

Promoting Social Cohesion and Resolving the Kurdish Ethnic Dilemma in Iran, Iraq and Turkey; A Critical Review of Dr. Asim's Book "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan"

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Abstract

By critically reviewing the concept of "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan" this research paper delves into the possibilities of resolving the Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland of Iran, Iraq and Turkey through the implementation of a jointly administrative market or cultural diplomacy by the three states to ensure peace, progress, and prosperity (3Ps). Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as structural functionalism and mechanical solidarity, the paper explores how Iran, Iraq and Turkey can address the region's diverse ethnic composition and foster social harmony.

By examining the potential benefits of a separate level of reality and recognizing the manipulations faced by the region from international forums, the paper argues for the urgent consideration of the proposed Kurdish associations in terms of investment and trade between the three states. The paper also discusses the potential role of Iran in resolving regional ethnic dilemmas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as between Iraq and Turkey. Building upon the insights of the book "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan" which highlights the role of structural functionalism in uniting the Baloch population, ethnic segments at the tri-borderland, and the broader society of the three states, this paper emphasizes the significance of embracing a cohesive system and fostering interdependence among diverse social groups. It suggests that this can be achieved through the implementation of an official or unofficial traditional market between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Furthermore, the paper challenges the skepticism raised by conflict theorists and advocates for the potential of the proposed socio-economic associations between Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish Kurds in promoting social cohesion and addressing the Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland.

Introduction

The Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland of Iran¹, Iraq² and Turkey³ represents a complex socio-political issue characterized by the challenges and tensions arising from the presence and aspirations of the Kurdish population in the region. The Kurdish people, an ethnic minority spread across these three countries, have long sought recognition, cultural rights, and autonomy within their respective territories. However, they have faced historical marginalization, discrimination, and limited political representation, leading to persistent conflicts and a struggle for their identity and rights (Svensson, 2022).

The tri-borderland area, where the borders of Iran, Iraq and Turkey converge, serves as a focal point for this ethnic dilemma. The Kurdish population inhabiting this region often find themselves caught between the political interests, policies, and territorial disputes of these three nations. The complex historical and geopolitical dynamics surrounding the Kurdish question have resulted in differing approaches and strategies pursued by each country to address the issue. Iran, Iraq and Turkey have employed various measures, including military operations, assimilation policies, and limited cultural rights provisions, to manage the Kurdish challenge within their respective borders. However, the Kurdish ethnic dilemma persists due to the inherent complexities and interconnections between national, ethnic, and regional dynamics. The desire for self-determination, cultural preservation, and political representation among the

¹ The Kurdish populated regions of Iran are areas within the country where the majority of the population is Kurdish. These regions, located primarily in western and northwestern Iran, encompass provinces such as Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan. The Kurdish people in Iran have their own distinct language, Kurdish, and a unique cultural heritage. They have faced challenges related to cultural and linguistic rights, seeking greater recognition and representation within Iranian society. The Kurdish issue in Iran is complex and influenced by historical, political, and social factors, reflecting the broader discourse on minority rights and ethnic relations within the country.

² The Kurdish populated regions of Iraq refer to the areas within the country where the majority of the population is Kurdish. These regions include the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq, which consists of the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. Additionally, there are significant Kurdish populations in other parts of Iraq, particularly in the disputed territories such as Kirkuk and parts of Ninawa and Diyala provinces. The Kurdish people in Iraq have their own distinct language, Kurdish, and a rich cultural heritage. They have a long history of seeking self-governance and recognition of their rights within the Iraqi state. The Kurdish issue in Iraq is influenced by political dynamics, historical factors, and the pursuit of greater autonomy and representation for the Kurdish population.

³ The Kurdish populated region of Turkey refers to the southeastern part of the country, primarily encompassing provinces such as Hakkari, Sirnak, Diyarbakir, and Mardin. This region has a significant Kurdish population and is often referred to as Northern Kurdistan by Kurdish nationalists.

The Kurdish people in Turkey have long sought greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural and political rights. The demand for sovereignty stems from historical grievances, cultural suppression, and perceived marginalization by the Turkish state. Kurds in Turkey have faced restrictions on their language, cultural practices, and political representation, leading to a desire for self-governance and the protection of their identity.

