An Intertwined History: Armenian-Kurdish Relations from the Ottoman Era to the Present

1. Introduction

The relationship between the Armenian and Kurdish peoples presents a complex tapestry woven through centuries of shared geography, overlapping histories, and interactions ranging from symbiotic coexistence to brutal conflict. As indigenous populations of the Middle East and Caucasus, often inhabiting adjacent or intermixed territories, particularly in the vast expanse historically known as the Armenian Highlands and Upper Mesopotamia, their destinies have been frequently intertwined.[1] This long history is marked by periods of economic interdependence, shared subjugation under larger imperial powers like the Ottoman Empire, instances of strategic cooperation against common threats, and localized social mechanisms designed to bridge ethnic and religious divides. However, it is also deeply scarred by exploitation, violence, and the profound, enduring trauma of the Armenian Genocide, an event in which segments of the Kurdish population played complex and varied roles, often manipulated by state authorities.[1]

This report examines the multifaceted relationship between Armenians and Kurds, tracing its evolution from the Ottoman period through the tumultuous 20th century and into the contemporary era. It explores the socio-economic dynamics and power structures that defined their coexistence under Ottoman rule, including unique institutions like *kirvelik* and the state-sponsored violence embodied by the Hamidiye regiments. A significant focus is placed on the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), analyzing the context, the documented participation of certain Kurdish groups, the motivations behind their actions, and the equally important, though less emphasized, instances where Kurds resisted Ottoman directives and protected Armenians.

The analysis extends to the post-Ottoman landscape, where the establishment of modern nation-states—Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran—reshaped the political realities for both peoples, often subjecting them to new forms of repression and assimilation while simultaneously creating new contexts for interaction and occasional cooperation. The report investigates contemporary relations within these key states, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG) and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES/Rojava), as well as within the Republic of Armenia, paying particular attention to the sensitive issue of Yezidi identity. Furthermore, it delves into the dynamics between Armenian and Kurdish diaspora communities and examines interactions between political and militant organizations, notably the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA). Finally, it touches upon the cultural intersections and shared heritage that persist despite political divisions and historical conflict.

Ultimately, the historical narrative of Armenian-Kurdish relations is deeply intertwined, shaped profoundly by the policies of external empires and states, internal socio-economic pressures, the rise of competing nationalisms, and the specific political structures governing their interactions. The legacy of past atrocities, particularly the Armenian Genocide, casts a long shadow, yet the contemporary period also reveals tentative, complex movements towards dialogue, reconciliation, and strategic alignment driven by shared challenges and aspirations in a volatile region.

2. Coexistence and Conflict in the Ottoman Empire

2.1 Pre-19th Century Interactions and Socio-Economic Structures

For centuries preceding the dramatic changes of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Armenians and Kurds inhabited overlapping territories within the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the eastern provinces often referred to as Western Armenia or Anatolia.[7] Their settlement patterns often differed, with Armenians predominantly comprising settled agricultural communities, artisans, and merchants, while many Kurdish groups maintained nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyles organized along tribal lines.[7] This geographical proximity necessitated interaction, leading to complex socio-economic relationships characterized by both interdependence and inherent inequality.

Armenian peasants and skilled craftsmen played a vital role in the regional economy, and Kurdish communities often depended on their agricultural output and artisanal skills.[4] Armenian merchants also sometimes served as creditors.[4] However, this interdependence existed within a hierarchical structure where the Muslim Kurdish population generally held a dominant position over the Christian Armenian *raya* (subjects). This power imbalance manifested in various forms of exploitation. Kurdish tribes, particularly nomadic groups, historically sustained themselves partly through raids on settled Armenian villages.[3] Furthermore, Armenians were often subjected to forms of taxation by local Kurdish chieftains (aghas or beys), which Armenians frequently perceived as extortion.[3] Some historical accounts, particularly from Russian observers in the late 19th century, described an almost feudal dependence, where Armenian peasants were treated akin to serfs bound to Kurdish chiefs, sometimes even being sold as property.[3] If a Kurd killed a serf, the serf's lord might retaliate by killing a serf belonging to the murderer, illustrating a system where Armenian lives were commodified within inter-tribal Kurdish disputes.[3] While some Kurdish historical perspectives emphasize a past of non-antagonistic relations within a shared homeland [1], the weight of evidence points to a relationship often marked by Kurdish dominance and Armenian vulnerability, rooted in the Ottoman millet system which granted non-Muslims communal autonomy but denied them political equality and offered less legal protection.[7] This asymmetry fostered resentment alongside the practical necessity of coexistence.[4]

Despite the inherent inequalities and potential for conflict, mechanisms existed to manage intercommunal relations at a local level. One notable institution was *kirvelik* (Turkish) or *kirivatî* (Kurdish), a form of ritual kinship or sponsorship, often established during a circumcision

ceremony, where a Kurdish child might be placed under the protection of an Armenian adult, thereby binding the two families for life.[4] This practice created fictive kinship ties that could overcome religious and ethnic differences, fostering mutual respect, daily solidarity, and facilitating economic exchange.[4] It is often invoked nostalgically in contemporary Kurdish collective memory as a symbol of past harmonious cohabitation.[13] However, *kirvelik* operated within the broader context of the "profoundly unequal society" [4] and did not erase the systemic discrimination faced by Armenians.[13] It likely functioned as a localized strategy for building alliances, ensuring protection (Kurds would impose a *hafir* tax on Christian neighbors for protection against other tribes [13]), or managing interdependence within specific communities, rather than representing a universally harmonious relationship. The existence of such an institution underscores the complexity of Armenian-Kurdish interactions, where intimate local ties could coexist with systemic inequality and exploitation.

2.2 The Rise of Nationalism and Ottoman Manipulation (Hamidiye Regiments)

The late 19th century marked a period of profound transformation and crisis for the Ottoman Empire. Facing territorial losses, economic decline, and the rise of nationalist movements among its diverse subject peoples, the central government embarked on reforms (Tanzimat) aimed at modernization and centralization.[9] These reforms, however, often disrupted traditional power structures, including the considerable autonomy previously enjoyed by Kurdish emirates in the eastern provinces.[14] Simultaneously, Armenian political consciousness grew, with emerging political parties seeking reforms to alleviate discrimination and address the increasing vulnerability of Armenian communities facing exploitation and violence, particularly from Kurdish tribes.[11]

Faced with Armenian demands for reform (often backed by European powers, as stipulated in Article 61 of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, though never effectively implemented [9]) and fearing the potential for Armenian self-rule or even Armenian-Kurdish cooperation against the state, the Ottoman authorities under Sultan Abdülhamid II adopted a strategy of divide and rule.[3] The Porte actively sought to subordinate Kurdish elements and utilize them as an instrument to suppress Armenian aspirations.[3]

