broader implications for understanding Russia's international military ambitions and interventions today, particularly in Ukraine, the Central African Republic, and Syria.

A People Without Their Nation:

Lingual and Dialectal Roots of Kurdish Nationalism and Its Failure

By Phillip Chao

There are over 30 million Kurds around the world, most of whom live within the national borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, while others reside in immigrant communities in continental Europe and North America. The Kurdish people were able to survive the rule of the Assyrians, the Sumerians, the Sassanid Empire, the Persians, the Safavid Dynasty, and the Ottomans, while still retaining their own language, rituals, religious beliefs, and cultural identities, despite centuries of foreign rule and many attempts of forced assimilation.[1] Entering the nineteenth and twentieth century, the lingual and cultural distinctiveness of the Kurds has since led to the birth and rise of contemporary Kurdish nationalism, inspiring many attempts across the world to establish an independent Kurdish state. Notable independence movements include the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, which set up training camps in the Qandil mountains and launch frequent attacks on the Turkish government, and the Syrian Kurds, who took advantage of the regional power vacuum left by the Syrian civil war and achieved temporary self-rule until their defeat by a Turkish invasion in 2019.[2] Despite these valiant attempts to organize armed resistance and lobby for western intervention, the establishment of an internationally recognized, independent republic, the ultimate goal of Kurdish nationalists across the world, never seemed to materialize.

As a result of prolonged foreign rule and lack of statehood, the contemporary Kurdish population is sharply divided along lingual, cultural, and religious lines, with contrasting ideologies and political beliefs. The differences in Kurdish dialects and the incohesion among their speakers have formulated due to a combination of historical rifts, geographical disparities, and contemporary political struggles. Such a split reflected the broader cultural and ideological division within the Kurdish diaspora, which contributed to its inability to organize concerted, cross-national efforts towards independence and statehood.

One people, divided: Kurdish dialects and incoherence within nationalist movements

The Kurdish nationalist movement does not share a singular, coherent national language as most Kurds have adopted one of the two major dialects, namely: Northern (Kurmanji) Kurdish, spoken in Turkey, Syria, and Northern Iraq and written in Latin script, and Central (Sorani) Kurdish—used widely in Central and Southern Iraq as well as Iran and written in Arabic-Persian script.[3] These differences resulted in the absence of an unified and distinct literary tradition, as most books and records in Kurdish language in the contemporary era were split between the two local dialects. The Kurds in Turkey, Armenia, Northern Iran, and part of Syria spoke Kurmanji, which itself was the conglomeration of dozens of minor dialects. Influenced by the Latinization of the modern Turkish language, the Kurdish communities in Turkey have adopted the Hawar alphabet to write Kurmanji, which was based on a Latin alphabet. Meanwhile, Kurdish literary communities in Iraq and Iran primarily used Sorani Kurdish for daily communication and administrative tasks, which became standardized based on the modern Arabic alphabet and borrowed a great number of words from Arabic and Persian.[4] Ethnic Kurds also speak a series of other local dialects, such as the Zazaki language used in Northwestern Iran, which is not part of the Kurdish language tree linguistically, and Southern Kurdish spoken in villages alongside the Iraqi-Iranian border, a dialect that also adopted the Arabic-Persian script and bears many similarities to Sorani. Concerted efforts by the international Kurdish diaspora, European activists, and local political factions led Sorani Kurdish education to thrive, as it was elevated to one of the two official state languages in Iraq.

Although the Kurdish lingual and cultural traditions were purposefully suppressed under the regime of the nationalist Ba'ath party and Saddam Hussein, the recent democratization of the Iraqi Government has allowed for more rights and autonomy of the country's Kurdish inhabitants, who predominantly reside in the Northwestern Mosul region. With the help of flourishing autonomous movements and cultural campaigns, Kurdish youth in Iraq are now encouraged to master their ethnic language. On the other hand, the use of Kurdish language and practices of cultural rituals remain marginalized in today's Turkey. For the past decades, the country's nationalist factions feared the promotion of a unique Kurdish identity and the incorporation of the Kurdish dialect into public education would help strengthen the cause and rally the support base of pro-independence insurgency groups like the PKK. Although the Kurds make up almost one fifth of the country's population, their language still lacks legal standings within the judicial, political, and education system, oftentimes referred to as "unknown sounds" by news media and government officials.[5] In recent years, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has taken gradual steps to guarantee more rights for the country's minorities, such as allowing the Kurdish dialect to be taught as an elective in public schools or used in broadcasting systems.[6] Despite these temporary progresses, Erdoğan's reforms are nevertheless a symbolic, political move, as he needs to show his European allies an improved human rights record. His ruling alliance also requires support from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party to secure its majority in the upcoming election in May.[7]