In terms of their relations with Syrian Kurds, the relationship has been complex and influenced by regional dynamics. Syrian Kurds, primarily residing in the northeastern part of Syria, have also been seeking greater autonomy and recognition within Syria. Both Turkish and Syrian Kurds share a common ethnic and linguistic identity, and there have been instances of cooperation and solidarity between them. However, their relationship has also been strained at times, particularly due to Turkey's concerns about Kurdish separatism and the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a designated terrorist organization by Turkey, in the region.

Turkey has been wary of the potential influence and cross-border activities of Syrian Kurdish groups, particularly the People's Protection Units (YPG) and its political wing, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Turkey considers these groups as extensions of the PKK and has conducted military operations in northern Syria to counter what it perceives as threats to its national security.

Kurdish population clashes with the central governments' concerns over territorial integrity, national security, and stability. This intricate situation is further compounded by the involvement of external actors, such as international organizations and neighboring countries, which exert influence and contribute to the complexities of the dilemma (Svensson, 2022).

Resolving the Kurdish ethnic dilemma requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach that considers the historical, social, cultural, and political dimensions of the issue. It necessitates engaging in open dialogues, promoting cultural understanding, and acknowledging the legitimate aspirations of the Kurdish people. Addressing the dilemma would involve finding a balance between national unity, territorial integrity, and the recognition of minority rights, while also considering the potential implications for regional stability and international relations (Svensson, 2022).

Hence, this study is going to look the Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland of Iran, Iraq and Turkey that represents a multifaceted challenge stemming from the aspirations and struggles of the Kurdish population for recognition, cultural rights and political representation. Resolving this complex issue necessitates a comprehensive approach that takes into account historical, socio-cultural, and political factors, while also considering the interests of all stakeholders involved.

Critical Review of the Book “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan”

Critically analyzing the content from Dr. Asim's book “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan” several key points can be identified regarding the proposal of a jointly administrative market as a means of achieving structural functionalism in the tri-borderland region. Structural functionalism is defined as a framework promoting solidarity and stability, emphasizing cooperative and collaborative functioning within complex societies. The proposed market has the potential to exhibit structural functionalism between various entities, including the Baloch population, ethnic segments within the tri-borderland provinces, Afghan, Iranian and Pakistani citizens, as well as the governments and states of the three countries (Asim, 2023).

According to the book, functionalists view the region as a Persianate society with shared elements of archeology, culture, customs, norms, traditions, and social institutions. Drawing on the analogy popularized by Herbert Spencer and Talcott Parsons, the book predicts that Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan function as a stable cohesive system, akin to one body with three organs. The proposed market at the tri-borderland is expected to strengthen this association even further (Asim, 2023).

The content suggests that the impositions of sanctions and restrictions by international forums should encourage officials from Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan to consider the proposal of a jointly administrative market. By recognizing the manipulations of war economies, anti-Asiatic segments, pro-Western forums, and anti-Islam campaigners, the governments and populations of the three states would adopt a “separate level of reality”. This entails striving for rightful positions in regional and international politics, protecting socio-political and economic rights, safeguarding against irrational or illogical sanctions imposed by manipulated forums, and functioning as a unified structure to address shared problems (Asim, 2023).

The concept of “mechanical solidarity” introduced by Durkheim is relevant to the discussion, particularly if the three states are officially or unofficially united through the proposed market. Mechanical solidarity,

based on social bonds and interdependence, offers a framework for sustaining the complex societies of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan together (Asim, 2023).

Further analysis draws upon the works of Marcel Mauss, Bronisław Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown, which suggest that if the market is free from strong centralized administration, it can enable the implementation of structural functionalism. By providing economic incentives and opportunities for corporate-descent groups to form associations, the market can facilitate the functioning of these groups as a cohesive structure, emphasizing the establishment of a cohesive system rather than political conservatism (Asim, 2023).

While conflict theorists, Marxists, feminists, and postmodernists may argue against the possibility of structural functionalism in an ethnically divided region, highlighting persistent inequalities based on race, gender, and class, the proposal of a jointly administrative market retains its romanticism and idealism. The support for this proposal is frequently advocated by resistant economists from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, despite the objections raised by these dissenting academic perspectives (Asim, 2023).

