COMPARATIVE KURDISH POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ACTORS, IDEAS, AND INTERESTS

Edited By Emel Elif Tugdar and Serhun Al

Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East

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Editors

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Contents

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List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

Today, around 30 million Kurds across Iraq (5.5 million/17.5% of total population), Syria (1.7 million/9.7%), Turkey (14.7 million/18%), and Iran (8.1 million/10%) politically and socially play a significant role in contemporary Middle East politics. Kurds are the fourth-largest ethnic group in the region after Turks, Persians, and Arabs. Despite their different dialects such as Kurmanji and Sorani, Kurds speak Kurdish which is an Indo-European language. In terms of religious affiliation, Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Despite their large population and massive cultural, political, and economic influence in the Middle East, Kurds do not have an independent state yet. As an ethnic group and a nation in the making, Kurds are not homogenous and united but rather the Kurdish Middle East is home to various competing political groups, ideologies, and interests. The main goal of this volume seeks to unpack the intra-Kurdish dynamics in the region by looking at the main actors, their ideas, and political interests across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

Although Kurds have not always been in the spotlight of the international community and regional affairs, there have been two significant events that put the Kurds at the center of international scholarly and public attention. First was the Gulf War in the early 1990s, where the United States and the Iraqi Kurds became coalition partners against the Saddam regime. After the Gulf War, the Kurdish question in the Middle East became one of the fundamental issues of international affairs. The US-Iraqi Kurds partnership led to an official federal status known as the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq after the Saddam regime was toppled in 2003. Today, after more than a decade, Kurds

are again in the headlines of international media, think-tanks, academic circles, and government agendas due to their fight against the notorious Salafi-jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and being the major partners of the international coalition against the ISIS. While the Peshmerga forces in Iraqi Kurdistan have stopped the Islamic State's expansion in northern Iraq, the Kurdish People's Defense Units (known as YPG) has cleared northern Syria from ISIS. The increasing attention on the Kurds can be easily told through skyrocketing academic and media publications on their role in regional affairs and international relations. Thus, fundamental questions about the actors, ideas, and interests relevant to the Kurdish politics in the Middle East continue to attract scholarly attention.

However, many tend to homogenize Kurds as one single actor in the region with a collective goal of greater Kurdistan. Moreover, many existing studies analyze the Kurdish politics in the Middle East through the lens of their relationship with external actors including the capitols that they are attached to (i.e., Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, and Ankara). Yet, few studies analyze domestic affairs of the Kurds from a comparative perspective across Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. This is a significant gap in the literature and needs further research since Kurds do not constitute one single actor but they consist of many different actors with various alliances, conflicts, ideas, and interests.

We aim to address these questions with historically grounded, theoretically informed, and conceptually-relevant scholarship that prioritizes comparative politics over international relations. In a nutshell, this edited volume seeks to explore the Kurdish World in the Middle East within its own debates, conflicts, and interests.

The theme of Part I is "Actors" in the Kurdish World. In Chap. 1, Emel Elif Tugdar discusses the role of ethnoreligious diversity in Iraqi Kurdistan and its effects on state-formation. Particularly, she focuses on Turkomans as actors in Iraqi Kurdistan's state-formation. She argues that although Turkoman integration in the Kurdish state-building has been complex, respect and tolerance for this minority group in Iraqi Kurdistan has promoted ethnoreligious diversity in the region. In Chap. 2, Bekir Halhalli introduces the competing Kurdish actors and political parties in Syria along with their past struggles and future expectations. He argues that the Kurdish political presence in the post-2011 uprising against the Assad regime has not been homogenous and he draws

the map of demands, similarities, differences, and the organization styles of the rival Kurdish groups in Syria. In Chap. 3, Serhun Al analyzes the role of Turkish and Kurdish Islamic actors in the peace-building efforts in Turkey during the so-called "Kurdish Opening" (2013–2015). She argues that the utilization of Islam between the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (known as Diyanet) and the Kurdish Islamic actors significantly differed and affected the course of the peace process.

The theme of Part II is "Ideas" in the Kurdish Middle East. In Chap. 4, Michael Wuthrich discusses the nature of nationalist idea among Kurds from a human security perspective. He particularly argues that nationalism for the Kurds functions as a security provider for their physical and cultural safety from external threats due to their traumatic historical experiences in the region. In Chap. 5, Cenap Çakmak analyses competing for Kurdish nationalist projects in the Kurdish Middle East and unpacks how different ideological and political agendas offer contending ideas with regards to the establishment of an ideal Kurdish nation. In Chap. 6, Ina Merdjanova puts the idea of self-determination among Kurds under scrutiny. He particularly focuses on the approaches and understandings of pro-Barzani, pro-Ocalan, and pro-Islamist groups toward the idea of self-determination. Thus, the chapter investigates how the idea of self-determination has been utilized and framed by pro-Kurdish groups in their political discourses.

Part III focuses on "Interests" in the Kurdish political space. In Chap. 7, Serhun Al and Emel Elif Tugdar discuss the role of Kurdish identity from a political economy perspective. The notion of ethnic capital is particularly applied as a mechanism for reducing transaction costs in cross-regional or cross-border trade and commerce in the Kurdish Middle East. As the ethnic consciousness of pro-Kurdish identity becomes more consolidated in the region, Al and Tugdar argue that this is likely to boost the economic interests of Kurdish individuals for more trade and labor market activities within the Kurdish ethnic and cultural space. In Chap. 8, Umut Kuruzum analyzes the role of multinational oil companies and global capitalist trends with regards to the political interests for Kurdish independence and statehood in Iraq. In Chap. 9, Idris Ahmedi observes the political gains of Iranian Kurds and comparatively analyzes why they lag behind compared with the Kurds in other parts of the Kurdish Middle East. He particularly emphasizes the role of power and resources in terms of Kurdish mobilization capacities and the role of socially shared ideas of Persian national interests among the Kurds.

Overall, this edited volume introduces the dynamics and complexities of the intra-Kurdish politics in the broader Kurdish World. As the Kurdish political space in the Middle East is conducive to many competing Kurdish actors, rivalries, alliances, ideologies, interests, and future outlook, this comparative study seeks to unpack this complex intra-Kurdish dynamics within the themes of actors, ideas, and interests. In the end, the book has three major objectives: (1) to introduce scholars of Comparative Politics and Middle East Studies to pertinent theoretical approaches with the help of a series of case studies regarding the Kurds; (2) to advance the understanding of causal mechanisms of internal dynamics underlying the contemporary Kurdish politics in the Middle East; and (3) to encourage further research that draws on the same models or modifying them with a focus on particularly stateless nations.

PART I

Actors

CHAPTER 1

Iraqi Kurdistan's Statehood Aspirations and Non-Kurdish Actors: The Case of the Turkomans

Emel Elif Tugdar

Introduction

State-building in the Middle East has been a popular topic in political science literature since 9/11. The interest of Western powers in the region has increased in parallel with security concerns under the name of "spreading democracy." Thus, the concept of state-building has acquired political, economic, and social dimensions, all of which are required to explain the state-building patterns in the Middle East. This chapter will examine some of the key theories of state-building and how certain theories have been applied to the Middle East and Iraq. I will then consider how these thematic areas relate to the core focus of the analysis: the state-building efforts in Iraqi Kurdistan.

I will concentrate on sociopolitical factors and, in particular, the role of the Turkoman people in this process. The northern part of Iraq, which is known as Iraqi Kurdistan, is a region rich in ethno-religious diversity.

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However, the role of the Kurds in state-building, for example, has been well researched. The Turkomans are the third-largest ethnic group in Iraq, yet we know relatively little about their role in constructing a successful Iraqi Kurdistan. This chapter aims to take a closer look at this group as their participation is vital in a number of different areas. As the Turkomans are politically very active, we are interested in their attitudes and role in Kurdish state-building. This chapter will examine demographic and related political questions, religious, cultural and ethnic matters, the role of language, and the vital connection to Turkey. The central argument presented here is that, while there are a number of complex problems for Turkoman integration (in addition to current issues related to ISIS, economic recession, and the refugee crisis), in many of these areas, there are also several reasons for optimism within a KRG that has often shown both tolerance and respect for the Turkoman population.

State-Building in the Context of Middle East

In general, the process of building a state has three dimensions: political, economic, and social. Although the first condition of building a state is easy to analyze, measuring emotions is not reliable and not possible. Charles Tilly (1975), who is a well-known scholar of state-building theory, defines the concept of "state" as consisting of relatively centralized, differentiated organizations with officials that successfully claim control over the means of violence within a population in a large territory. This definition constitutes the political dimension of state-building. Chandler (2006) also argues that state-building refers to the process of constructing institutions of governance that can provide citizens with physical and economic security.

Carment et al. (2007) argue that, nowadays, state-building typically occurs as a response of the international community to a state failure due to the consequences of underdevelopment and violent conflict. Thus, state-building is perceived as a post-conflict, failed state approach. Hayami (2003) claims that the biggest challenges involved in the restoration of a failed state relate to economic development. The global community's effort to contribute to state-building from an economic perspective is a neoliberal state-building approach. The neoliberal approach emphasizes the importance of free markets and private sector growth in a state for successful state-building. Blowfield (2005) argues that post-conflict economies are built around core neoliberal principles, such as the right to make profit,

the universal good of free trade, freedom of capital, supremacy of private property, the superiority of markets in determining price and value, and privileging of companies as citizens and moral entities. Furthermore, he claims that this approach explains the nature of post-occupation state-building in Iraq. In his view, by taking just the example of Iraq into consideration, we can judge the applicability of the neoliberal state-building approach to the cases in the Middle East.

In fact, Francois and Sud (2006) claim that focusing solely on a neoliberal approach to economic growth has failed to produce a cogent explanation in post-conflict states. Clapham (2002) also argues that it is expensive to maintain a state economically and socially as it requires solid material sources in order to build and maintain legitimacy. Thus, fragile, newly built states, in particular, need substantial material resources in order to build political support as well. The political legitimacy and independence of a rebuilt state require a form of "social contract" responding to national political priorities (Doner et al. 2005).

Indeed, Wesley (2008) focuses on the era of decolonization and claims that building a state is not only done via the infrastructure and economy but also through the development of emotional attachment among different ethnic and racial groups, which is related to our argument for Kurdistan. Without the process of emotional attachment, Wesley (2008) contends that "positive sovereignty" cannot be reached. Thus state-building is a combination of economy, polity, and society. Tilly (1993) specifies four core activities of state-building in modern Europe: state-making by neutralizing domestic competitors in the territory claimed by the state; war-making by deterring the rivals in the territory of the state; protection of the ally of the ruler against the external and internal rivals in the territory; and extraction of resources from the population in support of the other three activities.

In relation to Wesley's (2008) arguments, Safran's (1992) ideas on language and state-building can also be considered as an emotional attachment to the state. Safran (1992) links the concepts of ethnicity and language to the process of state-building in his analysis of France, Israel, and the Soviet Union. Similarly, in their analysis of China, Zhou and Ross (2004) argue that the Chinese language and its dialects have been used to regulate power of the state in history. Laitin (2006) points out that in the case of Africa "state rationalization" has not been successful as small tribes have their own linguistic practices, which weaken

"nationalization" and, accordingly, the state-building process. Safran (1992) argues that the importance of languages comes from the fact that they can be manipulated, elevated, and transformed in the interest of the state.[1]

Another form of attachment to the state suggested by Wesley (2008) is territorial belonging. According to Richards (2014), attachment to a given territory is another aspect of identity for people. Thus, state-building requires internal legitimacy, one of which is territorial attachment.[2] Wright (1998) proposes that emotional attachment to a territory used to be a behavior characteristic of medieval states. This attachment was the main motivation for wars as well.[3] According to Goemans (2006), this emotional attachment is actually used by political elites to socialize the public in order to encourage them to defend the state in return for even their sacrifices. Penrose (2002), who associates attachment to territory to a sense of nationalism, also claims this practice to be part of the eighteenth-century understanding of state-building.

State-building in the Middle East has well-pronounced economic and political dimensions and the social dimension is becoming more important. Furthermore, a fourth dimension can be added to state-building in the Middle East: international impact. Cousens (2005) maintains that state-building has become an important item on the international agenda in recent years due to the following three main factors: first, states learned that building peace after civil wars is necessary for peace implementation; second, by the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of fragile or failed states became a serious problem; third, 9/11 provoked the concern that weak states create fertile grounds for terrorism. Accordingly, state-building, particularly in the Middle East, has been given serious attention by the international community. In fact, Katzenstein et al. (2000) argue that international security has become autonomous and predominantly regional since decolonization. Anderson (1987) believes that state-building in the Middle East has always been a reaction to international pressure and not genuine domestic political and economic developments.

Consequently, the topic of state-building in the Middle East has become a vital area of scholarly debate. It gained prominence, in particular, after 9/11 with the intervention of Western forces in the region and the proliferation of violence and terrorism caused by weak and failed states. Various strategies and approaches to state formation in the

Middle East have been tried. Byrd (2005) contends that in the case of Afghanistan, a neoliberal approach has been applied. The international community has also focused on the reconstruction and economic development, not only the restoration of security. Lu and Thies (2013) also look at state-building in the Middle East from the economic and political perspective as they argue that Middle East state-building is politically and economically dependent on oil reserves in the region.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the economic aspect of state-building is undoubtedly very important. Since 2003, there have been some major infrastructure projects overseen by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), including investment in new roads and modern airports. Other promising developments include rapid improvements in information technology and communications with better access to the Internet and mobile phone provision. Moreover, there has been a concerted effort from the KRG to go beyond a centrally controlled public economy with the active encouragement of investment through tax incentives and individual enterprise.[4] Nevertheless, the current prospects for economic development and state-building in this area are hampered by the threat from ISIS which, along with the consequences of the war, has fuelled the influx of around 1.6 million refugees and internally displaced persons into Iraqi Kurdistan. This has reduced the possibilities of investment and the economy went into recession in 2014. This dimension of state-building will play a key role in the future and more research is required, bearing in mind these recent developments. However, a further in-depth analysis of these economic factors is beyond the scope of this particular examination. As stated above, the fundamental aim of this chapter is to focus on the sociopolitical aspects of state-building.[5]

Ethno-Religious Diversity of Iraq

Iraq is one of the most diversely populated countries in the world. The most important distinctive feature of the Iraqi population is its variety of religious and ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, and Yazidis as well as various sects of Christianity and Islam.

According to reports by Minority Rights Group International, approximately 96% of the Iraqi population consists of Muslims.[6] Thus, the biggest divisions are among the Muslim population, based on Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and ethnic Kurdish minorities that are also Sunni.

Similar reports show that 10% of the population is composed of ethnic Shabaks, Turkmens, Kurds, Palestinians, Roma, Christians, Yazidis, and Baha'i's.[7]

Current Iraqi legislation acknowledges this diversity and provides a solid legal framework for the protection of minorities. Article 3 of the Iraqi Constitution states that "Iraq is a country of many nationalities, religions and sects." Article 2 points to the religious rights of minorities by stating that the "constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights of all individuals to freedom of religious belief and practices, such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaeans." Additionally, Article 121 guarantees "the administrative, political, cultural and educational rights for the various nationalities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians and all other groups."

Language is another important feature of ethno-religiously divided states. The Iraqi Constitution recognizes that Iraq is a country of multiple nationalities, religions, and sects with two official languages, which are Arabic and Kurdish. However, other languages are also legally protected. The languages mentioned in the constitution are Turkoman and Syriac.[8]

As "Iraqi Kurdistan" is a federal region within Iraq, all national legal protections of ethno-religious minorities are valid in its territory. As stated by Iraq's federal constitution, Kurdistan's institutions exercise legislative and executive authority in many areas, such as the budget, police and security, education and health policies, natural resource management, and infrastructural development. As stated by the Department of Foreign Relations, "The Kurdistan Regional Government also works together with the federal Iraqi government to ensure the application of the Iraqi Constitution, and to cooperate with the federal government on other areas which concern all regions of Iraq."[9] To ensure the participation of minorities in Iraqi politics and the public domain in general, the constitution introduced a quota system. Thus, in the Iraq's national parliament, the Council of Representatives, 8 out of 325 seats are reserved for minority groups: five to Christian candidates from Baghdad, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Dahuk; one to Yazidis; one to Sabean-Mandaeans; and one to Shabaks.[10] On the other hand, the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament also has a quota system to promote minority participation, and it reserves 11 seats: 5 seats to Christians, 5 to Turkoman and 1 to Armenians.[11]

The Impact of Ethno-Religious Diversity on Kurdish State-Building Turkomans

"Wherever Kurds are, Turks exists as well…we need to learn living together…"

Hasan Turan
Turkoman Member of Iraqi
Council of Representatives[12]

Turkoman can be considered as a generic name, covering ethnic Turkmens and Turkic-speaking communities in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Central Asia. Petrosian (2003) argues that there is a conceptual lack in the literature to describe who Turkomans are. In history, the first mass flow of Oghuz-Turkoman origin tribes to Iraq is associated with the Seljuk invasions. However, it is well known that the penetration of some Turkic groupings to Iraq took place in the time of the Caliphate and even before.[13] These different flows became geographical factors that the main mass of Turkomans merged into other ethnic formations. The Turkmen groups who went far away to the West became isolated from their Middle Asian kinsmen in an ethnic, cultural, and even linguistic sense. Thus, today, we see two clearly divided peoples with the same ethnic name.[14]

Petrosian (2003) explains these two different Turkoman groups as: (1) Turkomans, who are a common denomination of the Turkic ethnic continuum from Central Asia, including Iran, Iraq, and Turkey and (2) Turkmen, which is a term designating the ethnic Turkmens in the Republic of Turkmenistan and adjoining areas, as well as the Turkoman inhabitants in Iran. This definition also includes the remnants and descendants of the old Turkoman ethnic elements resided in Iraq during and after the ninth century AD.[15]

I use the term "Turkoman" to refer to the Iraqi Turks. In Iraq, Turkoman settlements are located mainly in the northeastern and central provinces of Iraq such as Kirkuk, Mosul, Sulaimanyah, Erbil, Diyala, Khilla, and Baghdad.[16] Turkomans live in an original and peculiarly long corridor area, beginning at the villages of Shibik and Rashidiya and covering the towns of Tel-Afar, Erbil, Kirkuk, and the settlements of Altin-Kyopru, Daquq, Tuz Khurmatu, partly including Bayat, Kifri, Qara-Tepe, Kizil Rabat, Khanekin, Shahriban, al-Mansuriye, Deli Abbas, Kazaniya, and Mendeli town, which creates a natural ethnic border

between Arabs and Kurds.[17] Thus, the great majority of the Turkoman population resides in the Kurdistan region, which makes their contribution to state-building a significant factor.

State-Building in Kurdistan and the Role of Turkomans

Turkomans are the third largest ethnic group in Iraq after Arabs and Kurds. As of 2011, the Iraqi Turkmen population is estimated to be at around 3 million, which constitutes 8.57% of the Iraqi population, taking into account all available estimates of towns and villages that they live in.[18] Thus, this demographic reality could be expected to contribute to the state-building ambitions of Iraqi Kurdistan. Hasan Turan, a Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, notes that in the Middle East, wherever Kurds live, Turks are always their neighbors, which is taken to mean that this close coexistence is consequential for whatever Kurds do or plan to do.[19]

Although, the subject of population is a significant issue for the process of state-building in Kurdistan, many political elites of Turkoman origin claim that the population data is not reliable in the Turkoman areas that belong to Kurdistan: specifically Erbil and Kirkuk. Minister of Justice, Sinan Celebi, points out that the number of Turkomans used to be 250,000 when there were not many Kurds in Erbil in the 1960s. Today, he claims that the population estimate of Turkomans is 750,000 in Erbil. Celebi's argument points to an abnormal demographic increase, which he links to the assimilation policies from the Kurdish side.[20] However, Celebi's information conflicts with the data on the Erbil population, which is around 1 million. Nonetheless, Celebi's ideas do highlight the fact that many Turkomans claim themselves as Kurds. His advisor, Dr. Soran Shukur, claims that the reason for this uncertain demographic change is related to the quota system in the elections through which the Turkomans currently have five representatives in the Kurdistan Parliament.[21] In other words, through assimilation, the Turkomans improve their political influence.

The role of the Turkomans within the KRG presents a reality of mixed democratic gains and achievements. There have been some significant

benefits for the Turkomans under the Kurdish-dominated KRG, such as minority rights in areas, including education (see below). However, the Turkomans have to contend with the same, broad systemic problems that face other groups, including the Kurds themselves. The political system in the KRG is still in its infancy and, consequently, there are shortcomings. For instance, the President of the KRG, Mamoud Barzani, has enjoyed a term of office longer than the stipulated eight years. He was granted two years extension by the parliament in 2013, but has stayed in power partly due to the support of the USA, Turkey, and Iran who see Barzani as a stabilizing force. There are a number of concerns about corruption: the Barzani family not only holds key posts in power (including both President and Prime Minister) but also they own key media outlets and large companies. Kurdistan has also been experiencing economic difficulties for the first time in many years and many public workers have not been paid, sparking a series of protests aimed at the President. In early 2016, Turkomans were involved in anti-Barzani protests in various parts of the region, but Kirkuk Turkomans have been particularly vociferous.[22]

Nevertheless, the success of state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan will not just be dependent on whether the Turkomans and other groups can have confidence in the overall shape and legitimacy of the political system. It will be dependent on the extent to which they are given a proportionate stake in political power. As indicated, the Turkomans do have a small presence in the KRG parliament and they also have the opportunity to participate in local government in cities, such as Erbil. In addition, they have a hidden representation due to a willingness of some Turkoman political parties to form alliances with other parties, including Shi'a Arab organizations. This willingness of both Turkoman political parties and interest groups to cooperate and integrate in some areas with other groups, particularly in the KRG, has given them slightly more influence than they would otherwise have had.[23] The city of Kirkuk is a more problematic proposition. The stronger sense of division here between the Turkomans and the Kurds means that the political future of this city may be fraught with problems if fair, power-sharing arrangements are not put in place.

As mentioned above, religion constitutes an important part of the culture in Iraqi Kurdistan. From this perspective, the presence of Sunni Turkomans in the region appears as an advantage for state-building.[24]

Shi'ite Turkomans amount to around 35% of all the Turkomans in the region.[25] In the first decades of the twentieth century, Turkomans have been living in areas where the Zab and Hazer rivers meet. These groups were also found in Tel-Afar and Kirkuk. The majority of the Turkoman population lives in Erbil, and they are followers of the Hanafi school of the Sunni Sect.[26] This major similarity between the Kurds and Turkomans can be considered as an initial positive step toward state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Aydin Marouf, Member of Parliament in the KRG and representative of the Iraqi Turkoman Front, argues that Turkomans do not politicize the Shia and Sunni divisions among themselves. However, due to Saddam-era policies, the Shia Turkomans fled to Karbala, which is a town considered to be holy for Shias, and lost their ethnic heritage to their religious identity.[27] On the other hand, Dr. Soran Shukur, advisor to the Minister of Justice, claims that this division is a Turkish perspective held in the country of Turkey itself. Thus, there is no division among the Turkomans as their ethnic identity is more significant than their religion.[28] Although this points to contradictory views on the division of the Turkomans, we can state that, in Kurdish areas at least, similar religious beliefs between the Turkomans and Kurds are likely to encourage integration.

Indeed, Dr. Shukur's argument can be extended to the views of the Kurds themselves toward religion and governance which is vital in terms of the place of the Turkomans in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds have displayed some willingness to separate religion from the state and have shown some tolerance for other religions. The phrase "I am first a Kurd and second a muslim" has been frequently used by political and military elites. This attitude is partly rooted in a long history of persecution that has helped the Kurds understand the value of tolerance and fairness. There is also a long tradition of dividing religion and the state in Kurdish history.[29] In June 2012, the KRG officially stated that schools would now not be permitted to favor one particular religion. In practice, this means that ideas from different religions are taught in schools. This kind of policy is extremely rare in a region known for strict adherence to particular religious beliefs.[30]

In May 2015, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) passed a law to protect the rights of religious minorities and, especially since 2014, the KRG has agreed to provide a safe haven for various religious minority groups trying to escape from advancing ISIS terrorists.

Although there have been cases of religious discrimination in Iraqi Kurdistan, recent efforts to promote tolerance stand in stark contrast to the activities of the Iraqi Government which has been involved in serious discrimination based on religious affiliation.[31] Thus, from a Turkoman perspective, a majority Sunni affiliation may help them to strengthen ties, but those who do not have the same beliefs as the Kurds may not necessarily be excluded from life in KRG territory. This development of religious tolerance may be crucial for state-building in the long term.

On top of the religious similarities, the cultural integration of the Kurds and Turkomans has also been a reality in the region. Since the 1950s, connections via cultural exchanges have created a new dimension in their relationship as the Kurds started to migrate from villages to the city center of Erbil, where the majority of Turkomans used to live. As Muslims are allowed to marry within the same religion, Turkomans and Kurds established strong bonds with each other by starting families. Today, Turkoman and Kurdish families, who have family ties, share a very similar culture except for their language. Dr. Mahmood Nashat, consultant to the Parliament for Turkoman affairs, refers to this cultural integration as "becoming Erbilian." However, he claims that there is a huge division among Turkomans around Iraq because of that strong integration of Kurds and Turkomans in Erbil.[32]

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the Turkomans of Erbil, in particular, do not hesitate to call themselves "Kurds." The children of the families with a mixed background generally prefer to call themselves "Kurds" as well. Moreover, Turkomans not only know how to speak Kurdish but also use it in their daily lives. Language is a major element in the development of an ethnic community's political consciousness and a tool of state-building. Safran (1992) argues that the reason behind this fact is that languages have often been manipulated, elevated, and transformed in the interest of the state.[33] Dr. Mahmood Nashat, states that the language-oriented integration among the Kurds and Turkomans of Erbil has created a new group of people, which he calls the "Kurdmen."[34] From this perspective, language is likely to be a driving force for state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of Turkoman–Kurdish relations.

The crucial role that language will play in the success of state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan is closely linked to its official recognition and place within the education system. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, education was thoroughly reformed in Iraq. In the KRG, years of oppression provoked a turn toward a more open and democratic

system of education, concerned with human rights. Language was a vital element in this new system. As indicated, the Turkoman language is recognized as an official language in Article 4 of the Iraqi constitution. More importantly, the article states that citizens have the right to learn in the Turkoman language.[35]

Toward the end of 2014, the leader of the KRG, Mamoud Barzani, approved a law which recognizes the Turkoman language as an official language in areas where that ethnic group constitutes at least 20% of the population. There are already around 16 schools in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah that deliver teaching in Turkoman and this law also extends to other organizations, such as hospitals and courts (http://unpo.org/article/17666). In these schools, Kurdish and English are seen as compulsory additional languages in the curriculum. There are also opportunities for Kurds to learn the Turkoman language along with the choice of other languages in the region. Furthermore, the Turkoman minority is represented within the KRG Ministry of Education which helps to ensure that the rights established in law are actually implemented in practice. It is a policy in Iraq as a whole to provide official textbooks in as many languages as possible and the Turkomans are also provided for in this sense.

Handbook of Social Justice in Education, p. 178. Therefore, in many cases, the Turkoman language *is* protected and this is vital to the state-building process in Iraqi Kurdistan.

However, while the Turkomans living in other parts of Kurdistan, specifically in the disputed areas, such as Kirkuk, remain loyal to their mother tongue, some feel an affiliation with the Arabic language. The head of the Turkmeneli Political Party, Riyaz Sarikahya, claims that the majority of the Turkomans in Kirkuk do not know Kurdish as their official language is Turkomani (a version of Turkish) and Arabic is their second major language. Furthermore, Sarikahya, who points to the major similarities between the Kurdish and Turkoman cultures, expresses his concern about the protection of the Turkoman language in Erbil.[36] Arshad Al-Salihi, the President of the Iraqi Turkoman Front and a member of the Council of Representatives in Iraq, claims that, as a result of these similarities between the Kurdish and Turkoman cultures and the advantage of being part of the Kurdish community, Turkomans in Erbil change their identities and only speak Kurdish.[37] This suggests that, by making a strategic move to integrate with the Kurds, the Turkomans may, in fact, be losing touch with their own ethnic identity. Nevertheless,

while, the issue of language in this particular context appears to be a disadvantage from the Turkoman perspective, in reality, this integration, which can even be called indirect assimilation, is likely to be a positive driving force for state-building in the Kurdistan region.

As we have seen, the relationship between the Turkomans and the Kurds has had and still has its fair share of difficulties. Nevertheless, the emotional attachment to self-determination is something the Kurds value greatly and the broad acceptance (if not always) that minority groups in their region have similar attachments and aspirations is vital. While the Kurds are inevitably the dominant people in the region, they recognize the powerful emotional attachments that the Turkomans have in terms of territorial belonging, ethnic identity, language, and religious status, and this is recognized in both law and practice. Moreover, we have seen that this emotional attachment also extends to the sharing of traditions and cultures in cases, such as Erbil. However, while the relationship of the Turkomans to the Kurdish state is crucial, the true source of Turkoman loyalty and emotional belonging is often seen as the neighboring state of Turkey.

The close relations between Turkey and the Turkomans of Iraq may prove to be the major obstacle to the Turkomans making an effective contribution to Iraqi Kurdistan's state-building process. Compared to the Kurds, the Turkomans appear to be weak as they have been divided among religious groups: some are Sunni and others are Shia; some are secular with no Islamic beliefs; some are extremists, while others are moderates.[38] The nationalist Turkomans are loyal to Turkey, which makes it easier to be manipulated from the outside. This disloyalty to Kurdistan is likely to occur when the Kurdish or Iraqi governments treat Turkomans unequally although they are the third largest group in Iraq. As mentioned before, the Iraqi Constitution recognizes Arabs and Kurds as the two big groups that "own" the country. This understanding has been the same since the Saddam-era, which opened doors for interference from Turkey under the name of "protection" from the "mainland."

On the other hand, Turkoman representatives from many parts of the Kurdish region deny this close relationship with Turkey. Arshad Al-Salihi, the President of the Iraqi Turkoman Front, which is centered in Kirkuk, claims that they never actually feel the presence of Turkey.[39] Similarly, Riyaz Sarikahya complains that Turkey actually has a Kirkuk policy but not a Turkoman policy in Iraq. Thus, although the nationalist front in the mainland declares a cultural possession of Kirkuk, politically Turkey

sees the presence of the Turkomans in Kirkuk only as statistics.[40] As Kirkuk is the fourth richest city of Iraq in terms of oil reserves, then the demographics matter under any rule. Turkey as a neighbor has an interest in the city for the same reason and intervenes in politics by manipulating the Turkomans. The Turkomans are easily manipulated because they see Turkey as the only source of protection under these circumstances. Aydin Marouf, a Turkoman Member of Parliament in Kurdistan, insists that the Turkoman role in building a Kurdish state should be approved by Turkey. Thus, their support for the Kurdish state depends on Turkey being a guarantor to the Iraqi Turkomans that the Kurds would grant fair rights to them.[41]

Under Saddam's regime, between 1970 and 2003, many Turkoman people were forced to change their identity and become Arabized. The Turkomans did not have the right to build up or own land in Kirkuk unless they changed their identity and they became Arab under the Arabization policy of the Ba'ath regime.[42] Furthermore, they were allowed to sell their land, but were not allowed to buy any new plots. Arabs were given free grants and land to come to live in Kirkuk in order to change the demographic balance of the city.[43] After the end of Saddam's rule in 2003, the Turkoman situation has not got any better as the Kurds have taken control of Kirkuk, all the government buildings, empty houses, as well as the military campuses, were turned into houses for Kurdish families which were also bought illegally to change the demographics of the city.[44] The head of the Turkmeneli Party, Riyaz Sarikahya, claims that although the Kurds and Turkomans suffered together from Arabs under Saddam's regime, the Turkomans face similar difficulties from the Kurdish side now, such as the occupation of Turkoman lands by the Kurds without permission or ignorance of the Turkoman language.[45]

So the role of Turkey is vital in this case, but recent foreign policy developments mean that Turkey does not have to be an obstacle for Turkoman integration or the state-building process in general within Iraqi Kurdistan. There is a broader strategic dimension to Turkey's involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan that could play a crucial role in future state-building and help define the place of the Turkomans in that process. In recent years, Turkey has effectively made a U-turn in its policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan as a whole. In the past, Turkey has sought to curb the Kurdish influence in Iraq, fearing that it might empower

Turkey's sizeable Kurdish contingency.[46] The Marxist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which formed in the 1970s, began an armed conflict with the Turkish authorities in 1984 as that organization sought an independent Kurdish state within Turkey. Recently, after a short-lived ceasefire, Turkey launched airstrikes against PKK forces in northern Iraq with the approval of the KRG.

Over recent years, Turkey has become increasingly disenchanted with its lack of influence in Baghdad and began to see the KRG as a potential partner especially in an economic sense. Masoud Barzani also saw Turkey as an attractive partner in many areas of trade, particularly energy. Indeed, it was Barzani who first tried to initiate negotiations in 2005. A conflict arose between the KRG and Baghdad over oil revenues from Iraqi Kurdistan. This was about who controlled the oil in the region. The Kurds wanted to sell their own oil without having to pay over 80% of the revenues to Baghdad. At first, Turkey was neutral over this dispute, but soon saw the benefits of working with the KRG to help them export oil, bypassing Baghdad altogether. A special pipeline was built between Iraqi Kurdistan and the Turkish port of Ceyhan in 2014.[47]

This growing economic cooperation between Turkey and the KRG can be extended further into the political domain. It is in Turkish interests to see an effective state-building process in Iraqi Kurdistan. On the one hand, Turkey knows that it needs cooperation from the Iraqi Kurds if it is to tame the threat from the PKK. Discussion and negotiation have shown some promise here as Barzani Massoud has publically criticized PKK extremism and has asked the PKK to leave Iraqi Kurdistan. Further negotiations are possible on the position of the Turkomans to help them protect their rights and their property, as well as their overall contribution to the political system in Iraqi Kurdistan. As indicated, some Turkomans believe that Turkey is not supportive enough of their cause. In line with the new foreign policy, Turkey has also asked the Turkomans to build closer relations with the Kurdistan administration. It would be wrong to conclude that Turkey has abandoned the Turkomans. For instance, when they were under threat and displaced following the advances of ISIS in 2014, Turkey helped to provide them with humanitarian aid and shelter at a crucial time. So the role of the Turkomans in the state-building process will depend on how Turkey decides to use its bargaining power with the KRG. At the moment, trade appears to matter more to the Turks, but this could change in such a volatile context.

The true test may come when the fate of Kirkuk is finally decided. If the Turkomans find themselves powerless, the Turkish authorities may try to apply pressure to the KRG. So the role of Turkey in the state-building process remains unclear in the long term.

Conclusion

State-building has three dimensions; political, economic, and social. Regarding state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan, I took the "socio-political" factors into consideration with a focus on the Turkoman population in the region. Although the northern part of Iraq, which is known as Iraqi Kurdistan, is a region rich for ethno-religious diversities, for an in-depth analysis I have focused on the important Turkoman peoples, who are not considered to be "Iraqi Kurd" but important for state-building.

There are a number of obstacles and problems that will affect the success of the Turkoman contribution to state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan. There are broad systemic problems in the political system including a president who has been in office long after the approved term and issues of corruption. Despite these problems, a large section of the Turkomans has been willing to engage in the political system through, for instance, forming alliances with other groups. After years of growth following the end of the war in 2003, the economy has been experiencing difficulties in recent years and this had led to civil unrest. In addition, the influence of ISIS in the region has caused a number of problems for the KRG. Apart from the need to defend itself, Iraqi Kurdistan has experienced a huge influx of refugees. So there are several significant wider problems that will affect the prospects for state-building in the near future.

Nonetheless, there are also many positive aspects of the role of the Turkomans in the future of Iraqi Kurdistan. The issue of religion can be seen as an advantage in the case of the Turkoman contribution to state-building in Iraqi Kurdistan. The majority of Turkomans are Sunni Muslims like Kurds. Again, in a similar way to the Kurds, they have a small Shiite population. Indeed, these religious similarities have undoubtedly facilitated the integration of Kurds and Turkomans in the region. Such integration is also helped by the Kurdish tradition separating religion and the state. Kurdish values of tolerance and fairness have manifested themselves in the philosophy that schools can teach different religions. We have seen that the KRG has shown commitment, through both law and practice, to protect a number of religious

minority groups who ran from the ISIS threat. Therefore, non-Sunni Turkomans may not necessarily be excluded from the state-building process.

Consequently, sociopolitical factors related to ethno-religious minorities are important for founding an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. As the region is rich for ethno-religious groups, the analysis of the position of the Turkoman population is very significant for the prediction of Kurdish state aspirations. However, further research on the smaller groups in the region such as Christians, Kakais, and Shabaks can be fruitful for better understanding of the contribution of the non-Kurdish groups in the state-building process.

The analysis suggested that language is also of fundamental importance from the Turkoman perspective. In Erbil, we can see a willingness from the Turkomans to integrate and learn Kurdish. In a wider sense, the role that language will play in any successful state-building is closely linked to the education system. Since 2003, the KRG has reformed the education system with a new concern for human and minority rights. Consequently, the Turkoman language is respected and there are many schools where lessons take place in Turkoman and other groups can learn Turkoman.

In addition to the general political and economic issues facing Iraqi Kurdistan, and the ISIS threat, the other potential setback for the role of Turkomans in state-building could be their close relations with Turkey. As these relationships go back through history and Turkomans see Turkey as the only option to survive in case of a serious political suppression on them, they are easily manipulated by the "homeland." Especially, the nationalist ones are loyal to Turkey, and thus manipulation becomes easier. As mentioned before, the Iraqi Constitution recognizes Arabs and Kurds as the two big groups and this understanding has been the same in both Saddam era and Kurdish autonomous management, which opened doors for interference from Turkey under the name of "protection" from the "homeland." Nationalist Turks of Turkey are also very eager to be close to Turkomans and use the motto "Kirkuk is Turkish" in their political propaganda. However, I have argued that recent developments in trade between Turkey and the KRG may help to overcome these historical difficulties. While there are indeed areas of dispute, such as Kirkuk, these lucrative trade deals mean that both sides are well placed to enter negotiations on the integration and position of the Turkomans in Iraqi Kurdistan.

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CHAPTER 2

Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations

Bekir Halhalli

Introduction

Kurdish people/Kurdistan have/has been the weakest link in the system established with the Sykes–Picot Agreement[1] signed in 1916 with the colonial states subsequent to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Kurdish People and Kurdistan have suffered most from the nation-state system built on the monist understanding established in place of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious empire administrations. This Western-centred system based on modern 'nation-state' model has deemed the Kurds as a component to be 'assimiled' or an easy matter to resolve as being related to 'minority' issue and postponed to a later stage instead of including the Kurds in the new system. The high-profile geography, where the Kurdish people were living in, was fairly drawn with a ruler in the light of economy, geographic, interest affairs and discretionary settlement in order to make the region governable; national population facts, tribal ties and historical-cultural links were ignored. Consequently, in each of the four neighbouring countries—Turkey, Iran,

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Iraq and Syria—social, political and military entities emerged. In other words, under military, political and economic authorities, the Kurdish nationalist movement developed in different forms in each country.[2]

The separation of Syrian Kurdistan from the Ottoman Kurdistan happened with the Ankara Agreement signed in 1921 between Turkey and France after the First World War. Since 1921 up to the 2012 Rojava Revolution (in Kurdish Rojava means 'West') in Syria, where wars and military coups prevailed and various administrations with different socio-cultural governed, nearly the only thing remain unchanged is mass murders, denial, assimilation and prohibition policies.[3] Up to now, despite the fact that the Kurds in Syria have no demand for being an independent and separate state, it would be untrue to see the matter as just an ethnic issue with regional dimensions. In addition to this, abuse of democratic rights and lack of democratic governance have a significant impact as well. The Kurds in Syria have never been accepted as a minority group in terms of cultural and linguistic rights and have not been freed from violence and war.[4] The Kurds were forcefully Arabized by the Syrian administrations. The Kurdish people in Syria were exciled and displaced for many years, and deemed as a colony. And they were victim of physical and cultural oppression.

After a brief introduction to the Kurdistan geography and history, this research study aims at first revealing historical developments/conflicts/discussions and by looking into the Kurdish political actors to demonstrate the people's long-lasting struggle in the Middle East, even partly, with the Kurdish political parties in Syria. As widely known, Kurdish political movement in Syria unlike to the Kurdish political movements in Iraq, Iran and Turkey has been less discussed in the academia, international platforms and the research on diplomatic activities before the Arab Spring spread to Syria in 2011. Therefore, in order to comprehend the Kurdish political actors/parties in Syria, analyses of the situation, quest and the activities of Kurds migrated to Syria because of the Kemalist administration during post-World War I and discussion on Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistane li Syria-PDKS) in a historical context would be useful for this study's purposes as there are no such complicated political party divisions like PDKS in any other part of Kurdistan. In the present day, nearly all the Kurdish political parties which are active in Syria—except for Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat, PYD—have been developed on a separation from the PDKS established in 1957. PDKS and other following political parties have not been recognised by the Syrian administrations, have been prohibited and

not been included in Syrian elections. Moreover, they have been seen as a threat to country integration and to the Arab identity; their rights were limited, and the pressure gradually increased. The Kurdish political opposition has been both sensitive and moderate for emerging of a separate Kurdish state in neighbouring countries and followed a calm, peaceful and democratic struggle in Syria.[5] The PYD (Democratic Union Party—*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* in Kurdish), which is founded by the Syrian Kurds in 2003 on the social and political heritage of the PKK, has neither stood with Syrian regime nor with the opposition based on the justification of the Kurdish people's natural and democratic rights were being ignored. In general, PYD preferred to resolve current issues with a pragmatic approach and in a peaceful way as well as adopting the principle of solving the existing problems through armed struggle, whenever possible.

In the course of preparation of this research on Kurdish parties in Syria, this study benefitted from Harriet Allsopp's book, an expert on the Syrian Kurds, '*The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East*' by large. Additionally, '*Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*' authored by Jordi Tejel and Thomas Schimidinger's research '*Krieg and Revolution in Syrisch-Kurdistan: Anaysen und Stimmen aus Rojava*' (War and Revolution in the Syrian Kurdistan: Voices and Analyses from Rojava) provided profound contributions to this study.

In the next chapters of this study, there will be information provided on the Syrian Kurds and there will be discussion on their long-lasting struggle. And, the following chapter will shed light on the Syrian Kurdish parties' situations, organisational structures, their umbrella organisations as well as their relations with regional Kurdish political movement.

Syrian Kurdistan: The Long-Lasting Struggle

The population of the Syrian Kurds is estimated to be nearly between 2 and 2.5 million (1.9 million citizens, 350,000 foreigners and 250,000 unregistered-without ID) which equals to 11–12% of the 22-million Syrian population in total.[6] These numbers demonstrate that the Kurds are the biggest non-Arab minority in Syria, and as a high number of Kurds are deprived of basic rights and of the Syrian citizenship, it is more difficult to estimate the actual number. Nearly, all of the Kurdish people who are speaking Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish are Sunni, whereas very

few are the Yazidi. Although the Kurds are a major minority in Syria, they have been less successful to organise and less developed in terms of politics, military, culture and economy when compared with the Kurds in other neighbouring countries.

The Kurds are densely populated in the northern parts of Syria in parallel to borderline which is Turkey's longest land border and are primarily based in the city of Al-Qamishli (Qamişlo) across Nuseybin, and in the inner parts—the province of Haseki in the south, in Tirbe Spi (these regions are called Cizire as well) across Silopi, in Amude across Mardin, in Dirbesiye across Kiziltepe, in Sere Kaniye (Resul Ayn) across Ceylanpinar, in Girê Spî (Talabyad) across Akcakale, in Kobanê (Ayn el Arab) across Suruc and in more western parts including the Afrin regions Kurd Mountain (in Kurdish Ciyaye Kurdan, in Arabic Cebel-ul Akrad) and in many villages situated in between regions.[7]

The majority is based in the north-east part of the country which is close to Turkish and Iraqi borders (the French people name this region 'le Bec de Canard' meaning duck-bill), and additionally there is a high number of Kurds living in Damascus and Aleppo as well.

