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Minorities' architectural heritages: A human right

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Abstract

Architectural heritage is an important field in architecture of any particular country in the world. It is important both for the local society and the international society. The historical learning of the urban development emphasizes the necessity of using the heritage as an important source for sustainable urban development strategies in any country. But architectural heritage in many countries with multi-ethnic societies are suffering from ignorance and suppression because of using architecture as a target in the power struggle. This paper attempts to answer how and why such phenomena occurs, what are the consequences on the sustainable development of these nations. The paper will discuss it as a global phenomenon which had been existed since early human history and will use Erbil in Kurdistan, North Iraq as a case study.

Keywords: Heritage; Architecture; History of Architecture; Minorities; Sustainable Development; Human Right; Architectural Hollywoodism; Kurdistan; Iraq

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1. Introduction

History of Architecture and History of Cities can give us large number of cases where cities had been destroyed during power struggle which had resulted in disappearance of their architectural heritagesⁱ. As a consequence, many cities were totally abandoned such as Troy, Memphis, Palmyra, Hatra and Chan Chan, As a consequence they had ended as dead heritages. In other cases the people had returned to them and built new cities on the devastated sites such as Athens, Jerusalem, and Baghdad. They ended with live heritages that had continued and flourished. Same situations had been repeated in the contemporary history following destructions of the 1st and 2nd World Wars such as in London, Berlin, and Hiroshima.

Architectural heritages of all cities had been developed over long time through continuous learning process to support local needs. It had been developed in a way to function as a container to facilitate a dynamic sustainable living process. It includes among others material use, building's methods, buildings' design solutions, urban design and a receptacle of common local meanings for its particular community. All these factors give the architectural heritage an important role in the present as a reflection of the national identity. It can be a very an important learning source for the contemporary urban development in large number of countries. Therefore, many countries are applying different methods in conservation historic built up areas in cities and how learn from them in developing contemporary local architecture and urban developmentⁱⁱ.

On the other hand, political struggle and changing of ruling power had played an important role in changing architectural identity and architectural heritages of cities such as during old emporiums, dynasties and colorizations where their troops built new settlements and cities in the new lands, reconstructed or transformed the existing cities and changed the their existing local architectural heritage .

Industrialization had played a similar role in destroying the old cities and their architectural heritages by replacing them with new urban design and architecture such as London, Paris, Rome and Stockholmⁱⁱⁱ. But the industrializations influence have much larger dimensions and in very short time compared with the previous ages.

In the present, there is a parallel phenomenon that happens in multi ethnic countries along with transforming their cities architecture and their related architectural knowledge. Architectural heritages of large number of ethnical minorities have been ignored, deteriorated and even destroyed because they are belonging to minorities who have no access to decision making or control over the development process and facing discrimination policies particularly in countries with undemocratic systems.

After 1st and 2nd World War large number of new countries had been established by major powers without considering the populations ethnical and cultural backgrounds. It was one of the most historical events that had changed the world's history and established a new basis for transforming local architectural heritages for the earth's nations. But since the new borders didn't consider the cultural and ethnical borders of the people, the new architecture has been created by the new imposed realities.

[We] have been engaged in drawing lines upon maps where no white man's foot ever trod, we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small

impediment that we never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were. Lord Salisbury) Lord Salisbury. Prime Minister UK, 1895-1902

Parallel with this process UN had issued The Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. It came after several destructive wars with large consequences to our world's social, economy and environment. One of the focal issues of the declaration is that all members of human family are entitled to these rights without distinction of any kind^{iv}.

Since these countries are composed of multi-cultural nations, so they also have multicultural architectural heritages. It is common to find a particular country with different types of city architecture, languages, religions, and life styles. Several studies and researches are showing that large number of countries has multi architectural cultures^v. One of these studies is The Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World edited by Paul Olive^{vi} which contains large number of architectural heritages in multi ethnic countries. All these are evidences that most counties in the world are composed of multinational groups where each group has its own architectural heritage. Yet, this multi-heritage reality in large number of these countries has been ignored by the dominating group and in many cases the other groups' architectural heritages have been destructed.