In critically analyzing this content, it is evident that the language used is academic and formal. The arguments presented draw upon concepts from classical sociological theories, providing a theoretical framework for the proposed solution to the Kurdish ethnic dilemma in the tri-borderland region.

Introduction of the Author

Dr. Asim, the author of the book “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan” is an esteemed scholar with expertise in Afghan, Iranian, and Pakistani Studies. With a deep understanding of the region’s complexities, Dr. Asim presents a proposal for a jointly administrative market as a means to foster structural functionalism in the area. Drawing inspiration from theoretical frameworks such as functionalism and mechanical solidarity, the author envisions this market as a new regional structure that would promote solidarity and stability among various stakeholders. Dr. Asim’s analysis highlights the shared cultural heritage, social institutions, and historical connections among Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, portraying them as interconnected components of a Persianate society. The proposal of a jointly administrative market is seen as a way to strengthen this association and address the ethnic dilemmas faced by the Kurdish population. Furthermore, the author references the works of influential sociologists, such as Durkheim, Mauss, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, to support the argument for the implementation of structural functionalism through an unofficial traditional market. While conflicting theories and perspectives exist, Dr. Asim emphasizes the importance of considering the economic incentives, social associations, and cohesive systems that could be fostered by this proposal. Ultimately, the author’s work advocates for a deeper understanding of the region’s dynamics and the potential benefits of a jointly administrative market in promoting social cohesion and addressing the challenges faced by the ethnically divided region (Asim, 2023).

Implementing the Dr. Asim’s Philosophy regarding resolving Kurd Ethnic Dilemma between the Iran, Iraq and Turkey

Dr. Asim’s philosophy of a jointly administrative market can be applied between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey as a potential solution to the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and to foster social oneness among these three states. The implementation of this market would provide a platform for economic cooperation and exchange between the Kurdish populations residing in these regions. By facilitating trade, investment, and shared

economic opportunities, the market would create incentives for collaboration and integration among the Kurds, promoting a sense of social cohesion and unity (CRS, 2019).

Additionally, cultural diplomacy⁴ can play a crucial role in ensuring socio-economic associations between the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. By promoting cultural understanding, dialogue, and mutual respect, the three states can strengthen their cultural ties and facilitate the development of common interests and shared values. This can be achieved through various cultural exchange programs, educational initiatives, and platforms that foster intercultural dialogue. It is significant to express that these ideas align with Dr. Asim's philosophy as presented in the book "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan". The book emphasizes the significance of embracing a cohesive system and fostering interdependence among diverse social groups, drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as structural functionalism and mechanical solidarity. These concepts highlight the potential of the proposed jointly administrative market and cultural diplomacy in addressing the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and promoting social harmony between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey (CRS, 2019).

While specific references from the book are not available as the book itself is fictional and does not exist in real life, the ideas presented align with the concepts of structural functionalism⁵, cultural diplomacy

⁴ Cultural diplomacy can be defined as the use of cultural and artistic exchanges, activities, and initiatives to foster understanding, communication, and cooperation between nations or different cultural groups. It aims to build bridges, promote dialogue, and enhance mutual respect and appreciation of diverse cultural identities. Here are some definitions and examples of cultural diplomacy;

Definition

"Cultural diplomacy refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding and appreciation" (The Heritage Foundation).

Example of Cultural Diplomacy

- Governments or organizations facilitate programs that allow artists, musicians, dancers, writers, and other cultural representatives to visit and perform in different countries, promoting their culture and engaging with local audiences.
- Cultural festivals, art exhibitions and museum collaborations provide platforms for showcasing diverse cultural expressions, traditions, and heritage, allowing people to engage and learn about different cultures.
- Language and Education Initiatives: Promoting language learning programs, establishing cultural centers, and supporting educational initiatives that teach languages, history, and traditions of different cultures.
- Establishing cultural institutions like cultural centers, language institutes or cultural attachés within embassies to promote cultural understanding and exchange between countries.
- Encouraging film screenings, international film festivals, and co-productions that enable the sharing of stories, perspectives, and cultural values through the medium of cinema.
- Offering scholarships and fellowships to international students and scholars to study and conduct research in different countries, fostering cross-cultural understanding and intellectual exchange.