One of the ways to comprehend the situation in the Western Kurdistan and to develop historical understanding is to look at the affairs in the post-Ottoman era and the activities of the ones who migrated from the pressure in Turkey to Syria following to rebellion. During the French Mandate Administration of 1920–1946, after the Kurds' autonomy demand[8] was declined, the Kurds accepted (were forced to accept) the Syrian citizenship and remained to live quietly without facing high-level pressure. Nevertheless, while the borders were being drawn as *serxet* (the border is divided with railway: above the border is Turkey) and *binxet* (below the border is Syria)—after the Kurdish rebellions in Turkey (Sason, Seyh Said, Kocgiri, Dersim and Agri, etc.),—the tribe leaders, intellectual leaders and Kurdish intellectuals, who struggled against the Turkish (Kemalist) regime, took over substitute roles to arouse the movement in Western Kurdistan and give a new impetus. In particular, the main and leading organisation of Kurdish movement in Syria, the Xoybûn (Independence) Organization was established in 1927 in Lebanon and was expanded in Syria (particularly by the Kurdish intellectuals from Turkey who were sent to excile in Damascus). The Xoybûn Organization primarily carried out political and cultural activities and struggle against Turkey.[9] Yet, in the French Mandate, Kurds established their own local governments, but their political manoeuvre was limited. Xoybûn expressed that the rights

provided under the Mandate in Syria would be sufficient and there would not be any political demand for these rights.[10] With these kinds of expressions, Xoybûn might have aimed to get along with the French and British administrations and to protect and develop their cultural activities (the focus was given to political and diplomatic activities in the scope of cultural demands so that Xoybûn's nationalist discourse was placed in Kurds' memory and consciousness)[11] without causing political problems. Because the Kurdish political movement could not bring various political groups together after the disintegration of Xoybûn movement, in the end of 1940s some of prominent Kurdish individuals such as Cegerxwin, Qedri Can, Osman Sabri, Resid Hamoand Muhammed Ali Hoca turned towards the Syrian Communist Party. Thanks to the elections brought by the French, the Kurdish politicians were elected to be Members of Parliament and (Prime) Ministers in 1947, 1949 and 1957 periods.[12] More importantly, General Husni Zaim, who himself was a Kurdish, did a military coup in 1949 to provide security for the regime and then his administration was ended by Edip Sisek—who was also Kurdish—and Zaim was executed. General El Sisek was implementing policies restricting the Kurdish people's and non-muslims' social and political rights, but Sisek was also overthrown by a military coup in 1954.

The Syrian Kurds, who were mostly not dignified, did not establish a Kurdish party that focuses on the Kurdish nationalism or Kurdish movement in Syria until the second half of 1950s, as they were deprived of their social, cultural and political rights. In other words, between 1946 and 1957 the Kurds did not own an organisation that could defend their rights. This case changed after the second half of 1950s. In reaction to the changes in Iraq and rising Arab nationalism, PDKS was established with the support of Mustafa Barzani and then Iraq KDP Politbureau member Celal Talabani. Although it was established under the name of 'Syrian Kurds' Democrat Party', later in 1960 the name changed into 'Kurdistan Democrat Party of Syria'. However, the Party whose secretary was carried out by Osman Sabri and chairmanship by Nureddin Zaza due to the foundation of United Arab Republic with Egypt lost its manoeuvre, and nearly 5000-sympathisers including secretary, president and members of board were on trial on ground of 'separatism', and the party was shut down.[13]

From the mid-1960s onwards, by justifying agriculture reform, the lands of 120,000 Kurdish villagers were expropriated, and at the same time their citizenship rights were taken away.[14] The Arabs were placed in those emptied Kurdish villages, and exclusion of Kurdishness was made

a central component of the Syrian political system and Syrian culture. In this context, the 1962 population consensus and 'Arab Belt'—which was introduced with the Ba'ath regime coming to power in 1963—became a base for various major problems at the regional level.

From the beginning of the Ba'ath regime in 1963—with the introduction of State of Emergency in 1963—'Arab Belt' has been in practice and was concluded in the Assad administration(s). As inferred from the 1973 Constitution, there was no progress in terms of rights of Kurds and of any other minority group. Between 1970 and 1976 with large-scale implementation of 'Arab Belt', 41 sample modern villages were set up around Iraq–Turkey border, and nearly 25,000 Arab families were placed in place of the Kurds.[15] In addition to this, the Syrian Administration with the State of Emergency, which has been in force since 1963, used Arab nationalism as a threat over the Kurdish language and folklore and narrowed the Kurdish identity and resistance manoeuvre with the laws including restrictions.

In addition, these enforcements leaving Kurds in a difficult situation, Hafez Assad, starting from the end of 1970s and up to 1988, supported the PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan–Kurdistan Workers' Party); let their camps in Syria and used this as a trump in the (foreign policy) matters with Turkey. The regional dimension and transnational nature of Kurdish issue has played a significant role in the state-to-state affairs. The lack of any initiative by Kurds in Syria in this period can be explained by the existence of the PKK in Syria. The PKK which had good relations with Syria managed to direct the attention of Syrian Kurds to Turkey and Iraq. Thus, the Syrian administration achieved to polarise the Syrian Kurds as supporters of the Kurdish movements in Iraq or Turkey.[16] With the signing of Adana Protocol in 1998 between Ankara and Damascus, the support to the PKK was ended. At the same time, the oppression on Kurds in terms of leading to the regime was removed. That being said, the PKK was occupied with the conflicts among themselves over political orientation at early times and with loss of their leaders; yet, the PKK members in Syria came together under the name of the PYD (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat) just in 2003; this party never received support from the regime and even faced more pressures compared with the previous Kurdish parties.[17]

In March 2004, in a fight over a football match in the city of Al-Qamishli between Kurdish and Arab supporters, 36 Kurds died, 160 Kurds were injured, and more than 2000 Kurds were tortured in detention.[18] These events started a new era in Kurds' affairs and caused

Kurdish uprising or Kurdish revolts also known as *serhildan* (Rebellion in Kurdish) against the Syrian Government. Although Bashar Assad declared that the rights of Kurds would be returned, there was not any progress on this. At the same time, the Kurdish politics was affected by not only internal dynamics but also cross-border dynamics. Federal Kurdish State in Iraq kept the activities and hopes of the Syrian Kurds alive.

In the end, the wave of rebellions called the Arab Spring spread to Syria in spring 2011. From this period on, the Kurdish political parties started to mention of/discuss demands for possible federation in the post-regime era. Barzani and the Syrian opposition Kurdish parties which are close to KDP in order to take a common stance and develop a common policy in this period convened under the Masoud Barzani leadership in October of 2012 in the city of Erbil with the agenda of 'self-determination, a constitution that would secure and protect the Kurds' demands and democratic Syria'. Nonetheless, the PYD did not attend this meeting. Later, Meclisa Gel (TEV-DEM or People's Assembly) which is known to have close links with the PKK and Kurdish National Council in Syria (Encumena Nişţimani ya Kurdi li Suriyeye-ENKS)—which is a union of Syrian Kurdish parties who take joint actions—attended the meeting in city of Erbil on 9–10 July, 2012. After that, the PYD remained distant to the antiregime activities in the period of conflicts in Syria, and therefore, being strongly criticized. At the same time, the PYD did not take part in Syrian National Council, instead the PYD formed/strengthened its own defence forces. 'People's Protection Units' (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel—YPG) secured a number of Kurdish districts in the Northern Syria (with the regime's withdrawal) without entering an armed conflict in the height of internal conflicts in July 2012. In November 2013, along with a number of other Kurdish political groups in Syria, PYD controlled a Kurdish semi-autonomous structure consisting of three democratic cantons—Afrin (Efrîn), Cizîre (Cızîrê) and Kobani (Kobanê)—and established a temporary government in these regions and announced its name as Rojava.

Kurdish Political Parties in Syria

The Kurds in Syria mostly come into the attention of international arena with regard to human rights issues and the research on the Syrian Kurdish Political Parties and Syrian Kurdish Movement remain

underexplored in the literature. However, the Kurdish groups after the outbreak of civil war in 2011 caught the attention worldwide by controlling the biggest gained land against the Syrian regime. Besides this, it found a place in the international media with receiving support from numerous international forces in its fight against DAİŞ (Dewleta İslamî ya Iraq û Şamê in Kurdish, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—ISIS in English).

The Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic have vast heritage in cultural activities, but they have been less successful to be organised, and they are less developed in the areas of politics, military and economy compared with the Kurds in other neighbouring countries. The drawn borders in the Middle East after the First World War caused division among the Kurds in the region; fewer Kurds remained within the Syrian borders under the French mandate than in Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Between 1920 and 1946 in the period of French Mandate, the Kurds, under the leadership of Xoybûn movement/organisation, brought a new breath for cultural, political and military struggle in Syria. As said earlier, in 1920s and 1930s after the Kurdish rebellions in Turkey (Sason, Seyh Said, Kocgiri, Dersim, and Agri etc.), the tribe leaders, intellectual leaders and Kurdish intellectuals—who struggled against the Turkish (Kemalist) regime—took over substitute roles to arouse the movement in Western Kurdistan and to give a new impetus.

After the foundation the Syrian Arab Republic, because of the state's policy to hinder/deny the strengthening of sub-identities, the Kurds in Syria did not gain strength in the political arena. Between 1946 and 1957, with the undesired developments in the other parts of Middle East, the Kurds did not own any organisation defending the Kurds' rights in Syria as well. Therefore, the Syrian government integrated Kurdish regions, who are distinctive group in terms of ethnicity and language, in addition to regions on the borders with Turkey and Iraq, into several cities in the other parts of country particularly significant places such as Damascus and Aleppo—in terms of economy, culture and politics.

Yet, a number of politicians and bureaucrats with Kurdish origins undertook roles in state institutions at the foundation stage of the Syrian government and after that. Husnu El-Zaim—the first person led the military coup in Syria—became president in 1949 and had Kurdish roots. Also, Halid Bekdas who was elected for the Syrian Parliament in 1954—which makes him the first communist Member of Parliament in Syria—and at the same time the chair of the Syria Communist Party as well

as a number of prominent religious leaders such as former State Mufti Ahmed Kiftarro, had Kurdish roots.

Although it is not recognised officially by the Syrian government, the 'Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria', which was established in 1957 and later in the early 1960s became the 'Kurdistan Democrat Party of Syria (Kurdish: Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan a-Sûriye-PDKS)', is the source of nearly all political parties excluding a few. In the midst of 1960s, the Kurdish parties focused on the issues like whether to work for Kurdish autonomy or not and whether to work with Communist Party or not and divided into numerous different organisations in the end.

The reasons for different separations/fractions will be elaborated in the next chapter; in brief, there are external factors (dominant powers in the region, the close stance/dependency of Kurdish parties in Syria to the Kurdish parties in Iraq and Turkey, prohibitions/laws by the Syrian regime and cooperations) and internal factors (social, ideational and personal interests). On grounds of being illegal, almost all parties remained as weak structures and were organised as secret cells.[19] Most of the parties did not go beyond being just 'sign party' without public support/popular support and are the organisations established by some relatives and friends.[20] The Kurdish parties which are operational in Syria mostly choose Cezire region, particularly the city of Al-Qamishli as central; the PYD, in addition to Cezire region, is situated in regions like Kobanê, Afrin, Girê Spî and thus is able to control nearly all northern Syria. The Party activities at the same time are being conveyed to Europe (to diaspora) and with the support of Kurds living there, thus demonstrating that European States are not oblivious to Syria's Kurdish Policy.

Most of the effective Kurdish opposition parties originating from the same source (PDKS) in the Syrian Arab Republic have been able to continue their activities until today, although most of them have suffered instability and internal leadership conflicts. The brief information about the parties will be provided in the following sections.

The Outlook of the Kurdish Political Parties in Syria

PDKS (Syria Kurdistan Democrat Party) was established in June of 1957. The party programme targeted the recognition of Kurds as an ethnic group and democratic administration as a basis. The leaders of PDKS, which was established in reaction to the Arab nationalism, were arrested in 1960; the party chair was asked to leave Syria. PDKS was

divided into branches in 1965—one was under the leadership of Zaza and focusing on cultural and social rights and the other one wanted to focus on political struggle under the leadership Osman Sabri.[21] As the PDKS was facing divisions internally in the 1960s, Molla Mustafa Barzani—who was leading the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq that had close links with PDKS—invited all fractions to Iraqi Kurdistan to reunite. However, his efforts did not result in a reunification. After a series of meetings, Deham Miro was elected for the post of party chair and then was reelected for the PDKS chair in 1972.

As a result of the fractions that started in 1965, the party lost its power and effectiveness; yet, fractions like *çep* (left) and *rast* (right) merged and the party went through various changes. In 1965, both the parties came out of PDKS: PDKS (left wing) under the leadership of Osman Sabri (1969–2003 Salih Bedrettin and 2003–2005 Mustafa Cuma leadership) and PDKS (right wing) under the leadership of Abdulhamid Hajji Darwish.[22] It is also necessary to state that the party came forward with formal changes and leaders rather than ideologic differences. For instance, Abdulhamid Hajji Darwish[23] (he was chieftain of the tribe), who left PDKS and established (Partiya Demokrata Pêşverû li Suri) Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria—Progressive Front, positioned himself in the right wing, although he received support from Iraq Kurdistan Autonomous Region, particularly from the party of Celal Talabani's (Yekîtîya Niştimanîya Kurdistan) Kurdistan Patriotic Union.[24] Darwish—who is an experienced politician—carries out Secretary General position since 1965; thus, the party has continuous leadership among the Syrian Kurds and particularly has support from Celal Talabani's party Kurdistan Patriotic Union.[25]

One of the four parties, which are still operational with similar names and constitute the main axis of PDKS since the 1965 dissolution, is the party with its changed name in 1981 and which is known by the public today is Al Partî'.[26] The party was led by, respectively, Deham Mîro (1970–1973), Hemîd Sîno (1973–1976), Mustafa Ibrahim (1976–1977), Ilyas Ramazan (1977–1978), Kemal Ahmed (1978–1996), Nasreddîn İbrahim (1996–1998) and Muhammed Nezîr (1998–2007). Since 2007, Abulhakim Bessar has chaired the PDKS. The Party which separated from Al Partî (PDKS) in 1975 and moved on with the same name was led by Sêyh Muhammed Bakî between 1975 and 1997. The chair has been Cemal Sêyh Bakî who is still chair of the Party. Also, Nasreddîn Ibrahim was party chair between 1996 and 1998 before he left

Al Parti. The coming of Muhammed Nazir Mustafa's to party chair position in 1998 influenced Nasreddîn Ibrahim's decision to leave the party. The last group with the same name is PDKS Al Party which has been chaired by Abdurrahman Aluci since 2014. After Aluci died, the party was led by Lazgin Mahmud Fahri. After he left from PDKS, in order to distinguish himself from the other party, he started to use this name.

It is also necessary to mention that, with the initiative by Masoud Barzani, the leader of Kurdistan Regional Government, the four political parties in Syria—The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (Al-Parti) led by Abdulhakim Bessar, Azadi Party led by Mustafa Cuma, Azadi Party led by Mustafa Oso and Kurdistan Union Party led by Abdulhamit Hemo—merged into 'Kurdistan Democrat Party in Syria (PDKS)' on 7 April 2014, and Suud Mele was elected for the chair position.[27] The journalist-author Faik Bulut explains the necessity of this unification as a precaution and, if necessary, as an alternative power to PYD that became a dominant power in the Syrian Kurdistan.[28] Nawaf Rashid, the representative of the party in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), who spoke to the Anadolu Agency, said that 10,000 *Peshmerge* (military force of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan) were trained in the KRG to be sent to North Syria with the protection of the US-led international coalition.[29]

The Syria Kurdish Democratic Patriotic Party (Partiya Welatparêz a Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê)—that separated from the PDKS's right wing on ground of leadership struggles in 1998—is led by Tahir Sifuk.

Another right wing party that separated from PDKS in 1992 is the Kurdish Democratic Equality Party (Partiya Wekhevî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê), which is led by a former senior leader Aziz Davud in PKDS. There is no significant ideologic and organisational difference between this and the other parties.[30]

After Osman Sabri, the fractions of the left wing of PDKS Syria Kurdish Democratic Left Party (Partiya Çepa Demokrata Kurdî li Sûriyê) were led in 1975–1991 by Ismet Sayda (later in 1991–1993 by Yusuf Dibo and in 1994–2005 by Hayreddin Murad). In 1980, the name of the party was changed to Syria Kurdish People's Union Party (Partiya Hevgirtina Gelê Kurd li Sûriyê). Later, the PDKS left wing was led by Salih Bedreddin between 1970 and 2003 and by Mustafa Cuma between 2003 and 2005. In 2005, with a decision made, as a consecutive to this party, Syria Kurdish Freedom Party (Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê) was established which is also known as Azadi in the political arena and its secretary is being carried out by Hayreddin Murad. At the end of

October 2011, Azadî was divided into two. Since then, one of the two parties having the same name is led by Hayreddin Murad (and later Mustafa Hidir Oso) and the other by Mustafa Cuma.[31]

Between 1990 and 1993, the Syrian Kurdish Labour Party (Partiya Zehmetkeşanên Kurd li Suriyê) under the leadership of Sabhatullah Seyda; the Syrian Kurdish Workers' Party (Partiya Kar a Demokrat a Kurdi li Suriye) under the leadership of Muhiddin Seyh Ali and the Syrian Kurdish Democrat Party (Partiya Demokrata Kurdi li Suriye) under leadership of Ismail Ammo leaguged together under the Syrian United Kurdish Democratic Party led by Ismail Ammo.[32]

After the division within PKDS, one of the parties that originated from the left wing—the Kurdish Democrat Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrata Kurdî li Suriyê) known as *Yekîti*—was established in 1993 under the leadership of Ismail Ammo. The party was chaired by Ismail Ammo between 1993 and 2001, and since 2001 it has been chaired by Muhiddin Sheikh Ali. Due to disagreements within the party, there were separations from the party and in 1998 under the leadership of Muhammed Musa Left Party of Syrian Kurds (Partiya Çepa Kurdî li Suriyê) and in 1999 Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Partiya Yekitiya Kurdî li Suriyê), known as *Yekîti* was established.[33] Kurdish Union Party in Syria has been led by, respectively, Abdulbaki Yusuf (2000–2003), Hasan Salih (2003–2007), Fuad Aliko (2007–2010), İsmail Hami (2010–2013) and İsmail Biro (2013–ongoing).[34]

Again, originated from the left wing, the Kurdish Socialist Party of Syria (Partiya Sosyalist a Kurdi li Suriye) was established by Muhammed Salih Gedo in 1977 and conducted its political activities until 2002. Salih Gedo—who was the deputy chair of Muhammed Musa's party in 2004—and a number of politbureau members left the party on grounds of internal disagreements in 2012 and established the party with a similar name—Kurdish Left Democrat Party of Syria (Partiya Çepa Demokrat a Kurdî li Suriyê) and its secretary still being conducted by Gedo even today.

Apart from the fractions from the PDKS, the independent political parties arose as well: the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat), the Syria Kurdish Democratic Reconciliation Party (Rekeftina Demokrat a Kurdi li Suri) and the Syria Kurdish Future Movement (Şepela Pesroje ya Kurdi li Suriye). The party chaired by Fuad Omer (by Salih Muslim after 2010 and co-chaired with Asya Abdullah after 2012)[35] in 2003 has a more effective and enlarged base than other

Kurdish parties, thanks to its military branch—the People's Protection Unions (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel—YPG) by large.[36] In its inauguration year, a certain group of members under the leadership of Kemal Sahin separated from the Party based on internal disagreement and established Syria Kurdish Democratic Reconciliation Party (Rekeftina Demokrat a Kurdi li Suri). However, after Kemal Sahin was killed in February 2005 in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Party was chaired by numerous leaders and yet, it did not last as an effective movement. Although the Syria Kurdish Future Movement (Şepela Pesroje ya Kurdi li Suriye) seems to be out of PDKS-originated party tradition, it was established by Misel Temo, who served in Salih Bedreddin's party and left in 1999 and then established Syria Kurdish Future Movement in 2005. After the assassination of Temo on 7 October 2011, the Party divided into two with the same remaining name—one led by Rezan Bahri Seyhmus and the other one by Cemal Molla Mahmud.

The Umbrella Organisations of the Syrian Kurdish Political Parties

The Kurdish Political Parties—that dissolved/disintegrated because of political weariness, personal interests and long-lasting meaningless ideologic differences—tried to unite their political and diplomatic movements under umbrella organisations; however, this was not enough. The Kurdish Democratic Alliance in Syria (Hevbendi ya Demokrat a Kurdi li Suriye), that established in 1992, signed the Damascus Declaration in 2005 with Syria Kurdish Democratic Patriotics Front (Eniya Nişтimanî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê) that was established in 1996.[37] The non-signatory parties to the Damascus Declaration united under the Kurdish Coordination Committee (Komita Tensiqe ya Kurdi) in 2006. Again, on 30 December 2009, the Syria Kurdish Political Council (Encumena Siyasi ya Kurdi li Suriyeye) was formed.[38] Schmidinger explains the foundation of these alliances and distintegration with external factors: the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party under the leadership of Abdulhamid Haci Dervish acts dependent on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Iraq (Yekîtîya Nişтimanîya Kurdistan or Yetîkîya Nişтimanperwerê Kurdistan/ PUK) and on the other hand, Abdulhakim Bessar who leads the Syria Kurdish Democratic Patriotics Front in Syria remained in cooperation with Iraq Kurdistan Democratic Party (Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan a Irak/KDP).[39] As for PYD, it preferred to be out of these alliances until the rebellions called 'Arab Spring' that spread to

Syria. Consequently, political hostilities and leadership disputes paved the way for more fractions.

The diplomacy of unification/reconciliation of the Kurdish parties in the Syrian crisis can be framed under two umbrella organisations: the Kurdish National Council of Syria (ENKS) and the Democratic Society Movement in Western Kurdistan (TEV-DEM or Meclisa Gel ya Rojavayê). The parties under the ENKS have been controlled by Masoud Barzani, and on the other hand, the parties under TEV-DEM carried out their political activities under the control of PYD. The table lists the member parties of the ENKS (Table 2.1).[40]

ENKS—the most comprehensive/inclusive umbrella organisation of the Syrian Kurds—was supported in Erbil through Masoud Barzani on 26 October 2011. In general, the Council consisting of Kurdish parties against the regime receives support from Barzani, and in order to protect the Kurdish rights, the Council situates itself as a part of the Syrian revolution. ENKS, seeing itself as a part of the Syrian opposition, refuses to be in a dialogue with the regime and has been in struggle against PYD. And, ENKS condemns PYD with being in cooperation with the regime and making secret deals. In return for this, PYD accuses Turkey of exerting too much influence on the Syrian National Council and refuses the classical models, i.e. federalism and having self-government and demands for 'democratic autonomy' and recognition of Kurdish rights within a constitutional framework.

TEV-DEM, which is known to be close to the PKK, attended a convention in Erbil on 11 June 2012 with the ENKS—an alliance of the Syrian Kurdish parties. With the Erbil Cooperation Agreement,[41] the Kurdish Parties were brought together under the Kurdish Higher Council (Desteya Bilind a Kurd). Yet, PYD were neither part of the Syrian National Coalition against the regime nor the Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces National Coalition.[42]

Because of this, during the conflicts in Syria, PYD remained distant to anti-regime activities and was criticised strongly about this stance. In the meantime, a number of political parties separated from the ENKS membership and/or just their names remained on the list symbolically. Another agreement that was signed between the two umbrella organisations in Duhok on 22 October 2014 was not enforced. The ENKS was invited (within the opposition group) to Syria Meetings in Geneva/Switzerland and Astana/Kazakhstan held by the UN to end the war in Syria; however, as the PYD was not invited, the decisions of these

Table 2.1 The political parties within the ENKS[58]

Party (Kurdish)	*Party (English)*	*Chair*	*Relation*
Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistan-Sûriyê	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria	Suud Mele	Barzani (KDP) and Syria National Council
Partiya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê (el-Partî)	Kurdish Democratic Party (al-parti) in Syria	Nasreddin İbrahim	Barzani (KDP)
Partiya Welatparêz a Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Democratic Patriotic Party in Syria	Tahir Sifuk	The separation from the PDKS in 1998
Partiya Demokrat a Pêsverû ya Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party of Syria	Abdulhamid Hajji Darwish	Talabani (PUK)
Partiya Demokrat a Kurdî Sûrî	Kurdish Democrat Party of Syria	Abdurrahman Aluci–Lazgin Mahmud Fahri	The Separation from el-parti in 2013
Partiya Wekhevî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Democratic Equality Party	Aziz Davud	The Separation from the PDKS in 1992
Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria-Azadi	Mustafa Hıdır Oso	The Separation from Azadi in 2011
Partiya Çep a Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Left Party of Syria	Muhammed Musa Muhammed	PYD
Partiya Çepa Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Left Democrat Party of Syria	Muhammed Salih Gedo	The separation from Syria Kurd Left Party in 2012
Partiya Yekîtî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Democrat Union Party in Syria	Muhiddin Sheikh Ali	Talabani (PUK) & PYD
Partiya Yekîtî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê	Kurdish Union Party in Syria	Ibrahim Biro	Barzani (KDP)
Partiya Demokrat a Kurdi ya Suri	Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party	Cemal Sheikh Bakî	PYD/Syria Regime
Tevgera Reforma	Kurdish Reform Movement	Faysal Yusuf	
Şepela Pesroje ya Kurdi li Suriye	Syria Kurdish Future Movement	Cemal Molla Mahmud	The Separation from Syria Kurdish Future Movement in 2011
Şepela Pesroje ya Kurdi li Suriye	Syria Kurdish Future Movement	Rezan Bahri Sheikhmus	The Separation from Syria Kurdish Future Movement in 2011

meetings were not recognised. Along with a series of opposition and political Kurdish groups in Syria, PYD—through social contract method under the name of democratic autonomy—tries to justify itself and to make itself accepted with a geography covering the most of Kurdish regions.

Consequently, the parties operate under the two umbrella organisations (the parties employed Abdullah Ocalan's ideology and the parties stand close to Masoud Barzani) and constantly tend to blame each other and strongly criticise voided the cooperation agreement/efforts.

Internal and External Factors and Relations

The relations and interactions of the Kurdish movements in Syria are beyond of this chapter's scope. Yet, the Kurdish movement in Syria in the course of long-lasting struggles has been affected by its internal dynamics and other Kurdish movements as well as regional dynamics.[43] In addition to this, the Syrian Kurdish movement until the Arab rebellions has been affected by the regional Kurdish dynamics and became affecting come after this date.[44]

Three political movements in the Middle East dominate the Kurdish political arena: the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey (PKK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iraq (KDP) and the Patriotics Union of Kurdistan (PUK). All these three parties have 'brother/sister parties' in Syria. As elaborated in previous sections, the fractions of the Kurdish movement can be explained with tension and power struggle among Abdullah Ocalan's party PKK, the parties accepting its ideology and the parties are part of Masoud Barzani's KDP and the parties on the same stance with Celal Talabani's PUK. According to Jordi Tejel, the Kurdish Parties merged after the PDKS, have generally organised around a central personality and has been affiliated with the Kurdish organisations in Iraq or Turkey.[45] This is one of the reasons why the Syrian Kurdish parties disintegrated.

As there is no law on political parties in force, the Syrian administration followed remittent policy trend towards the Kurdish parties; generally speaking, the organisation of Kurdish people joining the elections and political parties were banned. The activities apart from setting up a party office and hanging a party sign were banned for the Kurdish parties.[46] The disintegration of the Syrian Kurdish parties served for the Syrian regime, periodically; the Syrian secret service *mukhabarat* or

intelligence remained always over the Kurdish parties just as the the *Sword of Damocles* and hindered organisation and mobilisation and kept them in control. Yet, before the rebellions, the parties taking into account of 'red lines' of the regime accepted the view of there is Kurds in Syria, but not Kurdistan.[47] The cooperation with the regime played a role in the disintegration of the parties. Harriet Allsopp categorised the Kurdish parties in the context of cooperation with regime into three in a broad sense: Right (e.g., the Progressive Party remained unofficial, sustained good relations with the regime and did not take a part in the protests against the regime in the events of Al-Qamishli), Central (for instance, the Democratic Union Party—*Yekiti* sustained good and bad dialogues with the regime on a case basis and became careful about red lines) and Left (for instance, the Union Party—*Yekiti* and the Future Movement were monitored by the regime and their activities were not allowed).[48] In the Al-Qamishli events of March 2004, the regime showed how it tries to maintain order in the streets and squares with the help of the Kurdish parties.

The relations with the Arab opposition always remained limited. The Democratic Union Party, the Patriotic Party, the Democratic Equality Party, the Left Party, the PKDS (al-parti) and the Reconciliation Party supported the Damascus Declaration and got represented, but the Union Party (Yekiti), the Freedom Party (Azadi) and the PYD stayed distant to this formation on grounds of lacking ground for the Kurds and their rights. On the other hand, in the agenda of the Syrian Arab Opposition, there was a nationalist discourse taking place and in the agenda of Kurdish opposition, there was more emphasis on identity, language and cultural demands. The Arab opponents ignored the situation of Kurds in the context of language, history and culture and preferred concealing it. Therefore, the Kurdish Parties' being vocal about 'Arabization' policy and discourse has been seen as a threat by the Arab opposition mostly. This case is deemed to be akin to Israel's Palestine policy.[49]

According to experienced journalist–writer, Fehim Taştekin, the opposition parties were afraid of the reaction of the (Ba'ath) regime.[50] Because the Kurdish question was the most fundamental contradiction of the Arab opposition; the Arab elites were far from clarifying the position on the existence and rights of the Syrian Kurds. The Kurds supporting the Damascus Declaration supported the foundations of the organisations

demanding democratic reforms in Syria, but Kurd–Arab dialogue remained limited due to its being seen as a long-term project.[51] Since the start of rebellions, the cooperation (generally with the initiative of Barzani) between the Arab nationalist, (moderate) Islamic parts and Kurdish parties did not become fruitful and the Kurdish society was not represented in national–international platforms.[52] The approach of the Muslim Brotherhood to the Kurdish parties has not gone beyond the slogan of 'Islam or umma fraternity'.

President Hafez Assad granted relatively the freedom to operate for the Kurdish parties coming from neighbours, Iraq and Turkey. In other words, with this policy, the Syrian regime targets to realise their own regional aspirations and to keep the Kurdish threat away from the capital as well as to transfer its Kurdish problem to Iraq and Turkey between 1970 and 1990.[53] Before Ocalan was arrested in 1988, the PKK organised training camps for the guerilla units in Lebanon under the Syrian control.

The PKK-Syria regime relations date back to 1980s. The views of Abdullah Ocalan, the prominent leader for the Kurdish Politics in Syria, were later developed by the PYD circles. In the 1980s, when the relations with the regime were relatively good and 1990s, PKK directed the struggle and the attention of Kurdish movement in Syria to Turkey. Consequently, the Syrian–Kurdish parties did not compete with the PKK in terms of political activities, even more stayed in its shadows. Until the uprisings in Syria, KDP and PUK had party offices in both Damascus and Al-Qamishli. The main objective of Hafiz al-Assad's policy with the Iraqi Kurds has been to undermine the strength of the rival Ba'ath party and to direct the interest of his Kurds out of the country. Therefore, Assad provided himself with a tool to use/pressure in negotiations with the neighbour countries. He ensured that the Syrian Kurds join the struggle in Iraq and Turkey, but achieved to hold them distant from the Syrian–Kurdish problem.

In Syrian–Turkish relations, although the parameters of PKK, Water, Hatay and Israel issues changed periodically, the post-Arab Uprisings era has become the most controversial area of Turkish Foreign Policy. In the course of Syrian uprisings and later, AKP (Justice and Development Party) could not make an agreement directly with the PYD, and instead tried to put the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Masoud Barzani in place. Barzani tried to bring all the Kurdish parties under the same umbrella organisation in 2012 in Erbil, but have not been successful.[54] Later in the face of ISIS attacks on Kobanê, Ankara once again,

instead of taking a stance with the Syrian Kurds, chose Barzani and in the time of Kobanê resistance gave a greenlight to peshmerges for passing through Turkey to Syria to fight against ISIS. This case can be described as the most comprehensive and strategic action since the 2004 Al-Qamishli events.

At the same time, this development in the Kurdish history played a role in making imprisoned Kurdish nationalism within the borders more regional. The AKP government's view of PYD and PKK as being same played a significant role in the Turk-Kurd polarisation.[55] Furthermore, Ankara's view of Kurdish organisation in North Syria as a threat to Turkey's security and ignoring non-state actors, Kurds being active in high-profile politics in the south side of the border and silence in ISIS's Kobanê siege had a significant role in Turk–Kurd polarisation today as well.[56] Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the training of thousands of Peshmergen in the KRG to be sent to North Syria with the protection of the international coalition under US leadership will further increase the competition between the Kurdish parties close to KDP and the Kurdish parties close to the PKK in Syria. The main purpose here is to turn the monopoly of PYD and its military arm YPG into its own favour.

Cantonial Kurdish region resisting against a strong organisation like ISIS (troublemaker in the region)—Kurds followed the third way independent from Assad Regime and Free Syria Army (FSA) under the leadership of PYD—has been a threat to the Turkish government.[57]

On the other hand, the Syrian–Kurdish movement changed its relations particularly with the USA and the European States in the Kobanê war and later for the struggle against radical Islamist organisations and proved that could be a beneficial alliance. In particular, the USA, in the context of coalition forces against ISIS and El Nusra in the 2014 Kobanê siege, supported PYD politically and YPG in military dimension and started to help. During the bombardment of the ISIS sites, the USA moved in coordination with YPG—the military side of the PYD. PYD, along with YPG, has been conducting a two-way strategy towards both the USA and Russia. PYD/YPG, which fought together with the USA against the ISIS in the north of the country, also received support from Russia against the same rival in the south.

Besides, the Kurdish movement in Syria has closely followed the Kurdistan state-building in Iraq since the 1990s and gained experience. After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, although the Iraq Kurdish Nationalist Movement has been followed by the Syrian Kurdish

movement after the Syrian crisis, Iraqi KDP entered into a struggle for power over the Syrian Kurds with the PKK-PYD. As for Turkey, PKK is the main enemy, but KDP (Barzani) is the best alliance. AKP deliberately has been supporting Kurdistani parties aligned with KDP as a tool to take away the demands of both PYD and PKK at international platforms.

Conclusion: Demands and Expectations

The Kurdish Movement with its own internal and external dynamics has been affected by regional developments and has focused on areas like cultural, national and struggle for human rights and political pressure. At the same time, the Kurdish Movement tries to change the regime's policy towards Kurds and establish a legal base for identity and cultural activities and practices. In other words, they demand reverse of the Arabisation policies, democratisation of the Syrian political system, respect for human rights and development of Kurd–Arab affairs. Until today, the Kurdish political parties have not been legalised, and their activities were banned, and they did not demand for an independent Kurdish state/Kurdistan; rather, they demand for a democratic autonomy in Rojava called (Western) Kurdistan and/or federalism. The quest for a peaceful solution, secular construction and constitutional protection, removal of discriminative, racist and chauvinist practices are some of the demands. Also, giving back citizenship rights to the ones who were removed from the citizenry in 1962 and returning Arabised (Arab Belt) Kurdish regions in the Ba'ath regime are part of the demands as well.

Since 1957, PDKS has been through numerous separations. These separations can be explained with more formal reasons, personal interests as well as internal and external factors, instead of ideologic (rightest-leftist), forming new and compelling elements. No Kurdish Party—the Kurdish Movement in Syria different from that in Iraq and Turkey—did not demand for armed conflict and not spread it in the Kurdish-dominated regions. Almost all of the Kurdish parties in Syria are implementing a strategy aimed at separating themselves from the radical religious elements of the regional sovereign actors (especially Syrian Islamist dissidents, Iraq, Iran and Turkey). Kurdish parties believe that this distinction will earn international legitimacy and support for the Kurds.

On the other hand, internal organisational structures of the Syrian Kurdish parties are conflicting with their commitment to democracy, clearly. Because of numerous separations, Syrian Kurdish problem and

transnational nature, it turned into KDP-PKK intra-blocs struggle for power, and therefore their structures were weak(en)ed. A long-term success for the Kurdish people as a force in regional politics will be dependent on their ability to start cooperative relations among various Kurdish political movements (umbrella organisations). The Kurdish politics in Syria is shaped by deep rifts and competition between the PYD and ENKS; the need to cooperate will fulfil these expectations even partly. Moreover, mainly the USA, Turkey and KRG as well as Russia will play a significant role in the future of Kurdish movements in Syria. KRG will be cautious to protect its affairs with Turkey, but is affected by developments in the Kurdish regions of Syria and therefore, KRG–Turkey relations will bring significant restrictions on KRG's capacity to cooperate with PYD.

Notes

1. Kurdistan geography, which used to be within borders of two countries: Iran and Ottoman State prior to the First World War, was left for France (Syrian Kurdistan) with the Ankara Treaty (1921), and the province of Mosul (Iraqi Kurdistan) was left for British Iraq Mandatory with Ankara Treaty (1926).
2. Tejel, J. (2009) *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, Routledge: New York (Tejel 2009).
3. Arslan, S. (2016) "Rojava Kronoloji I", *Toplum ve Kuram*, Sayı: 11, Bahar 2016, p. 122 (Arslan 2016).
4. Halhalli, B. (2015) "Turkish Policy towards the Kurds in Syria", *Conflicts, Context & Realities in the Middle East-IDEAZ Journal*, No: 13, p. 41 (Halhalli 2015).
5. While making political preferences, armed struggle is most preferred political movement in Kurdish geography outside of Syria, whereas Syrian Kurdish parties never carried out an armed struggle except for the short-lived and failed Kurdistan Freedom Movement (Tevgera Azadiya Kurdistan). For further information, Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul; Tejel, J. (2009) *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, Routledge: New York (Schmidinger 2015; Tejel 2009).
6. The official certain numbers and statistics are not available because of the Syrian Constitution's reference to the citizens in Syrian Arab Republic as Arab, and no valid population census is conducted as well as denial policies of Kurdish presence and identity. For further information, please see: Bengio, O. (2014) *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in*

a Fragmented Homeland, University of Texas Press: Austin; Gunter, M. (2011), *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Problem in Turkey and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York (Bengio 2014; Gunter 2011).

7. Bingöl, N. (2013) *Suriye'nin Kimliksizleri Kürtler*, Do yayınları: Istanbul, p. 50 (Bingöl 2013).
8. Although at the beginning of 1920s, Bozan and Muhammed Sahin—members of the Berazi Tribe living in the region of Kobane—and those living around the Kurd Mountain and the then Kurdish Member of Parliament Nuri Kandy demanded administrative autonomy for all regions where the majority of population was Kurdish people, the French Mandate Administration divided the country by giving autonomy or granting special regime status, respectively, into the Lebanon (Christian) State, Alevi State, Cebel-i Durzi State, Aleppo State and later Iskendurun County within Aleppo State.
9. The families of Cemilpasazade and Bedirxaniler, Ihsan Nuri Pasa, Haco Aga, Cegerxwin, Nureddin Zaza, Ferzende, Memduh Selim, Seyh Ali Rıza, Osman Sabri, Mehmet Sukru Sekban played a significant role in establishing and carrying out activities of Xoybûn Organization. Further information on this can be found at following sources: Tejel, J. (2009) *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, Routledge: New York; Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul; Bolme, S. M. (2015), "Hoybun Örgütü: Kürt Milliyetçiliğinde Yeni bir Evre [Hoybun Organization: A new era in Kurdish Nationalism]", *International Journal of Kurdish Studies,* 1 (2), S. 22–42 (Bolme 2015).
10. Kutschera, C. (2013) Kürt Ulusal Hareketi, Avesta Kitap: İstanbul, p. 114 (Kutschera 2013).
11. Although in the period of occupation there was no significant gainings, with many ways and approaches it brought a fresh impetus to the Kurdish movement and left significant gainings for the following organizations. For example, the established various Kurdish associations, medressehs, Hawat and Roja Nu journals expressing the Kurdish belonging, feeling and Kurdish ideas took the Kurds a new phase. Bolme, S. M. (2015), "Hoybun Örgütü: Kürt Milliyetçiliğinde Yeni bir Evre [Hoybun Organization: A new era in Kurdish Nationalism]", *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 1 (2), S. 22–42.
12. Bulut, F. (2015) *Tarih Boyunca Kürtlerde Diplomasi 1. Cilt*, Evrensel Basım Yayın: İstanbul, p. 284 (Bulut 2015).
13. Allsopp, H. (2015) *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East*, IB Tauris: London-New York (Allsopp 2015).

14. Minorsyk, V. & Bois, T. (2008) *Kürt Milliyetçiği*, Örgün Yayınevi: İstanbul, p. 138 (Minorsyk 2008).
15. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, p. 82.
16. Tejel, J. (2015) *Suriye Kürtleri: Tarih, Siyaset ve Toplum*, İntifada Yayınları: İstanbul, p. 153 (Tejel 2015).
17. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, p. 92.
18. Human Rights Watch (2009), *Group denial: Repression of Kurdish political and cultural rights in Syria*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 2009).
19. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, p. 102.
20. Bingöl, N. (2013) *Suriye'nin Kimliksizleri Kürtler*, Do yayınları: İstanbul, p. 52.
21. Both Dr. Nureddin Zaza and Osman Sabri went to Syria after the failure of Seyh Said rebellion. There, they took prominent roles in first establishing Xoybûn and then PDKS.
22. Kurdswatch (2011), *Who is the Syrian-Kurdish Opposition? The Development of Kurdish Parties, 1956–2011*, Report 8, http://kurdwatch.org/pdf/kurdwatch_parteien_en.pdf (Kurdswatch 2011).
23. Abdulhamit Heci Derviş, although he was not leftist, joined his student fellow Celal Talabani's Marxist camp in 1965. For further information, see: Tejel, J. (2015) *Suriye Kürtleri: Tarih, Siyaset ve Toplum*, İntifada Yayınları: İstanbul.
24. PDPKS which originated from PDKS's right wing continued to exist under the name of PDKS between 1970 and 1983 and with a decision made in 1983 the party name was changed as Partiya Demokrata Pêşverû ya Kurd li Sûriyê.
25. ORSAM (2012) "*Suriye'deki Kürt Hareketleri (Kurdish Movements in Syria*", Report No: 127, p. 18. http://www.orsam.org.tr/eski/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/201286_127%20yeniraporson.pdf (ORSAM 2012).
26. Partiya Demokrata Kurd li Sûriyê- The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria.
27. "Suriye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi Başkanını Seçti", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 09.04.2014. http://aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/suriye-kurdistan-demokrat-partisi-baskanini-secti/168560 (Suriye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi Başkanını Seçti 2014).
28. Bulut, F. (2015) *Tarih Boyunca Kürtlerde Diplomasi 2. Cilt*, Evrensel Basım Yayın: İstanbul, p. 100 (Bulut 2015).

29. "Syrian Peshmerga to Return Home After Training in Iraq", *Anadolu Ajansı (Anadolu Agency)*, 24.01.2017 (Syrian Peshmerga to Return Home After Training in Iraq 2017).
30. Bulut, F. (2015) *Tarih Boyunca Kürtlerde Diplomasi 2. Cilt*, Evrensel Basım Yayın: İstanbul, p. 97.
31. As can be inferred, there are two Azadî parties in Syrian Kurdistan today. Hayrettin Murad lost power a while ago and had to leave his place for Mustafa Hıdır Oso. In brief, today there are two Azadi parties- one is led by Mustafa Cuma and the other one is by Mustafa Hıdır Oso.
32. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, pp. 254–255.
33. For further information, see: Ibid.
34. At the present time, İbrahim Biro is leader of the both KNC and the Kurdish Union (Yekîtî) Party.
35. Co-chairmanship was put into practice with the fifth congress held with the slogans of "Democracy for Syria, autonomy for Western Kurdistan" on 16 June 2012. Salih Muslim and Asya Abdullah were selected to be co-chairs. Although nearly all parties claimed to have women members, except for the PYD among the Syrian-Kurdish parties the politics remained to be dominated/controlled by the men.
36. International Crisis Group (2013) *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle*. Middle East Report no. 136. Brussels: ICG (International Crisis Group 2013).
37. According to the International Crisis Group report, founding year of Kurdish Democratic Union of Syria is 1994 and Kurdish Democratic Patriotics Party of Syria is 2000. However, Schmidinger refers to the founding years as 1992 in his book (War and Revolution in Syrian Kurdistan) and Allsopp refers as 1996 in his book (The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East).
38. Allsopp, H. (2015) *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East*, IB Tauris: London-New York, p. 96.
39. ENKS which was founded on 26 October 2011 and after several stages the Party covers only seven parties today and is known to have close relationship with Mesud Barzani- the KDP leader and the leader of the Iraq Kurdistan Regional Government. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, p. 104.
40. Schmidinger, T. (2014) "Syrian-Kurdistan and its Political Actors", *Research Briefing*, (Handout) at the Conference: The Syrian Conflict and the Promotion of Reconciliation and its Implications for International Security (Vienna, February 6–7, 2014) (Schmidinger 2014).