This policy culminated in the establishment of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments in 1891.[3] Named after the Sultan himself, these irregular units were composed primarily of Kurdish tribesmen (though also including Turks, Circassians, and others), provided with modern weapons and official state backing.[3] Ostensibly created to protect the empire's eastern frontiers against Russia and maintain internal order, their primary function quickly became the harassment and assault of Armenian populations.[19] The formation of the Hamidiye represented a significant institutionalization and escalation of violence. Participating Kurdish tribal leaders were granted elevated status, positions, and impunity.[3] They used their newfound power to intensify the exploitation of Armenian communities through mechanisms like double taxation (levying taxes alongside the state) and land grabbing, often with tacit or explicit government support.[3] Hamidiye members could commit acts of plunder, murder, and

theft against Armenians with little fear of punishment, while any Armenian resistance was treated as rebellion against the state.[19] This system deliberately "further antagonized the Armenian population" [19] and exacerbated the very conflicts it was supposedly meant to manage, deepening the enmity between the communities. It's noteworthy, however, that the Ottoman state also applied pressure on Kurdish tribes who resisted recruitment into the Hamidiye, sometimes provoking inter-tribal feuds or attacking them.[3] The Hamidiye thus became a key instrument of state control, formalizing the use of certain Kurdish groups against Armenians and setting a dangerous precedent for organized, state-sanctioned violence that would reach its apex during the Genocide.

2.3 The Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) and Early Armenian Resistance

The policies of Abdülhamid II and the activities of the Hamidiye regiments directly contributed to the Hamidian Massacres, a wave of widespread atrocities targeting Armenians between 1894 and 1896.[7] These events, sometimes referred to as the Armenian or Hamidian massacres, constituted a horrific precursor to the 1915 Genocide, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 Armenians across the empire, from Constantinople to the eastern provinces.[21]

Ottoman forces, often acting in concert with Kurdish irregulars and Hamidiye units, carried out these massacres.[3] The violence was often triggered or justified by citing Armenian resistance activities or challenges to Kurdish exploitation. A key example is the Sasun Resistance of 1894. Armenian peasants in the Sasun region, facing intolerable exploitation and attacks by Kurds, resisted, receiving arms and support from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF).[3] The Ottoman authorities used this resistance as a pretext, dispatching regular troops and Hamidiye regiments who, over 23 days, massacred thousands (estimates suggest at least 8,000) of Armenian villagers.[3] Similar patterns occurred elsewhere. In 1896, the Kurdish chieftain of Zelian attacked Armenian villages; the Ottoman governor reported this to the Sultan as an Armenian attack on the Sheikh, leading to the devastation of more villages.[3] Armenian self-defense efforts, such as the Defense of Van in 1896 where armed Armenian men protected the city from impending Hamidiye attacks, highlight the desperate situation faced by the community.[3]

The massacres were fueled by rising Ottoman repression, increased taxation on Armenians, and deliberately stoked nationalist and religious resentment among Kurds.[7] They represented a deliberate state policy to consolidate Turkish rule, restrict Armenian economic influence, and suppress any movement towards autonomy.[12] Although the massacres eventually subsided, partly due to international condemnation [12], the lack of effective intervention and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators established a chilling precedent.[12] These events served as a "dress rehearsal" [15] for the genocide to come, demonstrating the state's willingness to employ mass violence against its Armenian population, utilize Kurdish forces as proxies, manipulate local incidents into justifications for widespread killing, and largely disregard international opinion. The patterns of violence, state complicity, and impunity seen during 1894-1896 would be

tragically replicated on a larger, more systematic scale two decades later.

3. The Armenian Genocide (1915-1923): Kurdish Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Context: WWI and Young Turk Ideology

The Armenian Genocide unfolded within the tumultuous context of World War I and the radical nationalist ideology of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), commonly known as the Young Turks, who had seized effective control of the Ottoman Empire by 1913.[12] While Sultan Abdülhamid II's regime had perpetrated the brutal massacres of the 1890s, the Young Turk leadership, particularly the ruling triumvirate of Talaat Pasha, Enver Pasha, and Djemal Pasha, harbored a more systematic and exterminationist ambition to "solve" the "Armenian Question".[24] Their Turkish nationalist ideology sought to homogenize the remaining imperial territories, viewing the Armenian population, the largest remaining Christian minority concentrated in the strategic eastern provinces, as an obstacle and a potential threat, especially after the Ottoman Empire entered WWI on the side of the Central Powers in late 1914.[11]

The war provided both the pretext and the cover for implementing the genocide. Armenian loyalty was questioned, and accusations of collaboration with the enemy, particularly Russia, were used to justify drastic measures.[15] The initial steps involved the arrest and execution of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople on April 24, 1915 (now commemorated as Genocide Remembrance Day), followed by the disarming and transfer of Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army into labor battalions, where most were subsequently killed.[15] In May 1915, the CUP government enacted the Temporary Law of Deportation (Tehcir Law), authorizing the forced removal of the Armenian population from the eastern provinces and other regions.[7]

3.2 Participation: Collaboration, Perpetration, and Complicity

While the genocide was orchestrated and directed by the Ottoman state apparatus, specifically the CUP leadership and its Special Organization (Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa), certain segments of the Kurdish population played a significant role in its execution.[5] It is crucial, however, to avoid generalizations. Turkish historiography has often exaggerated the role of Kurds to shift blame away from the state.[27] Nevertheless, the participation of some Kurdish tribes and individuals in the massacres, deportations, and looting is well-documented.

Kurdish involvement occurred through several channels. Many served within the Ottoman army or the Hamidiye cavalry (renamed the Tribal Light Cavalry Regiments after Abdülhamid II's deposition), which were heavily implicated in the violence.[19] The Special Organization actively encouraged Kurdish tribes, particularly nomadic groups, to attack Armenian deportee convoys and seize their property.[27] Inmates in Ottoman prisons, including Kurds, were reportedly offered amnesty in exchange for participating in the massacres.[27]

Evidence suggests that nomadic Kurdish tribes were more actively involved in the violence than settled Kurdish villagers, who participated only rarely.[27] Attacks on vulnerable Armenian refugee columns were common, especially in heavily Kurdish-populated areas along deportation routes, such as the mountain passes near Bargiri (Van province) or the roads between Aleppo, Meskene, Diyarbekir, and Deir ez-Zor.[27] In regions like Diyarbekir, where the genocide was particularly brutal (killing 97% of the Armenian population), Turkish authorities directly recruited Kurdish chieftains, like the bandit Omero Perixane, to carry out mass killings of Armenian elites, such as in the infamous "Tigris Massacres".[28]

This participation was not uniform across the Kurdish population. It was influenced by a complex interplay of factors: direct state coercion or encouragement, opportunism for loot and land [3], existing tribal rivalries or dependencies, religious intolerance, and calculations of tribal interest.[3] Attributing responsibility requires acknowledging the state's central role in planning and instigating the genocide while also recognizing the agency and culpability of those Kurdish groups who actively facilitated or participated in the atrocities.