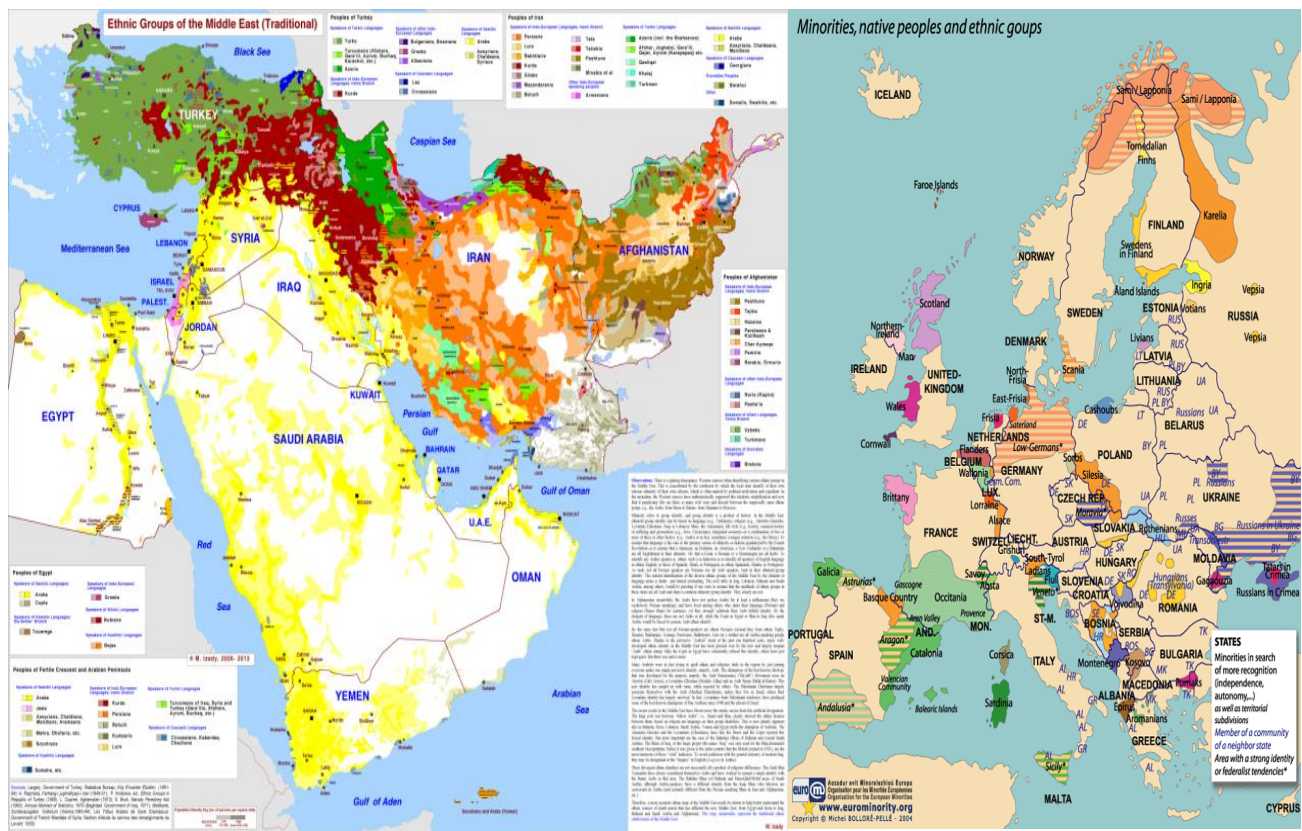


Figure 1. Ethnical Map of the Middle East and Ethnical Map of Europe (<http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>)