41. For the full text of agreement (English and Arabic), please refer to: http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_D027_en_ar.pdf.
42. The Kurds under the control of PYD, claim that Syrian National Council and Revolutionary Forces Coalition (SMDK) are "still Arab nationalist organizations with the strong tendencies of Arab Islamists" and imples that the country's ethnic and religious pluralism is insufficient. Moreover, they claim that Council is under influence of Turkish Government and they do not trust.
43. ORSAM (2012) "*Suriye'deki Kürt Hareketleri (Kurdish Movements in Syria)*", Report No: 127, p. 39.
44. Merkez Strateji Enstitüsü (MSE) "Suriye'deki Kürt Hareketi: Suriye'de PYD/YPG'nin PKK ve Bölgesel Kürt Dinamiği ile İlişkisi ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri", Report No: 14, p. 13 (Merkez Strateji Enstitüsü 2016).
45. Tejel, J. (2015) *Suriye Kürtleri: Tarih, Siyaset ve Toplum*, İntifada Yayınları: İstanbul, p. 190 (Tejel 2015).
46. Bingöl, N. (2013) *Suriye'nin Kimliksizleri Kürtler*, Do yayınları: İstanbul, p. 60 (Bingöl 2013).
47. Schmidinger, T. (2015) *Suriye Kürdistanı'nda Savaş ve Devrim: Rojavadan Sesler*, Analizler, Yordam Kitap: İstanbul, pp. 88–89 (Schmidinger 2015).
48. Allsopp, H. (2015) *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East*, IB Tauris: London-New York, pp. 117–118.
49. Ibid., p. 100.
50. Taştekin, F. (2016) *Rojava Kürtlerin Zamanı*, İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul, p. 115 (Taştekin 2016).
51. Allsopp, H. (2015) *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East*, IB Tauris: London-New York, p. 114.
52. Even Kurdish politician, Abdulbasit Seyda, who was brought to the presidency of the Syrian National Council, has not collected the Kurds under the Council roof.
53. Tejel, J. (2015) *Suriye Kürtleri: Tarih, Siyaset ve Toplum*, İntifada Yayınları: İstanbul, p. 152.
54. Halhallı, B. (Mart, 2015), "Türkiye'nin Rojava Çıkmazı", *Türkiye Politika ve Araştırma Merkezi (Research Turkey)*, Cilt IV, Sayı 3, pp. 93–99, Londra: Research Turkey (Halhalli 2015b).
55. While the EU and the US are considered PKK as terrorist organization, PYD/YPG is not considered as such. The AKP government defines both PKK and PYD as terrorist organizations due to using same organizational structure, strategy, tactic, propaganda means, financial sources and training camps. For further information on this, please refer to the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.tr.mfa.

56. Halhallı, B. (Mart, 2015), "Türkiye'nin Rojava Çıkmazı", *Türkiye Politika ve Araştırma Merkezi (Research Turkey)*, Cilt IV, Sayı 3, S. 93–99, Londra: Research Turkey.
57. Ibid.
58. After several stages, ENKS which currently has only 7 parties in its own influence, is known to be close to Massoud Barzani, leader of the KDP and President of Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government. At the same time, ENKS is represented by Ibrahim Biro, the president of the *Yekiti*.

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PART II

Ideas

CHAPTER 3

Human Security Versus National Security: Kurds, Turkey and Syrian Rojava

Serhun Al

The security dimension of nationalism has been mostly understudied as many studies on nationalism have focused on the political and social dimensions. However, both for state nationalisms and minority nationalisms, security aspect remains an important dimension in the emergence and path dependency of nationalist discourses. Yet, what these nationalisms understand from security may differ to a great extent. While state nationalism prioritizes the security of the state in the sense of its territorial integrity and the interests of "national security" defined by state actors, minority nationalisms tend to define security in broader terms which is beyond the state-centric approach. The security understanding of minority nationalisms tends to be closer to what the United Nations Development Programme broadly framed as "human security," particularly freedom from fear in the sense of cultural, psychological and linguistic security. This chapter attempts to examine the function of nationalism as an instrument of security which is understood differently by state and minority group actors through an analysis of complexity among Kurds, Turkey, and Syrian Rojava (Western Kurdistan). The breakdown of the Kurdish peace

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process (2013–2015) with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkey's national security concern with regards to the Kurds and YPG in Rojava is discussed within the theoretical framework of competing security understandings of state and nonstate actors.

Introduction

The security dimension of nationalism has been mostly understudied as many studies on nationalism have observed and analyzed the political and cultural aspects of the field. However, both for state nationalisms and minority nationalisms, security aspect remains an important dimension in the emergence and path dependency of nationalist discourses. Yet, what these nationalist ideas understand from security differ to a great extent. For instance, while state nationalism prioritizes the security of the state in the sense of its territorial integrity and the interests of "national security" defined by state actors, minority nationalisms tend to define security in broader terms which is beyond the state-centric approach. The security understanding of minority nationalisms tends to be closer to what the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Human Development Report of 1994 framed as "human security" which is more people-centered rather than state-centered.[1] This chapter attempts to examine the function of nationalism as an instrument of security which is understood differently by state and minority nationalisms through an analysis of the Kurds in the Middle East. In the post-Ottoman era, while the Kurds in Iraq and Syria have historically been subject to "Arabization" policies at the hands of the state actors, the Kurdish identity in Turkey was denied and subject to assimilation up until the end of the twentieth century.[2] Thus, historically security for the Kurds, as a stateless ethnic group, mostly meant cultural, linguistic, and physical security against the repressive and assimilationist policies of the state actors.

In 1994, the UNDP report introduced the concept of "human security" and declared that the traditional understanding of security had been state-centric for too long that ignored chronic threats such as hunger, disease, repression, and environmental degradation that many people feel insecure from around the world.[3] While the nature of such chronic threats have become transnational beyond the control of a particular state, the traditional state-centric understandings of security in terms of "territorial integrity" and "national unity" have been dissolved as many nonstate actors have challenged the forms and contents of "national

security" as defined by states. For instance, in many contexts of intrastate ethnic conflicts, state actors have framed the political and cultural claim-makings of rival ethnic groups as threats to their territorial integrity and national unity, leading to the securitization of such rival identities. On the other hand, rival ethnic groups have claimed that the state-centric security frames have not been able to protect their vital freedoms surrounding their distinct identity.

In this chapter, I argue that, in such competing approaches to the understanding of security, nationalism plays an important role as an instrument of "security-provider" both for the state actors and the rival ethnic groups. While the official nationalism discourses of the state prioritizes the security of the state and "securitizes" any alternative approaches to "national security", minority nationalisms tend to prioritize "the human security" of their own communities and their nationalist discourse establishes a comfort zone against the state's repression on their identity. Taking the case of the Kurdish question in the Middle East with a focus on Turkey, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the dialectical relationship between security and nationalism.

In the first section, I will provide a discussion on the conceptual value of "human security" with particular emphasis on cultural security. Then, I will conceptually examine the relationship between nationalism and human security. In the second section, the historical background of Kurds and their political and cultural struggles in Turkey will be discussed within the framework of human security and nationalism. In the final section, I will present my main argument with regards to "nationalism as a threat" and "nationalism as a comfort zone" for the Kurdish cultural security.

An Alternative Security Understanding: The Human Security Approach

Theoretical debates on security among the scholars and policymakers of international relations have been built on the questions of what security is, what should be or is being secured, what leads to insecurity, and how insecurity should be best resolved.[4] While realists and neorealists prioritize the state as the main referent of security in the sense of protecting territorial integrity from external aggression and address such insecurities mostly in the self-help system and through the degree of military strength,[5] liberals recognize the role of the state and nonstate actors such as international institutions in building interdependent relations to maintain and seek for

security.[6] Constructivist scholars have challenged the fixed and essentialist understandings of security especially in realist and neorealist frameworks and introduced the malleability of taken-for-granted concepts and behaviors within the social processes and interactions between state and nonstate actors.[7] The post-Cold War era increased the pace of critiques on state-centric understandings of security since many challenges such as "transborder threats such as poverty, globalization and environmental disasters, internal armed conflicts and international terrorism—have failed to be resolved by traditional realist responses."[8]

A security perspective as the mere military concern of the state has been mostly taken for granted without much questioning of the possible breadth and depth of the concept. For instance, the state definition of "national security" mostly homogenizes the nation and takes it as a monolithic body neglecting the interests of different cultural or ethnic groups that constitute the nation. Thus, the interchangeable disposal of the state and the nation together implicitly leads to the assumption that the security of the state directly creates a secure environment for the nation in general and certain ethnic groups in particular. This interchangeable rationale between the concepts of state and nation has been the departure point of alternative discourses under the critical security studies.[9] Sam C. Nolutshungu argues that "states, presiding over diverse and unequal societies, simply are not always representative of, or responsive to, all sections of their populations; nor are state interests always coterminous or congruent with popular interests."[10] The conceptual dissociation of the state from the nation, by all means, entails a reconfiguration of the boundaries of security as the state-centric conception. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever succinctly express how the conventional understanding of security is changing in our contemporary world:

> … the story of global security becomes more diversified. A relatively uniform picture of military-political security dynamics dominated by state actors gives way to multisectoral conceptions of security, a wider variety of actors, and sets of conditions and dynamics differ sharply from one region to another.[11]

The need for a broader understanding of security which would go beyond the "national" interests of the state was taken into consideration in the 1994 UNDP report which introduced the concept of human security. The human security approach opens up the narrow framework of military-oriented security approaches. Since then, most of the literature on human

security has been originated from the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report in 1994 which extensively raised concerns over the security of human beings rather than of states:

> Human security is *people-centered*. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities-and whether they live in conflict or in peace.[12]

The report also states that the concept of security should be altered in two ways: (1) "From an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security" and (2) "From security through armaments to security through sustainable human development."[13] Thus, the content of human security includes categories of economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community (cultural) security, and political security. In such widening of the security concept, the referent object shifts from the state to the people as groups on the one hand and individuals on the other. In other words, the human security approach is mostly concerned with non-state human collectivities. The 2003 report by the UN Commission on Human Security concluded that:

> Human security means protecting vital freedoms. It means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, building on their strengths and aspirations. It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity, and livelihood. Human security connects different types of freedoms—freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one's own behalf. To achieve human security, it offers two general strategies: protection and empowerment.[14]

As Walid Salem argues, "the main objective of human security is to guarantee the freedom of every individual for the promotion and preservation of his/her well-being and dignity."[15] This also reflects the emancipatory notion of human security approach where the eradication of structural and contingent oppressions by the state institutions is particularly emphasized.[16] Human security emphasizes the absence of threat to the core values of individuals including physical survival, welfare, and identity.[17] Overall, the human security approach has been one of the central theoretical and practical frameworks of the critical security studies which have developed a vast body of literature against the traditional/mainstream security studies, largely criticized as being

heavily state-centric. Nevertheless, ambiguity over the limits of the concept of human security in terms of its precise definition and extensive inclusiveness has raised critical voices whether the concept has any theoretical value.[18]

The concerns over the definitional ambiguity of human security revolve around the questions that where human security begins and where it ends. This, in turn, questions the idea whether human security approach can be considered as a paradigm shift in the security studies. In other words, some scholars state that if human security means everything, then it has no conceptual value.[19] Besides, it is hard to say that scholars reach an agreement what really human security is. Therefore, one might argue that human security is conceptually contested. It is contested in the sense that narrow or wide, theoretical or policy-oriented definitions, to some extent, hinder a scholarly agreement on a precise and single definition of human security. However, in any case, the theoretical value of human security as a conceptual tool lies in its flexibility which can be applied to myriad cases where collectivities of human beings encounter various categories of insecurity in which the security of the state is not sufficient to establish security to those insecure communities. On the other hand, the emphasis should be given not to what human security is, but rather to what *human security is not.* In that sense, "both in theory and practice, the concept of human security indicates a shift in the main referent object of security" which explains that "it is no longer the state we are concerned about (*national* or state security), nor traditional warfare (military security)".[20] In fact, this is where the critical security scholars have consensus. Aylin Ozet states that "all the critical security scholars tend to agree that state-centric and military-focused security policies can be detrimental to the lives of human beings".[21] Therefore, human security is "not about designating individuals as referent objects, but about countering dominant state-centric thinking".[22] For the sake of this chapter's scope, I take the human security concept in its flexibility and its dissociation from the state-centric security conceptions with particular emphasis on the issues of cultural security which is one of the important dimensions of human security.

Cultural Security

Cultural security is one of the components of the human security perspective. Identity boundaries such as ethnicity, religion, and gender are the concerns over the ontological insecurity of certain communities

if they are likely to be marginalized due to their willingness to express their identities vis-à-vis the dominant identity that they live within. Assimilation-based nation-building processes have been one of the most important threats to the diversity of various linguistic and cultural communities around the world within which their existential security has been challenged. Therefore, "the quest for existential security can be linked with and expressed through issues of national, ethnic, gender and religious identity as ways in which people create collective meanings".[23] Since the cultural and linguistic identity of ethnic communities is the means for establishing collective meanings for the external world and for sustaining their existential heritage, the question of how they are free from fear to express their identity is very crucial within the human security dimension. Marginal populations are more likely to be the subject of cultural insecurity. Sam C. Nolutshungu defines marginal populations as "distinguishable minorities within states whose integration to the society and state is markedly incomplete so that their participation in either is partial, intermittent, or subject to qualifications or restrictions"[24] and he argues that "'national minorities' claiming a right to self-determination are usually of this type".[25] The Kurdish question in the Middle East is an important case in unpacking what cultural security is and why it is important. Since culture and language tend to be intrinsic parts of the same whole, the issue of language for ethnic communities such as Kurds is vital for the pursuit of well-being and the development of self-esteem and their cognitive development.

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas states that "ethnic groups are often defined as belonging to a linguistic minority on the basis of their mother tongue, in particular groups not distinguishable from the majority by anything much more than by their language".[26] The question of why a minority language would be critical for the psychological entirety of the community needs attention in terms of analyzing the cultural (in)security of marginal populations.[27] With psychological entirety, I seek to point out that language is not simply a tool for mutual communication. In essence, "language is a system of symbols by means of which the individual is able to describe the external world, the reality which surrounds her, and her own internal world, her inner reality, as well as the relationship between these two".[28] Under conditions of linguistic assimilation, individuals are less likely to describe their external and internal world from their own linguistic heritage, but from another language's meaning-making framework. Under such break off between self and the external world, an individual's

cognitive development is more likely to be psychologically distorted than a person who enjoys cultural and linguistic safety. As Li Wei states, "through language choice, we maintain and change ethnic group boundaries and personal relationships, and construct and define 'self' and 'other' within a broader political economy and historical context".[29] This is where I shall turn to the relationship between cultural (in)security and nationalism and how they would reinforce or mitigate each other.

Nationalism and Human Security

If human security is a shift from state-centric notions of security to people-centered security concerns, and if this entails an interaction between the formation of the state and the marginal communities, nationalism is likely to be one of the puzzles, especially regarding to the politics of cultural identity drawing the lines of "self" and "other". In other words, the dispute between "self" and "other" may lead to a security dilemma, not among states, but among cultural communities within a specific state. My argument is that state nationalism can be perceived as a threat to certain ethnic minority communities who claim to have distinct identity than the national identity claims of the state. For instance, in the Kurdish case, state nationalisms in Iraq and Syria with strict emphasis on Arab identity and the state nationalism in Turkey with emphasis on monolithic Turkishness have led to a deep cultural and linguistic insecurity for the Kurds. However, Kurdish nationalism and armed Kurdish rebellions have been historically perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of the states in the region. The question is how this kind of security dilemmatic interaction affects the human security of Kurds since they are historically disadvantaged population and how this zero-sum game of security concerns can be turned into a win-win game. By a win-win game, I mean that while the pursuit of national security by the central state actors can build a collective secure environment for the Kurds, pro-Kurdish claims for cultural recognition and political representation would not risk the security of the states in terms of state collapse or state death.[30] As Turkish, Iraqi, and Syrian states historically justified their repression of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights based on their concern for "the survival of the state" (*devletin bekası* in Turkish), it is important to overcome the zero-sum game mentality when it comes to the political and cultural development of the Kurds in the Middle East.

For instance, Kurdish peace process (2013–2015) between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state was a significant attempt to overcome the zero-sum game between the Turkish and Kurdish nationalist discourses. While Ankara framed its national security without criminalizing and securitizing pro-Kurdish actors, many Kurds psychologically, emotionally, and culturally felt secure and safe within the Turkish national unity discourse. For instance, the pro-Kurdish legal party, Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), framed its June 2015 general election campaign as "*Türkiyelileşme*" (being a party of Turkey, not just Kurds). In other words, national security and human security approaches and ideas did not clash with each other during this peace process until the PKK and Turkish military began an all-out-war after the June 7th, 2015 elections. One of the key reasons for the breakdown of this peace process in Turkey was the Syrian civil war where the PKK-affiliated Peoples' Protection Units (known as YPG) began to expand its territorial influence and control in northern Syria during its fight against the jihadist the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), almost becoming the new neighbor of Turkey. The idea of the PKK becoming almost a de facto state in northern Syria as a legitimate actor in the international coalition against the ISIS triggered Ankara's traditional *raison d'état*: fears with regards to the survival of the state. Moreover, the July 2016 failed military coup attempt against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) led to a nation-wide state of emergency within which many pro-Kurdish political actors and cultural institutions have been purged. The process from the peace process to an infectious Syrian civil war and the Kurdish political development in northern Syria once again triggered the zero-sum game between Turkish national security ideas and Kurdish human security concerns.

For the sake of this chapter, I intend to explore nationalism from a security perspective. Traditionally, nationalism represents the idea of bringing a nation and the state together under a political roof of nation-state within its own territory.[31] The question of why a specific nation would seek its own state is an issue of debate as well. According to Jack Snyder; "nationalism reflects a need to establish an effective state to achieve a group's economic and security goals".[32] Moreover, Douglas Woodwell argues that "nationalism represents, in the broadest sense, a desire to mitigate the degree of foreign influence and control exercised over the members and perceived territory of a nation".[33] Thus, in order to construct or establish boundaries of the "self", there needs to be a degree of interaction with the "other". Foreign is being the "other" and this

reciprocal interaction turns into the politicization of both group identities invigorating with and by nationalism. Within that interaction, nationalism shapes itself as "the rejection of excessive or illegitimate foreign influence and/or control over national populations or territory".[34] Then, nationalism is an instrument of security—political, economic, and/or cultural—used by national groups where the goal is to create their own living space along with their own governing institutions within an idealized territory. However, if this ideal project is realized where the territories of nation-state host the "other" or the "foreign" as well, then nationalism as an instrument of security might have a rival nationalism which can be utilized as an instrument of security by the "other," possibly resulting in a security dilemma between the "self" and the "other" within the state. This brings up the issue of multiculturalism and collective rights within the nation-state since "the single most important project of nation-state was, and continues to be, homogenization".[35] Human security, especially in terms of cultural security, comes into question within this problematic interaction between homogenization and cultural diversity within the territories of nation-state, revealing a power relationship between the majority (homogenizer) and the minority (anti-homogenizer).

Security Dilemma and Nationalism as an Instrument for Security

The homogenizing mentality of the majority nationalism which manifests itself in systematic state policies such as the nonrecognition of minority identities at the public sphere potentially generates a cultural threat for minority identities. Due to the fact that homogenization is "an effort to liquidate the identity of minority groups so that their claim for collective rights can be put in jeopardy and delegitimized",[36] the cultural security of minority groups is directly under risk if they cannot resist to assimilation imposed by the dominant social, cultural, and political institutions. Again, as Jack Snyder argues, if "people look to states to provide security and promote economic prosperity",[37] then minority groups might potentially look for agents of security other than the state, if not their own state. Such ambition of self-determination for the sake of cultural or political security can potentially turn into an ethnic conflict in which one side of the conflict is driven by a state-sponsored nationalism while the other side is galvanized by a state-seeking nationalism. While the majority nationalism, which is state-sponsored, seeks to protect the territorial integrity of the state and the unity of the nation, minority nationalism

with state-seeking inspirations or ambitions of autonomy seeks to challenge the projects of homogenization in order to form a living space for their own cultural and linguistic survival. This story also reveals the relationship of the internal colonizer and the internally colonized. The quest for security for the colonized mobilizes them toward two possible alternatives; secession or federal autonomy.[38] Therefore, while the nationalism of the state poses a threat to human security of the minority, the minority nationalism is also perceived as a threat to the state's "national security" interests. This creates a Janus-faced nationalism as an instrument of security provider for the state actors on the one hand and the minority ethnic groups on the other: (1) Nationalism as a threat and (2) Nationalism as a comfort zone.

For instance, Kurdish aspirations in Iraq are more toward an independent state which Baghdad would not strictly oppose unless the deal is negotiated between Baghdad and Erbil. Moreover, since Iraqi Kurdistan is already an official federal entity secured in the post-Saddam 2005 constitution, the Iraqi sovereignty has been now shared. Kurdish claim-makings in Turkey and Syria are leaning toward cultural and administrative autonomy from the central state and any aspirations for independence seem to be a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the central states. The civil war in Syria in the post-2011 uprisings has already led to a de facto autonomous region for the Kurds, often called Rojava (Western Kurdistan) and Syrian Kurds have already emphasized their policy of protecting the territorial integrity of the Syrian state. In Turkey, the 2-years long peace process between the insurgent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state ended in July 2015 which led to a new wave of urban and rural violence in Turkey. Moreover, although the main pro-Kurdish legal political party, the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP in Turkish acronym) has been able to win most of the municipalities in the majority Kurdish cities in eastern Turkey in the 2014 local elections, the state of emergency rules after the failed military coup attempt in July 2016 have purged many members of the Kurdish political representatives both in municipalities and in the Turkish national parliament. In addition, the furious terrorist attacks of the jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) against the Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey since 2014 have created an added existential threat to the human security of the Kurds in the Middle East. Under these conditions, Kurdish nationalism has become an important instrument of security in order to prevent any threats to their cultural, linguistic, and physical existence.[39]

In the next section, I demonstrate the security dynamics of nationalism by focusing on the case of Kurds in Turkey in the light of collapsed "peace process" (2013–2015) and the Syrian civil war.

Turkey, Kurds, and Rojava in Syria

As I have argued elsewhere, the boundary-building in modern Turkish nationhood on the basis of Muslimhood and Turkish language led to a strictly singular and monolithic national identity rather than a plural and hyphenated identity where ethnic pluralism was never promoted or allowed by the Turkish state elites.[40]

With an estimated population of 14.7 million which amounts to 18% of Turkey's total population,[41] Kurds have historically been securitized by the state. Publicly claiming to be a Kurd, speaking Kurdish in public space, and publishing in Kurdish meant to be charged with "treason" to the state and this caused many legal and paramilitary punishments by the judicial and military institutions of the state.

Since the project of Turkish nationalism has not fully achieved to assimilate the Kurds' distinct cultural heritage into the dominant Turkish culture and language, the question of national identity still continues today. Many Kurds are more likely to demand official recognition of their identity and language at the public sphere and state institutions, as the Turkish state continues to manage the cultural grievances of Kurds without risking the "Turkishness" as the primary state identity.

The exclusionary nationalist policies of modern Turkey and its assimilative social engineering policies triggered reflexive reactions from the Kurdish periphery starting from the religious-nationalist based Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 to the rise of the insurgent PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) as a Marxist–Leninist militant movement in the beginning of the 1980s. While the rise of Kurdish nationalism has been perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey, Kurdish nationalism has provided a cultural space for Kurds where they have found a comfort zone to protect their identity and language from external pressures.

Kurdish Cultural (In)security in Turkey

Although the armed conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK insurgents has created an environment of physical insecurity in the Kurdish regions of Turkey as well as in other parts of Turkey, my main

approach to human security of Kurds is focused on the environment of cultural (in)security.

Since the key entity that distinguishes Turkey's Kurds from the majority Turkish identity is the Kurdish language, Kurdish cultural demands have been mostly surrounded within linguistic concerns. Modern Turkey with its emphasis on Turkishness has had fears about granting cultural and linguistic rights to minority groups, especially to Kurds. Concerning Turkey's fear, Kerim Yildiz and Mark Muller argue that:

> One of the greatest challenges to cultural rights, though, is that for some governments, the haunting spectre of group identities distinct from the official national identity provokes acute fears that the territorial integrity of the state will be undermined. Accordingly, it is perceived that conferring cultural rights will lead to a greater cultural awareness among minorities, inspire radicalization of minority claims and ultimately fuel demands for autonomy.[42]

This manifests the fact that the Kurdish demands based on their cultural identity and language have been mostly perceived as a security issue by the Turkish state. Hamit Bozarslan also argues that the regional dimension of the Kurdish question poses a security problem as much for the states as for the Kurds themselves in which particularly Turkey's Kurds suffer from internal colonization where there is no internal autonomy and no external protection.[43] For instance, Ibrahim Sirkeci mentions the effects of Turkish Anti-Terror Law on the free exercise of Kurdish cultural and linguistic capital where this law:

> '…is often used to punish free expression dealing with the Kurdish question along with other laws preventing broadcasting in Kurdish, teaching Kurdish in schools, and using Kurdish in political campaigns… These laws have been the basis for arresting journalists and politicians, confiscating books and publications, censoring and shutting down newspapers and other media throughout the 1990s in Turkey.[44]

In terms of the legal system, Derya Bayir provides an excellent analysis of the discursive history of the Turkish judiciary toward the Kurdish identity. Identifying the Turkish judiciary's discursive attitudes toward the Kurds as "legal forms of Orientalism," her legal-historical analysis shows that Turkish courts' representation of Kurds since the 1970s is based on three overlapping discourses:

> 1. denying the Kurds' separate existence and claiming their Turkishness; 2. acknowledging the Kurds while denying Kurdism; and 3. portraying the Kurds' traditional law, culture and social structure as deficient.[45]

According to Bayir, the main concern of the judiciary has been the right to self-determination by Kurds. Thus, it has been always emphasized that Turks and Kurds belong to the same culture, values, laws, and history. Kurds have been placed in the organic definition of Turkish nationhood. She argues that the post-1990 discourse of the Turkish Constitutional Court resembles pre-1990 discourse of Martial Courts that strictly emphasized the Turkishness of Kurds. The Turkish Constitutional court has seen the Turkish language not only as an official language but as the common language as well which is used in every aspect of social life. It is argued that few people do not speak Turkish in eastern Anatolia. It also rejects the claims of Kurds as territorially concentrated people in the Eastern and Southeastern provinces. Kurds have not been seen as natives of Anatolia. Under these state-led nationalist legal and cultural policies, the Kurdish population of Turkey has encountered the perils of cultural insecurity where their Kurdishness, both culturally and linguistically, has been securitized by the Turkish state.

A research report based on in-depth interviews among Kurds published by Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA) gives an insightful analysis of how Kurdish language is an issue of cultural (in) security.[46] This research specifically relates the right to education in mother tongue to the cultural security of minority communities. According to the study:

> When the use of the mother tongue in education is in question, political, military and civil bureaucracy, as well as judicial authorities, all show extreme sensitivity and resistance to this demand. This stance against the mother tongue prevents the possibility of different cultures within the community from developing and places in a disadvantaged position those with a mother tongue different from the majority language. The multifaceted issues that Kurdish students experience during their education generally arise from two fronts: the first of these is the high rate of poverty in Kurdish-majority regions and the insufficiency of state investment in education combined with improper educational policies.[47]

Overall, the lack of right to education in mother tongue in Turkey is seen as the underlying cause of social conflict and the lack of societal peace in this research published by DISA. This language-based point is very crucial for the development and survival of the Kurdish culture.

Kerim Yildiz and Mark Muller succinctly summarize the relationship between culture and the psychological entirety of an individual:

> Cultural background is one of the primary sources of identity, and the basis for key elements of self-definition, expression, and a sense of group belonging. Thus, cultural rights are not a 'luxury' to be realized at a later stage of development. Culture is inseparable from the quality of being human being, and from the human sense of self-respect, its denial is the inverse: it diminishes the group or individual and undermines their sense of worth.[48]

Therefore, if Kurds are deprived of their culture and language which consist the existential capital of their sense of worth, their psychological entirety will likely to be distorted in the sense that their Kurdishness might turn into a source of inferiority complex vis-à-vis the dominant Turkish identity.

Above all, if Kurdishness is perceived as a sense of weak self-esteem by Kurds vis-à-vis their fellow Turkish nationals, then this poses a serious cultural insecurity for the Kurdish population in Turkey. The security dilemma here is how to restore the security of Kurdish culture and language in Turkey without it being perceived as a threat to the existence of Turkish territorial integrity and national unity. This has been achieved for the first time in the modern history of Turkey when the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) initiated the so-called Kurdish opening (or known as Democratic Initiative) in 2009 and later started the peace process with the PKK in 2013.[49] Yet, the hopes for peace short lived due to the unexpected political developments in northern Syria or Western Kurdistan (Rojava).

From Kurdish Peace Process to Rojava: Missed Opportunity and the Clash of Human versus National Security

In 2002, Turkey's single party period with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) began. In 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leading founder of the party, became the prime minister of Turkey and in 2014 he became the first-elected president of Turkey. The main ideological stance of AKP was conservative democracy with emphasis on the lifestyles of pious Muslims. In their initial years of government, AKP acted as a pro-European Union and reformist actor in order to consolidate the Turkish democracy. This attitude reflected on the state policies toward

historically disadvantaged groups such as the Kurds in parallel with Turkey's official candidacy to the European Union of 1999. Certain harmonization packages were put under way. On April 9, 2002, the notion of "banned language" was lifted from Law on the Press and also the learning of different languages used by Turkish citizens was permitted in private instruction institutions; on August 3, 2002, the freedom to broadcast in different languages was put in effect and in June 2004, the state-sponsored Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) began broadcasting radio and television programs in various languages such as Bosnian, Kurmanci, and Zazaki. And finally, on January 1, 2009, the first Kurdish television channel by the state-sponsored Turkish Radio and Television initiated broadcasting 24/7.[50] These steps later led to the Kurdish Opening in 2009 which sought to establish greater cultural and linguistic rights for the Kurds of Turkey and then transformed into a peace process (2013–2015) with the aim of convincing the PKK to lay its arms.

These times for high hopes for sustainable peace were, in fact, a result of historical moderation between the Kurdish and Turkish nationalist discourses. As I have argued elsewhere, while the pro-Kurdish nationalist discourse, particularly the PKK's rhetoric in the late 1990s, shifted from secessionism to greater cultural rights for the Kurds, the Turkish state distanced itself from the denial of Kurdish identity and forced assimilation after the 2000s.[51] HDP entered the June 2015 general elections with the framework of "Türkiyelileşme" (being part of Turkey) and received around 13% of the total votes winning 80 seats from the 550-seat parliament.[52]

These developments in Turkey's Kurdish identity and language policies represented significant initial steps in transforming the historical dilemma between the human security of the Kurds and Turkish nationalism. In other words, these policies were perhaps the first attempts of seeing the human security of Kurds as the "national" security of the Turkish state. In other words, the cultural security of Kurds and the national security of the Turkish state was not extensively viewed as mutually exclusive dimensions but rather seen as mutually constitutive policies that would secure the territorial integrity and national unity of Turkey without neglecting the cultural needs of the Kurds. These reforms and peace efforts were the first comprehensive attempts to turn the zero-sum game between Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms into a "win-win" situation for both political camps. The idea of "win-win" situation ended with the Syrian civil war and the rise of the PKK-affiliated YPG ruling in northern Syria.

The Syrian civil war started after the 2011 protests following the wave of the Arab Spring across the Middle East. The harsh suppression of these protests by President Bashar Al-Assad gradually turned into a war between various rebel groups and the Syrian government.[53] While the jihadist ISIS expanded its territories and turned the city of Raqqa as its de facto capital, Kurds in northern Syria within the leadership of YPG first protected Kurdish territories and then expanded its influence in three cantons: Jazeera, Kobani, and Afrin in northern Syria.[54] Particularly, in October 2014, when the Islamic State attacked the obscure Kurdish town called Kobani, YPG along with the US air missile support showed a great resistance. This moment was the first time that the expansion of ISIS was stopped on the ground. YPG fighters became international celebrity figures as heroes against the radical Islamist terrorists.

YPG is also a follower of PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan's ideas with regards to democratic Kurdish autonomy and thus, the Turkish state refused to differentiate YPG from the PKK, which is a US-designated terrorist group. In other words, for Turkey, the idea of PKK and PKK-affiliated groups in northern Syria becoming an international legitimate actor in the fight against the ISIS was frightening and it triggered Turkey's traditional "survival of the state" understanding of its national security. On the other hand, the PKK saw Rojava as an opportunity to experiment and practice its "ideal society." Thus, the cost of abandoning the Kurdish peace process was not high for the PKK since the organization was able to establish a new living space in Rojava.

In fact, the leader of the political wing of YPG, known as PYD (Democratic Union Party), Saleh Muslim was in direct communication with Ankara in order to talk the ways in which the group and Turkey would establish a strategic alliance in Syria against the atrocities of the Bashar Al-Assad government. In February 2015, the Turkish military and YPG even cooperated as the Turkish armed forces entered northern Syria in order to remove the tomb of Suleyman Shah—the grandfather of the founder of the Ottoman empire, Osman I.[55] In order to protect the tomb from the potential Islamic State attack, the Turkish military moved the tomb near the northern Syrian village of Esme (Ashma). During the Newroz celebrations of March 2015 in Diyarbakir, a letter from the imprisoned Abdullah Ocalan was read that emphasized and appreciated the cooperation of YPG and the Turkish military which he framed as "the Spirit of Esme:"

> I call on nation states to engage in a new type of democratic process, and I call on them to build for themselves a new democratic collective abode in the Middle East. In addition, today I call on the women and youths who beat the wings for freedom, and who form the overwhelming majority, to strive for success in economic, social and political fields and in the realm of security. Furthermore, I salute the resistance and victory of Kobane which has great significance for our region and for the whole world. In this manner, I greet the "Spirit of Esme" which has been embellished as a symbol of a new era. These declarations which I have stated above comprise in one sentence a vital call for the rebuilding of society and for revision and restoration, both for our past and for our present.[56]

By "the Spirit of Esme," Ocalan was referring to a political, cultural, and military Kurdish–Turkish alliance and cooperation in the Middle East. In other words, he was referring to a win-win condition beyond the security dilemma between Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms. If this Kurdish–Turkish alliance would become real against the jihadist threat of ISIS, the human and cultural (in) security of the Kurds and pro-Kurdish groups in Turkey and Syria would be soothed as well as the national insecurities of the Turkish state with regards to the regional threats in the Middle East.

However, on the contrary, while Ankara perceived YPG and PKK as a more significant threat than ISIS, PKK did not hesitate to involve in a massive wave of urban violence with Turkish security forces in southeastern Turkey.[57] According to the July 2016 International Crisis Group report, the new wave of violence between the PKK and Turkish security forces since July 2015 led to the death of 885 state security force members, 1063 PKK militants, 385 civilians, and 219 youths of unknown affiliation.[58] In addition, the AKP government has become more authoritarian and repressive on the legal pro-Kurdish actors and institutions in the post-July 15th military coup attempt by turning the declaration of the nation-wide state of emergency into its own tool of exclusion and repression. The most significant reflection of this policy has been the arrest of popular charismatic co-leader of HDP, Selahattin Demirtas on November 4, 2016.[59] Today, reconciliation between Kurdish human and cultural insecurities and the national security fears of the Turkish state seems elusive. For stateless nations, establishing their own human security and achieving psychological entirety is a hard task since these groups are mostly the national security issue for the host states. For this reason, unless host states can make the Kurds feel culturally, linguistically, and

psychologically secure and safe, an independent Kurdish state may perhaps be the only way to achieve Kurdish human security in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The security dimension of nationalism has been mostly understudied, particularly nationalism as an instrument of security provider for both state nationalisms and minority nationalisms. This chapter discussed the relationship between nationalism and human security with an emphasis on cultural security by examining the Kurdish case in Turkey. While I articulated state-led nationalism as a threat to the cultural security of minority groups (i.e., Turkish nationalism and Kurds), I argued that ethnic minority nationalism establishes a comfort zone for the survival and sustainability of their culture and language (i.e., Kurdish nationalism and Kurds).

On the other hand, as the rise of pro-Kurdish claim making in the political context of Turkey has had posed threats to the territorial integrity and national unity of Turkey, these competing discourses of two nationalisms have become both sources of threat and sources of comfort zones. While the cultural (in) security of Kurds led to a Kurdish nationalism as a comfort zone and as a threat to the foundation of Turkish state, the legal and cultural practices of Turkish nationalism posed a threat to the cultural security of Kurds and provided a comfort zone from the costs of changing the well-established social and political institutions of the Turkish republic. Under this contradictory relationship between human security and nationalism, Turkey and the pro-Kurdish movement had an opportunity to move from security dilemmatic relationship toward a win-win situation during the reformist years of the AKP, the so-called Kurdish opening and the Kurdish peace process (2013–2015). Yet, the Rojava factor played a significant factor in the breakdown of such win-win condition (i.e., the Spirit of Esme as Ocalan framed) for the pro-Kurdish groups and the Turkish state as the PKK-affiliated YPG expanded its sphere of influence in northern Syria and became a legitimate international and regional actor in the fight against ISIS. If Kurds in the region cannot socioculturally and linguistically feel secure within the perspective of human security, an independent Kurdish state can be the only sustainable solution.

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CHAPTER 4

Kurdish Nationalist Organizations, Neighboring States, and "Ideological Distance"

F. Michael Wuthrich

An Introduction to the Quandary

On a Friday night, in late October 2014, just days after Turkey had celebrated Republic Day (Cumhuriyet Bayramı), in the town of Suruç, celebratory fireworks were set off once again.[1] Here and along the 250-mile stretch of road connecting this Turkish border town to Şırnak, people lined the streets to watch a military procession. Escorted by Turkish security forces, soldiers in trucks and military vehicles loaded with cannons and heavy machines guns passed to the applause of waving onlookers. The soldiers themselves were dressed in their official uniforms and displaying the flags, not of the red and white of Turkey, but with the red, white, and green stripe and yellow sun of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq.[2] These heavily armed troops were Kurdish Peshmerga, preparing to enter the combat zone of Kobani, Syria with Turkish assistance and coordination.

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The Turkish government had been under pressure from the United States and the coalition of forces battling the Islamic State to do something about the deteriorating situation in Kobani, the middle of three Kurdish enclaves in Syria bordering Turkey to the north. Despite the fact that Turkey had deployed around 10,000 troops to the border overlooking Kobani,[3] the government had been extremely hesitant to support the Syrian Kurdish resistance to the ISIS attack. The international media covered this moment widely, but confusion in the reporting of the events was clearly evident. Outside of the essential details, interpretations of the "why" behind the events and its implications were diverse. Why was *this* the solution that the Turkish government was comfortable with?

On one hand, the hesitancy of Turkey to intervene on behalf of the Syrian Kurds in Kobani seemed to fit the long-standing narrative of Turkish-Kurdish antipathy. The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, elected by a popular majority months earlier, had clearly referred to the Syrian Kurdish resistance fighting ISIS as terrorists and had been trying to block the US from providing these Kurds any material support, certainly not guns and ammunition. Turkey had, however, opened its borders to some 200,000 of Kobani's Kurdish residents. But, if Turkey felt compelled to intervene to support the resistance against an ISIS takeover of Kobani, why would they prefer the transfer of Kurdish Peshmerga troops from Iraqi Kurdistan rather than other more direct options? Why were they willing to let heavily armed Kurdish soldiers from a bordering territory whose autonomous government appeared to be a hair-breadth from establishing an independent Kurdistan? Why forcibly prevent Kurds from within Turkey's own borders or from Iran from joining the fight? If they did not want to create pan-Kurdish affinities by mixing Kurds, why didn't they use their own forces amassed at the border to provide air support for the fighters at Kobani? If direct involvement was undesirable for Turkey, why not simply allow the Americans to use İncirlik air base to conduct strikes against ISIS? Why did Erdoğan seem far more irritated about the US dropping material supplies to the fighters than by providing support and a travel corridor through their own Kurdish-populated territories for a heavily armed Kurdish militia with their flags and uniforms clearly proclaiming an autonomous Kurdistan?

Most news agencies and reports indicated that the move was made "under pressure" from the US and the West, but it is unclear why "the West" would have favored such a complicated logistical solution that

required drawing away Kurdish troops that were also engaged in fighting ISIS in northern Iraq. From the standpoint of coalition support, Turkey could have been involved in a half dozen more efficient ways. It is also interesting to note the ownership that the Turkish government took the decision to escort these Peshmerga forces hundreds of miles across its territory.[4] Erdoğan, at a press conference on Wednesday, October 22, specifically contrasted the appropriateness of bringing the Iraqi Kurds through Turkey to Kobani with the inappropriateness of the US providing material support for the Syrian Kurds fighting in Kobani, and insisted that *he* was the one who suggested bringing in the peshmerga and the Free Syrian Army as support[5] (whether this was true or not). The delays in getting the forces in Kobani were also reportedly due, not to hang ups on the Turkish side, but because of some reluctance on the side of the Syrian Kurdish resistance force to accept the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga.[6]

This particular event very blatantly highlights the distinction that the Turkish government has held in regard to its Kurdish neighbors. Clearly, one group of Kurds has a favored status over other groups of Kurds. It is important to try to understand why. Widespread basic assumptions and theories regarding social identities, ethnicity, and nationalism are unable to explain this turn of events. Why would two Kurdish nationalist groups hesitate to work with one another and have such divergent relationships with a neighboring state? In terms of identity and nationalism as the basis for irredentism, it would seem, that if anything, the Iraqi Kurds would be far more of a threat to Turkey due to the comparative size of the populations in their home territories and the level of institutional consolidation of the nationalist movement in the KRG territory in northern Iraq. Furthermore, if we judge Turkey's behavior toward Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish territories as fitting into dominant neorealist theories in international relations, we also reach a quick impasse when searching for explanations. If power is the criteria for threat in a state of anarchy, again, the KRG should be Turkey's greatest threat.

This chapter argues that a critical factor underlying Kurdish extra- and cross-communal relations is ideology, and perceptions of similarity or distance in the ideological outlook of the leadership of various Kurdish nationalist organizations and their neighboring heads of state. In the following section, Brubaker's framework for ethnicity, nationalism, and "groupness" will be discussed as a fruitful starting point. Then, Mark Haas's "ideological distance" formulation will be explained and considered for its relevance for analyzing relations between Kurdish nationalist

organizations and their neighboring states and other cross-border Kurdish nationalist organizations. In relation to relative state relations and cross-organizational rivalries, ideological distance appears to accurately predict Kurdish nationalist organizations' relational interactions better than the other common theoretical alternatives.

Groups and the Politics of Nationalist Development

While many theorists on nationalism offer interesting insights into the development of Kurdish nationalism over time, and studies on Kurdish nationalism have drawn from the insights stemming from these theories,[7] Rogers Brubaker establishes an over-arching framework that seems particularly helpful in understanding the politics of ethnic identity. Brubaker emphasizes the importance of attending to "groupness" as the object of study rather than the unit of analysis, or the container, within which we focus our gaze.[8] Arguably, it has been this tendency to assume a group—i.e., to understand the group as a "thing-in-the-world"—that has led to the key scholarly conflicts regarding the timing of the development of Kurdish nationalism. For example, the argument of when Kurdish nationalism begins—with the seventeenth-century poet Ahmed Khani, or with the mid-nineteenth century rebellions (by Bedirhan and Sheikh Ubeydullah) against Ottoman rule, or with the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, or the Mahabad Republic 1946, or with Barzani in Iraq and the Kurdish leftist movements in Turkey in the 1960s—helps to indicate that attending to the question of "groupness" among Kurds often receives short shrift.[9]

Understanding the formation of groups as a contingent "event"—as something that happens or may not happen—requires, ala Brubaker that we operate from the following analytical principles: first, we need to make a distinction between what we mean by "group" and what is meant by "category." Brubaker defines "a group" as "a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity."[10] Thus, we can fairly objectively cluster people into categories without there being a group though the potential for a group to form from the category is possible though not easy, not a given and temporally bound. In other words, Kurds and Kurdishness could be seen as a category that has long existed, but its ability to generate "groupness" among populations of Kurds has been variable though this trend has increased immensely in recent decades. Second, groupness requires effort, and thus, it is necessary to understand

"group-making as a project" and track the social, cultural, and political ways in which categories are transformed into groups.[11] This involves tracing the group-making entrepreneurs, the "materials" they are working from, and the context within which groupness might happen.