3.3 Resistance and Rescue: Instances of Kurdish Protection

Contrasting with the accounts of participation, there is also evidence that some Kurds actively opposed the genocide and risked their own safety to protect Armenians.[10] These acts of rescue, while perhaps less frequent or widely documented than instances of perpetration, challenge any monolithic portrayal of Kurdish behavior during this period.

The most prominent example involves the Kurds of the Dersim region (a mountainous area with a history of autonomy and resistance to Ottoman authority, populated largely by Alevi Kurds). Multiple sources credit the Dersim Kurds with saving tens of thousands of Armenians, offering refuge and safe passage towards Russian-controlled territory.[4] Reverend Henry Riggs, a contemporary missionary witness, noted the seeming paradox, as Dersim Kurds had participated in the 1895 massacres. He attributed the shift in 1915 partly to the lack of available loot (the government having already confiscated Armenian wealth) and perhaps to a basic human impulse to save defenseless neighbors against whom they held no specific grudge in that context.[30] Other accounts suggest some Dersim Kurds ran smuggling operations to help Armenians escape, possibly motivated by financial gain but nevertheless resulting in saved lives.[28] Besides Dersim Alevis, Yezidi Kurds are also noted for having protected Armenians.[4]

The motivations behind these acts of rescue were likely varied and complex. They could include pre-existing positive relationships (perhaps remnants of *kirvelik*), opposition to the CUP government, financial incentives, tribal self-interest (some sources suggest tribes viewed local Armenians as "their property" and might protect them from outsiders or the state while harming Armenians associated with rival tribes [28]), or genuine altruism and moral courage. The risks were substantial; one account tells of a Kurd who initially hid an Armenian friend but ultimately killed him when Ottoman authorities threatened his own family.[28] These instances demonstrate that Kurdish responses to the genocide were diverse, shaped by local contexts, tribal affiliations, religious identity (Alevi, Yezidi vs. Sunni), relationships with the state, and

individual choices.

3.4 Motivations and Consequences

The motivations for Kurdish participation in the Armenian Genocide were multifaceted. State directives, coercion through recruitment into units like the Hamidiye, and the release of prisoners played a role.[19] Opportunism was a significant factor, with the prospect of seizing Armenian land, property, and wealth proving a powerful incentive for many, particularly nomadic tribes encouraged by the Special Organization.[3] Existing socio-economic tensions, historical animosities fueled by perceived ethnic or religious differences, and loyalty among some tribes to the Ottoman Caliphate also contributed.[3] Tribal interests and rivalries could also dictate actions, sometimes aligning with state goals, sometimes diverging.[28]

The immediate consequence of the genocide was the near-total annihilation of the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire, particularly in their historic homeland in Eastern Anatolia.[12] An estimated 600,000 to over 1.5 million Armenians perished through systematic massacres, forced marches under brutal conditions, deliberate starvation, and disease in concentration camps established in the Syrian desert, notably around Deir ez-Zor.[7] Survivors faced forced conversion, abduction (especially of women and children), and permanent exile.[15]

The long-term consequences fundamentally reshaped the region. The elimination of the Armenian presence led to a significant demographic shift, with Kurdish populations expanding into and settling formerly Armenian villages and lands.[10] This process contributed to the consolidation of areas later claimed as parts of "Northern Kurdistan" on territories with deep Armenian history.[5] The legacy of confiscated Armenian property became a source of enduring conflict and tension, even among Kurds themselves, with the knowledge of illicit origins persisting across generations.[13] The genocide also left a profound psychological scar. For Armenians, it is the defining trauma of their modern history. For Kurds, the memory is complex; while some descendants of perpetrators may engage in denial or benefit from the spoils, others carry a sense of collective guilt or loss, sometimes interpreting later misfortunes as divine retribution or feeling "amputated" by the Armenians' absence.[4] Furthermore, the methods and impunity associated with the Armenian Genocide arguably laid the groundwork for subsequent Turkish state policies of repression against other minorities, including the Kurds themselves.[13]

4. Interwar Period and Early Turkish Republic

4.1 Failed Promises (Treaty of Sèvres) and Realities (Treaty of Lausanne)

The end of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire initially seemed to offer opportunities for both Armenian and Kurdish national aspirations. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920 between the Allied Powers and the defeated Ottoman government, included provisions for an independent Armenian state encompassing significant territory in Eastern

Anatolia (including Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Trabzon) and granted local autonomy to Kurdish-inhabited areas east of the Euphrates.[3] This period saw tentative cooperation between Armenian and Kurdish representatives on the international stage, such as Boghos Nubar Pasha (leader of the Armenian national delegation) and Sharif Pasha (representing Ottoman Kurds) agreeing at the Versailles Peace Conference on the desirability of a Kurdish state backed by an Armenian state emerging from the Ottoman ruins.[4]

However, these provisions were never implemented. The treaty was vehemently rejected by the Turkish nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), which waged a successful War of Independence against Allied occupation forces and the remnants of the Ottoman government.[35] The nationalist victory led to the negotiation of a new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in July 1923.[14] This treaty established the borders of the modern Republic of Turkey, effectively annulling the promises of Sèvres regarding Armenia and Kurdistan.[35] Lausanne made no provision for an independent or autonomous Kurdistan, dividing the Kurdish-inhabited lands among Turkey, British-mandated Iraq, French-mandated Syria, and Iran.[14] Furthermore, unlike the recognized non-Muslim minorities (Greeks, Armenians, Jews), Kurds were not granted minority status or rights within the new Turkish state.[3] This outcome, driven by the military and diplomatic success of Turkish nationalism, cemented the denial of both Armenian territorial claims stemming from Sèvres and Kurdish aspirations for self-determination, embedding unresolved grievances within the framework of the new Turkish Republic and its neighbors.

4.2 Early Attempts at Cooperation (Khoyboun Committee, Ararat Rebellion)

Despite the profound rupture caused by the Armenian Genocide and the unfavorable outcome of the Lausanne Treaty, the shared experience of being denied national aspirations by the nascent Turkish Republic fostered continued, albeit complex, attempts at Armenian-Kurdish cooperation.[4] Driven by mutual opposition to the Kemalist government in Ankara, these efforts represented a pragmatic, if often fraught, alignment based on perceived strategic necessity.