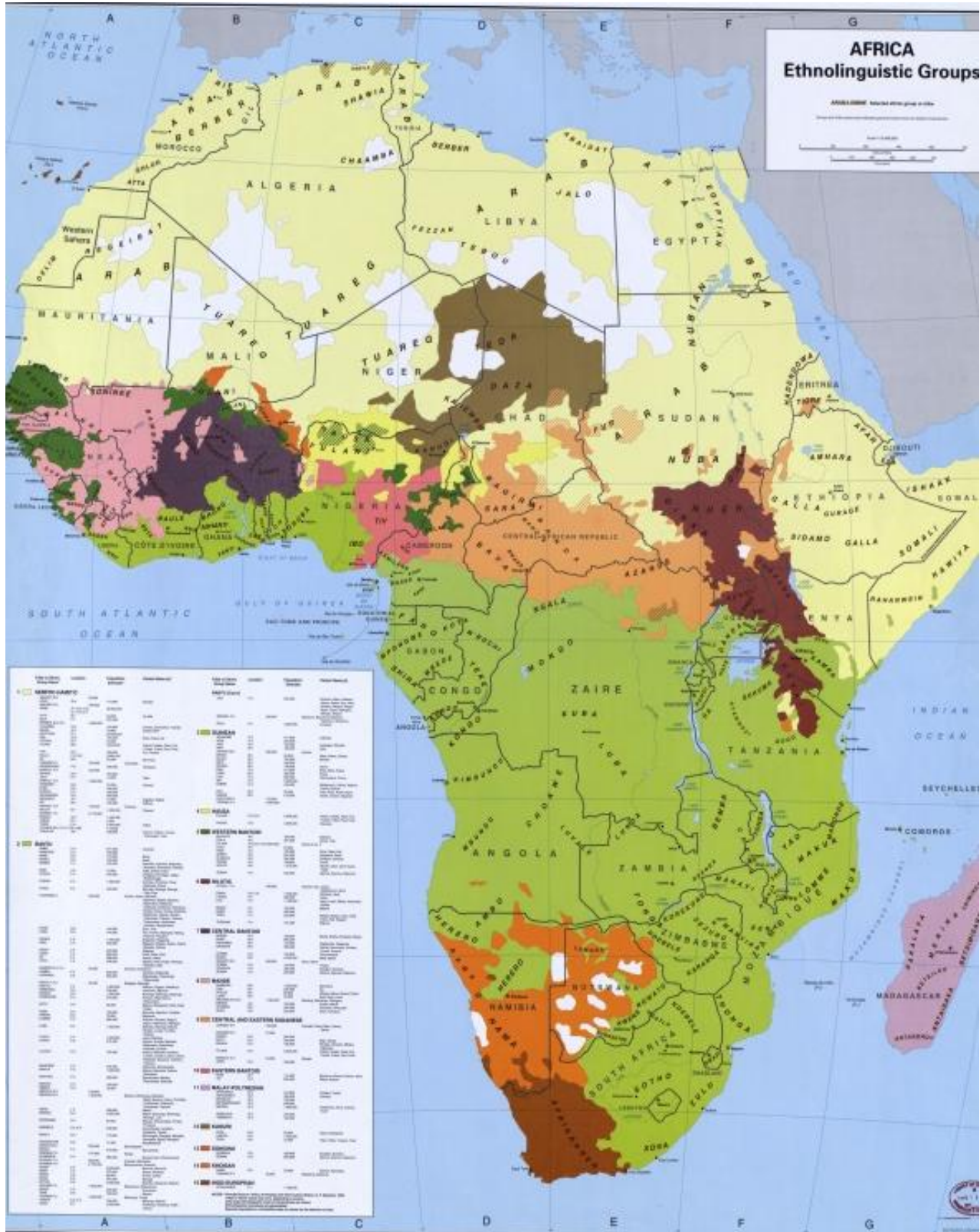


Figure 2. Ethnical Map of Africa (<http://www.uiowa.edu>)