In addition to these principles, it is also important to distinguish ethnic or national *groups* from *organizations.* Social leaders, often understood as speaking for the "group," are almost always leaders of organizations, who, despite their own rhetoric, do not, in fact, speak for the ethnic group.[12] Their organizational resources might enable them to speak louder than others, and the ethnic or nationalist organization itself might be striving for or a major catalyst in group-making, but the organization cannot be conflated as *the* group, or the voice of *the* group. The protagonists of ethnic conflict, ethnic violence, or ethnic movements are typically organizations, and it is useful analytically to make this distinction.

Finally, the process of group-making—i.e., moving people who fit a category into a collectivity that operates as a group—includes an important cognitive component, and thus, we need to attend to how things are framed and coded. As Brubaker reminds us, "Ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting and representing the social world. They are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world."[13] Thus, group-making also involves contested symbols and interpretations that are imposed upon categories and events, but these frames have real outcomes whose relationships and linkages require our observation.

Why is Brubraker's conceptual framework so helpful for the Kurdish case? Kurdish history, especially since the nineteenth century, has been filled with nationalist organizations and political entrepreneurs who have had greater or lesser success in their group-making projects, and they have utilized a variety of symbolic and material means to facilitate "groupness" among Kurds. To the extent that they have not been able to make the group happen, or only briefly so, this does not mean that "Kurd" as a category lacks potency for group-making. Nor does it mean that Kurdishness is less of a reference for an identity, or in Brubaker's terms "self-understanding" than any other highly regarded national or ethnic category. At the same time, however, entrepreneurs of Kurdish nationalism at various moments in history have experienced colossal failures in attempting to invoke or generate Kurdish groupness. Thus, simple attributions of these events as Kurdish nationalist movements could only be considered accurate with the following caveat: they are nationalist movements in that the leader or leaders invoked Kurdish nationalism

on some level, but the movements—in terms of the coordinated collective action of people—were only very weakly facilitated, if at all, by the glue of Kurdish nationalism, proper. In many cases, tribal or sheikhly affiliations, the resistance to state centralization, or other kin or clan categories were the chief inspiration for Kurds to fight for or *against* these movements led by nationalist entrepreneurs.

The fact that these movements have been facilitated by different organizations, for different reasons, at different points in history, should also encourage us to be skeptical of interpretations that refer to a Kurdish nationalist movement as a historical monolith, either within and across the territories with large Kurdish communities. References to Kurds as a single unit or a "super agent" are problematic in that they miss the changing goals and the limitations in the scope of these organizations that purport to speak for *the* Kurds. The development of the various Kurdish organizations all occurred in separate contexts and with differing logics and goals with respect to their "group-making" projects. Important distinctions were made in the nature to which the ideal group member was scripted to an ideal. In the process of "invoking" or generating the group, an underlying political ideology necessarily creates the structure within which members are organized, interact, and understand their role in regard to the group though this ideology may be more latent or explicit. Therefore, within the context of attending to group-making processes, the role of organizations, and the importance of framing, it is important to discuss how these underlying political ideologies influence the relations between these nationalist organizations interactions, other Kurdish nationalist organizations, and other states.

Ideological Distance and Kurdish Nationalist Organizations

As distinct from the dominant paradigms and options within neorealism or even the major alternatives in neoliberal and institutional theories, in his work, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989*, Mark Haas argues for the importance of ideology in explaining a leader's perception of threat coming from other nations. Unlike other constructivist theorists who do discuss ideology, he does not argue that it is the *substance* of one's political ideology, nor is he using it as a way to discuss one's perceptions stemming from learned or understood norms; instead, he is arguing that the perception of threat correlates with a

leader's perception of the difference between their (domestic) political ideology and that of other relevant leaders. He writes, "ideologies, or actors' foundational principles of domestic political legitimacy, are likely to impact leaders' foreign policies by affecting their *perceptions of the threats* that others pose to their central domestic and international interests."[14] Thus, while Haas does not reject entirely the influence of power, he argues that the perception of power threats are filtered through an ideological lens and that a leader's domestic political ideology and others' affinity or antagonism to it help determine "friend" or "foe."

Haas proposes three interactive causal principles behind this claim. The first causal mechanism that he refers to is "demonstration-effects," that is, that the ideology of a foreign leader and how that leader envisions that polities should be organized could have a spill-over effect into one's own political territory. Because political ideologies have a transnational scope and appeal, when another leader adheres to a political philosophy that aligns with one's own domestic political opponents, that leader is more likely to be seen as a threat. To the extent that the rival ideology of one's domestic opponent flourishes under the leadership of another nation, the more threatening that state's growth in power will be seen to be. Conversely, a strong country whose leaders share one's own political ideology acts to legitimize one's own domestic political authority. Haas argues that this dynamic also leads to the perceptions of political subversion by rivals and mistrust of their international objectives.[15] When political fortunes within a country change, and a new ideological leadership arises, it is likely that perceptions of that country will also change.[16]

Another factor used to explain the role of ideology in the perception of threat from another leader is the "communications mechanism." Haas posits that "the greater the ideological differences among actors, the greater the impediments to effective communication among them."[17] Ideologies tend to have a discourse, symbols, and interpretation of terminology that differs from one another, so that, in the sensitive realm of diplomacy, it is easy for misunderstanding to take place and for leaders from very different ideological perspectives to mistrust one another's words.

Finally, Haas also argues from the grounds of social identity theory that these perceptions are triggered by a "conflict probability" mechanism. Beyond the obvious in-group and out-group categories of citizenship and ethnicity, one's political ideology and outlook influences the

affinity one feels for another leader who agrees with or opposes one's principles. In short, Haas argues that, at the level of cognitive psychology, "people have a universal tendency both to categorize others into 'in-groups' and 'out-groups,' and to desire their own group(s) to realize higher levels of achievement and status than others."[18] Thus, "decision makers are likely to make a distinction between those politicians who share their legitimizing principles and those who do not."[19]

It must be noted that Haas's formulated was conceived and discussed entirely on the level of interactions between nations.[20] Obviously, in the case of the Kurds, in most cases, we are most clearly talking about various ethnonationalist organizations rather than states or state-like entities, with the exception of the KRG in northern Iraq, and to a lesser extent the PYD's loose and more tentative organization of Rojava in northern Syria. It could be argued, however, that the concept of ideological distance can still be applied to these organizations in the same vein as its application to nation-states. First, these organizations are indisputably political organizations with an understanding of how specific territories should be politically organized. In most cases, these ethnonationalist organizations have or aspire to a force of arms within the territories that they inhabit, and they have a clear intent to engage diplomatically with external forces.

Furthermore, though many of these organizations have political revolutionary aspirations that transcend the territory dominated by Kurds in each of the four major existing states in which they reside, these ethnonationalist organizations primarily organize and operate within those bounded territories with the aim of being the legitimate authority to represent and politically organize the Kurds in those areas. That being the case, in the Kurdish areas of each of these four countries, each organization has to contend with other ideological ethno-nationalist rival organizations. In the KRG, the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party), led by Masoud Barzani, has edged out its ideological rivals primarily through elections, but Barzani himself has also managed to extra-legally hold onto his position of President of the KRG despite the fact that an election should have occurred in 2015. In Syria, through the ability to ensure the monopoly of legitimate force, the PYD (Democratic Union Party) and its militia units (YPG) dominate other Kurdish rival organizations, which have coalesced under the banner of the KNC (Kurdish National Council). In Turkey, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) has dominated Kurdish ethnonational organization, mostly by force, since 1984, but it

also has important rivalries with other ideological organizations fighting for the affections of Kurds in the country. In Iran, factionalism among Kurdish nationalist organizations has made it difficult to argue that any one organization dominates, but most of these adhere to a nationalism that is undergirded with some variation of leftist political ideology. Nonetheless, in all four cases, these organizations have to be concerned about "friends" and "foes" with states and organizations both beyond their territories of operation and also within them, and because of this, Haas's "ideological distance" theory logically comes into play.

Conservative Kurdish Nationalist Ideology

Although smaller organizations and ideological nuance do exist, it is reasonable to posit that ethnonationalist politics among Kurds are dominated by a strong cleavage between conservative nationalist and radical leftist nationalist movements. Added to this is a strong third ideological strand among Kurds that tends to be traditionalist and/or religious conservative and which downplays nationalism, in its proper political sense, while prioritizing cultural rights. The major left–right cleavage and the ideology that downplays nationalism can be found in the Kurdish areas of all four countries. But, particularly as we move forward in time from the 1960s, in terms of the overall salience of Kurdish nationalist organizations, the leftist Kurdish nationalist ideology has tended to dominate the conservative Kurdish nationalist ideology in all areas with the very important exception of the KRG in Iraq. The conservative KDP in Iraq as it was ideologically reconfigured by Mullah Mustafa Barzani in the 1960s occupies a fairly unique ideological space in relation to the much more prolific leftist Kurdish nationalist variants, none of these as potent as the ideology embodied by Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the PKK in Turkey.

The reason for the individual power of the KDP as an organization in the process of "group-making" in Iraq and the relative weakness of conservative nationalists in comparison to the leftist nationalist movements in other areas is simple: the Kurdish nationalism of the KDP is founded on an ideology that requires the support of a symbolically powerful and populist authority to overcome the obstacles inhibiting the group-making process among Kurds; on the other hand, Kurdish leftist nationalism was able to create an ideological language that could generate the cognitive power needed to hurdle the impediments to

group-making. It was easier for new organizations to work off a leftist ideological discourse to recruit new members, especially as Kurdish areas became increasingly urbanized and Kurds were displaced from their previous communities. Arguably, the particular success of the PKK and its ideological offshoots, over the numerous leftist organizational alternatives, is that it could work off of the leftist ideological discourse and simultaneously benefit from its symbolically powerful leader, Öcalan.

It is important to note that I am not arguing that populism and charismatic leadership are synonymous with conservative Kurdish nationalism. What I argue, instead, is that conservative Kurdish nationalism does not get off the ground organizationally and in group-making without this additional cohering force. To the extent that nationalist political ideologies were involved in movements or rebellions prior to the 1940s, these were, to a great extent, ideologically conservative or relied heavily on conservative elites. By this, I mean that these nationalist movements largely sought to preserve the traditions, culture, norms, and values long existing among Kurds—i.e., to conserve, or at least not challenge, these sociocultural structures. This also included operating through the pre-existing vertical social structures that organized life in most communities in Kurdish territories, especially the rural ones. The problem with such vertical structures, operating at lower clusters of people and reaching to the level of large tribes, is that ethnic "group-making" is very difficult among the rank and file.[21] Thus, people are not gathered together primarily through an "imagined community" of the masses, but through the calculations of local notables—religious, or tribal—at the top who presumably have the ability to mobilize the community or communities attached to them through loyalty to the "group" in a sub-ethnic sense.[22] Van Bruinessen captures the subsequent strategic choice dilemma for nationalist movements in the first half of the twentieth century:

> Participation and non-participation or even opposition of tribes to the revolt were apparently determined to a large extent by the same kind of considerations that had for centuries determined tribal politics and policies vis-à-vis the state. The motivation of the commoners—be it religious or nationalist—played no part as yet worth mentioning. Chieftains joined or opposed according to what seemed the most advantageous thing to do and to what their rivals did; the commoners simply followed the chieftains. When chance turned against the rebels and they were on the losing side, several tribes that had remained neutral until then suddenly began to oppose them.[23]

Ironically, as Hakan Yavuz writes, "Tribal structure played a dual role: it prevented the formation of a Kurdish unity by keeping them fragmented, and preserved a heightened Kurdish particularism vis-à-vis the Turks, Persians, and Arabs."[24] Thus, the vertical sociopolitical structure common among communities of Kurds helped to distinguish the *category* of "Kurdishness" by preserving the components often used to establish such categories but also proved to be a significant obstacle to Kurdish ethnonationalist entrepreneurs interested in a *group-making* project. The early movements and rebellions among Kurds extending to the middle part of the twentieth century were primarily instigated by or compelled to rely on elites who adhered to a conservative ideological vision that kept the project at the elite level,[25] and this allowed for such rebellions to be soundly repressed. As Romano notes, "If, for important segments of the population, a Kurdish nationalist identity had predominated over other identities at the time, the rebellions would have enjoyed much greater success."[26] Mango records a similar observation by the Turkish Minister of the Interior following the Shaikh Said rebellion in 1925: "While the local population is strongly attached to its language and ethnicity…. Kurdish nationalism was still only an ideal amongst elites and was not deep, all-embracing or dangerous."[27] Once the elites were subdued, often by other Kurdish elites, all evidence of a Kurdish nationalist "group" largely melted away.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani became a hero to the Kurds due to his legendary defense of the Mahabad Republic in Iran in 1946, his refusal to surrender to Iranian forces and their demands, and his adventurous evasion of Iranian troops as he led his rebel forces along the borders of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey in route to the Soviet Union. As McDowall points out, although he was never hesitant to take opportunities to expand his own personal traditional authority, his claim to champion Kurdish nationalism and lead a Kurdish nationalist organization was a reluctant one at best.[28] It was his popular status as a Kurdish legend, ability to use various levels of support from the Iraqi state to squelch all tribal and nationalist rivals, and the particular contingent constellation of events that established him as the emblematic leader of a conservative Kurdish nationalist movement and organization. Had the Iraqi state been stronger than it was at critical points and less reliant on his support, it is likely that the allegiance that he ultimately commanded from the northern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan would have been neutralized by other tribal leaders as had been the case with other Kurdish political entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it was arguably

the groundwork laid by leftist Kurdish nationalists in the territories that fell under his organizational dominion that allowed for nationalist ideology to be attached to the rationale behind his authority with Kurds. The establishment of Barzani's conservative ideology within the KDP nationalist movement, at the initial stages, was extremely tentative and could have easily remained in the leftist trajectory that inspired most of his truly Kurdish nationalist contemporaries.[29] But, in the end, his symbolic authority and ability to stay atop the organization, more or less, from one location or another allowed him to pass on a conservative Kurdish nationalist organization to his son, Masoud.

Although much could be discussed in regard to the rise of the KRG-dominating KDP under Masoud Barzani leadership, it is sufficient to say here that the combination of conservative ideology with a Kurdish nationalist organization is the rarer form. Although political conservatism is by no means uncommon among Kurds, it is usually not strongly nationalist; the conservative elites supporting traditional family, kin and social structures and those supporting orthodox Sunni religious values tended to be the elements most antagonistic to standard nationalist assumptions. That leaves us then to discuss why Kurdish nationalist ideology would primarily be the endeavor of those with leftist political orientations.

Leftist Kurdish Nationalist Ideologies

Although progressivism and a desire for social change are often associated with the left and clearly complement a ethnonationalist agenda among group-making entrepreneurs within any minority group, in the case of the Kurds, there are two major reasons why moderate to radical leftist ideology functioned as a better catalyst for a nationalist group-making project. First, from a more moderate leftist outlook, Kurdish nationalist entrepreneurs saw in "modernization" and urbanization an opportunity for Kurdish nationalism, particularly in the principle of secularism.[30] In all the existing states where large communities of Kurds live, hegemonic political elites have often resorted to the "shared religious values" card as an antidote to Kurdish nationalist claims. Whereas religion has offered a strong emotive appeal to groupness on behalf of other nationalist movements, explicit religious appeals and symbolism for Kurdish nationalists are fairly counterproductive and groups that employ this position have been very marginal at best.[31] Not only are Kurds

heterogeneous in religious beliefs and practices, but they share those religious beliefs and practices with the ethnically dominant populations in the states that suppress their political demands. Quantitatively illustrating this trend, Sarıgil and Fazlıoglu's (2014) public opinion survey in Turkey shows that higher religious practice among Kurds is significantly related to lower expressed levels of political nationalism. Of course, leftist ideology is very strongly correlated with cultural and political nationalism, and Kurds who practice the Shafi school of Sunni Islam express stronger sentiment for cultural nationalism than Hanafi Sunni Kurds, who share the same practices with Turks.[32]

Second, Kurdish ethnopolitical entrepreneurs found in leftist discourse the language and ideology they needed to take on the pre-existing traditional and conservative local leadership that often (violently) stood in the way of group-making among Kurdish populations. In the rhetoric of equality and brotherhood, and the vilification of landed elites and exploitation, Kurdish ethno-nationalists found the weapons that they needed to fight the resistance to their group-making projects.[33] To the extent that a "modern" Kurdish nationalism was to take hold, the Kurdish intellectual elite, imbued with a socialist leftist ideology, ultimately came to believe that existing Kurdish society and culture would have to be deconstructed and rebuilt to foster the strong grass-roots and horizontal linkages necessary for a successful nationalist movement. The essential villain in this nation-building project became the traditional elites the *aghas*—reframed as "feudal lords"—and the "feudal conditions" in which most rural Kurds in Turkey and elsewhere lived. For these leftist nationalist entrepreneurs, socialist-leftist ideology created a new language through which the Kurds could speak to each other and directly confront existing vertical social structures in vernacular discourse.[34] Language was important, indeed, as Anderson, Hobsbawm and others anticipate, but in Turkey; for instance, the spoken language that arguably allowed horizontal linkages among Kurds and awareness of a Kurdish community was ironically Turkish initially but through the symbolic discourse of the ideological left.

This leftist ideology, undergirding a Kurdish nationalist group-making project, was revolutionary and radical, both in relation to the dominant states that these nationalist organizations resisted against, but also within Kurdish communities. Although this ideological underpinning laid the foundation of many Kurdish nationalist organizations from Komala and KDPI in Iran, to the PUK in Iraq, most of these organizations found

themselves, nonetheless, incorporating traditional elites into their organization for purposes of expediency. One notable exception, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), ultimately advanced its organizational agenda not through concessions to traditional Kurdish local notables, but through building up its guerilla militia wing and through the charisma of its battle-tested leader, Öcalan. The military exploits of the PKK along with Öcalan's charisma allowed for the ideological advancement of this revolutionary vision across the border into Iran, Iraq and Syria. Although Öcalan's symbolic leadership of all of these groups has been more constant than the ideology—the ideology itself has shifted from a more classical Marxist line to one that supports the anti-nation-state principles of "democratic confederalism"—its approach and agenda has retained its revolutionary aura, and its affiliates in Syria (PYD/YPG) and Iran (PJAK—The Free Life Party of Kurdistan) also prioritize the operation of a guerilla militia wing to support their political activities. In recent years, the organizations that consider themselves to fall under Öcalan's symbolic and ideological guidance for democratic confederalism are connected through the umbrella organization of the (Kurdistan Communities Union) KCK .

If ideological distance influences the perceptions of threat regarding these various organizations, we would expect their interactions with one another and the existing states that encompass the territories of Kurds to reflect anticipated ideological patterns rather than power concerns. Furthermore, state actions and the Kurdish nationalist organizations operating across different borders will likely have a pattern consistent with the causal mechanism of "demonstration-effects" in particular with some evidence of the "communications mechanism," particularly in regard to the interactions between Masoud Barzani of the KRG and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey. We would also anticipate, then, that change in leadership could also create changes in the patterns of interaction. Let us turn to examples of these patterns below.

Ideology, Kurdish Nationalist Organizations, and Turkey

While focusing on developments in Kurdish nationalism among Kurdish communities, it is not at all surprising that ethnic identity plays a role in in-group–out-group relations. This factor is certainly a key element in

state behaviors toward Kurds and much has been written from this vantage point. However, what remains to be highlighted is the critical role that ideology plays in determining "friend" and "foe" in ways that do not fit what could be logically anticipated from ethnic categories alone. Ideology appears to strongly predict when and why organizations aspiring to a pan-Kurdish nationalist group-making project would explicitly obstruct another organization's advancement, even when that organization primarily operates across the border. These organizations have, at times, also worked hand in hand with states who have been working to prevent the spread of Kurdish nationalism within their borders and even across them. Although much of the analysis regarding these strange patterns has focused on factors like the supposed blind ambition of Kurdish elites, their greed, factional-tribal politics, or on the Machiavellian machinations of the state leaders involved, explanations at this level cannot account for why alliances are made with particular elites and not others. Furthermore, they fail to explain changes in state-Kurdish nationalist organization relations over time, especially when one considers pragmatics and realist theoretical considerations. To demonstrate the important role of ideology, we should discuss the pattern of relations between various Kurdish nationalist organizations (mostly) operating on opposite sides of a border, and I will highlight the very illustrative example of Turkey-KDP relations over time.

Although chapters could be written (and, indeed, have been) detailing the interactions of Kurdish nationalist organizations with organizations of that type across their borders, it is fairly apparent that cross-border collaboration and conflict fits ideological expectations. Of course, Kurdish nationalist organizations with relatively similar ideological visions operating among the same populations of Kurds have a competitor problem that makes relations less predictable; they either (1) stridently compete with each other for the affections of the same populations like organizations in Iran, (2) engage in live and let live strategies by operating in different regions, or (3) play the delicate overlay, allowing the relevant population to support both organizations (through a tentative distinction in organizational function) like the PKK and Kurdish leftist parties like the HDP (Peoples' Democracy Party) in Turkey. When it comes to organizational interactions across borders and their decisions to support, collaborate with, or collide with other Kurdish nationalist organizations, the patterns are very predictably based on ideology.

The balance between pan-Kurdish nationalist aspirations and realities brought on by borders creates the dynamic of having sets of independently-run, individually-named organizations with tight affiliations and collaboration with ideological compatriots across the four borders. In particular, for those aspiring to the nationalist outlook and guidance of the Barzanis and Abdullah Öcalan, affiliated organizations in multiple countries. In Iraq, the KDP has close ties with the KDPS in Syria, and a very minor KDP affiliate in Turkey. Those who advocate Öcalan's revolutionary democratic confederalism concept have a constituent umbrella organization, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), and branches in Turkey (PKK), Syria (PYD-Democratic Union Party), and Iran (PJAK-The Free Life Party of Kurdistan). The KRG has managed to prevent attempts at an Iraqi organization espousing Öcalan's ideology (KDSP), but in recent years, much to the dismay of Barzani in particular, the PYD and PKK have been operating (and recruiting Kurds toward their group-making project) in Sinjar and in the Qandil mountain range.[35] We must also add to this a number of leftist Kurdish nationalist organizations in each area that have a more conventional leftist ideology, such as the PUK in Iraq, Komala and KDPI in Iran, a number of parties in Syria united with KDPS under the banner of the KNC, and the Kurdish leftist nationalist parties like the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) in Turkey.[36]

Based on the logic of Ideological Distance Theory, we would anticipate that cross-border interactions between organizations would be cooperative to the extent that they share similar or the same ideology and more antagonistic to those with a different political outlook. Furthermore, the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Syria in particular, just as they used tribal rivalries in earlier periods to set the Kurds against each other, utilized the ideological differences between Kurdish nationalist organizations to weaken one another. For example, during the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s, the Islamic Republic used Barzani, who was pushed out of Iraq in the 1970s to attack the leftist KDPI when it was rebelling against the revolutionary regime while the PUK supported the KDPI.[37] This is ironic in that Barzani's father achieved his legendary symbolic status, defending the Mahabad Republic that was largely steered by the KDPI, and Mullah Mustafa established the KDP in Iraq clearly inspired by the Iranian KDP although, upon his return to Iraq from the Soviet Union, he restructured the Iraqi KDP toward a traditionalist conservative Kurdish organization. Thus, it is ironic due to the historical linkages, but it is exactly what we would expect in regard to ideological distance.

In Turkey, the leftist HDP political elites have shown clear sympathy for Syria's PYD,[38] and they, predictably exhibit caution and skepticism in their discussion of Barzani and the KDP.[39] The PKK and PYD, of course, being both ideologically committed to Öcalan, have collaborated so closely during the Syrian civil war period, that many have reasonably concluded, whether true or not, that one cannot really disentangle the two. Assad's decision to give the PYD the upper-hand over the KNC at a point when his relations with Erdoğan and Turkey had broken down appears to hearken back to a time when his father Hafez Assad used to accommodate the PKK in Syria in order to irritate and destabilize Turkey.[40] Surely Assad was aware of the ideological and organizational linkages between the PYD and PKK, and he was also unlikely to favor providing an advantage to the KNC who was more influenced by Barzani and showed greater sympathy toward the Syrian opposition.[41]

Turkey's relations with the KDP and Masoud Barzani emphasizes the changing fortunes that occur when the guiding political ideology of a nation's leadership changes. The current period reflects a relationship between the Erdoğan-led Turkish state and the Barzani-led KRG stemming from an unparalleled similarity in ideology and outlook between the two leaders. Similar approaches and ideology benefited the relations in the 1990s, but a change of leadership in 1999 with an Ecevit-led secular nationalist coalition government followed by the parliamentary selection of a secular nationalist president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, caused a very notable cooling of relations, such that, when it began to thaw again by the end of 2007, to many Turks the détente with Barzani and the KRG seemed novel and unexpected. Certainly, from a purely nationalist and realist standpoint, it seemed to be a foolhardy gambit with strange bedfellows.

Throughout the bulk of the 1990s, the Turkish government, both in regard to Prime Minister and President, was led by market-friendly, traditional conservatives or religious conservatives who found in the KDP a willing ally to attack PKK encampments that settled in areas like Bahdinan in Northern Iraq.[42] Turgut Özal, during his Presidency, which ended abruptly by his unexpected death in 1993, began to work through the KDP in particular. During the Presidency of Süleyman Demirel, another conservative politician, while the PKK was hunted down mercilessly by the Turkish military and security forces, the collaboration with the KDP quietly continued. During the no-fly-zone period, and before and after the subsequent KDP-PUK civil war in the autonomous region, Barzani benefited from trade with Turkey to the detriment of the PUK.[43]

As late as February 1999, weeks before Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Nairobi, Turkish technicians were helping the KDP get their own television station, KTV, off the ground, a station which also spent much of its time delegitimizing the PKK.[44]

Outside of ideology, this collaboration between Turkey and these Kurds does not make sense. First, why would Turkey trust the KDP, whose base among the less-prominent Kurmanji speakers in the Kurdish region of Iraq matches the dominant Kurmanji speakers in Turkey (and within the PKK), and not rely on the PUK whose base comes from the Sorani areas of Kurdish Iraq? And why would Barzani and the KDP agree to help forcibly remove these fellow Kurmanji-speaking Kurdish nationalists from their territory? If ethnic affiliation was the critical category, this would not make sense. Nor would there be a strategic rational in Turkey providing assistance in setting up a Kurdish television station across its borders to potentially be broadcast back into its own territory toward a population within which many might harbor dreams of a pan-Kurdish state. Obviously, the critical component is that the KDP and Barzani hated the PKK as much as the leaders in Ankara did because the PKK was an ideological rival threatening the authority of the collaborating party.[45] In this case, although Presidents Ozal and Demirel, and most of the Prime Ministers of the 1990s in Turkey were conservative and right of center, generally in the same ideological neighborhood as Barzani, it seems that their quiet collaboration with the KDP was primarily one of convenience—i.e., the enemy of my enemy is my friend—strongly reflecting a "demonstration-effect" pattern. However, it was the ideological options that largely established this convenience. The PUK, to the left of Turkish leaders—but not as ideologically left as the PKK—was less trusted by Turkey due to their greater sympathies for the PKK,[46] but was brought in as a mediator and go-between in the 1990s when Turkey and the PKK needed to communicate.[47]

The relationship between Turkish leadership and the KDP began to cool rapidly after Bülent Ecevit's leftist secular nationalist party, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), took the plurality of votes in the April 1999 elections. Approximately 1 year later, Demirel's tenure as president ended and he was replaced by the secular nationalist head of the Turkish Constitutional Court, Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The KDP, along with all elites from Iraqi Kurdistan, were blocked from communicating with the President and Prime Minister. Relations did not recover until the AKP's second term that coincided with Abdullah Gül's selection to

the Presidency by an AKP majority in parliament. What caused this frosty period in Turkey–KDP relations? This period coincides with the PKK weakest point. In February 1999, Öcalan was captured and imprisoned on Imrali Island, which ultimately led to a 5-year cease-fire declared by the PKK. One argument could be that, without the mutual threat, there was no need to collaborate. Although this is a reasonable proposition, the PKK ended its cease-fire before Turkey's leaders resumed their collaboration with the KDP and despite the fact that Turkey's military pinpointed the PKK camps in Iraqi Kurdistan as being the critical security factor. Collaboration only resumed after President Sezer left office.

In 2007, Barzani himself blamed the cool wind from Ankara on the paranoia stemming from the fall of Saddam Hussein and fears of aspirations for an independent Kurdistan coming out of Iraq.[48] In a November 2007 interview on Kurdish TV, Barzani states:

> In the past, before the fall of the regime, we used to go to Turkey and we were received at the highest levels. We were received by the president and the prime minister. We used to meet the people in the army … However, after the fall of the regime we got a legitimate entity here in the region and we have a legitimate framework in line with the constitution that was voted for by 80 percent [of Iraqis]. However, although we are part of federal Iraq … they do not recognize us and they do not want to deal with us.[49]

It is true that the secular nationalist leadership expressed their distrust of all Kurdish political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan due to the fear that a strong and independent Kurdish state would create trouble in the Kurdish areas north of the border in Turkey.[50] What is interesting about this argument is that this mistrust among Turkish leadership toward Barzani and other Kurdish elites in Iraq is that it began almost immediately after they took office. Even before the US turned its gaze toward Saddam and shortly after previous governments in Turkey worked to end the civil war in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, KDP elites spoke of the "paranoid suspicion" directed their way, and that "they hate anything that smacks of Kurdish progress. The more progress we make, the more they must sabotage it."[51] In a letter communicated to then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit through a go-between, Barzani expressed the desire that "they could resume the respectful and cooperative understanding interactions that befit their relations in the past."[52] Ecevit's response to the message was a cold shoulder. President Sezer was adamant that no détente between

Kurdish leaders in Iraq and the Turkish government could take place; he even refused to allow a meeting with Jalal Talabani, who held the office of the President of Iraq.[53] Months after Sezer left office, Talabani was invited to Ankara.[54] For secular nationalists, who prioritize the development and preservation of the unitary nation-state in their particular ideological outlook and have no strong economic or political ideals outside of those prescribed by Atatürk, they were colorblind in regard to the important ideological visions that separated Kurdish nationalist organizations and movements from one another. All Kurdish claims and identification were seen as a uniform threat as they assumed that ethnonationalist self-identification trumped all other political nuances. Therefore, despite the fact that Barzani offered the same olive leaf and proclamations of respect for Turkey's national interests and security to these leaders, being filtered as it was through the "communications mechanism" of a nationalist political ideology, such promises could only be either outright deceptions or opportunistic at best, considering millions of Kurds inhabiting the territory immediately across the border in Turkey.

The relationship of Barzani, the KDP, and (in trickle-down fashion) the KRG with Turkey's leaders took a very drastic turn following the selection of Abdullah Gül as president. With Erdoğan remaining as Prime Minister, and installing his lifelong political ally and co-founder of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) as president, Erdoğan was suddenly given a much freer hand in engaging with those the security and secular nationalist establishment had been uncomfortable with. Erdoğan, in particular, shows a penchant for fostering relationships with political elites that share his particular ideological constellation. Not only does Erdoğan adhere to conservative ideological principles derived from Turkey's social mainstream and a shared Nakshibendi spiritual heritage with Barzani, but it is also safe to argue that they hold a similar vision for the basis of legitimate ruling authority. To the extent that Erdoğan appeals frequently to democracy, he understands this in a populist and majoritarian vein. From this perspective, if the majority support a leader, that leader's action embody the "will of the people," and the "will of the people" should not be obstructed. In terms of national advancement, economic development, construction and expanding markets are prioritized while political connections are established with the masses by delivering services and goods to the poor in the name of the party. In this regard, especially among Kurdish nationalist organizations, it would be hard for Erdoğan to find a better ideological compatriot than Masoud Barzani.[55]

While it might be argued that there is a lot of bald self-interest and pragmatism in the KDP–Turkey alliance—"the enemy of my enemy" is still relevantly in play—the level of the warmth, trust, and accommodations on both side suggest that these relations are not simply pragmatic. Both leaders have taken steps to publically assist the other in ways that could potentially jeopardize their self-interest and these gestures have occurred at such a level to create mistrust and resentment toward the KGR by other Kurdish organizations.[56] It might be assumed that Barzani might feign warmth with Erdoğan out of political expediency, but there is less of an explanation on Erdoğan's side. At a point in which the KRG has become a political entity on the verge of independence, Erdoğan has only strengthened Barzani's hand. When Barzani came to meet with Erdoğan in Diyarbakir in 2013 at a critical point during the peace negotiations with the PKK, BDP, and the Turkish state, Erdoğan used the language "Kurdistan" to refer to the KRG region,[57] a word that is considered by many in Turkey as next to treachery when spoken. An example of the warmth shared between Erdoğan and Barzani can be seen in the letter Erdoğan sent to Barzani's nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, when he assumed the role of Prime Minister in the KRG. Erdoğan refers to Nechervan as "my dear brother," praises him for all the great things that have been accomplished in the KRG, applauds him for his "wise leadership" and that "there is no doubt that you will perform your tasks and duties successfully." At the end, he finishes with the following sentence, "I would like to also take this opportunity to request that you convey my warm regards to … the President of the Kurdistan Region and my dear brother, Masoud Barzani."[58] The Turkish government has also remained relatively silent and, some could argue tacitly supportive, when Barzani makes pronouncements of a move toward independence or a referendum for independence.[59] Realist and identity-based assumptions could not explain Turkey's position in this regard without addressing these leaders' mutual understanding and trust.

Besides the genuine trust and affinity that has developed between these two that communicate through a shared outlook and ideology, there also exists an important ideological strategy in propping one another up against the "demonstration effects" of ideological rivals. For each leader, the success of the other, contributes significantly in weakening the important elements of the ideological opposition within their political domains. The trade, particularly the illicit oil trade between the KRG and Turkey, the heavy Turkish construction and investment

in Erbil,[60] the training and support for Peshmerga forces in Bashiqa,[61] and the opportunities that Erdoğan provides to make the KRG seem a respected partner—like allowing the Peshmerga in full uniform to enter and travel through Turkey to enter Kobani—strengthens Barzani and the KDP at a point when the legitimacy of their dominance is under domestic attack,[62] particularly from the PUK and the Gorran Party. These parties, particularly the Gorran Party, regularly critique the populist and authoritarian behavior of President Barzani, and a popular movement within the KRG to unseat the current President would also fortify similar objections to Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian rule justified on the grounds of ensuring security and that his power represents the majority's will.

Their shared ideology and mutual threats from the potential success of ideological rivals across their borders has led to collaboration to weaken the power and obstruct the ambitions of the PYD in Syria. The PYD, the Syrian organization inspired by and closely affiliated with the PKK of Turkey, has benefited from Assad's apparent move to concede autonomy to the PYD and their security wing, the YPG, over the three heavily Kurdish-populated areas on the northern border next to Turkey.[63] Assad has chosen to favor the PYD over the Kurdish National Council, comprised of a number of Syrian Kurdish organizations and more closely aligned with Barzani. This alliance with Assad creates a dominant organization that ideologically opposes the Turkish state and the KRG and collaborates with the PKK in Turkey and with those units camped in Iraq.[64] Thus, Turkey's willingness to use Peshmerga forces from Barzani to help liberate Kobani has a very clear ideological and strategic dimension: Peshmerga success in Kobani's defense could help offset the PYD's increasing political dominance over Syrian Kurds. The plans to create and train militias in Iraq to be the Peshmerga wing of the Barzani-aligned KDPS—much to the dismay of the PYD who is blocking their entrance to Syria—also has to be seen in this light.[65] It is not as much about supporting Kurds against ISIS and other security threats as it is an attempt to weaken PYD's ideological hegemony.

Conclusion

Even in the case of ethno-nationalist organizations and movements, ideology and relative ideological distance matters. Although almost all ethno-nationalist organizations proclaim to incorporate or bring together all members of their nation, the underlying political assumptions of these

group-making projects in regard to what constitutes legitimate authority, how power and wealth are distributed, can create fissures between organizations and their members that could resemble a zero-sum-game rivalry. Of course, other nationalist organizations would share ideological vision and outlook and recruit and collaborate in their group-making projects in a more cooperative way. States who are stakeholders in the outcomes of these nationalist movements—particularly those who could lose existing territory—can use the ideological distance between organizations to weaken the oppositional nation-making projects within their borders. In most cases, states that are home to oppositional ethno-nationalist movements like Iran and Syria have more clearly used "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" approach pragmatically toward Kurdish nationalist organizations within and across their borders, using ideological distance to their advantage, consistent with the demonstration-effects mechanism discussed by Haas. In the case of Turkey, the Erdoğan-Barzani period shows a level of trust and communication that goes beyond pragmatism in simply allying with an ideological partner whose success will weaken one's domestic opposition.

The changing relations over time between the KDP and Turkey's government also points out another critical point in regard to the influence of ideology on the perceptions of threat from the "other." A change in leadership could bring an important change in the nature of the interactions between the two. Although Erdoğan and Barzani are both working to embed themselves in their respective political systems for the *longue durée,* it is reasonable to imagine both Turkey and the KRG operating under other leadership, particularly the KRG.[66] If one of the other oppositional voices in the KRG, particularly the PUK or the Gorran Party, partially or completely take the helm, it will undoubtedly change relations. The success of these main opposition parties, who are leftist and egalitarian in their political discourse, would demonstrably challenge the ideological basis that legitimizes Erdoğan's authority. Certainly, communications between the two sides would noticeably cool. Both the PUK and Gorran have ideological positions that overlay with positions within the Kurdish and Turkish left, Erdoğan's most strident domestic opposition. It would be very unlikely—especially under Gorran Party leadership—that the Turkish military would have the presence that it currently enjoys in the KRG, and the ammunition and military support and training would be less forthcoming on the Turkish side. Thus, tracking the ideological impact of the relationships established between

Turkey's political elites and Kurdish nationalist organizations across the borders highlights the fluidity in nature of the relations in a way that prioritizing identity-based or realist assumptions would miss.

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13. Ibid., p. 17.
14. Mark Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), p. 1.
15. Ibid., p. 8.
16. Ibid., pp. 6–8.
17. Ibid., p. 12.
18. Ibid. p. 9.
19. Ibid., p. 10.
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CHAPTER 5

Statehood, Autonomy, or Unitary Coexistence? A Comparative Analysis of How Kurdish Groups Approach the Idea of Self-Determination

Cenap Çakmak

Self-determination still remains a vague and controversial term in both international legal scholarship and the political science literature.[1] Attributed either a fairly negative or positive connotation, the concept, for this reason, suffers from analytical inadequacy in the academic discussions. Proponents, from either a moralistic or legalistic perspective, often tend to view it as an absolute and inherent right that particularly ethnic minorities can and should exercise.[2] Opponents, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the notion in fact refers to a very ambiguous legal and political framework that cannot serve as a basis for any nationalist or ethnic aspirations for full or partial independence, autonomy or further recognition as a separate entity within a certain political sphere of authority.[3]

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These two extreme approaches have so far been raised in both popular and academic debates in the case of the political rights of the Kurds, including the right to self-determination.[4] A denialist rhetoric (which sometimes even amounts to the level of assimilationism) suggests that the Kurds may not become eligible, under international law, to have a separate state of their own, or that they should not be recognized certain political rights as a separate political group.[5] A pro-Kurdish view, however, underlines that the Kurds, for the sake of being a political group (either minority, people or even a nation), have the inherent indispensable right regardless of the political hurdles emanating from the intricacy of the interstate relations or regional affairs.[6]

But the truth about the concept of self-determination is that it gains relative or changeable meaning, depending on how it is interpreted and framed by a certain political group. In other words, the term does not, on its free standing, point to an absolute right; but it is also not possible to argue that it is completely useless and irrelevant in raising political aspirations.[7] A self-claim of independence, autonomy, or recognition with reference to the term will remain unsupported; however, it may very well become a useful ingredient in a political discourse or struggle toward one of these ends.

This study seeks to investigate how the notion of self-determination has been used or framed by pro-Kurdish groups in their political discourses. As a part of a comparative analysis, this chapter is focused on how three major Kurdish groups or political movements have employed a discourse of self-determination to achieve their political goals, and tries to identify the conditions under which different political claims have been made. I, for this purpose, analyze how pro-Barzani groups and entities (including himself, and the Kurdistan Regional Government in general), the pro-Öcalan groups (particularly the HDP), and the Kurdish Islamist groups view the idea of self-determination to shed light on their political vision. A pro-Kurdish agenda may be attentive to the attainment of one of the three political outcomes: an independent state, political autonomy as either a minority or a constituent of the state, or greater recognition of group rights. The study investigates what group exercised a discourse of self-determination for which political outcome and under what conditions.

Use of Self-Determination Rhetoric in Pro-Barzani Politics: Independence as Vision of Final Political Settlement

How the pro-Barzani groups have relied on the concept of self-determination as a tool of political settlement in Iraq is a good example of pragmatism and wait-and-see policy. Massoud Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has never expressly raised a demand for full independence of the Iraqi Kurdistan. But he also, implicitly or explicitly, retained the rights of the Kurds for a state of their own through reference to self-government as an inherent authority under international law.

Barzani and his aides have been extremely careful in their political statements and avoided any provocations that would put their political ambitions at risk. To this end, these statements often placed emphasis upon the political unity of Iraq and allegiance to its central government.[8] Even after the US military offensive in Iraq aimed at toppling the Saddam regime which was also often viewed as an opportunity for the rise of the Kurds, the pro-Barzani circles have remained loyal to the territorial integrity of their country where they have been subjected to brutality and persecution for decades.[9]

The Iraqi Kurds did not attempt to exploit the political environment toward full independence after the maintenance of political control by the US forces. Despite that the conditions were considered by analysts as favorable to a Kurdish independence, the Iraqi Kurds did not rely on a discourse of independence.[10] Even the relatively marginal groups that strongly promoted the idea of independence in the past preferred a unified Iraq. But this was not because of fidelity to an Iraqi national identity; the Kurds considered that it was at their best interest to remain part of Iraq as long as their identity and rights are protected, they are allowed to participate in the political processes and their autonomy is recognized.[11] In other words, they regarded the new political environment as favorable to protect their interests.

Given that Jalal Talabani, leader of a major Kurdish group, became president of Iraq and that Barzani established greater legitimacy of a Kurdish autonomous region, it was not rational for the Kurds to break

away from the central government. The main goal of the pro-Barzani groups in this environment was to secure constitutional guarantees and safeguards for their autonomous status introduced in the early 1990s.[12] The constitution adopted after the US invasion officially recognized their autonomy. As a part of their pragmatic approach, they did not even make any concrete attempt at annexing Kirkuk, a critically important city for the Kurdish political movement, into the autonomous region until 2007.