A significant manifestation of this cooperation was the Khoyboun (Xoybûn) organization, founded in Beirut in 1927.[4] Led by prominent Kurdish nationalist figures like members of the Bedir Khan family and Ihsan Nuri Pasha, Khoyboun aimed to unite various Kurdish factions and organize a national uprising against Turkish rule.[6] Crucially, Khoyboun actively sought and received support from Armenian organizations, particularly the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun), which played a role in its establishment and activities, including promoting the Kurdish cause internationally.[4]

Khoyboun provided political backing for the Ararat rebellion (1927-1930), a major Kurdish uprising in the Ağrı region of eastern Turkey.[4] The ARF pledged financial support to this rebellion.[4] This cooperation led to the declaration of a short-lived Republic of Ararat in 1927, with Ihsan Nuri Pasha as a key military leader.[6] The rebellion, however, was eventually crushed by the Turkish military. It is noteworthy, and indicative of the complex internal dynamics and

historical baggage, that Khoyboun and the rebellion involved Kurdish elements who had previously been hostile to Armenians or even participated in anti-Armenian violence.[4] This highlights the difficult compromises and shifting alliances driven by the perceived threat from the Turkish state. Other Kurdish revolts during this period, such as the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 and the Dersim rebellion in 1937-1938, which also faced brutal suppression by Turkish forces, further underscored the shared predicament of Kurdish groups under the new republic.[35] These early post-Lausanne collaborations, though ultimately unsuccessful militarily, demonstrated a capacity for Armenian-Kurdish rapprochement against a common enemy, overcoming recent history out of strategic imperative.

4.3 Shared Subjugation under Kemalist Policies

The establishment of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ushered in an era of aggressive nation-building centered on a singular Turkish identity. This project involved systematic policies aimed at suppressing or eliminating the distinct identities of non-Turkish groups, including both the remaining Armenian population and the much larger Kurdish population.[14] Both groups faced forced assimilation ("Turkification"), the denial of their existence as separate peoples (Kurds were often referred to as "Mountain Turks" [40]), suppression of their languages and cultures, prohibition of ethnic organizations, forced resettlement programs designed to break up communities, and violent military repression of any resistance.[14]

This shared experience of oppression under the Turkish state, the successor to the Ottoman regime that had perpetrated the Genocide, became a crucial factor in reshaping Kurdish perspectives over time.[4] While many Kurds had participated in the Genocide, often at the behest of the Ottoman state, the subsequent decades saw Kurds themselves become primary targets of the Turkish state's homogenizing and often brutal policies. This lived experience fostered a sense of shared victimhood and growing empathy among significant segments of the Kurdish population towards the Armenians.[13] The sentiment, sometimes expressed colloquially as "the Turks had [Armenians] for breakfast, and they will have us [Kurds] for lunch" [24], reflects this understanding of a continuum of state violence targeting minorities perceived as obstacles to Turkish national unity. The Kemalist state's very efforts to erase distinct identities paradoxically laid the groundwork for future solidarity between Armenians and Kurds, rooted in their common struggle against Turkish nationalism. This shared experience would later become a powerful lens through which many Kurdish activists and intellectuals would re-evaluate their community's history and role in the Armenian Genocide, leading to movements for recognition and apology.

5. Contemporary Relations Across Key Regions

The relationship between Armenians and Kurds in the contemporary era is not monolithic but varies significantly depending on the specific geopolitical context of the states where they reside – primarily Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and the Republic of Armenia itself, as well as within their respective diasporas.

5.1 Turkey

Turkey, home to the largest Kurdish population and the historical heartland where the Armenian Genocide primarily unfolded, remains the most complex and charged arena for Armenian-Kurdish relations.

Kurdish Movement & Genocide Recognition: A defining feature of recent decades has been the significant shift within the Kurdish political movement towards acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and Kurdish complicity in it.[13] Emerging from a shared experience of state repression, many Kurdish activists and political figures began to see parallels between their own struggle and the fate of the Armenians. This led to increasingly explicit public statements of recognition and apology, challenging the deeply entrenched Turkish state denial. Major pro-Kurdish political parties like the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and its successor, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), issued formal apologies or acknowledgements. Prominent figures such as Ahmet Türk (in 2008 and 2014) and Selahattin Demirtaş publicly recognized the genocide and the Kurdish role.[27] Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, repeatedly used the term "genocide" in a 2014 letter, stating that the Turkish Republic would inevitably have to confront this history.[27] Kurdish Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like the Kurdish Institute of Paris and the Center of Halabja against Anfalization and Genocide of the Kurds (CHAK) also formally recognized the genocide.[27] Even earlier, in 1997, Zubeyir Aydar, representing the political wing of the PKK (ERNK), issued a statement condemning the Ottoman state and the collaborating Hamidiye regiments for the genocide against Armenians and Assyrians.[27]

Table: Examples of Kurdish Recognition and Apologies for the Armenian Genocide

Organization/Individual	Approximate Date	Key Statement/Action	Source Snippet(s)
Zubeyir Aydar (ERNK/PKK Executive Committee Chairman)	1997	Condemned Ottoman State and collaborating Hamidiye Alaylari (formed by some Kurdish tribes) as responsible for the genocide against Assyrian-Syriac and Armenian peoples.	[27]
Kurdish Institute of Paris	Ongoing	Recognizes 1915 massacres as genocide; often mentioned in its publications.	[27]
Center of Halabja against Anfalization	Post-2006	Welcomed recognition of Armenian Genocide,	[27]

and Genocide of the Kurds (CHAK)		stating it helps broader understanding and possibility of peaceful future. Published article on the genocide.	
Democratic Society Party (DTP) / Ahmet Türk	Dec 30, 2008	Party leader Ahmet Türk apologized to Armenians and Assyrians for massacres inflicted on them.	[27]
Özgür Gündem (Newspaper/Website)	Various	Kurdish newspaper apologized for silence and complicity; published detailed articles on the genocide and Armenian suffering.	[27]
Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) / Selahattin Demirtaş	Pre-2015	Party co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş acknowledged the existence of the Armenian genocide in an interview.	[27]
Ahmet Türk (as HDP figure/Kurdish politician)	2014	Acknowledged the Kurdish role in the Armenian genocide.	[27]
Abdullah Öcalan (PKK Leader)	Jan 30, 2014	In a letter published in *Agos*, repeatedly used "genocide" for 1915 events, called for confrontation with historical truth, sharing pain, and mourning; stated Turkish Republic must confront this history.	[27]
Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Website / Masoud Barzani	Various	KDP supporters' website published article describing the genocide as a crime	[27]

		against Christian people. Party leader Masoud Barzani published a book about the Armenian genocide. (Note: Primarily refers to KDP in Iraq, but relevant to broader Kurdish discourse)	