The current Turkish republic inherited most of its political legitimacy from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who led the nationalist forces to prevail amidst the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and coined "Kemalism"—the mixture of lingual, ethnic, and cultural nationalism and state capitalism.[8] One of the key pillars of "Kemalism" was the predominance of a single, national language (Turkish) which, due to the secular views held by Ataturk, has since replaced religion as a defining feature of the national identity in Turkey.[9] The existence of Kurmanji and other Kurdish dialects spoken in the area, thus, stood in the way of a coherent Turkish identity envisioned by nationalists and conservatives. Partly in order to curb the increasing freedom granted to Kurds by the civilian government, the Turkish military, known for its Kemalist affiliation, staged the 1980 coup d'état and overthrew Süleyman Demirel, the democratically elected president, after which minority rights were largely limited and Kurdish language and education became outlawed across the nation.[10] In Iraq, however, ever since the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the rights and autonomy of the Kurdish minority became safeguarded by the new, democratically elected government.[11] Since Kurdish media outlets, language schools, local administrative divisions in Iraq and parts of Iran all adopted Sorani Kurdish, a lingual and cultural rift between Iraqi and Iranian Kurds and Turkish Kurds arose and further deepened the two communities' geographical isolation. Although the Kurdish regional government in Iraq now lists both Kurmanji and Sorani as official languages and has ordered that both dialects should be taught in schools, most Kurds living in the area are still unable to master both dialects, since it requires years of formal schooling for someone to pick up one of the dialects even if he or she is already proficient in the other.[12] In a way, the proliferation of Sorani education in Iraqi public schools also signaled the growing influences of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi Kurds in the international Kurdish community, which inevitably sidelined their peers in Turkey and deepened their pre-existing discords over ideologies and methods of achieving independence.

Kurdish youth in the West: an emerging force with new agendas

Aside from Kurds who reside in their ancestral homeland in the Middle East and West Asia, millions of Kurds, escaping persecution and political instability back home, immigrated to Western Europe and North America and settled down in ethnic communities. In the past century, many overseas Kurds had formed cultural organizations and research institutions and used their influences to promote Kurdish language, music, and literature, cultivating an international voice within the independence movement.[13] As time goes by, while Kurmanji and Sorani Kurdish are still routinely used by elder members of these communities, the younger generation, who were born and raised in an environment where the local language predominates daily life, news media, and pop culture, can now speak the local language more fluently than their native tongue of Kurdish. Many found it unnecessary to study their traditional language and scripture as they gradually moved out of traditional emigré communities and deviated away from their parent's coethnic networks, attempting to integrate themselves into the mainstream society. While the loss of Kurdish language among the young generation in the West may be attributed to social, cultural, and economic factors, a similar trend happening in Turkey was rather the result of forced cultural assimilation and political oppression by the nationalist government, who hoped to erase the distinct Kurdish lingual and cultural identity to quell separationist factions and domestic insurgency forces like the PKK.

Instead of an armed resistance strategy adopted by the PKK or the educational reform approach in Iraq, young Kurds residing in European countries often focused their efforts on marginalized populations and sub-sectors within the broader movement. For instance, the Kurdish community in the UK formed non-profit organizations like Make Rojava Green Again, which funds and promotes ecological preservation in the Kurdish ancestral land in Northern Syria, and the Kurdish Women's Movement, which advocates for the expansion of women's rights within the Kurdish diaspora.[14] Kurds in Europe and North America also utilize social media to enlist support, mobilize resources, and insinuate nationalist sentiment.[15] Lingually, culturally, and ideologically, the young generation of the Kurdish overseas diaspora formed a distinct force and resorted to tactics that were drastically different from their peers, which nevertheless complicated the unity and cohesion within the cross-national independence movement.