Overall, it is possible to argue that despite that they sometimes promoted the idea of independence, the pro-Barzani groups in Iraq tacitly abandoned their strong rhetoric and instead defined a vision for the future in a unified Iraq. This political position was legally established and confirmed in the text of the constitution that contained innovative provisions toward a federal political setting.[13] Above all, the constitution redefined the state of Iraq, transforming it from a unitary state into a political union of different ethnicities, religions, and sects. But ironically, it is also possible to argue that this redefinition was an assurance for political integrity, preventing major groups, particularly the Kurds, from pursuing their ethnic and nationalist aspirations.[14]

It also appears that the constitution was drafted mainly to recognize the rights of the Kurds, as well as the Shiites, the two groups that were severely persecuted under Saddam regime. Despite a general reference to multiple ethnicities and sectarian identities, the constitution lists two official languages, Arabic and Kurdish. The recognition of the right under the constitution for provinces to form a federal entity was a clear indication of the direction for the future Iraq, confirming that strong ethnic groups would enjoy greater autonomy subsequent to this major change in the political and legal structure of the country. In addition, a review of the constitutional provisions reveals that the Kurds were visibly favored and recognized a privileged status:

> There was also clear favouritism towards the Kurdish parties. For example, Articles 53, 54, and 58 acceded to Kurdish demands and further weakened central government. Further, the authority of the Kurdish regional administration was extended de facto though not de jure to provinces of 'disputed areas', such as Kirkuk, Diyala and Nineveh (Mosul), in addition to the three recognised Kurdish provinces; Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya.[15]

For the large part, the constitution was satisfactory to the pro-Barzani Kurds; a strong political entity that reflected recognition of a Kurdish

identity was established by this initiative which also saved them from long-standing persecution and brutality. For this reason, the KRG Kurds regarded this as fulfillment of their political aspirations for self-government. In a sense, therefore, the KRG was a proper and acceptable result of the Kurdish self-determination. In other words, Barzani and his aides viewed the settlement achieved in the constitution was an ideal case of self-determination for the Kurds, particularly in the presence of Article 140 which allows a call for a referendum on the legal status of Kirkuk and other disputed areas in the future.[16] Official statements since the adoption of the constitution supported this position, except that both Barzani and his aides never explicitly indicated they abandoned the right to full independence of the Kurds. In other words, they stated that the settlement was acceptable, but this would still reserve the right to declare an independent state in the future if the deal is undermined.

The willingness of the pro-Barzani Kurds to remain part of Iraq and honor its territorial integrity after a decade-long de facto independence was associated with the idea of a voluntary union "in which Iraqi Kurdistan will have a federal relationship with the central government but will leave it to other groups in Iraq to decide their own future, whether they go for centralist, governorate-based units or other options."[17] But the pro-Barzani political elite were also smart enough to avoid an initiative that would provoke the neighbors and cause destabilization in the region:

> Kurdish leaders are painfully aware of the fact that if they opt for independence, their geography and power bases are strongly against them. In such an unlikely situation, independence goes most probably through a military confrontation not only with Iraq, but with neighboring states and possibly with U.S. forces. It is difficult to imagine that Kurdish leaders would undermine their best chance to renegotiate their future and throw themselves into another wave of political violence.[18]

Ironically, the US, despite that it has been accused of destabilizing the region and seeking opportunities to create an independent Kurdish state, has been the primary hurdle before an independent Kurdistan.[19] In other words, Barzani always considered US support for their cause as a vital element. Without a green light or tacit and indirect endorsement by the US authorities, Barzani would never take initiative toward independence. But still, he did not raise any objection to an informal referendum held by the

Kurdistan Referendum Movement alongside the national parliamentary elections and the Iraqi Kurdistan elections in 2005 where 98.8% of the participants favored an independent Kurdish state. The referendum results were handed over to the UN Electoral Assistance Division as proof of the people's will.[20] The result would, in the years to come, serve as the best indication of popular support for independence that the Barzani administration would like to refer as a component of the legal basis for voluntary separation from Iraq. However, in the absence of opportunities for mass mobilization,[21] the pro-Barzani groups would have to wait for proper political conditions in fulfillment of their nationalist aspirations.

In fact, they might have viewed full independence as inevitable particularly after the US invasion which helped them consolidate their rule. But they also enjoyed an inherent advantage as well, an advantage that facilitated the attainment of their ultimate goal: the "sheer democratic weight and territorial concentration of Kurds within Iraq." Thanks to this advantage, "it was impossible for Ba'thist Iraq wholly to eradicate, expel, or assimilate them."[22] This enables the proponents of a self-governed, semi or fully independent Kurdistan to rely on the strong popular support they would need in case they decide to take an action they would regard the most appropriate.

The Iraqi state's failure and inability to assimilate the Kurds and incorporate them into the relatively weak and poorly constructed Iraqi national identity could be attributed to the historical distinctiveness of the Kurdish identity as well as territory.[23] Southern Kurdistan was artificially attached to the state of Iraq which was itself an invention rather than a firmly rooted political entity with recognized nationhood and territory throughout the history. In other words, the home of the Kurds was involuntarily incorporated into this new invention as part of political settlements in the post-World War I environment. The Kurds have never approved this "arranged marriage,"[24] as evidenced by influential and periodic revolts reflecting their unwillingness to remain under full control of the central government. Additionally, the British seemed to have left the door open for them to determine their future.

This allowed the Kurds to follow (albeit a flawed and incomplete) path of nationalism of their own even though they remained part of a unified Iraq. A smooth shift from purely tribal affiliation to assembly in form of political parties representing the Kurds who held equally strong national identities along ideologies with subtle differences was followed by the continued weakness of the Iraqi state which created opportunities for the Kurdish elites to consolidate their power and develop the idea of

a relatively autonomous Kurdistan region.[25] However, despite consolidation, Kurdish groups in Iraq have remained diverse and suffered from serious divisions along sectarian and tribal lines. Even though emergence of a culture of party politics alleviated the severity of the divide, the two major political groups (organized in form of political parties) have been strong rivals against each other for several decades.[26]

The US intervention in Iraq in 2003 was a blessing to the Iraqi Kurds in the sense that they realized they would have a chance of political and tribal unification among themselves once they settle their disputes by reliance on peaceful means.[27] A successful settlement of the long-standing rivalry between Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK created a fertile ground for the implementation of a self-determination project in form of a strong autonomy, backed by a certain degree of political recognition and greater political leverage in Iraqi national politics.

In a fairly pragmatic move and good reading of regional and international politics, the Iraqi Kurdish groups further improved their democratic standards, strengthened their institutions, and created a relatively safe home of wealth and prosperity for their constituents. Subsequent to consolidation of power in the Kurdistan autonomous region, Barzani and his aides often made references to the territorial integrity of Iraq and their intention to remain part of it. But they also stressed that they reserved the right to declare independence any time that they consider appropriate because their participation in a united Iraq was on a voluntary basis. In 2010, Barzani took a concrete step of revealing the KRG's intention of independence when they experienced a rift with the central government over the distribution of oil revenues. For the first time, Barzani presented the issue of self-determination to his party convention "to be studied and discussed."[28]

The tone has become even stronger over the time mostly because the KRG has attracted greater attention of the international community over its fight against ISIS and the growing problems within Iraq. In a fairly strong statement in June 2014, Barzani stressed it was time for self-determination of the Kurds:

> During the last 10 years, we did everything in our ability, we made every effort, and we showed all flexibility in order to build a new, democratic Iraq. Unfortunately, the experience has not been successful the way that it should have…It is the time now, the time is here for the Kurdistan people to determine their future, and the decision of the people is what we are going to uphold.[29]

In a short time after this statement, Barzani asked the Kurdish parliament to proceed with declaring intention toward self-determination:

> I ask for your assistance to set a date… We have international support for independence, and those who do not support us do not oppose us…You have to pass a bill on a KRG election commission as soon as possible.[30]

In early 2016, Barzani took another step further, calling for a non-binding independence referendum.[31] More recently, in a more comprehensive statement, the KRG administration expressed why independence is a viable and inevitable option:

> Many of us here today carry bitter stories of our horrific path on the successive regimes of Iraq and beyond, as the world simply looked on… The path forward must be on the pint by a realistic dialogue between the Kurdish leadership and moderate forces in Baghdad for a mechanism to shape our future relations based on good neighborly ties and mutual interests…Regarding the risk of declaring independence, our [Kurds'] past is full of atrocities and genocides. We didn't declare independence but yet we were treated barbarically…We are confident that the presence of a Kurdish state will develop Kurdish cause and promote stability in the Middle East… For the people of the Kurdistan Region, the risk of not declaring Kurdish independence is much more than declaring it because we have already seen and experienced it in the past…We are obliged to call for an independent Kurdistan to protect ourselves [from the repetition of atrocities, genocides and chemical attacks against Kurds]. They [Baghdad] have obliged us to ask for independence because they haven't accepted us [Kurds] as an equal citizen; they haven't been ready to respect us and protect our lives.[32]

"Democratic" Autonomy: Elusive Vision of Pro-Öcalan Kurdish Movement

Unlike the Iraqi Kurdish political elite, pro-Öcalan groups (although not entirely monolithic, it may include the Kurdistan Workers' Party-PKK, People's Democracy Party-HDP, and Kurdistan Communities Union-KCK) make a less stronger and obvious reference to self-determination. It is even possible to argue that representatives of these groups often avoid this term and tend to use replacements in the presentation of their political goals. Even though these groups are motivated by similar objectives and political ends, there are subtle differences in the discourse they

rely on to reveal their position on the political and legal status of the Kurds they claim to represent.

For instance, the PKK, at least initially, spoke of political independence as ultimate goal, whereas the political wing has never explicitly relied on a discourse of an absolute right to self-determination. With some minor changes, the pro-Öcalan Kurdish political groups remained adherent to the propagation and promotion of what they call democratic autonomy as a final settlement to the long-standing Kurdish question in Turkey.[33] Although the tone and content of this fairly unusual proposal (unusual in a sense that it does not seem to be fitting into the main precepts of the modern nation-state) has been changed over the time, the gist remained the same.

Despite suspicions over their true intentions, particularly the political (and non-violent) wing has been consistent in their demands and position in the political sphere. Without making direct and strong reference to self-determination, they advocated a unique type of autonomy for all "peoples" in Turkey.[34] But given that no other group makes similar claims, obviously this position practically applies to Kurds concentrated in certain areas alone. Whether this officially announced policy could be transformed into something that calls for greater political autonomy, independence or even merger with potential Kurdish entities in Iraq and other neighboring countries remains unanswered, at least in the eyes of the Turkish state. Most probably this is in fact why the state hesitates to endorse this position.

It is interesting to note that despite that they have been more ideologically driven than the pro-Barzani groups, the pro-Öcalan movement adopts a more lenient and a less stronger position in terms of what could be considered nationalistic aspirations. Whereas KRG appears to be pushing for full independence, HDP and its affiliates find local autonomy of the Kurds and recognition of their cultural rights in the national legal system sufficient. As an actor of the political stage in Turkey, the pro-Kurdish parties may be sincere in their relatively "milder" (in the standards of Turkish official perspective) position; but regardless of whether this is the case, this position could be attributed to some major factors.

Above all, the Kurds in Turkey did not have a historical experience of a high degree of autonomy. It is therefore not easy to determine whether they served as one of the main constituents of the state. This is crucial to assessing the validity of an argument in favor of self-determination. Second, Kurds and Turks, as well as other ethnic and national groups have

a common history and experience of coexistence for centuries.[35] This, in fact, allows the state to dictate a monolithic national identity which it claims is not based on ethnic lines. Third, it is not possible to regard the Kurds in even predominantly Kurdish areas as a monolithic group since there are some lines of division among them. Conservative and religious Kurds have often been suspicious of the intentions of the pro-Öcalan actors and this skepticism drove some of them to align with the state position.

A review of the HDP Party Program reveals that their approach to self-determination is centered around local administrations which they argue reflect self-government of the people and democratic decision-making on daily life.[36] The HDP argues that this type of democracy goes beyond representative democracy and approximates to direct democracy and that true democratization can be attained only through self-government and strong and autonomous local and regional administrations.[37]

HDP's democratic and autonomous local government approach is based on the idea of a strengthened local democracy and establishment of an administrative structure of autonomous assemblies. This model seeks to consolidate principles of participatory local government and direct democracy and to ensure use of native language in public sphere.[38] Driven by a leftist agenda, HDP, in its program, emphasizes that local administrations will assume main roles in the provision of services in different fields including health, education, environment, transportation, agriculture, and even security. Inevitably, this proposal entails rule by a local governor who would come to power through popular election.[39]

HDP further proposes the formation of regional assemblies.[40] As noted before, this may in practice apply to predominantly Kurdish areas only. Referring to a regional assembly as a true democratic solution for the entire country, HDP argues that this will contribute to confidence building among different peoples and to attaining peace and widespread freedom. According to the HDP Program, this democratic autonomy model will play an important role in the free and voluntary association of the peoples, Turkey's democratization and fulfillment of the demands of the Kurdish people.[41]

In contrast to the dominant discourse of one-nation and one-state in Turkey, HDP promotes multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multiple identities and stresses that all diversities should be preserved and guaranteed. HDP party program, often referring to peoples rather than one-monolithic nation, considers citizenship as the objective common denominator among the constituents. To this end, the party views

denial of multiple identities as a major obstacle to achievement of peace and equality among "peoples" of Turkey and dedicates itself to political struggle against assimilation and denial.[42]

In the only explicit reference to self-determination in the text, the HDP promotes the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination in principle and advocates the settlement of the Kurdish issue on the basis of democracy and recognition of equal rights and voluntary cooperation.[43] To this end, HDP proposes a new constitution that will guarantee recognition of different identities, languages, cultures, and religions on the basis of a constitutional citizenship. This constitution, according to the HDP Party Program, should also ensure use of native language in public sphere and education in native language as well as implementation of their unique model (democratic autonomy) which should be based on the principle of free and voluntary cooperation of the peoples toward Turkey's democratization.[44]

Obviously, the HDP Party Program makes no explicit or implicit reference to any nationalist or ethnic aspirations toward full independence and establishment of a separate state for the Kurds. But the main idea is to secure some sort of autonomy for all "peoples," particularly the Kurds who represent the main constituents of the party. Yet this autonomy does not necessarily refer to a federal state; instead, the HDP promotes the idea of strengthened local administration that will enjoy greater autonomy and that will base its legitimacy upon direct popular vote.[45] This unusual model does not offer any concrete project of self-determination that can be justified or explained under international law. The "democratic autonomy" model fails to fit into any of the major existing alternatives in world politics that entail creation of a discernable sphere of authority framed by territoriality and popular representation. In other words, the HDP does not seem to be promoting a type of self-determination recognizable in international law and politics. This does not necessarily mean that the model cannot be transformed into a viable political option. But based on this review, it is safe to argue that the HDP does not underline the necessity of self-determination for the Kurdish people that would eventually mean establishment of a national state of their own.

However, there are certain elements in the program that remind us of the mainstream definition of the principle of self-determination. First, the program refers to the voluntary association between the Kurds and other "peoples" without mentioning a specific group. This suggests that the Kurds have voluntarily joined the process of nation-building in Turkey and may imply that they are entitled to withdrawing their will

to remain part of the nation. Second, the HDP program further implies that the Kurds have the inherent right of determining their future as a political and sociological entity.

What exactly does this mean? It does not really mean that the HDP asks for a certain territorial space to be reserved for the Kurds; what they promote is, instead, recognition of Kurds as a people and a political group with certain collective rights. This is obviously different from a vision of nationhood which is useless without a territorial reference. The HDP promotes the idea that the Kurds should be recognized as a political group even if their vision bears no promise of ascending to the level of nationhood or statehood. This is partly because of the unique situation and the historical relationship between the Kurds and the state. But the chief reason is their political and ideological orientation. Framing itself as a universalist-leftist political party, the HDP is a product of an initiative proposed by Abdullah Öcalan which is popularly called "democratic confederalism."[46]

The proposal entails formation of a national (in terms of geography and representation) rather than regional or ethnic party. For this reason, as an outcome of such a proposal, the HDP would not promote solely the rights of the Kurds and their political autonomy. Instead, it is focused on the rights and privileges of all "peoples" as political collectivities. But the initiative failed in Turkey at least in the sense that the HDP has become marginalized as a pro-Kurdish party that has been accused of aligning with the PKK and its violence and fell victim of the growing nationalism particularly in the presence of the escalation of the conflict.

Fight for God-Given Rights: An Islamist Agenda of Coexistence

Even though one can observe a strong and visible awareness of ethnic identity among them, the Kurds cannot be regarded as a monolithic group. In addition to linguistic and sectarian differences, the Kurds are further divided along secularist-religious lines as well. Violent confrontations are often observed between the representatives of the rival pro-Kurdish groups over ideological differences; and the state of constant animosity affects the political alignments and voter preferences in the elections as well.[47]

It is interesting to note that there are major similarities in the discourses of these two ideological representations, not to mention the emphasis they place upon the recognition of Kurdish identity and the

rights of the Kurds. The long-standing rivalry despite these similarities can be attributed to the irreconcilable roots of the ideologies that serve as basis of the secularist and Islamist pro-Kurdish groups. Roughly speaking, ideologically motivated seculars promote a fairly leftist agenda, evolving from a Marxist orientation into a Universalist tone.[48] Islamists, on the other hand, without making direct reference, are influenced by the success of the Iranian revolution and its appealing message that puts political alignments aside and places emphasis upon the ties of brotherhood among fellow Muslims in the world.[49]

HÜDA PAR (Free Cause Party) is a telling example of a pro-Kurdish Islamist movement. Inspired by the Iranian revolution, HÜDA PAR promotes some fairly generic and universalist goals including delivery of justice at home and in the world, rejection of the sanctity of the state, and firm establishment of the principle of equality among people.[50] Other fairly generalist objectives include redefining the state and politics, conveying social norms to the political space, reviving the humane and Islamic values, ensuring full recognition of fundamental rights and freedoms, removing barriers before religious freedom, addressing moral corruption, maintaining social justice, contributing to social peace and harmony, and placing principle of justice at the center of foreign relations.[51]

In its party program, HÜDA PAR provides some details on how it would promote the idea of protecting fundamental rights and freedoms under separate headings.[52] The tone and language in these sections give the impression that the party makes no special reference to the rights of the Kurds as a separate political group. This is most probably because of the greater emphasis they put on Islamic identity and the Islamic principle that all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or national backgrounds, should be treated as equal brothers. This is one of the rare differences in terms of political discourse between HÜDA PAR and secularist HDP which makes strong references to the rights of the Kurds in the political stage.

As a fairly recent political party (founded in 2012) that was initially viewed as the political replacement of violent Hezbollah, the Free Cause Party framed itself in the political spectrum as a party seeking support of all like-minded fellow Muslims in Turkey regardless of their ethnic orientation. In other words, like the HDP, HÜDA PAR also raised a universalist-ideological discourse in the national political environment. But obviously the reality was that they would only represent a small

portion of the Islamist Kurds, without being able to appeal to radical Muslims in other parts of Turkey. In other words, despite that it promotes a transnational discourse and agenda relying on the notion of divinely established brotherhood among Muslims, the Free Cause Party has a fairly small constituency, restricted to Kurds who feel extremely distanced to a leftist political movement and hold Islamic sensitivities. This constituency is further limited because relatively moderate pious Kurds should also be excluded since they have shown tendency of voting for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in recent elections.

This means that even though it refers to a more comprehensive agenda, HÜDA PAR is, by the nature of its constituency, a pro-Kurdish political party. Their approach to the Kurdish issue and to the notion of self-determination, however, is significantly different from how pro-Barzani and pro-Öcalan groups approach and interpret the term and its implementation. Primary reason (a practical one) would be the fact that the party is unable to maintain a strong territorial representation which constitutes an essential element for a working definition of self-determination. Second, with some insignificant exceptions, demographic outlook of the supporters also does not serve in favor of the party's cause to achieve its goals on the political stage. For this reason, instead of seeking concrete representation either in the national parliament or in the local administrations which requires the support of the majority of the Kurdish voters in a certain election district, the Free Cause Party prefers appearance in the political competition as an entity that conveys a message of ideals and standards, and, in some cases, at least partially aligning with the ruling party where there is significant overlap in terms of Islamic sensitivity.[53]

A partial explanation for alignment with the ruling party is the perceived need of representing the religious Kurds who, in the eyes of the party leaders, should not be left at the discretion of the PKK or the HDP. Particularly after the bitter confrontation between the AKP and the HDP that became visible subsequent to the de facto end of the so-called democratic solution process (initiated to peacefully settle the Kurdish issue by the political administration), HÜDA PAR sensed an opportunity to establish links to the religious Kurds who would no longer cast their votes for the pro-Öcalan groups. This alignment further has taken the party to a fairly moderate political stance under which it promotes the idea that the state is a practical apparatus that should not impose a defined ideology and instead offer the services the citizens would need.

Taking a radical stance, the party places emphasis upon the need for amending the constitution which should be free of a central ideology, and for building a professional army rather than relying on compulsory military service.[54] HÜDA PAR's proposed constitution further offers an objective definition of citizenship which maintains a relationship of rights and obligations between the people and the state.[55] This framework of citizenship is taken in the party's program as a basis to address the Kurdish question without any explicit reference to the right of the Kurds to self-determination, either in form of independence or of autonomy of any sort.

HÜDA PAR's reference to the Kurdish issue does not carry any strong ethnic or territorial reference. Defining the Kurds as people settling in a vast area in different parts of the Middle East who speak Kurdish, the party argues that the practices employed by the state have done damage to the brotherhood between them and other peoples. The party program notes that secularism and strong emphasis upon Turkish identity, two major elements in the formation of the new state in the Republican era, have been main reasons for the state of irresolution. The program notes that the state should offer a formal apology to the persecuted Kurds and pay compensation as well.[56]

HÜDA PAR holds that the constitutional definition of citizenship based on the assumption that every citizen who is a Turk should be abolished and the Kurds should be acknowledged as constituents of the state. Accordingly, Kurdish should be recognized as one of the official languages and all racist practices and elements should be removed from public sphere and institutions. In addition to these generic items, the program also makes reference to more specific and concrete suggestions as well, including the abolishment of the village guard system and setting up commissions for proper investigations of unidentified murders and disappearances.[57]

As an Islamist party, HÜDA PAR's agenda of promoting fundamental rights makes strong references to religious figures and matters; the party asks for recognition of the Kurdish Islamic scholars who were persecuted in the past, adding that religious schools and madrasas should be reopened in official capacity. The party program underlines that general amnesty should be declared for the political dissidents who are either in prison or in exile so that they would lead a normal life.

HÜDA PAR, like the HDP, favors a strengthened local administration, stressing that all local governors and administrators should be

elected by popular vote.[58] But this proposal does not suggest autonomy of the local administrations; instead, the party program implies that the administrations may remain part of a unitary state structure. The gist of the HÜDA PAR proposal is that greater power should be vested in the local administrations and the state administration should be decentralized. It should be noted that this proposal is justified by the observation that centralization has caused huge problems in state administration, and not by the need for greater autonomy for the Kurds. For this reason, to avoid further problems, local administrations should be empowered because they become more attentive to the local needs and priorities.[59]

HÜDA PAR's proposal on the empowerment of local administration does not contain extensive details; instead, it offers some basic guidelines and principles. For instance, the party recalls that the central administration should not maintain strong tutelage on the local administration, that cooperation should be enhanced, and that proper mechanisms of internal audit should be established. The supervision of the central government over the local administrations should not undermine their ability to perform their inherent function, and should not include review in terms of substance. Additionally, the central government should be legally authorized to remove an elected figure of the local administration from power. Proper mechanisms should also be proposed to ensure greater participation of local people in the political processes so that they would have a word on the political stage. According to the party program, this will ensure effective use of the resources. Even though it does not propose a certain political model, the party notes that all alternatives including provincial system, autonomy, or federation should be freely discussed and that the people should be allowed to pick one of these alternatives.[60]

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter shows that self-determination can become an elusive term, gaining a fairly changing meaning and content depending on the political position of the groups under review. This, therefore, confirms the overall tone in the literature that self-determination serves as a political tool rather than a purely legal right under international law, used to attain, support, justify, or polish certain political goals. A review of how pro-Barzani Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq, pro-Öcalan political movement, and Islamist pro-Kurdish HÜDA PAR approach rely on the

term itself and others that may be associated with it demonstrates that their position, the political circumstances on the ground, their ideological orientation, and the priorities of the populace they claim to represent are dominant factors on the politics of self-determination.

Despite that each pursues a pro-Kurdish agenda, the discourse and practice they rely on in relation to the understanding and implementation of self-determination is explicitly different from each other. A pragmatic tone can thus be deducted, consistent with the political ambition that has motivated them to take action in the first place. This means that their approach vis-à-vis the idea of self-determination may be changed any time, again, depending on some of the factors referred above.

Barzani and his aides seem to be the most enthusiastic in promoting an agenda of self-determination. They make direct and strong references to the term in pursuit of full independence in the end. They often state that their intention to remain part of Iraq is not a permanent assurance and is conditioned upon the recognition of their extensive privileges as a highly autonomous political (and legal) entity. KRG reserves the right of declaring independence unless their political demands are fully honored and respected. In other words, the formulation of their stance vis-à-vis self-determination indicates that the right to independence as well as the right to determine its timing and conditions is their prerogative. They are able to do so because KRG is formally recognized as an autonomous entity under the Iraqi constitution, the demography and geography offer a great deal of advantage, and they enjoy a favorable image in the international political stage.

Pro-Öcalan HDP's reference to self-determination in its political discourse is less strong. One probable explanation is ideology. As an ideologically driven group, the HDP is dedicated to the idea of the so-called democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism which seeks to unite all "peoples" including the Kurds in a loose political (and broad—in the sense that it goes beyond national boundaries without legally eliminating them) entity, each group holding their inherent rights of self-government and autonomy. A more practical reason, on the other hand, is that they do not have full and strong territorial control and suffer from lack of full popular support in predominantly Kurdish areas.

Islamist HÜDA PAR makes no reference to the notion of self-determination itself; additionally, it does not appear to be promoting the idea of political autonomy of the Kurds in association with a certain defined territory, with separate political and legal powers. Instead,

the party promotes the idea of fundamental rights and freedoms which it refers to as God-given entitlements that do not have to be endorsed by the state. Even though it is a pro-Kurdish party (mostly Kurdish Islamists vote for it), HÜDA PAR distances itself from the idea of self-determination and a greater degree of autonomy for the Kurds. The most obvious reason is that in case of autonomy, their constituency will fall under control of the HDP and its affiliates, their biggest rival.

Notes

1. See for instance, Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination," *The Journal of Philosophy,* v. 87, n. 9 (1990): 439–461 and Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy*, Sovereignty and *Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).
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PART III

Interests

CHAPTER 6

Islam and the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey (2013–2015)

Ina Merdjanova

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to analyze the peace-building efforts in Turkey related to a recent initiative (2013–2015) by the governing Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) to solve a 30-year conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-led Kurdish insurgency that embroiled the country's southeast and claimed the lives of over 40,000 people. Within the broader spectrum of political and social agents in the peace process (PP),[1] I elaborate specifically on the role of religious leaders and activists. I look at the views and activities of imams working for the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which is a state agency, on the one hand, and of the Kurdish meles, or "people's imams," who generally work outside of the Diyanet-controlled spaces of worship in the Southeast, on the other. Because of the lack of space, I am not able to discuss how the minority religions in Turkey saw the PP, even though I conducted research on this issue, too. I briefly refer to some of the concerns of the Alevis. By exploring the religious

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dimension in the complex peace process in Turkey, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of how religious identities influence people's thinking about the politics of peace in places of protracted violence and social polarization.

My initial hypothesis was that Islam in Turkey can be a powerful constituent of the state-driven PP given its unique place in the Turkish polity. It is paradoxically incorporated in the governance of a legally secular state through the institutional structures of Diyanet, and at the same time it spans a vast horizontal system of networks and solidarity relationships through numerous Islamic schools, civil society organizations, and semi-official tariqas. Since the majority of the Turks and Kurds follow the dominant Sunni Islam which has enjoyed unprecedented material and ideological support since AKP came to power in 2002, I wanted to understand to what extent Islamic leaders and actors had utilized their immense resources to diversify the government's top-down approach in the Kurdish–Turkish PP, and to bring the two divided communities closer together, while also reaching out to the smaller ethnoreligious groups in the country.

My research findings led to a different set of conclusions: Islam was infrequently, selectively, and one-sidedly invoked as a mobilizing force in the cause of peace. Understandably, references to Islam and peacebuilding differed significantly between the Diyanet imams and the Kurdish Islamic actors. The minority religions, in turn, displayed conjunctural attitudes to the PP; they saw little opportunity for their participation and role in it, even though they had certain expectations from it.

My conclusion is that the PP in Turkey needs to be pursued in a holistic way that goes beyond the solution of the "Kurdish issue" alone and guarantees equal rights and inclusive citizenship for all. While the "Kurdish opening" remains central in efforts to bring stability and peace to the polarized, militarized, and beleaguered society in Turkey, it needs to be placed into a larger set of initiatives that would address the problems of other minorities such as the Alevis, Jews, Armenians, and Christians more broadly, as well as issues related to continuous human rights violations and persistent gender inequalities and instabilities, including notoriously high levels of violence against women.

In my research, I employ sociological and ethnographic perspectives, and draw on multiple sources such as personal conversations, newspapers, social media, analysts' blogs, policy reports, and academic literature. Many

of my observations in this chapter are based on over 12 months of living and research in Istanbul between 2012 and 2015. My visit to the cities of Diyarbakır, Ankara, Konya, and Istanbul in May–June 2015 to explore the role of religion in the PP allowed me to talk with local religious actors, scholars, activists, and policy makers. These trips coincided with the political campaigns in the run-up to the general elections in Turkey on June 7, 2015. Many people mentioned that things would look differently after the elections, depending on whether the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) would be able to pass the 10% electoral threshold (Turkey has the highest electoral threshold in the world, which has persistently barred smaller parties, including the pro-Kurdish ones, from entering the parliament). My presence at this time allowed me to observe the election campaigns and to talk with both religious leaders and ordinary people about their political choices, grievances related to the Kurdish–Turkish conflict, hopes and misgivings about the PP, and expectations about potential shifts in the distribution of political power in Turkey. To be sure, the people with whom I talked often understood the PP in widely differing ways. Generally, there were those who saw it as strictly related to the Kurdish issue alone and those who thought that it was connected to a multi-level democratization of the country. Furthermore, Kurds and Turks often had different understandings of, and expectations from, the PP. As a lawyer from the Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği) put it, "The Turkish peace and rights are different from the Kurdish ones."[2] "Everybody has their own PP in Turkey, which makes things so difficult," observed a university professor.[3] The latter also averred that there were two parallel processes: democratization (related to human rights and minorities) and the PP (dealing exclusively with the Kurdish issue).

The relapse into violent conflict in Turkey's Southeast just a month after my visit unexpectedly turned my field notes into a unique snapshot of a now lost historical moment of considerable promise and hope. For this reason, I decided to quote more extensively from my conversations than I would have done otherwise. Even though only in a few cases my sources asked for anonymity, given the collapse of the PP in July 2015 and the subsequent indiscriminate brandishing as "terrorists" of academics, journalists, lawyers, artists, and ordinary citizens who called on to the government to return to the peace talks, I decided to withhold the names of my interlocutors in order to protect their security.

Turkey's Islamic Secularism and the Kurdish Question

Secularism in the Turkish Way

Islam has played a central role in the Turkish society, which is 98% Muslim. The majority of Muslims are Sunni and an estimated 20% are Alevi. Furthermore, Islam has been a major tool of governing and control, a tradition that goes back to the time of the Ottoman empire. Its influence was circumscribed under the republic's founding ideology of secularism (laiklik) in the first decades after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, but never faded away. Since the 1980s, Islamic-based religious actors, political, and social activists have been increasingly assertive in the public sphere.[4]

While state secularism might mean other things in other contexts, in Turkey from the early republican years it served to sanction and endorse a specific form of Sunni Islam, as defined and promoted by the state-run Diyanet, in the constructing of the national political subject. Turkey's secularism is thus not about a separation between religion and state; it is rather about a hierarchical classification of the nation's members on the basis of their position vis-a-vis Sunni Islam and about the controlling of their personal and social lives through a control over their religiosity. In tandem with nationalism, secularism has functioned as a discursive practice of governmentality[5] by injecting homogenizing policies into society and seeking to discard both religious and ethnic difference, while sanctioning Sunnism and Turkishness as interlinked paradigmatic identities. To my mind, secularism also served historically as a driving force in the production of new national elites. Indeed, in the first decades of the Ataturk republic, it triggered the transformation of the Ottoman ruling classes into secular republican elites.

After the 1980 military coup, Islam was powerfully endorsed by the state as a means of achieving a stricter political control over the society. Religious classes were reintroduced in public schools. Numerous imam-hatip schools and theological faculties were established. The budget and personnel of the Diyanet increased tremendously. An officially promoted Turkish-Islamic-capitalist synthesis facilitated the ascendance of political Islam in the country. Islam-based parties embraced and promoted liberal economy and technological progress, which appealed to a wide range of people and expanded the power base of those parties. Because of its fusion with the state, religion served to mediate and legitimate

the neoliberal project rather than to criticize its injustices. Therefore, Turkey's policies of secularism not only crafted a specific "national Islam"; since the 1980s, they also created the material conditions for a massive deprivatization and expansion of Islam into the public and political spheres by sponsoring the training of a huge cohort of acolytes in the imam-hatip and higher theological schools. Imam-hatip graduates have consequently embraced public Islamic identities and have drawn extensively on Islamic patronage networks, especially in matters of professional career and upward social mobility.[6]

The Islamic-oriented AKP has both drawn heavily on the material and human resources created by the post-1980 boost of Islam and further expanded those resources. Under the AKP government, the state promotion of Islam has reached unprecedented scale, marking a new stage in the transformation of secularism. It has consistently asserted the centrality of the Islamic values and norms in all spheres of life and has facilitated the replacement of the Kemalist establishment with an Islamic one.

The budget of Diyanet, for example, has grown exponentially over the last decade, reaching around 5.4 billion Turkish lira in 2014 (ranking above 37 ministries' budgets), while its personnel has gone up from 74,000 to 141,000.[7] Furthermore, according to one of my interlocutors, the real budget is much higher because the official numbers do not include the Diyanet's income from hajj packages, which they sell as the only authorized agency to run the hajj in Turkey, or the expenses for the imam-hatip schools, which are run by Diyanet but are paid by the Ministry of Education.[8] Those vast resources serve exclusively the Sunni Muslims, leaving aside non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims even though all citizens contribute to the Diyanet's budget through their taxes. The Alevis have struggled without success to have their worship houses (cemevi) recognized and funded on an equal footing with the mosques. Statements by AKP officials such as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rhetorical question "Why should the Diyanet treat all religions as equals? This nation's beliefs are clear"[9] have fueled concerns among the Alevis and other minorities that the AKP government aims the Sunnification of the "nation" as those who are not Sunni are obviously seen as being not real members of it.

Diyanet has been increasingly active politically, campaigning for AKP both through various communal initiatives and the Friday sermons, which its regional chapters produce and distribute to the imams. Just before the general elections in June 2015, it has become the center of

the election campaign, with 100,000 members actively promoting AKP, according to one of its own imams.[10]

Turkey's Nation-Building and the Kurds

A considerable part of the complex demographic mix inherited from the Ottoman Empire—a multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups—did not fit the Turkish republic's nationalist matrix. Efforts to build a homogeneous nation out of those different populations under the guiding principle "one state, one nation, one language and one flag" involved various strategies that shifted over time, in synch with larger political and social transformations. However, multiple divisions continue to cut deeply through the fabric of society, which is split up into Islamists and secularists, Sunnis and Alevis, Muslims and non-Muslims, Turks and Kurds, in addition to being differentiated along gender, ideological, class, and generational lines. Those complex divisions often simultaneously draw on and play themselves out in crosscutting religious allegiances, symbols, and narratives.

Invariably, religion has been central to efforts for unification with Kurds, the majority of whom are Sunni, though following the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence as opposed to the Hanafism of the Sunni Turks. As Muslims, the Kurds enjoyed a privileged position in the Ottoman empire and a semi-autonomous status. Various Sufi religious networks traditionally commanded a significant influence among the Kurdish population, and their sheikhs often served as tribal leaders, too. The kinship-based tribal structure of the Kurdish community and the blending of religious and political leadership invested the communal leaders with considerable political power. In the Ottoman empire, the sultan used these leaders as a tool of control over the Kurdish population.[11] The tribal social structure and the Sufi networks have survived until today, and continue to play an important role in the Kurdish society, wherein some of them side with the Turkish state and some of them support the Kurdish resistance struggles.

Kurds, whose number regionally comes up to over 30 million, are considered to be the largest nation without a state. Their hopes of a separate statehood which was promised to them by the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 never materialized. The Lausanne Treaty in 1923 divided them between Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Today, approximately 16 million live in Turkey, 7 million in Iran, 5.5 million in Northern Iraq, and 2.5 million in Syria.

The Kurdish question in Turkey is related to the second-class economic, social, and cultural status of the Kurds, who make up some 18% of the population in this country. Since the establishment of the Ataturk republic in 1923, the Kurds have experienced continuous oppression, inequality, and denial of basic human rights. From the very beginning, their demands for rights and equal citizenship were branded as "separatism." Early rebellions against the state's assimilation policies in the 1920s and 1930s were brutally suppressed. With the emergence of political pluralism in the 1960s, the Kurdish struggles for recognition began to shape. They expanded under the influence of the regional anticolonial movements, on the one hand, and of the growing Turkish leftist movements, on the other hand. In fact, most of the Kurdish leftist activists started their political careers as members of the Turkish Worker's Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TIK).[12] In 1978, one of the leading Kurdish activists, Abdullah Öcalan, and his comrades founded the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK), aiming to establish a free Kurdistan. Having suffered enormously at the hand of the military junta after the coup of 1980 (which cracked down on both the Turkish left and the Kurdish activists), in 1984, PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish state.[13]

The Kurdish Movement (KM), which includes PKK as its military wing, and a score of political parties and cultural organizations as its civic brunches, has used both peaceful political activities for civil rights and PKK-led guerrilla warfare. It has combined economic justice struggles with identity claims, while its ultimate goal shifted in the 1990s from the establishment of a separate Kurdish state to democratic autonomy within Turkey. The conflict between PKK and the Turkish state had a gruesome human and material cost. In addition to the huge death toll on both sides, some 3,000 Kurdish villages in Turkey were wiped from the map. According to official figures, 353,000 people were displaced during the conflict, while international observers and Turkish NGOs estimate that the total number may be as high as 1–4.5 million.[14] The conflict has cost the economy of Turkey an estimated 300–450 billion USD.[15]

There have been several attempts for a peace deal between the government and PKK: in 1993, 1999, 2004, and 2009. None of them produced a sea change. A new initiative that started in early 2013 seemed until mid-2015 to stand better chances due to domestic and international conditions. A major factor was related to the political calculations by Turkey's long-standing prime minister and current president Erdogan,

who sought to secure larger Kurdish support for his party in the local and presidential elections in 2014, as well as in the general elections in 2015. Another important circumstance was Turkey's growing apprehension at the ongoing conflicts and instability in the region and at the rising movement for independence among the Kurds in Syria, which raised fears about spill-over effect among larger portions of the Kurds in Turkey.

Islam and the Kurdish Question

In the observation of Hakan Yavuz, AKP has presented secularism as a major driving force of Kurdish nationalism and separatism, and has sought to "Islamize" the Kurdish issue instead of resolving it through the introduction of equal rights and inclusive citizenship.[16] Indeed, the ruling party has continuously sought to instrumentalize Islam as a political tool of reapproachment with the Kurds. The "Islamic brotherhood" rhetoric has been powerfully employed to symbolically endorse a sense of commonality, and to expand the AKP's vote in the Southeast. It also became an important tool in the AKP's promotion of the PP. However, as some authors note, the pro-Islamic approach toward the Kurds has failed to significantly improve Kurdish–Turkish relations, let alone to reduce the Kurds's ethnic awareness. The influence of religious parties like the AKP among the Kurdish population has been rather linked to their economic performances and ability to provide security and stability.[17]

Ocalan himself used the "Islamic brotherhood" rhetoric in his Newroz letter to the Kurds on March 21, 2013, in which he called for an end of the armed conflict. His reference though did no go down well with the non-Sunni Kurds, as one of my interlocutors, an Alevi Kurd from Dersim (the Turkish name of the city is Tunceli), pointed out. Indeed, as Somer and Gitta Glüpker-Kesebir have emphasized, a focus on Islamic identity deepens secular-Islamist and Sunni-Alevi divisions and thus prompts ethnicization of Islam rather than Islamization of Kurdish ethnicity.[18]

As the PKK's political ideology was rooted in Marxism–Leninism, religion was viewed as an obsolete, fading away remnant of the past. However, in the 1990s, the KM revised its negative stance on Islam. It recognized that religion is deeply entrenched in the Kurdish culture and started engaging it in its struggle over the minds and hearts of the people. As one of my informants explained, "In 1993, PKK reevaluated

critically their real socialist ideology and decided to engage religion. They said: 'We also need to listen to the masses.' Their atheism was a propaganda by the Turkish state. My father followed the PKK ideology, but regularly did namaz."[19]

Another informant pointed out: "KM was never completely secular. People in it were never forced to leave religion, many guerrillas kept their faith. PKK has fought not against Islam, but against its use for the subordination of women, non-Muslims, etc. Religion was used against the Kurds, thus the PKK's initial reaction was anti-religious but this gradually changed. KM is a democratic movement, they respect their parents' faith."[20]

In addition to the demise of Marxism as a political force with the breakup of real socialism in 1989,[21] analysts consider two developments crucial for the PKK's engagement of Islam: the emergence of the Kurdish Islamist group Hizbullah, which many perceived as a state-supported formation aiming to suppress KM through extra-judicial killings, and the KM's transformation from a small leftist armed group into a nation-wide movement. The KM declared Islam a religion of justice, which opposes all kind of oppression and tries to accommodate the pro-Islamic Kurds as well as the Yezidis and Alevis.[22] In the observation of Ozsoy, Marxist PKK guerrillas were compared to the companions of Prophet Mohammed and were represented as the real grandchildren of Sheikh Said, the quintessential symbol for the Sunni Kurds, and Seyyid Riza, the Alevi leader of the Dersim rebellion against the Turkish state in 1937–1938, revered by the Alevi Kurds. Kurdish media published Öcalan's pictures with prominent Kurdish religious figures, and PKK established mosques for the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.[23]

The PKK's opening towards Islam was briefly reversed after the capture of Öcalan in 1999, when at the trial against him he sought to tactically assure the Kemalist establishment that the Kurds would guarantee secularism in a "democratic republic." Later, the KM turned again to religion, organizing the so-called civilian Friday prayers as well as commemorations of Sheikh Said, and cooperating with pro-Islamic Kurdish actors.[24] Especially, BDP/HDP[25] has increasingly accommodated religion, including distinguished religious figures in its ranks, supporting Islamic civil society groups in Diyarbakir and other cities, and organizing a number of workshops on Islam.[26]

My visit to Diyarbakır, the unofficial capital of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish Southeast, in May 2015 coincided with a Book fair, organized by

the HDP-run Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. The fair takes place periodically, and recently it has started to include stands with books in Kurdish, which many people saw as a historical step, given the restrictions and even bans on the Kurdish language in the not so distant past. About one-third of the public talks on important social and political topics during the fair were held in Kurdish. A key speaker at one of the panels, "Islam as a Religion of Justice and Peace," was Ihsan Eliaçık, a charismatic Turkish author of numerous books on Islam in contemporary society and the leader of the "Anti-Capitalist Muslims" group based in Istanbul. He counterposed "natural" to "institutional" religion and emphasized that all religions make a call to peace and expect their followers to lead moral and just lives, as well as to defend each other's social rights.

Overall, in the last decades, both the Turkish and Kurdish political elites have recognized the importance of religion for sociopolitical legitimation, and sought to tap on the enormous potential of Islam to mobilize the masses. This has inevitably created conditions for a clash of their different interpretations of Islam, broadly captured by dichotomies such as "statist" versus "people's" Islam, or "institutional" versus "natural" Islam, and related to their vastly diverse political ideologies. Under the current circumstances, the prospects for reconciliation of those clashing visions seem more distant than ever.

Islam and the Kurdish Opening 2013–2015

At the end of 2012, the AKP government announced its new initiative to solve the Kurdish issue, after the failure of a similar short-lived attempt in 2009.[27] It started negotiations with the imprisoned Kurdish leader Öcalan around several points: cease-fire, withdrawal of PKK fighters from the territory of Turkey, and a legal framework aiming to democratize Turkish society and to address the grievances of the Kurdish population.