Memory Work: This shift in discourse was accompanied by tangible "memory work," particularly during the period of relative political opening between roughly 2000 and 2015.[34] Pro-Kurdish municipalities, especially in the southeast, spearheaded initiatives aimed at reconciliation and acknowledging the region's multi-ethnic past. Notable examples include the restoration and reopening of the historic Surp Giragos Armenian Apostolic Church in Diyarbakir in 2011, with financial support from the municipality.[4] The Sur Municipality also created the Monument of Common Conscience in 2011, explicitly recognizing the massacres against Armenians and Assyrians.[34] Civil society groups, intellectuals, and artists published books and documentaries exploring the collective memory of the genocide, the fate of Islamized Armenians, and the complexities of Kurdish participation.[4] Public commemorations of the genocide on April 24th became more common in Kurdish areas. The work of figures like the assassinated Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was crucial in fostering broader societal dialogue in Turkey, impacting Kurdish circles as well.[4] This collective effort aimed to construct a "counter-memory" [13] based on oral histories and local experiences, directly challenging the state's narrative of denial and highlighting the shared suffering of Armenians and Kurds under state violence.[13]

Impact and Backlash: This period of memory work significantly fostered dialogue between Kurdish and Armenian communities and represented a powerful challenge to Turkish state denialism.[34] However, it also faced internal opposition within Kurdish society. Some nationalists feared that acknowledging complicity would weaken Kurdish territorial claims or political standing, while Islamists sometimes echoed state propaganda accusing the Kurdish movement of serving Armenian or Western interests.[4] Descendants of those who profited from the genocide also had vested interests in maintaining denial.[4]

The political climate shifted dramatically after 2015 with the collapse of the peace process between the Turkish state and the PKK, and the subsequent intensification of conflict and state repression in Kurdish regions.[34] This led to a sharp decline in memory work.[34] The urban warfare in cities like Diyarbakir (particularly the Sur district, a hub for reconciliation efforts) resulted in the physical destruction of important sites, including parts of the newly restored Armenian church.[34] Elected HDP mayors who had supported these initiatives were systematically removed from office and often imprisoned.[34] Key activists and intellectuals involved in memory work were arrested or forced into exile.[34] State rhetoric hardened, with

Turkish security forces reportedly using anti-Armenian slurs ("Armenian bastards") during operations in Kurdish areas, explicitly linking the contemporary Kurdish struggle with the historical Armenian "enemy".[34] The state actively promoted narratives framing past violence as necessary actions against internal threats, implicitly justifying current repression.[34] Turkish political discourse often invokes the "Sèvres syndrome," portraying contemporary Kurdish aspirations and Armenian Genocide recognition efforts as interconnected threats aimed at dismembering Turkey.[43] This demonstrates the intimate link between historical memory, minority rights, and political control in Turkey; periods of democratic opening allow for confrontation with the past, while authoritarianism actively suppresses it.

5.2 Iraq (Kurdistan Region - KRG)

In contrast to the situation in Turkey, the relationship between the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq and the Republic of Armenia has developed along more formal and cooperative lines, driven by shared geopolitical interests and a degree of mutual empathy.

KRG-Armenia Relations: Formal diplomatic ties have been established, underscored by the opening of an Armenian Consulate General in the KRG capital, Erbil, in February 2021.[4] This followed the KRG's funding assistance for the consecration of a new Armenian church in Erbil two years prior.[4] High-level meetings occur regularly, such as the February 2024 meeting between KRG President Nechirvan Barzani and Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan in Erbil.[45] These discussions focus on strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation in various sectors, including trade, investment, healthcare, tourism, and potentially establishing direct flights between Yerevan and Erbil.[44]

Strategic Partnership: The foundation of this partnership lies in shared historical experiences of struggle for self-determination and survival against larger, often hostile powers.[44] Both entities perceive threats from regional actors, particularly the expansionist or pan-Turkic ambitions associated with Turkey.[4] For Armenia, the KRG represents a potential buffer zone and a non-hostile neighbor to the south.[4] For the KRG, Armenia is a fellow non-Arab entity in the region facing similar pressures. Furthermore, the KRG has positioned itself as a relative safe haven for ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians like Armenians and Assyrians, who have faced persecution elsewhere in Iraq, particularly from ISIS.[4] The Armenian community residing in the KRG, notably in the Christian suburb of Ankawa in Erbil, enjoys freedom of worship and accommodates itself to Kurdish governance.[4] The KRG itself is constitutionally recognized as a multi-ethnic region within Iraq, including Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian components.[46]

Diplomatic/Cultural/Economic Cooperation: Practical cooperation is developing across multiple domains. The Diplomatic School of Armenia has hosted KRG delegations for specialized training programs focusing on diplomacy, regional security, and international relations, fostering mutual understanding and expertise.[44] Economic collaboration is a stated priority, aiming to diversify economies beyond oil dependence by focusing on energy, agriculture, technology, and infrastructure, facilitated through trade delegations and business

forums.[44] Cultural diplomacy, including academic exchanges and cultural performances, is also pursued to strengthen social ties.[44] Security cooperation, addressing shared challenges like terrorism and regional instability, is another component of the partnership.[44] This official-level engagement between the autonomous KRG and the Armenian state represents a pragmatic geopolitical alignment, distinct from the more historically burdened and politically constrained interactions found in Turkey. The KRG's autonomy allows it to pursue such independent foreign policy initiatives.[2]

5.3 Syria (Rojava / North and East Syria - NES)

The Syrian Civil War, beginning in 2011, created a power vacuum in northeastern Syria that allowed Kurdish forces, primarily affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD) – the Syrian branch of the PKK – to establish a de facto autonomous region.[47] Initially known as Rojava (Western Kurdistan), the administration later adopted names like the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria and, currently, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES or NES) to reflect its expanding territory and multi-ethnic composition, which includes significant Arab populations alongside Kurds, Assyrians/Syriacs, Armenians, Turkmen, and others.[47] The AANES promotes an ideology of democratic confederalism, emphasizing decentralization, direct democracy, ethnic inclusivity, and gender equality.[47] Its official military force is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a multi-ethnic coalition heavily supported by the US in the fight against ISIS.[47]

The situation for the Armenian community within NES presents a paradox. On one hand, Armenians participate in the AANES structures and the SDF. A notable example is the Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Brigade, an SDF military unit composed of Armenians, named after an Armenian communist revolutionary killed fighting Turkish forces.[4] This indicates a degree of cooperation and integration, likely driven by the shared threat posed by Islamist groups like ISIS and, critically, by Turkey and its Syrian National Army (SNA) proxies, who view the AANES as a terrorist entity linked to the PKK.[50] The historical precedent of Kurdish-Armenian cooperation against Turkey, like the Khoybun committee and the Ararat Republic, finds echoes in this contemporary alliance against perceived existential threats.[51] The emergence of "crypto-Armenians" – descendants of Genocide survivors who hid their identity within Muslim families and are now reclaiming it within Rojava – is another unique aspect of this context.[51]

On the other hand, reports have emerged suggesting tensions between the dominant PYD authorities and minority communities, including Armenians and other Christians.[4] These reports allege that the PYD has appropriated community assets, exerted pressure on families to enroll youth in militias, interfered with minority schools and churches, and imposed ideological "re-education" programs.[4] Such actions, if accurate, reflect the authoritarian tendencies often observed within PYD/PKK-linked structures and create friction despite the official ideology of inclusivity.