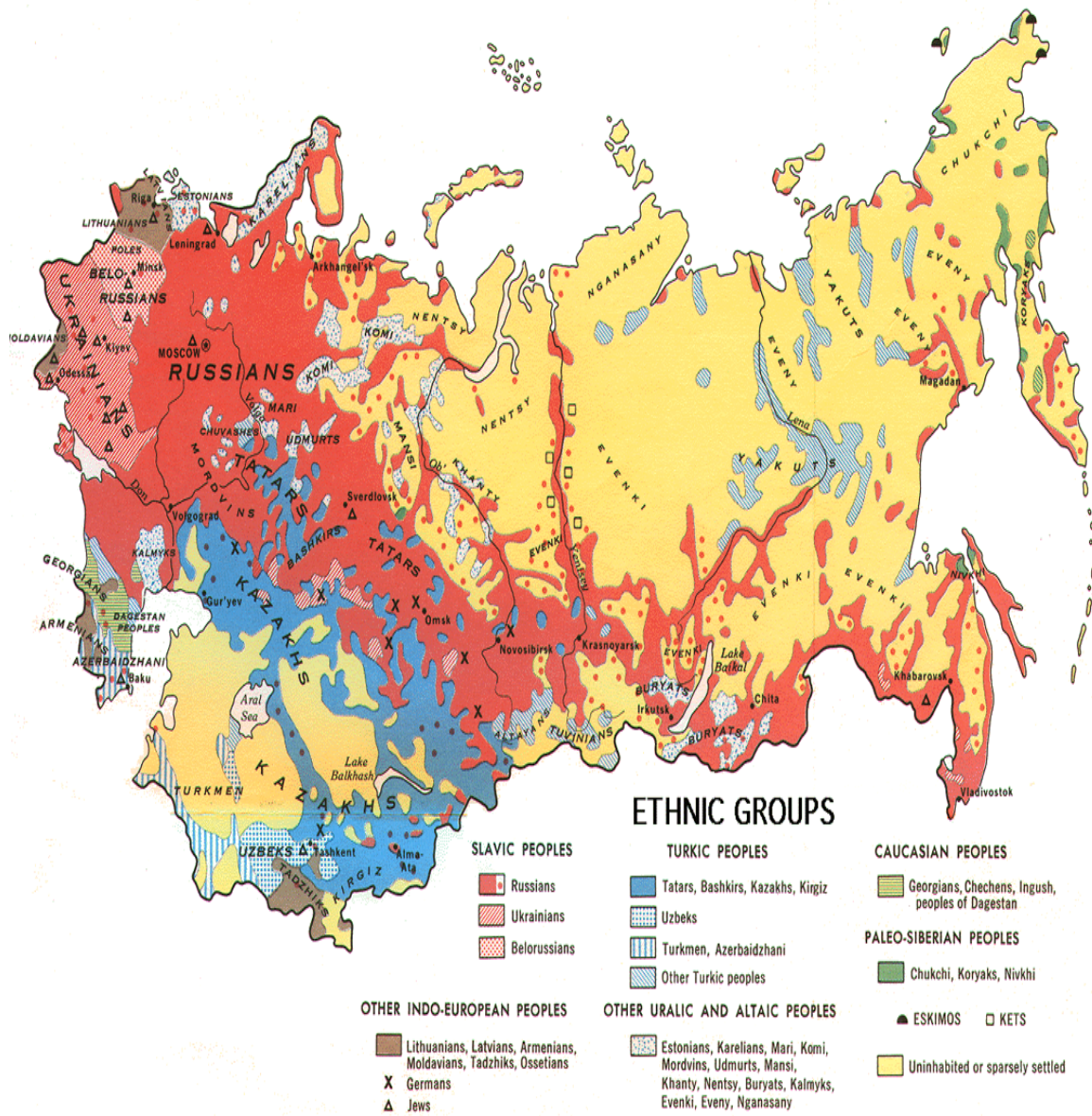


Figure 3. Ethnic Map of Central Asia And Russia

2. Heritage state in the contemporary cities

Architectural heritage can be identified in different ways. For example, It can be the identity of a particular nation and how it is reflected in forming of buildings, urban design and which kind of life it creates.

Local architectural heritage is a cultural domain that is directly influenced by the applied decision making process and users' ability to practice their rights in forming their built environment. Considering the UN human rights declaration (Each particular cultural group shall get the possibility to decide how to conserve, reuse, and develop its architectural heritage in the present city to create a living domain with identity)^{vii}. The issue gets complicated situation when one particular ethnical culture dominates on the architectural decision making and neglects the other cultural groups' rights. Such situation has contributed to deteriorate and/or to destroy architectural heritages of the other cultural groups in the same country. This problem requires more study about how architectural heritages are researched and reused in urban development of multicultural countries. Although, this phenomenon had been existed since earliest human cultures^{viii} yet the present knowledge, experiences and requirements to establish sustainable development in each particular country rises the issue of correcting this historical mistake. Doing this will require understanding role of the present architects and the contemporary architectural knowledge.

In a program broadcasted by BBC^{ix} in 2002 several questions were raised to explain the relationships between architecture and power. The main question was that architects are strongly influenced and restricted by the elite? This question is very important to restudy and re-identify architecture and the architectural heritage^x. It raises an important issue about the elite groups' central role in the process of shaping architectural heritage. In a discussion on ARCHNET, it has been argued that city architecture shall not be considered as Hollywood and Architects shall not be considered as Hollywood stars^{xi} because otherwise we get the phenomenon of what I call it the *Architectural Hollywoodism*^{xii}.