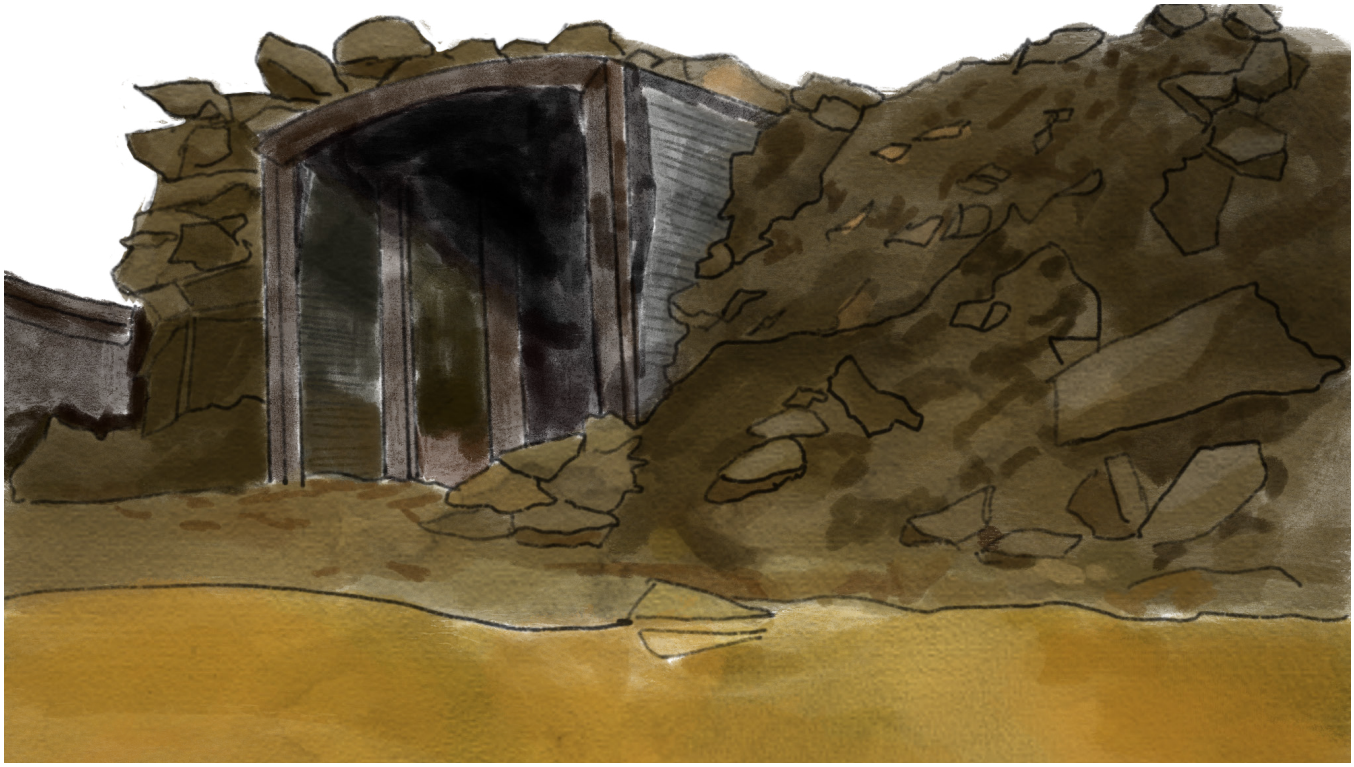
Long road ahead: the uncertain future of Kurdish statehood

Despite valiant efforts by guerilla fighters and activists across the Kurdish homeland and overseas, lingual, cultural, and ideological divisions thwarted the successful formulation of a cohesive nationalist identity and a united independence movement among the Kurdish diaspora. The inconsistencies within the movement, compounded by the group's vulnerability to foreign interferences and nationalist sentiments in neighboring countries, rendered the hope for independent statehood fruitless after decades of struggles.

Looking forward, education reforms within the Kurdish autonomous region, expansion of cultural infrastructure, and increasing international activism by young immigrants has helped to bring Kurds across the world closer together despite their long-standing differences. Although the goal of establishing an internationally recognized Kurdish republic remains extremely challenging, the tireless efforts by these reform and activist groups may nevertheless pave a solid foundation for the emergence of a cross-national, cross-lingual, and cross-cultural front for seeking more autonomous rights for Kurds in the Middle East, enhancing Kurdish language education at home and abroad, and perhaps, one day, full independence.

Securing (Land) Rights for the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil

By Stacey Na



Introduction

In May 2021, armed miners raided the Fazenda Trapajós village of the Munduruku People and set several homes on fire including that of Maria Leusa Munduruku, an opponent of illicit mining operations and coordinator for the Wakoborũn Munduruku Women's Association.[1] On Yanomami Indigenous land, two children drowned while fleeing from miners that opened fire with automatic weapons from the Uraricoera River in October 2021.[2] Attacks on the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil have continued with former President Jair Bolsonaro's efforts to revoke Indigenous Peoples' rights and his loosening of mining and deforestation regulations. Illicit mining and deforestation operations on Indigenous lands have resulted in short and long-term harmful effects on the livelihoods of the Indigenous Peoples, including those related to their well-being and modes of subsistence. In January 2022, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced six decrees revoking or altering Bolsonaro's anti-Indigenous and anti-environmental efforts, combating illicit mining and deforestation operations on Indigenous lands.[3] Lula's attitudes and actions are a restorative and refreshing inflection in Brazilian Indigenous policy for Brazilian political and economic institutions that have long favored the conservative movement.