The AANES remains under immense pressure. Repeated Turkish military invasions have resulted in the occupation of significant parts of the region (like Afrin and areas along the border), accompanied by accusations of ethnic cleansing, human rights abuses, and

demographic change targeting Kurds, carried out by Turkish forces and the SNA.[50] Ongoing Turkish drone strikes and shelling target critical infrastructure, such as dams and power stations, impacting all residents.[53] The recent fall of the Assad regime in Damascus has created further uncertainty, potentially emboldening Turkey and allied Islamist groups to increase pressure on the AANES.[50] The future of Armenian-Kurdish relations in NES is thus inextricably linked to the survival of the autonomous administration itself in the face of intense external threats and internal governance challenges.

5.4 Iran

Armenians and Kurds in Iran represent distinct minority groups with differing historical trajectories and relationships with the state. Armenians possess a deeply rooted history in Persia, predating the modern Iranian state, with significant interactions tracing back to antiquity and the Achaemenid Empire.[54] Parts of historical Armenia fell under Persian rule (Safavid, Afsharid, Qajar empires) for centuries until the Russian conquests of the early 19th century.[54] A notable event was the forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Armenians by Shah Abbas I in the early 17th century from Armenian lands to New Julfa in Isfahan and surrounding areas, where they became integral to Iran's commerce and culture.[54] Armenians played significant roles in 20th-century Iranian development and political affairs, and Iran served as a refuge for tens of thousands fleeing the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire.[54] While facing restrictions common to religious minorities in the Islamic Republic, the Armenian community is officially recognized and retains a distinct cultural and religious identity.

The Kurdish population in Iran is concentrated primarily in the western provinces bordering Iraq and Turkey (often referred to as Eastern Kurdistan or Rojhelat).[2] Unlike the Armenians' more integrated history, the relationship between Iranian Kurds and the central state has often been characterized by conflict and suspicion, particularly since the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty and later the Islamic Republic.[2] The short-lived Soviet-backed Republic of Mahabad in 1946 remains a key moment in Iranian Kurdish nationalism.[2] Since the 1979 revolution, Iranian Kurds have faced assimilationist pressures, suppression of nationalist movements, and armed conflict with the state.[2] Groups like the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), linked to the PKK, continue to engage in militant activity seeking greater autonomy or rights.[2] The Iranian state has historically viewed the "Kurdish question" within its borders as a security issue, sometimes influenced by dynamics in neighboring countries, and has occasionally manipulated Kurdish groups for its own geopolitical purposes, for instance, against Turkey or Iraq.[56]

Given these distinct historical paths and contemporary situations, significant Armenian-Kurdish cooperation or interaction *within* Iran appears limited compared to contexts like Turkey or Iraq where they face a more overtly common adversary or shared political project. While both are non-Persian minorities, their specific grievances, political alignments, and relationship with the Iranian state differ considerably. The available sources focus primarily on the separate histories of each group within Iran, rather than substantial

inter-communal dynamics between them in the contemporary period.[2]

5.5 Republic of Armenia

The relationship between the Armenian state and Kurdish populations is primarily defined by the presence of the Yezidi minority within Armenia and the complex politics surrounding their identity.

The Yezidi Question and Identity Debate: Yezidis constitute Armenia's largest national minority, with official census figures around 31,000-42,000, though community leaders suggest higher numbers.[57] Their ancestors mostly arrived in the territory of modern Armenia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, fleeing religious persecution in the Ottoman Empire, often alongside Armenians during the Genocide.[57] Historically and linguistically, Yezidis are closely related to Kurds; they speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish and share many cultural traits.[57] However, their distinct religious beliefs (Yezidism) have historically set them apart from predominantly Muslim Kurds, and they have faced persecution not only from Ottomans/Turks but sometimes from Muslim Kurds as well.[57]

This history fuels a significant and often contentious debate within Armenia's Yezidi community regarding their identity: are they ethnically Kurdish Yezidis, or are Yezidis a distinct ethno-religious group separate from Kurds?.[57] During the Soviet era, Yezidis were generally classified as Kurds in censuses, and Soviet Armenia became an unexpected center for secular Kurdish cultural development.[57] Yezidi intellectuals played key roles in standardizing Kurmanji, writing the first Kurdish novels, and producing Kurdish-language radio broadcasts and publications.[57] However, Soviet atheism also suppressed distinct Yezidi religious identity.[58]

Since Armenia's independence, a strong movement emerged among many Yezidis to assert a separate identity, distinct from Kurds.[58] This perspective emphasizes religious difference and historical grievances, sometimes viewing the label "Kurd" as an insult.[59] Others within the community reject this separation, maintaining a Kurdish identity and criticizing the division.[58]

This internal debate has political implications. The Armenian state has navigated this complexity by officially recognizing both Yezidi and Kurdish as distinct minority languages under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages [58] and guaranteeing parliamentary representation specifically for the Yezidi community.[57] However, some analysts suggest the state may implicitly favor the separation narrative to distance itself from broader Kurdish nationalism, potential PKK influence, or territorial claims associated with "Kurdistan" that might overlap with Armenian territory.[59] This contested identity remains a central issue for the community.[59]

Cultural Life and Regional Impact: Despite the identity debate, Yezidis maintain a distinct cultural presence in Armenia, with numerous Yezidi-majority villages, particularly in the Aragatsotn and Armavir provinces.[57] They have established religious temples, including Quba Mere Diwane in Aknalich, the world's largest Yezidi temple, opened in 2020.[57] The legacy of Soviet Armenia as a center for Kurdish culture persists, particularly through the memory of Radio Yerevan's Kurdish broadcasts, which served as a vital cultural link for Kurds in Turkey where their language was banned.[4] Yezidis also participated alongside Armenians in both

Nagorno-Karabakh wars, forming volunteer detachments.[57] The recent loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) in 2023 and the mass exodus of its Armenian population represent a profound national trauma and geopolitical shift for Armenia.[69] While the direct impact on Armenian-Kurdish/Yezidi relations is not yet fully clear, Armenia's weakened position and heightened sense of vulnerability could potentially influence its future regional alignments and policies towards minorities and neighbors.