The history of architecture is showing that in the past architects and their designs were strongly influenced by the dominating cultural group^{xiii}. This issue can be found in all levels from building new planned cities such as Baghdad and Cairo, reforming existing cities such as Damascus, and Aleppo, along with building individual buildings such as palaces, public buildings and houses. In the present, this phenomenon has been strongly continued and strengthened with wider international consequences by increasing the role of individual architects who have been selected and supported by the dominating groups, powers or leaders to become the leading actors in applying particular architecture. An example is Building Brasília in 1956 where President Juscelino Kubitschek invited Architect Oscar Niemeyer to design the new City^{xiv}.

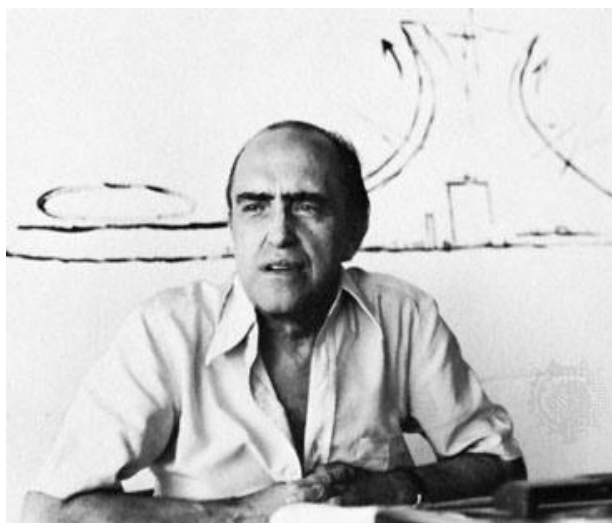


Figure 4. Oscar Niemeyer
(<http://iamwaywen.wordpress.com>)



Figure 5. The National Congress

Even the schools of architecture have played an important role to apply this in the architectural knowledge and education. The contemporary imposed architecture of an elite group of a particular dominated cultural group embodies different ways of thinking about the city’s form, architecture and planning. It also reflects the types of empowering agencies, social orders and laws of each particular culture^{xv}.

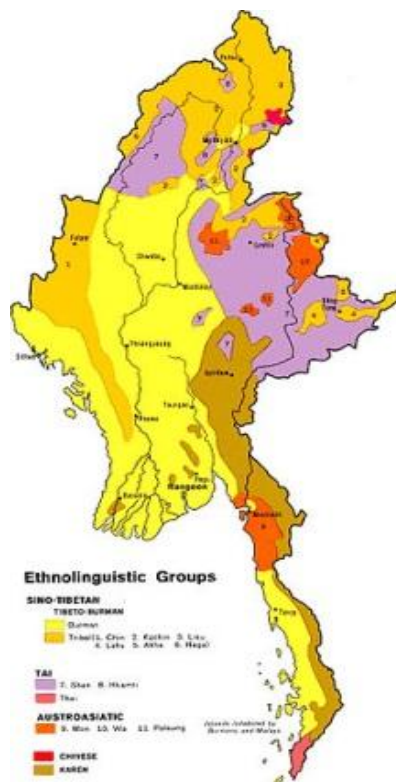


Figure 6. Ethnical groups of Myanmar



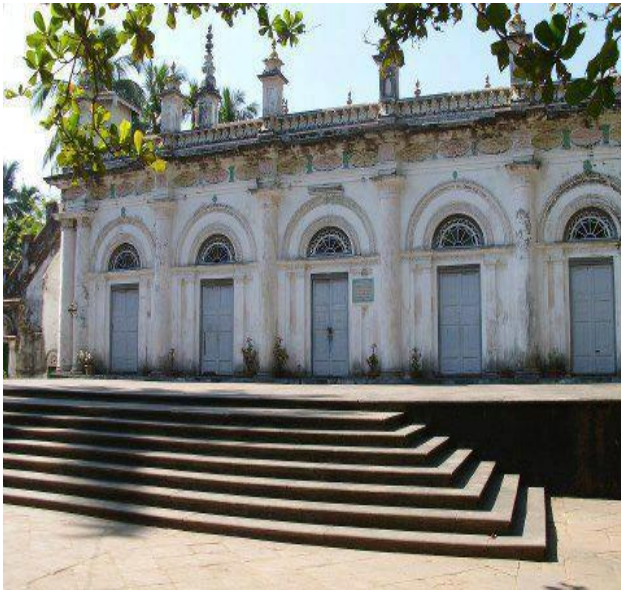


Figure 7. SawduroBor Masjid: A mosque from 8th century burned down in 2012

The Elite groups' architectural influences have been strengthened by the industrializations and the colonial era and architecture became as part of the power struggle^{xvi}. The elite groups gave the architecture new influence dimensions both in new industrial nations and the colonized nations. In the present, there are many democratic countries have developed more open decision making and access to conserve, develop and reuse multi-ethnic architectural heritages in local urban environment development.