Diyanet

As a state agency, commanding enormous material and personnel resources, and running the mosques in the country and abroad, Diyanet has been instrumental in reaching out and conveying government's politics to the masses, in particular through the Friday sermons (hutbes). According to Elisabeth Özdalga, it has started to use hutbes for political guidance since the 1960s, and increased when after the

1980 coup the military demanded from it to cover a broad range of topics. Since 1997, the hutbes have been written in the Diyanet's headquarters, and even after a recent organizational decentralization, different regional offices have been routinely sending their hutbes to the center for approval.[28]

"Usually 80% of the hutbes content should be about Islam and 20% about nation-related topics," commented a Turkish researcher. However, his analysis of over 150 hutbes delivered between 2003 and 2005 established that "love for the country" was mentioned more frequently than the "love for God." The notions of "Islamic brotherhood" and "justice" were brought up 37 times, in contrast to the 167 appearances of the topic of the "nation."[29]

In 2012, the Turkish National Security Council assigned a more active role for the Diyanet in "the fight against terrorism."[30] "Terrorism" meant PKK, which is outlawed in Turkey and which the state considers a "terrorist organization."

One would expect that the AKP peace initiative would be a returning topic of the Friday sermons written by Diyanet, but my conversations with imams and regular participants in the Friday prayers indicated that this was not the case. Furthermore, the Diyanet-appointed Turkish imams in the Southeast seemed to struggle with mistrust and lack of genuine acceptance by their congregations. A young imam stationed in a small Kurdish village complained that his predominantly Shafi'i congregation did not pray with him. "They come to the mosque and they are nice and respectful but they don't want me as their imam. I had high hopes becoming an imam to reach out to the community and help people. Now I am stuck with a community who sees me as alien."[31]

In Diyarbakır, a Diyanet imam pointed out that "Diyanet understands the PP in the form of Islamic brotherhood rather than peacebuilding." This key point highlighted poignantly the dominant approach of Diyanet which has reflected the government's strategy to emphasize Islam as a common faith rather than to address the KM's demands for collective rights, equal and inclusive citizenship, and democratic regional autonomy. My interlocutor criticized both PKK and the state for their instrumentalization of religion, and noted that "Diyanet has a minimal role in the PP, it can't act by itself, because it is dependent on the state." In his view, Diyanet should be independent from the state; believers should be able to directly elect their religious leaders and to engage in free religious

activism[32]—which seems to be a minority view among the Diyanet officials.

In 2010, during the previous peace initiative, Diyanet organized a symposium in Diyarbakır to discuss the expectations of the local religious actors. The importance of the mother tongue as a key ingredient of an inclusive peace was emphasized. "We said, our mother language is very important, we want to use it. No language or people are better than the others, equality is ingrained in our hadises and ayets." In fact, "a couple of years ago, Diyanet made possible delivering of the hutbes in the local mosques in Kurdish, Arab and Zazaki. A week ago, it launched a Kurdish translation of the Qur'an. We already have such translations, but this is the first time Diyanet did one, and it took so long because the state wants to control everything," pointed out my interlocutor.[33]

In Konya, which is a religiously conservative and nationalist city, a Diyanet imam emphasized that "the PP needs strict rules. There is no way that Islam is touched," obviously referring to the HDP's call for the abolishment of Diyanet[34] and thus equating Islam with Diyanet. He further explained that "people have certain expectations from the PP: to stop this terrorist organization, which fights against the state, and which should not take advantage from the PP." He saw PKK as solely responsible for the conflict, since, according to him, Kurds and Turks "live peacefully and even intermarry," while "Diyanet even translated the Qur'an into Kurdish and Armenian." As an example of the government's interreligious goodwill, he pointed to a "Religions Garden" (Dinler Bahçesi), which was opened in Antalya in 2004 and includes a historical mosque, church and synagogue in close vicinity.

My interlocutor averred that it was the Atatürk state which pitted people against each other. He quoted the Qur'an's ayet "no compulsion in the matters of religion"; yet, he interpreted it exclusively as "freedom of religion." "Those who want to practice should practice. Now we have freedom and being religious is not a problem. The problem comes from people who don't like religion." He emphasized that "Islam is a religion of peace, and those who want peace need to learn the Qur'an. It is against the killing of people and supports the good neighborly relations." And while he claimed that "in Islam, we don't look at people with superiority," he also displayed an entrenched feeling of superiority against the Kurds, which seemed to be shared by many Turks: "In the East [the Kurdish areas], they have a feudal society. People are poor and ignorant. There is no education in the villages. Men do not know how to

treat their wives. They only see them as their servants." "If we live a true Muslim life, there will be peace," summed up my interlocutor.[35]

People's Imams (Meles)

The Kurdish imams, called meles, are usually graduates of local Shafi'i medreses[36] (which are unrecognized yet tacitly tolerated by the authorities) rather than of the official imam-hatip schools. They are traditionally highly respected figures in the Kurdish society. Depending on the situation, their salaries are paid either through locally raised funds or by the state, as some of them work in the Diyanet-run mosques.[37] Importantly, the sheikhs and meles have played an important role in the solution of various communal conflicts such as blood feuds, honor killings, and family and tribal disputes.[38]

Although initially the meles were alienated by the KM's take on religion, since the 1990s, they have increasingly aligned with the movement's struggles. In 2011, in an impressive form of civil disobedience, thousands of Kurds regularly attended Friday prayers held in Diyarbakır's Dağkapı square, the place where the Turkish state hanged the rebellious Sheikh Said and his 46 companions in 1925. They refused to pray in Diyanet-run mosques and flocked instead to the place with the greatest symbolic value in the Kurdish nation-building. Those "civilian Friday prayers", as they were called, rapidly spread to other Kurdish towns. In a gesture of support, Selahattin Demirtaş, the HDP's leader, asked the Kurds not to follow "Turkist", "Fethulahist," and "statist" imams, as such notions did not exist in "our religion."[39]

Key events in recent efforts to integrate Islam into KM through a new interpretation of its meaning and goals were the two meetings of the Democratic Islam Congress (DIC)[40] which were held on a call by Öcalan. The first meeting took place in Diyarbakir on May 10–11, 2014, and was organized by the Democratic Society Congress (an umbrella organization for pro-Kurdish groups), while the second one addressed the diaspora and took place in Hagen, Germany, on May 24–25, 2014 under the auspices of the Federation of Kurdistan Islamic Community. The meetings emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace and justice, and put forward the Medina contract as a model for a peaceful coexistence in a religiously pluralistic society. According to Rahman Dag, "by formulating Islam in a way that stresses fighting oppression and pursuing peace and order, the Kurdish nationalist movement is creating its own

interpretation of Islam to consolidate its existence as a nation among others."[41]

One of my interlocutors, a mele and a seyda (teacher), emphasized that the Kurds demand basic rights, equality, and the use of their mother tongue. He thought that the destruction of the peaceful coexistence in Diyarbakır dates back to 1915, when the Armenian and Syriac communities were exterminated. "Before that Kurds, Syriacs, Armenians, Yezidis, all lived together. Afterwards the whole society was built on war." According to him, the PP was very important, yet it did not proceed very well. "The PP depends on Erdogan. He said earlier: 'The Kurdish issue is my issue,' and now he says: 'There is no Kurdish issue.' He is afraid that all Kurds will unite, and tries to seduce people through Islam." My interlocutor criticized Diyanet for "never uttering a word about the violence against the Kurds" and noted that "the state should leave Islam free." In his words,

> The Turkish state divided the Kurdish people, and I don't say 'the government,' I say 'the state'. We don't trust the state. We used to support the AKP, they did many good things, but they later changed. The state is the only one responsible for the conflict. On a grassroots level, we don't have problems between Kurds and Turks, we live together, often intermarry.[42]

A respected leader of DIC was more optimistic about the role of religious actors in the PP and beyond. "We want an inclusive Islam, and we follow the principle of justice (adalet ilkesi). We try to engage women and young people, and to be inclusive to the minorities, too. If Turkey wants to be a model, it has to respect the differences," emphasized my interlocutor. He criticized AKP for their controversial attitude to the minorities, and for their thinking that only the Sunni-Hanefi Turks have rights. He also emphasized that historically "there has been a lot of oppression in Turkey. The Turkish state wanted to destroy all ethnic differences and used Islam as a means of control."[43]

DIC does not have any relations with Diyanet. When they requested a meeting with the current head of Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez, the latter declined. My interlocutor criticized Erdogan for his lavish spending (israf), quoted recent numbers on the poverty in Turkey, on the killing of women, and other burning social issues which he thought had been neglected by the AKP government. "We are strong, we are on our own land, we are inclusive, we are friends with the minorities. We will change the system," concluded he.[44]

I was also able to do a small focus-group meeting with four meles. The first one, whom I call here Aalan, sounded quite extreme on most of the topics, criticizing the West, which according to him "played a key role for the terrible situation in both Kurdistan and the Middle East." The second mele, whom I call Baran, was a member of the DIC Steering Committee, and spoke with certain authority and political acumen. The third one, whom I call Can, was a soft-spoken person who shared interesting observations, speaking mostly in Kurdish. The last one, whom I call Dibo, was a young, determined-looking person. He was clever and sharp, but kept a respectful silence most of the time, obviously in line with the traditional age hierarchy in Kurdish society. Our conversation was revealing of not only how those four meles saw the PP, but also of what perhaps a considerable portion of the pious Kurdish grassroots thought of the PP and related issues.[45]

When I announced the topic of my research, Baran stated: "Islam has always been a religion of peace. People, by practicing Islam, by getting the message of Islam, practice peace."

Aalan: The history shows that Kurdish people are peaceful and peace-loving. We are victims of the Great Powers. Because the Kurds don't have their army and state institutions, other states have used their armies to rule us. We have been cheated by Europe, especially by Great Britain and Germany for 100 years and it is difficult to trust them now. We don't want gifts, we only want what is ours, our rights. The PP depends on sincerity, but the Turkish state is not sincere.

Can: The KM is a democratic movement, but some powerful states still brand it as terrorist. The Kurds have been pushing for peace since 2000, 15 years already, that was the reason why the current PP started.

Baran: This year, DIC organized forty panels on Islam and peace on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday in different cities across Turkey. They did not want Diyanet to monopolize again the celebrations as they have always done. The speakers were scholars such as Kadri Yıldırım [a professor in Islamic theology at Mardin University] and Hüda Kaya [a renown female theologian; both have been subsequently elected as HDP MPs]. Everywhere the meeting halls were full. One of the major topics was the Medina contract, which promotes the rights of minorities. We emphasized the ayet "there is no compulsion in religion." The Prophet established this principle because there were some Muslims in his time who tried to convert people by force.

Can: HDP is our PP. Baraj [threshold] for us is not only the 10% electoral threshold, many things are baraj: Diyanet, the Turkish army, police, media, the psychological pressure exerted on us.

Aalan: In the 1990s, I was tried and relocated to Samsun [a city on the north coast of the country, one of the Turkish nationalist strongholds] because I delivered a sermon in Kurdish to my cemaat. It took me 10 years of service as an imam there for people to accept me. Today, we can preach in Kurdish, even though this is not a legally guaranteed right. Since the Ottoman time Kurds have suffered Turkification and Hanification.

Baran: Diyanet is now more relaxed to Shafi'ism, especially when they saw how powerful we are when we organized those civil prayers all over the Southeast. Öcalan gave importance to religion. He said: 'Tesavvuf [spirituality/mysticism] should stay.' We respect other religions, too. Young people here often don't like religion, which is also because of what Hizbullah did in the name of religion. Hizbullah made people afraid of Islam.

Can: We want justice, equality, and rights for everyone. We don't support the majority's exclusivism. There can't be a PP without justice.

Aalan: There was an imam from Samsun who came here, preached in Turkish and was received very well. Peace will arrive when we go to Samsun, preach there in Kurdish and feel welcome.

In addition to Kurdish meles, I was able to talk with representatives of the Kurdish Islamic organization Zehra in Diyarbakır.[46] People at Zehra noted that they work to advance the rights of Kurds outside of KM, and complained that all sides misuse religion. For them, the Turkish–Kurdish conflict was a political rather than a social problem as "Turks and Kurds have a history of peaceful living together." However, they were not very optimistic about the PP. They were worried that the processed had dragged on for three years without noticeable progress, and complained that despite their support for the PP, they were not given any role in it.[47]

The Alevis

The Alevis in Turkey are a heterogeneous community, divided into the major groups of Alevis and Bektashi, and further smaller groups called "ocaks." The major organizations representing them are grouped in two larger federations: the Federation of Alevi Foundations (Alevi Vakıfları Federasyonu, AVF) and the Alevi Bektashi Federation (Alevi Bektaşi Federasyonu, ABF).

Alevis often object against their being defined as a minority, and some of them claim that they represent a specifically Turkish version of Islam. They are believed to be around 15 million (there is no "Alevi" category in the national censuses, so they go under the category of "Muslim"), yet they have largely remained socially excluded. An estimated 3 million have Kurdish ethnic identity. Many Alevis prefer to hide their identity because of exclusion and discrimination on a daily basis (for example when applying for a job). Furthermore, they are occasionally threatened and often live in fear.[48] One of my informants shared: "Recently, some nationalists in Antalya marked the doors of the houses where Alevis are living, and there was a fear they would be attacked and even killed." He noted that the Alevis had "many expectations" from the PP, the most important of which is the recognition of their distinct identity. "For a real peace to happen, we need to establish a peaceful coexistence. The cemevis have to be legalized, this has both a material and a symbolic value for us, and it is really important. It would mean our identity is recognized as equal."[49]

A prominent leader of a major Alevi organization voiced similar concerns. During our first meeting in 2014, he noted: "We want our cemevis to be accepted as places of worship; religious education should include adequate information about us; we should be allowed to open schools for the training of our clergy, as currently we don't have any religious schools." He pointed out that the Alevis feel enormous pressure against their identity. As an example of political discrimination he noted that not a single governor in Turkey is of Alevi origin.[50] During our meeting in 2015, my informant emphasized that human rights are not only individual, but communal as well. "We want to keep our culture, to educate our children. We need cultural and ethnic freedom." Yet, he harbored no hope for a new Alevi opening[51] and was convinced that the AKP government was trying to create a "religious country."[52]

To be sure, despite occasional pledges to uphold the rights of the Alevis, the AKP government has not resolved the cemevis issue. Recently, the head of Diyanet stated that granting a legal status to the Alevi worship places is out of question as "cemevis cannot be considered an alternative to mosques."[53]

My interlocutor insisted that the PP and religious freedom do not overlap, even though he agreed that the PP and democratization go hand in hand. However, he criticized the Kurds for starting to campaign for the country's democratization only recently, with the emergence

of HDP. He thought that if HDP entered the Parliament, "this would help a better mosaic, even though not necessarily a better atmosphere. It would reduce the voice of AKP and slow down the Islamization of Turkey." However, he was not very optimistic about the future. "We may see a disaster, the Syrian war spreading further, and a civil war in Turkey. I am extremely concerned."[54]

Indeed, violence again erupted in Turkey's Southeast following the AKP's loss of its majority in the Parliament during the June 2015 elections.

Conclusion

My research confirmed that religion-related spheres are an important, even though not the primary, terrain where ideological and social views of the PP in Turkey clash and compete. Religion exerts significant influence on the individual and collective lives of the majority of the population in the country, and there have been certain attempts by religious leaders to harness religious discourses in the cause of peace. Those attempts, however, have remained politically affiliated and sponsored. For example, the organization and running of four parallel celebrations of the Prophet's birthday in 2015 in Turkey's Southeast, the biggest one by Hizbullah through its related organization Lovers of Prophet (*Peygamber Sevdalıları),* the second one by the DIC, the third one by Diyanet, and the smallest one by the Gülen movement, was a perfect illustration of how divided Sunni Muslims in the Kurdish areas are. Yet, as Cuma Çiçek, a scholar who has studied extensively Islam among Kurds, emphasized in his recent book, the different Kurdish Islamic groups are not autonomous actors. They often share overlapping social bases which results in competition, but also in interaction and mutual transformation. The main factor for their transformation is the society; they learn from each other in the process of their interaction.[55]

Islamic leaders and actors in Turkey are heavily dependent on political configurations and agendas, and the religious arena as a whole is extremely politicized and polarized. While Diyanet imams insist that only PKK is to blame for the conflict, Kurdish males hold responsible the state. There is no communication let alone cooperation between the two groups. Even though both sides emphasize that "Islam is a religion of peace", they seek to elaborate distinct approaches and visions of the role

and place of religion in the society, which are captured by notions such as "statist" versus "people's" Islam. Diyanet imams seem to understand the "Islamic brotherhood" as a unifying project which overrides national and linguistic identities. Kurdish meles criticize Diyanet for being silent about the oppression against the basic rights of the Kurdish believers and see "Islamic brotherhood" as a rhetorical tool for control and assimilation. They emphasize that the Qur'an recognizes and respects national and language differences. My findings concur with the conclusion of Sarigil and Fazlioglu that Islam has been employed for contradictory purposes by pro-Kurdish Islamic and secular actors, on the one hand, and by Turkish nationalists and Islamists, on the other. While the former have referred to Islamic teachings in order to promote Kurdish political and cultural rights, the latter have sought to constrain Kurdish nationalism through an emphasis on a shared faith.[56]

As for the minority religious groups, either Muslim or non-Muslim, they supported the PP but were apprehensive about the political linking of the PP with the "Islamic brotherhood" principle. They remained socially unequal and politically vulnerable, and even though they would have liked to play a role in the PP, they felt excluded from it. Generally, they have been embraced primarily by HDP, and only occasionally by AKP. This is related to the hugely divergent ideological orientations of the two parties. While AKP is an Islamic-based, socially conservative party, which has frequently employed Ottomanist rhetoric and approaches in its treatment of minorities, HDP is a leftist political formation, which has sought to include all religious and ethnic minorities, and has focused on gender equality, pluralism and grassroots democracy.

Overall, Islam has not been a factor in the PP in Turkey, at least not in the form in which it has been promoted by the state-controlled Diyanet. The instrumentalization and politicization of Islam by the state have exacerbated religious exclusivism. As for KM, it has begun to construct its own approach to Islam and even its own concept of Islam, divergent from the "statist," institutional Islam. Furthermore, it has formulated and started to put in place an inclusive politics on religious pluralism, which is very different from the patronizing approach of the Turkish state to ethnoreligious minorities. However, KM still needs to develop a systematic and self-critical engagement with religion, according to Çiçek[57] if it wants to enhance its base among pious constituencies and to boost further its pluralism and inclusiveness.

Notes

1. The governing AKP preferred to call the process "Solution Process" (Çözüm Süreci), while the pro-Kurdish actors used predominantly the notion "Peace Process" (Barış Süreci). The use of those different notions signaled distinct conceptual approaches prioritized by the two sides: the former designated the search for a statist political solution to the Kurdish issue through legal and institutional means while the latter suggested a more comprehensive approach which in addition to state-instigated legal and institutional formulas included the participation of civil society organizations and an emphasis on social reconciliation. As I see peace-building as a holistic, multidimensional process, which reaches beyond the end of the violent conflict to include communal and personal reconciliation and transformation, I use the term "Peace Process" throughout this article.
2. Conversation, May 27, 2015.
3. Conversation, May 27, 2015.
4. About Islam, society and politics in Turkey see, among others, Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan, eds., *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006); Omer Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1981); Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
5. I am referring here to Foucault's concept of "governmentality" as a set of discursive practices used by political elites to acquire and maintain power. See Michael Foucault, "Governmentality," *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979): 5–21.
6. For a discussion on the networks of imam-hatip graduates see Iren Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
7. Data quoted in Pinar Tremblay, "Who speaks for Islam in Turkey?," *Al Monitor*, May 8, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/turkey-religious-affairs-directorate-under-scrutiny.html#ixzz3o2lHXnKI.
8. Conversation, June 1, 2015.
9. Online post, accessed April 25, 2015, http://m.ortasayfam.com//siyaset/akp-yetmedi-sira-erdoganda/6928/

10. See Pinar Tremblay, "Is Erdogan signaling end of secularism in Turkey?," *Al Monitor*, April 29, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/turkey-is-erdogan-signaling-end-of-secularism.html.
11. About the history of Kurds see, among others, Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1992), and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris,1996).
12. Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "Born from the Left. The making of the PKK," in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*, eds. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (New York: Routledge, 2011), 123–142.
13. About the history of PKK see, among others, Aliza Markus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York and London, New York University Press, 2007).
14. Global IDP Database, Profile of Internal Displacement: Turkey, 2004, 8., accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Europe/Turkey/pdf/Turkey-April-2004.pdf.
15. Data quoted by *Conflict Watch*. Accessed November 8, 2015. https://theconflictwatch.wordpress.com/europe/kurdistan-conflict/
16. M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 174.
17. See, among others, Zeki Sarigil, "Curbing Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism in Turkey: An Empirical Assessment of Pro-Islamic and Socio-Economic Approaches," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33/3 (2010): 533–553; Zeki Sarigil and Omer Fazlioglu, "Religion and ethno-natioanlism: Turkey's Kurdish issue," *Nations and Nationalism* 19/3 (2013), 531–571.
18. Murat Somer and Gitta Glüpker-Kesebir, "Is Islam the Solution? Comparing Turkish Islamic and Secular Thinking toward Ethnic and Religious Minorities," *Journal of Church and State*, 58/3 (2015): 529–555.
19. Conversation, May 12, 2015.
20. Conversation, May 21, 2014.
21. Martin van Bruinessen, *Mullah, Sufis and Heretics: the Role of Religion in Kurdish Society* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 54.
22. Cuma Çiçek, "The pro-Islamic challenge for the KM," *Dialectical Anthropology,* 1 (2013): 162; Hisyar Ozsoy, "Between Gift and Taboo: Death and the Negotiation of National Identity and Sovereignty in the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 147–148.
23. See Ozsoy, "Between Gift and Taboo", 148 ff.
24. Çiçek, "The pro-Islamic challenge,"162.

25. The Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi), was established in 2008. It is a sister party to HDP (founded in 2012). In 2014, the BDP's name was changed into Democratic Regions Party (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi, DBP) and it moved to operating at the local administrative level in the Kurdish areas, while the HDP operates at the national level as a pro-Kurdish, pro-minority, left-wing formation.
26. Burcu Ozcelik, "Turkey's Other Kurds," *Foreign Affairs*, May 4, 2015, accessed July 5, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-05-04/turkeys-other-kurds.
27. The 2009 opening promised greater cultural rights for Kurds, some form of local autonomy and demobilization and integration of PKK fighters into society. In the end, it only provided a Kurdish language TV channel in the state broadcasting network, made changes in laws on the rehabilitation of minors involved in "terrorist acts" and allowed the use of Kurdish in prisons. See Zeynep Başer and Ayşe Betül Çelik, "Imagining peace in a conflict environment: Kurdish youths' framing of the Kurdish issue in Turkey," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 48/3 (2014), 265–285, here p. 269.
28. Elisabeth Özdalga, "Nationhood and citizenship in Turkish Friday sermons: from 1908 Young Turk revolution to early 21st century pro-Islamist governments" (lecture at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, May 27, 2014).
29. Conversation, May 27, 2015.
30. Cicek, "The pro-Islamic challenge," 159.
31. Quoted in Tremblay, "Is Erdogan signaling."
32. Conversation, May 6, 2015.
33. Ibid.
34. During the election campaign, the HDP co-chair Demirtaş called for the abolishment of Diyanet and free, instead of state-controlled, practice of religion, which the AKP followers interpreted as an attack on Islam. As a HDP activist explained: "We want imams to be elected like municipality officials." She also emphasized that HDP targeted Diyanet because "it supports men's control of women, especially their bodies, and thus works to marginalize women." (Conversation, May 20, 2015)
35. Conversation May 27, 2015.
36. Even after the 1925 closure of medreses by the Kemalist regime, Kurdish medreses have continued a clandestine existence. As the only places where people could learn to read and write Kurdish, they have played important role in the raising of the Kurdish national awareness. See, among others, Zeynelabidin Zinar, "Medrese education in northern Kurdistan," *Islam des Kurdes*, special issue of *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, ed. by Martin van Bruinessen & Joyce Blau, 5 (1998), 39–58.

37. The mosques in the Kurdish region are divided into state-run mosques, mosques run bun by local sheikhs, and mosques controlled by the Kurdish Hizbullah (KH). See Emrullah Uslu, "The Transformation of the Kurdish Political Identity in Turkey: impact of modernization, democratization, and globalization" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2009), 76. According to Uslu, in Batman, the stronghold of the Kurdish Hizbullah, around 80 mosques are controlled by the state and 40 by the Hizbullah, ibid., 77.
38. Uslu, "The Transformation of the Kurdish Political Identity," 78; Zinar, "Medrese education."
39. Çiçek, "The pro-Islamic challenge," 159.
40. DIC is an umbrella structure that includes various Kurdish Islamic organizations. It has been meeting annually since it was formed in 2011.
41. This paragraph draws from Rahman Dag, "Democratic Islam Congress and the Middle East," *Open Democracy*, June 14, 2014, accesses February 20, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/rahman-dag/democratic-islam-congress-and-middle-east.
42. Conversation, May 6, 2016.
43. Conversation, May 8, 2015.
44. Ibid.
45. Focus group conversation, May 11, 2015.
46. Zehra is a Kurdish Nur group, rooted in the teaching of Said Nursi, whose books the leader of the organization, Molla Ibrahim, has translated in Kurdish. Zehra has been active since 1993, endorsing a cultural Kurdish nationalism. It is a non-hierarchical organization, all staff are volunteers, and it has a score of female members. Every Sunday they hold discussions on "Risale-i Nur" ("Rizale-i Nur" sohbetler), which are also attended by women. For 23 years Zehra has been publishing a quarterly journal called "Nubihar" (New Spring) in Kurdish. From time to time they also include articles in Zazaki, the language of a small group within the Kurdish community. The articles in "Nubihar" discuss religion, culture and literature; there are special issues on peace in Islam. A major figure in the Kurdish Nur movement was Izzlettin Yıldırım, who was murdered by Hizbullah in 1999.
47. Conversation, May 7, 2015.
48. There have been several pogroms against Alevis in the recent Turkish history: in Malatya in 1978, Maraş in 1979, and Çorum in 1980, when hundreds of Alevis were murdered, their homes were torched and looted. Further massacres include the Sivas Massacre (1993) and the Gazi incidents in Istanbul (1995). See, among others, Zeynep Alemdar and Rana Birden Çorbacıoğlu, "Alevis and the Turkish State," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 10/4 (2012): 117–124, here pp. 119–120.

49. Conversation, May 30, 2015.
50. Conversation, June 6, 2014. A governor, or vali, is responsible for the implementation of the government's decisions on provincial level. Currently, none of the 81 governors in the country comes from a minority group. Furthermore, only one woman serves a governor. About the latter see Zeynep Oral, "Yuh Olsun: 81 İlde 1 Kadın Vali!," *Cumhuriyet*, September 21, 2014, accessed December 16, 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/121661/Yuh_Olsun__81_ilde_1_Kadin_Vali_.html.
51. The AKP announced the so-called Alevi opening in 2007. The initiative contained a number of workshops with Alevi leaders in an attempt to map and address the major concerns of the community. It continued until 2010, did not produce significant results, and some Alevi groups saw it as controversial. On the Alevi opening see, among others, Talha Köse, *Alevi Opening and the Democratization Initiative in Turkey,* SETA Policy Report, 2010, accessed January 8, 2016, http://arsiv.setav.org/Ups/dosya/28899.pdf.
52. Conversation, May 31, 2014.
53. "Legal status to Alevi worship houses a 'red line,' says Turkey's religious body head," *Good morning Turkey*, January 4, 2016, accessed January 16, 2016, http://www.goodmorningturkey.com/politics/legal-status-to-alevi-worship-houses-a-red-line-says-turkeys-religious-body-head.
54. Conversation, June 1, 2015.
55. Cuma Çiçek, *The Kurds of Turkey: National, Religious and Economic Identities* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2016).
56. Sarigil and Fazlioglu, "Religion and ethno-natioanlism," 532.
57. Çiçek, *The Kurds of Turkey.*

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CHAPTER 7

Ethnic Capital Across Borders and Regional Development: A Comparative Analysis of Kurds in Iraq and Turkey

Serhun Al and Emel Elif Tugdar

Introduction

The work of Ernest Gellner (1983) suggests that the rise of nationalism is a function of industrialization. He argues that modern states impose standardized mass education that would facilitate an industrial growth and economic progress through a culturally and linguistically homogenous labor market. Accordingly, assimilation as a means toward an end of homogenization is assumed to minimize transaction costs that would otherwise be higher under multiethnic and multilinguistic social order.[1] This is likely why assimilation rather than ethnic distinctiveness; public education in state-imposed language rather than multilingual public education; and monolithic national identities rather than hyphenated

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national identities have been the conventional governing mechanisms of modern nation-states. As a result, national minorities and immigrant communities alike have often assimilated to the majority, following the logic that adopting the majority culture and language would help with upward socioeconomic mobility. In other words, under this assumption, assimilation would be more likely to cause upward socioeconomic mobility than ethnic distinctiveness.[2]

Many scholars of migration and migrant communities, however, have shown that ethnic distinctiveness can be beneficial for upward socioeconomic mobility among migrant communities (Portes 2000; Portes and Rumbant 2006). Moreover, many other scholars have shown how ethnicity can serve as social capital and promote economic and social mobility within immigrant communities (Borjas 1992, 1995; Waldinger et al. 2006; Zhou and Lin 2005).

When considering regions, rather than groups, some scholars of nationalism and ethnicity have shown that minority ethnic nationalism could lead to opportunity structures for alternative economic policies in the periphery that would in turn foster regional economic development (Graefe 2005). Yet, the impact of ethnicity on economic development in a nonimmigrant transnational setting—that is, a geographical-cultural context within which a single ethnic group dominantly populates and cuts across national borders—has been understudied. By taking the Kurdish case as an example of transnational ethnic minority that cuts across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, this article speculates on the theoretical puzzle of *when* and *why* ethnic distinctiveness rather than assimilation can maximize the potential for regional and transnational economic development.[3] The chapter looks at the micro- and macrolevels of how ethnic distinctiveness can open-up opportunity spaces for individuals in the labor market on the one hand and trading patterns in the region on the other.

For instance, Jeroen Smits and Ayse Gunduz-Hosgor (2003) demonstrate that the socioeconomic consequences of non-Turkish speaking minority Kurdish women in Turkey include less employment in formal economy and lower family incomes. Thus, Smits and Gunduz-Hosgor suggest that "this language problem may be an important barrier preventing their [Kurdish women's] access to the resources and positions available in Turkish society."[4] Under what conditions would this "barrier" turn into a *benefit* for Kurdish-speaking minority in Turkey? Of, from a different point of view, how has the assimilation attempts of

Kurdish culture and language into the majority Turkish identity *hindered* the Kurdish socioeconomic development in their own geographical context? By referring to the existing theoretical/conceptual insights of "ethnic capital," this chapter seeks to develop a theoretical discussion and offer a future research agenda on the potential benefits of nonassimilated ethnic capital in a transnational context. Overall, this article argues that the recent trends of declining state assimilation of Kurdish ethnic minorities, especially across Turkey and Iraq, transform Kurdishness into an important ethnic capital for socioeconomic development in the region both at micro- and macrolevels. Thus, increasing ethnic solidarity and consciousness among Kurds may lead to greater trade patterns between Kurdish communities across borders. In other words, the less the Kurdish ethnicity is repressed and assimilated in the states they populate, the more likely that there will be a transnational-regional Kurdish trading zone in the Middle East. However, this does not mean that this chapter seeks to make a simply deterministic causal argument between Kurdish ethnic capital across borders and economic development in the region. Rather, we basically argue that shared assets such as Kurdish language and culture are likely to reduce the transaction costs of trading patterns and other economic activities in the region. This does not necessarily mean other factors such as proximity, territorial constraints, and profitability might not be influential in economic preferences of the Kurds across borders. Yet, what we try to point to is that when Kurdish identity becomes more publicly visible and instrumental due to declining assimilation policies in the states that they populate, this might create opportunity structures for the Kurds to use their ethnic capital in their economic preferences across the borders. Thus, we embrace the notion of ethnic capital cautiously rather than in a deterministic way.

> In the first section of the chapter, the role of intangible capital in economic progress is discussed with particular emphasis on ethnic capital which is the key concept of our analysis. While the notion of ethnic capital is mostly embraced on the socioeconomic mobility of immigrant communities in their host countries, its conceptual use in a nonimmigrant transnational setting has been neglected such as the stateless Kurdish ethnic group that cuts across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. How and under what conditions would ethnic capital function in such setting? While the first section frames the theoretical and conceptual infrastructure of the Kurdish case, the second section introduces a brief political history of the Kurdish people in the

Middle East and highlights the recent trends of increasing trade and labor market within the Kurdish ethnic zone and across borders, with a focus on Turkey and Iraq. In the final section, the potential theoretical implications of the Kurdish ethnic capital and a future research agenda are discussed.

Intangible Capital, Ethnicity, and Transaction Costs

Neoclassical economic theory often neglects how intangible capital, such as human skills, institutions, and social relationship, can reduce the transactions costs of economic activities due to its focus on market-based mechanisms such as the rate of investment and technological change. In reaction to this assumption, Douglas North (1981), in his seminal study *Structure and Economic Change,* laid out the role of institutions as intangible capital such as ideology and property rights regime which would reduce the transaction costs to explain the historical evolution of economic performance in a global perspective. North's insights on intangible capital are reflected in a recent report prepared by the World Bank which reveals that "intangible capital makes up to 60–80% of wealth in most countries"[5] referring to more immaterial resources such as human skills, social and cultural capital rather than material resources such as land and financial capital. Thus, policymakers are often encouraged to find ways for policy innovations that would strengthen "intangible capital" in the pathway toward economic growth and development. Intangible capital provides an avenue to reduce transaction costs, which is a key aspect of economic dynamism. Yet, Portes (2000), for instance, criticizes the conceptual stretch in intangible capital, particularly social capital, cited in various literatures and states that the benefits of social capital can be overrated especially in terms of the idea that both communities and individuals are thought of as holding "stocks" of capital. For the sake of clarification and specification, this chapter explores the influence of specific type of intangible capital: ethnicity. In this regards, ethnicity is an important intangible capital because it functions as an informal institution that reduces uncertainty among the members of ethnic category in subject (Hale 2008).

As Paul Quarles van Ufford and Fred Zaal (2004) state, "the notion of institutions is interpreted in a broad sense and encompasses not only well known formal institutions such as legal and political structures but also ethnicity, community, bonds, gender, and ideologies and conventions as well."[6] Thus, "ethnicity" as a unit of a transaction-cost

minimizing capital can be framed as "ethnic capital." We conceptualize "ethnic capital" as a taken-for-granted environment and a subjective belief on trust, efficient communication, and reliable information that emerges by simply being a member of a specific ethnic group.[7] In other words, ethnicity functions as capital by decreasing uncertainty, risk, and the fear of being cheated in economic transactions.

In addition, ethnic capital has functionality in economic agenda of minority nationalisms in the periphery of states against the failing central economic policies. For instance, observing the effects of nationalist policies of Quebec on the region's economic development, Peter Graefe (2005) argues that the decline of the nation-state due to the rise of globalizing actors has paved the way for opportunity structures for region-states. He puts that "nationalism may be a powerful basis for mobilizing alternatives to failed central economic policies, but capitalizing on the opportunities presented requires achieving success where the nation-state failed, namely on the terrain of development"[8] This also shows that assimilation by the nation-state does not necessarily lead to regional economic development in an ethnically-distinct periphery as expected via homogenous labor and capital market. In fact, ethnic capital within the framework of minority or periphery nationalism is likely to establish autonomous economic policies. Then, ethnicity can be an intangible instrument for economic development for certain communities suffering from the uneven resource allocations between the center and periphery. This regional/macrodimension of ethnic capital within minority nationalisms is, of course, not independent from the role of ethnicity in micro-level, i.e., among individuals.

For instance, Ronald Wintrobe (1995) argues that "one particularly effective way to provide a foundation for exchange under many circumstances is to invest in ethnic networks or 'ethnic capital".[9] At this point, the function of ethnicity for building a trust relationship between individuals and social network is important. According to Ronald Wintrobe, "the central feature of ethnic capital is the peculiarity of blood as a basis for network 'membership'"[10] and "because membership is to some extent at least not subject to choice, part of the difficulties normally encountered in establishing a trust relationship are resolved."[11] An individual tends to feel secure in her own community and in her own culture. Ivan Light (1984) underlines this (in)security dimension of certain ethnic communities who are disadvantaged in their pursuit of socioeconomic development.

In his analysis of immigrant communities in the United States, Light (1984) argues that minorities and immigrants see themselves in a risky position since they are more likely to be kept out of state and corporate labor market. Such insecurity then is likely to push such communities to invest in the social networks of their shared ethnicity in small-business, entrepreneurial, and self-employed sectors in order to gain socioeconomic security as quickly as possible. Since these disadvantaged ethnic communities experience "relative deprivation" in the sense that their expectation of socioeconomic development is higher than what they really have (Gurr 1970), they consider their shared ethnicity as an important capital to pursue their socioeconomic interests. As Brubaker argues (2004), when people are experiencing sentiments of ethnic "groupness," they are likely to share cognitive schemas, discursive frames, and cultural idioms. If belonging to a common ethnic group and speaking the same language creates a comfort zone for the members within a specific territory, building trust that would potentially decrease transaction costs tends to be much easier than in "other" cultures where "other" languages are spoken.

The established lines of "us" and "other" through ethnic cleavages can be intrinsically trust-maximizing entity within the boundaries of the comfort zone. The feeling of security and inherently trust-producing community-based environments, then, are likely to reduce the fear of being cheated in economic transactions. This mechanism of cheating-reduction naturally functions differently than market institutions which tend to prevent cheating by enforcing formal-institutional punishment mechanisms. Ronald Wintrobe puts that "the absence of enforceability generates a demand for trust, and markets do not supply trust except via rents: the market mechanism deters cheating only if rents are paid which are at least equal to the gains from cheating."[12] Overall, a model for economic development solely based on market institutions is not necessarily plausible for all nations or regions where a variety of nonmarket institutions might be the driving force behind economic dynamism, potentially leading to economic growth. Although tangible and intangible sources of economic growth are not necessarily mutually exclusive, development projects which are solely based on tangible sources such as physical and financial capital do not necessarily lead to success stories across time and space as the World Bank report indicates (2011).

Membership in an ethnic group is primarily based on the (contextual) belief of inherited attributes. On the one hand, this notion of belonging

potentially creates a secure environment for economic activities for the specific ethnic group in the subject, but on the other hand, it has a potential function of suppressing economic activities beyond traditional means and thus, hindering innovation or creativity. Carlo Trigilia (2001) succinctly highlights this caveat:

> The concentration of ethnic groups in some areas can favour the growth of economic activities through networks of firms and between local entrepreneurs and workers. On the other hand, these relationships may constitute barriers to the entrance of other subjects, or they can limit development and innovation by posing strong social pressures on individual behavior.[13]

Moreover, he argues that there should be efficient political mechanisms such as the rule of law and security that can soothe the negative effects of ethnic capital. This is why Carlo Trigilia (2001) emphasizes the role of the efficient state as the valve for preventing the collusive side of social capital within ethnic communities. He argues that "without an efficient state, social networks are more easily able to develop their collusive potential in both economic activities and in public institutions, leading to the appropriation of political resources (for example, contracts, licenses, jobs, subsidies)"[14] An analysis of ethnic capital in the context of the Kurds in the Middle East would definitely inform the academic debates on the positive/negative roles of ethnic capital in economic growth.

Taking the case of Kurdish ethnic groups across the borders of Iraq and Turkey, we seek to theorize the role of "ethnic capital" as a mechanism of reducing transaction costs such as trust and information which in turn may lead to better economic development results transnationally. Embodying around 25–30 million people in de facto Kurdistan region at the intersection of Turkey; Syria, Iraq and Iran, Kurds form minorities in the states they populate although they are the majority in their traditional homeland incorporating certain regions of those states (Bayir 2013, Kirisci and Winrow 1997). After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq (KRG), a region which has been more stable and peaceful than Baghdad, has been experiencing enormous growth in trade and foreign direct investment.[15] Such economic dynamism is mostly at the regional level, especially between Turkey and KRG. Numbers also indicate that southeastern Kurdish regions of Turkey also show increasing exports to the KRG. We argue that increasing ethnic solidarity and consciousness among Kurds along

with the declined assimilation attempts by their central states (i.e., Turkey and Iraq) has been generating greater trade patterns across borders. This trend may lead to a transnational-regional Kurdish trading zone in the Middle East in the near future unless other factors such as security issues, the establishment of law and order, and democratic governance can be enhanced. For instance, corruption, patronage politics, and nontransparent political environment are major governing problems in the region which are likely to keep away business investments and trade despite the comfort zone of Kurdish ethnic capital. Moreover, recent violence pattern caused by the jihadist group, the Islamic State, leads to a serious decline in business activities and further investments. Thus, this article does not neglect the influence of potential factors other than ethnic capital and this central concept of the article is not embraced deterministically but rather cautiously. Yet, what we seek to emphasize for the sake of a theoretical discussion is that declining assimilation can increase ethnic consciousness among Kurds across borders in their home countries (rather than host countries). This, in turn, may create opportunity spaces for the utilization of ethnic capital in the trading and business patterns of Kurds with their brethren across the borders.

Due to the homogenizing and assimilationist projects of both Iraqi and Turkish nation-state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish culture and language have been legally suppressed in which the flexibility of Kurds to utilize their ethnicity for economic reasons has been limited. However, as the Kurdish demands for cultural and linguistic rights have recently become desecuritized in the region, there is an observable economic dynamism in Kurdish regions of both states where cross-border trade takes place. In other words, rising ethnic consciousness of Kurds in their traditional homeland and their recognition by the central states of Iraq and Turkey is likely to create an opportunity space for Kurds to benefit from their ethnic capital in the aim of galvanizing trade across borders.

The Political History of Kurdishness as Ethnic Capital in the Middle East

Kurdish people are assumed to be the largest ethnic group in the world without their own state, constituting a population between 25 and 30 million people in the Middle East (Brenneman 2007). They are mostly

populated in de facto Kurdistan region located across four major nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Moreover, Kurds generate the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East after Arabs, Persians, and Turks (Sezgin and Wall 2005). Historically, Kurdish identity has been based on religious and tribal affiliations (Van Bruinessen 1992; Brenneman 2007). However, the rise of nation-states and the centralization of authority after the fall of the Ottoman Empire also stimulated a distinct Kurdish identity which began to exceed religious and tribal boundaries.

Since Kurds are dispersed across borders of surrounding nation-states, there has not been a unified Kurdish struggle for an independent state or autonomy against all four nation-states (Barkey and Fuller 1998; Natali 2005). Rather, for instance, Kurds of Turkey have mobilized for cultural and political recognition against the Turkish state (Gunes 2011), while Kurds of Iraq have mostly pursued their cause against the Ba'ath regime in Iraq.[16] Moreover, in terms of the relationship among the bordering states, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003) argue that "it allowed, in principle, the possibility of cooperation for the countries with large Kurdish populations (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria), but more often it gave them an instrument to undermine and trouble each other."[17] Hence, Kurds have been a security issue for neighboring states since potentially they have always had a capacity to threaten the territorial integrity of the states they populate. Thus, Kurdish identity has been securitized during the most of the twentieth century (Karakaya-Polat 2008). After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of these new nation-states in the region, Kurds have not been successful to establish their own nation-state and have been subject to assimilation and denial of their identity. In turn, the politics of identity and nationalist projects have manifested itself in the underdevelopment of Kurdish regions in which the periphery has suffered from military conflicts between the Kurdish *insurgents* and the Turkish military in Turkey and the Kurdish *peshmerges* and Iraqi forces in Iraq (Natali 2005, 2010). Within this political context, the public use, expansion, and progress of the Kurdish language have been one of the main targets of legal-institutional oppression (Zeydanlioglu 2012). This has also led to the economic marginalization of Turkey's Kurds (White 1998). As Paul White (1998) argues:

> Our investigation reveals that the Kurds in villages, towns and cities in Turkey's Kurdish region have benefited the least–and suffered the

> most–from the country's economic reforms to date. Turkey's unprecedented urbanization, caused by economic pressures and the military's policy of forcible village clearances, has resulted in appalling economic conditions leading to overcrowding, poverty and unemployment. Kurdish villagers recently arrived from south-east Turkey are arguably the least likely to find employment in Turkey's swollen cities and make a place for themselves in the crowded urban environment.[18]

This is why the value of Kurdish language as the linguistic aspect of ethnic capital, especially in Turkey, has been seen as an obstacle for social and economic upward mobility (Smits and Gunduz-Hosgor 2003). Economic backwardness of the Kurdish populated regions was partially due to conscious central state policies on the one hand and the structural ethnic inequalities on the other. Thus, Turkey's Kurdish southeastern regions and Iraq's Kurdish north have traditionally been agricultural economies with minimal industrial activities. Ibrahim Sirkeci (2006) argues that:

> All the south-eastern and eastern provinces of the country have only achieved the tenth level (the lowest) on the development whereas no province, in the central, northern and western parts of Turkey were on the lowest classes of the development ladder. Not surprisingly, all the least developed provinces' populations are made up of Kurdish speaking majorities.[19]

The economic conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan have not been very different than their brethren across the border. By the 1990s, UN sanctions against Iraq, the Baghdad blockade on Iraqi Kurdistan, and the interference of neighboring states paralyzed the economy in Northern Iraq (Leezenberg 2005) and the Iraqi Kurdistan economy was agriculturally based, nonindustrialized, and dependent on external resources (Natali 2007).