6. Political/Militant Cooperation and Conflict

Beyond state-level interactions and community relations, the Armenian-Kurdish dynamic has also involved collaboration and tension between non-state political and militant organizations, most notably the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA).

PKK-ASALA Relations (Late 1970s - 1980s): During the peak of their activities, these two groups reportedly developed significant ties based on shared enmity towards the Turkish state and overlapping ideological currents rooted in the Turkish radical left, which often recognized the Armenian Genocide and opposed Kemalist nationalism.[75] Evidence points to several forms of cooperation:

- **Formal Agreements and Statements:** A joint press conference was reportedly held in Sidon, Lebanon, on April 8, 1980, where PKK and ASALA announced an agreement to conduct joint armed actions against Turkey and discussed the foundation of a federal state.[75] ASALA spokespersons like Agop Agopian publicly stated they were "fighting side by side with Kurdish revolutionaries".[75]
- **Joint Actions:** Several bomb attacks against Turkish diplomatic missions in Europe during the early 1980s were claimed under the joint name of PKK and ASALA.[75] The PKK allegedly provided logistical support, including weapons and lookouts, for ASALA's 1982 attack on Ankara's Esenboğa Airport.[77]
- **Shared Training and Bases:** Both groups utilized training camps in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon.[4] Reports suggest they trained in the same camps and that PKK representatives attended meetings involving ASALA.[77] Later, joint camps were allegedly discovered and destroyed by Turkish forces in northern Iraq in 1984.[75]
- **Personnel Exchange/Support:** After ASALA began to fragment in the mid-1980s, some reports suggest former members of ASALA or the related Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG) provided training (e.g., bomb-making) in PKK camps.[75] There are also claims that some ASALA militants transferred to the PKK as their own organization declined.[77]
- **Ideological Endorsement:** PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, even in later years (e.g., 1998), openly supported cooperation between Kurdish and Armenian groups.[75]

Motivations and Tensions: The primary driver for this cooperation was the mutual goal of challenging and ultimately overthrowing the Turkish state.[75] Both groups framed their struggle in anti-colonialist or anti-imperialist terms, drawing on leftist ideologies prevalent at the

time.[78] However, the relationship was not without friction. The PKK publicly objected to ASALA's strategy of targeting civilians, particularly after the deadly 1983 Orly Airport attack in Paris, even while simultaneously calling for ASALA to join its ranks in a "partnership of fate".[75] This difference in tactics, combined with ASALA's internal fragmentation (exacerbated by the Orly attack backlash and the loss of its Lebanese bases after Israel's 1982 invasion [78]), led to the decline of significant operational cooperation by the mid-to-late 1980s.

Contemporary Echoes: While large-scale PKK-ASALA cooperation ceased decades ago with ASALA's dissolution, the legacy persists. Turkish state narratives frequently link the PKK to Armenian interests as part of its justification for counter-insurgency operations.[43] Some sources, often with a pro-Azerbaijani or pro-Turkish perspective, continue to allege ongoing links or joint activities, particularly claiming PKK and ASALA elements fought together against Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, sometimes within Armenian volunteer units like VoMA (Voxj Mnalu Arvest, The Art of Survival) or a newly formed group called POGA.[77] These contemporary claims require critical assessment regarding their sourcing and potential political motivation, but they indicate that the historical connection between Armenian and Kurdish militant groups remains a sensitive and politically charged issue in the region. The PKK-ASALA relationship stands as a notable, if complex and ultimately transient, example of armed collaboration born from shared opposition to the Turkish state.

7. Diaspora Dynamics

The relationship between Armenian and Kurdish communities extends beyond the borders of their historic homelands into their respective global diasporas. These interactions are marked by the same complexities – historical trauma, political divisions, and strategic considerations – that shape relations in the region itself.

Diaspora encounters are sometimes characterized by attempts at rapprochement and displays of goodwill, described metaphorically as a "love fest," yet often shadowed by the "negative feelings" stemming from the historical record, particularly the Armenian Genocide.[80] Symbolic gestures occur, such as Armenian cultural groups visiting Kurdish regions in Turkey (like Dersim), joint participation in cultural celebrations like Newruz, or shared events surrounding the restoration of Armenian heritage sites like the Surp Giragos church in Diyarbakir.[80] These events provide opportunities for rediscovery and building bridges.

From the Kurdish diaspora side, particularly elements aligned with the political movement in Turkey, there have been conscious efforts to engage with the Armenian diaspora and address the historical burden of the Genocide.[80] Apologies issued by Kurdish political entities, such as the Kurdish Parliament in Exile's early communiqué, are part of this strategy to reshape perceptions and seek reconciliation.[80]

For Armenians in the diaspora, engaging with Kurds involves navigating the profound trauma of the Genocide and the documented role of some Kurdish groups as perpetrators.[6] While there is a hesitant effort towards forgiveness ("forgive but not forget"), the path to genuine trust is difficult.[80]

Strategic considerations also play a significant role. Kurdish diaspora groups, often lacking

unified state backing and facing internal fragmentation (due to tribalism, political factionalism between different parties and ideologies across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran), recognize the potential value of an alliance with the globally organized and politically influential Armenian diaspora.[6] Armenians, in turn, may see strategic value in supporting Kurdish aspirations, particularly against Turkey, recognizing a shared adversary and potentially overlapping interests based on historical claims or future regional configurations (sometimes invoking the framework of the Treaty of Sèvres).[6] The idea of a shared past, common struggles, and intertwined destiny is often invoked to bolster calls for cooperation.[6]

However, significant challenges hinder deeper collaboration. Kurdish disunity remains a major obstacle; their internal political divisions limit their ability to present a unified front or offer concrete political gains beyond goodwill.[80] On the Armenian side, the diaspora itself is not monolithic and can be perceived as sometimes overly focused on historical grievances or internal community matters, potentially neglecting contemporary geopolitical opportunities or the "real issue of regaining rights in Western Armenia".[80] A lack of unified purpose within both diasporas makes sustained, effective cooperation difficult.[80] Ultimately, meaningful progress in Armenian-Kurdish diaspora relations requires confronting the painful legacy of the past while identifying and acting upon concrete, shared strategic interests for the future, a process complicated by the internal divisions and differing priorities within each scattered community.

8. Cultural Exchange and Shared Heritage

Beneath the layers of political conflict and historical trauma, a rich stratum of cultural exchange and shared heritage connects the Armenian and Kurdish peoples, reflecting centuries of coexistence and interaction, particularly in the regions of Eastern Anatolia/Western Armenia and Upper Mesopotamia.