Yet, in large number of other countries the process has continued to be closed and dominated by elite groups. This phenomenon can be found in all continents, Africa, Asia, Europe, America, and Australia. Among them are Bosnia, Kashmir, Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya, Burma, South Africa and Sudan. For example, neglecting cultural heritage of ethnical groups is Myanmar (or Burma) which is composed of 9 main ethnical groups, the biggest is Bamar. It has experienced several historical changes since the early 20th century. Till the present it has failed to protect the ethnic minorities including their cultural heritage. On contrary these minorities are facing policies which are aiming to suppress their culture and identity such as the case the Rohingyas minority.

3. The case of architectural heritage in Iraq

Modern Iraq has been formed following 1st World War in 1920-1921 and involved three different ethnical groups Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens. Each ethnical group has its own territory and culture. Some cities also have some mixed ethnical groups.

The first generation of local Iraqi architects were educated in Western countries. They returned home and started applying western design solutions, among them Chadirji and Makiya^{xvii}. The central authority had chosen them to design major buildings in Iraq. Whereby this way the new educated Iraqi architects were

played the main role in applying the modern architecture in Iraq and transforming the local architectural heritages by adopting the international functionalism^{xviii}. The political and social changes in the region had contributed to rise a new trends in architectural and urban design based on considering local architectural identity^{xix}.

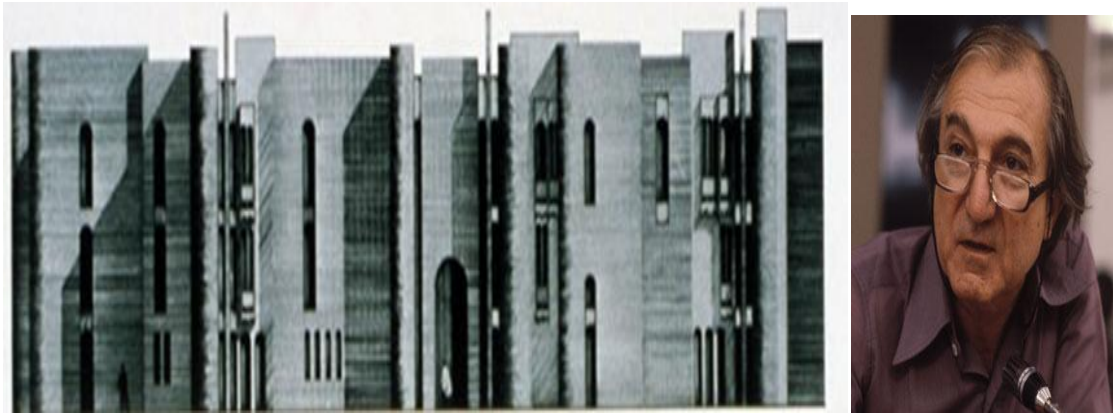


Figure 8. Office and Tobacco Warehouse, Baghdad – RifatChadirji^{xx}

Although, local Iraqi architects have tried achieving the contemporary local architecture yet their works were only based only on considering architectural heritages of the Arabic Towns and never managed to study and understand traditional architecture of other cultural groups such as in Kurdistan^{xxi}. Even research works have failed to involve Kurdistan architecture in their studies about Iraqi architectural heritage^{xxii}. The consequence of this was that architectural heritage of Kurdistan had been totally ignored since establishing the state of Iraq in 1921 although, Kurdistan is a major part of Iraq with own particular architectural heritages.