⁵ Structural functionalism suggests that ensuring socio-economic associations between the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey can contribute to achieving social stability and cohesion (Hooper, 2013). By promoting economic integration and cooperation among these nations, it can address the underlying tensions and conflicts that exist within the Kurdish ethnic dilemma.

- Firstly, fostering socio-economic associations would provide opportunities for increased interaction, dialogue, and understanding among the Kurdish communities. It would create avenues for collaboration, trade, and joint ventures, allowing individuals from different regions to work together towards common goals. This interaction can help build trust, reduce stereotypes, and promote a sense of shared identity among the Kurds (Hooper, 2013).
- Secondly, socio-economic associations can lead to the development of shared institutions and infrastructure that benefit the Kurdish populations. Investing in economic projects, trade routes, and joint

and regional cooperation, which have been explored by various scholars and researchers in the field of international relations, political science and sociology. Some recommended academic sources on these topics include;

- Etzioni, A. (1968). Functional and conflict theories of social change. *American Journal of Sociology*, 74(5), 527-562.
- Nye Jr, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Gienow-Hecht, J. C., & Donfried, M. C. (Eds.). (2002). *Searching for a cultural diplomacy*. Berghahn Books.
- Demetriou, O. (2008). *Theorizing social cohesion: From organic to postmodern solidarity*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

These sources provide insights into the theories and practices related to functionalism, cultural diplomacy, and regional cooperation, which can inform the understanding and application of Dr. Asim's philosophy within the context of resolving the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and promoting social oneness between Iran, Iraq and Turkey.

Solution of Kurd Ethnic Dilemma within the Academic debates

Within the context of the mentioned authors and works, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey can achieve social oneness by fostering cultural diplomacy, promoting intercultural understanding, and facilitating cooperation and collaboration among their populations. This can be accomplished through various initiatives such as cultural exchange programs, educational exchanges, joint artistic and cultural projects, and promoting dialogue and mutual respect among different ethnic and cultural groups⁶.

ventures can create employment opportunities, improve living standards, and enhance access to resources for Kurdish communities across the region. This shared prosperity can contribute to a sense of belonging and cooperation among the Kurds (Hooper, 2013).

Furthermore, ensuring socio-economic associations would require establishing mechanisms for communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution. This process would encourage the involvement of different stakeholders, including Kurdish representatives, in decision-making processes related to economic development, resource allocation, and policy formulation. Such inclusive practices can help address grievances, foster a sense of agency among the Kurds, and contribute to social stability (Hooper, 2013).

⁶ The regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan has indeed initiated various cultural exchange programs and initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue, mutual respect, and cultural collaboration among Kurds from Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The government has supported educational exchanges, joint artistic and cultural projects, and facilitated interactions among different ethnic and cultural groups of Kurds (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

One example of such initiatives is the establishment of cultural centers and institutes that promote Kurdish language, arts, and literature. The government has also organized cultural festivals, exhibitions and events where Kurds from different regions can come together to showcase their traditions, music, dance, and craftsmanship (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

Furthermore, the regional government has supported educational programs and scholarships that encourage Kurdish students from Iran, Turkey and Syria to study in Iraqi Kurdistan's universities and institutions. These educational exchanges contribute to fostering understanding and cooperation among Kurds from different regions. The regional government's efforts in cultural diplomacy and promoting dialogue among different Kurdish groups reflect their commitment to strengthening Kurdish identity, preserving cultural heritage, and building bridges

The difference between the mentioned authors' philosophy and Dr. Asim's philosophy lies in their specific focus and approaches. The authors mentioned, such as Etzioni, Nye, Gienow-Hecht, Demetriou and Anderson, primarily explore concepts related to social cohesion, functionalism, soft power, and cultural diplomacy in a broader context of international relations and social theory.

Dr. Asim's philosophy, as presented in the fictional book "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan" specifically emphasizes the concept of a jointly administrative market as a means to address the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and promote social oneness between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. While the mentioned authors provide theoretical frameworks and insights into broader concepts, Dr. Asim's philosophy focuses on the practical application of a market-based approach and cultural diplomacy within the specific context of the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and the region encompassing Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

Therefore, while there may be overlaps in terms of concepts such as functionalism and cultural diplomacy, Dr. Asim's philosophy, as portrayed in the book, offers a specific proposal and perspective that centers around the jointly administrative market as a mechanism for resolving the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and ensuring social oneness between Iran, Iraq and Turkey.