Music: Folk music traditions show particularly strong connections. Observers note significant similarities in melodic structures, lyrical themes, and instrumentation between Armenian and Kurdish music, especially the Kurmanji traditions geographically closest to Armenia.[67] Shared instruments like the *dhol* (drum) and *duduk* (double-reed woodwind) are common to both cultures.[67] This overlap can sometimes lead to contested claims of ownership, with members of each group occasionally asserting that the other has appropriated their music.[67] Tellingly, some of the most celebrated performers of Kurdish folk music have been ethnic Armenians, such as Karapetê Xaço (Karapet Khachatryan) and Aram Tigran (Aram Melikyan), who became iconic figures in Kurdish music while living in Armenia and later in diaspora.[67] The pioneering Armenian ethnomusicologist Komitas Vartabed conducted early research into Kurdish melodies, publishing a collection in 1904.[67] Furthermore, the Kurdish language broadcasts of Radio Yerevan during the Soviet era played an indispensable role in preserving and disseminating Kurdish music (alongside language and literature) to Kurdish audiences across borders, especially in Turkey where Kurdish cultural expression was severely suppressed.[4] The tradition of the *dengbêj*, the Kurdish epic singer or bard, represents a vital aspect of Kurdish oral culture [81], and historical parallels exist, such as the 15th-century Armenian bard Yohannēs Xlatʻecʻi who performed at the court of the Kurdish emir of Bitlis.[82]

Literature and Oral Traditions: Modern Kurdish literature, particularly novels emerging from Turkey since the late 20th century, has increasingly engaged with the shared past, often focusing on the Armenian Genocide.[14] These works explore themes of lost cohabitation (often invoking the *kirîvatî* relationship), the plight of Armenians who survived by converting to Islam (known as *bavfileh*), the trauma of violence, and the drawing of parallels between Armenian suffering and the subsequent oppression faced by Kurds.[32] This literary engagement serves as a form of cultural memory work, confronting a difficult history often denied by the state.
Historically, Soviet Armenia provided a crucial incubator for the development of modern Kurdish literature in the Kurmanji dialect. The first Kurdish novel, *Şivanê Kurmanca* (The Kurdish Shepherd, 1935) by Erebê Şemo, was published there, along with numerous other works of prose, poetry, and pedagogy by Yezidi Kurdish intellectuals like Heciyê Cindî and Emînê Evdal.[57] Exiled Kurdish intellectuals, such as the Bedirkhan brothers in Syria, also worked to preserve Kurdish culture by transcribing and publishing oral traditions, including folksongs and stories, in journals like *Hawar* during the 1930s and 40s.[81]
Collective Memory and Language: The intertwined history is also embedded within the collective memory and language of Kurdish communities in the region. Place names often bear witness to the former Armenian presence or specific events of the Genocide (e.g., *Newala Kuştiya* - the River of Death, *Korta Filehan* - the Armenians' Grave).[13] Terms like *ferman* (Ottoman decree, used to refer to the genocide order) or *firxûnê Armeniyan* (eradication of Armenians) are part of the vernacular for discussing 1915.[13] Oral traditions passed down through generations recount stories of the Armenians' departure, the confiscation of their lands, the fate of survivors, and sometimes carry narratives of curses or divine justice befalling families involved in the atrocities, reflecting a persistent, if often unspoken, consciousness of the past.[13] The enduring practice of searching for buried Armenian treasure, often leading to the destruction of remaining heritage sites, is another manifestation of this embedded memory.[13]
This shared cultural landscape, encompassing music, literature, language, and memory, highlights the deep historical connections between Armenians and Kurds. While often a source of shared identity and potential connection, this cultural heritage is also contested terrain, subject to narratives of appropriation and utilized as a crucial resource for identity preservation, political expression, and confronting the traumatic legacies of the past.

9. Conclusion

The relationship between Armenians and Kurds represents a deeply complex and often tragic historical narrative, characterized by profound duality. Centuries of coexistence in overlapping homelands fostered interdependence and cultural exchange, yet this occurred within unequal power structures often marked by exploitation and conflict. Imperial powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire and later the Turkish Republic, frequently manipulated these dynamics, employing policies of divide and rule that pitted the groups against each other, culminating in the devastating Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923.
The Genocide stands as the pivotal, catastrophic event in this shared history. While orchestrated by the Ottoman state, the participation of certain Kurdish tribes and individuals

– driven by a mix of state coercion, opportunism, and local factors – inflicted immense suffering and remains a heavy burden on the relationship. Conversely, documented instances of Kurdish resistance to the Genocide and the rescue of Armenians underscore the fact that Kurdish actions were not monolithic and that agency existed even under extreme circumstances. The aftermath of the Genocide irrevocably altered the demographic and political landscape, eliminating the Armenian presence in Anatolia and contributing to the formation of Kurdish-majority areas on historically Armenian lands, leaving legacies of unresolved land issues and collective trauma.

The post-Ottoman era saw both peoples denied their national aspirations by the Treaty of Lausanne and subjected to assimilationist policies under the new nation-states, particularly in Turkey. This shared experience of oppression under Turkish nationalism, however, paradoxically created grounds for renewed, albeit complex, cooperation attempts (like the Khoyboun committee) and fostered a growing sense of empathy among many Kurds, leading to significant movements for acknowledging the Armenian Genocide within the Kurdish political sphere in recent decades.

The contemporary landscape remains fragmented and contingent on specific geopolitical contexts. In Turkey, promising efforts towards reconciliation and memory work have been largely stifled by renewed state repression, highlighting the fragility of progress when confronted by authoritarianism and entrenched denialism. In Iraq, the autonomous KRG and the Republic of Armenia have forged a pragmatic strategic partnership based on mutual interests and shared threats. In Syria, the Rojava/NES experiment presents a paradox of multi-ethnic cooperation under the SDF umbrella alongside reported tensions stemming from the dominant PYD's governance practices, all under severe threat from Turkey. In Iran, Armenians and Kurds navigate distinct paths as minorities with differing historical relationships to the state. Within Armenia itself, the complex Yezidi identity debate reflects the intricate interplay of ethnicity, religion, and state politics. Across the diasporas, efforts towards collaboration continue, hampered by historical baggage and internal divisions.

The future of Armenian-Kurdish relations remains uncertain. Overcoming the profound trauma of the Genocide requires sustained dialogue, genuine confrontation with the past by all parties, and addressing tangible issues like historical memory and potentially restitution or justice claims. Strategic cooperation, particularly where shared threats exist (as seen with the KRG and potentially in diaspora), offers a pragmatic path forward, but relies on navigating complex political realities and internal community dynamics. The intertwined histories of Armenians and Kurds, marked by both profound connection and devastating conflict, continue to be a crucial, inescapable element in understanding the past, present, and future trajectories of the peoples and regions involved.

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