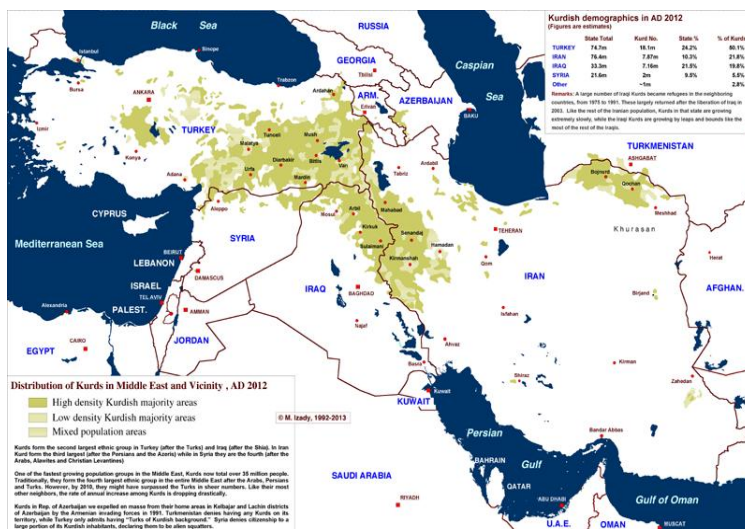


Figure 9. Distribution of Kurds in four countries in the Middle East (Green Parts)

This was also practiced in education by School of architectures in Iraq which never had courses or design projects related to Kurdistan architectural heritage.

4. Kurdistan architecture heritage

Kurdistan is a large plateau and mountain area, located in the Middle East with a population about 40 million. After first World War the entire land of Kurdistan had been divided between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria^{xxiii}. The area is mainly populated by Kurds, their language is Kurdish and is one of the oldest nations who settled in the Middle East and has rich heritages.



Figure 10. Mosque of Sanandage, Kurdistan Iran, 18th century



Figure 11. Bridge Malabadi, Diyarbakir Turkey 12th century

Modern Iraq was founded in 1921 after collapsing the Ottoman Empire. It has applied central decision making process where all town plans and development strategies had been decided by the central authorities in Baghdad. All these plans had totally ignored the local architecture of Kurdistan. The result of ignoring Kurdish architectural heritage in education and practice is the stagnation of developing a modern style of local Kurdish architecture that could support a sustainable development of the city.

A study of the vernacular Kurdish architecture has classified the Kurdish vernacular architecture into three basic categories according to their location, towns (*shar*), village (*gund*), and nomadic. Citadel of Erbil is a good example of this old and unique architectural heritage in Kurdistan^{xxiv}.

Among main cities in Kurdistan-Iraq are Erbil, Dahok, Sulaimani. Erbil has an ancient citadel which is considered as one of the oldest urban living settlements in the world. In June 2014, the Citadel has been listed in UNESCO World Heritage^{xxv} List. It is among the most endangered historical sites. The citadel has a clustered structure with houses of different sizes and narrow streets which have very organic shapes. The clustered houses at the outer side form the city wall^{xxvi}.

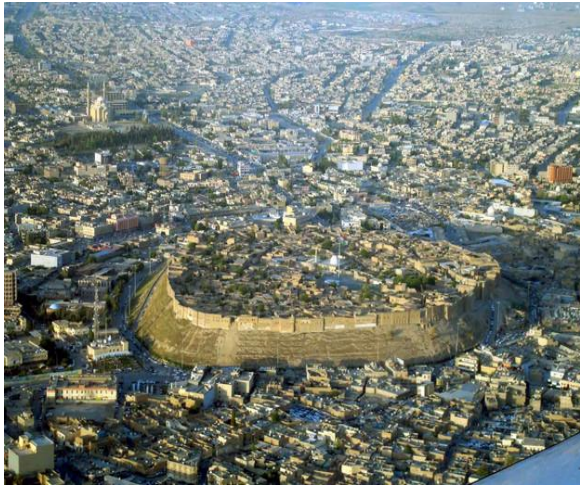


Figure 12. Erbil Citadel in the present



Figure 13. Erbil Citadel in 1950

The Bazaar is composed of long, narrow and covered net of streets with two rows of small shops on both sides. Each area in the Bazaar was specialized with particular merchandize or business. The construction material is mud, brick and timber^{xxvii}.