The underdevelopment argument of the Kurdish regions of Turkey was also the driving force behind the politicization of Kurdish identity in the 1960s and 1970s which led to the current ethnic consciousness of Kurds in Turkey (Gunes 2011). Invariably, after the 1991 UN establishment of a safe haven along Turkey-Iraq border created a de facto independent entity for Iraqi Kurds (Leezenberg 2005), the Kurdish distinct identity has started to become institutionalized vis-à-vis the Baghdad regime. In turn, after the 1990s, both in Turkey and in Iraq, it is possible

to say that Kurds have been eager to express their distinct ethnicity and language. However, due to the securitization of the distinct Kurdish identity in Turkey and in Iraq under harsh repressions on Kurdish culture and language, the opportunities to utilize ethnicity as a source of economic activities across the border were less likely to reduce transaction costs. This trend seems to be changing today as the semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has become an economic and political powerhouse for the Kurds in the region in general (Ottaway and Ottaway 2014)[20] and the Kurds of Turkey have survived the strict assimilationism of the Turkish state. This trend is likely to surface the importance of Kurdish ethnic capital in the socioeconomic development of the region. Ethnic capital functions at micro (individual) level in the sense that it provides resources such as language skills, culture etc. for individuals, so they can get into the labor market easier than who do not have such resources, for instance. Many young Kurds of Turkey tend to move to Kurdish Iraq (or vice versa) to look for jobs since they already have language, cultural resources available to work there. Also belonging to the same ethnic group creates more trust and certainty, especially in this highly sectarian and ethnically unstable region.[21] At the macrolevel, Kurdishness becomes an asset for the region's trading patterns that in turn may lead to better regional economic development in the larger Kurdish zone of the Middle East.

Recent Trends in Cross-Border Trade Between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan

The enclosure of Kurdistan territories by surrounding nation-states after the fall of Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century has triggered a century of political and cultural struggles with violent consequences. Tribal struggles against the Baghdad regime and genocidal responses of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the regime of emergency rule in southeast Turkey and the rise of Kurdish armed insurgency and the UN sanctions have all destabilized the region with underdevelopment, limited rule of law, and violent ethnic and tribal conflicts. Without security and the rule of law within the violent struggles, economic development has been less of an issue than physical security. However, despite being fragile, the region is relatively more stable than in the past where economic dynamism shows itself in increasing foreign direct investment and

trade, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan, along with better diplomatic relations between the KRG and Turkey. The KRG leader Mesud Barzani and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan have recently met in Diyarbakir, the major Kurdish city in Turkey for strengthening the political and economic relations in the region.[22] Although the recent rise of the jihadist Islamic State in the region has disrupted political and economic stability, peace process of the Turkish state with the Kurdish insurgents (PKK) in southeast Turkey and the KRG's close relations with Turkey have brought Kurdish identity in the forefront of all sorts of economic activities.

Gareth Jenkins (2008) states that "by early 2007, the volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and northern Iraq had grown to an estimated $5 billion a year" and "Turkish contractors had secured an estimated $2 billion worth of construction contracts."[23] Interestingly, he also states that most of the trade was conducted between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds (Jenkins 2008). Kurdish ethnic capital is likely to reduce transaction costs for cross-border and bilateral trade between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds. Ethnic-based networks have the potential to galvanize the economy further in the region. Robert Olson (2006) argues that "Ankara favored increasing trade with Iraq was that much of it took place and emanated from southeastern Turkey, an area heavily populated with Kurds and one of the most economically depressed regions of Turkey."[24] Therefore, Ankara was convinced that the ethnic conflict in southeastern Turkey would be soothed by stimulating economic growth. This has been the long discourse of the Turkish state since the government authorities have believed that the Kurdish youth join the insurgent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) because they are economically deprived. Today, the Turkish government is willing to boost trade with Iraqi Kurdistan on the basis that it could also help resolve the protracted Kurdish conflict in the region.

Despite various structural factors such as the lifting of the UN sanctions and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 may have been influential in boosting relative prosperity in the Kurdish regions, ethnic capital tends to play an important role in building networks across borders that highly decrease transaction costs in terms of trust and information. If "better-connected traders have better information on prices and on the credibility of clients, and as a result they enjoy larger sales and gross margins on their transactions."[25] Kurdish ethnic zone in the region is likely to provide trading incentives for Kurdish entrepreneurs from Turkey and Iraq.

This increasing role of Kurdish ethnic capital can also be seen in the rising economic interests of the European Kurdish diaspora in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iraq. A recent organization called European Kurdish Employers' Association seeks greater investments in the region due to the existing advantages of belonging the Kurdish community and call for other investors to trade with their Kurdish identity.[26] Many members of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, especially those who fled from Saddam Hussein's regime, are now more socioeconomic opportunities in their homeland and this is why many are willing to return.[27] Hallo Azad states that there are plenty of opportunities for returnees (Kurdish diaspora) as Iraqi Kurdistan is still developing and is weak and underdeveloped in some sectors, which need the entrepreneurship of returning Kurdish expats.[28] Considering the economic recession mostly in Europe, the number of newly started business by Kurdish expats/diaspora is not surprising. As stated by the Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government welcomes the return of the Kurds abroad and sees them as opportunities for the rebuilding of the country.[29] Based on these endeavors, K.R.G. reformed its residency policies after 2013 to encourage Kurdish diaspora to come back. Based on the new regulations, if a Kurd was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or was born abroad but his/her family is from the Region, he or she does not need a residency card like other foreigners.[30]

Moreover, Kurdish ethnic capital increasingly creates a labor market for the members of the Kurdish community. For instance, Denise Natali (2007) argues that "companies employ relatives across borders, opening the labor market to the larger Kurdish community."[31] It is not just trade, but also labor market is becoming transnational in the sense that Kurds have opportunities of employment across the border since they speak the same language and familiar with the culture. In other words, ethnic capital becomes more salient among Kurds across borders. The Turkish companies in various sectors, i.e., oil, construction, steel, food, education, cosmetics use the "Kurdish ethnicity" card to consolidate their presence in the region. The most efficient and convenient strategy, thus, is recruiting Kurds from Turkey to benefit cultural ties and language knowledge (Fig. 7.1)

According to Turkish Statistics Institute and K.R.G. Ministry of Economy, 60% of the imports are of Turkish origin.[32] Moreover, the adjacency of the K.R.G. market in addition to the high demand for Turkish goods consolidated the ethnic capital-based relationship.

2007	2011	2013	2016
19th	6th	3rd	3rd

Fig. 7.1 K.R.G.'s ranking in Turkey's export[34]

The visa-free regime toward the citizens of Turkey is mostly targeting the Kurdish population living there, who are eager to do business in K.R.G.[33] Based on this policy, Turkish citizens can stay in K.R.G. for 15 days without visa, hence, have enough time to investigate the region for trade relations or investment.

Thus far in this chapter, we have offered the micro-level argument that, in transnational settings dominated by a minority ethnic group, ethnic capital functions as a collection of resources—language, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas—that lower transaction costs and ease individuals' labor market integration and trading patterns. If this is the case, then individuals' attitudes and behavior should reflect the contours of where and how ethnic capital is beneficial. In other words, our argument suggests that individuals' decisions and labor market status should vary in accordance to the opportunities facilitated by the ethnic capital.

In sum, ethnic capital can influence individuals' attitudes and decisions that, in aggregate, may shape macrolevel transnational development. This is particularly the case in situations when ethnic communities cross national boundaries, such as the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. If Kurdish ethnic capital continues to flourish as an instrument for transnational economic activities among Kurds across borders, a flourishing labor and trading market across the border is more likely as well.

Conclusion: Potential of Ethnic Capital for Future Economic Development in Kurdistan

Although the role of ethnic capital in upward socioeconomic mobility, especially at micro-levels, have been studied extensively within the context of migrant communities in their host states, the dynamics of ethnic capital in terms of when and how it can function in a non-migrant transnational context—that is a geographical-cultural context within which a single ethnic group dominantly populates and cuts across national

borders—has been understudied. This article has focused on the case of Kurds, a transnational ethnic community across the borders of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran and discussed how the decline of assimilationist policies in these nation-states have opened a window of opportunity for the Kurds embracing their ethnic identity as a resource for trading and labor market activities across borders. Our field work in the region supports these arguments. Specifically, the observation of job market in the Kurdish part of Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan and the free movement of ethnic capital underlines the importance of "Kurdishness" across-borders.

After decades of suppression and marginalization of Kurdish culture and language in their traditional homeland, the change of political landscape toward the recognition of distinct Kurdish identity and greater chances of self-determination within autonomous structures tend to create economic incentives through an instrumental use of Kurdish ethnicity across borders. If ethnic capital is a source of networking and trust-building entity for migrant groups, the same source is plausible for ethnic groups who are dispersed across borders such as the Kurds. However, the real potential of Kurds' ethnic capital seems to manifest itself after certain structural changes occur with regards to Iraqi and Turkish states' relations with their Kurdish populations. For instance, the legal–institutional recognition of the Kurdish identity and language in Turkey has not been secured yet. Rather, Turkish authorities insist on Turkish language as instructional language in schools since they believe that educational and employment opportunities are greater for the Turkish language. However, they neglect the potential of Kurdish language as a socioeconomic source within the larger Kurdish areas in the region. Moreover, Kurds in Turkey are highly dependent on central government with very little autonomy. At most, Kurds control municipalities in their provincial areas which do not have the regulative capacity for cross-border trade. On the other hand, Kurds in Iraq have achieved to establish their own regional government under the federal Iraq. If legal-institutional structures other than assimilation can be deeply established, trans-border regional economic development through the use of Kurdish ethnic capital will be more likely.

Notes

1. By assimilation, we basically refer to forced assimilation which the state policies and programs seek to assimilate people against their will. However, this type of assimilation is more likely to strengthen than to

eliminate cultural and ethnic differences in society. For further on assimilation, see Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

2. Related arguments can be found in Peter Schaeffer (2006), "Outline of an Economic Theory of Assimilation." http://www.jrap-journal.org/pastvolumes/2000/v36/F36-2-4.pdf; Herbert J. Gans (2007), "Acculturation, assimilation, and mobility" http://herbertgans.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/24-Acculuturation-Assimilation.pdf.
3. For conceptual purposes, we should note that we neither take Kurdish identity for granted nor essentialize this identity category. Rather, our approach is that ethnic identities are fluid, historically contingent, and constantly fluctuating in contrast to nationalist teleologies that approach ethnic identities as real entities which can be objectively defined. We understand that despite their shared cultural and linguistic characteristics, Kurds do not constitute a single homogenous group and Kurdish communities can show many differences in terms of their patronage networks, political and tribal affiliations, and religious tendencies. For further on theoretical understanding of ethnic categories, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. For discussion of Kurdishness and assimilation, see Senem Aslan, *Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco: Governing Kurdish and Berber Dissent*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
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7. We approach ethnicity as Max Weber framed it: "subjective belief in common descent." Thus, ethnic capital can be framed as a subjective belief on inherent trust among the members of the ethnic group. See Max Weber, "The Origins of Ethnic Groups" in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 35–40.
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14. Ibid., 430.
15. See an investment report prepared by the KRG at http://www.kurdistan-investment.org/docs/invest_in_kurdistan.pdf.
16. As we noted earlier, we do not take Kurds as a single internally homogenous and externally bounded group. On the other hand, we do not state that state policies toward Kurds have not been unidimensional throughout the twentieth century. For instance, many Kurds in Turkey have also been integrated into Turkish culture without making their identity politically salient. This is why a decent amount of Kurds in Turkey vote for conservative Turkish parties and become businesspeople, governors and members of Turkish parliament. However, this does not necessarily diminish the fact that assimilation has been the main policy tool of the state against the Kurds.
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CHAPTER 8

In Search of Futures: Uncertain Neoliberal Times, Speculations, and the Economic Crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan

Umut Kuruuzum

Introduction: Uncertain Neoliberal Times and Lost Futures

During my preliminary fieldwork in May of 2014, Erbil was abuzz with public speculation about schemes for economic prosperity and the birth of an independent Kurdistan. Since 2005, liberalisation and the opening of petroleum fields had brought new public–private, global–local partnerships to Iraqi Kurdistan through production sharing agreements (PSAs) and volatile enterprise. In transitioning from a marginalised region within old Iraq to an autonomous region within the new federal Iraq, the Kurdish government has seen its goal as promoting entrepreneurship at every level, supposedly to speed up the development of an economically self-sustainable polity in the country's northern regions.

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The most debated issue at that time was the question of when Kurdistan should become an independent state. This was a vital issue given the level of progress achieved after multinational oil companies such as ExxonMobil (EMKRIL) accepted KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) legitimacy through independent contracts, infuriating the Iraqi government by crediting regional relations over federal power. Longstanding rumours of looming Kurdish independence gained momentum when a referendum for Iraqi Kurdistan was planned for 2014 amidst controversy and dispute between the KRG and the Iraqi federal government. For the Kurds, their long-awaited independence seemed to coincide with a 'neoliberal' or 'global time' (Bear 2014) that has transformed the marginalised region into a new frontier for oil exploration, multi-million dollar construction contracts and cheap imports from Turkey, Iran and China (Natali 2012, 2013).

Three months after my preliminary research concluded, the KRG experienced a full-fledged financial crisis as oil production slowed due to attacks from ISIS. Refineries went offline and export quality dropped dramatically. Faced with grim economic and financial prospects, the KRG reduced the salaries of its civil servants and delayed their payments for several months. As a result, much of Iraqi Kurdistan's public sector has been paralysed as various government institutions, including the health and education sectors, have gone on strike. The long-awaited dream of setting up an independent Kurdish state seemed unrealistic for even the most nationalistic factions, as the KRG's multi-year economic boom suddenly reversed to a devastating bust.

Following the market downturn, local experiences of time among the Kurds have come to contradict the reality of global/neoliberal time in Iraqi Kurdistan. Specifically, the tapping of the country's wealth by international companies has led to dissatisfaction among ordinary Iraqi Kurds, who now feel the squeeze from the plummet in oil revenues. As a result, popular protests have been intermittent over the past few months, and in some cases, the offices of political parties have been attacked. Protesters have accused certain individuals of profiting from their connections to the ruling parties, demanding that they return their 'illegal' earnings to the public treasury. Demonstrators have attacked buildings, set them on fire, tried to stone the Kurdish TV station Rudaw (known to be owned by the Barzani family), and called for the regional president's resignation due to his unlawful presidency.[1] In the public rhetoric, Iraqi Kurdistan was, with the assistance of international oil companies, rapidly

moving towards a bright future by distancing itself from the dark and corrupt past of the Iraqi nation. Yet the economic crisis instilled a sense of doubt, sparking public debate about whether the assistance of international oil companies would bring independence or destruction for the Kurds. This has motivated people to search for alternatives.

This chapter focuses on the contradictions between ideology and lived experiences and the impossibility of synchronising political and economic policies with everyday life in Iraqi Kurdistan. This has exposed social and economic spaces to continual insecurity and uncertainty (Pine 2015). The concrete experiences of time among the Kurds have come into conflict with global capitalist time in Iraqi Kurdistan following the market downturn. Based on the 'public understanding of economics' and politics where state ideology mixes with first-hand experiences via the familiar routes of street talk, gossip, conspiracy theories and projections (Weszkalnys 2010: 89), this chapter examines how public social and economic spaces came to be opened up to continual ambiguity and uncertainty in Iraqi Kurdistan, eventually bringing Kurdish nationalism into conflict with unregulated capitalist expansion in the region.

The Time for the Kurds

The Iraqi Kurdistan Governorate elections were held on 30 April, 2014. I met hundreds of Kurds waving flags, singing and honking their car horns in the streets of Erbil until late at night. Elections were rituals designed, among other things, to emphasise the moral and political unity of the Kurds, a people who are divided by the borders of various countries. On election night, I was in a car a taxi driver named Kejo, who comes from a village on the outskirts of Erbil. Kejo is also a government employee in the Department of Peshmerga. He and his brother were shooting guns into the air while children brandished Massoud Barzani's pictures in an election convoy to show support for the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party). In Erbil, the KDP Governor Nawzad Hadi was fighting to retain his post. His campaign focused on pointing to the development seen in the capital under his watch, drawing attention to new highways, a modern airport, shopping malls, public parks and assorted community services. Kejo believes that election times are when people should make decisions about 'what [governors] have done over the last four or five years, and what are they offering for the next four or five', instead of blindly voting for a preferred party. Most people believe that

rapid urbanisation has transformed the city from a provincial town to a world-class commercial centre in the hands of Massoud Barzani and Nawzad Hadi. 'No-one can imagine this without the central role of Massoud Barzani', Kejo told me on our way back home. As we drove through the streets, yellow KDP flags seemed to adorn every building in Erbil. With a bright smile, Kejo wagged his finger towards the crowd and added, 'The independence of Kurdistan is near'.

The Kurds are one of the world's largest peoples without an official state, making up substantial minorities in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. There is no question as to the desire of Kurds to be independent, and their history is replete with attempts such as the short-lived Mahabad Republic in Iran. The PYD (the Kurdish Democratic Union Party) has unilaterally declared their intent to form a federation within the Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria. The Turkish Kurds continue to demand some form of autonomy at a time when the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party) has been increasing its attacks on the Turkish government. Only the Kurds in Iran have been quiet, trying to leverage the international political system while resisting the repressive regime established in Tehran. In Iraqi Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani articulated the possibility of a Kurdish declaration of independence in July 2014. This came at a time when ISIS was busy eroding the borders between Syria and Iraq, the KRG was suffering from decreasing oil prices, and domestic criticism over the domestic crisis and Barzani's indefinite rule was at its peak. In this context, the president and prime minister of the Kurdistan Region seized every opportunity to promote the Kurdish state's independence, and sharp nationalist slogans calling for secession from Baghdad were augmented and dispersed.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, there is a widespread belief that the country is in a transition period. No one knows when it will become an independent state. Kejo believed it would be soon after the election night when he waved the Kurdish flag from atop his car, but belief became more difficult when he found himself in dire financial straits in the middle of an economic crisis. 'If the dream of a Kurdish state causes the economy to collapse, the Kurdish people will not support it', he said. Furthermore, no one knows for how long Massoud Barzani will serve as president of Iraqi Kurdistan.[2] The KDP and its allies advocated extending President Barzani's tenure for an additional two years, arguing that Kurdistan faces an existential threat and that he is the only reliable figure who can lead the nation out of the turmoil. Most in Erbil support his rule, but several,

including some of the most hard-line nationalists who back the KDP, have disclosed mixed feelings about Barzani's refusal to step down from office. One of them, Zaxo, explained the situation in a brief story:

> Kak Massoud is nearing 75 years old. He is still the president. His nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, is prime minister. His uncle, Hoshyar Zebari, was Iraq's foreign minister and is now finance minister. Kak Masoud's eldest son, Masrour Barzani, leads the intelligence service; his second son Mansour is a general, as is Kak Masoud's brother Wajy. Barzani's nephew Sirwan owns the regional cell phone company, which, though purchased with public money, remains a private holding. These are the things that everyone knows. What about the rest? Can one imagine? Family means everything in Kurdistan. But the interest of the Kurds involves more than just the Barzani family. If we want to be an independent state, we should leave the Barzani's interests behind and start thinking about the interest of all Kurds. The current situation is deeply hurting me, as everyone is taking care of their own business, including Kak Masoud's himself. However, he is a great leader. I owe him so much. I hope that once the transition period ends, everything will be better.

Iraqi Kurdistan has transformed from a marginalised region within old Iraq to an autonomous region within the new federal Iraq, and may eventually transition into an independent state in the north of Iraq. Like Zaxo, many people envision Iraqi Kurdistan as lingering between distinct past and future identities—that is, in the middle of a transition. One such future—the most desired one—is the establishment of an economically self-sustainable independent Kurdistan. My interview subjects believe that one should consider the possibility that unexpected outcomes, such as nepotism and corruption, are just temporary side effects of the transition period. The turmoil caused by these and other such problems must be overlooked and may remain unresolved until they can be addressed by an independent Kurdish state in the future.

In this context, the transition is constructed as a teleological discourse woven into the language, ideas and actions both of politicians and of ordinary people towards an indefinite future (Pelkmans 2006). Many people seem to think that in this future, things will be better. There were and are vital issues, such as the war with ISIS, dropping oil prices, the budgetary dispute with Baghdad, the flow of refugees arriving from Syria, and so on. The KRG is eager to prove its ability to change society for the better and establish Iraqi Kurdistan as a democratic, stable and

prosperous nation freed from the turmoil that plagues Iraq. Many present-day problems remain unaddressed because of a focus on the transition period and a general orientation on the future at the expense of the present. In Frederiksen's (2014) terms, Iraqi Kurdistan can be termed a 'would be' state, which refers both to a condition of 'that which might be' in the future and a regional government that gains its legitimacy by promising a better tomorrow. In other words, by portraying certain issues as unproblematic in an idealised, projected future, the Kurdish government has managed to make them appear unproblematic (and thus absent) in the present (Frederiksen 2014: 308).

I now wish to direct attention to the fact that the discourses about the future Kurdish state and nationalism were linked to transformations that entailed the cessation of state guarantees and the introduction of market norms in Iraqi Kurdistan. Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009) describe similar examples in Mexico and Indonesia. The Kurdish transition rhetoric is eager and ambitious in terms of developing an independent future Kurdish state, modelled after the example of Europe. This has been distorting practical implementations of the KRG agenda by masking or rendering absent aspects of social reality (Frederiksen 2014: 309). Nevertheless, this rhetoric of transition and the idealisation of the future as a technique of governance are partial and unstable, as there is an uncomfortable space that highlights contradictions between rhetorical ideology and actual lived experiences. The impossibility of matching the political and economic policies to everyday economics in Iraqi Kurdistan has left social and economic spaces open to continual ambiguity and uncertainty.

The next section will return to the ethnographic data I gathered to explain how the concrete experiences of national independence time among the Kurds have come into conflict with the neoliberal, capitalist transition time in Iraqi Kurdistan following the market downturn.

The Economic Crisis and the Experience of the Neoliberal Time

The Shar Garden Square has recently been constructed as a public square just below the citadel of Erbil, complete with fountains, brick arcades, and a clock tower modelled after London's Big Ben and imported from China. Located in the central bazaar area, the clock tower once rang out at the top of each hour, signalling the time to all nearby. While walking the dark maze of narrow alleys and dead-ends between the shops

in the bazaar, visitors could easily hear the clock chiming and striking. Sadly, Erbil's clock tower has been out of service for months as a result of the financial crisis plaguing Iraqi Kurdistan, as repairs for the tower are expensive and parts must be imported from outside the region.

The promise of an oil-rich autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan riding a wave of rapid economic growth has created a sense of Kurdish national time at the centre of the Kurdish capital. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the national time for their long-awaited independence seemed to coincide with the global capitalist time that transformed the marginalised region into a new frontier for neoliberal development. However, with the economic downturn as a result of the civil strife from a growing Islamic militancy, the budget dispute with Baghdad, and a sharp drop in oil prices, national time came to a halt—physically represented by Erbil's silenced clock tower. The city's skyline tells a story of affluence and growth followed by sudden decline, with half-finished buildings that once marked a thriving construction industry. The economic crisis crushed businesses such as cement factories and steel mills that supplied material to this construction industry. The crisis has forestalled economic progress—developers no longer have the funds to finish the high-rise apartments they once rushed to build. In these half-constructed, abandoned buildings that stand behind billboards depicting how idyllic life was to be when the construction was completed, refugees strive to live without basic services, water and electricity.

The technology, contracts and labour that move hydrocarbons from the soil to future markets are full of the messy frictions of cultural production entangled with Kurdish political and infrastructural landscapes (Tsing 2005; Appel 2012). In this context, oil is highly valued for its capacity to transform the marginalised region into an independent, prosperous and modern state. The Kurdish government and its leaders, blessed with enough precious oil to fund the building of a nation, are elevated in state discourse into agents of progress. This ideology is mobilised to create responsible citizens and facilitate economic transformations in the region.[3] Central to this process is the production not just of material products and profit, but also of communal identity and national fraternity among the Kurdish population. In this context, oil companies are highly valued and seen as vehicles to deliver the long-awaited Kurdish independence. Indeed, oil companies have even become sacred to some nationalists, who were afraid or unwilling to criticise or question their activities. In May of 2014, during my preliminary fieldwork in Erbil,

I was severely criticised by some Kurdish nationalists for conducting research on international oil companies; when I later returned to Iraqi Kurdistan, I was not granted access to conduct research in the oil fields.

The growing importance of national identity and solidarity among the Kurds has been boosted in the context of the on-going KRG dependence on international oil companies, the detrimental effects of oil exploitation on small-scale agriculture and the environment, and the elimination of labour laws and their replacement with a general freedom of contract, in most cases, non-contract regime. Local Kurdish people have become locked in a moment of time where they uphold a magical economy with only the anticipatory joy of profit and national belonging fuelling their hopes for independence. This Kurdish time was portrayed as a singular, neoliberal, global and local movement made evident by the convergence of imperialism and nationalism in the routines of state bureaucracies, institutions, universities, factories and banks. The future was described as unproblematic and absolutely certain.

Following the market downturn, this teleological and singular neoliberal-global time has come into conflict with the national conception of time, or what might be called the social life of the abstract, global-capitalistic time. As a result, multiple temporal rhythms, uncertain times, and lost futures have surfaced. The economic crisis has caused other alternatives to emerge suddenly in the midst of speculations, boom-and-bust cycles, and relentless rumours of conflict, war and violence. In October of 2015, teachers and civil servants poured into the streets and went on strike for a week in Suleimani to protest the delay of their wages and the overall economic situation. It was the most intense show of discontent since the economic crisis first hit the region. There were small protests in the regional capital of Erbil, where displays of public anger tended to be more rare. The strikes erupted as result of the KRG's decision in September to cut state employees' salaries by 50%, and they had not been paid what remained owed of their salaries since July. Protesters carried signs with messages to the government: 'If you cannot even pay salaries, resign right now.'

The KRG, in return, has claimed that it will pay back the reduced salaries in the future, either once oil prices rise or the economy stabilises. As a result, citizens in Iraqi Kurdistan no longer pin the blame on the central government; most protestors in Erbil did not blame Arab leaders in Baghdad for the harsh economic situation, but rather the Kurdish authorities. Based on interviews with Turkmen ministers in Kirkuk and a consultant in Iraqi Parliament in Baghdad, I learned that the economic

crisis has increased the suicide rate and the occurrence of kidnappings for ransom. One of the stories was about a doctor who had been kidnapped four times in Kirkuk. He finally fled Iraqi Kurdistan a few months later and eventually received asylum in Europe. Some Kirkuk residents have stoked ethnic divides by blaming the crisis on those entering the region due to displacement from the on-going conflict. However, most agree that the economic crisis has turned people into thieves and that the government is responsible for the region's deteriorating security.

Demonstrations and Other Possibilities

Kejo participated in the Erbil demonstrations, the first time he had ever been a part of public protests. As a member of the crowd, he chanted slogans against the government, sang, led offensive yells, directed traffic and explained to other demonstrators that he has not been paid for months and instead has had to work as a driver to provide for his family. During the demonstrations, he wore a dark green *poshu* instead of the customary black-and-white chequered ones around his neck, intending to use it to camouflage his face if necessary. After about half-an-hour among the crowd, we moved to the bazaar to have tea with Heja, a religious teacher who had been working at one of the local high schools, and Ali's colleague Rojan, a doctor at one of the public hospitals in Erbil:

Rojan We should keep protesting until they give everyone their salaries. Where is the money going? Every day they say we sold more than a million gallons of oil, so where does that money end up? Barzani is just another autocrat like Assad. Barzani has never done anything for the Kurdish people. True or false: did Barzani work with Saddam to kill Kurds? Yes, he did! Does Barzani work with the Turks who kill Kurds? Yes, he does! Does Barzani work with the Americans who created Daesh? Yes, he does! Why do these Barzani politicians take all the money and never do anything? It must be a joke. They sold our natural resources to foreigners. They sold Kurdistan's soil and mountains. They sold the Kurds. Oil is a curse. Look what they promised us and what is happening today. There is no future with the Barzani. We have to get rid of these politicians and the foreign oil companies who are both exploiting us; we need to start working again on our own. Otherwise, we will never be

an independent state and more crises and humanitarian catastrophes will follow.

Kejo I used to like Barzani. He was our life, our heart, our hope, our future. He promised us independence. Well, the Kurdish people are going through their World War II right now. We are in a major war facing enemies on all sides. This is not the time for risky changes in political leadership. It only serves the enemy and those who want Barzani to stop are only saying that for the sake of their own parties' *hizbayati* (translation). I would say the salvation of Kurdistan must be the highest priority in these hard times of war, but things have changed. I don't know, maybe he has lied to us. I support the Kurds and *Kurdiyati*. If it is good for the Kurds, then he should leave. He constantly lies about our independence. How can we become an independent state if the government is not able to pay the salaries of its employees? I really do not understand. *Wallahi* (I swear to Allah), is PKK better than him, you say? They sacrificed a lot of people, even in Kobane. Look at what they have done in Shingal. Kurds should never be deterred from their goal of independence. If the PKK will make Kurdistan independent, then I support the PKK. Maybe it is true that the future will be better with the PKK than with the Barzani.

Heja The PKK is the secret Turkish army. Its agenda follows a script written by the criminal Turkish intelligence agency. The PKK is nothing but a gang of murderers who are ready to sell out to the highest bidder, be it Europe, the US, Russia, Iran, Syria, or whatever. They have no ideology except Marxism and Communism. They have no religion. They don't believe in Allah. They never pray for the Kurds. They do not even want an independent Kurdish state. How can you support the PKK? They are in Shengal just to pressure Turkey to come and occupy Southern Kurdistan. Do you understand? The PKK needs to leave Shingal before it becomes another permanent target for the Turkish Air Force like the Qandil Mountains. Not only should the PKK leave Shingal, they should totally vacate Kurdistan. They serve no good purpose for the Kurdish people, either in Turkey or Kurdistan. They terrorise Kurds and Turks alike for a cause that is virtually dead and impossible to attain. Barzani is no better than the PKK. Look what they have done

> in the last decade: they sold Kurdish lands to Christian companies. For what? For nothing. If they get money from the oil companies, they put it back in their pockets or pay it back to America for protecting us from Daesh. Who created Daesh? The Iranians and Israelis created Daesh to control the Middle East. Why do you think Daesh has never attacked Israel these last four years while instead attacking Turkey? The future is bright if we can go along with Islam and cooperate with the Sunnia *cemaat* [community], leaving Shia Iraq and Iran forever. Islam is the only way to become an independent state and unite all the Kurds behind a better future.

From here, the discussion evolved toward considerations on how things are even more complicated in Iraqi Kurdistan then they seem. Kejo himself, although confused and questioning the rule of Barzani, continued to keep a picture of Barzani displayed in his taxi and support the regime during public discussions with strangers. On the one hand, he believes that advocating for the independence of the Kurds serves as a convenient ploy to deflect domestic criticism over the economic crisis and Barzani's indefinite rule, allowing him to maintain the support of his base. On the other hand, he behaves as though Barzani is the sole and supreme leader of the Kurds, and has said in several other conversations that he is the one leader who only speaks the truth.

Most of the people I addressed in Iraqi Kurdistan are puzzled. When I interviewed them for the first time, they immediately made clear their support for the Barzani and reaffirmed their unconditional loyalty and allegiance to him and the KDP. Yet after some time in conversation, they slowly disclosed strongly critical thoughts and explained their feelings that nothing is really as it seems. In Iraqi Kurdistan, there is an atmosphere of uncertainty that ranges from national politics to local-level government to immediate social relations (Gotfredsen 2015). For instance, while returning home after our discussion in the teahouse, Kejo expressed that he thought Heja to be, in reality, a secret service agent working in favour of Barzani to collect information on protestors. He felt bad about disclosing his own views to people that he does not know well, expressing that he should, at least in public, support the government that is employing him. In the end he said, 'Who wants to risk losing one's job over something as silly as this?' What is of greatest interest here, and what I elaborate on below, is Kejo's swift assumption that his

friend must have a secret deal or a hidden connection with someone at the Barzani office. It was a relatively accepted fact among Kurdish citizens, including government employees and politicians, that people relying on employment by public institutions (about two-thirds of the KRG population) are required to, or at least must pretend to, adhere to government policies even when away from their jobs and in private settings. Adding to this, politicians and public servants were characterised as selfish, and thus acted only to preserve their own positions and privileges rather than the interests of the people they were supposed to represent. These factors contribute to a particular understanding of politics as inherently dubious and opaque—a field rife with invisible connections and secret agendas that creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and a feeling that nothing is really as it seems (Gotfredsen 2015).

When I arranged interviews with government officials, several of my informants warned me not to trust their information or the documents they provided. Indeed, when I requested statistics, as from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, they themselves acknowledged that their numbers may be different than the real situation. The numbers I received, such as the quantity of foreign workers in Iraqi Kurdistan, are only approximate, as there is such a constant influx of people and illegal border crossings that it is impossible to maintain exact numbers. In most cases, I could not get access to basic statistics such as the economic growth rate of Iraqi Kurdistan, the amount of funds received from Baghdad since the establishment of the autonomous region, and data on bureaucratic processes related to labour. Some government employees argued that the statistical information and transparent bureaucratic processes established by the Iraqi government dissolved after the war; governance has since become precarious, blurred and deregulated.

Conclusion: Temporal Perspectives in Public Rhetoric and Lived Experience

This chapter represents a modest explanatory effort to develop a richer and more nuanced sense of the social construction of time, perceptions of the near future and the role of temporal perspectives in public rhetoric. I argued here that the varying contexts of insecurity and/or rapid social change—experiences that violate citizens' ordinary experiences—constitute a catalyst for the emergence of alternative possibilities. In this case, these alternatives are manifestations of marginalised political

imaginations and their limited presence in public debate. With the onset of the economic crisis, Kejo has participated in a public demonstration for the first time in his life. He did so despite his being employed in the public sector and his worries of being seen, recognised and subsequently laid off. His perspective on his own future has become blurred, and he wanted to share this with other people at a time when the financial crisis left him with an unpaid salary and thus thrust into public debate.

The key point here is that my informants either came to act in public as though in compliance with the Kurdish authoritative discourse while maintaining divergent private beliefs. For example, after the demonstrations Kejo said, 'I have always known that this is going nowhere', arguing that he expected the financial crisis to come along. Indeed he stated that he believed that Iraqi Kurdistan would never become an independent state while also pursuing policies beneficial to foreign companies and expatriate Kurds from Europe rather than the local Kurds. To Kejo, the Kurdish government has focused on short-term benefits regarding international oil companies and European-Kurdish expatriates, yet expounds future-oriented propaganda in interactions with its own citizens. Although the KRG government's policies were based on clearly elucidated visions of the future—whether in terms of improving the healthcare system, eradicating corruption or strengthening state institutions—many reforms failed in their implementation. Some, such as the labour law, failed in the draft stage before even being put into practice. Kejo explained the situation, 'The government states that everything is fine, yet actually nothing is fine at the moment', while underlying that 'when of the would-be is constantly postponed and the how was unclear' (Frederiksen 2014: 314). Even so, Kejo has continued to publicly support the government at every occasion since the demonstrations, and to show his support he posted pictures of Massoud Barzani and the KDP on Facebook and kept KDP flag stickers on his car. I also travelled with him in vehicle convoys supporting the Barzani presidency, although he has not supported him in any private meetings or demonstrations.

The private cynicism of Kejo and others I have met mirrors the type of binary mirror evoked in Yurchak's 2006 study on the nature of life in the Soviet system between the 1950s and 1980s, which explores how internal shifts in discourse and ideology predicated the collapse of the Soviet system. Yurchak asks why the collapse of the Soviet Union was completely unexpected by most Soviet people, yet people realised that they had somehow been prepared for such a drastic and unexpected

change. He argues that this paradox was possible because 'reproducing the system and participating in its continuous internal displacement were mutually constitutive process' (283). Neither the economic crisis nor demonstrations against allegations of corruption, growing inequality and nepotism have been a surprise for Kejo. Yet he maintained his support of the current government despite believing that their policies favour international companies and foreigners more than the local people who have suffered from wars, dislocations, ISIS and the recent economic crisis.

Kejo's case also evokes the common idea among the population that 'you cannot necessarily trust what people around you say or do', because everyone believes one should have both 'official' and 'hidden intimate' selves. This leaves the difference between other people's public and private personas up for interpretation and speculation.[4] Hidden thoughts are accessible only to one's closest friends or family members, but even then must sometimes be kept secret. In these instances, private opinions can be spotted only when the subjects 'suddenly let their strict self-control go and break their utmost secrecy' (Kharkhordin 1999: 357, 277). This belief draws on the same general attitude that surrounds the topic of national politics: nothing is as it seems because people believe that, in contrast to the image put forth by the KRG, information and political processes that should ideally be transparent are actually kept opaque. Even if revealed, in most cases they are flawed and distorted. In other words, nothing is as it seems (Gotfredsen 2015: 126). In the end, this situation leaves large-scale politics and immediate everyday social relations suffused in uncertainty and suspicion of perceived outsiders.

In taking the role of temporal tropes and perspectives in public rhetoric as my primary subject of analysis, I conclude that a set of alternatives can emerge into public discourse in the context of insecurity and/or rapid social change. In this case, such change is evident in the recent economic and financial crisis. The KRG has practiced a particular mode of politics in which governance becomes not just a promise-based enterprise, but also one with a future-minded orientation. Real achievement lies ahead, and for this reason the KRG has been doing what they deem necessary as a present condition for moving towards a better future. In that sense, the workings of the KRG's political apparatus were legitimised in a final goal (independence) towards which the present situation is but a stepping stone. Disagreements about the future and grief towards the stalled national independence movement were conjoined to fuel transformations entailing the cessation of state guarantees and

the introduction of market norms. However, the economic crisis soon directly influenced the lives of people through rising unemployment, reduced wage growth, and collapsing asset values. In the wake of these changes, the concept of neoliberal time evoked cooperation between local government and international oil companies and quashed hopes for economic security and national independence. In this instance, the concrete experiences of local time among the Kurds have come to contradict global/neoliberal time in Iraqi Kurdistan, which sparked not only public debate but also alternative possibilities, and thus new futures, for the Kurds.

Notes

1. Massoud Barzani has led the Kurdistan region as president since 2005. He has served two consecutive terms, and his last term was extended by two years in 2013 by the ruling KDP and PUK on the condition that he can no longer run as president. His term officially ended on August 20, 2015, but he has refused to step down and remains unofficially in office.
2. In October of 2015, protests erupted over Massoud Barzani's unlawful extension of his term limit as president of the KRG. These rallies included his traditional bastion of support, the city of Erbil. Media blackouts were imposed and Kurdish security forces were deployed to break up the protests. In March of 2016, Massoud Barzani said, 'The day we have an independent Kurdistan, I will cease to be the president of that Kurdistan. I will congratulate the Kurdistani people and let someone else take my place. This is a pledge from me—I will not be the president of Kurdistan.'
3. In the 'Magical State', Fernando Coronil (1997) revisits a similar process in which a relatively poor agrarian Venezuela was affected by decades of military rule and political instability. Due to the expansion of the oil industry, it became the site of a rapid accumulation of wealth.
4. In recent years, several scholars have leveraged cynicism in an attempt to explain why people accept authoritarian regimes. Some, such as Slavoj Zizek (1989) and Lisa Wedeen (1999), have stated that cynicism make a citizen maintain distance from the state, pretending to uphold official ideologies while privately rejecting them. In contrast, Yael Navaro-Yashin, in her analysis of Turkish public politics, takes cynicism 'as a central structure of feeling for the production and reproduction of the political in [the state's] public life' (2002: 5). She argues that cynicism in public culture helps uphold the state, as it encapsulates both the state's authoritarian practices and citizens' indifference to them (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 164).

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CHAPTER 9

The Stateless and Why Some Gain and Others not: The Case of Iranian Kurdistan

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Compared to the Kurdish cause in Iraq, Turkey and—more recently—Syria, the plight of the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan receives less attention in the world. Furthermore, while their fellow Kurds in the neighboring countries are gaining politically and even economically (as in Iraqi Kurdistan, at least until 2014), the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan are lagging behind.[1]

Considering the fact that the first Kurdish political entity—proclaimed under the name of Republic of Kurdistan, sometimes mistakenly referred to as the "Mahabad Republic"—with an independent administrative structure and de facto sovereignty in the 20th century was founded in Iranian Kurdistan in 1946, this is puzzling.[2] In addition, in the late 1960s, the Kurdish national movement in Iran experienced a brief revival. More importantly, from 1979 until the mid-1990s Iranian Kurdistan was the site of popular resistance and sustained ideological and

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military challenge to the post-revolutionary theocracy in Iran. Also, due to the efforts of A. R. Ghassemlou—a charismatic leader of the Kurds with extensive international contacts—the Kurdish issue in Iran gained limited international attention and support in the 1980s.[3]

The plight of the Kurds in Iran is not unique, however. We are dealing with a general phenomenon that calls for a general explanation. There is a variation in political gains among stateless nations in the world—as evidenced, to name but a few, in the constitutionally guaranteed self-rule of the Catalans and Quebeckers to the vulnerable position of the Tamils following the military defeat of their movement in 2009 to the advanced yet ambiguous status of the Palestinians.[4] The variation in political gains among the Kurds—one and the same nation populating a contiguous territory divided between four states—in the Middle East is perhaps even more perplexing.

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, threefold; it will outline a theory for the purpose of explaining variation in gains among stateless nations, demonstrate the explanatory power of the theory against the empirical record of the emergence and historical evolution of the Kurdish national movement in Iran and, finally, explain why the Kurds in Iran are lagging behind or are in a relatively disadvantageous position compared to their fellow Kurds in the neighboring countries.

The burgeoning literature on the success and failure of national movements and insurgencies suggest that variation in political gains is best explained by either the presence or absence of resolve, optimal strategy, internal hegemony, or external support by major powers.[5] The present chapter challenges as well as builds on this literature.

Three arguments shall be advanced. First, variation in political gains reflects the distribution of power or, alternatively, the balance of power between ethnic groups within a state. Second, the historical record shows that opportunities for political gains for the Kurds in Iran (and in neighboring countries) arise during circumstances when the balance of power between the Kurds and the ruling state is upset. These pertain, respectively, to external intervention by great powers; internal upheaval or revolution; and sustained guerilla warfare facilitated by rivalries between regional states. Third, the current (im)balance of power between the Kurds and the Iranian state account for their disadvantageous position compared to their fellow Kurds. In the absence of a shift in the balance of power in favor of the Kurds, this situation is likely to remain unchanged in the foreseeable future.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, I engage with extant research with a bearing on the issue at hand, outline the argument to be advanced and account for matters related to research design. Second, I trace the evolution of the Kurdish national movement in Iranian Kurdistan from the beginning of the 20th century to the present in an effort to assess the explanatory power of the proposed theory. Third, the chapter sheds light on the present condition of the political organizations making up the Iranian-Kurdish movement, since they are the significant actors advocating Kurdish rights.

Extant Research

For theoretical purposes, then, Iranian Kurdistan can be compared to the other parts of Kurdistan, as well as to Palestine, Catalonia, the Basque country, Quebec, Scotland, Wales, and so on.