The Brazilian government must continue to propose and pass legislation to enforce Indigenous Peoples' rights, especially their land rights to remove illegal miners and loggers from their lands, and participate in sustainable human and non-human development. In addition to the social element of sustainability is the ecological element that is achievable with enforcing Indigenous land rights for there are also complementary climate change mitigation solutions at the global level.

Overview of the affected indigenous peoples

The 2010 census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) states that Brazil is home to at least 305 Indigenous Peoples and a total population of over 800,000 people that speak more than 274 languages.[4] 22 percent of the Amazon belongs to the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, much of which is also the Amazon's best-maintained land.[5]

Those worst affected by illicit mining operations by size

include the Kayapó, Munduruku, and Yanomami lands. A total of 10,000 hectares of Indigenous land is occupied by illegal miners, growing 500 percent between 2010 and 2020.[6] Special Reporters within the Human Rights Council state that the Munduruku and the Yanomami Peoples are highly vulnerable and are among the most affected by illicit mining operations in the Amazon.[7] Furthermore, the Kayapó land is in the center of the "arc of deforestation" in the southeast Amazon.[8]

The Kayapó People live in villages along the upper course of the Iriri, Bacajá, and Fresco rivers and other Xingu river tributaries in Central Brazil. Their land is mostly equatorial forest, but the eastern region is partly cerrado, a savanna ecosystem. Their diet consists mainly of crops cultivated on their swiddens including sweet potatoes, corn, and sugar cane, vegetables, and fatty meats such as tapir, collared peccary, and deer. Kayapó villages are composed of a circle of homes around a public square. The circle of homes is considered women's territory for they manage the household. Male political figures meet in the square, which is also associated with rituals. For the Kayapó People, the village is the center of their universe and is a social space. Outside the village is an antisocial space. Men can transform into animals or spirits and it is associated with danger due to the appropriation of the social by nature.[9]

To understand why Brazilian political and economic institutions have favored the conservative movement, it is important to look into the history of the political and economic barriers that the Indigenous Peoples have met.

The Mundurku People had a warrior tradition, dominating the region of the Valley of the Tapajós River, which was in colonial times referred to as Mundurukânia. Their cultural expressions were associated with war activities, but due to colonialism, many forms of their culture changed including the loss of the men's house, which was once a part of their village, and the changes in their rituals. The Mundurku rely on agriculture, in particular manioc, bananas, potatoes, sugarcane, and yams. Fishing is also their main source of protein.[10]

The Yanomami People live in the tropical forest of the northern Amazon, located on both sides of the border between Brazil and Venezuela. The Eastern and Western Yanomami live in a conical multi-family home called a yano or xapono, respectively. The North and Northeastern Yanomami live in villages of rectangular homes. The collection of homes or the villages are distinct political and economic entities but their social circles overlap. Outside the social space is considered dangerous. They rely on fishing and hunting within their forest space circles.[11]

History of political barriers

Brazilian policy had an assimilationist attitude towards Indigenous Peoples from colonial times to the late 1980s. "Absorption into the Brazilian nation represented evolutionary progress and…social and cultural homogenization was central to the building of a strong Brazilian state."[12] However, the Constitution of 1988 includes two articles on Indigenous Peoples' rights. This attitude change is attributed to the growing international criticism of the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, the formation of alliances between Indigenous, environmental, and human rights movements, and Brazil's economic crises at the time.[13] In Title VIII: The Social Order of the Constitution, the rights of Indigenous Peoples are organized into Articles 231 and 232. Article 231 recognizes their "social organization, customs, languages, creeds, and traditions…as well as their original rights to the land they traditionally occupy." It is the duty of the government that their lands are respected. Furthermore, Article 232 recognizes that they have standing to sue to defend their rights. In 1991, Decree 22 was announced, which described the demarcation process and a deadline of 5 October 1993. The demarcation processes were not completed by this deadline.[14]

Signed into law in 1996, Decree 1775 also revoked Decree 22 and allowed state governments and commercial interests to oppose the demarcation of Indigenous lands. The government claimed that reform is necessary to protect Indigenous land from future challenges which is achieved through assessing counterclaims to Indigenous lands by non-indigenous institutions. Once demarcated in this way, the legality of the land will be assured. However, this addition allowed development to continue on lands that developers have successively claimed.[15]

Economic barriers

Brazil is naturally rich in minerals, making mining a valuable industry for the economy. Furthermore, the abundance of trees in the Amazon and the demand for

timber encourage deforestation and illicit logging operations. Illegal mining and logging, allowed in a decree by Bolsonaro and his lack of enforcement of Indigenous Peoples' land rights have put the well-being and modes of subsistence of Indigenous Peoples at risk.