Figure 14. Erbil Bazar after the new renovations

It was in 1950's that inhabitants of the Citadel had started moving outside the Citadel and built houses with new design copied from Baghdad by local builders and engineers because the city hadn't local architects to control or guide this process. This model of copy based architecture has being practiced since the 1950's till the present. In 1960 the main gate of Erbil Citadel was demolished by the local authority as part of its effort to open a main straight street in the central area of the city which had divided the citadel to two parts. In 1981, the authority had rebuilt the gate with a new design done by Architect RifatChadirji which was an abstracted copy from Babylon Gate. The design was both unrespecting the local architectural heritage and its historical value. It is one of the cases where local architectural heritage had been ignored changed the local architectural identity of Erbil. It is an example of how architecture can be used in political struggle. The new change in Iraq after 2003 has created a possibility to conserve the historical site of the citadel where many international heritage centres started with conservation of the citadel. In May 2013, the local authority has decided to demolish the gate to replace it with the original gate using its old original architecture.



Figure 15. Nawzad Hadi Governor Of Erbil who ordered demolishing the gate of 1980's and rebuilt the original one.

Note: These are images of Erbil Citadel Gate since its old original shape and its later transformations



Figure 16. Erbil Citadel gate in early 20th century



Figure 17. The Fake Gate that was built in 1981



Figure 18. Demolishing the Gate in 2013



Figure 19. Rebuilding the original Gate in 2013-2014

5. The heritage state in the present Kurdistan

On the other hand, large territories of Kurdish area has gained local control since 1991 following the Gulf war, Kurdistan has gained a position as an autonomous region. Yet, authorities, architects and schools of architecture in this area couldn't manage till now to benefit from this historical change opportunity in order to study and develop local architectural heritage that can support the sustainable urban development.

The major reason is due to lack of local architectural awareness about Kurdistan architectural heritage and the lack of enough researches in this field that could help identifying the local architectural heritage of Kurdistan and how to use them in building contemporary architecture that meet local demands of the local society in the Kurdish cities and rural areas.



Figure 20. New Belgium Village - Erbil



Figure 21. The American Village-Erbil

The elite groups have very strong role in this stage two because they support adopting architectural projects that can mainly gain economic profit and not relationship to their local heritage, climate, users' needs, and future generations requirements. This situation has been occurred largely because of missing the local architectural alternative, little concern about heritage, weak media involvement, weak professional local architects' involvement, and the absence of local critical research in this field.

Another reason behind this problem is the lack of central authority's awareness about the importance of this issue for the sustainable development in Kurdistan. As a consequence of all these factors, the city of Erbil is witnessing large construction activities that are producing different architectural styles without having any relationship to the local architectural heritage or using sustainability principles in the present urban development which faces large and rapid population growth. The population is grown from 200.000 in 1980 to 1500000 in 2012 resulted from local population growth and immigration from rural areas.

This trend is also influenced largely by Dubai model as a style and process. But this process is done almost without any real evaluation and critical research about their consequences on the society, culture, environment or economy.

6. Conclusions

Our planet is a home for different kinds of cultural groups. The most important characters of these cultures are the diversity and the locality. In the present, most of world's countries are composed of multi ethnical groups, yet architectural heritages of many nations have been neglected and threatened to be lost. This phenomenon is a direct reflection of dominating a particular cultural group on the decision making and ignoring the other cultural groups. The phenomena can be found in undemocratic countries as a part of the power struggle. This phenomenon has several negative consequences to the cultures of the multi-ethnic

groups and the sustainable development in their cities such as losing the architectural heritages, changing social life, and relationships of the affected groups.

Since this is a global phenomenon, it needs a global effort to achieve its goals. Therefore, both the architectural education and the architectural practice in each particular country need to be reformed in order to consider the multi-ethnic condition of the country and establish equal methods in considering architectural heritages of the country in any local urban sustainable development.

The case of Erbil in Kurdistan shows a good example how the city has suffered ignoring and animalization of its traditional architecture by the central dominating power. Changing that power in favour of decentralizing the decision making has provided a new environment to support the old heritage of Kurdistan particularly conservation of old sites such as the citadel of Erbil. On the other hand, the present urban growth in Erbil is dominated by copying architectural from other countries without any consideration of the negative consequences to the identity, sustainability and society's needs. They are repeating the same historical mistakes of previous cities in the world which ended with uncontrolled growth and large negative consequences to the nation's economy and environment.

If sustainability is about preserving present resources in a way that will secure the continuity of the next generations so architectural heritage of *all* nations should be considered as human resources and should be preserved for the next generations. This can only be achieved when all nations work for that *no architectural heritage left behind*.

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