The most pertinent literature to consider in the present context is the one alluded to above on the success and failure of national movements and insurgencies. It should be noted, however, that due to the empirical complexity of the subject matter, in this literature generic terms (such as "strategic effectiveness" and "strategic success") are frequently used for the rather different but related phenomena of wining war, obtaining international recognition, gaining territorial control, and achieving statehood.[6]

Similarly, I use the generic term "political gain" for the minimum gain of putting the movement's core issue on the political agenda in the target state to the maximum gain of achieving self-rule or statehood. In between, one could add such important gains as political representation in elected bodies, formal or informal control over territory and economic resources, as well as linguistic and cultural rights.

The empirical record of the Kurdish movements in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria does not conclusively lend support to nor refute the (monocausal) arguments advanced in extant research concerning resolve, superior strategy, and internal hegemony.[7]

While it is difficult to determine the effect of resolve with any degree of certainty, repeated and, during some historical periods, sustained military campaigns by Kurdish guerilla movements against Iraq, Iran, and Turkey since the beginning of the 20th century indicate that perhaps resolve has not been lacking on the part of various and successive Kurdish movements. Yet, in some cases the political gains of Kurdish

armed movements have been limited (as in Turkey) or did not yield durable gains (as in Iraq prior to the 1991 Gulf War). The Kurdish movement in Turkey has, except for the 1999–2004 period, waged a relatively sustained armed struggle since 1984, yet the electoral victory of "legal" Kurdish political parties at municipal and parliamentary levels from the 1990s onwards could properly be attributed to the combined effect of the guerilla campaign, opportunity structures in the rudimentary democratic system in Turkey, as well as European pressure on Turkey. No doubt, the guerilla campaign has been fundamental for putting the Kurdish issue on the political agenda in Turkey and to some extent in Europe. Indirectly, it may also be said to have paved the way for the aforementioned electoral victories. Similarly, in Iraq, guerilla war had ceased for years when the government was overthrown in a coup in 1958. For sure, the guerilla war of the 1940s had turned the Kurds into a potentially significant political actor. However, the weak post-coup military government, lacking a social base, tactically accommodated the Kurdish leadership following their return from exile in the Soviet Union, which nonetheless ushered in the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish people in 1958. However, once the government believed that its position had improved, conflict erupted, in effect resulting in a new war that continued until 1975 when the Kurdish movement collapsed due to the withdrawal of external support from Iran and the USA.[8] This became a pattern until the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent emergence of the Kurdistan regional government protected by the internationally enforced no-fly zone.[9] However, the argument concerning resolve is about a specific outcome: when guerilla movements achieve victory over militarily superior powers, as in the case of the Vietnam War.[10] Such an argument thus implies that Kurdish movements have lacked resolve, which seems unwarranted. It is perhaps more apt to view resolve as one of the necessary conditions for success, not a sufficient one.

One of the arguments concerning superior strategy in extant research implies that guerilla warfare is the optimal strategy to fight regular armies. Such a strategy uses asymmetric means to destroy the adversary's will to fight.[11] All Kurdish movements who have engaged in armed struggle have adopted such a strategy. One should bear in mind, however, that Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have all relied on irregular and paramilitary forces to fight Kurdish armed movements, thus thwarting their success.[12] This could in part account for the failure of Kurdish armed movements in achieving definitive victory over the Iranian, Iraqi, and Turkish armies.

Such an explanation nevertheless fails to consider other important factors, such as the lack of external support.[13]

Another argument holds that civil resistance is more likely to result in victory than armed struggle.[14] Except for the limited space in the rudimentary democratic system in Turkey, neither Iraq nor Iran has provided any political space for civil resistance. Also, as the case of the Kurdish movement in Turkey demonstrates, the armed struggle over time facilitated civil resistance.[15]

As to the argument concerning internal hegemony, it too fails to provide a satisfactory explanation in the context of Kurdish insurgencies.[16] In Iran, the Kurdish movement consisted of one single and dominant organization from the 1940s until the 1970s; namely, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. The same goes for the Kurdish movement in Iraq until the late 1960s, where the Democratic Party of Iraqi Kurdistan was the dominant organization. Similarly, in Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers' Party has for decades enjoyed a hegemonic position in spite of the existence of other Kurdish organizations. True, the Kurdish movements in Iraq and Iran became fragmented from the late 1960 and 1970s' onwards.[17] However, the hegemonic position of one organization within the Kurdish movements in Iran and Iraq prior to the era of fragmentation calls such an argument into question. As with the other explanatory factors discussed above, internal hegemony is better treated as one of the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for achieving victory.

The argument concerning the importance of external support from major powers for insurgencies implies that none of the conditions discussed above is sufficient for success. Scholars advancing such an argument maintain that external support for insurgency success is decisive.[18]

The briefly reviewed contributions to extant research specify their dependent variable differently—from winning war to toppling regimes through civil resistance to achieving statehood. This chapter is concerned with political gains, encompassing minimum to maximum gains. Nevertheless, the arguments regarding insurgency success and failure do generate hypotheses for the case at hand. The reason—according to each one of them—why the Kurds in Iran did not manage to make their past gains durable and are lagging behind today may thus be explained by lack of resolve on the part of the Kurdish movement; lack of optimal strategy; lack of internal hegemony; or lack of external support. Of these, lack of external support seems to be the most important explanatory factor not only when one considers such comparable cases as

Kosovo—where NATO's military intervention proved decisive for insurgency success—but also the political gains in Iraqi Kurdistan in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

In explaining variation in political gains among the stateless, I do acknowledge the importance of a number of factors—whether of internal or external nature—but still make the case that a commitment to theoretical parsimony calls for determining which factor or factors are *more* important than others. No doubt, resolve, superior strategy, internal hegemony, and external support are all important to account for variation in political gains. However, it is perhaps possible to subsume some of these under a relatively parsimonious theory capable of explaining variation in political gains among the stateless.

In any case, this chapter seeks a middle position between the mono-causal explanations discussed above and eclectic approaches. The latter is perhaps best exemplified by David Romano's work on Kurdish nationalism, which could potentially yield a richer explanation of variation in political gains among the Kurds in the Middle East. He has investigated the intricate relationship between opportunity structures, mobilizations strategies and identity in an effort to explain the causes and evolution of Kurdish nationalist movements in the different parts of Kurdistan. Romano's aim is to offer "analytical synthesis" rather than developing a relatively simple theory to that end.[19] A recent work similarly makes a case for an eclectic approach for understanding the Kurdish armed struggle in Turkey and the state's counterinsurgency strategy by meshing ecological, bureaucratic, constructivist, and historical institutional perspectives in such a way that makes any restatement of its core arguments a daunting task.[20] Whereas the downside of mono-causal explanations is obvious, analytical eclecticism harbors the risk of collapsing the theoretical into the descriptive.

The Argument

Ideally, a parsimonious and portable theory should have one explanatory variable. Consider, for example, Kenneth Waltz's theory of international politics.[21] Having international anarchy as its parameter and the distribution of power as its explanatory factor, its central proposition is that similarly positioned states act similarly. Hence the reason why the external actions of the Soviet Union and the USA—two states extremely different in terms of domestic political system and ideology—were markedly similar during the bipolar distribution of power. The theory thus implies that

the foreign policy or strategy of any given state reflects its position in the distribution of power.

Similarly, a parsimonious theory of variation in political gains among the stateless, inspired by realist theory, is possible to develop. What is provided here is a mere outline of the theory. Nevertheless, a brief statement of the theory's assumptions, key concepts, and explanatory claims are in order.

The theory assumes, similar to realism, that human beings "do not face one another primarily as individuals but as members of groups that command their loyalty"; also, that relations between ethnic groups are essentially competitive and conflictual (though not necessarily violent); and that power, the fundamental feature of politics, is the currency to achieve any political goal.[22]

However, "power" is not solely a matter of material capabilities. Power is properly conceptualized as a multifaceted phenomenon, having, as it were, material, ideational, psychological, and institutional dimensions.[23] For example, the nationalism of marginalized or oppressed stateless nations provides ideational resources of *legitimate struggle* against materially resourceful and dominant nations, thus compensating for their lack of material capabilities.[24] Similarly, dominant ethnic groups derive strength from their nationalism and corresponding beliefs about *cultural and linguistic superiority*, as well as claimed *entitlements* over the territory and even lives of the stateless.[25] It is difficult to mobilize women and men under arms to fight in ethno-national conflict without a sense of just cause or entitlements. Naturally, power can be intimidating, psychologically inhibiting, if not crippling. Hence, the reason why some marginalized ethnic groups refrain from challenging the status quo.[26] On the other hand, in some asymmetric conflicts, guerilla movements have managed to break the will of militarily superior adversaries.[27] But power also has an institutional facet, having, as it were, the manufacturing of "consent" as its hallmark and may thus entrench relations of domination and subordination between ethnic groups in some states.[28]

While acknowledging the multifaceted nature of power, the thrust of the realist inspired argument advanced here is that it is only when the hard military power of the target state is significantly challenged or rolled back by a national liberation movement that the balance of power can be upset, with resultant ideational, psychological, and institutional ramifications. While this involves, or may even result from, breaking the political will of the militarily superior adversary, the early argument by Andrew Mack overlooks geographic proximity.[29] Unlike colonial powers or great powers

fighting wars in distant lands, the geographic proximity between ethnic groups in bi- or multinational states makes it more daunting to break the will of the leadership of the ethnic group in control of state institutions. Nor can the dominant ethnic group break the will of the subjugated or stateless nation. That is why ethno-national conflicts are more enduring and intractable compare to similar conflicts during the colonial period.

The theory thus amounts to the general proposition that variation in political gains reflects the distribution of power between ethnic groups within a state. It also amounts to the specific claim that the strategic goal of a movement is likely to reflect the distribution of power or else to be commensurate with it over time. In short, the "balance of power" between ethnic groups or nations in bi- or multinational states is the key explanatory factor to consider in explaining variation in political gains among the stateless.

If a movement is to achieve success—depending on whether its goal is linguistic and cultural rights, self-rule within the boundaries of the existing state or the creation of a new state—the movement should have necessary resolve; preferably be dominated by one group; and adopt a superior strategy vis-à-vis the state it is fighting. Only under such conditions could the movement tip the balance of power in its favor. Also, it is possible for a movement, if strong enough on its own, to tip the balance of power in its favor without external support. External support thus need not be a necessary nor sufficient condition in some cases, while in other cases external support and intervention is perhaps crucial to achieve success. It is perhaps worth mentioning that even when external powers intervene in states of geostrategic importance for other reasons, as has been the case in Iran and Iraq, such interventions could indeed upset the internal balance between communities with potentially far-reaching consequences. Thus, central insights and arguments in extant research could be subsumed under a relatively parsimonious theory without having to take recourse to analytic eclecticism.

While such a theory, outlined herein rather than fully developed, seems promising, a caveat needs to be considered. It is not only the distribution of power that needs to be considered in explaining variation in political gains among the stateless, but also the "distribution of ideas."[30] In other words, prevalent ideas within states define relations between ethnic and national groups and variation in such ideas correspond to different institutional arrangements. Regime type is therefore important to consider. Some states, such as Switzerland, have accommodated ethnic and national diversity through federalism and power-sharing

prior to democratization; others, Spain for example, have done so following democratization.[31] This is to be contrasted with authoritarian bi- or multinational states, which generally have resorted to assimilation, cultural oppression, linguicide, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of mass violence in "dealing" with ethnic and national diversity. Incorporating the distribution of ideas (and, in extension, institutions) into the theory would compromise parsimony. This does not preclude the possibility to supplement the comparative analysis in this chapter with a consideration of ideas and institutions, however.

Research Design

Due to space limitations, the chapter is limited to the case of Iranian Kurdistan. Notwithstanding the lament that "the term 'case study' is a definitional morass,"[32] I nevertheless suggest that Iranian Kurdistan qua a broader case could be disaggregated into three more specific historical instances or cases of opportunities for political gains. These are to be viewed as *plausibility probes*, intended to assess the potential validity of the theory. In the original formulation by Harry Eckstein, "[p]lausibility here means something more than a belief in potential validity plain and simple, for hypotheses are unlikely ever to be formulated unless considered potentially valid; it also means something less than actual validity, for which rigorous testing is required."[33] Further studies, involving a greater number of cases, could be conducted to assess the explanatory power of the theory.

The first case is the rebellion against the Iranian state organized by Ismail Agha Shikak in the aftermath of World War I. The second case is the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan following World War II. The third pertains to developments in Iranian Kurdistan in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution. The brief revival of the Kurdish movement in the late 1960s could be considered as a potential case as well. However, it was very brief and did not yield any tangible gains.[34] I nevertheless briefly discuss the implications of this potential case for the theory.

The Evolution of the Kurdish National Movement in Iran

In this section, the three cases of opportunities for Kurdish political gains in Iran will be presented through a historical narrative of the evolution of the Kurdish national movement. Following that, a preliminary

assessment of the explanatory power of the theory and its usefulness will be provided.

World War I and the Rebellion by Ismail Agha Shikak

The first serious Kurdish rebellion against the Iranian state was organized by Ismail Agha Shikak, known as Semko, in the aftermath of World War I when Iranian Kurdistan was invaded and occupied by Russian, Ottoman, and British forces. The rebellion thus thrived against the backdrop of the collapse of state authority in Kurdistan.

It is a matter of scholarly dispute, however, as to whether Semko's movement was nationalist or not. Even if the leadership of the movement espoused nationalist ideas, tribal contingents constituted the bulk of its military organization. Tribal structures in Kurdistan, which had been deliberately strengthened by the Iranian state, constituted a serious hurdle for the emergence of a modern Kurdish nationalist movement. Qajar Persia "protected the privileged position of tribal leaders [in Iranian Kurdistan] and helped prevent the emergence of a Kurdish bourgeoisie to push forward nationalist ideas."[35]

Although Semko controlled a relatively large part of Iranian Kurdistan, he does "not seem to have attempted a unified administration or tax regime over the territories he controlled."[36] Nevertheless, during Semko's reign a journal, *Roji Kurdistan*, was published in Urmiya from 1919 to 1926. It "signified the earliest official use of the Kurdish language in Iranian Kurdistan."[37]

However, the movement was crushed by the postwar absolutist monarchy and Semko himself was assassinated during negotiations with representatives of the Iranian state.[38]

World War II and Establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan

In the aftermath of World War II, the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan and the Azeris in Iranian Azerbaijan managed to set up their own autonomous republics. Prior to the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan in 1946, members of the emerging Kurdish bourgeoisie and urban intellectuals had formed *Komalay Jiyanaway Kurdistan* (Society for the Revival of Kurdistan) in 1942 in the city of Mahabad. According to Abbas Vali, Komalay JK "marked the advent of modern nationalist thought and practice in Iranian Kurdistan."[39] The objective of the organization

was the establishment of a nation-state in a united Kurdistan—that is, encompassing Kurdish territories under the control of neighboring states as well.

However, the organization was transformed into the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) in 1945 under the leadership of Ghazi Mohammad, later president of the Republic of Kurdistan. The transformation of Komalay JK into KDP was not only organizational, but also ideological. Two factors seem to have contributed to the transformation of Komalay JK into KDP. On the one hand, the organization needed to expand and appeal to larger segments of Kurdish society—including traditional forces. On the other, the Soviet Union, which appreciated the geopolitical significance of Iranian Kurdistan in the midst of World War II and tactically supported the Kurds, seem to have pressured the organization to abandon its call for independence and instead opt for autonomy in order to placate Turkey.[40] Nevertheless, KDP was clear about rejecting communism and espoused liberal and democratic ideas. KDP also reached out to Great Britain and the USA for support, but the latter sided with the Iranian state, which the Western powers saw as a useful counterweight to Soviet influence in the Middle East.[41]

KDP sought autonomy for Kurdistan as a region within Iran. The Republic of Kurdistan was thus not intended to be an independent entity—although some ambiguities, and related scholarly disputes, exist in that regard. This matter notwithstanding, the political gains of the Kurds during the Republic of Kurdistan were unprecedented. Even a Persian scholar, who endorses the Iranian state's view of Kurdish nationalism, acknowledges this:

> In spite of the fact that the Mahabad republic [sic.] exercised authority over less than one-third of Iranian Kurds and lasted less than a year, it has remained the point of reference for Kurdish movements throughout the Middle East. During the republic's existence, many of the Kurds' aspirations came to fruition. Kurdish became the official language, and Kurdish-language periodicals and literary publications flourished. Kurdish *peshmerga* replaced Iranian police units, and a Kurdish government bureaucracy was set up.[42]

Once the Soviet forces withdrew from Iranian Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan, the Iranian army could crush the short-lived Kurdish republic.

Ghazi Mohammad as well as senior members of his government were executed following the demise of the republic. Similarly, the republic in Azerbaijan was crushed by the Iranian army. The Azeri leadership managed to find refuge in the Soviet Union, however.[43]

The 1979 Revolution and Subsequent Developments

After the demise of the Republic and the imposition of absolutist rule over Kurdistan by the Iranian state, the KDP was forced underground and later into exile in Iraqi Kurdistan. Inspired by the successes of armed leftist revolutionary movements around the world, a new leadership of KDP—under the name of the Revolutionary Committee—embarked on armed struggle against the Iranian state between 1967 and 1968. These efforts failed and prominent leaders of the KDP were killed in battle. Not only did they lack logistical and external support, but the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan, which had to rely on support from Iran, opposed KDP's new leadership.[44]

In the early 1970s, the KDP elected a new leader, the western-educated A. R. Ghassemlou, and added "Iran" to its name. It was intended to unequivocally signal that the objective of the party (henceforth KDPI) was to obtain political rights for the Kurdish people within Iran. To this end, Ghassemlou coined the phrase "Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan." KDPI formally endorsed armed struggle in pursuit of its objectives. It did not carry out any military operations, however. Following the Iranian revolution, KDPI's leadership could return to Iranian Kurdistan. Ghassemlou turned the KDPI into the dominant Kurdish political party in Iran in the 1980s.[45] At the same time, another Kurdish organization, called Komala but without any ideological links to Komalay JK, which its members claim was established in 1969 by Kurdish university students with Marxist-Leninist ideas, become the second largest.

For the first time, the Kurdish movement in Iran became fragmented. As Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab summarize:

> By 1979 […] a vast array of political organizations and groups introduced considerable diversity into Kurdish political life, and thus there was no unified vision of autonomy. The KDP continued to demand 'democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan'. The party's policy was to lead all social classes, groups of individuals who could be rallied to the nationalist cause. Komala, however, envisioned a popular democratic regime and a socialist

> future for Iran in which the laboring masses of Kurdistan could exercise power free of national oppression. […] Such differences laid the foundation for future confrontations between the two sides.[46]

The KDPI and Komala, in spite of ideological differences, initially negotiated with the post-revolutionary regime, but the theocratic government in Tehran dismissed the very idea of democracy as Western and also refused to recognize the Kurds as a distinct people or nation. No autonomy, however defined, was granted to the Kurds.

Essentially, the Islamists, in spite of factional disagreements, were first and foremost Persian nationalists who defined Persian national interests similar to the previous regime, thus precluding accommodation of calls for autonomy by the Kurds.[47] However, the central government was weak in the wake of the revolution. The Islamists had yet to consolidate their grip on the country. This did not prevent the regime from attempting to reimpose the central government's control over Kurdistan. In their first military offensive against Iranian Kurdistan, the Iranian forces were defeated by the Kurdish *peshmerga*. This was due to the fact that KDPI and Komala had managed to mobilize several thousands of *peshmerga* in their military wings. Once defeated, the government declared its willingness for negotiations. However, it proved to be a tactic to buy time for a reorganization of their forces. Subsequent offensives achieved greater success for the post-revolutionary Islamic regime.

Nevertheless, prior to and even during the government offensives, between 1979 and 1983, KDPI opened more than 500 schools; made primary education mandatory for girls and boys; and built hospitals with the support of Aide médicale internationale, Médecins du Monde, and Médecins Sans Frontières. KDPI also carried out its own program of land reform to address inequalities in Kurdish society. In general, as long as parts of Kurdish territory were under the control of *peshmerga*, KDPI tried to establish an administrative structure for Kurdish self-rule.[48]

By the mid-1980s, the KDPI and Komala had to move their headquarters into Iraqi-Kurdish territory. Nevertheless, the war between Iran and Iraq had offered the Kurds the opportunity to embark on guerrilla war against Iran from 1980 onwards. "Although the KDPI and Komala never cooperated directly with Iraqi forces," writes David Romano, "both groups did end up receiving supplies and weapons from Baghdad, which they used to help them fight Iranian troops out of Iranian Kurdistan."[49] They waged an armed struggle against the Islamic

Republic that lasted until the mid-1990s. From 1983, Komala became further radicalized ideologically, and established the Communist Party of Iran in the process while making itself the Kurdistan branch of this party. Curiously, it did not have any organizational presence or followers elsewhere in Iran. KDPI experienced a split in 1988 (although the splinter group reunited with the party in 1994). KDPI and Komala also ended up fighting each other for a period while simultaneously fighting Iranian forces separately.[50]

Iranian diplomats assassinated Ghassemlou on July 13, 1989, in Vienna during negotiations over the terms of autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan. Ghassemlou had explicitly stated that armed struggle was a means to pave the way for negotiations.[51] On September 17, 1992, Iranian agents in cooperation with members of the Lebanese Hezbollah assassinated Sadeq Sharafkandi, Ghassemlou's successor, along with three of his aids in Berlin. Sharafkandi had been invited to the annual meeting of the Socialist International, a worldwide organization for social democratic parties, where the KDPI held an observer status at the time.[52] These assassinations in conjunction with geopolitical shifts following the Gulf War weakened the KDPI. In the assessment of Nader Entessar:

> The loss of Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi dealt a major blow to the KDPI from which it has not yet recovered. Both Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi were adept politician who developed contacts within a large cross section of Iranian society and established an extended political network in Europe. There is no doubt that Dr. Ghassemlou was the most recognizable political leader with the widest appeal within the Iranian-Kurdish population.[53]

Following the assassination of Sharafkandi, KDPI appears to have made the strategic mistake to leave the Qandil Mountains, from where it had carried out military operations against Iran, and resettled in Koya in Iraqi Kurdistan. Komala resettled in areas close to Sulemanya.

When the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan was established after the Gulf War, its relations with Tehran ruled out the possibility for KDPI and Komala to continue the armed struggle against the Iranian regime. Iran initiated a systematic campaign of assassination against KDPI, Komala and other Kurdish opposition groups. Several hundred Iranian-Kurdish political activists were assassinated during the 1990s in Iraqi Kurdistan by Iranian agents. One Iraqi-Kurdish weekly

published the names of 151 of those assassinated during this period, all members of the KDPI.[54] As far as assassinations outside of Kurdistan is concerned, the US-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center highlights in a report that "Iranian intelligence agents have since [1979] assassinated more than 162 monarchist, nationalist and democratic expatriate activists in countries as diverse as the United States, Austria, Pakistan, France and Turkey."[55] However, as their chronological list of those assassinated shows, the majority of the victims have been Kurdish activists and members of the KDPI.[56]

It is, against that backdrop, difficult to identify durable Kurdish gains following the 1979 revolution in Iran. Government offensives destroyed the rudimentary institutional structure for self-rule that the Kurds had managed to build. KDPI and Komala were not able to control territory for any considerable time following 1983 to establish viable institutions. However, the fact that they developed organizations that could mobilize large sections of Kurdish society and, later, fielded thousands of *peshmerga* to wage guerrilla war for so many years have had their impact. The following appears to be a fair assessment of the situation as late as the mid-1990s: "By 1985 the Islamic regime had won the battle militarily, although its control was not effective everywhere [in Kurdistan]. However, the regime has lost the ideological and political war against Kurdish nationalism."[57]

The Current Situation

Although both Komala and KDPI managed to set up their own satellite TV-stations in recent years to more effectively reach out to the Kurdish people in Iranian Kurdistan following more than a decade of isolation in Iraqi Kurdistan, splits within them have added to their vulnerability.[58]

The emergence of PJAK (Free Life Party of Kurdistan) in recent years has further added to the fragmentation of the Kurdish movement in Iran. PJAK came into being in 2004 and presents itself as a party with merely "ideological" links to the PKK. It shares bases with the PKK in the Qandil Mountains. For some years, PJAK claimed responsibility for sporadic attacks against Iranian positions. Since 2011, however, it has not made such claims. This is most likely due to the PKK's priorities in Syria following the Syrian civil war. KDPI and Komala are reluctant to recognize PJAK as an independent party and regard it as an offshoot of the PKK in Iranian Kurdistan.[59]

The Kurdish movement in Iran has thus become even more fragmented compared to the 1980s. In spite of this, their political programs converge in the general demand for self-rule for Iranian Kurdistan within a future federal system in Iran. Also, KDPI and Komala have in recent years cooperated by issuing joint statements and speaking with a unified voice on many issues of mutual concern. These steps resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperation and Coordination on August 21, 2012.[60] Furthermore, significant developments with potentially far-reaching consequences have taken place since the Spring of 2015, when KDPI decided to return to its former bases in the Qandil Mountains, and especially since the Summer of 2016 when clashes between KDPI's *peshmerga* forces and Iranian revolutionary guards erupted. These clashes received unprecedented attention by international media, especially considering the fact that the Kurds in Iran have received scant international attention for past 20 years when KDPI halted the armed struggle.[61] It remains to be seen if KDPI's new policy—which is a combined strategy of armed struggle and civil resistance named "Rasan" in Kurdish—brings for the future of the Kurds in Iran.

Assessing the Theory

The three cases above, albeit briefly accounted for, lend support to the theory. Semko's movement could thrive thanks to the weakness of the Iranian state in the wake of World War I. The Republic of Kurdistan was established under similar conditions during World War II. In both cases, the balance of power was upset and ensuing conditions offered the Kurds the opportunity to make political gains, more so during the time of the republic than the earlier period. Similarly, the revolution of 1979 resulted in the collapse of state power in Kurdistan. Kurdish organizations could fill the ensuing vacuum and, later, fight Iranian forces. The war between Iran and Iraq and continued hostility between the two regional powers after the ceasefire in 1988 provided the opportunity for the Kurds to wage armed struggle for more than a decade. Conversely, when the balance of power definitely tilted in favor of the Iranian state in all three cases, the Kurds lost whatever tangible gains they had.

The brief revival of the Kurdish movement in the late 1960s too lends support to the theory. When the leadership of KDP embarked on armed struggle, conditions were not conducive for it. This was a time when the Iranian state was stronger than ever and had US backing.

Furthermore, the leadership of KDP lacked international support and secure bases in a neighboring country. As David McDowall writes, the effort was bound to fail in the absence of favorable conditions for guerrilla warfare. At that time, KDP "lacked modern or adequate weaponry, secure bases, or a real grasp of guerrilla warfare."[62] As a potential case, it demonstrates that resolve and internal hegemony might be necessary conditions for waging a successful insurgency, but in the absence of the other factors upsetting the balance of power, Kurdish movements are less likely to gain politically.

Furthermore, other cases could be invoked in support of the theory. Developments in Iraq since 1958—but especially since 2003—as well developments in Turkey during recent years, come to mind as potential cases. Nevertheless, it is only in Iraq that Kurdish national rights and demands for self-rule have been accommodated. This, however, appears to be the result of the weakness of the central government and contingent factors than a meaningful shift in prevalent ideas.[63] Turkey's democratic system and a discourse of "peace" during recent years appeared, on the face of it, promising. However, in the absence of redefinitions of Turkish national interests, genuine and meaningful accommodation of Kurdish rights claims appears a distant prospect. Whereas Kemalist interpretations of Turkish national interests mandated the denial of Kurdish identity and assimilation of the Kurds, the Islamist interpretation of Turkish national interests appears to grant partial recognition of Kurdish identity—as long as it is subordinated to a "common" Islamic identity within an ethnic Turkish-dominated polity. Yet, this partial recognition falls short of constitutional recognition and, as a result, Turkey has not been able to resolve the Kurdish issue.[64]

Having said this, confidence in the explanatory power of the theory is contingent on testing it in a systematic manner against the empirical record of the evolution of Kurdish movements in other parts of Kurdistan. Such confidence could be further increased if the theory is tested beyond this context. Before considering such an option, the peculiarities of the geopolitical context of Kurdistan should be considered.

Concluding Remarks

While the arguments advanced in this chapter could be deemed trivial, their implications are anything but trivial. First, the *major* obstacle to Kurdish gains is neither disunity within Kurdish society (as is often

emphasized by outsiders as well as Kurdish political activists), nor the lack of a radical nationalist discourse (as maintained by Kurdish intellectuals and scholars).[65]

The fragmented character of Kurdish identity and politics—while certainly reflecting realities within Kurdish society—should also be analyzed in view of external conditions. The states ruling over the Kurds have deliberately attempted to augment divisions among the Kurds, while Kurdish movements, in seeking the support of one of these states, have reinforced rather than transcended the fragmented character of Kurdish identity and politics.

Had it not been for overwhelming oppressive state power in Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, it is reasonable to expect that Kurdish organizations had been more inclined to demand independence rather than settle for local autonomy or federal formulas. Kurdish nationalist discourse in part reflects the balance of power. It is noteworthy that the PKK, one of the most successful and influential Kurdish organizations in the history of the Kurdish nationalist movements, dropped its demand for independence as early as 1993 and its political discourse and demands today are centered on linguistic and cultural rights for the Kurds within the boundaries of Turkey.[66]

Second, in the absence of definitive shifts in the balance of power in favor of the Kurds or fundamental ideological changes on the part of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria—which could pave the way for the recognition of Kurdish national identity and constitutional accommodation of Kurdish rights—we cannot expect the Kurds to make any lasting gains. For example, the gains of the Kurdistan region within the Iraqi federation is partly due to the weakness, then collapse, and now restored but still fragile state power in Iraq. The capabilities of the Iraqi state have been reduced compared to earlier periods, thus creating the opportunity for Kurdish political gains. The same cannot be said of the intentions of ruling political elites and their constituencies in Iraq. What exists in Iraq is a de facto federal system without federalism; that is, power-sharing arrangements without an accompanying ideological commitment to them on the part of ruling political elites and their constituencies. Consequently, when the balance of power shifts in favor of the central government, Kurdish political gains could be in jeopardy. This scenario is also very likely if the regime in Syria manages to crush the rebellion and regain control over the Kurdish areas. The same applies to the Kurds in Iran in the event power vacuums in the country arise in the future.

Durable Kurdish political gains in the Middle East is contingent on peaceful settlements and, ultimately, genuine democratization in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Irrespective of the prospects for peace and democratization in the aforementioned countries, Kurdish national liberation movements are, in spite of periodic setbacks, going to remain potent forces in the Middle East. This is more likely in view of accelerated power diffusion processes and the dynamic geopolitical environment of the region.

Notes

1. This is the case even when considering the recent reversal of Kurdish political gains in Turkey.
2. On the origins of Kurdish nationalism and the formation of the Kurdish republic in Iranian Kurdistan, see Abbas Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*: The Making of Kurdish Identity (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011). On the evolving international context of the formation and demise of the republic, see Borhanedin A. Yassin *Vision or Reality? The Kurds in the Policy of the Great Powers, 1941–1947* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1995).
3. See David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B Tauris, 1996), Chaps. 12–13; Carol Prunhuber *The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd*: Dreaming *Kurdistan* (New York, Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009).
4. I am aware of the politically as well as academically contested concept of "nation." Suffice to say that it is possible to agree with those who argue that nations are modern constructs and yet grant that they do have ethnic and cultural foundations. It is thus advisable to reconcile "objective" and "subjective" definitions of the term. Also, and related, one can arguably decouple states and nations in view of the incongruence between state and national boundaries in many of the existing multinational states in the world. This is neatly captured by Julius W. Friend in his *Stateless Nations: Western European Regional Nationalisms and the Old Nations* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 3–4: "By definition, a state is not a nation-state if it includes areas smaller than the whole that consider themselves to be nations. Thus the notion that Western Europe is largely composed of nation-states is a myth: most of its large countries contain substantial and ancient minorities that often consider themselves nations." The general problem of the incongruence between existing state boundaries and nations, especially in the contemporary Middle East, is systematically addressed by Benjamin Miller; see his *States, Nations and the Great Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

5. See, inter alia, Andrew J.R. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27: 2 (1975); Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: The Theory Of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26: 1 (2011); Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," *International Security* 33: 1 (2008); Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security*, 38: 3 (2013/2014); Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007); Perparim Gutaj and Serhun Al, "Statehood and the political dynamics of insurgency: KLA and PKK in comparative perspective," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19: 2 (2017).
6. See, inter alia, "The Structure of Success," p. 72; Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," p. 8.
7. See, inter alia, McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*; Yassin *Vision or Reality?* Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*; Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity, in Iraq*, *Turkey*, and *Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005); David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
8. See Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chap. 5.
9. Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (Walker & Company: New York, 2008).
10. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars."
11. Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars."
12. See McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement.*
13. See Record, *Beating Goliath*, Chap. 2; Gutaj and Al, "Statehood and the political dynamics of insurgency."
14. Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works."
15. See Aysegul Aydin and Cem Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion: Kurdish Insurgents and the Turkish State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2015), Chaps. 1–3.
16. Krause, "The Structure of Success."
17. See McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement.*
18. See Record, *Beating Goliath*, Chap. 2; Gutaj and Al, "Statehood and the political dynamics of insurgency," passim.
19. Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, Chap. 1. For a similar, yet theoretically implicit, argument, see Natali, *The Kurds and the State*, passim.

20. Aydin and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*.
21. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
22. For a succinct statement of these core realist assumptions, see Randall Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review*, 91: 4 (1997), p. 927.
23. Cf. Stefano Guzzini, "The Concept of Power: A Constructivist Analysis," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33: 3 (2005).
24. See Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), Chaps. 2–6.
25. See Alireza Asgharzadeh, *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
26. Asgharzadeh, *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity*, Chaps. 6–7.
27. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars."
28. See Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10: 2 (1986).
29. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars."
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33. Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," In F. Greenstein and N. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p. 108.
34. Cf. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 252–254.
35. Natali, *The State and the Kurds*, p. 23.
36. McDowall *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 221.
37. Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, p. 13.
38. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 214–221; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, pp. 222–224; Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, pp. 12–14.
39. Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, p. 20.
40. Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, chaps. 2 and 4.
41. Yassin, *Vision or Reality?*, pp. 153–154.
42. Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 28.

43. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 245–246.
44. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 253–254.
45. Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, p. 35.
46. Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab, "The Politics of Nationality and Ethnic Diversity," In Saeed Rahnema and Sohrab Behdad (eds.) *Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 235–236.
47. Hassanpour and Mojab, "The Politics of Nationality and Ethnic Diversity," p. 236.
48. Prunhuber *The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd*, part three.
49. Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, p. 237.
50. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, Chap. 13; Romao, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, pp. 232–239.
51. Regarding the political life of Ghassemlou and his assassination by Iran, see Prunhuber *The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd*.
52. See "Murder at Mykonos: Anatomy of a Political Assassination," Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2007, Retrieved from http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/pdfs/Reports/murder_at_mykonos_report.pdf. (last accessed 20 January, 2016).
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56. "No Safe Haven: Iran's Global Assassination Campaign", Appendix 1.
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Conclusion

Kurds, with their approximately 30 million population, has been in the spotlight of the international community since the 1990s as a stateless nation. Initially, with the launch of Gulf War in the early 1990s, the U.S. and the Kurds became coalition partners against the Saddam regime, which put the Kurdish question at the center of the Middle East politics. After more than a decade, the emergence of a fundamentalist terror organization at the heart of the region gave Kurds the role of a major partner within the international coalition against the Islamic State (ISIS) and brought the Kurdish question again on the table of the Middle East agenda. This increasing attention on the Kurdish nation escalated the academic and media publications on their role in regional affairs and international relations.

Although Kurds are a single nation, homogenizing Kurds as one single actor in the region has been a common mistake not only in the politics of Middle East but also in academia. Existing scholarly works on Kurds tend to analyze the Kurdish politics in the Middle East through the lens of their relationship with external actors including the capitols that they are attached to (i.e., Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, and Ankara). Thus, the relationship among the 30 million Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, is from a comparative perspective, is a significant gap in literature. This book answered the fundamental questions about the actors, ideas, and interests relevant to the Kurdish politics in the Middle East by exploring the Kurdish World within its own debates, conflicts, and interests.

E.E. Tugdar and S. Al (eds.), *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-53715-3

Under the theme of "actors" in Kurdish world, we focused on Turkomans in Iraqi Kurdistan as non-Kurdish actors and Kurdish political parties in Syria as minority political parties. In Iraqi context, Turkomans are the third largest ethnic group, with a divided view on the Kurdish state building. Thus, we took a closer look at this politically-active group as their participation is vital in constructing a successful Iraqi Kurdish state. Concentrating on the sociopolitical factors in the interaction between Turkomans and Kurds in Iraq, the interviews conducted in Erbil and Kirkuk (where Turkomans are demographically strong) based on demographic and related political questions, religious, cultural and ethnic matters, the role of language and the vital connection to Turkey, suggested a big division toward the idea of a Kurdish state. The central argument presented here is that, while there are a number of complex problems for Turkoman integration (in addition to current issues related to ISIS, economic recession and the refugee crisis), in many of these areas, there are also several reasons for optimism within a KRG that has often shown both tolerance and respect for the Turkoman population.

In the analysis of the Kurdish political parties as "actors" in Syria, which has been a shelter for both legal and illegal political formations of the twenty-first century, we found empowerment for the Kurds at both national and international level. Specifically following the period of uprisings in the Arab world and the weakening of the existing authoritarian regimes, historically isolated and oppressed groups in the region (i.e., Kurds) started being politically active. Thus, Syrian Kurds have caught the historic opportunity to defend their rights to self-determination and launched a new period in which they are not manipulated by the Assad regime anymore, but act on their behalf in northern Syria. Despite the appreciation of self-representation of the Kurds in Syria, the Kurdish activities on the political platform have failed to be homogenous due to competing Kurdish political parties regarding their demands, similarities, differences, and the organization styles. Moreover, the analysis of the fieldwork in Syria revealed that the heterogeneous nature of Kurdish political parties has been affected by the interrelationship between the parties of Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Turkish Kurds.

In our analysis on the "ideas" within the Kurdish world, we initially focused on the function of nationalism to shape the perception of security threat in the context of Kurdish question in Turkey. Both for state nationalism and minority nationalism, the aspect of security remains an

important dimension in the emergence and path dependency of nationalist discourses. Thus, the state nationalism underlines the concept of security as a feature of territorial integrity. In other words, "national security" is conceptualized by the state. On the other hand, definition of security by minority nationalism goes beyond the state-centric approach. Shedding a light on the contemporary issues regarding the Kurdish question in Turkey such as the so-called Kurdish Opening, peace process with Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in parallel with increasing popularity of its political platform Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and Turkey's ambiguous approach to the Kurds under the Islamic State threat in Syria, we found that the concept of security differs from state and non-state actor perspectives.

In our analysis on the "Kurdishness" among geographically distant Kurdish communities in the Middle East, we analyzed the formation of "Kurdish identity" and whether the assumption that people with shared ethnic identities have monolithic aims and agendas is applicable to this stateless nation. The analysis pointed out that Kurdish identity, which is constructed initially with pre-existing elements like language, shared traditions, etc., is actually "political" identity, which is glued together both implicitly and explicitly for creating an image of an "ideal Kurdish nation." Moreover, the role of the elite-led nationalism is significant in the construction of Kurdish identity under cross-communal and extra-communal relations. Based on Mark Haas's "ideological distance" perspective, the Kurdish identity formation is explained in the example of the approach by Turkey's President Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) as they propose a division of "good Kurds" and "bad Kurds."

Furthermore, on the idea of "self-determination," we investigated how it has been framed by pro-Kurdish groups in their political discourses within a comprehensive context. Regarding the self-determination debates of Kurds, denialist rhetoric suggests that the Kurds may not become eligible neither to have an independent state nor being recognized as a separate political group under international law. A contrary view suggests that the Kurds have the inherent indispensable right as a minority group or a nation regardless of the political context based on the interstate relations or regional affairs. Hence, the comparative analysis of the three major Kurdish groups or political movements in the region revealed that the discourse of self-determination is utilized to achieve their political goals such as pro-Barzani groups and entities (the Kurdistan Regional Government

in general), the pro-Öcalan groups (the PKK, HDP and YPG), and the Kurdish Islamist groups. However, we found that all these pro-Kurdish groups have different expectations from self-determination (i.e., an independent state, political autonomy as either a minority or a constituent of the state, or greater recognition of group rights).

In our analysis of "ideas" in Kurdish world, we also investigated the role of Islam as the majority of Turks and Kurds belong to Sunni sect of Islam. With a focus on Turkey's Kurdish question and so-called Kurdish opening efforts, we tested the paradoxical impact of Islam as a tool incorporated in the governance of a secular state through Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) and networking through various Islamic schools, civil society organizations and various *tariqas* in Turkey. Thus, we claimed that utilizing Islam as a tool via a top-down approach, Kurdish–Turkish peace process operated on the basis of Sunni Islamism networking. Moreover, the findings suggested that Islam was infrequently and selectively utilized as a mobilizing force for peace, but its application differed significantly between the Diyanet and the Kurdish Islamic actors and the role of Islam remained limited for participation in the peace process.

Regarding the "interests" within the Kurdish world, we initially investigated how economic and trade relations among Kurds across borders are promoted via ethnic capital. We tested if assimilation minimizes the transaction costs by homogenizing the society compared to multiethnic and multilingual social order. Thus, assimilation can be considered as a governing mechanism of the nation-states in the twentieth century in return for higher economic gains. However, the literature extensively studied the role of ethnic capital in the context of migrant communities. Focusing on Kurds as a single ethnic group dominantly populated across national borders, we analyzed the role of ethnic capital in their trade and labor market activities within Kurdish-populated areas of the region. The findings suggested that as the assimilation policies decline, opportunity spaces for the use of ethnic capital across borders increases with the outcome of regional economic development.

Relatedly, to understand the meaning of economic prosperity in the Kurdish world, we explored the concrete experiences and social rhythms of time among the Kurds specifically in Iraqi Kurdistan and whether they contradict with the global capitalist time regarding the universal measure of value in labour, debt, and exchange. In Iraqi Kurdistan, liberalization and the opening of petroleum fields since 2005 brought new

public–private, global–local partnerships through production-sharing agreements (PSAs) along with volatile enterprise. Hence, the Kurdish government promoted entrepreneurship at every level speeds up the development of an economically self-sustainable polity to make the transition from a marginalised region within the old Iraq to a new autonomous region within a federal Iraq with a goal of an independent state in mind. Thus, the presence of international entrepreneurship is seen as inevitable for an independent Kurdish state as a contract with multinational oil companies, i.e., ExxonMobil legitimizes KRG and credits regional relations over federal power. Our analysis claims that in Iraqi Kurdistan, the local, national time for the hope of independence coincides with the global capitalist time, which has transformed the region into a new frontier for oil exploration, multimillion dollar construction contracts, and cheap imports from Turkey, Iran, and China.

Nevertheless, we also figured out different "interests" within the Kurdish world across borders regarding the variation in political gains among the Kurds in the Middle East. With a focus on Iranian Kurds as a distinctive group of Kurds, we explained why they are lagging behind to the Kurds in neighboring Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The analysis showed that the major obstacles are factors beyond the Kurds' control that can be grouped under two general points; the (im)balance of power between the Iranian state and the Kurds, and socially shared ideas of Persia national interests. With the overlapping national interests within Iran, Kurdish national interests, which are already defined at a minimal level, are ignored and shadowed by the Iranian ones. Thus, Iranian nationalism is antithetical to Kurdish nationalism in the context of disadvantageous Kurdish position.

Taking all the analysis into consideration, this book reached two conclusions; one political in parallel with economics and one sociological. In terms of the internal dynamics of the Kurdish world, we understood that the relationship among Kurds across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria is not homogenous. Not only the ideologies but also goals vary in each region. Moreover, the state context has an impact on these factors; whereas Iraqi Kurdistan is semi-free to set a goal of economic development with independence in mind, Kurds in Iran and Turkey are suppressed both politically and culturally. Under the ongoing civil war in Syria, the Syrian Kurds step on the instability by their military power for the idea of an autonomous region. Meanwhile, the role of sociocultural factors such as Islam or nationalism applied differently across the borders

of the Kurdish world. As a recommendation of future research endeavors, we believe that the roles of the Kurds reside out of the context of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria is as important as the population in these states. Specifically, the focus on the strong lobby of Kurds in Europe and USA under different ideologies and goals would bring more insight for understanding this stateless nation.

Index

E.E. Tugdar and S. Al (eds.), *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-53715-3