Brazil's mining industry is dominated by iron ore, followed by copper, aluminum, nickel, and gold.[16] Many miners work illegally on Indigenous land, displacing the locals. Furthermore, deforestation occurs when building airstrips that allow for workers, resources, etc. to reach mining destinations. Illicit mining operations also have negative health effects. Pollution from buildings and the use of diesel-powered pumps to loosen minerals and the use of mercury to separate gold from mud negatively affect ecosystem health, including that of humans. Waste mercury ends up in the air, vegetation, and water. In the Tapajós River, it is transformed into methylmercury, a toxic substance that usually ends up in fish, an important source of protein for the Indigenous people.[17] The high incidences of mercury exposure among Indigenous peoples is in the vicinity of gold mining operations.[18] Mercury is also associated with fetal abnormalities and neurological and motor problems. In one Yanomami village, it was found that 92% of inhabitants had unsafe levels of mercury in their blood.[19] Illicit mining surged under Bolsonaro, a long supporter of the legalization of mining on Indigenous land.[20] Bolsonaro had loosened regulations in favor of mining and logging in the Amazon and cut federal funding for agencies that enforce Indigenous and environmental laws.[21]

Furthermore, illegal logging accounts for the majority of Brazil's timber production. 80% of all logging in the Amazon was illegal during the 1990s.[23] Some loggers start fires as a "diversionary tactic," drawing out Indigenous patrols.[24] These fires also negatively affect the air quality, which has many health effects for the local Indigenous Peoples, including decreased lung function and respiratory diseases. Under Bolsonaro, deforestation reached a record high, and more than 34,000 square km (8.4 million acres) disappeared from the Amazon (not including natural forest fires).[25]

Implications for the environment

Indigenous Peoples are stewards that have knowledge of the land in which they live, using natural resources responsibly and looking after the environment. Knowledge of the environment and natural resources has been passed down for generations. Furthermore, lifestyles are sustainable and sustaining, for they do not need fossil fuels and depend on the natural resources of the environment.

Indigenous lands have high biodiversity and contain on average about 50% more carbon per hectare than unprotected areas in the Brazilian Amazon.[26] When properly protected, they act as barriers against deforestation. Differing from non-protected areas, they consist mostly of primary forest which has more biomass and biodiversity. Therefore, losing these lands to illegal miners and loggers would result in a disproportionately negative impact on the environment.[27]

A study conducted in 2020 has shown that collective property rights have reduced deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon.[28] When Indigenous lands are granted full property rights, they are more effective at curbing deforestation than those outside of the border. In 2012, the National Policy for Environmental and Territorial Management on Indigenous Lands (PNGATI) was established with the consultation of 150 Indigenous Peoples. Its aim is to guarantee and promote "the rehabilitation, conservation, and sustainable use of Indigenous land and territorial natural resources." In doing so, the integrity of Indigenous land, the improvement of the quality of life, and the whole conditions of physical and cultural reproduction for the present and future generations of Indigenous Peoples are ensured and socio-cultural autonomy is respected.

In January 2023, Lula stated in his inaugural address, "Indigenous peoples … are not obstacles to development — they are guardians of our rivers and forests and a fundamental part of our greatness as a nation."[29] It is imperative that the new government enacts legislation that enforces Indigenous land rights. On a global scale, working with Indigenous Peoples and enforcing their land rights can help mitigate climate change by reducing deforestation. In 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that Indigenous Peoples are forest guardians and should be recognized as a solution to the climate crisis.

Conclusion

For a sustainable future that encompasses all three facets of sustainability—social, ecological, and economic–Indigenous Peoples' rights must be enforced. The legacy of political and economic barriers that Indigenous Peoples face continue in contemporary society. Furthermore, Brazil's economic dependence on the mining and logging industries has made cracking down on illicit operations difficult. However, the culture of stewardship in Indigenous Peoples is long fostered for generations. They have knowledge of how to responsibly and sustainably use natural resources from the environment. Indigenous Peoples have been humbly doing for centuries what developed countries with new technologies and industries could not: promoting social, ecological, and economic well-being with a fraction of the natural resources.

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