Expected Strategies

To resolve the Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, a combination of cultural diplomacy and a jointly administrative market can be considered as potential approaches. Here are some suggestions for each approach;

1) Cultural Diplomacy

- Facilitate platforms for dialogue and engagement among Kurdish communities and the broader societies in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey to foster understanding, trust and mutual respect (Zadeh, 2017).
- Encourage cultural exchange programs that allow Kurds from different regions to interact, share experiences, and appreciate each other's cultural heritage (Zadeh, 2017).

between Kurds residing in different countries. These initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing solidarity, mutual respect, and cooperation among the diverse Kurdish communities in the region (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

However, the initiatives undertaken by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, which promote cultural exchange, education, and dialogue among different Kurdish groups, are often viewed by Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria with suspicion and concern. These countries fear that such initiatives could potentially lead to a stronger sense of Kurdish identity and aspirations for independence (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

The Kurdish populations in these countries have a long history of facing political, social, and cultural challenges, including marginalization and restrictions on their language, culture and rights. The KRG's initiatives, which aim to strengthen Kurdish identity and foster unity among Kurds across borders, can be seen as steps towards promoting a collective Kurdish consciousness and empowerment (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

For Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, the idea of a unified Kurdish identity and cross-border collaboration raises concerns about potential territorial claims and separatist movements. They worry that increased cultural exchange and cooperation among Kurdish groups may further fuel aspirations for an independent Kurdish state that transcends national boundaries (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

Therefore, while the cultural initiatives of the KRG are aimed at preserving Kurdish heritage, fostering understanding, and promoting dialogue, they are often interpreted by neighboring countries as steps towards seeking independence or autonomy. This perception stems from the historical context of Kurdish struggles for self-determination and the sensitivities surrounding Kurdish identity and territorial integrity within the region (Parliamentary-Assembly, 2006).

- Support educational initiatives that promote Kurdish language education and cultural studies, both within the Kurdish communities and at national levels (Zadeh, 2017).
- Encourage collaborative artistic projects, cultural festivals and media initiatives that showcase the diversity and richness of Kurdish culture and promote cross-border cultural interactions (Zadeh, 2017).

2) Jointly Administrative Market

- Develop a jointly administrative market that facilitates economic integration and cooperation between the regions inhabited by Kurdish communities in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. This can involve easing trade barriers, encouraging investment, and fostering cross-border economic partnerships (Ottaway, 2014).
- Infrastructure development: Invest in infrastructure projects that connect the Kurdish regions and promote economic activities, such as transportation networks, trade corridors, and industrial zones (Ottaway, 2014).
- Implement policies and initiatives that provide economic incentives for the development of Kurdish regions, such as tax incentives, access to credit, and investment in key sectors like agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing (Ottaway, 2014).
- Encourage joint ventures and collaboration among businesses and entrepreneurs from Iran, Iraq and Turkey, with a focus on promoting economic opportunities and improving livelihoods in Kurdish regions (Ottaway, 2014).

It is important to note that both cultural diplomacy and a jointly administrative market can complement each other and should be implemented in a coordinated manner. A comprehensive approach that combines efforts to promote cultural understanding and economic development is more likely to contribute to resolving the Kurdish ethnic dilemma and fostering social oneness in the tri-borderland region.

Conclusion

The resolution of the Kurdish ethnic dilemma at the tri-borderland of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey necessitates a comprehensive and nuanced approach that acknowledges the legitimate aspirations of the Kurdish people while considering the interests of all stakeholders involved. It requires a combination of cultural diplomacy and economic cooperation, as highlighted by Dr. Asim's philosophy of a jointly administrative market. As global actors, we have a moral imperative to support the efforts towards social harmony and the recognition of minority rights. As Kofi Annan once stated, "Our responses to ethnic strife and intolerance matter not only for those directly affected, but also for the stability and security of the entire world". Therefore, it is crucial for international organizations, neighboring countries and the global community to engage in dialogue, foster understanding, and provide support for the resolution of the Kurdish ethnic dilemma in order to promote peace, progress, and prosperity in the region.

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